ACHING A CHRISTMAS STORY

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If was very dark and very silent in the room. Even the regular breathing of the stamberer upon the couch seemed interwoven with the stillness and part and parcel of it. Night's anaesthetic held its prip upon everything.

adenty this was changed, in one particular at The knob of the unlocked deer to the right was turned; slowly, stealthfly. There was a sharp, shrill speak, the door opened gramblingly perhaps an tuch or sa; another squeak, then wider, wider. Not with enough this time to permit of entrance or of said but Wide enough to permit of the stealthy inserof a human hand into the darkness and the slience; a hand that gripped the near's edge and held it paiseless as it yielded to the opening corre-wider, wiser yet, until there was a fost of space to pass through. Ther followed pause.
The Phing with the Hand, lies the horseman at the

regitered crossing, evidently felt it wise to stop, to look, to listen. He, too, heard nothing save the breathing of the sleeper on the bed. Yes—one other sound; the fix-rex or escaping atoms from the radiator to the room. Satisfied with this scrutiny of eye and ear and mind, the Man-Animal entered. For a midnight marauder be was a strange specimen, this Man-Animal. Judged by the standard of the men who mare in shadows and lurk in dark corners, he was undersized, wofully undersized. He could have wriggied through the most conservative transom in the world; yet, small though he was, there rested upon him ever the pride of his great atrength. Steadily the Man-Animal crossed the room; stealthily approached the bod. He stopped.

Somewhere within the house a clock was striking. It startled him at first—one—two—three—four, it chimed. He regained his composure on the instant. but with it came the determination that what he had to do he must do quickly. In two hours more it would be six. Swiftly he stepped to the bedaide and glanced upon the sleeper. His eyes, well used now to

the darkness, drank in the details.

The woman sleeping was young and very beautiful in the eyes of the Man-Animal. She slept upon her side—her right side, so that that organ called the stamach should not press upon the heart. One hand and arm were tucked away underneath the pillow. Two thick braids of hair, like rivers flowing gently side by side, strayed over the coverlet. The course of one had become slightly diverted and its end bung gracefully over the edge of the bed. The Man-Animal touched it softly with his hand and drow back, his fingers tingling.

The young woman slept on, with her mouth closed. breathing through her nose, just as the Man-Animal did himself. He drow a doep breath as he watched her. Some day he would marry her and he would do this just as soon as the law could be changed allowing a lady to have two husbands. He bent way over and started to his her on the lips, the cheek, the forehead. He changed his policy, as one invoking danger. He hissed her on the hand. She did not stir and he passed on, out of her room, into the maxt, adopting the same method of stealth, of caution.

The next room was as noisy as here bad been silent, but it never feazed the interloper. He knew well nough that the noise was Snores, due to the fact that Father, unlike Mother, would keep his mouth open and would lie on his left side and let his stummick press anywhere it darned please, and, of course, you ean't tell things to the man that earns the Money The Man-Animal, emboldened and encouraged by the Smores, proceeded on his way out of that room and into the hall and up the stairs. Everywhere he went the sound of steam escaping from the radiators fol-

"Norah-dear-happy-cheer kep the fire up just for Me, I guess," he whispered to himself as he climbed the creaking steps.

Now, it must not be supposed that the Man-Animal in question was a chronic sompambulist, or in fact that he was a somnambulist at all; nor had he got the habit of midnight prowling. By no means. He was too much afraid of other Man-Animals, and of Things, neither animals nor men, who prowl about at night tooking for little Boys, to indulge himself as a matter of course. But he knew and felt that there is just one night in the whole year when Fear is dis Hed by the thought of Cheer, and when even are safe in the darkness and the silence of their

That one night is the Night Before.

