

Decorative border table with repeating patterns of letters and symbols.

DO you realize that it is but a few weeks until Christmas? You all know what it is to over-look or forget the little remembrance for the children, for friends, and for those who are dear to you until too late to procure them.

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Democratic Watchman

Bellefonte, Pa., Dec. 23, 1898.

When Marjorie Remembered.

ma'am," she called up to the eager face at the window. "Mother, mother," they all chorused, "the Queer Lady wants to go over there—let her see her—she called us out of the window, honest she did! She wants to ask us something."

"Yes," Ann Sophy recapitulated with slow emphasis, "honest." "Well, of all things!" ejaculated Mrs. Cooper in amazement. "I declare! Well, I suppose you'll go. She's harmless and they say she has to be honored. But you've got to clean up. Ann Sophy, you scrub the baby's face. Nip, you braid Tucky's hair over again—smooth, mind you, and you may tie her best ribbon on. Hurry."

After a good deal of hurrying and smoothing down and washing up, the small Coopers went, in a solemn little procession, to the Queer Lady's. She was waiting at the front door. "Come right in," she said eagerly, "and you'd better take off your eagers." "Oh, no," Ann Sophy cried hurriedly. "We wouldn't. We only had time to clean up outside—keep your mittens on," she whispered in a shrill aside to Nip and Tuck.

Mrs. Graham pointed to chairs, but Ann Sophy arranged them in a straight line, side by side, before they sat down. Then she seated them gravely, according to sizes, herself at the head and the baby at the foot. They sat up primly and folded all their gay little mittens on their little shabby laps. The baby's stout, abbreviated legs stretched straight out before him, and barely reached the chair's edge.

"Now, ma'am?" Ann Sophy said, expectantly, taking a last sidewise view of her line of parade. "What do you want for Christmas?" asked the Queer Lady.

The question was so abrupt, so unexpected, that a row of little gasps broke forth unbidden. Ann Sophy swallowed hard. "Ma'am?"

"What would you like best? Tell me all the things," the Queer Lady's sweet voice hurried on earnestly. She was too absorbed in her own thoughts to see how surprised and how wistful the little faces all were. She hardly noticed them at all. She was waiting, pencil and tablet in hand, for Ann Sophy's reply. "First—what?" she urged. "I want to make a list."

"Oh—oh!" Ann Sophy was too bewildered to consider clearly. Her eyes sought her red mittens in her lap, and then, in a flash, she remembered the fervent ambition of her narrow little life. "Oh, a pair o' kid gloves," she cried, "with plenty o' buttons! An' a book with pictures of cows an' trees an' country in it—an' a music box—an' side comb, an'—her tongue was loosened. She poured out her cherished dreams in a little turbulent flood of eloquence. The Queer Lady's pencil could hardly keep up with it. Then the others had their turn. Ann Sophy had given them courage and they stayed not upon the order of their saying, but said it all, with shrill enthusiasm. Even the baby expressed his wishes fluently, if not clearly.

On their way home the little Coopers talked it all over. "She's a goin' to give us a Christmas!" shouted Nip in an ecstasy of delight. "She's a goin' to!" echoed Tuck. "Hush, she'll hear you!" Ann Sophy cautioned them, but her staid little face was quietly radiant. She was almost ready to believe it herself.

"I don't know—it looks kind of so," she said, wistfully. "Huh, course it's so. What's she want us all to choose things for, then?" said Nip scornfully.

"Yes, what'd she want us to for?" "Well, I don't know—it kind of looks so, honest," repeated Ann Sophy slowly. "Hoor-ay! An' we warn't goin' to have any Christmas before—not a single thing, Ann Sophy Cooper, 'cause the coal bin's most empty!"

"No, we warn't—not a single, Ann Sophy Cooper!" "Hoor-ay!" "Hoor-ay!" "I can't help it—it looks kind of so," murmured Ann Sophy's wistful voice again.

The Queer Lady, left alone, was looking over her list. It was not altogether satisfactory. She was a little disappointed. Some of the things were so queer. If she could only remember—did children really want such things as those? "Well," she said, folding the list carefully, "I'll get all these things, anyway,

and perhaps they'll suggest others that aren't so queer." The few intervening days went past on swift wings. Marjorie Graham was very busy and happy. The children would come home on Christmas eve, just in time to hang up their stockings. And, meantime, there was so much to do—so many beautiful things to see!

