

A MOURNFUL CHRISTMAS STORY.

LEONARD H. ROBBINS 97.

"Mrs. Harris presents her best regards to Mr. Fitzmorris and requests the pleasure of his company to dinner on Monday next (25th), at one o'clock."

What thrills of happiness shot through the young frame of Augustus Fitzmorris when he read this little invitation, written in a dainty feminine hand, as he lolled in a big, comfortable rocking chair, his slippers and dressing gown on, and his mail and coffee by his side ready to be attended to.

For as long as two minutes he forgot to call his valet to do something for him, so wrapped up was he in the contemplation of his good fortune. A few coals tumbled out between the bars of the grate, but he did not call James to replace them.

He actually felt that he was doing something noble and generous.

But had he not a good excuse? And was he not invited to dine with the most influential family of Lincoln? And were there not two marriageable daughters in the family? And was not the mother rich, and could he not, through her influence, win social distinction—even sometime lead a German?

These many questions poured through his brain in a great flood.

Yes, on the whole, he thought that he would wait at least one minute longer before calling his valet. He would be just so magnanimous. He could afford it, considering his good luck.

But suddenly, as his eyes glanced over the invitation, he spied down in one corner these words: "You will carve."

He nearly fainted. "James!" he gasped. "Phwat, Sorr?" answered James, coming quickly into the room. "Quick, James, the smelling bottle!" he managed to articulate.

James soon had the article required where it would have the most effect, in the meantime demanding, "And phwat moight the mather be wid ye?"

Augustus slowly recovered. "Oh, James, what a shock!" he murmured.

"Be jabbers, an' I tho't ye was agoin' to doi!" James exclaimed.

"An' did ye swallow something or did something bite ye, or phwat?"

"No, James; worse," Augustus weakly answered.

"Did ye see a mouse, maybe?" anxiously inquired James.

"No, James, but listen. James, can you keep a secret?"

"Faith an' wasn't Pat Murphy a tellin' me about his girl a runnin' off this mornin' just an' I havn't told a blessed soul yet—"

"James, never mind that, but listen. Can you carve a turkey?"

"An' is that all that's troublin' ye? Why I was carver at Brown's for three years."

"James, here is my wallet. Go buy a carving knife and six chickens."

James hurried off and soon returned with a market basket full of dressed chickens.

"Now, James," said Augustus, "I want you to teach me how to carve a chicken."

"Well," said James, "you give it a jab here an' then ye get the fork straddle of the breast-bone, an' then ye take one leg like this and the other like this and the wings like this and the sides like this and—"

"No, no, James; don't go so fast. I can't keep up with you. Go slower, please."

So James began again, slowly; and by the time the last chicken was reached Augustus could do a fairly creditable job, although he had a very hard time overcoming his repugnance at the idea of taking hold of the drum-stick with his bare fingers.

James was satisfied and said, "There, now, ye could get good wages in a hotel for your carving."

Augustus looked horrified at the idea.

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At last Christmas came.

Augustus, his hair faultlessly brushed, his collar and shirt front spotless, his necktie immaculate, his shoes shining as two mirrors, paused a moment at the paneled oak