

"Well, they shall have to-night the best that Boston affords," says Mr. Todd. "Now, you must tell me your name, my boy. We want a good understanding before we start."

"Ben, sir, is what my mother calls me."

"Ben Johnson, eh? A first-class name, and a famous one. Correct!" laughs Mr. Todd. "And now, will the little lady tell me her name?"

"Ruby, sir, is all there is of it," answers the maiden.

"Well, Ruby," says Mr. Todd, "your name is like the boarder's coffee; it is good enough what there is of it, and there's enough of it, such as it is. Now, you want to know what to call me. My name is Uncle Hal; That's what a lot of boys and girls out West would have been calling me to-morrow if I hadn't missed the train; and if you'll just let me play, to-night, that I'm your uncle, I shall have a great deal better time."

So they go off merrily.

Music Hall is packed from floor to topmost gallery. On either side of the great organ rise the ranks of the chorus, eight hundred singers; the orchestra is massed in front; the soloists are just entering, to take their places at the left of the conductor.

"There's Miss Cary," cries Ruby, eagerly.

Mr. Todd points out to the children the other singers whom they do not know, and, while he is speaking, the click of Mr. Zerrahn's baton is heard, the musicians of the orchestra lift their instruments, and the glorious strains of the overture burst upon the ears of the wondering children.

But no wise historian will try to tell about this evening's music, nor how Ruby and Ben enjoyed it. More than once, in the rush of the great choruses, Ben finds himself catching his breath, and there is a rosy spot all the while on Ruby's cheek and a dazzling brightness in her eye. Mr. Todd watches them, momentarily; he listens, as he said, with their ears as well as his own, and finds his own pleasure trebled by their keen enjoyment.

"Oh, mamma," says Ben, as she tucks him into bed, "it seemed, some of the time, as if I was so full that I couldn't hold another bit. When Miss Thursby sang that song—you remember Ruby. What was it?"

"I know that my Redeemer liveth," answers Ruby.

"Yes; that's the one;—when she sang that, I thought my heart would stop beating."

"But what I liked best," says Ruby, true to her old love, "was one Miss Cary sang about the Saviour, 'He was despised.'"

"It was all very beautiful, I know, my darlings," answers the mother, "but you must forget it now, as soon as you can, for it is late."

The next morning, Ruby is awakened by the stirring of her mother. "Oh, mamma," she says, softly, putting her arms about her mother's neck, "I had a beautiful dream last night, and I must tell it to you before you get up. I dreamed that Miss Thursby was standing on a high rock on the sea-shore, singing that song, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' and when she came to that part, 'In the latter day he shall stand upon the earth,' I thought that dear papa rose right up out of the sea, and walked on the

water to the shore, and that Mr. Todd took him by the hand and led him up to us, and just as he flew towards us, and caught you in his arms, I woke up."

The desolate mother kisses the daughter with tears, but cannot answer. Beside that dream the dark and stern reality is hard to look upon. Yet, somehow, the child's heart clings to the comfort of the dream.

Presently her eyes are caught by an unwonted display of colours on a chair beside the bed. "Oh, what are these?" she cries, leaping to her feet.

"They are yours, my daughter."

"Look here, Ben! Where did they come from, mamma? M-m-y! Oh, look! look! And here are yours, Ben!"

By this time the drowsy boy is wide awake, and he pounces with a shout upon the treasures heaped on his own chair, and gathers them into his bed. A book and a nice silk handkerchief for each of the children, an elegant morocco work-box stocked with all sorts of useful things for Ruby, and a complete little tool-chest for Ben; The Christmas *St. Nicholas* for both, with a receipt for a year's subscription, and a nice box of sweetmeats to divide between them—these are the beautiful and mysterious gifts.

"Who brought them, mamma?" they cry, with one voice.

"Your friend, Mr. Todd. He had two packages concealed under his coat, when he came for you last night, and when he rose to go I found them on the floor beside his chair, one marked, 'For the Girl,' and the other, 'For the Boy.'"

"What makes him do such things?" asks Ben, solemnly.

"Good-will, I think," answers his mother. "He seems to be one of these men of good-will of whom the angels sang."

"Anyhow, I'd like to hug him," says the impetuous Ben. "Did he say he would come and see us again?"

"Perhaps he will, in the course of the day. He said that he should not return to Maine until the evening train."

Suddenly Ruby drops her treasures and flings her arms again about her mother's neck. "You blessed mamma!" she cries tenderly, "you've got nothing at all. Why didn't some of the good-willers think of you?"

"Perhaps they will, before night," answers the mother, speaking cheerfully, and smiling faintly. "But whether they do or not, it makes the day a great deal happier to me that my children have found so good a friend."

It is a merry morning with Ruby and Ben. The inspection of their boxes, and the examination of their books, makes the time pass quickly.

"Somebody's moving into the next room," says Ben, coming from an errand. "I saw a man carrying in a table and some chairs. Queer time to move, I should think."

"They are going to keep Christmas, at any rate," said Ruby, "for I saw them a little while ago, bringing up a great pile of green."

"Perhaps they've hired the reindeer-team to move their goods," says Ben.

Then, answers his mother, "they ought to have come down the chimney instead of up the stairs."

