

How the Convict Escaped

There are times when a person doesn't want to be alone—and Christmas Eve is one of them. If there is a night in the year for good-fellowship, for the gathering around cosy fires, for the loving of one's friends and the forgiving of one's enemies, it is Christmas Eve without doubt.

In the very air of it there is a mysterious joyousness that touches everybody—the important and, fortunately, as there are so many of us, the unimportant also. Now, who is there desiring to sit down and revel in a mysterious joyousness alone? Nobody. Nobody indeed. As dear Lord Dunderbary said some time ago, "If it is a fool of a bird that would flock by itself," and we are all birds of a feather upon that blessed evening, for whether our hearts be mellowed by time or hardened by it, according to their capacity they send out kindly thoughts then towards the world. Therefore, to come back to the beginning, it is no night to be alone.

So thought little Dolly Drayton as she sat before the fire in the holly-trimmed parlor and counted the clock strike eight. She did not sit still, that would have been contrary to her nature, but rocked lightly and steadily, touching the floor with the top of her small slipper and sending the rocking chair perilously far back at each trip.

"I wonder what I'd better do?" said the girl reflectively, puckering up her pretty brows. "It'll be four good hours before dad's train gets in, and Janet can't possibly go all the way to her cousin's and be home again before half-past ten. That cousin is always taken ill at such inconvenient times! It's perfectly horrible to be here alone on Christmas Eve. Then she yawned daintily, yet with such an amount of exaggerated weariness that a diminutive but dangerous-looking bulldog, curled up on the rug, rose, stretched himself like a piece of animated India rubber, and yawned tremendously by sheer force of contagion.

"You're better than nobody, I suppose, Kitchener," said Dolly, looking down into the dog's golden-brown, pink-edged eyes. "But, really, I am lonely tonight, and I can't keep from worrying about Ben. It is so hard to shake off the feeling that something may happen to him yet. There!" with a little impatient gesture. "There! I won't think any more. If it wasn't snowing so hard we'd run over to the Gravelys, wouldn't we, old fellow? But no, we'd be outsiders, for they have their house full of relations—all down for Christmas."

"I wish we had some relations, Kitchener. We haven't, though. At least I haven't, you may have, of course." The dog wagged his tail and cocked up one ear sharply, being that best of all things, a good listener, though but a small conversationalist.

"I know what that means," went on Dolly, rubbing his smooth head the wrong way. "It means that you don't care a rap for your relations as long as you have me. Well, I don't care so much about any, either, most of the year, but it would be nice at Christmas to have a respectable family gathering. The kind they have in the pictures of 'The Graphic,' you know, with a grandfather and grandmother, an uncle from India, sundry aunts and innumerable cousins, tall, good-looking cousins, Kitchener, in the army and navy. Oh, dear! It's just a quarter-past eight. Come," she cried, springing up and catching the dog in her arms, "come, let's look out of the window and see if it's stopped snowing."

They stood quite a long time gazing out at the silvery white night. The trees and bushes bent beneath their feathery weight and the fences were fast losing their identity.

"The garden looks just like a Christmas card, and it's beautiful, isn't it? I wish, Kitchener, dear, we were not quite such a long way from any one," she continued, giving him a soft pat. "If I wanted anybody in a hurry—of course, I won't, but if I did, you know, if we were to get frightened or—ill or anything, no, me, but you, you had a kind of fit last summer, you remember, why we couldn't get them nearer than Kitty Gravely's or," with a little nervous laugh, "or the penitentiary. I believe I can see the light on the guardhouse. Look, old fellow," lifting the dog up, "there it is! No, not the yellow light across the street—that's the lamp post—but away far off, the tiny red speck winking through the trees—there, don't you see?"

Kitchener gave a mild yelp, whether because he saw, or on account of being held in an extremely uncomfortable position, was an open question.

"Yes," said Dolly, dropping him suddenly on the floor, "that's the light on the guardhouse. The guard

walls up there always, with his gun. If any of them, the prisoners, were to manage to get over the walls he would fire, so dad says. Oh, poor fellows, poor fellows! I do wish, Kitchener, we didn't live so near that awful place, or else that Janet was home. Her cousin always does get ill at such inconvenient—Hark!" picking up the dog again and holding him tight, "I heard something!" Kitchener had stiffened into an attitude of attention and was still as a piece of black and white marble.