Two days before Christmas Marshall Graham came home unusually early in the afternoon. Twilight was just beginning to fold in the merry Christmas world. He hurried up the steps. Roxy let him in. "Where is Mar—where is Mrs. Graham?" he asked anxiously.

The girl's pleasant, buxom face quivered suddenly. She pointed toward the parlor door. "In there," she said huskily. Then she sank down on the stairs and broke into hushed sobbing, swaying back and forth and rocking her arms.

"She's fixing the—the—it," she sobbed under her breath. The little man braced himself as for a blow, and went into the parlor. Marjorie came to meet him with a laugh of triumph. "See, dear boy!" she cried, "isn't it lovely! It's all ready but lighting the candles. I couldn't wait till Christmas to fix it. You see, I can keep the parlor door locked—the children won't know, and I can keep coming in to admire it. No, come over this side—there! that's the best view of it. Now, you dear boy, say it's the loveliest tree you ever saw—say it! Begin, 'it's the loveliest—'"

She was reaching in and out among the laden branches re-adjusting and re-looping. Her eager eyes shone like candles to him. "Say it, dear boy, why don't you begin?" she cried eagerly. And the little man drew a long, sobbing breath and said it as well as he could. It satisfied her. She was too preoccupied to think his voice was stilted and strained.

"Those little Cooper children helped quite a lot, I called them in. You can't think what funny little things they were! There, it's done, quite done. An' over here, see, on this sofa, are the stocking things. Four piles—this little sock one's Peck o' Mischief's!"

The tears were running helplessly down the little man's face, but she did not see them. He kept his head turned away. Four piles of toys were ranged in a prim row and four little black stockings lay beside them, their limp lengths dangling over the sofa's edge. Outside in the hall Roxy looked her arms and cried tears of honest love. That evening Marshall Graham called on Dr. Sperry again. He told the whole sad little story, and the kind-hearted doctor hemmed and coughed and polished and repolished his spectacles. "My dear sir," he began, then coughed and tried again. "My dear sir, you must wait. Wait and the Lord help you, I tell you there's nothing else to do; she must waken of herself. Shock? Man alive, could she waken without a shock? There will be mercifully easier if it comes as naturally as possible. I tell you it will be the difference between life and death to her. You say she talks of not remembering? Just so. I believe she is going to remember by and by. And it will come upon her gently. I believe it. You must wait."

"But Christmas, doctor?" "I know—I know. It will have to come. But wait, wait. The waking up may come, too. If not in time, you must explain, prevaricate, anything to satisfy her." And so, with his heavy heart, the little man went home.

In the middle of the night he woke up in unexplainable terror, to see Marjorie coming in at the door with a lighted lamp in her hand. She had on a pale blue wrap and in the dim light she looked too pale and frail to be embodied. He sat up in bed and held out his hands.

"Marj, Marj," he called. And then as she came nearer he saw her face plainly. "Oh, Marj!"

For he saw that she had remembered. He read it instantly in her face, in her sad, quiet eyes. There was no restlessness in them at all. She came up quite close before she spoke. The hand that held the lamp did not tremble. It was quite firm when she set the light down beside him.

"I went down to look at the tree, dear boy," she said steadily, "and all at once I remembered. The children are dead. They aren't coming home to Christmas."

With a sudden cry she threw herself beside him on the floor, with her face in his arms, and cried the terrible, beautiful, life-saving tears he had longed for. An hour—two hours—he never knew how long they lasted. It may have been but a short time. It seemed a long, long time to the little man.

The first faint light of morning was creeping in to them when Marjorie lifted her face. It was swollen and stained with the blessed tears, but it smiled at him bravely.

"Dear boy—I am glad I remembered for your sake," she said gently. "And—and we have each other, dear boy." Christmas morning ushered in the most wonderful, the most glorious day in all the short lives of the little Cooper children. Their wildest hopes were realized, and though Nip said, "I told you so!" in gleeful triumph, for once Tuck failed to echo her.

"You never!" she cried in scorn, "you never told meso, Nip Cooper. You couldn't have told it all if you'd been tellin' me so ever since!"

In the early evening, just as early Christmas tree candle light—for Marjorie would have it so—all the little Coopers formed in a wavel procession and crunched through the new snow to the Queer Lady's. And the Queer Lady met them at the door and led them into Enchanted Land. She was smiling down at them.

Afterward Nip confided to Tuck that that smile looked just as if she was crying. "But she didn't look 'queer' a bit—not even kind of so," said Ann Sophy softly.

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