

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS.

By Edgar A. Guest.

Home for Christmas! There's a joy For the weary, grown up boy...

Home for Christmas! Girl and lad Going to the kindly dad...

CHRISTMAS MAGIC.

A Story that Proves a Lot of Things.

"This Christmas," proclaimed McRitchie proudly, "we shall have a tree!"

He looked into the depths of a frilly basket, to meet the calm gaze of his daughter, six weeks old.

"Yes, old lady," he continued, "it will be some tree. And you shall hang up your stockings, and Mother shall hang hers, and even your broken-down old dad may take a chance that Santa will not forget him."

McRitchie looked at her reproachfully. "My dear, this is the fourteenth time you have asked that question, and each time I have replied emphatically that I prefer a daughter."

McRitchie turned, looking down on his wife soberly. Then he exploded: "A little one! On the dining table! Well, I guess not! Mary" (his voice lowered), "I never had a Christmas tree. When I was a kid there was no one who cared enough to fix one for me, not in my memory, you know."

"Oh, Mac!" said Mary, tenderly. She was continually finding out new things about her husband that made her ache for the lonely little boy he had once been.

But this time! Of course it was absurd to have a great big tree for a baby who would only blink at it; but it wasn't absurd to have a tree for Mac! It should be the tree of his dreams, to every minutest detail.

"Mac, I'd love it! I haven't had a tree for years and years. It'll be a real family Christmas this year—just for the three of us. Oh, Mac! isn't it nice to be a family at Christmas time?"

There followed busy and exciting days. And as the time passed, Mary wondered if her husband spent his entire noon hour in an orgy of shopping at the ten-cent store.

These treasures he hid carefully on the top shelf of the china closet, as if he feared the baby might get an untimely glimpse of them.

But the most important purchases were made on that day when Mary went to town. Mrs. Fisher, whose husband worked under McRitchie at the office and who owed the older man a debt of gratitude, appeared bright and early to care for the baby in Mary's absence.

the people who live in them, you know. Your house is lovely, Mrs. Fisher, especially since you got that pretty paper for the living-room."

"You didn't mind my getting it like yours?" asked the girl shyly. "Indeed, no, cried Mary. 'I felt quite flattered. Now I must go. Just look outside and see the Christmas tree. Mac's going to set it up tonight.'"

She stooped to drop a kiss on the girl's cheek. It was a cheek which six months before had held a touch of rouge. It didn't need rouge now, thought Mary, as she walked briskly toward the station.

It was a pity that Fisher's sisters considered her beneath their notice. But it was really hardest on the sisters. They had none but Fisher; and Mrs. Fisher had her husband and the baby, too.

This last fact Mary hugged jealously to herself. Mac was so dear! He always wanted to share everything he had with everyone who hadn't quite as much, especially the people in the office, whose happiness he considered his special care.

One by one, Mary had entertained the whole office force, from Mr. Corey, the dignified head of the firm, to Thomas, the elevator boy.

McRitchie met her at the station, and together they finished the purchases for the tree. Her husband was like a boy, hesitating over each shining ornament as if the fate of a nation rested on the decision between a sparkling icicle and a Christmas rose.

McRitchie spoke to his sister in the office. "Not that I really blame him," he said to Mary, "after the snappy way she treats his wife, and taking no notice whatever of the baby."

"Now, don't you dare get anything for me!" she scolded. "All right," said McRitchie, grinning joyfully. "I won't bother about you. Of course, being the whole show yourself, doesn't matter whether anyone remembers you or not. Say, I've got to get back to the office now. Do you think the crowd would notice if I kissed you?"

"Yes, I do," laughed Mary. "Don't you dare! McRitchie was rather quiet that night at supper, but his spirits rose during the process of putting up the tree. It was a lovely tree, and symmetrical as one could wish, reaching, as Mac had stipulated, just six inches from the ceiling."

"I'm dying to trim it, Mary!" he said boyishly. "Can't I put a few things on and take 'em off again?" "No," Mary replied severely; "you must string the pop corn. And why you bought all those cornucopias for sandy, when there's no one to eat it but you and me—"

"But—but they always have 'em on Christmas trees in pictures," began McRitchie uneasily. "And—well it's a pretty big tree for just one little baby, Mary."