On the Night Before, as is a well known fact, you don't think of anything at all except how early you are going to wake up, and if you do not wake up too carly whether Mother or Father will catch you doing

ter Bockhoven, 3d, as the Man-Animal was univerally known, Mother and Father were not apt to catch ou at it. (You spell the Frederic without a k, benuse Mother said so; Father and Father's Father ermany it was good enough for them, but what they aid and what German Emperors did didn't go with iother. Mother knew enough to sleep with her touth shut and wouldn't let her stummick press own on her heart, and just as like as not she knew bout k's, and so without a k.).

And so Frederic de Peyster Bockhoven, 3d. eached the top floor of the house and pushed open nother door, without particular precaution, and went nother door, without particular precaution, and went n. He fumbled for an instant at the wall. There was a citck, and the room was flooded with light. It was a big room, embracing the whole top floor save only he little room of Norah-dear-happy-cheer.

This big room was the Geranium—Father's and Frederic's. Father and kicked a goal from the Floid for Princeton in 1865 and had never gotten over it, so Mother said, hence Father's present interest in Atha-letics, and hence also the Geranium terest in Atha-letics, and hence also the Geranium.

erest in Atha-letics, and hence also the Gerantum. And the little Man-Animal, blinking his eyes, glanced interestedly about the Geranium. He noted the usual and ordinary things first—the rowing machine in the corner, the flying rings, or wings, as the Man-Ani

By William Hamilton Osborne

blood ran a bit more quickly in his veins as he viewed the Harry's Uncle Bob. Of all the devices in that big room the Harry's Uncle Bob had always pleased him most-he could do Things on it.

Suddenly he stopped breathing. "Gee whiz!" he said. He had seen the Tree, and the Things about the Tree. There is no thrill like that thrill, and his little heart pumped the blood up into his face and forced the sparkle and the glisten into his eyes. And yet-and yet-he approached the centre of events

with doubtful, halting footsteps.
"I wonder," he exclaimed, with hesitation, to himself, "I wonder if It's there."

the lightweight boxing gloves, the football

just like Father kicked the goal with so long ago,

the plastic putty, the paints and plenty other play-

For a full hour he searched without disturbing sings. He heard the clock down stairs chime one,

"It isn't there," he wailed at last. He toddled over

to the door, switched off the light, and stood for an

instant peering through the darkness toward the tree. "Why didn't I get It?" he complained. He cropt down

and then placed his clenched hands against his eyes.

"Why didn't he-why didn't Kriss Kringle [!t is well to state that this nomenclature in re the patron

saint of children had been adopted in the household,

probably to make up for the lack of K in other direc-

tions; besides, 'Santa Claus' isn't such an unctuous mouthful, after all]—why didn't Kriss bring It to me,

anyway?" exclaimed the midnight marauder. Then he added, in disgust:-"The old fool!" An attitude,

this, somewhat at variance with the traditions, some-

what incompatible with the possession of a boy's

motorcycle Special No. 1 and a flying wedge, patented,

for coasting, and all the other things, but it was an

attitude about which, nevertheless, there was no un-

"Plup! Plup-p-p! Plup-p-p-p!" the audible pout of dignified displeasure. Once in his own room, he threw off his bathrobe and kicked off his crocheted and crept into bed and crouched and cuddled

Half way down he smote the air of a sudden

two, three, four, five, but still he searched, and

"But." exclaimed Frederick, "I can't find It."

"Naw" ventured little Fritzie in response. "Don't want to know. Plup! Plup-p. Plup-p-p!"

Mother picked him up and kissed him, laying his indifference to a lack of realization. "Wait until Flops gets up stairs," she exclaimed, "and sees what Kriss brought him! All the shades are down and all the candles ready for lightling, and"—

"Plup-p-p-n!" pouted the hepoficiers

"Plup-p-p.p." pouted the beneficiary.
"Come on," said Father, "we won't dress the little beggar. We'll take him up just as he is. It's so warm all over the house and we'll plump him down in the midst of everything, and"—

The suggested campaign was followed out. The glory of the candle lights shone all about. But Flopsy-Fritzle-Frederic, 3d, only placed his arm against

on the cloth evenly with his knife—and after he had kicked the table three times in succession from underneath (huge kicks too, like the kick that made the goal in 1893) that Mother felt compelled to Banish him.

