THE SUNDAY BEE: OMAHA, DECEMBER 14, 1924.

GIFTS

The Very Heart of Christmas

She was born to management as half-brothers and sisters saw to that | check made her look younger, more | married. But I own an awful nice before did I have to wait a minute in making one for Thanksgiving and frock of French blue crepe, silk stock- that we've got so many nice things. the sparks fly upward, was Flora Janney. She never cried unless there Janney. She never cried unless there it in a business-like way—just a few short, sharp, dry-eyed walls to notify in the savings account be. She like it in a business-like way—just a few short, sharp, dry-eyed walls to notify it in a business-like way—just a few short, sharp, dry-eyed walls to notify it in a business-like way—just a few short, sharp, dry-eyed walls to notify it in a business-like way—just a few short, sharp, dry-eyed walls to notify it in a business-like way—just a few short, sharp, dry-eyed walls to notify it in a business-like way—just a few short, sharp, dry-eyed walls to notify it in a business-like way—just a few short, sharp, dry-eyed walls to notify it in a business at the short was a good investment. The savings account be-

there was one.

kept her little pinafores clean for ed them all upward and on by sheer a miraculous length of time and will power. The commission house played happily with any sort of where she was employed raised her makeshift toys. And when that dark salary every year as regularly as the shadow which was her father's pres- calendar changed, and handed her a ence entered the home, she was pretty sum for bonus besides. The utterly silent, keeping out of his sight saving bank account grew into four and out of reach of his heavy hand. figures, and was invested in safe and

Osceola Janney was a tyrant and a sure bends. brute, despite a certain dashing hand- Emmeliine had been pushed, pulled. someness that made women look and prodded through high school and efter him, whether he was walking was reluctantly entering college when steadily or not, and most usually he Flora was 23; Cliffy had another year in high school to go, and then was not.

Perhaps it was the memory of that he too was college-bound, eventually dashing youth that he once was that to become a doctor; Marguerite, made Mrs. Janney burst into wild Lester, and Violet were all making tears on the night word was sent their way on the lower rungs of the

from a hospital, that he never would come home again to abuse his wife and child. Flora was 5 years old when that happened and she cuddled against her mother. "Don't cwy, Mother," she said pro-

tectingly, "Sno use to cwy." Old Miss Carmine, the roomer on

the top floor, heard her and said approvingly "Listen to that childnow she's got sense." Things went more smoothly after

the dashing Osceola returned no more. The roomers stayed longer and the old city house, which was tied ip some way by an entail and could ot be sold, brisked up a little. Flora, at the age of 7./ was doing er rands competently. And when she was 8 she could sweep the pavement and dispense clean towels -to the roomers. Also she had insisted on having neat dotted swiss curtains for all the front windows

When Flora was 9 Mrs. Janney dec'ded to marry Mr. Pentz, the first-floor front: a bald-headed, young. old man, not in the least like the lamented Osceola! He had been head salesman in the Ladies' department of the Ready Cash Shoe Emporium ever since the Ready Cash had such a department. He would never rise any higher; but it was doubtful if he would ever fall any lower, for he was a good salesman and deservedly popular.

Since he was a man and in busi ness, Mrs. Janney, who was a born leaner, had frequently demanded his advice. Mr. Pentz gave her the best of his help, and counsel, and in gratiude she insisted on sewing on but-

ons, darning his socks, looking after his laundry-delicate attentions of a rather intimate nature, these, and of family life.

So Mrs. Janney became Mrs. Pentz.

afied him "Pentzy," having declined at the foot of the steps. to call him father. "He's a lot too

ney's square little chin gave the fam- worry about the gloves-you've got But I've never lived in it. Aunt Ella's kissed her fervently.

aproachable. "Do you think, Flora, if I wore men. All furnished. Had a chance to If there was only some way...." Christmas. What about Lester's re-"On you think, Flora, if I wore men. All furnished. Had a chance to If there was only some way...."

short, sharp, dry-eyed walls to notify the world of her wrongs. Oh, she was a good baby, a model baby, if ever

And she was a good little girl. She ily something to live up to. She haul- your black ones and they're newer. let me board with her since Ma died. "All the same, I fell like a traitor,"

men's furnishings at Glenn's, Pentzy was dumbheaded for books and I just And she did! neckties apiece, at not more than \$1 and madame says maybe I'll get to times she felt they did not reply with ought o've written to you; but it to be.

sufficient exactness to her many questions as to the details of their life. It was half the easing of anxiety, half the overwhelming joy of seeing them all again that made Flora sim- were signs of pleasant luxury: a talk- And," she looked around at them, em ply speechless with happiness when ing machine, new cushions, a pair of braced them with her glance, "and Roscoe said, one evening late in De- painted vases, some bright pictures, yes, it's perfectly grand that you've

"Let's run up to New York and spend Christmas with your folks. Sur- display all the new delights to this The tension loosened, everbody beprise 'em." dearly loved sister.

