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"Indeed I don't," said Ned, springing to his feet, and bending over Claire, his hand on the back of her chair, "But I love you dear," he said softly. "Don't you feel that you should be your wife's first love?" asked Claire, looking up through tears glistening on the long curled lashes. "I would have said so before I knew you," said Ned seriously. "but to know you, Claire, to me was to love you, and the joy of my life will be, that through my love and care for you I may help to lessen the sorrow that God saw fit to send to mar your sweet young life."

Claire covered her face with her hands and her shoulders shook with the sobs she could no longer suppress.

"Goldie, darling, don't do that," pleaded Ned, as he dropped on his knees beside her, folding his big arms around her, "don't do that, sweetheart," he pleaded. "Can't you love me a little, I'll wait if you can't just now, but let me teach you. Oh! Goldie I don't know what life would be like now if I can't have you, and you know how I love Billie and Goldie dear, Daddy loves you and he loves Billie, too. Don't you know what a happy little family we would make," he pleaded.

A little shudder ran over Claire as she ceased her sobs, and slipping her arms around Ned's neck, she laid her tear-stained face on his shoulder and whispered, "Oh, Ned, you are so good, I would hate so terribly to go away," and "Ned," she whispered still lower, "I do love you. I tried not to but I couldn't help it. It didn't seem loyal to Frank. But you were so kind, so big and strong, and now that Madge is gone, you do need one. And poor Billie, pleading for you for his daddy."

"My darling," said Ned as he rose to a standing posture, and drawing Claire up beside him kissed the tears away.

It was the beginning of the third week in December, when Dick and Madge returned from their trip. And then all was busy with the preparation of the other wedding, which Claire had set for Christmas Eve.

It was to be very quiet, no one present except the two families and the minister and his wife.

Claire and Madge spent part of their time fixing up Ned's home, making everything ready and comfortable for the old gentleman, while they should be away.

The air was cold and a gentle snow was falling, as the minister pronounced Claire Dixon and Edward Oliver man and wife. Then after a dainty dinner they gathered around to say good-bye. Dick coming in in his big fur coat, called out cheerily, "The rig is ready Old Golden Top," and slapping Ned on the shoulder, said, "Well, now perhaps you are ready to tell us where you are going, old man." "No," said Ned, his glad eyes turning to Claire, "Claire hasn't told even me yet where we are going. Won't you tell us now dear?" he asked, going over to her. She gave his hand a little squeeze, and going over to his father, she put her arm around his shoulder and holding the other hand out to Ned, she said, "We are going home with Billie's grandfather."

"God bless you, my daughter," said the old man, rising and kissing her forehead. "Ned, my son, I wish your mother could have lived to have seen this day." Then, turning to the others, Claire's happy voice called out, "And we want you all to come over to spend Xmas with us," and gathering little Billie up, she said, "So come along Ned, you'll have to kill another turkey, you know."

Ned put his arms around the both of them, and said, his deep voice almost trembling, he was so happy, "My noble, noble little wife. Come to Daddy, Billie," he said, taking Billie in his arms. Billie looked into Ned's eyes and squeezing his little arms around Ned's neck said, "Oh, I'm so glad (glad) Dad sent you for my daddy."

And they were tears of gladness that streamed down Mr. Oliver's kind old face as he and Claire and Ned filled little Billie's stocking that hung by the fire-place that night.



The Belt Dance of Bulgaria

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In the land of the rose fields, where the distilleries turn the rose leaves into the most fragrant of perfumes—Attar of Roses, one witnesses with delight, the performance of the "Belt Dance," a variation of the "Ring Dance" originating in Bohemia.

Dressed in their very best clothes made of sheep skin, which solves the highland Bulgars dress problem, wearing as they do the wool side next the skin in winter and the embroidered side next the skin in summer, and embroidered as only a Bulgarian woman knows how, any number of men and women above four, when the spirit is on them, grasp one another's belts and the dance is on.

First three steps forward, then three steps backward, then forward again for three steps, after which they form into a ring. Swinging and balancing to the weird music which puts one in mind of the Dervishes, how they manage to keep themselves "pin-wheeling" for hours at a time, is remarkable.

To watch them gyrating is a treat for about fifteen minutes. Then one becomes dizzy by the rapidly revolving wheel of humanity which goes faster and faster until one can no longer follow.

Though the dance may last for hours at a stretch, each one of the dancers looks as "solemn as a funeral" and never speaks; but at intervals the men howl like hungry hyenas. Taken as a whole it is a very entertaining performance which can with safety, as well as profit, be added to any parlor dance programme.