

STORIES IN PASSING.

All the day before Christmas the train had sped over the monotonous prairie and at noon was climbing the higher ground toward the mountains. It was now near midnight and the porter had just gone through and turned down the lights until darkness prevailed all the car. The few travellers had settled down for the night. One woman by turning the opposite seat and using two large valises had made a temporary couch. Another was curled up in one seat with her head on the window ledge, the pillow half slipping to the floor, and with a shawl thrown over her form to keep out the chill of the mountains. Near the center of the car a young man in a light overcoat and a soft hat, slept bolt upright but with one arm and hand stretched stiffly out into the aisle. A big man with his feet wide apart and his hands in his pockets snored deeply from under a newspaper he had drawn over his face some hours before to keep out the light.

At the far end two politicians still talked in low tones, and a woman in black with her hair loose, crooned softly to her child. Occasionally from the smoking apartment where the light still burned brightly, came the laughter of heavy voices and across the entrance floated clouds of grayish-blue tobacco-smoke.

In the last seat but one, a girl of six sat with wide-open, half-starting eyes. She wore a large felt hat and carried a muff and a doll. Every few moments, rubbing a clear place on the frosty pane, she would gaze out into the darkness of the night, broken only by the flickering strip of light reflected from the moving train on the snow-covered earth beside the track; for hours she had been gazing this way—gazing and listening dreamily, to the regular clicking of the wheels on the rails. She was coming home.

Finally the music of the wheels overcame the child and she slipped back into the corner, half shivering, and slept, her head resting against the window-sash, one hand in the little white muff and the other holding tightly to the doll which sprawled on the seat beside her.

Then the train pulled up to a little station and stopped for water and fuel. There was very little bustle about the depot—only the mailman and the station-agent. The light in the bay-window of the depot burned brightly and a switch-light twinkled far down the track. All else was darkness. And inside the car the child slept soundly.

With the starting of the train the child awoke, turned her head slowly and again gazed out of the window. She saw the little red station, the agent and the mailman with their yellow lanterns. And then she sat up with a little jump of joy. A man had driven hurriedly to the platform and leaped from the carriage to the moving train.

But the train had passed into the shadow of the big coal-shed, and around the sharp curve of the hill, and out into the darkness of the night again.

And inside the dimly-lighted car, a little girl with one hand in a white fur muff and the other tightly clasping the sprawling doll, shrank into the corner of the seat and sobbed convulsively to herself.

We were at the play—the colonel and his wife, and I sitting between them. "George," she said leaning across to speak to her husband, at the same time fanning herself, "George, I saw your cousin Will at the football game this afternoon, and I was surprised. When you see him again, you just say, 'oh, my!' to him for me."

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"Why? What's wrong with Will?" asked the Colonel with interest.

"Why, he had Mrs. E. H. Hawkins in his drag at the game."

"And who is Mrs. E. H. Hawkins?" asked the Colonel innocently, looking intently toward the right tier of boxes.

"Why—why, that widow Hawkins from Denver, who colors her fluffy hair yellow and whose husband died only last August. Why she's just too—but you just tell Will, 'oh, my!' for me. That's all I've got to say to him."

"All right, my dear, I'll try and remember her name—Hawkins, you say."

The colonel's wife turned to bow to a friend and the colonel spoke in my ear.

"The widow Hawkins, Charlie, is the most stunning woman in town. Will's been trying to get her interested in him for a month and I have been coaching him a little—all for Will, of course. That's she in the right hand lower box—the tall blonde. She's bowing in this direction, now, my boy."

But the Colonel's wife had turned to us again and the colonel's voice had died in a whisper and his eyes were again intent upon the orchestra.

A certain university student who graduated last June, went down into the country in September to take charge of a village public school. Arriving Saturday night he went to the church of his denomination. He introduced himself and was induced to stay to Sunday-school. Here, as the only stranger, he was quite an object of interest to the children. One class of boys about twelve years of age who sat directly in front of him could not keep their eyes from him, but kept turning around and making half whispered remarks to each other.

"Who is he?"

"Dunno. Some guy from the city!"

"Just catch on ter that tie!"

"Yep, and that collar—would make a good shirt-bosom."

"He's got a mug like a babboon."

But just then the leader of the Sunday-school spoke up and said that the new principal of the school was present and would address the children. When the stranger with the checked tie and the babboon face arose to speak, that class of boys were paralyzed and scarcely ventured a whisper in his presence, neither that day nor for many after.

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