

Old Bill's Gift

By Octavia Roberts

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Bill, more familiarly "Old Bill"—he had never been known to mention a family name—looked around his "haven of holiday comfort," as he termed it, with a chuckle of supreme satisfaction.

"It's great!" he gloated, "with only one thing missing—a Christmas tree." Bill was a character. The townspeople designated him a tramp. Somehow, however, the appellation did not seem to fit. He did not drink nor swear. He did not beg. His willing ways had made him popular, and when Bill was "down on his luck" and passed a doorway hungry-looking, his wants were generally provided for unsolicited.

It was the day before Christmas. Behind the patient gleam in "Old Bill's" eyes lurked some sentiment of memory that impelled him to celebrate. This especial year he had been preparing for the event with the eager ardor of a school boy. Bill had made no confidants. Quietly and enjoyably he had laid his plans.

These were now perfected. A week back Bill had "gone to house-keeping." He had discovered an old abandoned barn just beyond the town limits. The lower part had

lost doors and windows and was bleak and cheerless indeed. A rickety stairs, however, led to a room in one corner of the loft. It was cozy and warm and at one time had been a harness room. Here Bill had "camped." He had fished out an old oil stove, a cot, a table and chair from the town dumping heap.

A particular housewife had presented him with a roasted chicken because one side was slightly charred. On the red table beside it were half a dozen homemade doughnuts and a real mince pie.

Bill took a last look at the goodly array of comfort then went out to seek a branch of arbor vitae which would serve as a Christmas tree.

As he neared the barn on his return he came to a speedy halt.

A light glowed over at one corner of the place. It proceeded from a lantern set in the feed box of a manger. In the manger itself across the stale hay it contained a blanket was spread and, swathed in coverings upon this

peaceful slumber, his softened spirit in radiant dreams wandering through that "upper room" filled with the souls of those, however humble, who had helped to make true "Peace on earth good will to men."

Near by a serious-faced man was shaking the snow from his shoulders. Beside him, seated on an old suitcase was a comely but care-worn woman.

The man began to speak. Bill, agape, row into the shadow and listened. It was to hear enough to learn that bad luck was driving these homeless ones from their former

home, penniless, on foot, to the father of the wife, ten miles further on. The storm had driven them to temporary shelter.

The husband and father had taken a well-thumbed volume from his pocket.

He began reading aloud. It was of "an upper room," of a master and his beloved disciples, of a supper never to be forgotten in the memory of mankind.

Bill stood like one transfixed. What tender chord had been struck that he closed his eyes! He was back forty years in memory, at his mother's knee. How vivid, how appealing—a picture she had shown him of the Christ-child in a manger, of the devoted father and mother, as here before him, a prototype of that holy eye so real, so touching—the First Christmas!

A mighty thought moved him as he quietly spoke:

"Friend, upstairs you will find comfort till the storm is over. Call it a Christmas greeting—see?" and was gone.

"I'll strike out for Farmer Dale's haymow," shivered Bill, after half an hour's desultory wandering, and he turned about—to start, to shout out, and then to run.

For there in the distance the familiar farmhouse showed no illumination within, but beyond it a glare shot up—a haystack on fire!

Bill reached the farmyard. The wind had blown the flames against one gable of the house and it was burning. He ran to the stable for a pitchfork. Then began a fierce battle.

Bucket after bucket of water he carried. The last spark was dashed out, and Bill sank exhausted to the ground as the farmer and his family, visiting at a neighbor's and attracted by the blaze, came rushing upon the scene.

"Yes," declared Farmer Dale, two hours later, as he showed Bill up the stairs and into a comfortable chamber, "this is your room, and you will sleep here, and you're a free boarder long as you like, understand? Why, there'd be no house to sleep in if it wasn't for you!"

Old Bill was a long time getting into bed. Like to a child he sank into a

peaceful slumber, his softened spirit in radiant dreams wandering through that "upper room" filled with the souls of those, however humble, who had helped to make true "Peace on earth good will to men."

Cheap Christmas Cake.

Dissolve a level teaspoonful of soda in two teaspoonfuls of warm water add half a pint of very thick cream stir for a moment, then add half a cupful of New Orleans molasses, mix thoroughly, add half a pint of brown sugar, three and a half cupfuls of sifted flour, through which has been mixed a tablespoonful each of cinnamon and a tablespoonful each of cloves, spice and nutmeg; add a tablespoonful of grape juice; stir into this a pound of sultana raisins cut into halves and floured, and half a pound of citron. Bake one and a half hours in a moderate oven.

Cake Candles.

If you wish to place red or green candles around your cake, take a piece of pasteboard somewhat larger than the cake, cover with fine white paper set the cake in the center; melt paraffin slightly, dip candles in and set around the cake. This keeps the cake icing whole, and there is no danger of the candles falling over. Little sprigs of holly may be placed between the candles.

At Christmas Time.

If the mother of the family is a very busy person, and if the trimming of the Christmas tree seems one thing too much, try giving the kiddies the fun of trimming it themselves. This of course, applies only to the children who have grown out of the baby stage

To Hang in Guest Room.

Sleep sweet within this quiet room,
O thou, whoever thou art,
And let no sad, dull yesterday
Disturb thy quiet heart.
Forget thyself and all the world,
Put out each flickering light,
His star is shining overhead,
Bright Christmas, dear—good night.

The mistletoe could tell some funny tales had it the gift of speech.

Shortest Reference to Christmas.
"December 25th—Rained all day." This is the shortest reference to Christmas in any book. It is the only entry under that date in the diary of our old friend Robinson Crusoe.

More Blessed to Give.
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What are You Kicking About?

—You Men who think you're underpaid

Don't "cuss" your luck because your pay is small. Don't blame it on the boss. Don't think that the reason others get more pay is that they have more "pull," because IT ISN'T SO!

The men who get big pay are those who are TRAINED to do work that is worth it. You have no special training, and you have to do work that any man with two hands can do; therefore your pay is small—AND YOU, ONLY, ARE TO BLAME.

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