



Poor Mrs. Midgely sat in her disordered living room in a utterly hopeless attitude.

"Oh, dear," she sighed, "I haven't the heart to tidy the house or even myself. To think of Christmas only three weeks away, and not one gift for the children and no hope of getting any. I am glad they are at school; I can at least have a good cry!"

Just as she was getting out her handkerchiefs, she heard the postman's step on the porch. Habit forced her to jump back the tears and go to the door. He handed her several letters, all of which she recognized as bills, with the exception of one, which bore the handwriting of her sister Judith.

"Anna, dear," she wrote, "at last I can visit you, and shall be with you in a few days."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! To think of Judith visiting us at a time like this, when we can hardly manage, with the high cost of living, to set the table, let alone having a holiday time!"

Mrs. Midgely indulged in the dearest cry, then, realizing there was much to be done, she dried her eyes, and with the relief that the shedding of tears

gave her, she started in to put the house in order.

"At least we'll be clean," she said to herself, as she made broom and dustpan about.

Some months before this time Henry Midgely had lost his position as bookkeeper on account of the failure of the firm for which he worked. They had had no idea of impending conditions and were almost staggered by the blow. The Midgelys had four growing children and every month had lived up to the salary. Mr. Midgely had just found another position. When Anne wrote home she did not tell her father of their loss, and she bravely set herself the task of making up for the months when debts had accumulated.

Christmas! That was the hard part. Nothing for the children! They had had such jolly times before, with presents for everyone. Now she had more work than ever to do and less time for making presents, even if she had the money with which to buy material.

"I shall have to tell Judith," she said to her husband that night, when they were seated by the lamp and the children were in bed, "how sorry we are that we cannot make her visit a pleasant one."

"It is too bad," said he. "Judith is such a slave to your father, looking after his every whim and never thinking of herself. I wish she had a home of her own. I always planned to give her a really good time whenever she should make that long-deferred visit."

Judith arrived, her face shining with happiness.

"As last I am here! Are you quite well, Anne?"

"Oh, yes, dear," Mrs. Midgely's voice had a strange note in it. Judith looked up quickly.

"You don't look well, Anne. What is the matter?"

Poor Anne let the floodgates of her tears open and told Judith her troubles.

"Anne, dear, we must take an inventory of stock and see what we can make for the children for Christmas."

"There is nothing," said Anne. "We'll find something!" determinedly answered Judith.

"You can make things out of comparatively nothing," laughed Anne, "but you can't make them out of absolutely nothing."

"Yes, we can! I'll send for my yarns and knit a cap and mittens for each child. They are using bright colors and combinations of colors. In that way we can use your left-over yarns, too. We'll have plenty without buying any more, and I knit rapidly, I've done lots of this work for the Red Cross."

She made looms with empty spools and pins, from which each child helped to make a round string which they worked on at odd moments. They were to be sewed on the mittens. No more hunting for the "other mitten." The children were entertained with the idea of being useful and of helping Aunt Judith.

The sisters looked up discarded dolls and sewed up legs and arms, painted the faces and restored the hair. Entire swaths of clothes that could be taken off and put on were made from bits of cloth found in the scrap bag, and they crocheted lace enough for the trimming. These were for the two little girls, Martha and Peggy, aged seven and nine.

How to make eleven-year-old Ralph happy with left-overs was the problem. These Judith remembered that years ago she had been the recipient of a stamp book which she had not need. She wrote her father for it, and then invested in some mixed stamps for Ralph to make a beginning with. A few new puzzles and toys from the ten-cent store made a goodly array of bright things for Tommy, who was the youngest child.

"Now for the dinner," said Judith. "Let's not try to have the usual Christmas dinner, but think up something different."

"I did so want to ask Mr. and Mrs. Lambert," sighed Anne. "They came from England several years ago, and are so alone at Christmas time. I had hoped to have them, but of course I cannot do it this year."

"That gives me the very idea, Anne. We'll invite them and surprise them with a regular English dinner—roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and gravy, and have roly-poly pudding for dessert."

The days flew by with the sisters as busy as bees. Anne was never happier in all her life. She had not time for repining, and found that by simply making the best of everything she had no real troubles at all. Henry, too, caught the spirit of hope, and remarked to his wife:

"It won't be long until we have made up for lost time, and I like my new position better than the old one, because it has more of a future to it."

The Lamberts were delighted with the invitation, as they were expecting a lonely day, far away from Marie England.

One day, when Judith came in from shopping, Anne met her with the news: "A nephew, John Leigh, has surprised the Lamberts. He has been serving in France, and is sent here by the British government on a mission to Washington. He has a week's vacation and has come to spend it with them. I insisted that he come to our Christmas dinner, and they are all going to call tonight."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Judith. "Perhaps he can advise me about my Red Cross work."

Everyone was delighted to meet the handsome young soldier and eager to hear stories of "over there" from one who knew. John became a great help to Judith with her plans for the children's Christmas and her Red Cross work. In fact, he thought of so many things that he came to the Midgelys at least once a day and every evening. He trimmed the tree while Judith made the simple things to adorn it.

