

A Yuletide Blessing

By Ralph Hamilton



CHRISTMAS CHEER was in the air everywhere. The sleigh bells had a special tone for Ned Graham as he sped over the glittering snow homeward bound, the melodious clang of the skates along the river course made perfect music to his enraptured ear, the stars appeared to shine with a new luster—and all for him, he almost fancied, on this first Christmas eve he could remember where peace on earth, good will to men had a real vitalizing meaning, and himself a part of it all!

Left an orphan at eight, for five years he had been the slave of a miserly old being. Then Victor Wade, a distant relative, and his wife Alice had taken Ned to their humble little home. "You have no children of your own and a blessing will come to you for caring for this poor outcast," the village clergyman had told them, and indeed his words had come true. He nestled down into their hearts and gave them an obedience and love.

And Ned as well shared the shadow that hovered over their lives. Alice was the only daughter of the richest man in Brompton. She had married Wade against the wishes of Martin Brill, who had from that hour shut both of them out of his life.

"He can't treat my dear, good mother that way!" declared Ned sturdily to a chum. "Some day I'm going to let him know how mean he is to the best two people who ever lived."

Mr. and Mrs. Wade had gone to a Christmas entertainment and Ned was speeding homeward full of holiday plans.

Dashing through the gateway Ned came to a sudden halt. A light showed in the parlor, the porch window of the room was open, and plainly visible inside was a rough-appearing man tossing over the packages grouped under the little tree.

"It's a burglar!" gasped the startled Ned, "and stealing our Christmas presents! Hey, you! get out of there or I'll shoot you full of bullets!" and



A Rough Appearing Man Tossing Over the Packages.

Ned ran to the window, drew a revolver from its case and presented it in menacing view.

The intruder turned, dashed from the room into the hall and disappeared. Valiantly triumphant, Ned went back to the parlor, for the first moment noticing a small satchel lying open on a chair. It somewhat thrilled him to observe strange-looking articles of steel within.

"Burglars' tools!" whispered Ned, fairly awed. "And here's a great big wallet stuffed full of papers and bank notes, and right across it is stamped the name of 'Martin Brill' in gilt letters. Say! This fellow must have robbed the old man before he came here."

Half an hour later Ned stood in the garden of the Brill home. Gazing into the one lighted room of the place he saw Brill tied to a chair and striving to dislodge a gag in his mouth. He was frantic; he tore his hair; incoherently he babbled forth the visit of a night marauder as Ned released him.

"You're the Wade boy, aren't you?" he quavered. "You've done me a good turn. Do another. Call the police."

"Say," interposed Ned, "if you'll come with me I'll see that you get your wallet back."

"What—why—come with you—where?"

"To your daughter's home. A funny thing has happened, and if you want your wallet back you've got to go with me there."

Half distracted, fully mystified, Martin Brill consented to the strange proposal. Arrived, Ned told his story, produced the wallet and restored it to its owner.

"Oh! lad, you've won my eternal gratitude!" cried the delighted old man, but paused abruptly, his eyes fixed upon a decorated framed portrait of himself.

"Mr. Wade got the holly for that," said Ned, "and your daughter trimmed it. They do that every year."

Martin Brill sat staring at the portrait, a dim mist crossing his eyes. Ned stole quietly from the room as he heard footsteps on the front porch.

"Sh-h!" he whispered, reaching it. "Mother, you've got a visitor."

"Why, who is it?" asked Alice surprisedly.

"Santa Claus, I'm thinking," was the prompt response—and it was.

The Cake Lady

By Mildred White



TESSIE LOUISE was making a great deal of trouble. From the time her invalid mother had brought Tessie to the city hospital to be treated for her spine, the golden-haired baby had been the pet of the nurses. And as her stay was prolonged, partly because the mother was too ill and too poor to yet understand the care of her child.

"What in the world," asked the austere young house doctor, "does that child want?"

"Tess-ess wants a Nora Christmas doll," the nurse said eagerly.

Doctor Bruce wrinkled his brow.

"What does she mean?" he asked.

"Miss Nora Dean," the girl answered, "is a young woman who visits the children's ward and has been much interested in them. She lives in a cottage out on the lake shore, and last summer she came in and took two of our little convalescents for a month's stay there. Tessie Louise was one, and she so fell in love with Miss Dean at the time that we could hardly



coax her back. But it was necessary that she should come. Yesterday, Miss Dean came to the hospital with a basket of Christmas cakes, made like dolls, with currant eyes, and colored frosted dresses. The kiddies were so pleased; they call her the Cake Lady.

Doctor Bruce frowned.

"That's bad practice," he complained, "allowing women to come in here and feed our patients. I did not suppose—"

The pleasant nurse hurried to champion her friend.

She has helped us in many ways. I should call Miss Dean a philanthropist if she were not—"

The pleasant nurse paused, "in humble circumstances herself."

"The young woman you speak of lives on the lake shore?" the doctor asked.

The nurse nodded.

"Her uncle was an old sea captain," she told him. "Miss Nora made her home with this uncle and aunt when she was as small as Tessie here."

"Now she lives on in the house at the water's edge to take care of her aunt, who is old and crippled. And still that girl—"

The pleasant nurse choked up unaccountably.

"Well, she's always trying to do things for others," she finished; "that is the way Nora Dean finds happiness."

"Great Scott!" interrupted the doctor, "there goes Tessie again; that noise must be stopped. She must not disturb the sick ones."

The prettiest nurse came hastily.

"Tessie says she won't stop until she is taken to Miss Nora. I really wish we had made arrangements yesterday to have her driven out to the lake shore for over Christmas."

"How far out is it?" Doctor Bruce asked briskly.

