

CHRISTMAS MONEY.

BY MARTHA McCULLOCH WILLIAMS.

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A dozen heads turned to look as Betty went up the street to Lawyer Westfield's office. Though it was coming to noon of a bright December day there was still a biting touch in the air. The critical loungers hugged the sunny side of the street—and even there the wind made them shiver—though to one in rapid motion the day was a delight.

Some of its frosty vitality seemed to radiate from the girl. "Steps pretty high, considering," one of those who watched her said to his gossip as the slim shape, lithe for all its huddled shawl, passed out of earshot. The girl had looked neither to right nor left. Her cheek wore habitually the fine red it now showed, but the most casual glance saw a hardening of the lines about the mouth and below the eyes.

"Yes, considering most of all that she's got to walk back the seven miles home," a third man said, coming up to the two. He had lurched down the street in Betty's wake—further, he was her close neighbor, John Burley, known to his intimates as Toad.

"Now mind what you say, Toad," the first speaker admonished. "Miss Betty she don't b'ar you no mighty good will, an solid as she is with her lawyers you better mind how you out your notches, else you might git yourself an rest o' us in er label suit."

"Aw, go 'long, you Doc Green. We all know you'd be skered out o' seven years' growth if she just looked hard at you," Toad returned with a great guffaw. "I ain't like you. I know what I'm talkin' about, an shore's you've knee high to er grasshopper that gal has done sold Lightfoot an her cyart an steers too."

"Wh-e-e-e! That every hoof o' stock thar is on the Walton place," Doc said, digging his hands deep in his trousers pockets. "It must be she's goin' ter quit the ranch."

"You hush," some one whispered violently, clutching at Doc's coat and nodding toward another who came swinging along the pavement. He was tall, with broad shoulders and level looking eyes that did not fall to the faces about, though he gave the group a comprehensive good morning. He had a fine car too. It had caught the import of their talk, but he made no pause for further speech.

"Ain't he in er swivet this mornin'?" Doc Green asked sarcastically. Toad nodded assent. The third man, Tobe Pellow, said with a judicial half closing of eyelids:

"Shet up, you fellers. That's young Lawyer Westfield, an he'd have you ter understand the Westfields ain't got no use fer common folks, except round 'lection times, when they want our votes."

"Be 'shamed o' yourselves, you all. You know as well as I can tell you thar ain't nobody o' clearer grit nor less stuck up than Ned Westfield. Look how he fought an hung on fer pore Sam Walton, an knowin' all the time he was bound ter have his trouble fer his pains," Uncle Billy Trotter said severely.

The ripple of sarcastic laughter hushed itself to a sudden quick shame. Toad shifted uneasily upon his feet and said apologetically behind his hand:

"He did that. Pore Sam, 'tain't a year yit since he went erway, an I'm thinkin' this'll be er terrible Christmas fer him. Whatever else he done Sam thought a heap o' his children an give 'em Christmas money."

"Yes, he did. Pore old Sam! They had er dead end on a shet case on him, but nobody can make me believe he was sober enough ter know what he was doin' when he took that critter," Doc returned in Toad's key, studying the pavement as he spoke.

"He never took it," Uncle Billy said with emphasis. "Whisky don't make men mean. I tell you it jest lets loose

OWN that want wuth nigh as much right what he'd been seen ter leave it in the mornin. I know he told er lame tale about er strange man overtakin him, banterin him fer er swap, an when they had traded gallopin back the way

he had come, but though Ned Westfield raked the county with er fine tooth comb he couldn't find nare 'nother soul that had saw the other man."

"Still Sam Walton ain't no horse thief," Uncle Billy said stoutly. Pellow twiddled his fingers and said tentatively:

"That ain't neither here nor thar. Say, you all, it's jest two weeks tell Christmas. Somethin oughter be done."

All the rest gathered about him and fell into eager consultation. None was more eager than Burley. As he marked the looks of surprise in the other faces he said, a curious greenness settling about his mouth:

"Lemme carry it ter 'em. Maybe it'll fetch me luck. I ain't told you before, but I've sold out, stock, lock an barrel, an am goin ter Texas about old Christmas day."

