

Miss Betty's Christmas Gift

By HOPE DARING

"See! To-day is—yes, it is the last two weeks from to-morrow!"

Betty Dane, spinster, stood before the calendar which hung on her sitting-room wall. She was a plump little woman, upon whose face a faded smile still lingered. Her brown hair was shabby, and the brown hair brush from her brow was threaded with silver.

"Christmas!" she repeated, as she shook her rocking chair. "I suppose a Christian woman ought not to say anything, but I dread the day," and Betty wiped her eyes.

"I ought to be ashamed, and I am," she went on, rocking to and fro, "but I can't help it. I have had a most awful never to have a Christmas. I am a spinster, and I have no family. Now I'm spinning because I'm an old maid, never saw the man I'd think of, not a word, anyway," the dull pink in her cheeks was burned to crimson. "I haven't been in this part of the country, and I am so shy and bashful that I never lose to people. Sometimes I envy the women, I mean, who get the nice, dainty gifts that love prompts." She sat a few minutes in silence, then she heard her half-articulate murmur:

"I was poor—I mean needy, for I am not rich—the church would send me

A little later she stood by the dresser, the shades lowered, and her purchases set out before her. After her usual fashion Miss Betty communed with herself: "You were foolish, Betty Dane, to pay a dollar and a half for a china cup and saucer when you have more than two dozen of them now. But it is a beauty," touching the fragile porcelain with a caressing finger, "and there's nothing nicer to give a woman than china. There are two handkerchiefs. They are the sheerest, softest linen, and the embroidery is beautiful. I am not so sure about the book. The girl at the store said 'The Blue Flower' was one of the best-selling books of the season. But I did something worse than buying these things."

Miss Betty paused. Her eyes sparkled, and she trembled with excitement.

"You ordered two dozen red carnations sent up to yourself on Christmas eve. Yes, you did, Betty Dane. Well, I suppose you had a right to, only it's too bad there is no one else."

With a sigh she commenced her preparations for supper. The momentary depression passed as her mind dwelt upon her day's outing. When she sat down to her supper Miss Betty was at peace with all the world.

The table was spread with snowy linen, glistening silver and pretty china. There was a quaint, old-fashioned silver teapot of fragrant hyson, bread, a pat of yellow butter, creamed potatoes, thin slices of pink ham, a dish of black-berry jam, and a plate of rich dark fruit cake.

The windows of the dining-room faced the side street. In her abstraction Miss Betty had forgotten to lower the shades.

kerchiefs she had purchased for herself.

"I suppose it is foolish to send a woman in her circumstances such a nice one," she said, in a shame-faced way to Florence, "but women like—well, they like pretty gifts on Christmas."

Florence bent her sunny head and kissed Miss Betty. "It is dear instead of foolish. Why, Miss Betty, that is the Christmas spirit, giving the best."

The day before Christmas was clear and cold. There was no snow, but the earth lay brown and bare in the grasp of the frost king. Just as the shades of evening were beginning to fall Miss Betty emerged from the church where she had been all the afternoon.

"Come home to supper in an hour, dear," she called back to Florence, who stood in the doorway, her sunny head outlined against a mass of dusky evergreens. Florence nodded a smiling assent, and Miss Betty hurried on. She stopped for the mail and found a card from the express office. Calling there she received the package from the florist.

"I am so glad I ordered the carnations," Miss Dane said to herself. "Florence will be delighted with them. In the morning she shall take a few over to Miss Bliss, who is sick. I know Florence will be pleased with the cup and saucer. It seems almost providential that I bought it, for she does love pretty china. And I'm glad I have that other handkerchief for our minister's wife. Mrs. Perry is a real lady, and she don't have any too many of the pretty things women like."

Miss Betty was home by that time. In a trice she had the stoves open and the kettle on. As she took the scarlet carnations from the box and inhaled their spicy fragrance, a gurgling laugh broke from her lips.

"What a dunce you were, Betty Dane, to go and buy yourself Christmas presents! Why, I have given them all away but the book, and I wish there were some one to whom I could give that. I have learned that the blessedness of Christmas is in giving, not in getting."