Of course her first answer was in character, "But it's such a long trip, Roscoe. Do you think we can afford comes every week to collect on it; How we got new furniture in Em-joy of Flora's attitude. She was their Flora. And they were hers, as never

And he answered with great gravity, "No: it will undoubtedly drive us into bankruptcy." Whereupon she said he was a dar. Whereupon she said he was a dar. And she was aware of a curious a great big turkey! My, I'm glad them a curious peace. She had given them had Whereupon she said he was a dar ling and how did he know that it

was the one thing she really wanted to do.

Flora? Gee, I'm so glad you're here

She must not fail them in this moment. She must make them see each. Thus did Flora write pages and be a designer. I've got such good that she loved them as they were in pages in her neat, clear hand. Some- ideas. I get thirty-five a week. I reality, not for what she wished them

was kind of hard, going against your She kissed Violet's topknot and an-ideas so." Swered, with just the suspicion of Still Flora did not speak. But she a' gasp in her voice. "I'm glad to was seeing. All around the room be here to have some, too, baby. a smoking set for Pentzy. Violet got them all. I'm glad of that, too.

took up the tale, proudly anxious to Awfully glad." gan to laugh and talk again, a lit-"And we got new furniture in Em the hysterically from the relief and and we go to the movies two'n' three before. Every word they said, every

times a week, all of us; an' listen, look they gave her, told her so. you're here to have some of that them a great gift; but they had turkey. We got fruit cake, too, and given one to her also. They had mince ples, and plum pudding, and given has the revelation that each lots of veg'tables, and celery and life must be lived to itself, in its own. cramberry sauce, and Pa brought home a fi pound box of the very best chocolates. And now you and Ros. coe're here and can have some of build for them. She would have all her strength, all her energy, for-

Turkey! Turkey in the city was 58 cents a pound. Flora knew that, Fruit cake, mince ple, plum pudding -a five-pound box of the very best chocolates. And all of them dressed had seen all, and had understood to the nines-rhinestone pins shore, from the very depths of his loving heart.

string of gaudy beads around her Presently she slipped across and spoke to him. "The shops'll be open neck that suited very well the fancy tonight," she whispered. "Let's slip beaded blouse she was wearing, just out and get some more presents for 'em. I don't want to disappoint 'em." such garments as she had always yearned for, but Flora never would He nodded. Oh, yes, he understood let her have. And she had on silk night girl, -everything. stockings, too. And so, as Flora's Flora," he whispered tenderly.

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PEOPLE

eves informed her, did Violet, and Old Miss Carmine had understood, too, "I always said she was sensible," They had backslidden. They had she murmured with pride.

escaped her. They had, the very instant she had taken her restraining hands from them, run back into the MAKE channels of their own natures. Her people-hers! They were like every other family on the block-shiftless, wasteful, hand-to-mouth, laughing at the thought of a rainy day. Stormy sobs rose in her throat, choked her, her eyes were bright with scalding. opeless tears.

etiling mile. In their abash ed, constrained silence there was still that ardent, tender love for her that she had always treasured. And in

Flora drew in her breath sharply his aunt to look up the old lady. He nice place to go, Miss Janney." he of such a tremor as any young wo bosom. He became, de facto, one of everything with the family and ar- Why, they were afraid of her, afraid jubilation they all got very glum, and through to spring," said Flora. might do.

Marguerite.

A'l but Violet, For Violet was still She got ready their gifts in a whirl of joy. Outing flannel nightshirts for gloating over the thought of the Pentzy, and a neat dark gray bath pleasure they could share with Flora. was to Flora's young mind: a very grand way to live indeed. Flora was and of Mr. She passed him, and he noted of me to offer, it be more than reson and me noted of me to offer, it be more than reson and me noted of me to offer, it be more than reson and me noted of me to offer, it be more than reson and of all the ber plain dress, her quick light step. grand way to live indeed. Flora was with approval. She was at her door. Miss Carmine seized Flora with fractions, she was conscious of a loving speeches that were made that "Poor youngster-she really cost a dollar a yard Flora noted explained to them her plans and doesn't have much time to sew." she dumbly) against her sister's shoulder thought as she cut it out. It was and said with the uttermost expan , but of Flora's favorite dark blue serge; siveness: "Isn't it perfectly grand

