

heard it said it was always summer there—least ways always warm."

Mother knitted furiously. She did not even ask where.

"Speakin' o' Chris'mas," she said, talking rapidly and bravely, "I've been thinkin' a good deal today about that family that's moved into the old log house down on the crick. Nobody's lived in it for dear knows how long, and I'm mortal sure it ain't fit for a self-respectin' Poland-China t' put up in. I noticed when I went by yesterday there was a boy playin' by the door, but I see no one else. The man's been choppin' wood for Squire Barton. Miss Barton told me. She said they hated to ask inquisitive questions, though they was pintedly convinced the man was in a starvin' condition. They did what they could fur 'im without hurtin' 'is feelin's, but it was'n't much. Hev you took any notice to 'im?"

"First I've heard of 'im." The old man was still far away.

"Well, being as we're their nearest neighbors and all, and bein' tomorrow is Chris'mas day I thought mebbe they wouldn't think it intrudin' if I put my shawl over my head and run over. There'll be more turkey 'nd cranberry than we c'n eat, and they might's well hev a little. 'Nd I'm sure they needn't take it as charity 'less they want to. There's Mis' Barton as good a neighbor'nd friend 's ever lived. Don't she often send us over a glass o' jell or a pumpkin pie?"

Before Father could affirm the propriety of receiving such small gifts in a neighborly spirit, a faint knock sounded at the front door. Father turned 'round and looked penetratingly at the frost-rimmed key-hole.

"D'ye hear a knock?" he inquired.

"I guess 'twas the cat," Mother said serenely sticking a knitting needle upright in her little knot of gray hair, thereby giving herself a peculiarly bristling appearance. But even as she spoke the low, timid, knock was repeated.

"I thought I heard a knock," Father affirmed as he opened the door. Mother peering over his shoulder, suddenly changed her tactics, whisked round in front of him and dragged into the room the half-clad, shivering boy at the threshold. He stared at her eagerly from under his mat of black hair, his big sombre eyes imploring her to understand the message his frozen lips could not frame.

"This is that boy," said Mother, briskly, "from down on the crick. Somethin' or other's the matter down there. Call William and send 'im down t' see what. Whad'ye say, dearie?"

"Yes, 'is father's sick, he says—What? All alone? Hurry up, Father, the man's all alone down there. Get John up, too, and let the two of 'em bring 'im up here. They ain't no livin' way of makin' fire enough to keep from freezin' down there, I know. What say?"

"No, you ain't goin' yourself! Father Wilson! Air you crazy? The men c'n take a litter and bring 'im up. 'Tain't but a little piece, and you're needed here bad enough, the land knows. Git the men off and then heat a blanket to wrap this child in. He's frozen stiff." The child had succumbed to her lively ministrations. He watched her curiously as she drew off his ragged shoes and stockings. A new light dawned in his eyes.

"Land, child! don't look at me that way! You make my blood run cold. Ain't you ever been taken care of, poor lamb?"

The clock struck twelve. In the warn bed-room off the kitchen where the sick man lay, muttering, a lamp burned low. Father sat at the head

of the bed, his elbow on the stand, his head bowed on his hand. He seemed to be listening intently. After a little time he rose and went to an old-fashioned bureau, in the end of the room. Slowly he drew out the top drawer. His hand shook as he selected the articles he wanted, and ranged them on the shelf before him. There were not many—a much scarred and battered tin horse, a tin horn with a soiled tassel, a ball and a top, minus the string. After a short search in the kitchen the only deficiency was remedied. The old man stood for a little time resting heavily on his hands and looking at the cheap array. Then with a long sigh he gathered up the tops and carried them into the sitting room. The new gray stocking neatly toed was lying on the table. He bent stiffly and put his burden on a chair. Patiently he fastened the stocking in place, under the shelf, and carefully placed the toys within its capacious depths. Then he went quietly back to the small room and the dim lamp, and his long watch. As he shut the door the cathedral gong on the new clock chimed half-past twelve. The stair-door opened and Mother stepped into the kitchen. She went to the pantry, lighted the little lamp, and crept about softly. When she had visited the ceiling, and the cupboard, she went into the sitting room and put the lamp down on the table. She held her apron gathered in her hand, and something within sagged it heavily. She hunted for the stocking for some time. When she found it, she sat down suddenly on a footstool and put her head in her arms on a chair. But not for long. Her freight rolled on the floor. Rosy apples and crisp cookies, a square of fruit cake, and some cubes of sugar. Stooping she gathered them all, and they, too, went into the gray stocking.

Silently she stole into the next room and stood by the sleeping boy. The warmth made his cheeks quite rosy and, as he slept, a smile crept about his mouth.

What so sweet as a sleeping child? The clock struck one!

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