

happy surprise, and pressed your husband and Judy into my service, but knowing the latter could not keep my secret, I fairly carried her off to-day on pretence of helping me. I meant to have made myself a Christmas present to you, Dora, but was too impatient, and here I am!"

"And you actually kept a secret from me, Judy?" said Mrs. Fred, in what she strove to make an injured tone.

"Clare to goodness, Honey," protested Judy, energetically, her yellow turban all awry with excitement. "I couldn't help it! Massa Rolf he done gib me no chance! He say he want you all to dinner to-morrow, an he keep me dat busy my ole bones ache!"

"Yes," interrupted Rolf—"you dine with me to-morrow; at what hour will you be ready, and I will call for you?"

"Not till after morning service," said Dora gently.

"You are right, little sister, we have double cause for thankfulness to-morrow! we will go direct from church. And now, lest the eyes be dim which must look their brightest, I will go to my hotel. Look for me early, and look your prettiest; before to-morrow night you shall have a famous Christmas-box."

But Dora, with brimming eyes, said softly, "I have had my Christmas-box, none so precious in all the city."

And the moon-lit splendours of that Christmas Eve glided softly into the roseate hues of the blessed Christmas morning, and "wee wee" awoke with such gladness in her heart, that her voice was ringing through the house in Christmas carols long before breakfast, spite of Judy's solemn warning—with spoon in one hand and saucepan in the other, that "she'd cry fore night, sartin." And Fred, with many smiles and kisses, invested his wife in a set of silvery gowns, which made her look, as he declared, like a fairy. And Judy, with a great display of ivory, presented Massa Fred with a pair of gorgeous Indian moccasins, on which all the colours of the rainbow combined to form a long-haired Indian girl with bow and arrow. "Noie, I reckon you comfortable for de winter, sah! You no cill to hab cole feet wid dese yere!" And Fred thought with woeeful countenance, that he would be expected to appear at all times, in these objects of her admiration or grieve the faithful creature. He had not forgotten her, and a coarse, but bright warm shawl gladdened her heart, a scarlet and yellow pin-cushion of beads, was then presented to her mistress, and her Christmas ceremonies were over. And now the bells pealed forth their invitations. And crowds of happy-hearted worshippers were thronging the churches, Rolf joined them as they entered the old-fashioned church beside them, and entered heartily into the services. The cheerful, helpful sermon over, they were joined by Judy at the gallery stair, looking in her best clothes, like an animated rainbow, and giving a last peep at the home-ward, to see all was right, Dora was helped by her brother into an elegant sleigh, with prancing grey horses, and liveried driver.

"Why, Rolf," she said, "this must be a private carriage."

"Yes," said he, with an amused smile, "it belongs to a friend of mine."

And resigning herself to the luxury of gliding rapidly over the glittering snow, wrapped in soft furs, she wondered vaguely to which hotel Rolf was taking them? Oh! it was exhilarating! the frosty air, the jingling bells, the crowds of people walking, and driving toward their homes; eager for Christmas cheer! One almost forgot there was poverty, sickness and sorrow in the world, but it was there, though it hid itself like a wounded creature this bright day. And Dora inwardly resolved, if ever Fred was rich, Christmas should be a glad day in many a poor home! But a glance around showed her the coachman had left the crowded city streets, and was passing the villa residences of the West end, and before she could speak he turned the prancing greys through a great stone gateway, up a semi-circular drive, bordered with evergreens, and stopped at the stone portico of an elegant mansion. With a puzzled, doubtful look, she said "Brother! who's house is this?" "The lady friend's, who own the sleigh," he said smiling, "don't be alarmed! I will soon introduce you." And following her brother, leaning on her husband's arm, she entered the noble hall, and was warmly welcomed by white-headed Uncle Simon, who in black suit and white tie, tried to look dignified, but succeeded only in being joyful. Turning to the right of the hall, upon the tessellated floor of which the light fell from a stained glass dome, Rolf flung open a door—saying, "let me introduce you to my friend"—and led the astonished pair through a stately drawing-room, with window hangings of green velvet and white lace, across a carpet like a field of softest mosses, green and brown with scattered sheafs of lilies of the valley. Dora saw with one bewildered glance that the walls were hung alternately with lofty mirrors and sunny landscapes, with here and there a group of exquisite statuary, she felt the air heavy with the perfume of hot-house flowers, she noticed vaguely the luxurious green velvet couches and chairs, the elegant trifles scattered about; but her brother attentively led the way to the end of the room, where an archway, draped with green velvet, seemed to lead to a smaller room, and grasping the hangings said—"behold my dearest earthly friend, the mistress of this mansion!" One little pang, as she thought, "the brother found was to be lost so soon!" And lifting her eyes they remained fixed in astonishment on a lofty mirror, which filled the arch, and reflected the long room, her brother and husband, herself in the foreground. Fred, with a bewildered air, began vigorously pinching himself, not doubting he would wake up presently a poor clerk, on a limited salary. While Dora turned so pale, that Rolf caught her in his arms, saying exultingly, "this is wee wee's Christmas-box!"

