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E. A. STRANG

ONE CHRISTMAS EVE.

There was a bright fire burning in the grate and the soft fragrance of violets in the pretty room. Over the mantel hung the brave face of Sir Galahad, with his snow-white steed, dark foliage behind them, and paler clouds, showing up the steadfast look on the knight's noble countenance. The girl on the crimson covered sofa raised her eyes to the picture once or twice, and then sighed a little, though a smile succeeded the sigh each time. She was very pretty, too, with lovely, shimmering hair and violet-blue eyes, but the delicate features were too fragile for perfect health, and the tiny hands were white and waxen as palest marble, and she was a cripple. "so that ends it all!" she said of herself, with a frankness very sad and yet very childlike.

She took the darkest view of the case, her friends told her sometimes, for the great doctor, who was deeply interested in her somewhat complicated ailments, was distinctly hopeful at heart, and that is always a good sign. But she would never sing as she had sung in the old days, like a lark rising from his bed in the yellow corn land, above the sea, pouring out a flood of wonderful wild melody, all his heart's story of love and thankfulness and praise, or like a wave on the golden margin of the shining sands, plaintive and plashing and sinking into silence with a long-drawn sigh.

For a little while she had come and sung the people who listened into happy wistfulness and sweet remembering. She had smiled and changed the tune, and they were all children again, swinging under the pink and white apple blossoms, and amid the scented May, and the cuckoo called from the fragrant pine wood, and the thrush sang in the swaying beeches, and then had come silence.

One night at a great concert there had been an alarm of fire—nothing serious, and almost nobody hurt, except the little white-robed singer alone on the curtained platform where the lights were hurriedly extinguished, so that she could not find her way out.

She had fallen then, and hurt herself badly, so badly that she stirred not from where she fell until they came later and found the small crushed heap of satin and flowers, all scented and pale and broken.

And then they carried her away to an hospital, and some one else sang at the next concert and received the plaudits of the audience and the bouquet of white roses which would have been her's too.

And the newspapers deplored her loss to the concert-room and said it was very sad.

It was very sad—very sad indeed, to the girl in the long ward, where the white-capped nurses came and went and spoke tenderly to her as they passed, but she bore a brave heart through it all. She asked who was singing at Bristol that night, and when they told her she only smiled and said that her successor would be glad of such a good opportunity, and that she hoped she would do well, and I believe that she meant it, too.

And then came the after time—the days when she was better, and yet not well—unable to do anthing for herself, and yet well enough to leave the hospital and the kindly care of the good nurses.

A relative, good hearted and generously inclined, gave her shelter and treated her tenderly, yet with strong disapproval of the public life that the poor, pale girl had led. "A woman is meant to live in her own home," the benevolent lady said, drawing upon her little store of maxims for the benefit of her sister's child.

And Ernestine listened and smiled, though her heart felt heavy as lead.

Then the thought of the past came back.

There was one who had come before fascination of her beautiful voice dawned upon her, one who had offered her his all if she would love him too.

And his kindly eyes had charmed her and his tender voice had thrilled her through and through, till she forgot everything in the joy of being beloved, but with the waking knowledge of her power she began to chafe under the silken bonds of love. She yearned to stretch her dainty wings and soar, and her little world seemed small and narrowed and trivial. And so the difference began and so it ended. And the daisied meadows above the way of love changed to the crimson-hung walls and the stately palms that screened her as she sang.

"I don't mean to settle down in a little, sleepy town all my life," she had said, petulantly, as an April shower. "I want to make somebody, you all, proud of me. I have a chance; why shouldn't I take it?"

Yes, it was true, the chance and the opportunity offered—love or fame, and she chose fame.

And now? She turned away from the cozy fire with a shrug of her dainty shoulders. Where was fame now? Another's name shone on the concert party's bills—and very splendid bills they were, too—in her place. Another voice sang, perhaps, the very songs, new songs all of them, that she had practised so often, and with such varying delicacy of expression. Another won the murmur of applause that was wont to be hers.

And she lay here, on the comfortable sofa that was her aunt's, by the warm fire, with nothing in the stiff, but expensive room, her own, save the bunch of violets in the little green vase yonder. Who sent her those, by the way?

