

Lida's Christmas Gift.

"Well, Christmas will soon be here, and I wonder if I will get something real nice for Christmas this year!"

So mused pretty Lida Burkeham as she stood by the window thoughtfully looking across the bleak meadows of Chestnut Grove farm. There had been a heavy fall of snow the night before, and a sharp, piercing wind blew from the north, while a distant tinkle of sleigh-bells pervaded the air.

"I cannot expect anything of much value, as father has a place for all of his money," said Lida.

"Yes, Lida, you know just how it is," replied Mrs. Burkeham in her easy-going way. "Father has all he can do to get money to pay on the farm; he sold his wheat last week, and with what he has saved up through the summer, makes three hundred dollars in all. If you were successful in getting the village school this winter it would be a great help. And there is little Tot and Bennie, they will both need new shoes and coats and—"

"Yes," interrupted Lida, "if I am only successful in getting the village school it will give me something to do and be earning some at the same time. Of course I have never had anything but a very common education, but my heart's desire is that I will be lucky. I can't more than fall, and if—"

Here Lida was interrupted by the sudden entrance of her father, who had just returned from the village.

"Here, wife, I have a surprise for you. Brother Johns wants us all to come and spend Christmas with them," and he studied awhile.

"Well, what do you say about it, Susan? It is fifteen miles from the village and the snow is so deep, and here is all this money; it will not be safe to leave it in the house."

"Yes, Ezra," replied Mrs. Burkeham. "I don't see how we can leave, and yet I hate to disappoint Brother Johns so much. We had to disappoint them last Christmas on account of Bennie's sickness. You know he was taken with the fever about a week before, so we couldn't go."

"Well, you can think about it," and the farmer left the house.

"Now, mother, dear, you just make up your mind to go. I will stay at home, and you can leave Bennie and Tot to my care; it will be too cold to take them with you."

There was nothing more said on the subject until a day or two before Christmas, when the subject was again discussed.

"I don't think it will be safe," said the farmer, "as there are burglars around. It hasn't been but a week since Farmer Boylson was robbed. The house was broken into and eight hundred dollars in cool cash was taken by the burglars, and they offer a reward of three hundred for their capture."

"Oh, father, don't talk about burglars. They wouldn't come here to get money or anything else."

Indeed, the Burkeham homestead wasn't a very promising place for burglars. The house stood back from the road a quarter of a mile. It was a large, wood-colored structure, and had been neglected for years, and large poplars grew all around the house and up to the door.

"I can make all the doors and windows burglar proof, but I am not afraid of burglars," said Lida, "in this desolate place."

So it was decided that they would go, and they started on the afternoon before Christmas. The sleighing was excellent, with a cold wind blowing from the north.

"Lida, you must keep fresh logs on the fire, and keep warm. I think there is going to be a snow storm, and it is getting so much colder, and the snow flakes began to fall as he spoke."

"Well, old Dobbin, we will have to go," and after the good byes were said Farmer Burkeham took up the reins and old Dobbin started off at a pace you would not think he possessed.

Lida stood and watched them until they got out of sight, and as she returned to the house it was with a feeling of dread, as she happened to think there might be such a thing as burglars.

She went into the house and busied herself with the household duties. First she got the children their supper, then tidied up the big, roomy kitchen, stirring the embers in the big-old-fashioned fire-place, which lit up the whole kitchen with a red glare. Then she made a hasty toilet and set down to read after lighting the lamp, while Bennie and Tot amused themselves playing marbles. The old-fashioned clock slowly ticked the time away, and just then chimed out seven.

"Oh, how time does fly!" mused Lida. She was interrupted by the merry tinkle of sleigh-bells and laughing voices.

"Oh," thought Lida, quickly, "some one from the village going out sleighing," and they came nearer and nearer. "They are coming down the lane," and as she arose a two-horse sled load drove up to the door, and a number of her most intimate friends and school-mates alighted. Lida received them all with a hearty welcome, and soon a merry company seated themselves around the big fire-place.