"It isn't just for a baby," said Mary gently. "It's for a little boy who never had a Christmas tree years ago. As for the cornucopias—" She stopped abruptly as a sudden suspicion of the truth flashed into her mind. "Mac—it isn't possible—"

The dreadful certainty which was creeping over Mary was confirmed by the guilty look in her husband's face. For a moment she couldn't find her voice, and McRitchie also became strangely dumb. It was the most uncomfortable moment of their married life. Then Mary's sense of humor came to the rescue, and she said shakily:

"You might as well confess, Mac. How many people have you invited for Christmas dinner?" His face brightened suddenly, like sunshine. "Not one! On my honor, Mary, not one! Do you think I'm such a beast as to ask you to get dinner for a crowd, when you haven't got half your strength back? But I thought in—in the afternoon, you know—some of 'em might like to see the tree and—and—the baby. We could have some hot chocolate, maybe. I'll make it, Mary and wash all the dishes. You see, dear, that little Miss Spencer, from Vermont, is homesick. I caught her crying the other day; and before I thought what I was up to, I asked her to come out Christmas afternoon. I—think she's had a quarrel with Billy Hall, the bookkeeper. I asked him, too. I thought maybe they'd make it up on the train, or something. And then—"

"Well," plunged McRitchie desperately, "there's Miss Knowlton. It's the first Christmas without her mother. She was wild to come. And Mrs. Thompson's just back from the sanitarium and I thought that if—if they dropped in a while it would do her good. Their boy would love the tree, Mary, and we could have a package for him. The Taylors can't come because they're going to her mother's; but Thomas almost shot the elevator through the roof, he was so pleased when I asked him. And Mr. Corey—"

"Mr. Corey!" exploded Mary. "You don't mean you asked Mr. Corey, Mac? To our little house—on Christmas?" "Why not?" answered McRitchie innocently. "I—I'm sorrier for him than for anybody! Living with a tragedy the way he does. Why, he just ate the invitation right up, Mary. He said Christmas was the hardest day in the whole year."

"Did—did you ask the janitor?" asked Mary weakly. "Of course," Mac answered soberly, "but he said he always spent the day with his in-laws." McRitchie's eyes twinkled. "He didn't seem very enthusiastic about the in-law Christmas-mases, either. But the Fishers will come, and—oh, look here! Are you awfully disappointed, darling? If you only knew—"

"Knew what?" asked Mary, hoping her consternation was absent from her voice. "How—how awfully lonesome a lonesome Christmas is, dear. Do you know, all the years I lived in a hall bedroom no one ever asked me to Christmas dinner, or to have a glimpse of a tree, or—anything. I suppose because I didn't talk about it they thought it had somewhere to go. Once I spent the whole day in the office. It was more like home than any place I knew. Sometimes I'd wander around the streets at night, hoping some one would leave a shade up so I could steal a look at all the fun. And now, when I have so much, Mary: you—and the baby—and a home—!"

McRitchie swallowed something as he felt Mary's warm cheek against his own. "It will be splendid!" she said generously. "I'll ask Mrs. Fisher to help me make some doughnuts. No one will want much supper Christmas night. And there should be a little package for everybody on the tree, jokes—or something to make them laugh. I guess you'll have to do some more shopping, Mac. I can't get to town again, to save my life. We'll make a list now and plan out everything. We can sing carols; and we'll borrow the Fishers' phonograph and have a Virginia Reel. It's lucky we made these two rooms into one! I shan't sleep a wink tonight, I'm so excited!"

"Are you?" cried McRitchie happily. "You know—I was sort of afraid you might be disappointed—or something."

If Mary was disappointed she disguised it well; yet there were moments when she vaguely hinted to him that Mac had asked outsiders on this first Christmas with the baby, well as she understood his impulsive generosity. But these moments were few and far between. This was Mac's first Christmas tree, and she was determined to make it a success. On Christmas Eve, when the last shining bauble was in place, they fairly hugged each other in delight.

"And now," said Mary, "we must be sure we've forgotten no one. Here's the list of names, Mac, and what we have got for them. I couldn't contrive jokes for every one, but there are enough to make some fun. I haven't forgotten anybody, have I?"

