

day. The day before Christmas it was all piled, ready for the old white horse to haul. He had been to Becky's once in the meantime, and she had sent him to bring in some broken boards from the fence. They were rotten old things, and he wondered how she could keep herself from freezing with such a fire as they could make. He split them up for her, and he left them, and she was so cross that day that he almost repented of his generosity, and yet he wondered what she would say if she knew how hard he had been working for her. "I might die in my bed, for all any of my neighbours would lift a finger to help me," she said, and he had half a mind to tell her it was nobody's fault but her own.

It was very hard to know what to do for the rest of the people whose Christmas Jack wished to make pleasant. He had to spend money for two people, Mrs. Patten and Aunt Susan, and he fortunately had two dollars, which he had made by driving cows that summer for their next neighbour. He had meant to save this toward buying some books which he wanted very much—for Jack's had a great wish to be a good scholar, and he had a great liking for books. But he bought Mrs. Patten a spectacle case, for she was always mourning over hers, which she had somehow lost. And one day he saw a blue and black silk handkerchief hanging in one of the store windows, and with much fear and trembling he went in to ask the price. It was seventy-five cents, and he thought it would be beautiful for Aunt Susan to tie round her neck. She always wore a handkerchief, for she was apt to feel a draught. He could pay for it easily, and he felt as if he were spending a great deal of money, and put the little bundle deep in his pocket, and felt very grand as he carried it home.

Then there was Miss Duncan, whom he cared most to please, but he remembered that the year before she had said that she found it very hard to get enough of a certain kind of evergreen which she liked. She always made wreaths to put in her windows, and trimmed the rooms for Christmas, and he found one or two places where a great deal of that evergreen grew. So a day or two before Christmas day itself he knocked at her door with two big baskets full. She was not at home, but the next day he met her in the village, she was on horseback, and stopped when she saw him, and you do not know how pleased she was! "I was going to drive out to Mr. Patten's to see you and thank you, Jack," said she. "I don't believe you know what a kindness you have done me in bringing that evergreen. I never can make any other kind serve me half so well, and only knew one place where I could find much of it, and yesterday I went to pick some and found that all that piece of woodland had been cleared and burned over. I was cold and disappointed when I came home, and the first things I saw were these great baskets. I couldn't imagine who had been so thoughtful and kind."

Jack looked up at her and smiled, and tried to say something in return, but he could not think of anything. "I'll take the baskets as I go back," said he. "Mr. Patten and I came down with the team," and he added shyly, "I've been trying to make somebody have a good Christmas. I brought down some walnuts I had for the

fellows in the class—they're scarce this year, and I've got a pile of wood split for that old Becky Nash—it was her wood, but she's so ugly—she wouldn't get anybody to haul it. And I am going to haul it for her early in the morning. I bought some things for Aunt Susan and Mrs. Patten over at our house, it ain't much, but then they won't be looking for anything. I don't have anybody belonging to me like the rest of the boys."

Miss Duncan's eyes filled with tears, but Jack did not notice it, and in a few minutes she said good-bye, and rode away, and John went up the street to do an errand for Mrs. Patten. Mr. Patten was very apt to forget such little things as sewing cotton or a darning needle. Miss Duncan saw him standing on the post office steps, looking very much puzzled as he read a letter. "Here's my sister down in Maine says she wishes I would take one of her sons that wants to live out. They've had a hard scratch to get along. I've always had to help them some. I declare I don't know what to do about John. I suppose you don't know of anybody that wants a boy?"

"I can't think of any one just now," said Miss Duncan. "He's a good boy; I hope he will find a comfortable home." She thought about him a good deal as she rode slowly away down the road, and suddenly she said to herself, "That's a capital plan. I wish that father would come home tonight."

Jack came up the street presently, hiding something behind him, which he put out of sight under the cart, and fastened there with some string. It was a new ox-goad, which he had happily remembered that Mr. Patten wanted, and he had promised the shopkeeper to pay for it in walnuts the next day.

Christmas day dawned bright and clear, and Jack was ready to get up as soon as he waked and thought what day it was. It was very cold, and the kitchen was like an ice-house, but he started the fire as soon as he could. "That ain't you, is it, John? How came you up so early this cold morning?" said Mr. Patten, for Jack liked to lie in bed as late as he could.

"Merry Christmas," said Jack. "Did you know it was Christmas Day?" and Mrs. Patten, who just then made her appearance, said: "Why, so it is! but then I never heard anything about Christmas in my day."

"I thought I'd get you some presents," said Jack, feeling very much embarrassed and doubtful if he were doing the right thing. "All the boys were going to get them for their folks," and he brought the ox-goad, and the spectacle case, and Mr. and Mrs. Patten looked at each other and thanked him, at first without much enthusiasm, but Mrs. Patten recovered herself first.

"I declare it was very pretty of him, I'm sure. I wish we had something to give you, John, but you see it wa'n't the custom when we were young folks. We're much obliged to you. I have been in a great strait for a spectacle case, too."

"This is as good a goad as I could have picked out myself," said Mr. Patten. "We shall remember it of you, my boy;" and he went out to feed the cattle, and John followed, after giving the handkerchief to Mrs. Patten for Aunt Susan.

