

compliment to his efficiency, and in a moment more he was speeding away, with his head down well to the wind.

'Well, young man, have you plenty of stick-at-itiveness and grit?' the gentleman inquired. 'I have here a day's work for you. I really believe there are more of these letters than you can manage before night. I think maybe I would better call in a Postal Telegraph boy as well. It will be a good time to prove to myself which service is better.'

'Oh, don't do that!' objected Merry instantly, as he tried to count the pile of letters all at once. 'Just try me—'

'This isn't a Christmas job, boy,' Mr. Gorman went on steadily. 'It isn't a Christmas job. It is my custom to have all my January rents paid in full on the twenty-fourth of December. My collector is sick in bed, or says he is, through this note here, but I have no intention of giving up a good habit of mine on his account. Experience has taught me that people are prone to give away on Christmas Day what ought to be reserved for paying honest debts on New Year's Day. Now, do you think you can manage it, or shall I get a postal boy to help?'

A pile of duns fully a foot thick! All-day's trotting, indeed, and none of the pleasant Christmas smiles and words; no tips. If the P.T. boy came, it would still leave some other time before night—but no, an A.D.T. would never put work in a P.T.'s way, even if it was disagreeable work. This was a matter of principle, and so Merry repeated hoarsely that he could feel Christmas rushing down through his bones and out of him through his toes.

'Very well, then. Now, young gentleman, I know more about Jacksonville right now, than you are likely ever to learn,' Mr. Gorman looked closely at him, from beneath some very bushy brows, 'and if I didn't, it is your place to follow instructions. I hope you understand this fully.'

'Yes, sir.'

Mr. Gorman slipped two broad rubber bands about the packages into which he had divided the bills.

'Carry this lot first, and whatever else you do, don't mix these bills in the packages, for I have arranged them in the way that will be easiest for you to go from one place to the other. Collect the rents and every time you get as much as forty dollars, go to the nearest respectable store, present this little certificate, and ask the proprietor to let you deposit the money with him, giving you a due-bill slip made out to me, in its place. See? Everybody in this town knows who Will Gorman is, and you will have no trouble about it.'

Merry merely glanced at the top-most address. It was for a place many blocks away, and as he rode out there, he did not whistle as was his custom. He had to get all those directions very clear in his mind, and besides, when one is very young and is swallowing a big disappointment, there is no breath left for whistling. Merry had done some collecting before, and he knew it to be a thankless job.

It was a tedious day's work, going from one place to another, and making constant trips to stores to deposit, but at last the day wore away, and it was scarcely nightfall when he wheeled back to Mr. Gorman's office with a pocketful of due-bill slips, and more unpaid bills in another than he cared to remember. He made his report as briefly as possible, for he had already learned that A.D.T. boys are not valued for their much speaking. Mr. Gorman nodded and looked wise, as he proceeded.

'Just said no, eh?' he commented, as Merry laid down the bills not taken up. 'Said no, did they? Their rent

contracts said plainly, too, "January rents payable the twenty-fourth of December." Well, Forty-nine, you did your part all right. Let's see. You were out nine hours, at forty cents an hour. That will make me owe your manager three dollars and sixty cents.' He placed three dollars and seventy-five cents on the table by him. 'He take this down with you and pay Campbell, then keep the change; yes, keep the change,' he said magnificently. 'I don't believe in this tipping business, but you've done a good day's work for me, yes, a p-r-e-t-t-y good day's work!' and he narrowed his eyes down to little grey slits, as he nodded good-night. 'But, say, come back New Year's Day. I'll have another all-day job for you, or perhaps you'd rather have me call a P.T. boy.' Mr. Gorman looked at him quizzically.

'No sir-ree! Just call up our office, and we'll accommodate you.' Merry tried hard to speak with the enthusiasm of the morning, but his smile was a sickly one. He touched his cap and turned away.

As he entered the office, little Tony slapped his pockets until they rang and jingled, winked one eye, and stuck out his tongue joyfully.

'I've minted money to-day, Park!' he sang out. 'What did you get?'

The other boys crowded up to hear. Merry was ready for them. He held up a nickel and a dime. 'Fifteen cents, and a good day's work—a p-r-e-t-t-y good day's work.' He narrowed his eyes, and pursed his lips. The mimicry was unmistakable, for every boy in town, indeed, knew his employer for the day.

'Gorman! Old Will Gorman!' shouted Terry Ellis. 'But what did he want an A.D.T. all day long for, close-fisted as he is?'

'And that's for me to know, and you to find out if you can,' returned Merry. 'If the boys knew that he had spent Christmas Eve collecting, how they would laugh!'

'Here, Parker!' called the boss. 'Here is a stack of Santa Claus as high as your head. The orders are for it to be left very quietly at the back door, and waste no time about it.'

Now Merry held the ancient saint in high regard, but before that job was finished he wished as he never had before that the reindeer and sled were still in commission. Doll carriages are knobby things, prone to poke through their wrappings and prod one in the

eye. Now and then a small parcel would work its way out, and then Merry would have to go through a regular performance of scrambling for it, and piling up, and starting all over again. When at last he came in sight of his destination, he was almost desperate, and even there he saw a crowd of children down the front steps and swarming with happy cries about the feet of a pretty young lady; so he wheeled circumspectly past, until they turned the corner on which their home stood. Then turning about, he went through the performance with the doll carriage again, and passed through the area gate to the back door. A pleasant-faced woman was waiting there for him. 'Oh, I am in such a hurry to get off with the children to sister's tree!' she exclaimed. 'I was so afraid these things were going to be late! Can't you help me upstairs with them?'

'Sure!' Merry felt that this was more like Christmas, as she slipped a half dollar in his hand, and smiled at him brightly.

'I wonder if you wouldn't like a bit of my fruit cake, and a cup of tea,' she said. 'The kettle is hot, and the cake right there under that napkin, already sliced.'

'I'd thank you,' said he heartily, for his dinner had been but an apology.

'Well, then, you just sit down there and help yourself. All the rest of the house will be locked, so when you finish you can just go out of this kitchen door and shut it after you. The night latch is on, and it will lock itself. Good-night now, and a merry Christmas!' She waved her hand gaily, as she disappeared through the door that led to the front of the house.

A scurry and scamper of padded feet up and back steps. 'Woof! woof!' came an angry bark. 'Bang! went the door, and then Merry took time to realize that he had left the area gate open when he wheeled his load through, and that here was a member of the family unexpectedly coming home, and not knowing that the A.D.T. boy was Santa Claus in disguise, quite ready to take a piece out of him. 'Woof—woof—woof—row—row—row!' How that big dog did carry on! Merry stood inside the door, and whistled and teased. It was fun. He hadn't heard a dog conduct himself like a real country-yard dog before in so long a time that he couldn't resist the temptation



WITHOUT A BACKWARD GLANCE.