

Waiting for an Expected Guest



A Song for Christmas

WHANT me a rhyme of Christmas—
Sing me a jovial song—
And though it is filled with laughter,
Let it be pure and strong
Sing of the hearts brimmed over
With the story of the day—
Of the echo of childish voices
That will not die away—
Of the blare of the tasseled bugle,
And the timeless clatter and beat
Of the drum that throbs to muster
Squadrons of scampering feet.
But, O, let your voice fall fainter,
Till, blent with a minor tone,
You temper your song with the beauty
Of the pity Christ hath shown,
And sing one verse for the voiceless;
And yet, ere the song be done,
A verse for the ears that hear not,
And a verse for the sightless one.
For though it be time for singing
A merry Christmas glee,
Let a low, sweet voice of pathos
Run through the melody.

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY.

THE WITNESS From the WOODS



WHAT a lot of things can happen between July and Christmas!" Kate said to herself and said it aloud, so loudly that it startled her. For she was alone. Mother was off on an eleventh-hour and unsatisfactory wrestle with the Christmas shopping problem. Sis had chosen this gray afternoon to call on a chum home from college. So Kate had opportunity to make herself as miserable as she desired.

It was now six weeks since Jack had called—and six weeks is a long time when a man's 25 and a girl is 20, and each is very much interested in the other. Just how much Kate was interested was something unsuspected. Once Jack thought he knew, but now all he knew was that he did not know. When Jack suddenly disappeared from Kate's perspective no one noticed his absence from the picture. To most people Jack had seemed a part of Kate's social background. Some who had seen them together at Grand Traverse had advanced him to the middle distance. But of the foreground no one thought.

What happened in July was this: The Wilsons were no more than firmly established in their cottage, which looks over Grand Traverse bay, than Jack appeared at the hotel, which looks over them both. That was not remarkable, for all had been members of that particular summer colony for years. Then, the day of the picnic on the Point, Jack and Kate found themselves sitting at the green fringe of the forest looking out over the blue expanse of the bay. A hundred yards in front of them Mrs. Wilson was gathering up the tablecloth and things.

There was a little sense of chill in the air—a harbinger of autumn. And there was a change in the atmosphere between the two. The girl's lips were tremulous. The man was agitated, and strangely tender and brutal in his speech.

"It will not interest you," he said, "but I am going down to-morrow."
"But why so tragic? We will be back in town in a week ourselves—and yet I do not feel so horribly blue about it."

"Well, things down there are different."
"Yes, they are different, but not unpleasant when you first get back to them. I shall miss the canna in front of your hotel; but I have no doubt the fall millinery on State street will be quite as gorgeous."

"You are clever, and, like most clever people, a little heartless. You know how things are different down there. The people are different—why, we are different ourselves. And it is just the difference of which you speak—the difference between these flowers and flowers of silk and satin, between those lilies out there and lily stems of wire and paper."

"You are a little unkind, Jack," she said, gently.

The soft reproof, more suggestive of tears than anger, brought the story to his very lips. He wondered how he should tell it. Then an old schoolboy trick came back to him. He brought out his penknife. Beside them was a little spruce and in the soft, flaky bark he carved a heart. Within its lines he dug deeply the initials of two people. The girl caught her breath and blushed a little, which are the proper and customary things for a girl to do at such a time.

Then he told her what was in his mind. It left her a little panic-stricken and she took the refuge her sisters always have taken—she asked him to wait for his answer.

In such a case there is but one thing for the man to do, and that is to wait—until to-morrow. But when a man is terribly in earnest he takes people seriously.

"When I see this carving of yours again then we will talk about this, Jack—if you still think this way."

She thought she was putting him on a most proper probation. It was only a woman's reluctance to give up her freedom.

But he took her at her word. Next day he went away.

Back in town again, at first he saw her often. His restraint she imagined was resentment. In November, a month of storms and dreary skies, they quarreled. That was six weeks ago.

All that six weeks he pondered the matter by lonely fires and over breakfasts late and bad. Then he resolved to end the suspense and still keep his word.

One day a young man, whom the natives were satisfied was most certainly insane, stepped off the train into a snowdrift. He wanted a team, a guide, a shovel and an ax. As he had money and determination he got them.

This crazy young man drove four miles and waded through two more.

Christmas Sweets



MISS DUPREE'S HOLIDAY JOY

She Recalls One Memorable Christmas Performance in the City of New Orleans.

WHenever possible, I prefer spending Christmas with my family out on Long Island, and unless my engagements take me too far away I always make it a point to be with them on that day.

There are times, however, in this profession when the wish must take second place to necessity, and from the viewpoint of actual novelty I suppose my most interesting Christmas was the one I spent in the southland. Our routing took us into New Orleans at Christmas, and to me, who had always up to that time spent the day in the colder north, the novelty of seeing trees in leaf and flowers blooming was as pleasing as it was unusual.

On Christmas afternoon, when others were home enjoying the big dinner with the family, I was getting ready for a special holiday matinee. I was not pleased with myself or with a profession that demanded of its members that they labor on Christmas day—above all others—and it was not with a particularly light heart that I dressed for my part.

But when the curtain went up on the first act and I made my entrance the welcome I received compensated for the disappointment I felt.

It was a special matinee arranged for the poor children of the poorest quarter of New Orleans, and the enjoyment of those childish auditors soon melted the disappointment out of my heart.