She soon had the coffee and the water for the oysters on the stove. As she brought a dish of salad from the pantry she heard the door bell ring.

Miss Dane went forward and opened the door. A man's voice asked:

"Is Miss Florence Nesbit in?"

"Miss Nesbit will be here in a few minutes. Will you walk in and wait for her?"

"Indeed I will, ma'am. I am the child's uncle, and I have just come home from a long stay abroad to find that my poor sister lost all her money before her death. The idea of Florence teaching school when I've more money than—Eh! Why, you are Betty Dane!"

Miss Betty looked up into the bronzed bearded face.

"Yes, Jack; I am Betty Dane!"

The man came a step nearer. "Betty, I was a hot-headed fool in the old days. You were right to throw me over and not to answer my letter, but it hurt. It hurts yet. Betty, for I have never loved any other woman."

The little spinster had grown very pale. Should she speak? It cost her a great effort to put aside her fatal shyness, but she did it.

"I never knew there was a letter, Jack; it did not reach me. I have been true to your memory all these years."

Florence came five minutes later. She found Miss Betty in the arms of her uncle, Jack Patterson. It took some time to explain matters. The delight of the girl almost equalled that of the elderly lover.

It was while they were at supper that Miss Betty looked up to say:

"Oh! I am so glad I bought that book! You don't understand, Jack, but I've a Christmas present ready for you."

Mr. Patterson's eyes twinkled.

"That is fine. I am sorry, Betty, that I have nothing to offer you, nothing but love."

Glad tears dimmed Miss Betty's sight. Her heart's hunger was satisfied. The perfect human gift—the image of the Gift that brought Christmas to the world—was hers.—Washington Home Magazine.

HIS CHRISTMAS "NIXIE."

The Experience of a Post Office Clerk at the Holiday Season.

The "Nixie" clerk—the one to whom goes all mail with insufficient or illegible addresses—took from his desk in a quiet corner of the post office a tiny, rumpled envelope.

"I never came across a Nixie that was addressed to anyone I knew except this one. Last Christmas the letters began to pile in as usual, addressed to Santa Claus. I reckon I get a hundred every year. On Christmas eve I was working late, and was very sad and lonely here in my corner. There was a great rush at the other windows of the office, and the mails were loaded with Christmas gifts and greetings. A merry crowd rushed through the corridors and laughter sounded all around, but a great shadow of sorrow rested over me, and my eyes burned as I bent over my work. Finally the messenger brought me the last few Nixies of the day, and laid them on my desk. I took up the first one mechanically. Attached to it was a note from Carrier No. 34:

"This was given me by a little girl at 302 Walnut street."

"My blood tingled when I read it, for that was my own home. The envelope was a small one, addressed to 'Santa Claus, North Pole.' I recognized my own little girl's cramped writing. I thought I had a right to open it, as I was her Santa Claus, although she did not know it. This is the letter."

He carefully spread it out, and read it up so it could be read.

"Dear Santa Claus: We are very sad at our home this year, and I don't want you to bring me anything. Little Charlie, my brother, went up to Heaven last week, and all I want you to do when you come to my house is to take his toys to him. I will leave them in the corner by the chimney, his hobby-horse, and train, and everything. He will be lost up in Heaven without them, specially his horse. He always enjoys riding it so much. So you just take them to him, and you needn't mind leaving anything to me. If you could give papa something that would make him stop crying all the time, it would be the best you could do for me. I hear him tell mamma that only eternity could cure him. Could you give him some of that? Be sure to take the things to Charlie, and I will be your good little girl. MARIAN."

In the silence that followed the reading of the letter the Nixie clerk put the tiny envelope back in his desk, says the Youth's Companion. When he did speak there was no sadness in his voice.

"Well, Santa Claus came and took the hobby-horse and the train and everything. If he did not take them to Charlie, he did the next best thing; he left them with a little fellow with a twisted leg at the Children's hospital. Whether old Santa Claus had any 'eternity' to give away or not, I do not know; but I do know that a little child gave me some faith that answered just as well."



