

BOB-FOR-SHORT'S Christmas

by Louise Dunham Goldsberry



OW, our baby had never encountered a locked door. The lovesome pit-pat of his busy feet was herald at whose coming every door in the house swung open and over thresholds he went into assured welcomes.

But we were planning a tree. And the library door was locked. He paused in his ascent of the stairs to button in a button that would not stay buttoned. It requires much time and he sat down on the step and with all his ten fat, wee fingers labored. Then, "Das a doodle bog," he objurgated himself as he resumed his climb of the stairs, the button buttoned; "Das a daryin' yittle gentleman!"

He shook the knob. Waited, juggling on the toes of him and discoursing to Nicodemus.

The door remained closed. Two fat palms smote it wrathfully. "Open," he commanded; "pease open dis door."

Nobody answered. "P-o-o-r yittle boy," he wheedled at keyhole; "zere ain't nobody loves 'im."

Nicodemus yapped and made felts at desertion when a dog barked outside. Fawned back, and licked the fingers where bread and honey aroma lingered. Sat up and waved an affable paw at him.

He sat down on the floor and gathered his yellow dog into his pinafore and hugged.

"Cept Nicodemus an' mysself," he said.

Great-grand came up the hall. "Is you been a bad boy, dreat-dran?" he said. "Is you all shutted out?"

Great-grand sighed. "Seems like this horse jist will run away," in doleful tone, "and I've got a bone in my foot and I can't run after 'im."

In a wink he was after the rampant steed. Captured and mounted, rode it lordly hither and yon, and when at last he came back from the breathless miles he had slipped down the back way and at stairfoot waited.

Slowly, with dignity, he dismounted, put his steed in stall, came back to stal-head, and, legs astride and head thrown back, surveyed us from the heights of remembered injury. Beside him, perky, tongue lolling out, Nicodemus squatted.

Long legs gathered to his chin, great-grand ranged himself on the top step and twinkled.

"Yes, sirs," quoth great-grand; "shuttus us all out!"

Our baby nodded confirmation and Nicodemus yawned in our faces.

"Me'n mys Nicodemus an' mys dreat-dran," he said. "An mys dreat-dran is dot a bone in his foot an' I needed to kiss mys muvver."

But for three long days the library door remained locked.

And regularly, after each morning's breakfast, he mounted the stairs and tried the knob and cogitated to Nicodemus, and poked broom straws under the door.

Christmas eve we sat about a great open fire. Great-grand loved to dig and delve in the red-charred logs and imprison the swarms of rosy bees. Fascinated, I would watch the swirling uplifted sparks, wondering what phantasms of youth he saw all beautiful in them, what faces went past in that rosy mirage that his own should wear so tender an answering look into eyes he alone was seeing. Sometimes our baby would come to stand between his knees, head leaned against his shoulder, and from within the encircling arms watch. Sometimes he would straddle one old knee and snug his head under the down-teaming old chin, gold hair and white hair commingled, and hand over the old hand, help the poker that prodded and piled the embers. And the wide eyes seemed to be seeing with the old man's vision, so united he would sit.

Christmas eve we sat about the great open fireplace. Great-grand sorted and piled his red-charred logs. Grandmother was watching, lost in idleness. Grand father had gone down cellar for apples and in my lap my baby was telling me secrets. We listened beyond the singings of the flames; beyond the delicate soft singing and the sighing and the laughter of them, the wind in the chimney. From the end of the new back-log the saps distilled, all the summer's rains and dews and green growings in their whicker-whicker. We had hated to shut out the skies, so divinely near they closed in upon earth, with their starry strands garlanding the rim of hills. Our baby had seen his first meteor—a feathered trail of ethereal fire and a soundless splendor as the meteor burst and biggened into a globe of slyssian azure, and went out. And the black violet skies seemed yet deeper black with that blue glory memorialized against them, and the stars pallid and cold. And my baby wondered if there might not be another Christmas baby, in that blue glory. He wondered whether, if we'd go out, we might not find a few boys and girls and babies that got left over, when God forgot who had asked to have some left at their houses. He wished he'd been there that night at the oxen's inn, to see the little child. So's

he could have brought it home to his own self's house. He wanted a baby so bad. And even his sweets-freighted babble picked up that blue sky-mystery and wondered about it. And his eyes were wide and fathomlessly sweet in the firelight, and his hand clung all the while to my face and deared it, and wove heavenly weaves into my life in every least little touches of it to my lips, my cheeks, and in the comings home of it to slip into my bosom and there nest.

Then we told him that it was going to be the Christmas baby's birthday tomorrow, and because we so love God's little son we give, year after year, all life long, gifts to him and to each other on that day. And the library door, tomorrow, would be unlocked, and a surprise inside for us each and all.

"Draculous!" was his sole comment; and slowly the happy eyes slipped from us behind their curtain-fringes, the little warm body lay heavy in my arms. Slowly Great-grand unbudded the house of red embers, and coming over took the little sleeper into his arms, rocked and crooned and hugged and God-blessed him. And with grandmother's kisses on the wee feet that never were still save in slumber, and grandfather's proud look into the unwitting face following after, I bore him away to his crib; so loved, so loved!