"This wouldn't have happened," said Father's Father, glaring at Mother's Mother, while Mother was engaged in consummating the process of outiawry, "if you'd left that k on the and of his name. Frederick," he said to Father, "give me one more gob of that chestnut dressing, if you please."

The outlaw, up in his own room, waited a decent length of time before commencing operations. He shut the door and went to the window and kicked on the wall. Outside, all about, was a dreary waste. The next house—Allinger's, the bank man's—seemed a mile away. Frederic, 3d, reasoned with himself to the effect that it was no good being a broker, or a bank man, or anything of that kind, because you had brought them, and Fritzle watched with growing 'acterest as bundle after bundle was undone and passed to live way up on top of a hill, in a great big house, just mopin' around. He made up his mind that when he married Mother if he ever did) he'd go into some business so's he and she could live in an alleyway somewhere, with fire escapes and things.

"N who's this kid" be asked himself.

"This kid" was an atom beating its way along the road, blowing upon red knuckles, knockreg superan-

road against the wind, shivering, dancing along the road, blowing upon red knuckles, knocking superan-

HAND IN HAND AND SOUND ASLEEP. the wall and put his head against his arm and sobbed There were a good many things there, grouped about the huge fir, with its glittering baubles and its can-dles ready for the lighting. There was the printing to his heart's content.
"It." That was the burden of his song. And Mother and Father looked each other in the eye and press, the moving picture machine, the boy's motorcycle (Special No. 1), the flying wedge (patented) for

Mother and Father looked each other in the eye and wondered, pondered.

"What is it that he wanted and we didn't get him—what can it be?" ssked Mother of Father. And, appointing themselves an investigating committee of two, they applied a pocket handkerchief to the overflowing eyes and put their heads together with Flopsy's and cross-examined him on it.

"What is it, dear?" asked Mother.

Whereupon the witness, bursting into a fresh torrent of tears, tore himself from their embrace and selected a fresh patch of wall and glued himself to it as before.

But tell us what It is"-

The victim slammed his elbows through the air—have you ever seen 'em do it, gentle reader?—and cate-gorically answered the interrogatory.
"I don't know." he wailed.

And it was true. Every Flopsy, as is well known in all places where Flopsys flourish, always craves every Christmas some One Particular Piece of Property—stakes his life, his happiness upon it; spends ix months anticipating it; becomes a howling idiot if he gets it and a raving maniac if he does not.

if he gets it and a raving maniac if he does not.

"Oh, if I only get that Automatic Electric Child's Trolley Car Outht No. 4, with Fifteen Feet of Track and Three Semaphores, and the Bridge and the Tunel, Car with Motor and Trailer, Complete \$8.50 by Express"—that's the kind of irrational speech that all Flopsys Indulge in, and you know it, to the eternal detriment of your depleted pocketbook.

But with Frederic, 3d, it had come to be different.

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But with Frederic, 3d, it had come to be different. Like a cow that loses her cud, he had nothing to chew on. He didn't know what it was he wanted. Only two ments before the event Mother had placed in his hands several white clean sheets of paper and had told him to write down on them his several desires, so that Kriss might not plead lack of notice. And only three days ago Fritzle had handed in his report—blank sheets, unsullied, innocent as to penmanship, vertical or otherwise. So Father, who was a broker, and therefore could do all sorts of things that it took money to do, had followed out his usual procedure and had furnished everything for Fritzie's Christmas. It was about the sixth time he had adopted this safe method and heretofore it had been highly satisfactory. But now—

"Plup-pl" and the siamming of elbows through the air and the hugging of walls and the reddening of eyes, all, unfortunately, a disease without a cure. "I don't know what It is." That was all.

They dressed him. They fed him his breakfast They toted him urstairs again. They played with him, or tried to—only they did all the playing; they left him alone, they wheedled him, punished him, fed him sweets, gave him a dose of calomel, felt his pulse, took his temperature—all to no avail.

