

A Nautical Christmas Tale



A ship came in from the Land of Nod,
Its deck was white as snow.
It bore no tow'ring masts above,
No anchor chains below.
Its small, spring-bottomed mattress-hull
Was laden high with wealth,
Which strangely had been placed aboard
En voyage—hast!—by stealth.

The skipper of this freighted craft
Was quite a careless sort.
The cargo he did not spy,
Till he hove into port.
And then upon the portside bow,
In raptures he did kneel,
For Santa Claus is no mere dream,
And Christmas toys are REAL!

—GENE MORGAN.

A CHRISTMAS DREAM

By J. A. WALDRON.

I DREAMED a dream on Christmas eve that no one, surely, will believe. All will discredit it because in it I was with Santa Claus and witnessed many things so queer I hesitate to tell them here.

Old Santa had just filled his pack and made it ready for his back. It holds a million things or more from Santa's rare and endless store, and like some basket magical, though taken from 'tis always full.

Though I saw Santa plainly, he seemed not at all to notice me. He sat in silence with a map spread out upon his ample lap to mark his course o'er land and sea while waiting for his evening tea.

His cook—he has no wife, you know—came in and said she meant to go. She said her job did not quite suit and he must find a substitute. Cooks everywhere just grump and gad, and with most folks they get in bad.

Well, Santa's smile quick left his face and he ripped up a dress of lace perhaps intended for this cook, who gave him then a wrathful look; and



when she put the teapot down I saw her slip from out her gown and drop into the teapot quick some sort of dope with movement slick.

"Would take much more than this, I think, to drive old Santa Claus to drink; that is to say, to rum, perhaps, though sometimes he may like his schnapps. Pull many a cup of tea he quaffed. The more he drank the more he laughed. Uncanny was his jollity, and I at first thought I should see.

He seized his pack, and full of joy piled me upon it like a toy, and rushing forth into the night began his world-embracing flight. He used a sleigh, as we all know, but needed neither ice or snow. We sailed away o'er mount and plain, through many weathers, snow and rain—through wind and sleet and zero air—though all the time it seemed quite fair.

A dozen reindeer ran ahead. Their bells were soundless as they fled, and all the ghostly journey seemed quite fitting in the dream I dreamed. A

The Gift That Tipped the Scales

By LILLIAN DUCEY

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So long as Calista's money held out she went gayly about her Christmas shopping. When she found that her tiny purse was empty, she stopped buying—wherein she showed greater wisdom than many grown-ups—and with a soul replete with satisfaction she left the store.

"I've got pretty much most everything, I guess," she said to herself, hugging her bundles close as she tripped along the country streets. "But I'll know for sure when I get home."

And when she reached home the very first thing she did was to array the gorgeous gifts upon the white spread of her little bed. Christmas was two days away. Therefore it was imperative that she begin that very moment to put them in order. Then like an embodied cyclone she burst into her elder sister's room, intent upon tissue paper and seals and all the other necessities for making beautiful Christmas bundles.

What Calista saw there made her freeze in her tracks, as if the high wind of Destiny, which had borne her thus far, had suddenly become a dead calm. Margaret, her beautiful, lovely sister, was standing with tightened lips that twitched and quivered. In her hand, which hastily dropped to her side, but not before Calista had seen, was clutched a photograph. And the whispered words on her lips repeated themselves over and over in Calista's mind, while amazement held her dumb. "It grows worse, the ache—worse as the days go by." Not until Calista had interpreted the meaning of those words did she find her voice; then she said blandly:

"I came for—I'm wrapping up my Christmas bundles." Seeing what she wanted lying on Margaret's desk, she went for them.

Meanwhile, a brave control touched the quivering lips of the elder girl. She was indeed fortunate, she thought, that it was only Calista who had discovered her momentary aberration. For that was what it was. How could it be anything else? What girl with any pride would allow herself to—No, she hadn't cried! The man did not live who could make her weep for him.

"You'll return what you don't need, Calista, dear?" she said, sweetly.

"Yes," answered Calista briefly, and went.

And then, just to prove to herself that she had regained her sanity, Margaret Wesley looked again at that picture in her hand—looked, and felt a quick contraction of the throat, a sudden piercing sting upon her eyeballs. And down upon the picture dropped a tear.

