

THE LITTLE FELLER'S STOCKING



H. IT'S Christmas Eve, and moonlight, and the Christmas air is chill, and the frosty Christmas holly shines and sparkles on the hill, and the Christmas sleigh bells jingle, and the Christmas laughter rings, and the last stray shoppers hurry, takin' home the Christmas things; and up yonder in the attic there's a little trundle bed where there's Christmas dreams a-dancin' through a sleepy, curly head, and it's "Merry Christmas," Mary, once ag'in fer me and you, with the little feller's stockin' hangin' up beside the flue.

"Tisn't silk, that little stockin', and it isn't much fer show, and the darns are pretty plenty round about the heel and toe, and its color's kinder faded, and it's sorter worn and old, but it really is surprisin' what a lot of love 'twill hold; and the little hand that hung it by the chimney there along has a grip upon our heartstrings that is mighty firm and strong; so, old Santy, don't forget it, though it isn't fine and new, that plain little worsted stockin' hangin' up beside the flue.

And the crops may fall, and leave us with our plans all gone ter smash, and the mortgage may hang heavy, and the bills use up the cash, but whenever comes the season, Jest so long's we've got a dime, there'll be somethin' in that stockin'—won't there, Mary?—every time, and if, in amongst our sunshine, there's a shower or two of rain, why, we'll find it, bravely smilin', and we'll try not ter complain long as Christmas comes and finds us here together, me and you, with the little feller's stockin' hangin' up beside the flue.

—Joe Lincoln, in Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post. Copyright by Curtis Publishing Co.

FELICIA AND THE KITTENS

A Christmas Story by Edyth Ellerbeck



FELICIA hesitated. She certainly had no right to enter his rooms. The cats were his, and he could do just what he liked with them; no one could prevent him, and the cats themselves were helpless. Helpless? Yes, indeed, poor little things! And they were so soft and downy. Felicia had caught a glimpse of them as she went down the hall. It may be necessary to science that some creatures should suffer, but surely it was cruel to sacrifice this whole family of six Angoras—the devoted mother and her five worshiped, nestling babies.

The Professor was out. Felicia had opened the door of his room and peeped in. The alluring picture of domestic felicity that met her eyes decided her. Madam, the Angora mother, lay purring, sleepily on a soft rug before the hearth, while five little bundles of soft down snuffled and wriggled against her maternal side. In a moment Felicia was on the rug beside them, her dark locks mingling with the white fur, five pink noses rubbing in a searching, puzzled way over her smooth cheek. For five minutes she gave herself up to this quiet ecstasy; then, puss, resenting this prolonged interruption of her family privacy, gently but firmly showed her disapproval.

Felicia sat up and pushed back the rumpled hair from her face; then she looked around her at Prof. Max Eger's apartments. Just what a professor's rooms should be, she thought—books, books with atrocious titles everywhere, along with a profusion of very ancient-looking curios. This next was his sleeping room, and beyond, Felicia saw with a shudder, was the laboratory. What a horrible collection of skulls, bottles, test-tubes, alcoholic specimens and infernal machines it was! And to-morrow these little darlings might repose on that shelf in bottles marked "Felis domestica,"—Felicia felt uncomfortable—"and I have some doubt of the propriety of this."

He began to unwrap the largest of his bundles. Felicia watched him, mystified. Why should he consult her? The string was knotted, and dignified Prof. Eger was soon on his knees at his task. Now Felicia was distinctly amused. He was beside her on the rug before the fire, and as she looked down she could see where the dampness had curled his hair into soft rings on his neck and on his temples. How mother would have loved to run her fingers through the tumbled locks! Felicia conquered the temptation.

"You like cats?"

The question was abrupt. Felicia started guiltily. Did he know?

"I adore them!" The tone was defiant.

"Then you will understand why this appealed to me." And he held up his purchase for inspection. It was a wicker basket, thickly padded and lined exquisitely with blue satin, ruffles of white lace and dainty ribbon bows.

For a cat! Then he did not mean to—Felicia almost groaned.