"And is this a surprise to you?" asked Harry Fielding. "I saw your father in the village to-day. He said you would be all alone this evening, so we made up a party to surprise you."

"Indeed, it is a surprise, but I had a presentiment that there would be somebody here to-night, and I am truly glad that you came, for I was getting lonesome. Now for the popcorn and taffy," exclaimed Lida, and she got the popcorn ready to pop, and Molly Landon and Harry popped the corn over the red-hot coals, and they soon had a large pan heaping full.

"Now the taffy. You know it will not be complete without something sweet," said Hattie Fielding. Lida got a generous supply of molasses and sugar for the taffy, and in a few moments they pronounced it done to a turn, so Lida poured it out on plates and set it in the snow to cool, and Bennie went to the cellar and soon appeared with a large pan full of bright, red-cheeked apples. By this time the taffy was cool enough to pull, so they were full of glee.

"Say we tell stories," exclaimed pretty Daisy Green.

"All right," they all exclaimed in a chorus, so they went on to relate weird ghost stories, Indian stories, and stories of daring robbers.

"Speaking of robbers, that just reminds me of Farmer Boylson's house being robbed and eight hundred dollars taken. They offer three hundred reward for their capture, and I wouldn't care if I could capture them," exclaimed Harry. "Three hundred don't grow on every bush. There were two very suspicious looking fellows seen yesterday on the old Pike road. I'll bet they are not prowling around for any good."

The clock struck the time away, and the evening passed only too quickly for them.

"Oh, who would have thought it was so late!" exclaimed Daisy, as the hands pointed to eleven, and they started for their wraps.

"Won't you be afraid to stay here all alone?" said another.

"Oh, no," Lida replied, "I have stayed alone before."

Lida was a brave girl indeed. She wasn't of the hysterical sort.

"We shall not forget this evening's enjoyment soon," they exclaimed, as they started away with the speed of the wind.

There was a pale moon visible, and Lida watched the merry party as far as her eyes could see by the faint moonlight. But, as she went into the house, it was with a feeling of loneliness. Bennie and Tot had long since been in the land of dreams. And Lida sat down by the fire-place, thinking of the pleasant surprise her friends had made for her, and how terribly dull and lonesome it seemed now. She wished it was morning, and glanced at the clock to find it was nearly twelve.

"Oh, I must retire, but sleep—not a bit."

She proceeded to bolt the doors and fasten all the windows securely.

"Oh, let me think! Papa said the

money was in the china closet, off the dining-room. Oh, I wish there wasn't a cent of money in the house," and she put an extra log on the fire. The sparks flew out in all directions, and she ran upstairs and threw herself on the bed. In spite of her brave thoughts she was a bit of a coward. Sleep was out of the question, and she lay wide awake, thinking of what a good time her folks would have at Uncle John's, and wondering if she would be missed, and if Aunt Jane would send her a piece of that delicious plum cake and—

"Hark! what was that? Just a slight noise in the kitchen—the wind, may be."

At this sudden thought of burglars flashed upon her mind, and all the blood in her seemed setting around her heart. Bolt upright now she sat, and listened breathlessly. Hush! there it was again. She felt sure now that the sounds issued from the kitchen.

"I must act now, and quickly too," and she sprang out of her bed on the instant, out in the hall and down stairs, through the lower hall, until she got to the dining-room door; here she stopped to breathe, and she saw a small streak of light through the key-hole, so she quickly knelt down and peered through the small opening to the room beyond. She could hear voices and muffled footsteps.

"It's a good thing that the old man and woman is gone," said one of the ruffians in a low voice; "and if the young gal or one of the brats would make a scene we would soon silence 'em." This was plainly audible through the key-hole.

"So they must have watched when father and mother left this afternoon," thought Lida; and her heart beat so she could scarcely breathe. Then the dog began to growl in the kitchen, and they were silent for a moment.