Calista, on the other side of the door, was saying to herself:

"She was going to cry. Her eyes were teary. It was Jasper's picture she was trying to hide." And then, childlike, in spite of her surprise the gathering forces of her sympathy were completely overwhelmed to the demands of Christmas. And why not? After all, Calista's mind was too youthful to be deeply concerned about lover's quarrels and broken engagements and such things. And she had made such marvelous purchases.

Indeed as they lay spread out on the bed it did seem as if only a genius or a little girl could have reached such decisions. There was a really lovely box of handkerchiefs, embellished with the pinkest of pink paper, for mother. That gift had put a tremendous hole in her pocketbook. And a pair of suspenders for daddy. These two presents were the first purchased, and while Calista still held the leash in her fancy. Afterward, let the sad truth be revealed at once (but then Calista was such a little girl, how could she be expected to prove bigger minded and stronger than grown-ups?), she succumbed to this intoxication of glittering, gleaming, glowing displayed wares.

"For brother Jim—that nice green tie," Calista hummed softly to herself—a tune improvised for the occasion.

"For sister Nell—that story book. I hope she reads it all to me. And baby boy can have that rattle. Uncle Fred that nice glass pitcher." She paused and added sotto voce: "I got it in the beautiful Ten Cent store. And he's going to be married, so he can use it." Then the song went on—

"And Auntie Madge that box of soap." That was from the Ten Cent store also, but then each cake was done up in shiny red paper, and there were three cakes in a box. "And sister Kate a string of beads. 'Once more the song reverted to everyday speech: 'Maybe she'll lend them to me once in a while 'cause I gave them to her.'"

"And sister Margaret—" Calista paused against. The one thing that

had not been apportioned was a tiny set of dishes—also from that beautiful Ten Cent store. She looked over the gifts. Some were already wrapped, for all the while she sang her nimble fingers had been busy. But her genius solved the problem.

"Well," she said reflectively, "she can use them for an ornament on her desk maybe, and I'll promise to dust them for her. I like little dishes."

But having cleared that hurdle another presented itself almost immediately. On a flooding onset of memory Calista remembered that she had fully intended when she started out to get something for Jasper—the brother that was to have been, but now wasn't to be, as she explained it to her mind. For in Calista's loyal little heart burned a steady flame of liking for the man who could treat little girls with the consideration he had bestowed upon her.

This was a dilemma. And for the moment Calista actually thought of robbing her real brother Jim of the glorious green tie. Jim, just two years older, was a "pig" to her sometimes. But then she remembered that Jasper never wore any but black ones on account of his red hair, as he had explained to her at one time.

It was indeed a perplexing problem to say the least. For had it been any one but Jasper she might confide in some one—her mother, or even Margaret—and negotiate a loan.

"I guess he'll have to go without," she concluded almost sadly. And curiously a dusk of dreams crept into her blue eyes. "Unless—unless I give him something of my own." But a mental review of her most cherished possessions failed to reveal anything suitable for a big grown-up man. Then even as she gave up the problem her despairing musing awoke to life with a delight. "Oh!" As she pondered she had been gazing directly at the framed picture of Margaret which stood on her little dresser.

Calista was nothing if not masterful in the manner in which she reached ultimate decisions—and then lived up to them. Less than a minute after she had allotted Jasper that forget-me-not framed face she was also promising him a note. For Calista really had a fellow feeling of understanding for the man—especially about that picture.

"Dear brother Jasper, that was to have been," her letter ran. "I am sending you for a Christmas present the picture of Margaret which you returned when you sent back the other presents she gave you. I know you will like to have it again. I know how you feel. Just most like the day I threw the peanuts at Kitty Marshall's head when she put them in my lap and I was mad at her. Only being a big man and not a little girl you can't do 'exactly what I did. Of course



It Was Imperative That She Begin to Put Them in Order.

I was mad—but I did want the peanuts. So after she was gone and nobody was looking I picked them up again. Nobody'll know you got the picture, 'cause I won't tell. Anyway Margaret's got one of yours she didn't send back. I guess 'cause she ain't such a maddy cat as we. It's our red hair.

"Your faithful and loving,

"CALISTA."