Such excitement as followed when they began to realize it was not a beautiful dream! and fell to inspecting each room in turn. Such a cozy yet elegant library across the hall, books from floor to ceiling: the great bay-window fitted up with massive desk, and crimson-covered chairs and couches. The old-fashioned fire-place was full of blazing logs, and above the bronze mantel clock hung a splendidly illuminated map of the world. Back of this was a noble dining-room, perfect in all its appointments. And opening from it a bright little conservatory, its fragrance and bloom filling Dora with delight. Up the graceful winding stair Rolf led them, first to Dora's suite of rooms, sitting, dressing, and bed-rooms tasteful and cozy, where a maid was waiting to remove her wraps; then the elegant guest chambers were inspected. But the crowning glory of the house to Dora was the music room, with a large stained glass window, scattering tints of purple, scarlet, and gold. Here were piano, organ and harp, and many costly pictures, two panels were vacant, Rolf told her they would be filled with portraits of their parents. And then in answer to their eager questions, how he had managed this great surprise, he told them his friend Tellfair has spoken to him of this house, just finished,

nearly furnished, when the owner died, and it was offered for sale at a price which found no purchaser. He examined it, and found that little was needed to complete it as a home for the little sister who had born poverty so well; and with aid of unlimited money he had worked miracles in a few days. "I determined not to make myself know to you Dora till my gift was in my hand." And now he said: "there is just time to examine my room before dinner. He led the way to a medium sized room whose windows and balcony overhung the garden. It was furnished with almost monastic simplicity; but between the windows and directly fronting the iron bedstead, hung a picture which fixed Dora's attention. It was the life-sized portrait of a beautiful girl, with heavy black hair braided away from a madonna brow, clear, dark oval face, and regular features, without a touch of colour, save the scarlet thread of the lips. She was clad in a robe of white India muslin, and rubies gleamed in his dark hair, and about her delicate wrists and throat; in the massive ebony frame the name "Inez" was set in rubies. "That was your sister" said Rolf, "those were the genius she loved, and it was my fancy to place them there." Over the mantel hung a southern flag draped in crape, and crossed with a gleaming sword, other ornaments it had none. With melancholy eyes upon the picture, he said "you must take the giver with the gift, Dora, he has no other home!"

Who shall paint the glories of that Christmas dinner? or the complacency of old Simon as he took a position behind his master's chair, having followed Rolf to Mexico and back, he felt he was not to be trifled with. As for Judy she told her "Missus" confidentially after dinner that she "spotted she'd hat to marry de ole fool to git rid of him. He'd ax'd her twenty times since her old man died, and now he'd ax'd her agin!" After dinner they gathered around the cheerful grate in the music room, and talked softly in the twilight of past, present, and future. "You will not be a portionless wife, Dora, said Rolf, and Fred must proceed with the law-studies which he gave up for the sake of my little sister." And as the glowing coals grew more intense in the darkness, Dora slipped away leaving them to their musings, and seating herself at the piano, while a flood of moonlight fell over her from the window, she touched the keys softly, recalling many tender memories to the hearts of both, and at last after a wild pathetic prelude, she sang a song she had composed in the first days of her exile.