(Reprinted from the Woman's Home Companion, by Permission.)

The New Year raised her slender hand
For all the months to pass.
The prettiest little schoolma'am she
That ever looked into a glass,
Or waited, frowning anxiously,
To hear a little class.

"My dears," she said, "good Father Time,
Our well-beloved trustee,
Has come to visit us to-day,
And much would like to hear you say
Your lessons, just to see
If you have well-instructed been,
As little Months should be."
March nudged September; August
Sighed,
And April hid her face and cried,
The timid creature!
"I'm sure you'll do your very best.
Come, January; then the rest
May follow," said the teacher.

And thick, the leaves came fluttering down;
And March chewed gum, I grieve to say,
And whistled in the rudest way;
And little rosy June and May
Just laughed and dimpled and looked sweet,
And danced about on airy feet,
And could not tell where daisies grew,
Or why the violets' eyes are blue!



AUGUST.

November bit an apple red,
And vowed, although he cocked his head
With manner brisk and perky
(You'll scarce believe me, but 'tis so),
What pie might be he did not know,
And never heard of turkey!
Then little Feb. began to jeer,
But though behind his rosy ear
A nice quill pen he carried,
He could not make a rhyme for "dove,"
Or spell a little word like "love;"
And while perplexed he tarried,
Last in the line December came,
And could not tell Kriss Kringle's name.



NOVEMBER AND FEBRUARY.

And August came, with glowing face,
And such a pretty dress on!

She, blushing, tried to tell how high
The mountains are that touch the sky;
How wide the fields, how deep the sea,
The lineage of every bumblebee;
Where four-leaved clovers—deary me!
She yawned until she could not see;
So warm, and, oh, so sleepy she!
How could she say her lesson?
Back, nodding to her seat she crept,
And drooped her curly head and slept.

Then, with a little bashful pause,
Sweet April came, and cried because
She couldn't quite remember
How many days to her belong.
Or where the bluebird learned his song!
December prompted, which was wrong!
But he was grieved, the gentle lad,
To see his little playmate sad;

And in her place, quite trim and neat,
With braided hair and slipped feet,
Came studious young September.
She knew her lesson like a book,
And said it off with serious look.
'Twas all of sunshine, cloud and haze,
And golden hours and shortening days,
And sheaves of gathered knowledge;
She spoke in French, of course, with ease,
In Hebrew and in Japanese,
In Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese;

At this the little Months, amazed,
Wide-eyed upon the teacher gazed;
Then to their places flying;
Picked up their books and went to work,
With not a pause for quip or quirk;
Their fingers in their ears, that so
No sound might reach them, to and fro
They rocked and buzzed until the room
Was like an orchard full of bloom
And thick with bees. The teacher smiled,
And Father Time was much beguiled—
He laughed instead of sighing;
And off they went and shut the door,
And left the little Months once more
To learn their tasks unruled;
And there they rocked and buzzed until,
For aught I know, they're buzzing still.
I hope they are, for, truly,
If they should fall again I fear
It would so grieve the little Year;
She'd be a very blue Year;
And as for us—for you and me—
With half the little Months in doubt
Just as to what they were about,
And all the holidays left out,
As you can very plainly see,
My little dears, 'twould hardly be
A very Happy New Year!



MAY AND JUNE.

And "ologies" and "ographies"—
As much as any college
She seemed to know; but, bold and spry,
Ere she had done, with flashing eye
And martial air, out stepped July,
And pompously began to try
To say the "Declaration."
Before the opening words were out
He stopped and gave a sudden shout,
Flung up his cap into the air,
And yelled till 'twas enough to scare
Old Time himself; and from her chair
The teacher sprang with startled stare
And frown of consternation.

The little Months, delighted, clapped;
The Year for order sternly rapped,
And when the room was still once more,
Called out the children as before.

