

## Tom's Best Christmas

By Archie P. McKishnie

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Tom Lawrence shook his fist under the grocery keeper's nose.

"You try and stop me and I'll fix you," he threatened, "even if I have to do time for it. You trying to hold a fellow away from his people this way, and it Christmas Eve, too. Why, the old man and the old woman will be right glad to see their little boy again."

He laughed wheezingly and leaned weakly against the counter.

"You can't keep me from feeding on the fatted calf, Josh. I'm going to walk in on the old folks to-night, just like the wild, wayward sons you read about do. You never hear of them getting the cold hand, do you?"

A fit of coughing choked the laughter from his voice, and when he lifted his face it was gray-white beneath the lamplight.

The big grocer laid aside the package he was tying, and walked around the counter.

"Come here, Tommie," he said, opening the door of the inner room.

The young man slouched forward obediently.

"Say, Josh," he whined, "cut it out, I'm tired of being preached to. Won't you get me a little whisky, just one drink?" he pleaded. "See, I'm all broke up, and I'm going home to-night. Six years of the life I've led wears

derstand you'd got a big position out west. I'm afraid I wrote 'em a letter from you, Tommie, tellin' 'em all about it and askin' forgiveness for not biddin' 'em good-by." The other nodded his head on his breast.

"You were always a big-hearted fool, Josh," he said, hoarsely. "I can't understand why you won't get me a little whisky."

"I remember their faces when they read that letter," said the grocer, hearing a big chunk on the fire. "I remember how glad they both was. Your ma said you'd be writin' again soon and let them know how you liked it. Well, you did." "I wrote again, did I?" "Yep, you wrote every week you've been away, and that's how long—let's see?" "Six years ago, day after to-morrow, Josh."

"You sent some money home, too," continued the big man, after an interval of silence. "Quite a little bit of money. Fifty dollars once, and a ten-spot every now and again." The speaker laughed queerly, his face working. "Only last night they got a letter from you, Tommie, with \$50 in it. Christmas box, I think you called it." Something like a sob came from the bowed figure.

"Your pa most always read your letters to the neighbors. They're right glad you're doing so well. Every Christmas Eve your ma and him come over here and buy a Christmas turkey with the money you send them—I always have a laugh at your pa. 'I'll eat Tommie's share,' he says. 'Cause it's next best thing to havin' him home. We're right proud of our Tommie, he always ends. They've been writing you, too, every week regular. I read all their letters, 'cause I have to in order to know how to answer them. They got a letter from you last night with their Christmas money in



one, Josh, wear one right down to the heart and soul, and this cough—"

He sank down on a seat before the fire, his slim fingers gripping his chest.

"Sit there and get good and warm. I'll be back in a minute." The grocer slipped out, locked the door after him, and went behind the counter. Customers had come in and were waiting to be attended to.

The grocer drew a tall young man to one side.

"Jim," he said, "I want you to help me out. Go behind and serve them customers. I don't care if you haven't never sold groceries; do your best. Don't be particular about weights. Give everybody Christmas measure. I've got to stay away for a spell, 'cause—"

He whispered something in the young man's ear. His hearer started.

"Why, they think—" he commenced; but the grocer laid a big hand on his arm.

"I know what they think; and, whatever you do, keep what I've told you to yourself. I don't know what to do, but I'll find out a way. When they come, call me. I'll be in here."

Lawrence lifted his white face from his hands as the grocer entered.

"Have you got it?" he questioned eagerly. The big man sat down, facing him.

"I want to have a little chat with you, Tommie," he said, gently. "You remember when you were a youngster at home here, how we used to chat together and have a mighty good time of it, don't you?"

His hearer made a grimace. "I want a drink," he said, shortly.

"You remember how you used to come down for the mail, Tommie, and I'd have you come in and help sort the letters?"

An expression that was almost a smile dawned slowly across the boy's haggard face. "I remember we used to imitate one another's handwriting, Josh," he said, slowly.

"Yes, and I got at last so's I could write just like you, Tommie. Remember you used to tell me you could almost believe it was your own writin'?"

"I remember, Josh. Go on. There's something behind all this. I'm waiting to hear it." "When you got into trouble over at Maxton's and—"

"And skipped. Yes. Well, go on, can't you?"

it, and they've answered it already. Here's their letter with your address on it. Mayb' you'd like to read it?"

The young man reached out a shaking hand for the letter. The other watched his face as he read. When a tear fell with a splash on the cramped writing, the grocer spoke again.

"You can send me to jail for doin' what I've done, Tommie. In one way it was wrong, very wrong. I've been guilty of openin' letters."

The other held up a thin hand as though to ward off a blow. Then he rose weakly and came over to the big man.

"Josh, old Josh," he spoke tremblingly. "You've been—you—are— Oh, I'll make it all up to you some day," he broke out, lifting his head. "I'm going to be a man. I know I'm not fit to go to them now. I've been drunk for days! But promise me you will take me to them soon, Josh."

"Day after to-morrow night is the anniversary of your goin' away. We'll go then," promised the grocer with a big smile. He took the boy's hand.

"I'm goin' now. You just lie down on the sofa here. You'll stay at my place until after Christmas. He moved toward the door. Then he turned.

"Shall I fetch you anythin'?" he asked gently.

"Nothing," answered the young man, smiling. "I'm perfectly satisfied, Josh."

An hour later the grocer carried an armful of groceries and threw them into the back of the sleigh. "Merry Christmas to you both, Mrs. Lawrence," he cried, tucking the robes about the old couple. The old man chuckled, and the old lady, glancing about her fearfully, bent forward, hesitated, bent forward again, and kissed the big man on his broad forehead.

"God bless you," she said, gladly. "God bless you for sendin' for our Tommie. I'm right glad you think him so smart." The grocer laughed awkwardly.

"Yep, Tommie's goin' to work for me," he called. And with his heart in harmony with the jingling bells, he passed into his store.

### A Christmas Cynic.

A woman's idea of doing charity work is to get somebody else to give the money for it.

It's very annoying to a girl to meet a man she likes when the color of the feathers on her hat doesn't harmonize with his cravat.—New York Press.

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 Following is a list of the printing offices in Lincoln that are entitled to the use of the Allied Printing Trades label, together with the number of the label used by each shop:  
 Jacob North & Co., No. 1.  
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 Freie Presse, No. 3.  
 Woodruff-Collins, No. 4.  
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 Western Newspaper Union, No. 8.  
 Wood Printing Co., No. 9.  
 Searle Publishing Co., No. 10.  
 Kuhl Printing Co., No. 25.  
 George Brothers, No. 11.  
 McVey, No. 12.  
 Lincoln Herald, No. 14.  
 New Century Printers, No. 17.  
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**Concord Cream Mints.**  
 Put into a porcelain lined saucepan two cupfuls of sugar and a half cupful of water. After it commences boiling cook exactly eight minutes. Take from the fire, add eight drops peppermint essence, stir hard and drop from the end of a spoon on to waxed paper.



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