One evening Mrs. Midgely remarked to her husband: "I never saw a young man so interested in children."

He looked up from his paper in amused surprise. "My dear, do you really think he is interested only in the children?"

"John, you don't mean Judith?"

"Certainly. It has been evident from the first."

Christmas arrived—a glorious day, with snow on the ground. The children had hung up their stockings. Into the bottom of each had been placed the bright new cap and mittens, and a gay bag of candy on top, while the other gifts were grouped about the tree.

The Girl and the Tambourine



IT WAS the Saturday before Christmas. The winter's day was fast disappearing as Tom Danvers and John Harding stepped out of the club and joined the moving holiday crowd. For an hour they had watched it through the window as they smoked and talked, and Tom, while he had been much amused at John's cynical comment, had taken it all as a joke, for John was never pessimistic. Now, as they walked down the crowded thoroughfare conversation was difficult, and John was unusually silent. Recalling bits of phrases in their recent conversation, it suddenly occurred to Tom that there had been an unaccustomed tone, even a note of bitterness, underlying the smile and lightly spoken words of his oldest and best friend, whom he felt he knew as he did himself. At the thought he looked sharply and piercingly at him, but the strong, resolute profile bore no trace of the cynicism of the last hour, much less evidence of its cause. It was just imagination, Tom concluded.

As they stood waiting for a cross-town car an observant and clever beggar approached. Tom answered the appeal with a coin.

"Not from me," said John, in a disapproving tone.

"Oh, well, it's Christmas time," said Tom.

"Yes, that's just it, and he knows it and makes capital of it. It is sympathetic or sentimental charity, and I don't approve of it."

"Upon my word, Tom, you are funny this afternoon. What is the matter with you? First you condemn women, then you denounce this happy holiday crowd as a 'passing show,' and now this poor beggar. It's well you are going to be with me for a while; you need the home influence, and—by Jove! you need a wife! That is the antidote for you, old fellow," he concluded, emphasizing his conviction with a slap on the back.

"No, thank you," was the laughing reply as they stepped aboard the car. It was well filled. Across from the friends sat two good-looking women, evidently mother and daughter. Next to the younger woman sat a sweet-faced Salvation Army girl, with her tambourine in her lap. Her plain dark blue dress was in marked contrast to the fashionable suit and beautiful furs of the ladies beside her. Suddenly the younger of the two turned and spoke to her. She smilingly responded and shook her head, but as the other continued to urge a wistful look came into the Army girl's face as she glanced about the car.

"No, no," they heard her say; "the conductor would not allow me. The rules are very strict." She added in explanation. For a moment or so there was silence, and over the faces of both showed disappointment.

Then suddenly the younger woman, with the color suffusing her lovely face, caught up the tambourine and, depositing a coin in it, started down the car, ignoring the shocked and expostulating "Nancy!" and the detaining hand of her astonished companion. Passing from passenger to passenger, she extended the tambourine, always with a little smile and "It's Christmas, you know," or some little word, until each one felt it a privilege to contribute something. As she turned by the door the conductor stepped forward with, "Please, miss, I want to add something to that, too."

Flushing, she exclaimed, "Oh! thank you so much."

She passed on to her seat and returned to its owner the tambourine, that never before had received contributions so promptly and cheerfully bestowed.

John Harding's hand had gone at once into his pocket when he realized what the girl was doing, and now he was watching her with an almost awe

struck interest—her lovely, sympathetic face, as she talked earnestly to the little worker in blue, apparently unconscious that her sudden impulse had first startled and then knit together in kindly sympathy an entire car of strangers.

"By Jove! that was a great thing to do," said Tom enthusiastically, when the tension of an absorbing interest had subsided a little.

"Yes, I never saw its equal," replied John. After a moment's hesitation he added: "I should like to know that girl. Do you suppose we could find out who she is?"

"We can try," his friend replied; "but why do you want to know?"

"Well, I do," John answered curtly. Tom glanced quizzically at him and smiled to himself. This was another phase of John he was just getting acquainted with. When the car reached the railway station where John and Tom were going to take a train for Tom's suburban home, the two women also left the car. They went straight to the ticket window. Tom took out his commutation book and passed it to John.

"You follow them and I will join you," he whispered, the spirit of mischief and adventure now possessing him. Having bought their tickets, the women turned from the window and hurried to the train. There in the same car Tom found them all.

"Well, if this isn't luck," he exclaimed, as soon as he was seated. And then, with the air of a boy bursting with news, he said: "They are going to D—."

"Yes, I know it," Harding replied. But as he vouches no information and did not seem inclined to talk, Tom took refuge in his paper and promptly forgot the whole affair, until he was abruptly called back by:

"Tom, I cannot tell you when a thing so impressed me as that did"—as if there could be but one "that."

"That?" asked Tom, a little puzzled. Then, "Oh, I thought you did not believe in that kind of charity—sympathetic and sentimental. I think you called it," he teasingly reminded him, remembering the chap who John had dropped in the tambourine.