McRitchie took the list, smiling delightedly as he read Mary's jokes. Then, suddenly he exclaimed: "Good land, Mary! I most forgot to tell you! I invited Fisher's sisters."

"Mary stared. "But—but what shall we do? They hardly speak to Mrs. Fisher, and—"

"I had to, Mary, truly," explained McRitchie. "When I got into the office hall tonight one of 'em was waiting for me—the one with the long nose."

Mary giggled, and McRitchie added: "You needn't laugh. It's awfully long and pointed. It always seems to get there ahead of her. Well, I saw she wanted to say something, and after a lot of beating about the bush she lugged out a package done up in ribbons and tissue paper. She asked if I'd leave it at her brother's on my way home. It was for the baby."

"Mercy!" gasped Mary in surprise. "That's what I thought," said McRitchie. "She said not to tell her sister—the one that works in the office, you know. And just then that one burst out of the door and I tucked the package under my coat. Sister had evidently been crying, and Fisher was just behind her. He started when he saw who was talking with me, and nodded like an icicle and went downstairs. He didn't wait for the elevator. I wanted to punch him; but I was sorry for him, too. He didn't know about the package. And he loves that little wife of his a good sight more than he did before he married her. But—those girls looked kind of pitiful to me. They're older than Fisher, and they adore him. So—well, I invited them; and they jumped at the chance. I guess they were feeling lonely. Can't you scare up something to give 'em, honey?"

"I may have some new handkerchiefs," said Mary dazedly. "That'll do for Caroline," said McRitchie, "but I shouldn't want to give anything to Lydia that might draw attention to her nose."

His kindly meaning was so genuine that Mary rocked with mirth. "A sachet would be almost worse," she laughed. "Well—I've a new crepe tie I'll sacrifice, though I'd planned to wear it. Oh, Mac, you are the funniest! I only hope your impulsive invitation won't spoil the party."

"It can't—on Christmas," replied McRitchie optimistically. "Come Mary, let's fill the stockings and go to bed. I'll never forgive myself if you get tired. My dear—I'm afraid your stocking will be pretty empty."

The sparkle in his eyes belied his words, and Mary smiled. "Don't worry. There won't be much in yours. We'll fill the baby's first. Doesn't it look darling, Mac, there between our two big ones?"

McRitchie lifted the tiny pink silk stocking tenderly. "To think, Mary, that such a thing belongs to us! It seems incredible. This—won't hold much, honey."

"It'll hold this rubber doll and worsted ball. Somehow, I don't think Miss McRitchie will know the difference."

"And I've got two little candy canes. We'll put those in for looks. There, Mary! Who dares to tell me that dreams don't come true?"

"Not I," said Mary as McRitchie kissed her. "Now, shall I fill your stocking while you turn your back, or—"

"You'll fill it while I fix the furnace, and then you'll scoot up stairs. This is a new job to me. I want the whole place to myself. Do you know, Mary, I feel just like a kid!"

"You won't peek at things when I'm gone then?" asked Mary sternly. "Cross my heart!" laughed McRitchie as he descended cellarward.

It was a glorious Christmas morning. A snow storm the night before had frosted everything. Miss McRitchie awoke her parents with a demand for breakfast, and ten seconds later her dad was wishing her a Merry Christmas.

Afterward (Mac hadn't allowed Mary even to start the coffee), they sat on the floor before the fireplace, the baby cuddled in her father's arms. "Don't try to tell me this kid's too young to enjoy Christmas!" exclaimed McRitchie. "She's trying to eat up all her presents."

"If you let her eat those candy canes you may regret it," replied the baby's mother. "Open your stocking, Mac. I can't wait another moment to look at mine. There's only one thing in yours, except the oranges to make it bulky, so don't be disappointed."

"And there's nothing in yours except the bulky things. Your present is in that box beside the fender. . . Oh, Mary! The idea of your getting me those fur-lined gloves! Is it possible my thrifty wife is turning out a spendthrift? I love 'em dear. Come nearer so I can hug you."

