

Her Christmas Joy

(By J. L. Glover.)

"It won't be a very merry Christmas to me, this year," said Miss Ellen Fitz-Hugh to herself, a little sadly, but bravely too, as one quietly accepting the inevitable. "It's not to be expected," she went on, moving gently about her little parlor and setting it to rights.

It was quite neat already, but she put away a stray magazine, and dusted the table with her handkerchief, and then went to the mantel and rearranged the group of photographs in neat little ten-cent-store frames, gazing lovingly as she did so. They were the pictures of a handsome, sturdy lad, and two pretty, fluffy-haired girls. The bright faces smiled at her, and she returned the smiles, tenderly.

"Who would ever have thought they would turn out so well—my dear children!" she mused. "When my poor Mary died a widow, and left me her three little ones to bring up, it seemed at first, as if I could not do it—not at my age. But I couldn't bear to separate the little things and put them in orphanages—though some of them are nice places I don't deny. But they'd have grown up strangers to each other, and it seemed lonely for them, and I thought I'd try to keep them together, if the Lord would help me. And He did. I never could have done it without His aid. It was wonderful how I managed to get work, one way and another, and to keep those children warm and well and fat. And it wasn't till they were all through school and old enough to work that my strength gave out, and I had to sell my own little home and take this room in the Old Ladies' Home, and I'm sure it's been a comfortable place to me, with the children all doing so well, and paying my board, and coming in every week to see me. I can't believe it's my Violet and Mabel that have those fine positions down town, and Rob studying law, and so clever. I know the Lord helped me. I never could have raised such clever children alone."

She had made the round of the room. It was perfectly tidy, in case one of the old ladies should "take a notion to drop in". She sat down before her tiny stove, and poured out her cup of tea, dreaming

still in the warm twilight.

"I wish they could have seen their way to come to see me this Christmas—but there! I know they would have loved to come, but Violet said in her note that they were going to such a nice house party for Christmas and how could I be so selfish as to expect them to give up such a pleasure, just for me! I haven't room for them all here, anyway, at once. They'll come one at a time to see me, after Christmas. Bless them! they won't forget their old Auntie! It's funny Rob hasn't sent me his usual cheque. He never forgets it. There I am again! Of course he needs all his money just now, and he'll send it later. It will do just as well, and he knew I would understand. There's the postman—maybe it's come!"

But the postman brought her only a greeting card from one of the old ladies in the Home. She swallowed her disappointment, and fell to musing again.

"I thought perhaps Mable would send me a pair of worsted slippers—she always does. But of course she knows the last pair can't be worn out yet. I'm very easy on slippers, and she needed the money. They have so many friends and they have to give some presents. No, I'm not complaining a bit; I'm only so glad I've got such loving children, and glad they are having a real good time at that house party. They deserve it; and they knew I'd understand."

She sat on, fancying how lovely Violet and Mabel would look in the beautiful dresses their own hard earned money had bought, and how handsome her boy Rob would be in evening dress, bending over some pretty girl, at the party that night.

"They are young things, and gay, and they want to be happy," she excused them, tenderly, to herself. "I'd be a selfish old woman to mind their not coming, or writing. They didn't mean anything unkind."

So, with unselfish trusting thoughts of her children, she went to bed on that Christmas eve, happily not hearing the indignant comments of some of the old ladies.

"It's a shame, I say! She is so patient, and those selfish children not caring a thing about her, after she slaved herself to death for them, all their lives! And now they are independent of her, not even send a Christmas card, to show

they remembered she was in the world!"

But Miss Ellen, sweetly asleep, was dreaming that she was telling the Christmas story to two rosy little girls and a curly-haired boy, whose bright eyes gazed entranced into hers; and she smiled in her dream.

Christmas morning came, bright and sparkling and crisp. Through streets "damp with snow", people hurried with bright Christmas faces and hands filled with holly-decked parcels. A group of girls came to the Old Ladies' Home, bringing gifts for every one of the old ladies, and went merrily about the house, delivering them.

"Thank you, dearie," said Miss Ellen, smiling gratefully over her lapful of gifts—a soft grey shawl, a pair of pink worsted slippers, a box of mints, prettily tied up. "How kind it was of you to remember me," she said, putting down in the bottom of her heart, out of sight, the little sore feeling that her own girls were not among this party of joy-bringers—that they had not remembered her need of shawls and slippers and mints.

The postman would bring some token of remembrance from them; she felt sure he would; and she watched eagerly from the window as he came down the street presently, laden as a Christmas postman should be.

But none of his many packages was for her. She had expected something then, and her eyes dimmed in spite of her courage. The next instant she was upbraiding herself:

"Ellen Fitz-Hugh, you are a self-seeking old woman! Expecting the children to have time to send things by mail, when you know they are visiting, and have so many things to do and you'll find they haven't forgotten you. They'll just spread out the Christmas happiness, that's all!"

She wrapped her new shawl about her, put on the pink slippers, and with the box of candy in her lap, sat down by the window to watch the pleasant stir of Christmas in the streets. A big automobile slid up to the gate of the Old Ladies' Home, and stopped.

"It's old Mrs. Lynwood's grandchildren; they always come to see her," thought Miss Ellen, watching with interest from her window.

Two girlish figures, wrapped in furs—a broad-shouldered young fellow in a

big overcoat, helped them out. It looked like—but no, it couldn't be—

But it was. Up the stairs light feet were springing; young voices whispered and laughed outside her door. A tap—then, before she could say "Come in!" they were all around her neck, the boy hugging her from behind—all crying at once.

"Merry Christmas! Auntie! Oh, Merry Christmas, and lots of them! In our own home, Auntie! Hurry and get your things on. I can't wait!"

"My dear children!" Miss Ellen, bewildered with joy, tried to catch her breath, which had been squeezed out of her by their vehement hugs. "I don't understand. How could you get here? I thought you were at the party!"

"Tell her, Violet, while I get her cloak and things?" ordered Mabel; and Violet and Rob together tried to tell the story coherently.

"You see, Auntie, darling, we were talking it over one day, and we found we were tired of boarding and being scattered, and having you vegetating here by yourself. And so we just thought we'd try to get a home together once more—a home with you in the middle to make it a real one. And Rob managed to find the dearest little house, just big enough to hold the four of us, and a stove; and that's our Christmas gift to ourselves and to you, Auntie, and we are going to eat our Christmas dinner this very day in our own little home. There! what do you think of our Christmas surprise?"

"Think!" Miss Ellen gasped. "Oh, my darlings, to think I could ever have doubted you for one single instant or fancy that it was possible you could forget me on Christmas!"

"Forget! oh, Auntie!" Mabel was on her knees beside her, the tears rolling down her face. "Violet! Rob! I told you we ought not to deceive her, even for a minute! That we let her think we forgot her!"

"Dearest!" pleaded Violet, "it was only for a Christmas surprise. You didn't really think so?"

"No—no! I trusted you all through," sobbed Miss Ellen. "But about the house party? How could you get away so soon?"

"It was our own house party," laughed Mabel. "We spent yesterday fixing up the house, and today the party comes

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