"Oh, that is altogether different," John answered, half defiantly.

"Yes, different because a pretty girl made this appeal, an old man the other," laughed Tom. "But tell me, how do you adjust your acts to the circumstances?"

"Oh, theories, the dickens! What are they ever compared to acts? And that act this afternoon was a spontaneous expression of the true Christmas spirit, from which springs the desire to help, to bring some joy to a lot of poor unfortunate, because 'It's Christmas, you know,'" he quoted softly. "It was the real thing, and everybody in the car felt it."

And having, as it were, justified his position and interest, he looked across at the unconscious subject of their remarks. Truly she was good to look at, though at present all he could see was the well-cut profile and the glorious copper-colored hair turning to gold spots where the western sun struck it, and eyes, that with her mood, he knew, varied from hazel to brown. A veritable gem of a girl, he thought, as she began adjusting her furs. With an intuitive feeling of understanding her, he turned to Tom.

"Don't mention the affair to anyone, not even Mary, for it would not please her. I am sure," he added, as the train pulled up at D—.

The station was small and John had just finished greeting Mrs. Danvers, when Billy Grant's deep voice spoke in: "Hello, Harding; glad to see you," as they shook hands.

Grant, an old friend of both Harding and Danvers, also lived in D—.

"Now, I want you to meet our friends, for its cold and I want to get home."

While Tom and John were bowing in acknowledgment to "Mrs. North and Miss North," their host checked out about its being "too bad the children have met at the other end of the line, as long as they happened to be on the same train."

Nancy North threw a quick glance at Harding, but otherwise no outward sign was given, as he walked with her to the car, that they had ever seen one another before or that the same thought was in the minds of both, but John was so strangely silent that Miss North's color deepened each time she looked up and met his smiling eyes.

"Now, don't you fellows keep our bridge waiting tonight," called Grant, as he gave the signal to start.

"I'll guarantee our arrival on time," Grant, answered John, well satisfied with the arrangement, whether it was chance or fate, for somewhere within him something was thrillingly alert, tantalizingly expectant, confidently hopeful, and the feeling of the afternoon that had expressed itself in cynicism and manifested itself in loneliness was gone.

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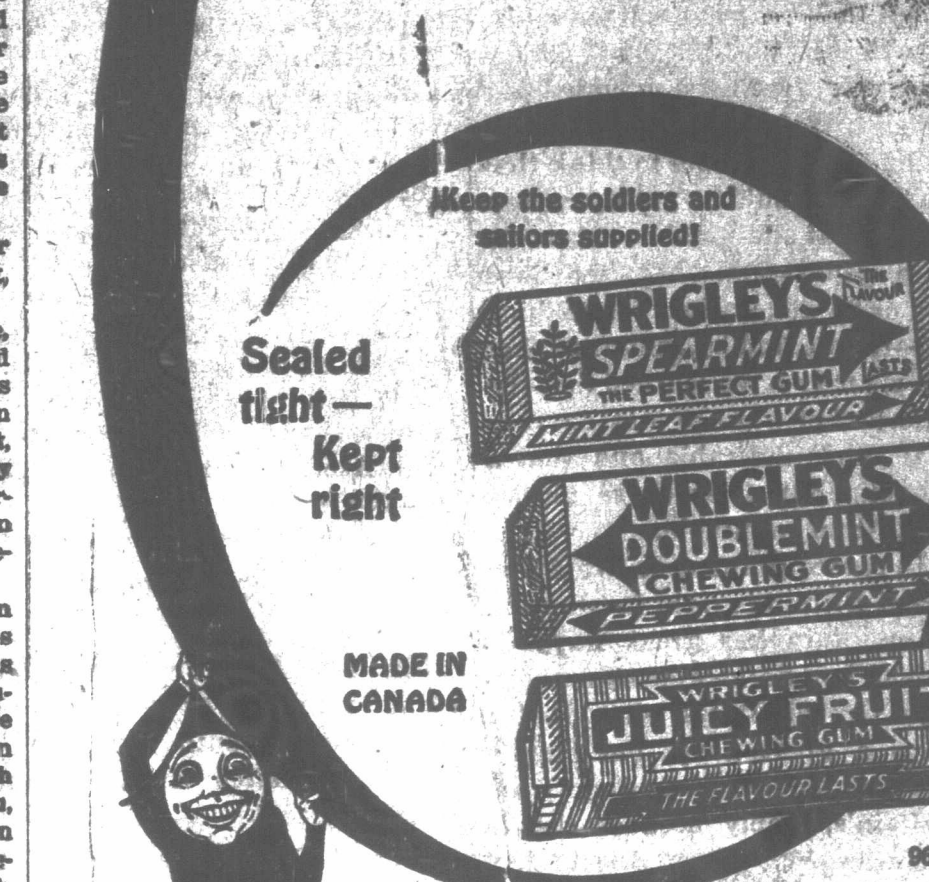
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