The thought was a new one, and diverted the other vexed strain for a while.

Some listener, perhaps, who had not yet forgotten her in the siren voice of somebody else, and Ernestine blessed the unknown donor for the kindly thought of her.

And with the pleased smile still lingering on her face, the door opened, and the friend of olden days entered, as he had entered long ago into that quaint rectory in the North Countrie.

He was very kind and gentle in his manner, and the girl's high spirit rose to the occasion, until the rose color mounted to her cheek and the flash of animation gleamed in her pretty eyes. "He should never think her despondent, beaten, crushed!" she said proudly to herself as they laughed and chattered over the days gone by and the people of old times. But of the future not a word, nor of the immediate past, until, as he was leaving, and her aunt stood with them, he ventured to say that he hoped she would soon be better.

"I shall be all right directly," she answered recklessly, heedless of her aunt's frown and sigh, and when he asked questioningly, and a little nervously, "And then?" she answered quickly and lightly, "And then! Oh, work again, and lots of it, I hope, if Miss de Vere hasn't stolen everyone's heart from poor little me!"

So there was nothing left for him to do but to say "good by," with a glimpse of his violets on the little table at his dear one's side.

"How foolish you are, Ernestine!" her aunt said, crossly, when he had gone. "Anyone can see how dearly he loves you, and yet you are playing with him still—now that he is a better parti than ever," she added to herself, though her quick-witted niece caught the words at once.

"Why is he more eligible now?" she answered languidly. "I thought as squire he was the great man of the country long ago."

"He has fresh fortune now, you silly ," the old lady said, taking up her knitting. "His uncle left him a great estate, and I don't know how much money. Let me see—that uncle was connected with my father's family through the Trevelyans, and then Ida Trevelyan married"—and the good lady went calmly through a string of names and marriages, and connections which pleased her greatly, though Ernestine never listened to one.

She would never marry anyone who proposed to her from pity—come what would. And when he did ask her—very gently and humbly—with a world of pleading in his honest voice, and wistfulness and love in his eyes, if she could not love him now a little, and try to love him more hereafter, with a sudden pain at her heart, nevertheless she only laughed, and told him that she was nearly well now, and he mustn't pity her any more—though she loved his flowers dearly. She had found her unknown lover out by then.

And for the second time they drifted apart again.

* * * * * * *

One Christmas eve the snow fell softly over the city, making it pure and beautiful, and the people came and went on their happy marketing, with presents for the children and greetings and good will. But in the dingy house in a side street, poor little Ernestine wondered where to-morrow's fire was to come from, and if her one or two music pupils would pay their little sum to-night. She was teaching music and singing now—from her chair directing the awkward girls in their studies—a worn, plaintive little figure, with only a glimpse of its old gayety left.

The kindly aunt was dead, and strangers reigned in the prim house, and showed no inclination to keep the niece that had come to them with the old lady's property.

And Ernestine had fled at once—to a life of hardship and privation, and yet independence, which pleased the yet unbroken spirit and the brave heart.

The doctor had been right; she was better, though still far from strong, and she worked her hardest in the narrowed sphere, for the beautiful, fairy-like voice had failed her, and was now, though sweet and true as ever, very weak and feeble.

And it was Christmas eve, and others were meeting with old friends, and laughing and wishing them a happy season, and out in the street the sound of merry footsteps came and went, while she sat on alone.

The pupil for whom she waited, came at last, and practised a song that she wished to sing at some festive gathering, and then she, too, hurried away without a thought of the few shillings that would have made the morrow brighter for another. She did not mean to be unkind, and she wished Ernestine a happy Christmas as she hastily put on her hat and ran away.

"Have I kept you waiting?" the little teacher heard her say to some one outside, and then there was more laughter, and quick footsteps passed the window in a little whirl of questions and answers and happy mirth.

And the lamp burned very low on the table, and the fire sank and sank, and Ernestine sobbed over the open piano and the scattered music scores. Quite suddenly her utter loneliness broke upon her, and the strong soul failed at last.