"Lost! lost! all is lost!"

Why do I live forlorn?

Loving father, tender mother—

Happy home, and noble brother—

All from me are torn."

"Lost! lost! the cause we cherished!"

Lost the flag we loved.

Trail it low, in dust and ashes—

Never more the cannon crashes

Will it float above!

Lost! lost! the God of Battles

Came not to our aid!

Though we strove as few have striven,

Yet we stand, forlorn, bereaved—

Though we wept and prayed!

Found! found! the Peace which passes

All we understand!

Grant that peace, O Lord, we pray thee,

May pervade the Land!

The peace of God which passes all

That we can understand!"

She ceased, and joining them at the fire, she too traced out a future in the glowing depths. Let us follow the thoughts of each for a moment. The husband saw a pathway opened before him, by which the highest honours of his country were possible to him; he saw himself honoured and respected, his wife admired and beloved; children, and children's children gathering about him, brightening an cheering his pathway to the grave, and at the last closing his eyes with the deep grief, felt only for the noblest and truest of mankind. The wife saw a lowlier path of household cares, and joys and duties, she saw the sick nursed, the sad comforted, the poor and the sinful, helped, she saw God's guiding hand in everything, and all the pathway to the grave was Peace. And Rolf saw a grave on a lonely sea-shore in a strange land; he saw himself but the steward of his immense wealth, doing what good he could in his day and generation—and, at the last—Inez and Heaven.

(Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.)

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AT LAST.

By J. F. BALLANTYNE.

I.

"Ugh! this weather is enough to make a saint swear. I'll be — blessed if I stay another winter in Montreal. I'll go south again."

The speaker, Mr. John Hatton, popularly known by his intimate friends as Jack Hatton, was a tall, slender, dark-hued son of Maryland. Whenever the weather was not precisely suited to his taste he habitually gave vent to his feelings in the above threat. He had done so for four years and was quite liable to do so ten more. The place was Jack's apartments on St. James street, "Bachelor's Paradise" it had been christened. The time was seven o'clock in the evening of the twenty-first day of December, eighteen hundred and something.

Having relieved his mind by his usual threat, Jack proceeded to divest himself of his cap, overcoat and boots. The cap he carefully deposited on the floor in one corner of the room, the coat found a resting place on an adjacent chair, and the boots were ignominiously thrust under the centre table. He then donned smoking cap, dressing gown and slippers, filled one of the brownest of meerschaums with tobacco, seated himself in a large easy chair, placed his feet upon the mantel and gave himself up to the enjoyment of a "good square smoke," as he termed it. For some minutes he puffed in silence and lazily watched the smoke as it curled upwards to the ceiling. An expression of ineffable contentment gradually settled upon his face and he began to soliloquize.

"Let me see. This is the twenty-first and Tuesday will be Christmas. Wonder how I'll manage to amuse myself. Suppose I'll feel awfully dull. Generally do on Christmas. I wish——"

Just what Jack was about to wish will probably remain forever a mystery, for at this moment his soliloquy was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Come in, come in," he called out, without moving from his comfortable position. "Don't stand out there all night in the cold."

The door opened and Harrie Sinclair entered.

"Well, Jack, you look comfortable, I must say."

"That you, Harrie? Yes, I do feel comfortable. Nothing like it, I assure you. Take a chair."

Harrie had not waited for this invitation, but, having divested himself of overcoat and cap, was busily engaged in filling a fac-simile of the meerschaum that Jack was so hugely enjoying.

"By the way, Jack, I've got a note for you. Mrs. Carusi charged me with its delivery."

"Toss it over. Ah! thanks. Um! Mrs. Carusi requests the pleasure of Mr. Hatton's company to meet a few friends on Christmas Eve. Yes. Just so. What do you say, Harrie, shall we go?"

"I intend to be there, if possible," responded Harrie.

"Who shall we probably meet, do you know?"

"Well, no. The usual crowd, I imagine. Oh yes, I forgot. There will be one young lady present whom you have never met, Miss Grace Martin, an old sweetheart of mine."

"An old sweetheart of yours, Harrie?"

