

# CHRISTMAS LIKE IT USED TO BE

**C**HRISTMAS like it used to be! That's the thing that would gladden me. Kith and kin from far and near joining in the Christmas cheer.

Oh, the laughing girls and boys! Oh, the feasting and the joys! Wouldn't it be good to see Christmas like it used to be?

Christmas like it used to be— Snow a-bending bush and tree, Bells a-jingling down the lane; Cousins John and Jim and Jane, Sue and Kate and all the rest Dressed-up in their Sunday best, Coming to that world of gloom— Christmas like it used to be.

Christmas like it used to be— Been a long, long time since we Wished (when Santa Claus should come), You a doll and I a drum, You a book and I a sled Strong and swift and painted red; Oh that day of jubilee! Christmas like it used to be.

Christmas like it used to be. It is still as glad and free, And as fair and full of truth, To the clearer eyes of youth. Could we gladly glimpse it through Eyes our children's children do In their joy-time we would see Christmas like it used to be. —Nixon Waterman, in Elliott's Magazine.

# A Christmas Wedding

**E**VERYBODY knew that old Mrs. Moon was "plumb set" against Tom White. They also knew that Tom was determined to marry Clarissy Moon. The views of Clarissy herself were locked in the breast of that maiden and no one, not even her grandmother, could draw them forth. She listened to the old lady's diatribes against Tom, just as she listened to Tom's ardent wooing and said nothing.

Mrs. Moon, her unmarried daughter and Clarissy lived in a tiny cabin at the foot of the Little Backbone, a very pleasant place in summer, though that season was brief enough in a region which is described by its denizens as having "nine months winter and three months cool weather" each year. In winter the cabin was not a pleasant place of abode. Not only did the snow drift high about it, but the playful winds entered through the crevices which Mrs. Moon was always intending to have filled up and never did. It was lonely in winter, too; not even the most persistent suitor could find his way to it frequently when the trail was obliterated by snow drifts and when night came early and suddenly, too, in the shade of the mountains.

Clarissy was thinking of these things, as she stood at the cabin door one afternoon in the middle of December. It was rather a cool place for meditations, but her Aunt Phoebe was on what her mother was wont to call a "high," and any place was preferable to her immediate vicinity at such a time. Aunt Phoebe's temper, never very sweet, had ill withstood the strain of prolonged spinsterhood, and she vented her maidenly disappointment on the nearest objects, her mother and Clarissy, who were quite innocent in the matter.

"Seems if I can't please her, no-how," Clarissy was saying to herself, "I can't bear that air bothersome Tom White, but he's better'n' what she is, anyhow. Sposn' I was t' give him er sign t' come 'n' talk t' me er-while!" As she hesitated she heard Aunt Phoebe's shrill tones still raised to danger pitch in the cabin. Drawing off the red handkerchief which was knotted coquettishly about her dark hair, she ran down the path and drawing down a branch of the young oak which stood alone, she deftly tied the streamer to it. The handkerchief was Tom's gift and he had begged her to use it as a signal whenever she desired his company. It was the first time she had made use of it, and as she tied it she was assuring herself that she "didn't care er mite fer that great, awkward fellow," but, in spite of that fact, her cheeks rivalled the handkerchief in color. Yielding to a sudden impulse she scurried into the cabin regardless of Aunt Phoebe's tongue.

"I'll peek out'n the window an' watch fer him," she thought, "an' I'll let him cool his heels a bit waitin', before I go out. Anyhow, I ain't promised nothin' by tying that handkercher up there."

Clarissy had the sharp ears of the mountaineer and soon she heard steps coming along the trail and finally into the clearing, but she never moved, save to see that her grandmother was dozing in the chimney corner and Aunt Phoebe absorbed with her quilt pieces. The latter had passed from the active to the passive stage of her ebullitions and was now sulking.

The steps approached nearer and nearer.

"Ef that old stupid ain't comin' in yere, after all," Clarissy thought, "Well, granny'll send him off with a flea in his ear if he does, that's all!" and she assumed an air of elaborate indifference.

"Hello, thar!" called a masculine voice scarcely audible to Clarissy for the beating of her heart. She made no move and the call was repeated.

"Ain't ye got no manners, t' let company wait out there that a way," her aunt said, sharply, and poor Clarissy went flying to the door.

There stood, not Tom, but Amos Purdy, a near neighbor, as neighbors go in a thinly settled country, and a widower of two months' standing who had dropped in once or twice of late. He entered now with a sheepish air which to anyone less preoccupied than Clarissy would have proved that he was on courting bent. He took a chair near the door and where he shut out Clarissy's view of the window.

"Right cold day," he ventured, addressing Aunt Phoebe.

"Well, I guess ye can't 'spect much else, with Christmas only two weeks off," was the ungracious reply.

"Yep, that's so," the visitor responded. Then he relapsed into an embarrassed silence, during which he, with apparent unconsciousness, stared Clarissy out of countenance.

"Ole Zeb White killed er bear last Chuesday," was his next remark, still addressed to Aunt Phoebe. "Biggest one this year, he says. Them Whites is awful liars, though, an' I can't promise ef he tells th' truth er not."