"Wait!" said Mary. She was untying a box as excitedly as a child. "Oh, Mac! Mac!" Her eyes swam with tears as she buried her face in the soft furs, furs she had wanted for so long. "Don't you talk about extravagance," she said shakily. "I know now why you wouldn't get an overcoat. And your old one's so—so shabby—"

"It is not. And even if it was, think how the other men will envy me my stunning wife. Put 'em on, dear—quick! Are they what you want? You can change them if—"

"Change them?" echoed Mary indignantly. "Mac, I feel like a duchess. I shall want to wear them every minute! I shall go to bed in them! Oh, Mac!"

The first of McRitchie's guests, the Fishers, arrived at three o'clock, armed with a baby, a blossoming azalea plant for Mary, and what McRitchie called a monument of doughnuts, since Mrs. Fisher had insisted on making every one. Mary had made sugar cookies and gingerbread; a huge cadoron of chocolate was on the stove, and there was grape juice and lemonade for those who wanted to cool off. Mary, seeing the Fishers turn in at the gate, hoped devoutly that Fisher's sisters would be the last arrivals. In a crowd things would be less awkward.

"Merry Christmas!" welcomed McRitchie, throwing wide the door. "Fisher, you dump those doughnuts in the kitchen. Mary's up stairs, Mrs. Fisher. I believe she wants you. She's going to rope you into pouring chocolate when the guests arrive."

This had been an inspiration on Mary's part. She was going to show those haughty sisters that Mrs. Fisher could do things gracefully. She had telephoned that morning to ask as a favor that Mrs. Fisher wear her dark blue taffeta. It was her most becoming dress, and Mary was bound that she should look her best.

"Come up," she called over the banister. "Baby's asleep. I hope she'll sleep an hour longer, for Mac's sure to keep her up outrageously. I know her habits will be in ruins by night; but we can't help it. Christmas comes but once a year and—Oh, Mrs. Fisher, how sweet your baby looks in that little jacket! And her hair is curling! I told you it would curl. Oh, I wish the Taylors were coming with all their children! This is an awfully grown-up Christmas party; just your baby and ours, and little Harold Thompson. Thomas is only fourteen, but I suppose he'd resent being called a child."

"Mr. Fisher's sister Lydia made the little jacket," said Mrs. Fisher proudly, "and Caroline sent that cunning pin. She gave it to Mr. Fisher in the office. I thought I'd let her wear them both. It—it made Mr. Fisher so happy to have them do it."

"Here—let me carry the baby down for you. I can't keep away from her, she looks so dear." Inwardly Mary was exulting. Fisher's sisters could not resist that baby! For the first time she felt glad of Mac's impulsive invitation. "Merry Christmas!" Mrs. McRitchie! "said Fisher joyously. "Say—that's some tree! And look, honey" (turning to his wife), "at that little stocking. Mac left it up for the crowd to see."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said Mary. "The one thing this party lacked was children. Merry Christmas, Thomas! You know where to find the gingerbread. Hello, Miss Knowlton! I'll kiss you when I get near enough. Merry Christmas, Miss Spencer! You don't know how glad we are to see you. And this is Billy Hall, of course. You see, I've heard about you even if we've never met. And you two are Mr. Fisher's sisters. It's splendid that you could come. Mr. Fisher, why do you find your wife and ask her to look after things while I show these people where to leave their wraps? Merry Christmas, Mr. Corey! Can you steer a double-runner? Those who want to coast may keep their things on, and the rest of you may come up stairs."

Two hours later, when the coasting party was over and the whole crowd had made the acquaintance of Miss McRitchie, Mac turned on the lights and proudly displayed his tree. "There's not a thing on it for any of you Taylors," mourned Mary, "but there's pop corn galore, and candy—"

"Don't you worry," said Mrs. Taylor cheerfully. "The children have had one tree already, and Junior doesn't want anything but the three bright pennies that were in his stocking. He's been hanging onto them all day. I believe he thinks they're gold. As for George and me—"

"Mary," interrupted McRitchie, "where's some tissue paper? I've a present here for Taylor, and nothing to do it up in."

"You see!" laughed Mrs. Taylor. "Junior!"—with a dash for her youngest—"don't eat the pop corn off the tree. It's for decoration."

"No, it isn't," contradicted McRitchie. "You can have a whole string in a moment, sonny. Thanks, Mary. Is everybody here? We might as well distribute these costly gifts."