* * * * * * *

A light shone in from the passage, and a firm footstep crossed the room. Some one stood by her—kind, brave, protecting—holding her cold hand in his own, calling her every pet name he could think of; then he took her poor little face between his hands and kissed the dropping mouth. And she clung to him in her happiness, laughing and crying together—overcome by the scent of the great bunch of violets that he had brought for her—dazzled at her swift delight at seeing him once more!

And when once he had calmed her, and she sat to talk with him as in the olden days, he told her that he had come to her for sympathy. "I have lost some money," he said, "and you wouldn't marry me when I was rich, but now I hardly like to ask you, darling, and yet—and yet—"

The delicate face was flushed and quivering with joy, the dainty lips were parted like rosebuds, the little hands played nervously on her knee. "Do ask me, please," a tiny voice said, coaxingly, and he took her into his protecting arms—and kept her there.

And the violets breathed their sweetness over the quiet room, and the fire flames burned slowly, slowly down, and the lovers talked of the new glad life.

* * * * * * *

"You have deceived me a little," the bride said to her husband in the golden days thereafter, "and you are not poor at all!"

"But I did lose some money—and I am glad of it, for your sake, my sweet," he answered, tenderly.

And she gathered pale Christmas roses for her hair, and gave him one.

MONTHS OF MADNESS.

Contrary to the general opinion, more people go mad during the summer months than in the usually gloomy and dull months of November, December and January, when times are bad and the general conditions appear more conducive to insanity. Not only in this country, but in many others, it is found that more people go mad during May, June and July than during any other portion of the year, and that suicide which is due to some form of insanity—is also more prevalent during the summer.

THE UNATTAINABLE.

Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! she exclaimed, and sighed and sighed.

The Fates exchanged meaning glances.

She's a blame-sight more likely to get crow's feet, observed the Fates, speaking among themselves.

This fable teaches us the unwisdom of hankering too hard for the unattainable.

A SLY DIG.

Mrs. Henpeck— No doubt the ancients were considered wise because there were fewer temptations in those days.

Henpeck—Why, my dear, the proportion of women in the world must have been about the same.

INDIAN TATTOOING.

It Was a Universal Custom With the Aborigines of Old Louisiana.

Tattooing was a universal custom among the Indians of old Louisiana with both sexes. Among the men it possessed a significance attaching to their career as warrious, and their tattoo marks were testimonials of distinction; with the women it seems to have been merely a matter of adornment. From their girlhood the women caused themselves to be tattooed on the face. Sometimes it was a line of tattooing across the top of the nose sometimes the line was up and down the chin, and not unfrequently the entire upper part of the body was thus marked.

The young men of the nation also subjected themselves to the tattooing process by being tattooed first on the nose, like the women, and not until they had given evidence of their courage were they privileged to receive tattoo marks on any other part of the body. This testimony of their merit as warriors was reserved for them when they had distinguished themselves in war by killing an enemy in battle or by bringing with them from the field of carnage the scalp of an enemy taken in the fight. When they had thus given evidence of their worthiness to be ranked among the warriors they had the right to tattoo their bodies with emblems and figures illustrative and commemorative of the incident in which they had proved their valor.

Every man and woman among the Indians yielded to the arbitrary custom of tattooing, but the warriors, above all, were carried away by this sort of vanity, and not one of that class by any chance allowed his opportunity to receive this patent of knighthood to pass by neglected. One of the ordinary methods adopted by a warrior to commemorate a heroic deed in battle, in which he possibly had killed or in some way overcome an enemy, was to cause a tomahawk to be tattooed upon his right shoulder, and under it the hieroglyphical sign of the nation to which belonged the conquered man.

The operation of tattooing required considerable fortitude to be borne without so much as wincing. A design was first drawn on the skin, and this design was then pricked with six needles, firmly fastened on a line in a flat piece of wood. After this finely powered charcoal was rubbed into the punctures made by the needles, leaving an ineffaceable print of the design. The operation caused much inflammation, and sometimes fever, which brought on severe sickness in case the patient was neglected while the swelling lasted. While the sickness remained the only food given was Indian corn, and water was the only drink.

