

had suddenly kissed his hand. "God will bless you for it!" she murmured. "That's right," said Kent. "But I brought the accident on myself through hurrying here to surprise Justine. Is Dr. Austin still here?"

"Yes," said the rector.

"And could you marry us now?"

"With pleasure."

"Then go right ahead—with Justine's consent, of course."

"I give it gladly," she added. And with those who loved her best grouped beneath the holly-branches, Justine

Forbes became Justine Hermiston. "It's the bestest wedding in all the world," said Linnie, "because it makes everybody smile again."

And outside, the Christmas waits were already singing, sweet and clear, "Salute the happy morn."

How do I happen to know all that I have written at this late day? Well, I am Erd Cleland. And a branch of holly with yellow berries that I picked up this morning brought it all back to me.

A Christmas Surprise.

The spruces rise in ermined state,
Plume-deep in sparkling ridge and drift;
The rosebush at the cottage gate
Its ropes of pearl can scarcely lift.
Within, the cedar-flames are rich
As pools of golden-hearted wine,
And in the cozy ingle-niche
Where shafts of tawny topaz shine,

A couple sit, as white of hair
As wind-made hillocks of the snow.
He, in his stout old oaken chair,
She, rocking gently to and fro.
But while about them friends and guests
Sing happily the hours away,
Deep in each aged bosom rests
A shadow-memory, cold and gray.

The fair old lady's eye is clear—
She will not cloud the Christmas joy.
Yet, down the dais of yester-year
Her heart is calling for her boy.
And he—the old man—stern of brow,
Steel-armored in unyielding pride—
Would he recall the wand'rer, now
With pardon—at the Christmastide?



The stranger-guest, a deep-eyed and slight—
One tea-rose in her dusk-brown hair—
Glides through the changing drifts of light
To stand beside her hostess' chair.
Upon her cheek warm waves of red
Like breeze-tossed roseleaves come
and go.
And suddenly she bends her head,
And whispers, "Mother"—faint and low.

She touches, with a soft caress,
The locks of snowy, silken white.
And says, with yearning tenderness:
"Your boy is coming home to-night."
Then, kneeling at the old man's side,
Her smiles like April sunbeams break:
"Your only son—behold his bride!
Will you accept her for his sake?"

A step rings on the crystal air
—And pauses at the cottage door—
The Lord has heard a mother's prayer—
Her boy is in her arms once more!
His father waits to grasp his hand.
The new-found daughter smiling near,
And Christmas chimes break o'er the land—
"Good will and love—good will—good cheer!"
—Harriet Whitney Durbin.

On Christmas Day.

My love and I fell out, one day,
But what about 'twere hard to say.
Swift words of anger came to break
The happy spell of love, and make
Our hearts grow bitter, each to each.
Beneath hot words of unwise speech.
The rose I brought to her at morn
Had withered, leaving but a thorn.

We parted, and in separate ways
Our footsteps led us. Dreary days
Of sorrow followed, and we grieved
As those do of a hope bereaved.
We sorrowed, but we gave no sign.
Her pride was stubborn. So was mine.
Though hearts were aching, all the while
We hid our grief beneath a smile.

The year drew round to Christmas time—
That day of days, when good thoughts climb
The golden pathways to the heart,
And swing its bolted doors apart,
And cry, "Oh, let love's sunshine fill
And warm the place so dark and chill!"
Till hope takes heart again, and sings
In gladness that the Christmas brings.



The bells rang out on Christmas Day,
And "Peace—Good Will," they seemed
to say
To every living thing that heard
The messages from God, that stirred
Their hearts to speech. And as they rang
Like a refrain this one thought sang
Its special message unto me,
"How is it, friend with thine and thee?"

"How is it? Hate or love? To-day
Let us entreat thee, put away
The bitter thoughts that dwell with thee—
Let love come in, thy guest to be!
Love is not dead, in spite of all.
Hate holds thy happiness in thrall.
Oh, turn it out, this Christmas Day—
Let love, we pray thee, have its way!"

I listened, and thank God I let
Love work its spell. With eyes all wet
With tears of penitence I came,
And scarce I spoke my sweetheart's name
Ere she cried out—"Forgive me, dear,
Mine was the blame!" Ah, Heaven
seemed near
That moment, as we kissed away
A whole year's grief on Christmas Day!
—Eben E. Rexford.

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