# Raising the Limit

## A Story of What Happened on Christmas Eve

By Jeanne Olive Loizeaux

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It was Christmas eve in a city. The rich were preparing by the expenditure of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of dollars to enjoy the festivities, those in moderate circumstances piecing out what they did not have by working with their own hands, the poor—alas, the poor—going without the joys others were blessed with, except where the good Lord sent some benevolent person to hunt them up and bestow upon them a dinner or a few toys for the children—the children that it would seem Christmas is especially for.

The streets were crowded with belated purchasers, some buying decorations, some gifts of value, some a few simple toys. The spirit of Christmas was among them, within them. A father had forgotten that he had promised Jimmie a jackknife, a mother that Lucy must have a set of dishes; brothers and sisters remembered at

"WE'LL START SQUARE."

the last moment some forgotten article and were hurrying hither and thither to supply the deficiency. There were lovers who had but lately plighted their troth carrying home gifts.

Big Jim could not escape the hurry, the laughter, the package laden throng. He hated the bedizened windows, the greetings, even the strings of turkeys and chickens in the market windows. He hated Christmas time. And, worst of all, he hated the word home. And it was being rubbed in. Why not let bygones be? For two years he had not even heard of his mother, and then she had written that Mariana had married John Foster. That was natural, of course. John had stayed by his job, and John was not dependent on cards mainly for a living.

Big Jim, with his hands in his pockets, fingered the roll of bills and the loose money, over $300. He had been lucky last night, but tonight, like as not, Shorty or some one would get it away from him. He turned down a side street and cursed beneath his breath as a little Italian with a basket on his shoulder proffered him a small plaster Christ. He thrust out his chin and passed Charley's place, for he had already reached his limit in drinks. That chin kept him from passing his set limit in anything. He was no weakling. He kept his word and was bad by choice, not through lack of will.

The very sleighbells jingled "home," and he hated to think of himself in that connection. He would have gone to his boarding house, but no one, save perhaps Shorty, who had deserted his wife, would be there—they all had wives or kids or mothers or some girl to make merry with, to be kind to, if only once a year. Then into the city clangor came the beat of a drum and a singing and strumming—the Salvation Army. In their march they stopped near him—he could catch the words of the high, coarse tenor:

"Come home! Come home!
Why don't you all come home?"

The song finished, he caught words of the harangue begun by a young girl with a clear voice.

"Yes, come home! Come back to your real selves! Quit your sin, your drinkin' an' gamblin' an' be decent, boys! It pays! It pays, girls! Go home to your mothers! Sin ain't pleasure, an' it costs dear in tears an' human misery! Come home!" He slunk away disgustedly. It seemed there was no escape.

It was too early to play poker. Well, he could go to the postoffice at least for his mail. But here, too, was Christmas—hurrying crowds, laughter. And, escaping a bevy of young girls, he ran into and nearly knocked over a shabby old woman, sweet faced, wistful eyed, with trembling mittened hands. He put her on her feet again almost tenderly, apologizing, but she peered up into his face—a kind face with good eyes in spite of all.

"I was waitin' for my girl," she began with the volubility of lonely age. "I ain't heard from her in a year, my Molly. She would be sure to come for letters Christmas time, wouldn't she, think? P'raps you know her, Mary Shane?" she asked eagerly, not minding his shake of the head. "She's pretty, is Molly, with big blue eyes an' curly yellow hair, an' little, like a doll. Do you s'pose somethin's happened her? She might—just forget to write mightn't she? They said she hadn't worked to the store for six months! Do you s'pose—she's—dead?" The cracked old voice was a mere whisper. The young man's heart softened.

"I'll tell you," he answered, "I expect she's all right—married and safe, likely, being so pretty—and good!" The mother snatched gratefully at the words. "Married an' safe, I reckon," she repeated. "An' so happy she's forgettin' to write—married an' safe! An' —good!"

"So you go home," he advised. "You will hear from her all right if you wait. You'll get sick here." He left her and at the door ran head-on into Shorty. He was glad to see even Shorty, although that worthy had "a grouch on." The two went down the street together and paused at an alley where newsboys, with an eye out for the police, were shooting craps.

"Their game's more fun than ours and quicker," growled Shorty, "and matching pennies is quicker yet and even more intelligent. I'm tired of being a fool. I've got $300 in the world in this roll. I'll match pennies, two out of three for it. Heads! What you got?"

"Two hundred dollars. I'll go you!"

They stooped to the pavement and matched. Big Jim's luck held. Silently the other handed over the roll. Jim laughed shortly.

"I'll raise the limit in this 'gentlemen's game.' Two out of three the winner—to quit this life and be decent!" Shorty nodded. "Settle down and earn a living an' get married tonight! An' go home an' behave!" Again Shorty nodded, but he amended:

"The loser to end it all. He jerked his thumb in the direction of the river. Big Jim reached his hand, and the men shook hands. Just then a policeman sauntered past, importantly eying them. The newsboys scattered. Then the two stooped again in the electric light and matched pennies on the pavement. It was Jim's luck again. Shorty laughed, a little enviously.