"Them Whites is a bad stock," Mrs. Moon broke in, suddenly; "one of 'em filled our ole cow full of shot when I was a gal, pretendin' like he thought she was er bear. An' all the satisfaction pap got was puttin' er load o' shot into him, and pretendin' like he thought he was er buck!" She chuckled at the remembrance.

"That air Tom White's goin' t' see Tiny Koontz," remarked the guest. "I seen 'em walkin' last Sunday. Reckon they'll be gittin' married soon. Seems s'f they'd be a lot of marryin' round yere before long. Er man ain' worth much nowadays 'less he's got a wife."

Clarissy had turned pale at the bit of news. She rose now, on pretense of getting more wood for the fire and went outside. Aunt Phoebe had suddenly become gracious and the sound of her voice followed the girl as she ran along the trail to the tree which held her token.

"He ain't goin' t' think I want 'im;" she panted, he can go t' his Tiny

Moontz received most graciously. Aunt Phoebe's eyes shone, but she kept them on the ground in maidenly modesty and was very reserved and coy in her manner. It never occurred to either her mother or herself that Clarissy was the object of Amos' evident intentions.

"I plum got t' have somebody t' keep house fer me soon," the guest remarked. "I ain't much of a cook myself, an' there's lots o' good meat spoilin' at th' cabin now fer want o' a woman t' look after it. I was er good husband' t' my woman while she was livin'," he concluded.

"So ye was, Amos," Mrs. Moon agreed, eagerly; "I always said so." She was overjoyed at the idea of giving up her daughter; she thought delightedly of the quiet life she could lead with only Clarissy. "An', now that air Tom White's out'n th' way, I'll git t' keep her a long time," she reasoned, complacently, as she listened to the visitor's account of what he intended to do for his wife when he married again.

"An' talkin' 'bout marryin'; I guess Tom White an' Tiny Koontz'll be gittin' married a Christmas. I seen her with a red handkercher he give her th' las' time I was over there," he went on. It seemed to Clarissy that she would die as she sat there. It was bad enough to tell herself that Tom had given her handkerchief to Tiny, but to hear it as a certainty was worse yet. She made no sign, but when the talk had once more veered around to the apparently inexhaustible subject of Amos' second wife she slipped softly out of the cabin and wandered about in the snow like some wild thing with a mortal hurt. As she was returning an hour later she found Amos patiently awaiting her at the hollow tree.

"I put a lot o' nuts in there and some yellow apples," he announced. "Ef ye don't like red apples ye mus' like yellow ones. Say, Clarissy, sposn' you'n me git married a Christmas, like what Tom White an' Tilly Koontz is goin' t' do!"

Clarissy never could remember rightly what she said, but Amos construed her answer into consent, and, promising to come with the preacher at seven o'clock on Christmas evening, he went his way.

It was dark when Clarissy came into the cabin, and her grandmother and



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and were in such a state of excitement that they failed to notice her pale cheeks and wild eyes. For they had decided that Amos certainly meant to marry Phoebe and that preparations had better be commenced at once.

"Because widowers don't want t' wait er minute," Mrs. Moon said, sagely; "they makes up their minds quick, an' they expects other folks t' do th' same. I wouldn't be a mite surprised to see 'im come in with th' preacher a Christmas, like what ole Sam Smith did when he got married th' fourth time. Sairy she wasn' 'spectin' 'em, but she thought she better take 'im when she could git 'im."

Nothing was said to Clarissy, who was regarded as a child by her elders, and she, in her intense preoccupation, failed to notice that the preparations for Christmas were on a much more elaborate scale than usual. She was in a sort of a daze, sometimes determined to marry Amos in order to convince Tom that she cared nothing for him; at others, determined to die before she did such a thing.

Fortunately for her, Aunt Phoebe wanted a quantity of ground pine and red berries with which to adorn the cabin, and as Clarissy knew the sheltered spots where they were likely to be found she was sent out in quest of them. In her anxiety to be alone she made the quest a prolonged one. Amos wisely absented himself from the cabin, a fact which puzzled Mrs. Moon and her daughter not a little. Clarissy gave this fact not a thought; she was quite in ignorance of the fact that Amos was supposed to be the victim of her aunt's bow and spear, and was only thankful to have him out of the way while she wrestled with her problem.

All too soon, it was Christmas eve, and Clarissy went forth for a last load of pine, with which the cabin was already gay. Late in the afternoon, she sat down a moment with her load, still pondering upon the subject which never left her mind. She was in no hurry to return home, for her aunt had gone to the store at the cross roads to make a few purchases and she knew that her grandmother would be dozing and unconscious of the flight of time.

As she sat there, Clarissy let the big tears roll unchecked down her cheeks. It seemed to her now that Tom had left her for another, he had

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"Amos Purdy tole ye that?"

"Yes, he did; and ye needn't to deny it—I don't care!" All the girl's fierce pride was in arms. "I—I only put th' red handkercher in 'im t' tree that day because—"

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