"You are surprised, nich wahr, that I should like a cat so well. This cat was my mother's, and I have just received her. I wish to make her and her wee family comfortable, and when I saw this in a window I was delighted. It must have been made specially for little kittens; see, so soft and downy."

"For kittens!" Felicia smiled to herself. It was a baby basket.

How she had wronged him! Her

deserted lips and cheeks until they were as white as the kittens she caressed. For Felicia was afraid of the professor; afraid of his voice, whether harsh or tender, afraid of the dark gray eyes that could be both cold and commanding. When she finally had to leave the kittens she stowed them away in the depths of her laundry-basket, locked her door, and went away feeling as if she had left behind her some dark and terrible secret.

Christmas eve in a newspaper office is like any other evening in the year, except that there is twice as much work on hand. It was past midnight when Felicia went up the steps of her boarding-house. A mixture of rain and snow was falling, and the wind was sweeping around corners with a velocity that wrapped Felicia's skirts about her ankles like a mummy-cloth, and threatened to carry off her umbrella. While she was struggling on the doorstep a firm hand grasped the refractory umbrella and a deep masculine voice at her elbow said:

"Permit me, Mees Fay." Once in awhile the Professor's accept was decided.

"Thank you. Isn't this weather beastly?"

"It is very bad weather."

Felicia always felt rebuked for her slang by his measured words.

"Why, you look like Santa Claus!" she exclaimed, when they got in the hall where it was light. Prof. Eger threw back his head and laughed. Felicia had never noted before what a boyish ring his laugh had.

"I do feel like old Kris Kringle to-night," he said, laying down the bundles that had suggested the likeness and approaching the open fireplace, where Felicia stood warming her numb fingers. "All I need are the sleigh, reindeer and the ability to get down chimneys neatly to make me start out on my rounds."

Felicia was amazed. Was this jolly, animated boy really the petrified Professor? Here was a man who considered Christ a myth, and who consequently could not logically believe in celebrating Christmas, now loaded down with packages that bore an unmistakable holiday air, and seemingly entering into the spirit of Christmas with the enthusiasm of a boy. Moreover, he had steadily avoided her for the past two months—ever since—since that night—and here he was chatting



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to her as if there had never been an interruption of their old tete-a-tetes before the hall fire. She felt pretty sure that this time he would be more careful about expressing his disapproval of journalism for women. At any rate, she would let sleeping dogs lie. Then she remembered the cats.

"If you haven't the reindeer and sleigh, at any rate you shall find slipping down chimneys much easier than the real Santa," she said, hurriedly, sinking into a chair. "You haven't his horizontal development, you know."

"That's so, I haven't." He glanced down at his rather slender figure and laughed again—a warm, happy laugh. Then his eyes fell upon his bundles, and he sobered.

"Miss Fay, I wish to consult with you." A fresh surprise. "You see, there is only one lady, one grown-up lady, in the world whom I would dare present with a Christmas gift"—Felicia felt uncomfortable—"and I have some doubt of the propriety of this."

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actica seemed utterly inexcusable now. He would be angry with her for supposing him capable of such a heinous crime, and now that he had begun to treat her as she longed to have him she could not endure the idea of coldness from him. Now he was gathering up his bundles and preparing to go up the stairs, and she leaned her head on her hand and did not say a word. She todded good-night to him, and then looked down into the fire. She knew he would come down again. And he did, anxiously and hurriedly, peering into the dark corners of the landing.

She watched him nervously until she caught his eye.

"You are looking for your kittens?" she asked.

"Yes; why?"

"You'll not find them here."

He questioned her with a surprised glance.

"I took them," she answered.

"Away?"

"Not very far; into my room."

"But I do not understand." Prof. Eger moved nearer to her.

"Neither do I now. I thought you wanted them for specimens. Scientific sacrifices, you know. And they looked so helpless, and—I love kittens."

She felt like a naughty girl confessing some mischief. She saw his eyes darken.

"Oh, I know it was wrong of me to jump at such a hasty conclusion, but some one told me how you once applied electricity to a dog and made it suffer horribly, and I was afraid I couldn't bear—"

She stopped. His mouth was closed in the straight line she dreaded.