"Drat the dog! I would soon quiet his nerves if it wasn't for arousing the house."

Presently there came a faint clink as of breaking glass.

"Oh, heaven help me, they are in the china closet, and that is where the money is," and a bright thought suddenly flashed upon her mind as she listened with bated breath. "I will slip out and lock the door and they will be imprisoned, and they can't possibly escape."

Softly she glided into the dining-room, and more cautiously she tiptoed across to the closet doors; it did not take one second to slide the big iron bar to, and the door was locked before those inside could guess that they were

entrapped, and everything grew black to Lida in an instant, and she fainted. When she opened her eyes she started up with a terrified shriek, and Harry Fielding was bending over her. With a smile he assured her that everything was quite safe.

"And the burglars, where are they?" she exclaimed in a terrified voice.

"Oh they are in the village lock-up safe enough by this time."

The sun was streaming in at the windows, and Lida soon recovered enough to collect her thoughts, and explained everything to Harry.

"Now, tell me how you happened to my rescue so fortunately."

And Harry went on to explain. "Well, when we left here it was late then, and as we were about half way to the village, we passed two big, burly fellows on the road; they wore big slouch hats, and seemed very much interested; they didn't look up, and were walking; very fast in this direction. Fred and I made up our minds to watch the fellows, so after the girls were all taken to their homes, we went and got the constable, for we knew if they were coming here, we hadn't a moment to lose. We took the sleigh-bells off, as we didn't want to be heard about this time, and we didn't arrive a moment too soon. The door was wide open and the dog was making a terrible fuss. I was the first one on the scene, and I found you lying by the closet door in a dead faint, and we guessed at the situation in a moment, that you had captured the burglars and had entrapped them in the closet."

"There proved to be three of the rascals. They were commanded to throw up their hands, which they refused to do, but finally reluctantly submitted, and were soon handcuffed. Upon being searched, four hundred dollars in money and some very valuable notes and papers were got on their persons. They were well equipped for house breaking, as they had a set of burglars' tools and were well masked, and they were soon hurried to the village to await custody. You know the rest, and I will have to return to the village; that is, if you are not afraid to stay alone," said Harry, as he drew on his heavy overcoat.

"Oh, no; I have got all over being frightened," exclaimed Lida, quickly, so he left for the village.

By this time Bennie and little Tot

handed it to him, she said: "I will not need it, for I will have the village school this winter, and you can pay this on the mortgage."

In this way the mortgage was paid, and Lida will never forget that Christmas Eve, and how she captured the burglars, and got the reward as a Christmas gift.

The Two Christmas Eves

Thirty years ago Mary Allen was a little eight-year-old girl, and since she could remember, the day before Christmas her mother baked pumpkin pies, jumbles, and ginger bread, and fried doughnuts, nice twisted ones, and if she had time she would make Mary a boy or girl, and fry it for her, and Mary always ran to get her the silver thimble to cut the holes in the upper crust of the tarts, and sometimes her mother would let her trim the edge of the pies with a small key that made the nicest trimming, but every Christmas Eve Mary went to bed early, so as to be sure and be asleep before Santa Claus came, for although he always brought her the same things, two or three doughnuts, an apple and three or four sticks of white and red striped candy, she every Christmas eve hoped he would not forget to put in a doll or a bright ribbon for her hair, and this Christmas she said "so to her mother, who did not believe in giving presents, for she thought it made them dissatisfied in time with every thing, and so she said to Mary, "You should be contented with what you get."

Mary did not reply to this, but her little heart was sad, for she could not understand why Santa Claus should every Christmas bring her the same things, while Jennie Hall always got something new.

"I think he is mean and selfish, so I do," she said to herself. "I know if I knew of any little girl that wanted a doll as bad as I do I wouldn't give it to some one else every time," but that night she hung her stockings up with the same hope that she would find a doll in it, and in her prayers she added, "O, dear Lord, don't let Santa Claus forget me this time," and then she hurried to bed and to sleep for fear she would surprise him as he pried around to find her stocking, and then some way the very thought of seeing him sent a chill all over her.