"H-m-m-m! Who'd you sell ter?" Uncle Billy asked a trifle sharply. "If can't, though, be nobody else but that

thoroughbred and Betty's own property, a gift from one of her father's boon companions, who found the foal, then less than a week old, a serious hindrance to his pleasure. He did not dream the newcomer could bring up his gift. He did not know, as Betty did, how wise and kind was Sook, the bell cow. After a sniff or two and one faint protesting moo Sook let the colt suck beside her own new calf quite as though they were twins.

Next year Lightfoot came out in her glossy new coat as fine and lusty a yearling as stepped on four hoofs. The children frolicked with her, talked to her and shared their dainties quite as though she had been human, which they more than half believed she was. And what a famous 3-year-old she made—bride wise, full gaited and handsome as a picture. Betty began to ride her then. Today it came back to her how her father had looked at her frayed, worn saddle and housings and said:

"Ah, Betty, you could show off your mare if only you had a father worth even hangin'."

Her dear father! He had been always the pattern of kindness so long as he kept at home. A pattern of industry and thrift, too, until the restless fit seized him; then he rode away, drank and gambled or indorsed other men's worthless paper, which later his own household was pinched to pay.

"I most thought you had forgot us, Betty," Trabant said unsteadily. "If—if you had staid a little longer, I meant to take Lightfoot back home again. Have you taken the money for her, Betty? If you haven't!"—A sob finished what he could not say.

"Yes, I took it and spent it," Betty said huskily. "Mr. Lane had the money all ready. I told him you would bring her—noddin toward the mare—and he said next week would do."

"Let's take her back. I'll bring her then. Honest I will. Oh, Betty, how can we part with her?" Trabant wailed, burying his face in his hands. Betty had taken the halter rein. She let it drop and flung both arms about Lightfoot's neck.

"I—don't—quite—know, Trabant," she said, swallowing hard. "But we must not take her back. That would be like dying twice over. We will comfort ourselves thinking how much she has gained—such a nice warm stable and no more hard work."

"But nobody will love her like we do, an she don't mind work fer us. Why, last summer, when she plowed so hard, she would frisk about when I turned her loose an look at me, as if she said, 'See, I ain't tired,'" Trabant said, wiping his eyes. "She knew how we needed her work, the darlin. I am goin to ask Mr. Lane to keep her until I can work an buy her back."

"He will keep her, then meet me at his store. I know a boy about your size who deserves some new boots," Betty said, trying to smile. Trabant sighed and again wiped his eyes.

"So you've got the money back an Brandy brought to spend," he said. "I thought a heap o' them, but nothin would be had if—if we could only take Lightfoot back home fer good."

Seven o'clock that night found Betty safe at home in the big double log house that her grandfather had built. It belonged to her mother's children, else would long ago have been swallowed by those security debts her father was always making. Betty was infinitely glad of this assured shelter, though her best friends had begged her to leave it, scatter the children about and give herself the distraction of a new neighborhood, but she had steadfastly refused.

All through her father's trial she had hoped against hope that his innocence would be miraculously proved. He had said to her, "Betty, I have done nearly all that was wrong to my poor children, but I am no thief," and she had believed him. All through the long day she had sat, looking forward, her eyes fast on the door, the strange, stern judge of whom even the sheriff was afraid. He had not seemed to see her, but at the last there was a break in even his cold voice as he said, "In consideration of all the circumstances of the case, I sentence you to imprisonment for three years, the shortest time allowed by the statute under which you are convicted."

Then, when those about looked to see her faint, Betty had pressed up to where she could touch her father and whisper in his ear:

"I believe in you just the same. Three years is not so long, and you shall find us all here when you come back."

So you may guess what answer she made to her advisers. If they shook their heads, they let her take her own way. Tonight the way did not seem so hopelessly hard for all the stress and strain of the day.

