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SPOILED BY A COOK

CHRISTMAS EXPERIENCE IN A
WOMEN'S BOARDING HOUSE.

How a Famished Tableful Had to Wait
for Their Turkey Until the Bel-
ligerent Female Could Be
Coaxed from the Room.

"My most unpleasant and yet most comical experience of Christmas-keeping," said the concert singer, "dates back to the time when I lived for economy's sake in a home for working women. The cook we had was a good one, and so, when Christmas day came, we all felt assured that at one o'clock we should have our orthodox turkey-and-plum-pudding dinner.

"But one bottle of whisky, smuggled into a Christian kitchen, will upset the expectations of 30 hungry boarders. Just how many drinks the cook had that morning, I cannot say, but when dinner time came she was belligerently drunk. The turkey was as well roasted as though she had been sober, but what was that to the boarders in general, when she stood over it, carving-knife in hand, declaring that not a soul in that dining-room should have a mouthful of it but mamma and myself?

"Vainly did the matron threaten and entreat. The determined cook was not to be disarmed. Mamma and I were bountifully helped, but the others sat and waited, wondering what would be the outcome of the trouble. Finally, the defeated matron came out of the kitchen, and with tears in her voice, said to me:

"I can do nothing with her. Will you go in and see what you can do?" "And so I went in, and in my most affable manner invited intoxicated Bridget to sit down and have a friendly cup of tea with myself. She complied, though with an eye still on the turkey. After we had had our tea, by exerting all of my arts and wiles I persuaded her to go up stairs and to bed. It was not until she was safely out of the kitchen that dinner was served to the other boarders.

"Of course the next day there was a bad quarter of an hour for that cook, one that ended with her 'getting her duds together and skipping.' Many, in fact, all of us, were ready to plead for her, knowing that she could not easily be replaced; but the matron was adamant, protesting that in her experience with the creature she had already forgiven her until seventy times seven, and she wasn't going to forgive her again. And I heard afterward that it was really a year or more before the woman was taken back again into that kitchen.

"Naturally, it was easier for the other boarders, who, you may be sure, resented that 'invasion of their wiles,' to forgive the cook than to make friends with mamma and me, and from that time on we were the most unpopular persons in the house. We had been ruined by a cook's favor. It would not have mattered so much about the boarders, but the defection of her kitchen head was too much for the matron's magnanimity, and as she managed the lady managers of that institution, it was not very long before we too, in our culinary friend's language, had to 'get our duds together and skip.'"

HOW ST. NICK FOOLED JOHNNY.

The Boy's Parent Bought Useful Presents When Santa Passed Him By

"I'll lay for St. Nicholas," Johnny said to his little sister, Sue.

"Why?" she asked.

"If he wants to leave useful presents I'll just stop him!" was his boastful answer.

"You'd best not!" Sue said—girls have these premonitions.

He said: "Pshaw, I'm as foxy as St. Nicholas!" and while his little sister lay asleep he watched.

Time passed. The clock struck midnight. Then he saw his papa and his mamma entering silently with certain bundles.

"What's up?" he called to them. "Where's St. Nicholas? I've been laying for him so's to head him off from leaving clothes and things as he did last year!"

"Rash boy!" said his father, after a moment of reflection. "Your mamma overheard your audacious plan—which almost kept St. Nicholas from the house! I assure you I would not have intervened but for the sake of your sister."

"How? What?" asked John. "Hush! Yes, St. Nicholas was very angry you should dare to criticize his gifts. He would have passed us altogether had I not gone to the roof and said: 'St. Nicholas, don't go off like that. I have a little daughter who is innocent. Give me her presents!'"

"Did he give them, papa?" asked the boy.

"For sure."

"Then what are those store bundles?" "They are your gifts!" answered papa, spreading out the useful objects—I think that it was a new hat, overshoes and an umbrella. As St. Nicholas left nothing for you, your mamma and I went out and bought them!"

A Perpetual Christmas Present. Mrs. Caller—You surely don't give your husband a necktie every Christmas?