"Yes," exclaimed Dolly, breathlessly, "there it is again! Somebody is certainly walking around the verandah! Now they are at the front door. What nonsense to be frightened, of course it's only some patient of dad's or else Janet."

Presently there came a short, half-hesitating knock, and Dolly went to answer it, the dog keeping close to her skirts. She opened the door widely and the swinging hall lamp shone upon a man's tall, youthful figure. He wore a heavy mackintosh and a Scotch tam pulled low down. Upon his broad shoulders and about his throat the snow had piled softly. As he raised his head the girl sprang forward with a joyful little cry of recognition, then stepped as suddenly back and clasped her hands against her heart. The man returned her gaze with great dark eyes, in which there was an unreadable expression.

"Is Dr. Drayton at home?" he asked, slowly.

"No, my father was called away this afternoon, in consultation. He will come home by the 12 o'clock train."

"Ah," he answered, "I—I have a message. Perhaps there is someone else I could leave it with?"

"There's me," said Dolly.

"Nobody but you?" he asked in a quick, intense way.

"No, Janet is away seeing her—Janet is out, I mean, for a little while."

"Well, you'll do," he answered, "or maybe I'd better wait."

"Will you come in?" asked Dolly, politely, after a slight hesitation.

The man glanced across his shoulder out into the darkness, then followed her into the warm, bright house without speaking. She led the way to the sitting room, turned and motioned him to a chair opposite the one she had been rocking in.

"Thanks," he said, lifting his hand to his head. He let it drop as quickly, without removing the tam.

Dolly raised her brown eyes in some surprise.

"Will you not be seated," she said in a tone more distantly polite, "and if you must wait, possibly you had better remove your storm coat. I can take the message, however, or Janet—Janet will be home shortly."

The man stood irresolute a moment then on a sudden caught Dolly by the arm, swung her close to him and looked down at her. His eyes, wide and famished, stared into hers, his face, sharp and white, yet heavy of jaw and dangerous, was close to her own, so close that a strand of her blond hair brushed against him.

Kitchener crouched on the rug and growled, showing his teeth, yet Dolly stood, absolutely still and returned the man's gaze without flinching, though her color went.

"Why do you look at me so?" he said steadily. "I thought you wanted my father—that—that you were a gentleman."

He gave a low, bitter laugh.

"You thought right. I am—that is, I am the remnant of a gentleman."

"Who are you?" Dolly asked in a small, quiet voice, "and— and what do you want?"

"See!" he said, lifting the tam with a quick gesture. "You know now—what I am, I fancy. If you need to look further—" He threw the cloak off and stood there in the hideous banded convict garb, a little, mocking smile on his hard mouth.

Dolly caught her breath. "You've escaped!" she exclaimed in a half-whisper.

"Not by a great deal," he replied hoarsely. "I'm escaping. They're after me already. The falling snow will cover the trail, thank God. This coat and hat I took from a man I ran against after I'd scaled the walls. I struck him, and he fell, heavy as an ox. You must help me, little one—a tone of entreaty crept into his voice—or—"

"Or what?" asked Dolly, slowly.

"Heaven knows I'd do what any desperate, trapped man would do," he said between his teeth. "I would not hurt you—but I could at least prevent you blocking my game or setting them after me."

"Yes," she answered, her fearless, blue-eyes on his dark, threatening ones, "yes, I suppose you could, but there is no need for that. I'm not in the least afraid of you, I'm only sorry, and I'd rather help you than

not. You see," with a tremulous smile, "you see I have a reason."

"What reason?" questioned the man, his face alert, strained to the last point of painful listening.

"There is no sound," said Dolly, "nothing but the wind. We are alone."

"What possible reason, then?" he asked again. "Why should you help me?"

"You look like Ben," she said gently, glancing up into the wild and tragic face.

"That's pleasant for Ben," he answered with a shrug. "As for me, I don't know who the fellow is, but I'm decidedly glad I look like him just the same."

"He's my brother," Dolly replied, "and he's been off to the war, you know. He was shot, but he's getting better."

"Ah!" said the convict, "we're alike in more than looks. I've been shot, too—See," holding out an arm bandaged with a woollen scarf.

The girl gave a distressed little cry.