"Is Trismus tum?"

I wakened with the words breaking the crystal of my dreams and kissing themselves against my lips and a fat white body embracing my head.

"Yes, sir," I managed to say through the strangling arms of him. "Happy Christmas, Bob-for-Short!"

"Happy Christmas, Bob-for-Short!" echoed from the doorway; and "Hap-

py Christmas, Bob-for-Short!" floated in from beyond the east and west shoulders of great-grand.

He shouted. He danced. Never before had he been met by all the family at crib-side. He jiggled all over the bed, trickling blarneyments and laughter at the three gray heads that wagged in unconscious tune to the prancings of him.

Then, all his yellow body apart with haste, Nicodemus hustled his fat self up the stairs into the fun he was missing, and in his wake, Katy from her kitchen.

And with a "Happy Christmas to yez, Mither Bob-for-Short," she set a gray kitten on the floor.

We were all very still, as he slipped from the bed and approached the kitten. He had never owned a kitten. He eyed it in raptured silence. "Meou," said the kitten.

Into his cheeks the red crimsoned. "Oh!" he gasped; "wad you tall, titty; pease wad you tall!" And she wagged her tail and arched her back against his feet and cooed him, and as he gathered her into his nightgown and the white fat bare legs ran with their treasure, she broke into loud silken purrings. And Nicodemus sulked and fell into a helpless yellow bunch of protest, when the gray kitten was held to his nose for a kiss.

And we all dawdled until Katy's bell rang third summons to breakfast. He went up the stairs alone. Then Nicodemus. Then Great-grand. Then I. And then the rest of his adorers.

He stopped at the door.

"Open the door, sir," said grandfather.

"Tum on, muvver," he said, reaching hand into my hand.

So we stepped over the threshold together.

The room was darkened. The firelight dulled behind a screen. In the center of the room a low, fair-branched young cedar tree gleamed like a great jewel.

My hand forgotten, he circled the tree.

"Round and 'round. And we after. 'Das a mo' bu-ti-ful drum," we caught the murmur as he inventoried. "Das a yittle 'tend horse." He paused to jog it and in ecstasy watch its tail go up and down. "Das a yittle toad-frod in dat bid marble. How you s'pose it dot in?" He tarried to investigate, and set it rolling for the kitten to chase. Nicodemus thought it was meant for him, and when he collided with the kitten, cowed and scared and muttering, he fled to a distance and yapped at ball and kitten.

And the inventory went on: "Das a doid waths, yike mys Dreat-dran is dot." He tarried to hunt a pocket, and deposit his watch therein. But first he held it to ear. And the murmur resumed: "Dat waths is def an' dum too. Das a piture-but an' das a piture-but an' das a piture-but. . . . Draculous!"

And Christmas was on for Bob-for-Short.—New York Independent.

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He Had Never Owned a Kitten.

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Christmas Day

To rule and reign with gentle sway,
The King of Love was born today.
No palace walls enclosed him round,
But in a manger was he found;
That so the boastful world might see
The greatness of humility.

He came, a child, in lovely grace,
That so a child might seek his face;
So poor was he, the humblest born
Might come, without a fear of scorn.
To all mankind he showed the way,
And ushered in the dawn of day.

And so, with grateful love and praise,
We hail this blessed day of days,
The children's joy, the poor man's feast,
The star of hope to great and least;
When holy angels come to earth,
And sing anew a Savior's birth!

GIVE THE SHOP-GIRL HER DUES

by KATHERINE POPE

I n an excellent short story published not long ago, O. Henry gave to his shop-girl heroine a colossal character, emphasized that in her were combined the notable attributes of Hercules, Joan of Arc, Una, Job and Little Red Riding Hood. And at this season of the year—glad Christmas days—it easily might seem to a less sympathetic person than the regretted O. Henry that the shop-girl most stands in need of the strength of Hercules, the heroism of Joan of Arc, the truthfulness and other singular excellencies of Una, the patience of Job. Think what it must mean, from eight to six, or eight to ten, as the case may be, to face and serve the rattled throngs that are now surging through the shops, think of the strain on endurance and nerve, on temper and manners. The wonder is not that she often comes up to the demands on her, but that she ever does.

Some of the veterans, survivors of many hard-fought Christmas battlefields, are marvels; may be seen at field-end of day still alert, though drooping so; still clear-headed, though with conscious effort; still with courteous attitude in their serving, though those they serve have lost the last shred of any politeness with which they may have started out.

Compare the manners of some spoiled darling, some indulged, arrogant child of wealth, with the dignity and patience and sweetness often shown by the girl behind the counter. The one self-centered, of most restricted vision, captious, petty; the other self-effacing, far-seeing, charitable, big. Caleb in search of a wife might well pursue his quest along the aisles of the big stores, find womanly ideal standing there behind the counter.

They are not all caricatures of fashion, with hair tortured into latest exaggeration, frocks cheap copies of showy splendors; not all more given to powder and rouge than to soap and water. And in the attainment of the so highly-desirable neatness and trimness heroism again has to come to the fore, it is no easy matter after long hours of labor to labor more, take pains for personal cleanliness, sew and darn when eyes are heavy, back is aching. Heroines every one of them that make a good show.