"We must believe, after this, in special providences," she said to Patty. "To think how we got home. Mr. Pellow's wagon brought all our bundles. It just happened to be coming our way, and nothing would do Uncle Billy Trotter but to fetch us both to our gate instead of dropping us at the big road, two miles away. And then my money held out so. I have bought all my realty—shoes, frocks, sugar, salt, nails, spelling books, a new hood for Marian, a red tin cup for Tess—and have two whole dollars left for Christmas money, and \$2 will buy such a heap of things."

"Will pappy come home Christmas?" Tess asked, nestling her head against Betty.

"You little idiot! You know he won't," Marian broke out. "I wish I was where he is," she sobbed. "Tommy Adkin said today at school he wouldn't even dare to show his face here again; he was a jailbird."

"I'll kill Tommy Adkin," Trabant shouted, his eyes flashing. Marian

smiled, though she was sobbing hard. "He won't say it again," she said, putting up her hand to hide a long scratch on her cheek.

"Hush! Somebody's comin. Hear how Bing barks," Pete said, walking to a front window. The curtains there were drawn, but at the back they hung so far apart it was easy to see from the outside the group in front of the fire.

"'Twas just some wagon passin. Old Ring is a big story teller," Patty said, looking up from her new linsy frock.

"He don't tell stories. He smells somebody sure, an he knows 'em, 'cause he barks in place o' growlin," Pete returned. Tess sat up and pushed the yellow curls out of her sleepy eyes, then broke into a passion of weeping.

"Pappy! Pappy! I want to see my pappy, oh, so bad!" Patty and Marian both caught her in their arms, sobbing in unison. The boys, too, were crying, but Betty had dry eyes. She had been through so much that day she was like one frozen.

"Hush, dears," she said clearly. "It would kill father to see you now. Be bra.. for him. It is all we can do."

Trabant held up a hand for silence. "There must be somebody about," he said after a minute. "I heard walkin like somebody was tryin to step easy."

"Ho! It's jest that old blue dawg o' Toad Burley's. Yonder he goes, streakin it down the front lot," Pete called from the window. Outside there was brilliant moonshine. The tree shadows lay in fairy lace upon the frozen earth.

"Ah, ha! He came after eggs and didn't get a one," Patty said triumphantly. "I do hate a suck egg dawg. Wonder what does make Toad keep that ugly thing?"

"He is not quite as ugly as his master," Betty said, laughing. "I dare say both of them admire each other." Then she shook her purse till the silver in it jingled and said, trying to speak gayly:

"Now for a Christmas council. Remember, everybody has one vote and majorities rule."

As the last word left her lips something came clattering down the big wide throated squat chimney and rolled to her feet. It was a round tin box, wire fastened and bearing upon one side a bit of paper with the words, "Not dangerous," laboriously printed upon it.

"Well, this beats all," everybody said in a breath. Then Trabant cried out, "I know there was somebody," and Marian began to plead, "Oh, Betty, do open that."

"I know how it got there. Somebody climbed up the big tree and threw it down from the limb that hangs over," Pete said as Trabant undid the wire that bound the lid. He shook the box over Betty's lap, and five half eagles fell from it. They were wrapped in a paper upon which some one had written:

"For the children's Christmas. Make it a happy one."

For the first time that day Betty dropped her head and cried.

While she sobbed a man was rushing away outside as though pursued by furia. He had been hanging about ten

minutes. He had seen and heard what went on within. As he came up to his tethered horse he was shaking all over, but not with the cold.

"Lord, O Lord!" he muttered, fumbling with the saddle girths. "How that little gal cried! I can't stand it, yit I must. Thar ain't no other way, not unless I—"

He broke off there and galloped furiously away. For perhaps a mile he held his course, then turned square about and went toward the county town at the same breakneck pace.

The day before Christmas there was warm and moist, with a blue sky so soft and springlike the nipped chrysanthemums under the edge of the south piazza perked themselves up with a semblance of blossoming anew. Human nature seemed in like kindly mood. All day a stream of wagons had rolled up to leave logs out in fire lengths at the Walton back gate. Then Uncle Billy Trotter and Aunt Nan had come, their big buggy loaded down. Such a big, splendid bronze gobbler as peered from between Uncle Billy's knees, such a thick frosted pound cake as Mrs. Trotter held in her lap, such old ham and pickles, the buggy box disgorged, not to mention a pig for Pete and a pair of pullets for Marian!