"Yes, I was once engaged to her, but we had a misunderstanding and separated."

"And you immediately turned your attention to that little red-haired Quebec girl, to whom you now stand committed?"

"I say, Jack, you ought not to speak that way of a lady you have never seen. Mary Graham is a noble woman, and her hair is not red: it is a beautiful auburn."

"Well, well, old fellow, excuse me. I meant no harm. But that curl you showed me is certainly red. Your eyes are blind by love and all that sort of nonsense. You are not an impartial judge."

"Oh, have it your own way if it pleases you."

With this remark Harrie knocked the ashes out of his pipe, reached for his overcoat and prepared to take his departure.

"Off already, Harrie? What's your hurry? Can't you take another pipe?"

"No, thanks, I must go. I have some work that must be finished immediately, so good-night. I suppose I'll see you at Carusi's?"

"Yes, I think I shall go. I'm rather anxious to have a look at Miss Martin."

As the door closed on his friend, Jack laughed quietly to himself.

"A young lady whom I never met. I rather guess he'd be somewhat surprised if he knew that I travelled all through Italy with her party, and had heard all about that little affair before I ever saw him. What a fool he was. By Jove, I wish I had had his chance. I do, sure as my name is Jack Hatton."

So saying he refilled the brown meerschaum, took a book from the shelf and settled into his usual attitude to read.

II.

The "few friends" whom Mrs. Carusi had invited Mr. Hatton to meet proved to be a large and brilliant assemblage. The spacious parlours of "The Evergreens" were well filled with guests, and the evening was passing merrily away in a round of dances.

Jack and Harrie were both present, the former in his usual exuberant spirits which nothing seemed to depress, the other in a rather unenviable state of mind. Three years ago that night Harrie Sinclair and Grace Martin had plighted their troth and in another year were to have been married. Some little misunderstanding, however, had intervened and Harrie in a passion had demanded release from his vows. Grace, too proud to plead, had quietly removed the ring from her finger and handed it to him, and all was over. She had immediately afterwards left for Europe and but one week had now elapsed since her return. He, during her absence, fancying that his affections had at last found their true object, had proposed to a young lady in Quebec, who after some slight hesitation had accepted him. Two weeks ago he had written to her urging that an early day might be fixed upon for the consummation of their happiness. The answer to this letter had been, to say the least, peculiar. While she assured him of her affection, she had not, she wrote, his hopeful confidence in the future. She should die without his love, but her only wish was for his happiness. She feared she could not fill the place that a wife should fill, and if he could only find some one who would enter into all his little plans and projects for the future with the interest she should, but did not feel, no murmur would escape her lips. She loved him too dearly not to value his happiness beyond her own. Harrie was perplexed. He had said nothing to call for such a response. He certainly loved her and her alone, and she assured him of her entire affection, yet she feared to marry him. He wrote again and demanded an explanation. Only that morning he had received, not an explanation, but what might be construed into an apology for her previous letter. This only added to Harrie's perplexity. All day long he had pondered over the question. "Does she really love me?" And then a second question arose unbidden to his mind. "Do I really love her?" Neither could he answer satisfactorily, and when evening came he went, sorely against his inclination, to "The Evergreens" with the two questions still racking his brain.

It was quite late when the two friends met.

"Well, Jack, have you been presented to her?"

"To whom do you refer?"

"Why, to Miss Martin, of course. Have you seen her? What do you think of her?"

"Perfectly divine. She dances like a fairy. Ah! there goes the 'Beautiful Blue Danube.' I must be off. She has promised me this waltz."

And Jack hurried away and soon glided with Miss Martin, past Harrie in such perfect harmony with the spirit of the aesthetic composer that the music and the dancers seemed inseparable. Jack's dancing was the admiration of all the women and the envy of the men, and he did not overrate Miss Martin when he compared her to a fairy. As they floated around the room more than one couple paused to watch their easy, graceful movements, and the dowagers nodded approvingly to one another and whispered that they seemed made for each other and wondered if it could possibly fail to be a match.

And Harrie, as they glided past him again and again, was struck with the same idea. At the thought, his heart almost ceased to beat and the conviction flashed upon him that all