"Present," called Fisher from the corner. "Fire ahead, Mac."

Yes, everyone was there, thought Mary, as she looked round upon the group. In Mac's big chair sat Lydia Fisher, the Fisher baby on her lap. Fisher himself was sitting between his wife and his younger sister, brazenly holding a hand of each, and looking, somehow, more manly than of old. Mac had been right when he urged Fisher to buy a place in the country and settle down. Responsibility, and perhaps the trouble he had been through, were obliterating the weak lines about his mouth. Billy Hall stood just where he could look down on Miss Spencer's smooth brown hair, without appearing to; and Mr. Corey was holding Mary's baby with all the ease of a veteran grandfather. The three Thompsons sat very close together on the davenport, as if they could bear no further separation after the year Mrs. Thompson had spent in a sanitarium. Miss Knowlton's plain, good-natured face was wreathed in smiles; and Thomas—the elevator was fairly beaming. It was a happy crowd, thought Mary, as she sat down on the floor among the four young Taylors.

The fun began when McRitchie presented Taylor with a pencil attached to a phenomenally long string. This brought laughter, because Taylor was always losing pencils in the office and borrowing of someone else. Thomas blushed with pleasure and embarrassment at the gift of a safety razor, while Fisher immediately offered to show him how to use it. Miss Knowlton received a cake of scented soap, because she was constantly regretting the lack of that article in the office coat room. And Mr. Corey, who was an inveterate smoker, but who always advised everybody else to leave the weed alone, was presented with a box of chocolate cigars, marked "Warranted harmless."

But it was Fisher who, after the gifts were all distributed, brought down the house by presenting McRitchie with a beribboned package which proved to be a copy of "How to be Happy Though Married." Everyone shouted, and there was renewed rejoicing when Mac declared he didn't need it, and passed it on to Billy Hall, which for some obscure reason brought the color into Miss Spencer's face.

Afterward, Mrs. Fisher presided at the chocolate pot, and everybody squeezed into the dining room; that is, everyone but Mr. Corey. Miss McRitchie had dropped asleep in Mr. Corey's arms, so he refused to move; and Mary, seeing that the baby was filling a long-felt want, did not insist.

Later, Jerry Thompson, who could really sing, started some carols, and the old carols that everybody knows, and they all joined in. But the crowning fun of the day was the Virginia Reel. No one knew that it was a whistling word from Mary which caused Mr. Corey to invite Mrs. Fisher to head the reel with him. Mary herself was at the other end with Thomas, whose past life had not included dancing, but whose Irish feet and wit were to cause him no uneasiness.

It was a glorious reel. Everyone danced but Fisher's sister Lydia, who refused to lay down her precious burden to join the fun. Then came a stampede for lemonade; and when every tumbler and teacup in the house was filled, it was Mr. Corey who raised his glass (it was a jelly tumbler) and cried: "Here's to the McRitchies—God bless 'em!" The cheer that followed threatened to wake the sleeping babies.

They were alone at last—the McRitchies. They stood looking down upon their daughter, slumbering sweetly in a corner of the davenport, unmindful that her first party was just over.

"It was a wonderful Christmas tree, daughter," said McRitchie, "and I was proud of you. I only hope that Mother isn't all worn out."

"I'm not," said Mary. "And even if I were, Mac, I shouldn't care, after seeing Mrs. Fisher's face when Fisher told her his sisters would spend the night in her little guest-room. That wouldn't have happened if we hadn't had the party."

"And when I opened the door to the coat closet, Mary, and discovered Billy Hall with his arms around the little Spencer girl—"

gracefully, but was too late. Miss Rose was the color of the red, red rose, my dear, but Billy was very bold. He said, 'Close the door, please. We don't require a light.'"

"That's lovely," said Mary. "Mac dear, we must go up to bed. Take down the baby's stocking and—why, look! There's something in it! It's stuffed full!"

"And heavy!" exclaimed McRitchie, lifting it wonderingly. "And here's a card. Come here on my knee, Mary, and see what's up. That's Mr. Corey's writing. It says—'McRitchie caught his breath—' it says, 'A nest egg for little Miss McRitchie, from the derelicts and others to whom her parents have given a happy Christmas.'"