"I will get them," she said, and started impetuously up the stairs. But she was very tired, and coming from the cold outside to the warm room had made her dizzy. She caught at the banister for assistance. Prof. Eger put his hand very gently under her elbow, and in silence they walked to her room.

"Will you get the basket?" she suggested.

He brought it to her in her sitting-room and waited while she put the kittens into it. Felicia felt very small and mean. She almost wished that she were blind like the kittens, that she might not see how dark and angry his eyes had grown.

"You don't look much like a cheerful Santa Claus now," she said, trying to make her tone light, but her lips and hands were trembling.

"No; and the feeling is all gone, too," he replied, gloomily.

"I am sorry. I would not have taken them if I had dreamed you cared so much."

He interrupted her, fiercely. "That is not what I care about! It hurts me that my interest in science should have made me seem to you a brute! You misjudged me once before, but I hoped I had made you understand me better!"

"I do, now," she returned, quickly. "Forgive me this time," very pleadingly, "and I will try to be a good girl; and she smiled whimsically up at him.

Max Eger's face changed. Felicia looked down quickly and laid her hand caressingly on one little creature in the basket.

"I might have known you could not harm a thing so helpless and white and little," she said.

Prof. Eger suddenly placed his hand over hers and gathered hand and kitten in a close grasp.

"It is little and white and—loveable," he said, intensely, "and if you wish to prove that you do not think me cruel and heartless you will give it to me and let me care for it as tenderly as I long to."

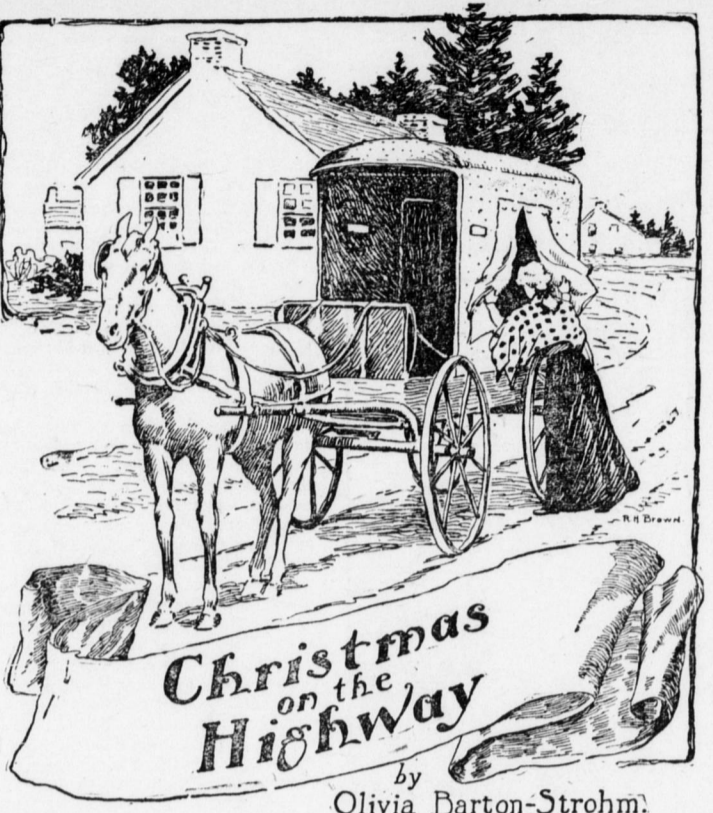
Felicia tried to slip her hand away, but he held it tightly in his. It rested there; it trembled there. The kitten squirmed uneasily; he could not understand his position in this matter. No wonder; he was still blind.

But in the morning it was Christmas, the kittens were nine days old, and they began to see things.—Woman's Home Companion.

Pass Them On!

"All who joy would win Must share it—Happiness was born a twin."