After the matinee I had arranged with my manager that I would receive the little folks on the stage, and the wise man in his knowledge of childish hearts sent out a hurry order for candy and other things that make Christmas a day of cheer to kiddies. At the conclusion of the last act the stage was cleared and I held the most unusual reception that I ever experienced.

Clean as pins, but with their little bodies clothed in many cases in garments ragged and frayed, they came up on the stage, were introduced and sent away after a handshake, each with a box of candy.

I have spent many other delightful and out-of-the-ordinary Christmases on the road, but none that afforded me more real satisfaction than the one in New Orleans.

MINNIE DUPREE.

MISS GEORGE'S CHRISTMAS

Happy Memory of a Season When She Did Not Write One Glad Holiday Story.

OH, my happiest Christmas! I did not then realize it, but I recall it now with a radiant glow of delight. It was my first season upon the stage. I was only a novice, one day soaring upon the buoyant wings of boundless ambition; the next plunged in an abyssal depth of doubt, despair and self-deprecation. It was a very tiny part that had fallen to me. The compensation was but sufficient for the bare necessities. The route bristled with all the horrors of the one-night stands.

At midnight, huddled, miserably worn, dejected, and wretched, in the waiting room of a country station, listening in vain for the whistle of a belated train, I confess to a sudden flood of tears. What a mockery this Christmas day had been. Even the chimes had sounded like the tolling of a funeral knell. The cheerless discomforts of a cheap hotel, the unsavory, slatternly served travesty upon a Christmas dinner, the cold chill of a shabby, musty dressing room, the added toil of an extra matinee for a mere handful of people, and now the hungry wait for an accommodation train of dingy day coaches.

That was all Christmas had meant to me. Iowa was blizzard swept. Mails were delayed and tangled wires hung useless in gathering snowdrifts. No message of cheer, no souvenir of remembrance, had come to any of us. Our hollow, half-hearted exchange of Christmas, greeting had straggled no conviction. We were only rolling vagabonds, outside the pale of sympathy, debarred from the domestic joys of living, mere dispirited, rainbow chasers, with success ever mockingly elusive.

But as I recall it all now, I am submerged by a great wave of passionate, longing regret, for I know that such a Yuletide will never come to me again while I am upon the stage. It was my happiest Christmas, because the first and only one, since I began to tread the thorny and tortuous path of my profession, that I have not been called upon to write a Christmas story.

GRACE GEORGE.

Speak as you think; be what you are; pay your debts of all kinds.—Montfort.

WORSHIP AT CROSS OF ICE

Scattered Christian Tribes in Turkey Celebrate Christmas with Impressive Ceremonies.

MOHAMMEDISM is the prevailing religion in Turkey and for that reason only the few scattered Christian tribes observe the birthday of Christ in any manner. The Mohammedan Turks have two holidays in the entire year, those being "Car Bon Biram," the day of forgiveness, which is the Mohammedan New Year, and "Balram," the anniversary of the date when Mohammed gave to his people his scripture. The Friday of the Christian is the Sabbath of the Mohammedan and is observed by him in the same manner as Sunday with the Christians.

The Christian Turks, who include the Bulgarians, Servians, Montenegrins and other smaller tribes, observe Christmas with impressive religious ceremonies.

Three days before Christmas the "Bladego" appoints a delegation of 100 men from each congregation, who go to the river and hew out immense cakes of ice, after which they construct a huge pyramid near by. A great cross measuring about 40 by 60 feet and cut from the bed of ice is set up against the pyramid, and the place of worship for Christmas day is completed. Early on Christmas morning all the people march to the pyramid, where the initial exercises are conducted by the "Bladego." A small crucifix used by him in the exercises is the prize of the younger men of the tribe, who dive into the ice-cold water after it as the "Bladego" throws it in. Many are drowned annually in this practice, but they all consider themselves fortunate to die while on such a mission.

From the pyramid the procession marches to the home of the priest, where bread is blessed and broken by the "Bladego" and all present partake of the food.

Keep ever in the path of duty, but fail not to climb the steep of knowledge.—Newton.

IN THE REALM OF THE CZAR

Russians Look Upon Christmas as the Most Sacred and Most Celebrated Holiday.

CHRISTMAS is the most sacred and most celebrated holiday in Russia. Contrary to the custom in nearly all other countries, Christmas there always comes on Sunday, and a continuous celebration is held until midnight on January 2.

The Russian believes in devout religious services in honor of the birth of Christ, and each day during the season each family, including all its members, attends church at least once. On Christmas morning the most important services take place. Each congregation marches solemnly to the nearest river, which is always frozen over, the ice being sometimes as much as three feet thick.

After a large hole has been chipped in the ice the priest dips his cross in the water and prayers are pronounced, after which the priest holds baptismal exercises. Having been blessed by the priest the water is considered to be holy and as fast as the people can file by the hole in the ice bottles of all sizes and descriptions are filled with the water.

This water is prized the most highly of anything in the home, and bottles of it are sometimes found a century or more old. Some fanatics secure large quantities of it and bathe in it at regular intervals during the year.

There is one custom which many Americans would cherish in their own Christmas celebration, and especially the young people. It is that of kissing, for on Christmas day every one steals a kiss from whomsoever he meets. In some cases, and among the older people, the hearty handshake is much used, but the younger element clings closely to the old style.

Santa Claus is unknown to Russian children, but the "Babushka," an old woman witch, carrying a long stick and attired in the usual witch costume, visits the homes in every village and city and distributes greetings and then comes at night and leaves the gifts for both old and young.