The next morning she jumped out of bed early and hurried to her stocking, first she took out a doughnut, then another, and another, these she laid aside while tears of disappointment rolled down her cheeks and slipped into her lap, next a paper of candy how well she knew what it was without looking at it, then the apple, and while that was all she expected she could not resist trying her luck again, and my, surely she was not mistaken, there was a flat, paper parcel in the toe of her stocking, and with trembling hands she took it out and when she got it unwrapped, she folded her hands and gazed at it in mute and amazed admiration, for it was the loveliest pink ribbon for her hair, and then her joy suddenly broke forth and she capered and danced around and forgot that she was not dressed until her mother called her to hurry to breakfast, and dressing she combed out her curls, and tied them back with the ribbon, which she fastened on top of her head in a double bow-knot, and to her admiring eyes she looked like a queen. With cheeks nearly as bright as the ribbon, she descended to the kitchen, and with shining eyes showed her parents what Santa Claus had brought her and they smiled at her she said: "I wonder if I heard me wish for a ribbon the other day," and her mother replied: "As like as not."

Mary ate her doughnuts and candy with a better relish than ever before, for while she wanted a doll too, she felt that now Santa Claus had once found where she lived, he would remember her again.

About half past ten her uncle and aunt came to take dinner with them. Her aunt had no children and took great delight in Mary, and after dinner she called her to her and said, "Mary, here is a box which Santa Claus left at my house for you."

"O, did he, Auntie? I wonder how he came to make such a mistake, for he was here last night, you know," and then an anxious look crept over her face as she added, "Maybe that is the reason that I never got any presents before; he took them to the wrong place," and she imagined the numerous things she had been cheated out of by some one who never told her they got her presents by mistake, but her auntie said, "Oh, no I think he knew that I was coming here to-day and left them for me to bring."

Mary all the while was untying the box, and when it was opened, she sat down on the floor perfectly overcome, for the first thing she saw was a dolly—O, the blue-eyed, yellow-haired dolly! It had a net over its hair, which was china, and painted yellow, and a high roll finished its headgear. After admiring it a while, she gave another look into the box and found a nice feather bed, two little pillows, with slips trimmed in lace, four sheets, two nice quilts, two hats, and several changes of underwear and dresses. In the bottom was another box, and when she opened it, the loveliest butterfly sprang up, and taking it out she handed it to her auntie to see how pretty it was. It was attached to a small piece of painted wood by a coil of wire and when the butterfly was touched it quivered as if hovering over a flower.

"O, mother, do look, did you ever see so many pretty things? I don't believe there is a happier little girl living than I am to-day."

"I am glad you are happy, Mary," replied her mother, "but don't let it turn your head."

"Let her alone," Polly, said Mary's aunt. "Imagine how we would have acted had Santa Claus remembered us in the least."

Mary turned the box upside down and put her bed on it and undressed and her dolly and put her on it, covering

her with the quilts and then after a few minutes she dressed her again and this she did a dozen times before bedtime, and when at last she was tired out and ready for bed the dolly had her little bed made by Mary's where she could put her hand out to see if she was there if she should wake up in the night, and the last thing Mary said as she fell asleep was, "I wonder how Santa happened to go to the wrong house?"

Thirty years later, we find Mary the happy wife of a prominent citizen in a western city and the fond mother of two children—Harry, a fine boy of fourteen, and Amy, a nice little girl of ten. The day before Christmas she is busy baking while Harry runs errands and Amy helps in a great many ways, besides making paper balls and flowers for the Christmas tree, which has been in the family since Harry was four years old. Then it had been cut from the timber on their father's farm, and its bare limbs wrapped in dark green tissue paper, strings of popcorn hung in loops from its branches and over this was looped narrow strips of different colored tissue paper, sacks made from red, blue, green and pink mosquito bar were filled with candy and nuts and hung promiscuously about, and with the drum, tin horn, rattles, picture book and monkey in the box for Harry, the dolly, rattle, blocks and blue mittens for little one year old Amy, and all this lit up with colored wax candles it was, as Harry expressed it, "The best beautiful."