You have no money for Christmas presents? Then pass on the things you have—the books you have read, the unused picture, the duplicate present, the scarf or gloves you do not need, the musical instrument you have stored away, the Christmas cards packed in desk or boxes—anything by which you may enrich or comfort or please others without impoverishing yourself. These things have yielded you their best flavor; let them carry to others friendship's rich aroma. Pass them on!—Sue Ocas.



MANY and varied were the greetings given this Christmas morning to Miss Matilda Scott as her mail-wagon bumped over the ruts of Cole county. The children, with bright expectant faces, waited at every post-box and gave a Merry Christmas in exchange for her bundle of mail. Old Ben Todd, whose three-score years exempted him from active service on the farm, stood by the little bird-house which served as post-box at the corner of his field and, presenting her with an ear of red popcorn, wished her Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, with a smile on his old face, as brown and wrinkled as the apples that had lain on the ground since harvest. But he, like the children, was cheerful, expectant, even gay; it mocked her mood of bitter disappointment. More to her taste was the greeting of the Widow Brown, a forlorn-looking dame, whose sleek hair, pulled violently back from her face, seemed, more than the cold, responsible for her purple nose. As she took the mail from Matilda's hand she remarked with a rueful shake of her head: "A green Christmas makes a fat graveyard." And the girl sighed in answer and drove on with anything but a holiday air. For there was a package in her bag, which, light and small, made her heart heavy as lead. It was addressed to a certain Miss Fay Barney, and the hand was as familiar as it was dear. Had she not often admired the heavy shading, and practiced with loving emulation the curves in the capital letters? A long and tender missive was hers every week in this same handwriting, and yet—Christmas day was here, the mail all collected and no remembrance.

Instead, there was a ring in this package, a diamond ring, so the open receipt read, addressed to her dearest friend, and, such was the clumsy playfulness of fate, she must be the one to deliver it.

Suddenly a voice startled her. "Merry Christmas," it said, and a strange head divided the curtains at the side of the wagon.

At the same instant the wheels came to a full stop, and Matilda's eyes, from which astonishment and fright had dried the tears, saw another stranger at the horse's head. Both were seedy and shabby, and both wore slouch hats drawn closely over their eyes.

"Merry Christmas and Happy New Year," continued the first speaker. "Can't you be civil to a feller on a holiday? No—no, that won't go; drop it," and he leveled a revolver in Matilda's face. For she was unaccustomed to the use of her hands, and had bungled in an attempt to slip it from its place. Pale, but determined, and with all her wits now fully about her, Matilda stared silently into the gleaming barrel. The man at the horse's head chuckled in open admiration, then warned his companion: "Hurry up; somebody might come." The other, still pointing his weapon at the little mail-carrier, urged: "Step lively, miss; some o' them things in that there sack 'll come in real handy. Christmas comes but once a year, you know."

Like lightning Matilda's brain sought out for some expedient. To gain time she demanded: "Do you know the penalty for—"

"Yep, get a move," was the laconic interruption, made still more effective by a threatening click of the trigger.

All this time Matilda had kept the ring tightly clasped in her hand. By great good fortune she was near the end of her route. There were only a few packages left, and this ring was, she felt sure, by far the most valuable. If she could only keep this from the men; and like a flash came an ugly thought—a temptation before which

she trembled and was afraid. Why should she keep it from them? Why risk her life to save it? Have not they as much right to it as that other? But horror at the tempter's voice gave her new courage, and, as if addressing conscience rather than the thief, she spoke with sudden vigor:

"You are wicked; you are outraging this holy day." Then as the man's careless shrug recalled her to his more practical view:

"There is nothing of value in the sack," she said. "A few cheap presents to the children in the country; are you fools to risk life and freedom for this trash? See."

As she bent forward, the right hand, which held the ring, dropped to her side, and the folds of her dress dulled the sound of the falling box. On the floor it lay, unobserved by the intruder, who now bent over the disclosed treasures. There were no registered letters, and the array of parcels was scant, tied, for the most part, with unpracticed fingers, and evidently of little value. Cupidity died out of the man's eyes as he saw the meager assortment, and he gave a disaffected grunt.