"Oh, that don't matter," he answered. "The guard shot blind, otherwise I'd have been done for. There's no blood trail. I tied the arm up so tight it's dead numb."

"Now, if you're going to be good enough to assist me, you'll have to move quickly," a bit of hopefulness sounding in the words. "I want some clothes."

"Yes, yes," she said, leaving the room. "Just wait a moment."

Presently she entered, carrying a shabby uniform and another suit of plain cloth.

"Take which you like and dress in the office. Go through that door."

"Thanks. The plain ones, if it's all the same to you."

"I'd like to see you in the others," she said, half regretfully. "You'd be so exactly like Ben—but never mind."

He took the clothes into the room beyond and the girl waited. The color had come into her cheeks again, and her eyes were brilliant.

"There's the money I've been saving for the trip," she said to herself, "he can have that." Before she had finished speaking her guest had returned, a roll of black and yellow in his hand.

"Can you get rid of it?" he asked.

"Yes, I'll take it to my room. Wait."

In a moment she was back, a small purse in her hand. She held it towards him.

"Take it," she said. "It is quite mine to give."

He took the little purse, and about his mouth came a queer trembling.

"As a loan," he said.

"As a loan, or a gift, which you please."

Then, hesitatingly, "You look very white. There's some wine in a decanter in the office."

He smiled somewhat grimly.

"Temptation comes from strange quarters. No, no, thanks, I'll not take any wine." He glanced down and held out his hand, but drew it back hastily.

"You've been uncommonly good to me, but I haven't the cheek to ask you to shake hands. Perhaps you wouldn't, anyway."

"Yes," she replied, "I would."

"Better not," he said, leaning towards her. "No, I'm a bad lot—and you— See, I won't touch you, little one. Who knows, the black might rub off a soul."

Straightening up and tossing back his head recklessly, he stood looking around the cosy room so gay with holly and mistletoe and sweet-scented, tasseled pine and cedar. A tiny, broken branch of holly came fluttering down from the big bunch above the mantel and fell at his feet. He picked it up and slipped it into a pocket of his coat.

"It's Christmas, isn't it?" he said.

"I'd forgotten. A fellow would lose his nerve if he stayed here long—here is peace—outside—the storm."

Then with a quick, restless movement, "I'll be off. I'm safe enough now any way, the snow helped; the shot went blind and you've done the rest. I've had rare good luck—and this time the devil has looked after his own."

She reached her two small hands out to him, and her eyes were blinded with tears.

"Don't speak so. Don't," she cried softly. "I have been glad to help you, very glad. If you only knew how like you are to Ben. Do try to be like him in all ways; he is such a brave and honest gentleman."

"He is your brother, that is enough for me to know. But we started differently, and we can't bring up at the same point."

She drew a long, sorrowful breath.

"If you'd been in Ben's place perhaps you would be as he is. I think you would."

"God knows," he answered, "but it doesn't matter. There is no one who cares."

"I care," said Dolly, "and, oh! I hope you'll get out all right. I'll think often of you."

"Thanks," he returned, picking up the tam. He threw it back on the

table with a little shiver.

"Give me another hat. I can feel that fellow go down as I struck him—though I don't believe he was much hurt," he said, half fiercely.

"No, no," replied the girl, her eyes full of dumb sympathy, "he could not be; you did not mean to hurt him, did you? Come into the hall. Ah! here's a hat of Ben's. Now go—"

They stood under the swiveling lamp again, Kitchener close to his mistress, his expression one of anxious doubt and his feelings finding vent in curtailed growls.

"It's snowing still," said Dolly, opening the door. "If you take the train that Dad comes in by, if by chance he should see you, he'll surely take you for Ben."

"I'll risk it," answered the man shortly. "Good-bye, little one, good-bye."

Dolly watched while he strode across the snowy garden. When the gate clicked shut, she turned and went back slowly to the pretty sitting-room.

There lay the tam on the table, and the heavy storm cloak rested over a chair.

These she carried to her own room and locked away with the striped clothes.

Afterwards she came again to the rocking chair and the fire. The room looked as it had before, only the flames no longer leaped high and joyously. There was but a pile of glowing coals upon the hearth. She sat quite still and gazed into the red heart of them, her firm little chin on her soft hand.

The dog crowded close to her and laid his queer round head upon her knee. His piece of a tail beat steadily upon the rug by way of expressing happiness.