"P. S. A merry Christmas. If you want to send me a present send it to Margaret instead. Without being unfaithful to her, I will close by just saying her ache grows worse with the days."

The gift and the letter were done up and duly delivered the next morning. Amid the stress of holding preparations Calista did not experience the necessity of being secretive. She walked up to the Hemingway's door, a little girl bursting with the season's joy, and said to Jasper's mother:

"It's—it's my Christmas present to Jasper! No reason—is there?—why I shouldn't give my dear Jasper one?" And with a shy little laugh she scampered off.

And then the wheels of Fate spun round and round, having been given a very vigorous start by Calista.

Christmas morning dawned clear and white-bounded. The drifting cloud banks had left the heavens during the night and settled with feathery lightness on the earth, had made Calista's world a beautiful amphitheater, snow-muffled to an echo, wherein sleigh bells tinkled merrily and joyous voices rang gleefully. It was an ideal Christmas Day. And perfect it proved to Calista.

Calista was steeped in bliss. But not any more so than if she had received but two or three of the many, many gifts heaped upon her by adoring relatives. And it was not until afternoon that her maze of joy began to take on coherency, and she began to link in her mind the gifts to their donors. Then it was that she remembered her sister's former betrothed.

"Did you receive anything from Jasper, Margaret?" she blurted out. Fortunately they were alone, the rest of the family having gone to Aunt Madge's house for a little visit. But since Calista had a cold, Margaret stayed at home with her.

Margaret, who had been staring with dream-haunted eyes into vacancy, started as if some white hot brand



That's Funny.

had touched her. But the next moment, as if remembering that this searing must be endured, she answered sweetly:

"No, dear."

"That's funny," Calista had noted the start and now was taking shy stock of her. "I didn't either. And I thought he'd give one of us a Christmas present."

Margaret added nothing to prolong this conversation, and apparently Calista was too intent upon going her own way in thought to continue it

perforce, for silence fell between them.

And it was into this silence that the telephone tore vehemently.

"Let me! Let me!" shouted Calista. And before Margaret could utter a word of protest she had the receiver. Then assuming an important air of grown-upness she attended to the affair in hand.

"Hello! Yes, this is 4237 J. Yes, this is Calista. Oh! Did you like it? Did you? I—yes. I thought you would!"

For a moment she slipped her very proper telephone manner and became the eager little girl. The next she was back again doubly dignified of tone.

"I suppose you didn't give any Christmas presents this year. Margaret says you didn't give her any—I asked her—and you didn't send me anything—"

"Calista!" It was Margaret's voice, quivering, questioning. "Who?"

Calista was intent on the phone. "Yes," she was saying, "you saw them going to Auntie Madge's. Yes, all but Margaret and me. Yes, of course she'll talk to you—when I get through. Now! You can't wait to hear her voice! I must say Jasper Hemingway, that you're very rude and impolite. I wanted to tell you about all the Christmas presents I got. Yes, I will be mad. I am. But I'll tell her."

Meanwhile a white face waited at Calista's side. From it great tear-washed eyes stared incredulously.

"Here—" Calista was oblivious to the insistent tide of human emotion surging about her, as she held the receiver toward Margaret. "He says to tell you he was in the wrong and he's ready to go down on his knees to ask you to forgive him. And he says to emphasize the 'down on your knees.'"

Margaret put out a hand. It was a wild yearning gesture with which she bent to hear that voice. And Calista, going into the next room, noted the sudden light that flew to her face. Incredibly transformed she was from the dream-haunted girl of a few moments ago. And without really understanding how she, a little girl, had made a hot-tempered man ashamed of himself, Calista yet knew that she had tipped the scales of chance.

"I did it," she whispered to herself. "My Christmas present made him glad again."

Hard Times Sure. Brown—you mustn't feel disappointed this Christmas, Johnnie. These are terrible times we're having. Little Johnnie—they must be pretty hard, dad, when Santa Claus takes the trouble to drag my old cart out of the lumber-room and give it a new coat of paint.

Cause for Sorrow. Photographer (taking family group)—Now, then, Mr. Housefull, the expressions are all right but yours. Try to look happy; remember that Christmas is coming.

Mr. Housefull (despondently)—Hang it, man, that's just what I am thinking about.

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