Mac looked speechlessly at Mary as he emptied the little stocking into her lap. Quarters, dimes, gold pieces, three bank notes, even Junior Taylor's precious Christmas pennies, were among the hoard. Then Mac unwrapped a scrap of paper, revealing another gold piece and a penciled scrawl.

Mr. McRitchie, I want to give this to your baby. It's the best I have. Mr. Corey gave it to me today, but I haven't any use for it, truly. I never had a family, and no one ever asked me anywhere but you. I didn't know they were such things as Christmases like this.

Your truly, THOMAS. "Oh, dear!" staid Mary chokingly. "Oh, dear!"

"For five cents," said McRitchie huskily. "I could weep. This is a real nest egg, Mary. We'll add to it every year, and when that sleephead is ready to go to college—"

McRitchie stopped abruptly, and became absorbed in the treasure on Mary's lap. "Mr. Corey must have given the gold pieces," he said slowly; "but whoever gave those bank notes could not afford it. I bet one was from Miss Knowlton—but—we'll never know. Maybe that's the beauty of it, dear. And that poor kid, Thomas—"

McRitchie's glasses suddenly needed wiping, and there came a silence before Mary spoke. "Well, dear," she said, "I think it's up to us to see that Thomas makes something of his life. He shan't spend all his days taking people from the first floor to the tenth of the Corey Building. We'll manage somehow to give the boy his chance."

"Oh, Mac, what a dear world it is!—so full of lovely opportunities to lend a hand! When I look at that little stocking and think what it meant to me of some of them to be so generous, I'm just ashamed. I—I wish I were more like you, Mac. I've been so selfish. I wanted dreadfully to have the day alone with you and baby. And now—"

"You dear goose!" cried McRitchie tenderly, "don't you know that's what I wanted, too?"

And those words were all that Mary needed to make her Christmas the perfect day.—By Christine Whiting Farmer, in The American Magazine.

Animals and Traps.

Of all the animals that fall victims to the trap, the snare and other devices of man, the fox, wolf and coyote are the most alert and wary when it comes to being cautious of approaching anything set for their capture. Bears, with all their shrewdness and keen instincts of self-preservation are nevertheless gullible and will blunder into the waiting jaws of a trap or trip a deadfall with no apparent misgivings of danger. Members of the cat family are stupid and easily duped by a tempting bait or titbit. The squirrel, muskrat, beaver, coon, skunk, marten, and weasel take little or no cognizance of the traps whose gaping jaws await them. I know of no mouse, slides and water-courses.

The lives of the hunted are beset with numberless perils. Sharp-witted, keen-sighted and ever alert though the wild creatures may be, they are outmatched by the ingenious and tricky devices of their cruel human overlords.

Guard Your Horse Against Black-Water! Guard your horse against black-water, generally the result of over-feeding when he stands idle on a Sunday or holiday. See that he has a good bran mash the night before. Especially when two rest days come together, cut down his grain materially and give him a little exercise if only by walking him. Black-water, so commonly fatal, comes from over-feeding and too little exercise.

Attacks occur almost always soon after the horse leaves the stable. Symptoms: Sweating, knuckling at fetlocks, either one or both, staggering of hind parts. Stop horse at once, unharness, blanket warmly, notify owner and call ambulance. Do not try to walk animal to nearby stable, and it is better for horse not to lie down. If he cannot keep his feet put blanket under him.

Once is Sufficient. A traveler tells how a pioneer once settled an old discussion. One day the teller of the story took refuge with a pioneer in the mountains during a thunderstorm. The two were standing in the open door of the cabin, when suddenly the lightning struck a tree near by. So terrific was the bolt that the tree appeared to have been dynamited. That brought to the mind of the narrator the old saying that lightning never strikes twice in the same place. He turned to the old fellow and asked: "Why is it, Tom, that lightning never strikes twice in the same place?" "Well, it don't need to!" was the response.

The Efficient Lovers.

"I find that my husband has been having the office boy call me up every day and mumble words of endearment." "I wonder you didn't find it out sooner!" "Well, you see I've had the cook answer all calls from the office."—Cartoons Magazine.