"No good, pard—plated spoons and celluloid work boxes; I can see it from the outside."

"Well, take 'em anyway," advised the other from his position as sentry.

But the leader was more cautious. First possessing himself of Matilda's revolver, he left her, pale, trembling, but outwardly calm, while he joined his companion. His words were plain to her strained ears: "What's the use? The swag is no good—it would only be in the way."

There was no answer while, for a moment, both men stood listening.

"Sure; it's wheels, pard—let's skeedaddle."

The leader came quickly back to the wagon. "We've concluded not to bother you, seein' as it's a holiday," he said, politely. "Much obliged for this," he added, flourishing her little pearl-handled pistol. "I'll take it as a remembrance of the season. Merry Christmas!" And, lifting his hat as jauntily as if it had been a brand-new tile, he followed his comrade, who had in the meantime jumped the fence and disappeared in the underbrush beyond.

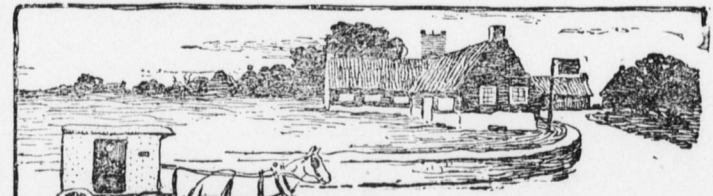
Miss Barney threw a cape hastily about her shoulders.

"Matilda is so late, mother, and I'm impatient for the mail. I'll go and meet her," she said; and she tripped out of the house and down the sodden path to the gate. Still no sign of the mail.

From the gate post she lifted the iron hoop, stubborn with frost, and, slipping through the gate, peered down the road. At the moment around the turn came the wagon, swinging this way and that as the horses trotted along, the lines dangling limp over the dashboard.

"Where is Matilda?" thought Miss Barney, with a sudden sinking of the heart. For the rosy face of the post-mistress invariably peeped out, and she usually waved a cheery greeting. And then a panic seized the waiting girl, as the horse came to a full stop at the accustomed post, and still no sign of its driver. She flew to the wagon and peeped in. In a little heap on the floor, lay Matilda, her eyes closed, lips open, her whole face white as the worsted hood she wore. Where it had fallen from her limp fingers, lay a small box addressed to Miss Fay Barney. All this the girl noticed, then she flew for help, and Matilda was promptly carried into the house, and eudled in a big chair by a blazing fire. The warmth, the cheer revived her.

But the new glow in her veins, the sparkle in her eyes, came from a fire within, kindled by Miss Barney's words: "He addressed the ring to me, 'Tiddy, but of course it is for you. I was to give it to you Christmas day, 'with his love,' he said, 'and best wishes for a Merry Christmas.'"



CHRISTMAS CHEER IN RHYME.

Christmas Chimes.
Hark! The Christmas chimes ring clear
Through the frosty midnight air.
Chant they news of wondrous cheer
Of the birth of God's great heir.
Kling, clang, ding, dong, clang, kling!
And the seraphs forget, as they listen, to sing.

Christ is come this wondrous night
As he came so long ago.
Stars swing low to glimpse the sight;
Earth grows warm with magic glow.
Kling, clang, ding, dong, clang, kling!
God's wide realm to its utmost ring
Reechoes the tones that the glad chimes
sing.

All the world grows young to-night,
For the Christ is come again.
Breaks the dawn of love and light;
Sounds the word "good will to men."
Kling, clang, ding, dong, clang, kling!
The bells chime out, and the cherubs swing
On the big bronze clappers—a wondrous
thing—
In the bellies of earth, while the great
kings ring.

Kling, clang, ding, dong, clang, kling!
—Lizzie D. Curtis, in People's Home Journal.

The Bachelor's Christmas.
Nay; spare your pity, thoughtless one;
I have my share of joy.
Although, like you, I miss the fun
I had when but a boy.

Let all make merry as they will—
Though I may sit apart;
There is for me a pleasure still,
A Christmas in my heart.

