

stopped, cocked his left eye and his right ear and flourished his tail judiciously. "Stupids," he said to himself, and then looked down with contempt upon his comrades, who were gossiping and flirting in a perfectly shocking manner. He ran farther out on the limb, glanced sidewise below and nodded his wise little head. Then back he came, ran out on another limb that projected from the opposite side of the tree, and peered down. Meditated a moment and then came back. "Those chipmunks are too slow to discover this," he said to himself, "but you would have thought those inquisitive old squirrels would have found it out. What fun I shall have telling them." He waved his tail in deep thought, trying to remember his mother's words. She was very literary and used long words. What was it she said? "My child, when you behold such a picture as I have just described to you, there is no danger. Man's mind does not dwell upon squirrels during such a crisis." In his excitement this young squirrel bit off two cones and down they came helter skelter against the rocks. One fell on Mrs. Martin's forehead. She opened her eyes. Was she dreaming? A voice that was assuredly Mr. Barrett's was saying:

"Annette, you are the gem in my life. You shall give to me the elixir of youth and your beauty shall be my guiding star. We will travel and we shall find many beautiful things that will give you pleasure."

The wind stopped and there was silence.

Mrs. Martin sat up and smoothed back her hair in a bewildered fashion. The landscape was the suggestion of peace, when the squirrel bent on the cone commission came down with a grand flurry of tail and cheerful malice of eye. The breeze came again with a flutter of aspen leaves as an obligato to another voice that was saying:

"Gertrude, though I have tried mightily to persuade you for a long time, I don't want to take advantage of your decision. I couldn't let you go now, but I want you to understand how it is. My office still has the look of a beginner that I can't rub off. It will be some time before I can contemplate my income, with cheerful indifference, but in the last few minutes I have felt somewhat, as if the 'mere man' might amount to something. There isn't any thing I wouldn't do for you."

"But if I should ask something small and mean, what then?"

"You wouldn't."

Mrs. Martin got up hurriedly, looked about with amazement. The squirrels looked up in doubt. "She is harmless," said one. Another, "she belongs to those boys," and such a scampering then as there was for the forts of squirreldom.

"Oh dear, oh dear," said Mrs. Martin. "Where am I?" whereupon a squirrel in his haste to escape, jumped past her. She screamed. From one concave opening at the end of the rock came Mr. Barrett and Miss Brown, and from the other came Miss Stanton and Jack Horton.

"I have been asleep," said Mrs. Martin apologetically. "I have just waked up."

"Oh," said Miss Brown. "Oh," she said again.

"I am the happiest man in the world," said Mr. Barrett.

"I am going right away," answered Mrs. Martin humbly, and by way of congratulation, as she stooped to pick up her rug.

"So are we," said Miss Stanton, and Horton gathered up the rug, his mouth drawn into a whimsical smile and the three walked on.

"Mrs. Martin," said Jack, "I shall never be able to disprove your logic by, by personal experience that is."

"I am so glad, glad" and then with a merry gleam of the eye, as she glanced back at the rock, "nor by personal observation." The sun broke through a dark cloud, behind which it had been hiding for the last half hour and danced along their path.

"A good omen," said Mrs. Martin and she stooped to pick a hare-bell that grew by the wayside.

GEORGE'S STOCKING.

[BY MARTHA PIERCE.]

Mother took the last stitch off the knitting needle, and holding up the gray stocking she was "toeing" looked at it critically. Father leaned down, thrust the poker into the lower door of the Round Oak stove, and shook it savagely, though there was a red spot on the side of the barrel next him. From beneath the white shade the lamp set precisely in the middle of the green moss mat shed its clear light down on the round table. Within its soft radiance was a shell with the Lord's prayer in undecipherable lettering on its humped back, a newspaper, neatly folded, and a spectacle case. That was all except, indeed, a letter which lay next to mother. When the needles were fluttering briskly again and father content with the fire settled into one of the favorite attitudes of the aged, his chest sunken, his hands lying loosely on his knees, his eyes on the bright coals glowing behind the isenglass, mother spoke:

"I'm selfish, I spose, but I did hope Mollie'd come home for Chris'mas. It's no more'n fair, as she says, that they should go to John's folks this year seein' they was here last. I ain't no ill-will, but I can't get over it some way—it'll be the first Chris'mas since Mollie was a baby we ain't had her 't home to plan and to fuss over."

"'Twas hard enough last Chris'mas with her and John both," said father slowly. "Seems like I never missed George so much."

Mother did not reply. She leaned toward the lamp and picked up stitches.

"After all, he always set more store by Chris'mas than Mollie seemed to, anyways. Mebbe 'twas because he was youngest, and we all layed out to give him a little the best time—and Mollie, keener at it then either of us, always had a kind of motherin way with 'im—d'ye mind? It was Little Brother must have this and Little Brother must have that. She was always for givin' him everything he wanted far's she could. Land! What a time she used t' have givin' me d'rections 'bout fillin' his stockin' 'fore she hung her's up 'nd went t' bed. Seems like no longer ago than las' Chris'mas, they was workin' away over there under that shelf, gittin' that stockin' o' his hung t' his satisfaction. D'ye mind, how he al'ays would hang it there and no-where's else? 'Nd how they'd git their heads t'gether, and whisper and laugh over their turrible big secrets, they thought they was keepin' so dark?"

Mother rose and went to the window. Her ball rolled to the farthest corner of the room, and the watchful kitten sprang after it, tangling the thread, but she did not notice. She pushed up the blue shade, parted the coarse lace curtains and looked out for a long time.

"There's a deep snow," she said at last. "I d'no as I ever saw a whiter Chris'mas. It's clean up t' the top o' the fence. There'll be fine sleighin'."

A long silence fell. Mother came back, rescued her work from the kitten, and sat down again.

"It never snows over there, I guess," the old man said at last, slowly. "I've

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