"I want It." That was the burden of his song.

After a while the Guests began to arrive—Mother's Family and Father's Family, all grown-ups—for dinner. They were all worshippers at the shrine of Flopay and all got down on their knees before him. Some, who had not sent in their offerings before, now to him. But the glow of anticipation was succeeded by glum despair. It was ever absent.

"Plup-pb"

It was after he had deliberately spilled the cranberry sauce on the table at dinner—spreading it out rertainty.

"The old fool:" he kept muttering as he passed back again through Father's room, having reference, be it understood, to the saint and not to Father, who never yet had been designated as a saint. The boy noted, however, that Father had stopped snoring and that he had changed his position so that the weight of his "stummick" had been shifted beneficially. Frederic, 2d, passed on. In his disappointment he felt that it would do him good to slam a door or two, but he abandoned the idea as ill advised. So he passed on through Mother's room, only making sounds with his mouth.

nuated shoes against each other. "This kid" seemed to have come out of Allinger's, the bank man's, and seemed to be coming into Bockhoven, the broker's. At any rate, he didn't pass on up the road. He disappeared somewhere. Frederic, 3d, forgot him for the instant and remembered only the Thing that he wanted and didn't get.

He pluped and he wept and he kicked some more, and suddenly he remembered that he was all alone and that it was about time (as was his custom in outlawry) to console himself in company with Norahdear-happy-cheer. He crept softly down the back way, conscious that they had reached the nut and fruit and port wine stage at the Christmas dinner, and made his way into the kitchen and threw himself upon Norah's neck. He didn't weep, though. He didn't have time. He merely stared at the kitchen table, for there, at the kitchen table, was "this kid," stuffing good things into his system to his heart's content. Frederic, 3d, watched him with interest.

"Does your stummick push up on your heart at night?" he asked "this kid." The kid politely filled his mouth with onlon dressing before replying.

"My stummick," he asserted, all ignorant of the Truth that Mother advocated, "don't push nothin. I only push my stummick."

At this declaration of independence Fritzie crept back to Norah-dear-happy-cheer with much interrogation in his eyes.

"Who is he, Norah?" he whispered, uncertainly. Norah laughed. "O'ny my little bye," she laughed.

"Who is he, Norah?" he whispered, uncertainly.
Norah iaughed. "O'ny my little bye," she laughed,
eager and happy to detect the expression of keen
jealousy that appeared on Fritzie's face.
"But," reasoned Fritzie, "where's your husband,

"Aw," said Norah, airily, "I don't need no husband. What would I do with a husband, so long as I've got

"is he your little boy?"

Fritzie figured it all out. "I don't see why it isn't

"Sure."
Fritzie figured it all out. "I don't see why it isn't a good way, too," he said.

"Good way, what?" queried Norah.

"Good way, what?" queried Norah.

"To get your little boy first and then you can take your time about picking out your husband, Norah, dear." And, learing Norah dear to ponder this sociological problem, Fritzie appealed to the kid for the facts in the case.

"She's kiddin' you," opined the youthful stranger. "I ain't her boy. I been in three places lookin' fr somepin' to est—to push my stummick wit', just like you said. I ain't never seen her before. I was trun down all over, till I struck here. I ain't her boy. I was the young with I was. She's mighty good to me, she is. My name," he continued in response to inquiry, licking his fingers the while, "is Pink."

"Cut me a piece of the skin, Norah dear," said Fritzle, who was feeling hungry by suggestion, and while he chewed upon it he continued the examination:—"Is your father a bank man? Is he Stocks and Bonds? Do you live in an alley?"

Whereupon it appeared in evidence that Pink's father was not in stocks or bonds, and Pink was blest if he knew where the old gent was, and Pink's mother was not, having shuffled off this mortal coil, and as for alleys, you know blame well, Bo, that there ain't no alleys in this burg—not till you gets to the Oranges an' Hoboken an' N' Yawk any such. An', aw, say, I couldn't eat another t'ing, and', aw, you're await good to me, "he said.