## inge and disquisting silence ran over the hilarity and ironed it out flat.

educational ladder which Flora's will Sit down, Mr. Neal, and make your | It's a better arrangement for a single said Flora. But she didn't mean it. "We can stay nearly a week," impelled them to tread, whenself at home. Now, you come along man." It was pretty nearly like lay- And Roscoe knew she didn't. Rosco Neal made his appearance with me, Miss Minnie, and you'll be ing his hand and heart and bunga-on the Pentz-Janney horizon. He was ready in two jiffs." So they went in and told the family to get some of these newfangled elec-that she would understand, would let they were to be married. After the tric heaters and look 'round for some them still keep their place in her afon the Pentz-Janney horizon. He was ready in two jiffs." bound to suggest to the receiver the nephew of a childhood friend of Mr. Neal detained them for a mo- wondered whether she realized this. first shock the family rose in hilar- handsome doorhandles and hinges." thereof the comforts and pleasures Miss Carmine's and had been sent by ment. "Maybe you can tell up some Apparently not, for there was no sign ious mass and took Roscoe to its "And it'll give me time to go over

came strolling rather uncertainly suggested. "I'm not very well ac- man would experience who realized them, at once. But after the first range what they're to do right of what she might say, what she and she and Flora no longer lived in down the street, his eye squinting quainted with the city. Or"- it was that she was being courted. the besement, but moved upstairs and inhabited the whole first floor of two rooms and bath, which is room work. She passed him, and he noted

much nicer'n father was, to call half to himself and half to her terrified, even through her elation. at wondered? Window boxes with ivy "I wish it

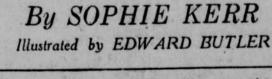
with approval. She was at her door. putting in her key, when he stopped at the foot of the steps. "Why this is number 45." he said. Flora could see the old lady was Had it window boxes. she Roscoe's.

Bue even through these tears she said Roscoe. "That'll give me time the love was a queer wistful appeal

fections.



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nrmiy mother suggested it.

But when the first Pentz baby ar- of countrified air about him. rived Flora became an adult with a mission. To see her rolling little Emmeline's carrage down the block to the green triangle of park, to observe her air of conscious superiority, was domestic drama on a high scale.

"Miss Minnie Carmine. Do you know if she lives here?" His voice was When a year later young Clifford soft and deep, with that kindly in-Pentz made his appearance, Emmeflection that so many men have who line became even more wholly Flora's talk but little. presently she had taken on

"Come in." said Flora: "I'll se Cliffy, too. Cliffy now rode in the carabout it." For of course she was not riage and Emmeline toddled beside it. and Flora managed both handily. She going to let any stranger who came along bother Miss Carmine. It might was 11 and getting tall for her age, and be one of these agants-you never instinct for management was increasing every minute. Pentzy and her can tell. ther never thought of having a She brought Roscoe into the Perftz family conclave without Flora-and sitting room, found out his business the child's judgment was suprising, and all about him, and had sent

ly sound, especially on matters finan. Violet up to tell Miss Carmine be cial. They had the roomers, to be fore the bewildered Roscoe realized sure, but the neighborhood was what was happening. But his mental rather running down and prices of processes were sure, if not volcanic. rooms with it. There was Mr. Pentz's This competent blue-eyed young wosalary, a steady asset; but the house man who so calmly assorted and ar needed many repairs. Besides, there ranged him caught and interested were more bables. After Emmeline and him. As he waited for Miss Carmine Clifford, arrived, in due course of he observed that she had kissed the time, Marguerite, Lester, and Violet. children, whisked the room into bet-Flora washed, dressed, fed and ruled ter order, deciding a wavering questhe five younger with great capabil- tion or two of her mother's and then, ity, smooth justice and a devoted as Miss Carmine appeared, she said, affection. She was far more of a re- pleasantly, "You just sit and have fuge and a strength to them than your visit right here. We're all going their mild father or their feather. downstairs." Whereupon, the whole

she inquired crisply.

Roscoe took off his hat. "I'm look-

"Who is that young lady?" asked

Ella Fowler-that-was' nephew had

ing for Miss Carmine," he explained. hat ...

headed mother. They courted her troop had disappeared. approbation-they were obedient to her. Mudder and fadder might be openly flouted-but not Flora.

By the time she was through high been established and Miss Carmine school she was a better executive had told him that the last time she than any women on the block. The saw him he was a little red-headed placidity of her childhood had stayed baby riding in his go-cart and as with her and so had the pink cheeks. solemn as a judge.