"Heard you had started in the chicken business," Uncle Billy said, pinching the child's ear. "So ma an me thought maybe you'd like some o' our red game breed. You're sorter game chicken yourself, eh, Marian?"

"Yes, I fight when I have to," Marian returned. "An I am goin to raise eggs an chickens next year. We all said we'd put the money that fell down the chimney in somethin we could work with an try to buy back Lightfoot."

"You'll git her," Uncle Billy said, chuckling hard, while Aunt Nan said aside to Betty:

"Ef it's fitten weather, Betty, I'm comin in the carryall next preachin day to take you all to church."

Before Betty could answer a black had rode up with a big basket before him. Dropping his hat, he said cheerily: "Miss Betty, Miss Sairy Pellow sav

bet's 'er piece er fraish beef an some much meat she done made petickler good, 'cause Christmas don't comes but once o' er year."

"I don't know how to thank everybody," Betty said to Mrs. Trotter, with wet eyelids, when the boy had gone away.

"Don't try, honey," that good woman returned, bending to kiss Tess' rosebud mouth. Then she drove away, snug and smiling at her husband's elbow, leaving Betty to receive yet other material tokens of the day of peace and good will. They came from every hand—fat sacks of meal and flour, apples, potatoes, preserves, homemade wine, flake crusted pies and sugary crisp sweet cakes.

Some way the superabundance wounded Betty, albeit she knew it was but some slight exaggeration of the friendly neighborhood custom. She was, in fact, a trifle morbid. She would have received as graciously and gracefully as any might but for thinking that the giving had the spur of her supposed necessity.

"There is nobody else to send anything. We can rest a little while," Trabant said after supper, but even as he spoke there came a thundering knock at the front door. Nobody was there when it opened, but they heard wheels rolling away.

"Bah! Blind geese! Don't you see the box? Thar! At your feet," Marian cried, darting past Trabant and Pete to snatch a square wooden something from the floor in front of her brothers. When she had wrenched it open, there lay, amid wrappings of pink and silver paper, all manner of Christmas cakes and Christmas toys, fireworks galore, and at the very bottom a scrawly slip.

"Tommy Adkin wishes his friends Trabant and Pete and Patty and Marian and Tess a very happy Christmas."

"And I am left out entirely, though Tommy used to claim me for his sweetheart when he wore dresses," Betty said, laughing to save herself from crying. Marian kicked the box contemptuously, saying:

"We must be gettin popular when Mr. Storekeeper Adkin thinks it worth while to be good to us."

"Marian, Marian," Betty said, "What a speech, and Christmas too! I am afraid I must make you write and thank Tommy, and remember, dears, Christmas means above everything peace on earth and good will to men."

"If Christmas makes folks good, why don't they let pappy come home?" Tess asked with round, wet eyes. Patty was staring hard in the fire. Without stirring she said over her shoulder: "I believe he will come, and Lightfoot too. There is a road in the fire—a long one—and a man and a horse coming along it."

Betty slept dreamlessly that night, but all the next day she was the prey of nameless terrors. Her mind went back constantly to the beginning of the trouble. It seemed to her it had truly been when Johnny Gates, the richest, idliest, most dissolute youngster in the county, came courting her and was sent about his business. Yet he it was who had brought her word of her father's arrest and in the same breath had begged her to marry him. When she gave him a frantic refusal, he looked at her, his face growing hard and white, his eyes burning to say: "Whatever your father suffers, Betty, it will lie at your door. You might save him, and you let him be disgraced, and all because you fancy Ned Westfield loves you. Maybe he does, but I can tell you he will not marry you. His father would sooner see him dead."

She had turned from him in silent scorn, but how his dart rankled. It was the smart of it, with a later taunt that the Westfields fought cases for either love or money, that had impelled her to sell Lightfoot and pay a counsel fee. Yet only three weeks back Johnny had come, humbly entreating her to let him take her burdens and promising vaguely great things for her father.