"Sure."

"Sure."

"In I' was ant he twinkling of an eye, Happiness Personified.

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"I' I' she faltered, for the discovery should have been hers, along with the pressure of the stomach on the heart; "I see it now. There were no chilled fritzle, who was feeling hungry by suggestion, and the vice of the stomach of the stomach of the stomach of the stomach of the sto

"I gotter go," said Fink.

"W-w-w-wait a minute," spluttered Fritzle, "I—I—I want to tell you somethin." What was it he wanted to tell? What was the strange, ecstraic, beatific aspression upen Fritzle's face? What did it mean? He stood there, struggling with his own thoughts, tingling with a new sensation.

"Say," he whispered hoarsely in the direction of Pink, "do you want to see a Christmas tree—my Christmas tree an' Things?"

Pink gave it as his opinion that he did.

While Norah was in the little butter's pantry Fritzle put his mouth close to Pink's ear.

"Gome with me," he whispered, pulling that gentleman across the floor; "creep up these stairs and when you get to the next floor run like the devil for the Geranium. Come on."

Said programme accordingly was carried out. Portwine and chatter were still in evidence down stairs. Fritzle and Pink entered the Geranium and shut the door behind them softly.

"This," said Fritzie proudly, "is the Geranium."

"Get on to the tree," said Pink in awe struck tones.

Fritzie ignored the tree and the things. He pointed out the features of the landscape. "There's the flyin' wings," he said, "and this," he added, as he swunghmest deftly upon it, "is the Harry's Uncle Bob."

"Quit your kiddin." returned Pink; "that's a horizontal bar, Bo. I seen 'em at the Christine Assination in the Hall."

"Harry's Uncle Bob is what I said," assented Fritsie, "didn't 1?" he added. Whereupon he turned and

zontal bar, Bo. I seen 'em at the Christine Assination in the Hall."

"Harry's Uncle Bob is what I said," assented Fritsle, "didn't I?" he added. Whereupon he turned and twisted on it to his heart's delight, and rose immediately in the estimation of the young kid, Pink.

"You're a reglar circus reformer," admitted Pink.
Pink approached the tree. "I gotter see the things," he said. He tasted the candy things and he touched the fragile things and he handled the toy things.

"Did you get everything you wanted, Bo?" he saked.
Fritzle's eyes grew large as this question sank in. His chin began to quiver and he prepared himself for the pang that had been shooting through his heart all day long, but the pang didn't arrive. His chin stopped quivering. The "Plup! Plup!" fell short of expression. Did he have everything he wanted? He had wanted—It. He had not known what It was. He had been miserable, But now a strange thing had happened. He didn't want it. There was nothing that he longed for. Like Plak's empty "strummick," Fritzle's unnamed, unknown, "systerious want had been filled—by what means or when or how he did not know. Like a thousand of brick the Christmas spirit descended upon him and he laughed aloud with sheer pleasure, cheer, heliday happiness.
"Pink," he returned, "I got a whole lot more'n I

him and he laughed aloud with sheer pleasure, chearheilday happiness.

"Pink," he returned, "I got a whole lot more'n I
wanted. Look at 'en. You can ride my Special No.
I if you know how. Tit teach you how," he added.

Downstairs Father, tossing his last cigar stump
into its receptacle, suddenly bethought him of the
outlaw upstairs. "Poor little beggar," he said to the
guests about the table, "he's as quiet as a mouse.
I'll go up and see how he's getting on."

He found that the outlaw had slipped his limits
and was not in his room. Suspicious sounds from
overhead sent Father up the third story stairs at a
bound. Just outside the Geranium door he paused.

"He's having a devil of a fine time," he told himself.

Laugh upon laugh, screech upon screech of child-ish glee—due probably to Pink's amusing efforts to tide the Special No. 1—forced themselves through the door. "Sounds something like," thought Father. He opened the door on a crack and peeked in. "Well—what do you think of that?" he whispered

to himself.