"You're a square sport, Jim. You'll keep your word." Then he turned on his heel toward the river.

Jim stood thinking awhile till a policeman passing bade him "move on." Then he passed slowly back toward the main street. It had grown full evening, and the crowd had thickened—the last night before Christmas. He was pushed to the edge of the walk, where people had gathered thick as bees round a fleeing queen. The drum was beating—the Salvation Army again! A few men were laughing, all trying to see. Jim shouldered his way to the front. The soldiers had surrounded an overdressed young girl and knelt about her. Her cheeks were crimson with excitement. She had not yet got to rouge. Her curling yellow hair extravagantly dressed was blowing in the wind; tears rolled down her babyish face. She was very pretty and little, like a doll.

He knew the girl. It was Babe Shannon. He caught her eye, and she crimsoned a deeper hue.

"Come to yourself! Come home!" pleaded the soldiers. "Go back to your mother! Be good! Nothing else pays!" She nodded assent to them.

"I'll—go home—but let me out of here now." They yielded reluctantly, but the young man forced himself to her and took her arm. She shook off his touch like fire.

"It's you and your like have brought me here," she flamed. "I've promised to go home, and I can't. I ask you: Can I? What chance would I have? My mother"— But he seized her arm again and walked her rapidly away from the curious crowd down a side street, where it was quieter.

"Babe," he pleaded, "I'm not much, I ain't fit, but if you'll marry me we'll begin square. You give me a chance and I'll give you one." She faced him in astonishment and unbelief.

"My name ain't Babe; it's Molly. What do you mean, talking about—getting married? A year ago—just a year ago—if you'd said that it would have saved me. Now"—

"Now—it will save both of us. I mean it, Molly. You're a thousand times too good for me. But marry me and I'll take you home and I'll stick by you. You can tell your mother you've been married a year. You ought to have been, and we'll make it true." Her eyes searched his face, and he pushed back his hat to help her, to give her a chance at his eyes—kind, steady eyes, too old for so young a man, but still clear. The girl knew she could trust them. Suddenly she put her arm up before her face and began to cry, but she nodded through her tears.

"Marry me tonight," he said, "and tomorrow I'll take you home. I'll wake everybody and get a license, and I'll take care of you. We've got $200 to begin on. Come to the postoffice first." He drew her along with him. Once inside, she waited while he made out and sent an order for $300 and mailed it to Shorty's wife. Then with a smile he turned to the girl, who made shift to smile back at him. He took her hand and, holding her close to his side, again went out upon the street. But this time he was no slouching loiterer—he had a license to procure, a justice of the peace or a preacher to find. And then at the station they would buy tickets for home; there would be time to ask her where home might be.

As they swung past the corner the squat, velvet voiced Italian from the store in his basket offered the man a small plaster image of the Christ child. Big Jim tossed the man a dollar and put the little symbol of good will to men into Molly Shane's willing hand. Her lips murmured a silent prayer—a prayer that they might be good again, that she might be good. She made silent vows of immaculate wifehood. And she knew that, being good, they would find their happiness together.

## TIME LOST BY WORKERS.

### Compulsory Vacations Cut Down Chicago Painters' Wages.

According to a report issued by Local No. 194, Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of Chicago, 607 members lost in time a total of seventy-three years and ten months and in wages $93,637.20 during the six months between Jan. 1 and July 31, 1910.

This union, which is composed of nearly 2,000 members, is the first to make an investigation of industrial conditions among its members. The policy was new, and interest was not fully aroused among the membership, so only 607 replies were received, and, while but a portion of the membership replied, the report is of importance in showing trade conditions which confront the painters and is likely to set an example to other unions to gather similar data. Such information will be invaluable as the basis of remedial legislation, as well as of trade union administration.

The report showed that of the 607 members of No. 194 who reported 72.6 per cent are married. Of that number 122 had no children dependent on them, while the remaining 319 had 736 dependent children. The average age of the members reporting was thirty-five years and five months. Of the 607 only 17.7 per cent have steady work. Eighty-two and three-tenths per cent have "compulsory vacation" of eight weeks and three days every six months, or more than four months a year. Taking the rate of 55 cents an hour as the basis of computation, the average weekly rate of wages among the 607 was $17.29.

The report shows that the total time lost by the 607 members reporting was 8,813 weeks, or seventy-three years and ten months' time lost in the six months covered by the report. If the same average holds good it should show a loss of 227 years in the same six months as the time lost by the entire membership of the local.

If such are the conditions among men strongly organized for an eight hour day, with time and a half for overtime and double time for holidays and Saturday afternoons, the conditions existing among the unorganized painters can the more easily be imagined.

### Bricklayers Strong In Texas.

The Texas state conference of bricklayers is now composed of thirty-three unions, with a membership of 2,500. The wage scale for the entire state is $6 a day.

### A POTENT FORCE.

If the members of organized labor had from the beginning been true to themselves in purchasing only goods bearing the union label there would not be many unfair employers today. Just because many have been remiss in this duty is no reason why they should always be so. The movement is now very large and powerful, and if all begin now to rightly use their purchasing power the conditions surrounding the working class can be almost revolutionized in five years.