I know a girl in a fashionable candy shop that every other night washes and irons that she may be presentable the next day. Her moderate wage is the chief part of the family support, there is not enough money for enough blouses to last the week, and so the midnight laundrying is done as a matter of course. But how pretty and sweet and fresh the girl does manage to look in her snowy white and well brushed black; much better dressed, she seems to me, than the woman of fuss and feathers.

What little mothers they are, a lot of them, simple affectionate, domestic creatures—though so often characterized as vain, shallow, foolishly ambitious, thinking only of dress and "dates." I know one girl that worked in one of the department stores which keep open evenings at Christmas time, who the night before Christmas did not leave the store until midnight, then after traveling an hour on the street cars to her home stayed up hours to trim a wonderful Christmas tree for the children of the family, the bunch of little ones the poor seem always to have with them. I know another girl that at this season goes down unusually early mornings to arrange "stock," comes home unusually

late evenings; but after dinner cheerfully dons kitchen apron and helps with giant plum pudding and other Christmas preparation that yearly is repeated in honor of old England and the home left behind when there was made search for fortune in the rich land of America. These are just two instances, the one quite commonplace, unheroic, but you may pick up a few for yourself by eavesdropping a bit in your shopping; observing among the buyers the many shop-girls purchasing toys and silver "pusher," children's gloves and sweater, or gray dress for mammy, muffler for daddy.

Of course there is any number of pert, incompetent girls that wait on hapless customers, rather keep hapless customers waiting, but they have been pictured with enough frequency, this sort repeatedly held up as typical, thereby obscuring the virtues of the many worthy ones following the profession of "waiting on." For some time past I have been gathering data, making experiment; and have found it the rule rather than exception that courtesy meets with courtesy. "Soft and fair go far in a day," not only on highway but in the miles of space in a huge department store.

A man said to me recently: "How little of church is brought into the Christmas of today." And how sadly true this is—"church" in this connection standing for whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are good, of full import to all religions. And bullying and bullying a shop-girl at this season seems about as far from "lovely and good" as one may wander. Put yourself in her place, remembering previous failures of your own when bodily weariness snapped, strained nerves, broke down poise.

Ye gods and little fishes, in what condition is the shop-girl to "enjoy" Christmas! I am sure if I were she all I would ask of good Saint Nicholas, would be a dark, airy room far, far away from people (from man, and especially woman); a great, soft bed where I could stretch out long and wide; silence and sleep forever and



Sew and Darn When Eyes Are Heavy.

forever. No dreams to disturb that sleep; no vision of past haggling, no vision of wearisome "exchanges" to come.

But the reality is a long way from this that I would ask. Do you suppose such a proud wage earner as she would be content to let Christmas day go by without displaying wealth and power? No, every dependent in the household must partake of her bounty; every pensioner be given good proof of what it means to have her dress up and go down town every day. Nothing of niggard in the shop-girl at Christmas, she is as much a Lady Bountiful as any millionairess of them all.

What a creature! A "Hercules, a Joan of Arc, a Una, a Job" and a Lady Bountiful on eight dollars and less a week!

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CHRISTMAS TIME.

I have often thought of Christmas time, when it has come round, apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time, a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time.—Charles Dickens.

All Nebraska Women Uphold Puritan

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USE OF WORD "SCALAWAG"

In the South It Does Not Carry Re- proach of Dishonest Character— Old Political Term.

A New York woman talking with a southern woman mentioned a well-known lawyer, a native of Virginia, but now a resident of New York.

"Yes, I know him," said the southern woman. "He was a scalawag."

"Oh!" gasped the New York woman. "Surely not. At least, I never have heard a word against him. Are we talking about the same man? I always have understood that the one I mean is a man of unimpeachable honor."

The southern woman smiled. "Yes, we are talking about the same man," she replied; "but I see we do not attach the same meaning to the word 'scalawag.' Evidently with you it means something dishonorable, or at least reprehensible. Did you never hear the southern use of it before?"

The northern woman shook her head. "I never heard it used in any way except to indicate a man who would resort to trickery, or even actual dishonesty, to attain an end."

"I never have heard it used that way in the south. There it is an old political term. It originated just before the war. Down in Virginia, in those days, a man who had originally been a Democrat, but who became a Republican, or at least a Union man, was called a 'scalawag.'"

"Oh—same as those we called 'Copperheads' in the north."

"I think so. I'm not saying there was no reproach implied by the word in war times, but not the reproach of a dishonest character."

False Hair Supply.

Most of the best true false hair now worked up on such a grand scale comes from the southeast corner of Bohemia. In this hair-raising region the human hair market is a too common sight, and the getting ready of the stuff for the white world market is a big and diversified business. The supply is helped out by cargoes from China, and large quantities of China hair it takes, too, at that. It comes packed in straw in bales averaging 130 pounds in weight. Think hair, as everybody here knows, is a bad black, intensely so, and in such color is no use or value at all. So the first thing to do is to make it a missionary blond by bleaching it in a pretty strong bath of peroxide of hydrogen and ammonia. This kills germs and makes the hair pretty safe.