"Do you know what it was the angel said years and years ago, Kitchener?" Dolly asked after a while.

"No, of course, you don't, so I'll tell you. He said, 'Peace on earth, good-will to men.' I'm afraid there never will be peace on earth, old fellow. If there was peace Ben would be home, and all the fighting would be ended, and there'd be no more prisoners and captives either, no need for prisons. No, Kitchener, peace hasn't come yet, but as for good-will to men, why, we can have that, both you and father. I wonder if he hurt the man he knocked down? O, I do wonder. Father will think he's Ben. I was good to him because he looked like Ben. If Ben were sad and very tired—and desperate— Then she sighed.

"Do you know, Kitchener," she said again, after a pause, "I'd almost think, perhaps I'd have helped him anyway, even if he hadn't looked like Ben."

At that moment Janet came bustling in and the two flew to meet her.

"Oh, Janet, I'm glad you've come," cried Dolly. "I'm very, very glad you've come, and it's just at the right time, for we were beginning to get lonely, Kitchener and I, and, anyway, no one wants to be by themselves on Christmas Eve."

SAW HIS CARTOON

Nugget's Comments on the Coon Dinner.

Mailed to President By Dawsonite Who is Thanked for His Thoughtfulness.

Dawson, as well as all other places in which race purity is advocated, had her say and her comments to make on what will go down in history as the greatest diplomatic blunder ever made, the invitation by the president of the United States to a negro to sit at his table. The Nugget, it will be remembered, cartooned the president and his guest as entering the dining room at the White House arm in arm and in the Stroller's department they were cartooned as playing horse in the back yard. Both these cartoons and the articles that accompanied them were clipped from the Nugget by Mr. G. B. Rook, the popular Third Avenue grocer, and mailed to the president of the United States.

By a late mail Mr. Rook received the following acknowledgement of receipt of his letter:

White House, Washington, Dec. 23, 1901.

My Dear Sir:

The president requests me to acknowledge receipt of your recent letter, with enclosure, and to thank you for the courtesy which you have been good enough to extend to him.

Very truly yours,
GEO. B. CORTELYOU,
Secretary to the President.

MR. B. G. ROOK,
Dawson, Alaska.

It is now in order for someone to mail Mr. Cortelyou a letter in one of Major Woodside's old envelopes on which was printed in circus poster type the flat-footed assertion:—"Dawson and the Yukon Territory are not in Alaska."

Editor Resigns

Victoria, Feb. 18.—C. H. Lugin has resigned as editor of the Victoria Colonist.

Beautiful Venus.

The planet Venus is now showing with its greatest brilliancy for this year as an evening star, a magnificent object in the southwestern sky for nearly three hours after sunset. Venus is now drawing in rapidly toward the sun, and by the end of the month will set at so early an hour as to be no longer visible. On February 14 she will be in conjunction with the sun—will pass between the sun and us—and after that date for the rest of the year she will be the morning star. As morning star she will be at her brightest on March 31.

To the Romans Venus as an evening star was known as Vesper, while Lurifer was the name given to the same planet when a morning star, corresponding Greek names, from which the Latin were derived, were Hesperus and Phosphorus. By a singular freak of fortune one of these names has become an alias of the "Prince of Darkness," probably because his fall was likened by Milton to that of Lucifer, the morning star, which by the by, does not fall, but rises, while phosphorus is now the best known popularly as the essential ingredient in the head of the lucifer match.

Photometric measurements have shown that when at her brightest Venus has the brilliancy of about one hundred average stars of the first magnitude. She is now fully ten times as bright as the splendid Dog Star, which flashes later in the evening in the southeast.—Ex.

Robins Needed.

Beautiful spring weather this morning, and all the owners of large buildings busy in shovelling the winter's accumulation of snow from the roofs of their buildings. The sidewalkers, too, from the mild weather, were more slippery than at any time during that winter that can now be scheduled as passed.

Choicest cuts, beef, mutton and pork, at Bonanza Market, next Post Office.

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SOCIETIES.
THE REGULAR COMMUNICATION of Yukon Lodge, No. 79, A. F. & A. M. will be held at Masonic Hall, Main Street, monthly, Thursday on or before full moon, at 8:00 p. m. C. H. WELLS, W. M. J. A. DONALD, Secy.

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