So they have their little jokes about their neighbours, but the children

have moved once themselves, and they are too polite to make use of the opportunity afforded by moving day to take an inventory of a neighbour's goods.

They are to have a big dinner. The turkey, bankered after by Ben, is not for them to-day, but a nice chicken is roasting in the oven, and a few oranges and nuts will give them an unwonted dessert. While they wait for dinner, the children beseech their mother to read to them the Christmas story in *St. Nicholas*. "It means so much more when you read," says Ben, "than it does when I read."

So they gather by the window; the mother in the arm chair, on one arm of which Ben rests, with his cheek against his mother's—Ruby sitting opposite. It is a pretty group, and the face of many a passer-by lights up with pleasure as his eye chances to fall upon it.

It is now a little past one o'clock, and Mr. Haliburton Todd, sauntering forth from his comfortable quarters at Parker's makes his way along Tremont street, in the direction of Court. He is going nowhere in particular, but he thinks that a little walk will sharpen his appetite for dinner. When he approaches Scollay's Square, his eye lights upon a man standing uncertainly upon a corner, and looking wistfully up and down the streets. The face has a familiar look, and as he draws a little nearer, Mr. Todd makes a sudden rush for the puzzled wayfarer.

"Hello, Brad!" he shouts, grasping the man by the shoulders.

"Hello!" the other answers, coolly, drawing back a little; then, rushing forward: "Bless my eyes! Is this Hal Todd?"

"Nobody else, old fellow! But how on earth did I ever know you? Come to look you over, your not yourself at all. Fifteen years, isn't it, since we met?"

"All of that," says the stranger. "Let's see; you've been in the seafaring line, haven't you?" says Mr. Todd.

"Yes, I have, bad luck to me!" answers his friend, with a sigh.

"Oh, well," says the hearty lumberman, "the folks on shore haven't all been fortunate. Where's your home, now?"

"Just what I'm trying to find out."

"What do you mean?"

"My dear fellow," says the stranger, with quivering voice, "my ship was wrecked a year and a half ago on the west coast of Africa; I reached the shore, only to fall sick of a fever, through which my cabin-boy nursed me, for a long time I was too weak to move; finally, by slow stages, we made our way to Benguela, there we waited months for a vessel, and, to make a long story short, I reached Boston this morning. I went to the house that was mine two years ago, and found it occupied by another family,—sold under mortgage, they said. They could not tell me where I should find my wife and children. I went to the neighbours who know them, some of them had moved away, others were out of town on their Christmas vacation. Of course, I shall find them after a little, but just where to look at this moment I don't know."

Mr. Todd has listened to this story with a changing expression of countenance.

When his friend first mentioned the shipwreck, a sudden light of intelligence sprang into his eye, and his lips opened, but he quickly shut them again. He is greatly interested in what he hears, but he is not greatly pained by it. His friend wonders whether Hal Todd has lost some of the old manly tenderness of the academy days.

"Well, Brad Johnson," he cries, drawing a long breath, after the short recital is ended, "this is a strange story. But, as you say, this family of yours can be found, and shall be. Come with me. There is a police station down this way."

The two men walk on, arm-in-arm, in the direction of Denison street.

"How much is there of this missing family?" asks Mr. Todd.

"There's a wife and two children,—I hope," answers the other. "The best woman in the world, Hal, and two of the brightest children. Sing like larks, both of 'em. Bless their hearts!" says the sailor, brushing away a tear; "I thought I should have 'em in my lap this Christmas day, and it's tough to be hunting for 'em in this blind fashion."

"It is tough," says the lumberman, checking a little. He has stopped on the sidewalk, on Denison street, just opposite Number 45. He lays his hand on his friend's shoulder. "Look here, Brad Johnson," he says, "we are going to find that wife and those children pretty soon, I suspect. And you've got to keep cool. D'ye hear?" "What do you mean?" gasps the sailor.

The eye of Mr. Haliburton Todd is quietly lifted to the window of the second story opposite. His friend's eye follows, and falls on the picture we saw there a little while ago,—the mother intent upon the book, the children intent upon the mother's face.

There is no outcry, but the father lifts his hands, as if to heaven, staggers a little, and then plunges across the street. Mr. Todd is after him, and seizes him by the collar just as he reaches the foot of the stairs.

"Hold on, man!" he says, decisively.

"You mustn't rush on that woman in this way. You'd kill her. She's none too strong. Wait here a few moments, and I'll break it to her."

"You're right," answers the father, pressing his hands against his temples, and steadying himself by the wall. "But you won't keep me waiting long, will you?"

Mr. Haliburton Todd knocks at the door, and is let in by Ben.

"Oh, Mr. Todd how good you are! Thank you a hundred thousand times!" cry both the children at once.

"Well, I'm glad if you've enjoyed my little gifts," he answers. "But I've been thinking that your good mother ought to have a little of the cheer of this Christmas as well as you."

"Just what we said," answers Ben.

Mrs. Johnson colors a little, but before she can speak, Mr. Todd goes on. "Pardon me, madam, but what your minister told me yesterday of your affairs has led me to take a deep interest in them. How long is it since your husband left home?"

"More than two years," answers the lady.

"You have had no direct intelligence from him since he went away?"

"None at all, save the painful news