Every year since something had been added to the decoration of the tree until this year it was one blaze of splendor, and after the work was done mamma went in the parlor with the children to finish trimming it. Shell-like balls of every hue were suspended sparkling bangles of every shape and color, strings of beads, red, green, yellow and purple, bangled crescents; bunches of milkweed balls, some in their natural creamy silkiness, others mamma had colored, red, pink and blue, from oil paints thinned with turpentine; fans, finy parasols, flowers and balls of French tissue paper; dolls dressed in crepon paper swinging from the branches of the tree—it was like a fairy picture and when the candles, which had been placed out as near the edge of the limbs as possible, were lit it brought forth an exclamation from papa, who had just come in: "Whew, but that is lovely!"

At half past eight Santa Claus always came and while he did not create that feeling of awe that he at first did the children eagerly looked for his appearance, and were very careful to be in their places by the time he came in. They were barely settled before he startled them by coming suddenly from behind the curtains of the folding doors, and stepping to the tree he made his customary speech to which he added, "My dear children, I have traveled a good deal and seen any number of Christmas trees"—here the children for some reason laughed and nudged each other, which brought a look of surprise from Santa Claus, who went on, "But I never saw as magnificent a tree as this one right here."

There was a complete set of silver-ware for mamma, papa received a set of his favorite author's books; Harry a pair of gold cuff buttons from mamma, a plain gold ring from Amy, a set of books by Trowbridge from papa, a box of white silk handkerchiefs from his aunt Nellie and a pair of the best ice skates from his uncle Ed, which made his eyes dance with joy.

A set ring for Amy from Harry, a set of bedroom furniture for her doll house from papa, a silk scarf for her chiffonier in her own bedroom from aunt Nellie, a big nice doll from uncle Ed, and a set of lovely dishes with gold bands from mamma, who, after it was all over could not help thinking of her first Christmas presents thirty years before.

WHY HE LEFT.

Scene: Boy calling on a farmer to ask for a new place.

Farmer—Do you know anything about horses?

Boy—Yaas; done nothing else all my life.

Farmer—Why did you leave your last place?

Boy—with much feeling—Ah!

Farmer—That's no answer. Why did you leave?

Boy—Well, if you must know, you must know. First the old cow died, and us had to eat she!

Farmer—Well, what next?

Boy—Then, the old sow died, and us had to eat she!

Farmer—Still, I don't see why you left.

Boy—Don't yer, then? Why, then, the old missus died—and I bolted!

THE WORM WAS UP LATE.

A father was lecturing his son on the evil of staying out late at night and rising late in the morning.

You will never succeed, he said, unless you mend your ways. Remember the early bird catches the worm. And what about the worm, father? said the young man sneeringly. Wasn't he rather foolish in getting up so early?

My son, said the old man, that worm hadn't been to bed at all; he was only getting home.

The young man coughed.

LUCKY.

Did your husband have any luck on his shooting excursion yesterday?

For him, yes.

Is that so? Why, I didn't see that he brought home any game.

Of course not, but he managed to get home without shooting himself.

HIS EXCUSE.

Passenger, on a southern train—What do you mean by calling hot peanuts? These are cold?

Train Boy—Well, they were hot when we started.

A BAD FIT.

Customer—You guaranteed a fit, didn't you?

Tailor—I did.

Customer—Well, the only fit about these clothes was the one my wife had when she saw 'em.



THE DOOR WAS LOCKED BEFORE THEY COULD GUESS THEY WERE ENTRAPPED.