GEN. WHITE'S V. C.

He Won His Way to Distinction in a Highland Regiment.

Sir George White, who commands the Natal forces, is an Irish officer, who did all his regimental service and won his way to distinction in a Highland regiment, says Mainly About People. Like Buller, he wears that coveted "bit of bronze," the Victoria Cross. He won it in Afghanistan, in the hard-fought battle of Charasiah, twenty years ago. White told the Gordons that he Counted on them to carry a hill with the bayonet. Up they went, two companies in front, two more in support, and the Gazette tells what followed, in recording White's claim to the cross. "Advancing with two companies of his regiment," it says, "and climbing from one steep ledge to another, he came upon a body of the enemy strongly posted, and outnumbering his force by eighteen to one. His men being much exhausted, and immediate action being necessary Major White took a rifle and going on by himself, shot dead the leader of the enemy." When White fired the Afghan was rushing upon him sword in hand, trying to bring his men to the charge. If they had come on mere weight of numbers might have hurled the handful of Highlanders down the hill. But the fall of the fanatic chief produced something like a panic among his people, and the Highlanders, cheering wildly for their heroic leader, rushed on with levelled bayonets. All was over in a few moments. The ridge was won, and the deadly rifles of the victors were busy shooting down the flying foe. On this occasion he would have won the Victoria Cross, and also at Candahar, when, charging again at the head of the Gordons, he captured one of the enemy's guns. Sir George White is a tall, soldierly-looking man, with a handsome face and a very charming manner that has won him hosts of friends. He has had always in his favour a remarkably strong constitution and is still, to use the popular phrase, "as hard as nails." About a year ago when another distinguished general was temporarily invalided through a bad fall, a friend of both remarked to White that he doubted if the injured officer would ever again be fit to mount a horse, for he had broken his leg in six places. "Why should he not get well," said White, cheerily, "he has only broken his leg in six places. I once broke one of mine in seven, and I don't think I am any the worse for it."

GEN. SIR CHAS. WARREN.

He Has Been Appointed to Command the Fifth Infantry Division in S. Africa.

General Sir Charles Warren, who has been appointed chief of the Fifth Infantry division ordered to Cape Town, is nearly sixty years of age and has seen considerable service in South Africa. When seventeen years of age he entered the Royal Engineers. Since that time he has occupied the positions of assistant instructor and chief instructor at the School of Military Engineering and the School of Gunnery for several years. Later, he acted as Royal Commissioner for laying down the boundary line between Grinqualand and the Orange Free State. As a major he commanded the Diamond Fields Horse in the Kaffir war, Griqualand rebellion, Bechuanaland war, and northern border expedition of 1877-79, receiving the medal and clasp, mention in despatches and promotion to Brevet Lieut.-Col. He served throughout the Egyptian war of 1882, receiving the medal, Khedive's star, third-class medjidie, and the decoration of K. C. M. G. He commanded the second Bechuanaland expedition of 1884-85, receiving the decoration of G. C. M. G. From 1886 to 1888 he was Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, commanded the troops of the Straits Settlement, 1889 to 1894, and the troops of the Thames district from 1895 to 1898.

The World's First Christmas

Christmas comes but once a year, it is true, but it is a matter for thanksgiving that it comes that once to everybody, high or low, rich or poor, millionaire or tramp, king or beggar. Even to those who have no turkey, nor mince pie, nor even where to lay their head—even to the poor little waifs and strays of childhood who have no kind friends to fill their suspended stockings with toys and con bons, or who have no stockings to suspend, the day itself comes just the same, and upon the saddest heart and the poorest, most blighted life, it sheds something of that sweet feeling of peace on earth, good will to all mankind, which it ushered into the world nearly 1900 years ago, when a lovely baby boy was born away over in Bethlehem, and his beautiful young maiden mother cradled him in a manger.