One little minute Betty faltered; then she shook her head and left him, and when he ran after her she never name marriage to her again. He went away, crying and cursing. She had not seen him since and was devoutly grateful for the fact.

As it drew on toward sunset Betty strolled out to the orchard. Her mother's grave was there—beside it she might dream a little of last year—and the creamy, heavy hearted roses some one had sent her upon Christmas eve. She had laid them upon the green mound, though knowing well their source. Ned's first gift, they were sacred and belonged by right to her holiest place. Snow fell and covered them. They were beautiful for weeks. Now as she looked at the flowerless swell a great sob rose in her throat. She knelt and prayed wordlessly with her face upon the earth.

The children were in the back yard full of joy in what their Christmas money had bought. The boys had yearling steers, Patty some beehives, Tess a

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watching them teeter and coquette in their roosting tree. It was a cherry, big and branched, and already half of them huddled in twos and threes affectionately on the boughs.

"That's a Christmas tree right," Marian said decisively. Tess stooped to scratch the head of her least pig as she answered reflectively, "I like Sarah Elizabeth of she an her babies can't go on a tree."

"Oh, say, wouldn't Legan an Bright look fine, hangin up in a cedar bush?" Pete said in gasps, laughing as he had not done for weeks. Marian nodded. "An put on Patty's bees, too, an then send for Tommy Adkin to distribute the presents. My, but I'd like to see him. Both his eyes would be shut a week."

Betty, coming back to them, opened her lips for gentle reproof, but before she spoke it they caught her in tumultuous arms.

"Come in to the fire, sister. I most thought you was lost," Tess declared, nestling close to her.

"Yes, do come. I put an egg to roast for you," Marian said, catching the other hand fast, while Trabant said discontentedly: "I wish it would get good an dark. My firecrackers are just aagin to go off."

Patty was already indoors. They found her again staring at the fire. Marian pulled her braided hair, Trabant stippled a chestnut against her cheek; still she did not rouse from her rapt contemplation until Betty bent and said softly, "What is it, Patty, dear?"

"It's all crumbled down," Patty said with a little impatient sigh. "But the

"PAPPY PAPPY! PAPPY HAS COME HOME!" same road was in the fire—the same man an horse—an it worries me that I can't find out if they are comin here."

"We'll know when they get here," Trabant began. A hail outside cut him short. Ring, the watchdog, gave a long, joyous howl that sent out pell mell to the door. Through the dusk they could make out moving figures at the gate. It swung in, some one darted through and caught Betty and Tess in the clasp of trembling arms, while the other children shouted wildly: "Pappy! Pappy! Pappy has come home!"

As he loosed Betty Ned Westfield caught her hand. He meant only to give her friendly greeting, but Uncle Billy Trotter behind him rang out, "Ef you don't kiss her right here an now, Ned, I'll never see nor 'lectioneer for you—never in the world."

So Ned kissed her hither and yon in the face of them all. His father at his back said with a beaming smile:

"So you thought, Betty, I did not want you for a daughter."

Tess, high in her father's arms, broke in gravely, "Betty is our daughter, an nobody else can't have her, but if you come in we have got a heap of Christmas, an you may have some fer bringin pappy home."

"They may have it all fer bringin Lightfoot," Trabant said as he clung fast to the neck of his recovered treasure. Betty turned to Ned.

"Tell me, am I awake?" she asked. "I have dreamed so often. Tell me, too, when you began to work miracles."

"It ain't nothin short o' a miracle—anybody gittin that pore, lyn Toad Burley ter speak the truth," Uncle Billy said, taking Tess from her father's clasp. As Mr. Walton met Betty's inquiring gaze he smiled and said:

"You will have to let Ned tell you, dear. All I know is that this mornin a pardon was read to me. I was told my friends waited outside, and there I found Ned, Tobe Pellow and Uncle Billy, and all bent on bringin me home with a hurrah."