Mrs. Athome—Oh, yes, I do! And the poor dear never seems to know that it is the same one!

THE STARD

A star arose o'er Bethlehem, and many paused to see
The wondrous light flood hall and vale to full of mystery.
The shepherds bowed their heads in prayer, the wicked stooped to pray
For grace and pity on their souls, no more 'twas Christmas Day.

A star arose o'er Bethlehem, each rock and hill and tree
Swam then in waves of amethyst, and far as one could see
The purple shadows upon the hills, the gold of leaf and stem—
All this they saw with wondering eyes, nor knew it was for them.

A star arose o'er Bethlehem, O' lord and break and bound!
There is a promise in the words a silence in the sound.
O turn thy face towards Judah's plain, its lowly manger see.
And know the star o'er Bethlehem is now the star for thee!

—RUTH STERRY



HIS CHRISTMAS SCHEME.

Deep-Laid Plot That Resulted in a Fine Dinner.

"Mrs. Skinem," he timidly began as the landlady of the boarding house came to her door in answer to his knock, "I-I called to see you just a moment regarding the Christmas dinner."

"Well," she asked with a scowl that made him wish he was a thousand miles away.

"You see," he went on, "we—we were talking it over just now, and we decided that it would be best not to have turkey or plum pudding or ice cream on Christmas, as—"

"Stop right where you are, sir—stop right where you are!" cut in the landlady, angrily. "Who do you think is running this boarding house, anyway?"

"Why, you, of course, ma'am."

"Who provides the meals here at great trouble and expense?"

"You do, my dear Mrs. Skinem."

"Who sees that the people of this house always get what's best for them to eat?"

"You—you do, Mrs. Skinem."

"Am I a woman, do you think, who is capable of running a first-class boarding house as one should be run?" she demanded to know as she looked him up and down in a way to make his hair curl with fear.

"You—you certainly are," he promptly replied.

"Well, then," she said, "you may go down and tell the other boarders that, just as long as I am at the head of this place and pay the rent and buy the provisions I propose to do as I see fit, and I will take no orders, sir, regarding the meals."

And instead of the beef stew and bread pudding that Mrs. Skinem had planned for the Christmas dinner she provided a 20-pound turkey and a mammoth plum pudding and a gallon of ice cream, and she went around all day with a chip on her shoulder, just wishing that some one would make a complaint about it.

But there were no complaints. There were only chuckles and smiles and whispers over the little game that had been played so neatly on Mrs. Skinem, and sometimes a shiver as some of the more timid thought of what would happen if the husky landlady ever learned of it.

LEGEND OF SANTA CLAUS.

Stockings Hung on Door of Mother Abbess in French Convents.

There grew up a custom in Christian countries of giving presents in secret on the Vigil of St. Nicholas.

In Italy it was called the Zopasta, which means in Spanish a shoe, because the gifts were put into shoes to surprise people when they should put them on in the morning.

In many French convents the boarders used to place each her silk stocking at the door of the room of the Mother Abbess, recommending themselves at the same time to St. Nicholas. And in Germany a boy dressed as a bishop would go round in vestments and mitre and fill the stockings hung up.

This solemnity of the boy bishop came to be kept here with much care and ceremony on the feast of St. Nicholas to commemorate his youth and his patronage of children. In Salisbury cathedral there is, or was, a monument to one of these boy bishops who died during his term of office. The same custom was observed in Spain, and in Switzerland until the end of the eighteenth century. At one place in England, the convent of Godstowe, in Oxfordshire, public prayers were said by a little girl dressed as an abbess.

The custom, stopped here first by Henry VIII. and afterward by Queen Elizabeth—was in a different form carried on by the Dutch in America and became in the end the secularized ceremony we still use here of Santa Claus, a person dressed in Dutch or German winter clothes of the sixteenth century.

Suspicion, Not Surprise.

Mrs. Gramercy—She must have been surprised when her husband gave such an expensive present for Christmas.

Mrs. Park—Not surprised, my dear, but suspicious.

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