"I'll take her in my car," he explained. "It's closed and comfortable."

Donald Bruce sighted the cottage as he brought his car to a stop in the



roadside. Then he gathered his small charge in his arms and made his way to the white door.

"Come in," Nora greeted cheerily, "the nurse phoned me of your coming. There's a new Christmas doll for Tessie Louise in the oven, and a lot more—to take back."

It was a broad, white kitchen, redolent of sugar and spices, and an old lady in a rocking chair near the window relieved Tessie of her wrappings.

"You must give the doctor a cup of coffee, Nora dear," the old lady said, "before his cold drive back to the city."

But Donald Bruce seemed in no hurry to return.

"This," he said musingly, "smells like my grandmother's kitchen. Used to spend our Christmas with grandmother when I was a boy."

"We are going to have a roasted chicken for dinner," the old lady suggested tentatively—"I wonder if it might not seem just a bit like being at grandmother's—if you'd stay and eat with us?"

It was remarkable how swiftly the afternoon hours flew in the lakeside cottage.

"I'm so glad," the old lady whispered at parting, "that you decided to wait to take Tessie back with you. It has been a happy Christmas for Nora. I can see it in her eyes; and usually happiness is only Nora's through the giving. She's the dearest girl in the world!"

"She is just that!" Donald Bruce answered solemnly.

His eyes were on Nora, as he clasped the old lady's hand.

A Christmas Romance

By Mary Graham Bonner



MARJORIE was the first girl every boy called on when he got home for the Christmas holidays. Yes, every boy who had gone away to school or to college always came to Marjorie's house first when the Christmas holidays began, though there were exceptions, of course.

Many of them, coming home at the same time, on the same train, would agree to call together.

Then they would have a good time, singing, talking, laughing. Marjorie was such a good sort. The whole "bunch" liked her.

She played the piano well for dancing and had the kind of voice which made others want to gather around the piano and join in the chorus.

In truth, without Marjorie the "bunch" would have been oftentimes very lonely, very restless and wretched.

Marjorie danced well, too, and if one wanted a girl to come up to a prom or a class dance Marjorie would always fit in anywhere. Then, too, she wouldn't be mad if a fellow asked another girl.

Marjorie was an exceptional girl. Marjorie wasn't jealous of any of them. She seemed to regard them as they regarded her—good sorts as she was a good sort. They passed the time for her merrily as she did for them.

They were jolly good companions as she was a jolly good companion.

So it went on. And another Christmas came along and Marjorie's house was the center of the gayety.

It was the night before Christmas. The "bunch" were taking around their Christmas presents. They were going to call on Marjorie last because then they would stay there for a while.

They all had presents for Marjorie, typical presents from members of a "bunch" to a friend of the "bunch."

There were several boxes of candy (which the "bunch" would help eat), and there were some books, which perhaps some of the "bunch" later would borrow and read.

One of the "bunch" had gone to Marjorie's earlier that evening, and had



Without Marjorie the "Bunch" Would Have Been Very Lonely.

taken with him a present which could neither be divided and eaten, nor borrowed and read.

Soon, soon he was going to give it to her, and soon, soon he hoped to see her wear it.

"Marjorie," he began, "the other fellows all like you, of course, but you know I've been feeling for some time kind of differently about things. And before I went back to college again I thought perhaps—you know—I thought Christmas eve would be such a nice time to look back upon when we had grandchildren as our engage—"

The front door burst open after a quick and vigorous knocking, and the "bunch" came in.

"What! You here, Jim! Stole a march on us, eh?"

They gave their presents to Marjorie. Then they asked her to play the piano. Then they sang. Nervously Jim looked at his watch. It was almost Christmas day—and he so much wanted to be able to look back on Christmas eve as the time of his engagement, and somehow he had fancied Marjorie looked upon him a little more affectionately than upon the rest. Finally he could bear it no longer.

"I say, fellows," he began, "it seems to me that as long as the 'bunch' wants to hang around the best friend the 'bunch' ever had and won't give any one fellow any more chance than another I'll just have to do my proposing before the whole 'bunch'."

"I've got a little ring here I'd like Marjorie to wear, and while I always want to be one of the 'bunch' and she always wants to be a 'friend of the bunch,' I know, I'd like to have her regard me as more than just a friend!"

"And I'd like to be more than a 'friend to one of the 'bunch,'" Marjorie said.

"Congratulations!" shouted the "bunch." "And Merry Christmas and lots of them!"

"But to think," one of the "bunch" said to the rest afterward, "that one of us was able to 'put it over' on the 'rest of us—and Marjorie, too!'"

And the next day, which was Christmas, the "bunch" all came around to see one of the "bunch" kiss the "friend of the bunch" under the mistletoe, which favor was granted the "bunch" very willingly.

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Mormons to Dedicate Temple.

The Mormons of Canada and many from the United States will gather at Cardston, Alberta, next May to attend the dedication of the great temple that has been in process of erection since 1914. The building will cost \$1,500,000 when completed and will be unlike any other structure in the domain. The paintings for the rooms and the decorations for the other interiors are now being finished. It is one of the show places of southern Alberta.

Somewhat Ambiguous.

Among the local items that appeared in a country paper was this: "Paul McManus met with a painful accident last week. A fishhook became entangled in his eye. Paul is being attended by Doctor Evers, who says his eye will come out all right."

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If you are interested in any of the above come in and see me and set a date to go down and look it over. I make the trip in auto and about three days is all that is required to make the trip and look the land over to your satisfaction. I believe I am giving you good advise when I tell you to act quick for land is sure to advance, as parties in northwestern part of Kansas are selling their land there and coming in here to buy.

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