They were as pleased as children, but Jack could not help noticing that there was something strange about the old people. Mr. Patten was unusually silent, and when they came in from the barn the boy noticed they looked at each other in a queer way. He wondered if it could be about him or his presents. Aunt Susan had dressed herself and come down into the kitchen much earlier than usual, and she had put on her new handkerchief, which seemed to give great pleasure, though she said she should keep it after that for company. Somehow they all seemed very fond of Jack that morning; they filled his plate with the best that was on the table; they couldn't have treated him better if he had been the minister.

"It seems pleasant to have somebody remember us, seeing we haven't got any young folks of our own. I shall tell everybody coming out of meeting to-morrow that we had Christmas presents as well as anybody," said Mrs. Patten.

Mr. Patten was sitting by the stove warming his hands, and John went in and out filling the great wood-box—it was Saturday and Mrs. Patten was going to do the baking, and the wood must be selected with care.

"I declare I don't know what to say to the boy," said Mr. Patten, while our friend was out of the room. "It seems as if we ought to keep him; he's a clever boy as ever was, though he is heedless sometimes. But then we have got a duty to our own folks. I suppose Jane thinks likely I'll give the farm to Samuel when I get through—she always had an eye to the windward, Jane had; but I don't know but what she's right, and perhaps Sam will work in first rate. He was a good strong fellow when I saw him and could do as good as a man's work then. I ain't near as smart as I used to be. John means well, but he's nothing but a boy and small of his age anyway, but I do hate to turn him off right in the winter weather. I guess I'll keep him over till spring anyway. He don't seem to have anybody to look to. But then, he may get a place where he can get better schooling—he takes to his book."

Mrs. Patten was in the pantry, and neither of them noticed that Jack was standing inside the door. He heart enough of what Mr. Patten said to make him certain that he had lost his home, and for a little while his head was heavy. He had tried so hard to do uncommonly well on that Christmas day that he had been sure that something he would like very much must be going to happen to him. In a minute Mr. Patten turned round and saw him, and looked confused and worried. He was a little deaf.

"Well, I may's well tell you, John," said he, "my sister's son's coming to live with me, I suppose, and I do know we shall want ye both. You needn't be no ways afraid. I shan't let you go until you've got a good place."

And poor Jack said "All right," but he felt as if the world had suddenly turned upside down, and went back to the woodshed for another armful of pine sticks. He was afraid for a few moments that he was going to cry, but he managed to keep back the tears. When he went into the kitchen again Mr. Patten had disappeared and Mrs. Patten behaved as if nothing had happened.

She had been knitting some mittens for Jack, and she said she should hurry to finish them that day and put some bright coloured taps on them; and when she showed them to him, she said she wished she had a better present. And Aunt Susan said she would give him a new hat if he would pick out such a one as he liked at the store, which pleased him very much.

As soon as he could he hurried away with the old horse and started for Becky Nash's with the load of wood, and it was not long before he was taking it up the lane. She did not appear until he had begun to throw it off, and then she suddenly opened the door.

"What are you a-doing of?" said she, as if she had caught him stealing, and she stood there scowling at him.

"It is your own wood," said Jack, laughing. "I thought I'd bring some of it over for you, you seemed to be about out. I thought I'd get it here for a Christmas present. It's Christmas day."

"My sakes alive!" said old Becky, "What kind of a boy be ye? Didn't nobody send ye? But I suppose you're expecting great pay."

"I don't want any pay," said Jack, angrily. "Anybody would think I did it to spite you. I thought you'd be pleased and—well it was Christmas Day and I wanted to make folks have a good time"—and he went on throwing down the wood.

"Well, I believe ye," said old Becky, presently, in a different tone altogether, "and you're the best boy I ever see, and I'm going to make it up to ye sometime or other. You are the first one that's done me a kindness in many a long year, and I dare say it's as much my fault as anybody's, too. I didn't know where to turn to get anybody to haul that wood, and I have been burning them rotten fences." "I've got another load ready to bring," and that's all there is.

"I ain't going to starve and freeze myself any longer," said Becky. "I guess you kind of thawed me out a-thinking of me with your Christmas presents. I can't stop here in the door no longer. I'm dreadful bad in my joints to-day, but I shan't forget ye."

Toward noon when our friend had finished his last load, he took a big armful and knocked at the door and went in. The old woman was wrapped in shawls and blankets and looked forlorn. Jack thought she had been crying, but he did not dare to look at her again, and went over to the wood box.

"Here's something for you," said she, reaching out her hand, "and I should take it kind if you'd split me a few kindlings before you go away. It won't take you but a few minutes, and I ain't able to touch an axe myself, and it's so that the Pattens can spare ye this afternoon, I wished you'd go over to my niece, Sophia Turner, and tell her to come and see me, and if she can I wish she would stop for a spell until I get better, and I want her to go to the store and bring up some provisions. I'm about out of everything. I'll treat her as well as I can," said Becky, smiling grimly. "We ain't spoke these twelve years. I guess you thawed me out," she said again to Jack.

And what was our friend's surprise to find when he was out of the door that she had given him a five-dollar bill.