Her brown hair was gold-flecked and Miss Carmine explained, adding, as alluring. She was straight and slen- was usual, "I tell you, that's one girl der and, if not so very tall, she was with sense."

tall enough. But the plain dull cloth- To this Roscoe made no answer. He es she wore denied what beauty she proceeded slowly but certainly for possessed. ward.

No one will ever know the epic of "I guess I might call you Aunt savings that went to make up Flora Minnie," was his first step, and the Janney's tuition for the business way old Miss Carmine smilled and school which she presently attended, bridled was earnest that his sense of At first it was just a "savings," but direction was good.

r a while it became a "college "I've been right lonely and dulf fund." The matter of banks paying since I've been in New York-not interest having been made clear to knowing anybody. I hope you won't

her in a certain arithmetic lesson, mind if I come around again soon." the money deposited in the nearest Miss Carmine hoped he'd come business dress, and tail silent Roscoe There was no time to be lost. The saving bank and her bank book be- just as often as he could. She'd in Neal.

came her greatest treasures. It was troduced him to Flora and the other a tremendous race with time as to children, and Mr. and Mrs. Pentz- sufficiently to explain that he had matter how competent was the clerk whether she'd have enough when she they'd all been so good and kind- a flourishing hardware store, and that left in charge. was ready to take the course; but why, when she had the flu last win- his business in New York was to

Flora won. And when she was 18, and ter, Flora had nursed her three weeks lay in a stock of electric fixtures, be plain language: "I never was in love a half she had gone through business on end, sitting up night after night, cause an electric light plant had late before or asked any gilr to marry college "like a streak," and became and going to business daytimes. a stenographer and typist in a big He said, well now, she must be a and everybody was having their knew you were the one for me, out of commission house at the magnificent fine girl. And since the hotel he was houses wired, and wanted stylish fix the whole world. I love you, Flora, salary of \$14 per week. staying at wasn't very homelike, tures.

The money eased the financial sit-bow about it if he and his new-found "We've got many fine residences," uation, but her youth of concentrated Aunt Minnie went around somewhere he related ostensibly to Miss Carmine had moulded her definitely, and had a bite of supper together. He but really to Flora. "And my store, "We've got to save to put the chil- added that maybe Miss Janney could if I do say it, is a credit to the place. dren through college, now," she said tell them a good place to go. The It's located on the main street, right to her mother and Pentzy. "I want prospect made old Miss Carmine in the heart of the shopping section. them to have good educations, so hilarious and excited. She called I made a good clean profit last year. they'll be somebody when they grow breathlessly downstairs for Flora. "Gracious, you're real prosperous;" lost without me. If of up." "Come up here right away, dear. shrilled Miss Carmine. "You've not were a little older. .

It sounds like a drab, dreary chron- It's important." It sounds like a drab, dreary chron-icle, the story of Flora Janney's child-Flora came up, not removing the Cot nice little wife and family back "Yes, I do," said Flora, half-laugh-were the best for sweaters. Here was And now Emmeline spoke up, and ach and open the bowels. A teaspoon ages printed on bettle. Mother! You hood and youth? But it was full of apron which she had on preparatory there, too?" ing. half frowning. "I'm just all a recipe for a poor man's plum pud-iaughter, and of loving, for the little to getting supper. Its blue and white "Oh, no," said Roscoe, "I'm not torn up about it. Never in my life ding which was excellent. No harm fashionably dressed—a tricky little tomorrow. It doesn't cramp or over an imitation fig syrup.

when her Flora looked down the stoop and saw the prospect of such a wild night and geraniums were one a big, square young man with a sort without some accustomed person cherished suppressed desires. near her. "I don't see why I can't there was no denying it. all the them. "You, are looking for number 45?" go," she said to Roscoe. "Thank you rooms on one floor did make house

for thinking of it, I'll just take off keeping easy. . . . And this Mr. my apron-and get my other Neal had a deep, pleasant voice. . Had he: or had he not equeezed satisfied.

And so they went, Miss Carmine her hand when he said good night?



They sat down and figured it out, all through one long evening.

in her foulard. Flora in her darkiln her heart she knew that he had During supper he found his tongue could not run itself indefinitely, nd

So Roscoe Neal put it to Flora in ly became one of the city's possessions me. But the minute I saw you

and I want you to marry me." His eyes were steady, his hand on hers was compelling. Flora, looking up at him, answered to his steadiness and his compulsion. And yet-how could she?