Centuries ago two plain people stopped at a village barn after a walk of eighty miles, too long a trudge for one in poor health. No lords of state awaiting in ante-chamber, as when other kings are born; no messengers mounted at the doorway ready to herald the advent from city to city; no medical skill in attendance; no satin-lined cradle to receive the infantile guest, but a monarch born in the hostelry called the House of Chim Ham. The night with diamonded finger pointing down to the place; the door of heaven set wide open to look out; from orchestral batons of light dripping the oratorios of the Messiah; on lowest doorstep of heaven the minstrels of God discoursing of glory and good will!

Soon after the white-bearded astrologists kneel, and from leathern pouch chink the shekels, and from open sacks exhale the frankincense and rustle out the bundles of myrrh. The loosened star, the escaped doxology of celestials, the chill December night aflush with May morn, our world a lost star, and another star rushing down the sky that night to beckon the wanderer home again, shall yet make all the nations keep Christmas.

I have always rejoiced that Christ was born on a December night. Had it been the month of May—that is the season of blossoms; had he been born in the month of June—that is the season of roses; had he been born in the month of July—that is the season of great harvests; had he been born in the month of September—that is the season of ripe orchards; had he been born in the month of October—that is the season of upholstered forests. But he was born in the month of December, when there are no flowers blooming out of doors, and when all the harvests that have not been gathered up have perished, and when there are no fruits ripening on the hill, and when the leaves are drifted over the bare earth.

It was in closing December, that he was born, to show that this is a Christ for people in sharp blast, for people under clouded sky, for people with frosted hopes, for people with thermometer below zero, for people snowed under. That is the reason that he is so often found among the destitute; you can find him on any night coming off the moors; you can see him any night coming through the dark lanes of the city; you can see him putting his hand under the fainting head in the pauper's carriage. He remembers how the wind whistled around the caravansary in Bethlehem that December night, and he is in sympathy with all those who, in their poverty, hear the shutters clatter on a cold night.

Christ's cradle was as wonderful as his cross. On that first Christmas he had only two friends. They were his parents. No satin-lined cradle, no delicate attentions, but straw, and the cattle, and the coarse joke and banter of the camel drivers. No wonder the mediaeval painters represent the oxen as kneeling before the infant Jesus, for there were no men there at that time to worship. From the depths of that poverty, he rose, until to-day he is honored throughout all Christendom, and sits triumphant on the imperial throne in heaven.

What name is mightiest to-day in Christendom? Jesus. Who has more friends on earth than any other being? Jesus. Before whom do the most thousands kneel in chapel and church and cathedral the world over? Jesus. From what depths of poverty to what heights of renown! And so let all those who are poorly started remember that they can be no more poorly born than was our Christ.

Do you know that the vast majority of the world's deliverers had barn-like birthplaces? Luther, the emancipator of religion, born among the mines; Shakespeare, the emancipator of literature, born in a humble home at Stratford-on-Avon; Columbus, the discoverer of a world; born in poverty at Genoa; Hogarth, the discoverer of how to make art accumulative and administrative of virtue, born in an humble home at Westmoreland; Kisto and Prideaux, whose keys unlocked apartments in the Holy Scriptures which had never been entered, born in want, nine out of ten of the world's deliverers born in want.

I stir your holy ambitions this Christmas with these thoughts of the world's first Christmas, to tell you that although the whole world may be opposed to you, and inside and outside of your occupation or profession there may be those who would hinder your ascent, on your side and enlisted in your behalf are the sympathetic heart and almighty arm of one, who, on the night of the world's first Christmas, about 1900 years ago, was swrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. Oh, what splendid encouragement for the poorly started. Our world has plenty of sympathizers! Our world is only a silver rung of a great ladder, at the top of which is your Father's house. No more stellar solitariness for our world; no other friendless planets spun out into space to freeze, but a world in the bosom of divine paternity. A star harnessed to a manger.

THE BOOMERANG.

The Australian aborigines are not the only users of the boomerang, nor were they the first to use that missile. The Egyptians knew all about it, just as they seem to have known all about everything else. At the present day the boomerang is used by some American Indian tribes, and by the Dravidian races of the Indian Peninsula. The missile used by the last named differs in that it is thicker than the usual form and does not return to the thrower. The return of the boomerang is due to the action of the wind, the shape of the weapon and the manner in which it is thrown.

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