Twenty minutes later he strolled downstairs again and lounged across the end of the sofa.

"How's Flopsy?" queried Flopsy's Mother.
Father smiled. "All to the good," he answered, glancing out of the window; "he's fast asleep upon his little bed."

his little bed."

"On his right side?" queried Mother.

"I—I believe so," answered Father, "and," he hastened to add, "no pulse and no fever, so he's all C. K."

Of course, being a broker, this sort of prevarication came easy to Father. "Gee," thought Father to himself, "but Fritzie certainly did tip that other chap a Cut in the Solar Plexus with those Boxing Gioves, for sure!"

"Madge," he said to Mother, after the guests had all "Madge," he said to Mother, after the guests had all departed, Father's Father having taken just another ip of old port to brace him for the cold air before he went—"Madge," said Father, "I wish you'd come with me." They went, hand in hand, up the stairs, through the early dusk of the holiday afternoon, and they paused just outside the Geranium door. Father peeked in first. There was not a sound within; not a whisper, not the winking of an eyelid.
"Well," exclaimed Father, and he threw open wide the doors. "Look, Madge!" he exclaimed.

There, under the Harry's Uncle Bob, with their backs against the upright, slumped two diminuitive forms—two Man-Animals—Pink and Fritzie, hand is hand and sound asleep. "I told you he was asleep," said Father, gloating

hand and sound asleep.
"I told you he was asleep," said Father, gloating over the half truth, as he was wont to do when he bamboosled some lamb upon the Street. Mother took one look, moved nearer and took another look.
"Merciful heavens!" she almost shrieked. "Who,

why, what?"
"I don't know," said Father, calmly, lighting an-

"I don't know," said Father, calmly, lighting another cigar; "maybe Norah knows."

Norah being called, knew and told, and was berated by Mother and congratulated by Father.

"But," exclaimed Mother, lifting her skirts as she approached Pink, "he might have B.'s"—B.'s in this connection designating visible though infinitesimal bacilli of an external and highly undesirable character—"he might have B's."

Father blew a smoke ring. "I don't care," he said, belligerently swinging his leg as one who would kick a goal from the field, "I don't care if he's got B. B.'s"—a term used advisedly to classify another and much more visible and bloodthirsty species of bacilli, banlahed sometimes by benzine. Mother shivered with horror.

horror.
"Just sit down, Madge," said Father, "and watch
'em and think about 'em hard. I saw the little beggar," he added, significantly, "before he went to

git, he added, significantly, before he went to sleep," Fink stretched his arms and yawned. He had been sleeping with his mouth closed—a point in his favor, surely. His waking was a noisy one. Then he be-came alarmed at the sight of Mother and Father. He shook Fritzie by the arm.

"Bol Bo!" he yelled with chattering teeth, "they're

after me!"

Bo—otherwise Flopsy, Fritzi, Frederic—opened
his eyes and grunted and smiled and—broke into a

Bo—otherwise Fiopsy, Fritzi, Frederic—opened his eyes and grunted and smiled and—broke into a laugh.

"Such fun!" he cried.

Mother opened her mouth wide—not to breathe through it, but to allow some expression of astonishment to escape her. Eritzie's face was changed, glorified. He was quivering with joy, excitement. He had become, as in the twinkling of an eye, Happiness Personified.

"Do you know what It was?" queried Father.

Mother shook her head. Father nodded. "It was another Man-Animal," he said; "we didn't understand. We kept the little beggar too much to ourselves."

"I—I"—— she faltered, for the discovery should have been hers, along with the pressure of the stomach on the heart; "I see it now. There were no children anywhere around—no companion for him."

"He has one now," said Father.

"Not—this," protested Mother, her lips forming the portenious letter B.

"Yes—this," responded Father, "for the time being at any rate. For this is—It. And Fritzie and I know it for the thing it is," he added. He laughed aloud, and the voices of the young Man-Animals joined with his.