I'll write all the time," she assured And Marriage is eternally the great ad-

enture, greatest, perhaps, in a case to Emmeline's love for gay things Shirts for Cliffy-strong figured per like Flora Janney's. But Flora knew that she had chosen well, and she was cale; bedroom slippers and knitted

There was only one uncertainty, Violet: a black cross-over knitted and she tried not to think about jacket for Miss Carmine. And finally that. Not the commission house, two pairs of good black cotton stock though the whole organization of that ings, heavy and durable, for every flourishing establishment threw its one of them. She glowed and picke hands in the air and said. "But look them out, How well she remembered we can't get along without Miss their sizes! For Violet and Lester she Janney." And they collected an bought a half size larger than last amazing sum of money and bought time. her a silver tea service that was per-

fectly overwhelming. But the family-that was different. There she really was indispensable. She knew it. Mrs. Pentz was more irresponsible than the youthful Violet, and Pa Pentzy, except for the faithgolden crisp, and cut it into square ful bringing home of his salary, was melting kisses, delicious to see an little better. Emmeline and Cliffy taste were wonderful, just as good as gold, The trip was all night and all day and anxious to do the right thing but on Christmas eve, laden with always, but-so terribly young, so their boxes and bundles, they entered

accustomed to Flora's aid and guidthe familiar block. ance. To be sure, she had left them a be true!" She stopped before the house

written budget, a schedule of duties, door, .but hesitated. "Why . a plan of life without her, which was this can't be the house-" so detailed and clear that a child of 5 "Yes, it is," said Roscoe, "It's num could understand it. But . . . all ber 45." the same . . . oh, they tugged at "But-" Flora began, and looked

her hearstrings, they lay upon her again. The windows were brilliant conscience. And the way they all with light, and silhoutted agains chorused continually. "I don't see them were great wreaths, green and how we're going to get along without massive, tied with lavish red ribbons you," while she loved it, hurt her "Someone sent 'em as a present. terribly

decided Flora-and pushed the bell. No, it was too late now. She knew The instant ecstatic hubbub that that she was happy, happy with a arose was more than satisfying. "It's thrilling, tremulous happiness such as Flora-it's Flora!" shricked Violet. pragmatism and executive power had throwing herself upon her sister. never supplied.

"Flora!" They came running at the Ie was gorgeous-that arrival at word-Lester, Marguerite, Cliffy, Em Asterville as a bride. It was a per- meline, Pentzy, Mrs. Pentz. They fectly lovely place, Asterville. Ros- seized on Flora, and hugged and coe's store was huge, really huge. kissed her as if they never could stop. Three clerks, and the latest, most up. They danced round her, they shouled to-date equipment. And as for the they pranced, they patted and pulled bungalow! The comfort, the conveni- at her. Roscoe was more or less in ence of it. The space, the privacy- cluded in the general rejoicing, but for one whose room had had to ac- the center of it was Flora.

commodate Emmeline and Violet, as "Now everything's O. K.," declared well as herself, whose one dresser and Mr. Prentz, over and over, like a ge one closet had to be divided by three. nial parrot. Old Miss Carmine cam In the bungalow there were six great down and joined the resounding host. closets, three bedrooms, two baths! Oh, it was all sweeter even that The fireplace was real, not whiffy Flora had imagined. But after a while gas logs. The kitchen-but Flora's they quieted a little and Flora could adjectives failed when it came to the look about her and ask questions kitchen. "Who sent these lovely wreaths?" was

And her callers, Roscoe's friends- her first inquiry. A strange and disquieting silence how kind they were, how nice, how homelike, how willing to help, to keep ran over the hilarity and ironed it out her from loneliness. And Roscoe be- flat. "I bought 'em-for mother." said longed to the community club, and Clifford, in rather a low volce. Flora she was learning to drive his little looked round at him and made the dis car covery that he was smartly, not to

Joyful chronicles like these formed say fashionably dressed. the beginning of all Flora's letters "Clifford makes a lot of money home. But after that, advice and di- now," piped up loving little Violet. rection. Violet was to have Mar- "since he stopped going to college and guerite's brown tricotine for school went into the advertising agency. He wear, since it was too small for Mar- said he didn't see any sense of being

"But the family, Roscoe. They'd be guerite. Emmeline's old serge would a doctor, anyway." "Gracious, you're real prosperous;" lost without me. If only the children make an exellent everyday freek for Flora opened her lips to speak, but pleasant taste of "California Fig Ask your druggist for

"Oh," said Flora, "It's too good to inger Bldg., St. Joseph, Me.

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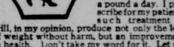


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