I am not lonely, dreaming here,
For I, in fancy, see
A home where there is Christmas cheer
And children 'round a tree.

I hear their shouts of glad surprise;
I note their laugh rings true,
That happiness beams in their eyes,
And I am happy, too.

I know just where St. Nick has paid
An unexpected call—
A novel, where they were afraid
He would not come at all.

Though nothing tangible be mine,
There is no need to grieve;
I have a joy almost divine—
In giving I receive.

—Chicago Evening Post.

Christmas.
Rejoice! for Christmas Eve is here once
more,
With all its charm of mirth and Eastern
lore.

Although you see no star not seen before,
Nor laden Magi wending by your door;
Although two thousand years have almost
passed,
Since in the fields, that dim and distant
night,
The shepherds saw the herald-angel
bright,
And mystic music heard from heights
dovecast;

Pile up the fire, spread forth the festal
board,
Dig out the roadway from the drifted
snow,
And bring in holly, bay and mistletoe,
That we may keep the birthday of our
Lord.

Rejoice! I trust Joy, Peace and Love will
be
Among the guests who share the feast with
thee.

—Sarah Wilson, in Chambers' Journal.

An Old Aunt's Gift.
Many long, long years ago
Upon a Christmas day,
Among a wealth of gifts received
A tiny package lay.

It was so very, very small
It scarce had caught my eye;
So modest that, the truth to tell,
I near had passed it by.

A scented pin-ball lay within
The wrapper coarse and brown;
And with it in a shaking script,
The lines a-running down,
A little, neatly folded note
"Dear liddle, though the gift's small,
Ye ken I love ye well."

Ah, that was long, long years ago,
I cannot now recall
A single costly gift that lay
Beside that scented ball.

The very givers, I must own,
Are gone from out my mind;
They gave to me, and I return
The compliment in kind.

—T. W. Burgess, in Good Housekeeping.

The Paternal Hope.
Some day old Santa Claus perchance
Will get the time to take a glance
At one poor person who, as yet,
He's somehow managed to forget.
He never forgets the girls and boys
With choice confections and with toys,
The family's fair ones all admire
His taste in feminine attire.

And all are merry, all give one,
Who finds reward in duty done,
And tries to think it but a joke
That he is now completely "broke."

But some day maybe even he
A Christmas glad surprise may see;
And while the rest with gay refrain
Note what their various hoes contain,
He'll find that Santa Claus at last
A look upon his needs has cast.
And when his pocketbook he shakes
As one who from bad dreams awakes
He'll see, with an ecstatic thrill,
Another twenty-dollar bill.

—Washington Star.

My Christmas Gift.
My Christmas gift—or properly,
The gift I would were given to me—
Reveals such good within my soul,
As proves me mad beyond control—
A victim of fond fantasy.

For I would ask monopoly
Of fairest gift the earth may see;
Earth's greatest treasure would enroll
My Christmas Gift.

I claim not in the least degree
To merit what I ask of thee.
Know thou art distant as the pole;
That I but play the motley role;
Yet, tell me, Doris, will you be
My Christmas Gift?

—Truman Roberts Andrews, in Chicago
Inter Ocean.

The Christmas Blessing.
Beside the fire this wintry night,
My farces sweet confessing;
Your red, sweet lips—your eyes of light
My Christmas blessing!

That face—of earthly faces fair—
To me, sweetheart, the fairest;
A little wreath of golden hair
Of gifts the dearest!

And still this thought my soul uplifts
To holdest endeavor;
Your love, your life, my greatest gifts,
Sweetheart, forever.

—F. L. S., in Atlanta Constitution.

Unfortunate.
The boy will hang his stocking up,
And hope for some small gift.
A toy, a book, a pretty cup,
Will serve all gloom to lift.

But when he's grown—this life is rough—
The custom is forgot.
A stocking isn't big enough,
He wants a house and lot.

—Washington Star.

The Sinner's Greeting.
Thru-out all the shops, from end to end,
We seek rare tokens for each friend;
But, with the gift, still fond and true
Old wishes shine as good as new.

—Chicago Daily Record.