Then Ned told briefly yet clearly how Burley had plotted with Johnny Gates and a reckless stranger whom they later spirited away against the good name of Betty's father; how Burley had personated Mr. Walton in carrying off the other horse, and afterward put the beast the stranger had got in the trade back where it had been first stabled by its owner. Then poor Toad, as the agent of the Christmas conspirators, had seen and heard what had sent him straight to Ned Westfield and confession. "Of course I let him go free," Ned wound up. "He is safe in Texas now, but his name is not Burley, and we will wish him luck. All the rest was ridiculously easy. Fortunately I know the governor well enough to tell him outright when I am in a hurry for anything."

"But Ned ain't told you yit, Betty, how he took an chased off like er streak o' lightning ter the Beleney, found that t'other feller an got his aff'avit," Uncle Billy said with a fresh and more vigorous chuckle. Betty gave him a heavenly smile, then put her arms again about her father's neck, saying:

"So long as we have him home free and sound and safe it does not matter in the least how it came about."

"Yes, it does," Marian said, clenching her fists hard. Then through a rain of tears: "I—I can't hate anybody, not even Johnny Gates, like I want to. I am so glad to see pappy again, she hate all slips away."

"But love and peace abide forever," Ned whispered in Betty's ear, and Trabant said slowly as they all went inside: "There never was in the world ezoh another happy Christmas."



"I THINK OF NOTHING ELSE DAY AND NIGHT," BETTY SAID.

rip tearin Johnny Gates. You an him have been as thick as thieves ever since he come inter his pile o' money last year."

Betty walked the vacant office with quick, impatient steps. A leaping fire crackled in the grate. Uncle Edom, the black manservant, had drawn the easiest chair beside it, but nothing could induce her to rest in it. She had peach blossom cheeks now. Uncle Edom had told her, "De ole big boss, ma'am, he done goned fer er week, but Marse Ned he'll be down in dest er little while."

She wished of all things to escape an encounter with Ned. She could never make him understand—her father and his had been social equals, class and college mates—hence the old man would have known intuitively how impossible it was that her father's daughter should leave his defense to be ranked among anybody's charity cases. His son—Betty's thought went no farther—the racing blood made connected thought impossible. She stood motionless, trembling, wishing herself 100 miles away, yet in no wise repenting the thing that had brought her. There was a back door, of which she knew nothing. Ned came through it and took her unawares. He walked straight up in front of her, saying with a little frown:

"Betty, why will you do such very foolish things?"

"I—I do not quite understand you," Betty faltered.

"Who bought Lightfoot?" he demanded, his voice still hard.

"Who says I have sold her?" Betty asked with spirit.

"I know. It was because of what Johnny Gates said when you refused him again," Ned went on relentlessly. Betty flung off her shawl as though its weight stifled her. Her eyes sparkled, her voice was an edged flute note as she said:

"Mr. Westfield, is there anything in the relation of lawyer and client to authorize questions such as you have seen fit to ask?"

"I am more than your lawyer," Ned said stoutly. "Betty, this is no fit time or place, but you know I love you, you know I mean to marry you as soon as I come into my grandmother's legacy and am independent of my father. I told you that over and over in the summer. Then you at least listened; now you try to shut me away from your concerns. You have stripped yourself of work stock. You live on a farm alone with the children. They must have fire and food and clothes. You have perhaps a right to sacrifice yourself and me, Betty, but let the children. Do have a thought for them."

"I think of nothing else day and night," Betty said. "But—but can't you see? Oh, do please take the money for your father. It is not much, only \$200, but when it is paid people cannot say—"

"Let them say what they like," Westfield broke in. "Betty, Betty, marry me at once. You shall not starve, dear. I—"

"Please, please never say such things again," Betty entreated. "Think of your father, of how good he was to mine, and his pride, and how it would break his heart to know his only son had married a convict's daughter."

"Stop!" Ned said, speaking low and hard. "I have been over all that, Betty, but if you love me anything is better than knowing you as you are, with nothing between you and the crush of things."

"I do not think so," Betty cried, dropping the roll of bills on the desk before him and hurrying away. She dared not trust herself to listen further. If only she could rush home—away from everything. But that was impossible. She had still to deliver Lightfoot. Trabant had her now—Trabant, who was next herself, though five years younger, and just fairly in roundabouts. They had stopped that morning upon the seat-common where it made a sort of bay up among back gardens and



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