Alas, their wits were scattered!
They quite forgot they were at school;
They could not say a single rule,
Nor seemed to think it mattered.
October tore his book till, brown

Or even—really 'twas a shame!—
The mission of a stocking!
The teacher turned away, a tear
Upon her cheek; did ever Year
Know anything so shocking!
"Alas, dear Father Time!" she cried,
"I fear you're scarcely satisfied!
But, as I hope you've noted,
The children are so young! And then
I must remind you once again,
They've all just been promoted,
And are not used as yet, you see,
In this new century class to be.
I'm sure they'll study harder now!"
"And if they don't"—upon his brow
A frown—"why, I can tell them,"
Said Father Time, "they'll have to go!
We cannot be disgraced, you know,
And though, of course, 'twill sadly mar
The beauty of our Calendar



SEPTEMBER.

So many Months to skip, if they
Can't learn their lessons, welladay,
We simply must expel them!"

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Wide-eyed upon the teacher gazed;
Then to their places flying;
Picked up their books and went to work,
With not a pause for quip or quirk;
Their fingers in their ears, that so
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CHRISTMAS CHARM.

The chief charm of Christmas is its simplicity. It is a festival that appeals to everyone, because everyone can understand it. A genuine fellowship pervades our common life—a fellowship whose source is our common share in the gift of the world's greatest life, which was given to the whole world.—A. R. Kimball.



"YES, JACK, I AM BETTY DANE."

a basket Christmas morning. Well, I'm thankful that I don't need that, and I always give something to help fill the baskets as well as money for the Sunday school Christmas tree. Mrs. Deacon Green will send me a mince pie. She has done it every Christmas for ten years, and I always send her a plate of my crullers. I will send Mrs. Carpenter a chicken and a few other things; she will return an elaborate note of thanks, every line beginning with a capital letter. There's Niece Tillie. She never fails to send me the new baby's picture. On the rare years when there is no new baby she sends me a card. Such things are all well enough, but they don't mean—"

Miss Betty stopped, rose, and walked aimlessly into the adjoining dining-room. After a few moments she returned to her former position. A determined look was upon her face.

"I'll do it. Why shouldn't I? The day after to-morrow I'll go to the city, and I will buy dainty little things, such presents as a woman ought to have at Christmas. I will pretend to myself that they mean the love I am so slow learning to live without."

On the morning of the second day following Miss Dane left the village on the nine o'clock train. She did not return until four.

As she walked briskly homeward from the depot, her arms filled with packages, she was overtaken by Mrs. Hall.

"Why, lands sakes, Miss Betty! You don't mean to say as you've been to the city, do you? I didn't know as you was calculatin' on goin'!"

"Well, I have been there," Miss Dane answered, a little defiantly.

"What'd you go for? You've got a new hat already, and your cloak was new last winter."

"I went to do some shopping."

"Land sakes! What'd you buy?"

Miss Betty threw back her head, her brown eyes staring straight ahead of her.

"I bought Christmas gifts. Good-by, Mrs. Hall," and, turning a corner, the half-frightened spinster hurried down a street that led directly to her own door.

Mrs. Hall looked after the plump little figure, baffled curiosity depicted on her face.

"Miss Betty is altogether too close-mouthed. It ain't becomin' to a woman as lives alone."

Miss Dane soon reached her own home. It was fast growing dark, and as she entered the sitting-room the gleam of the coal stove seemed like a welcome.

"I'm glad to be back, but I am not sorry I went," she thought as she carefully laid her parcels on the bed. "It is going to be a cold night. I'll start the fires in the dining-room and kitchen before I put these things away."

She glanced that way nervously when the door bell rang.

When she opened the hall door the light from the lamp in her hand fell upon a fair girlish face framed round with sunny hair. Miss Betty recognized her caller as one of the teachers from the village school.

"Good evening, Miss Nesbit. Will you walk in?"

Florence Nesbit followed the mistress of the house to the sitting-room. As soon as she was within the room the girl began speaking:

"Oh, Miss Dane, my errand is a strange one! You know I am a stranger here, and I have been so homesick! I haven't any home—my mother went away from me a year ago. I looked in your window as I walked by. You looked so cozy and homelike, I just came in to ask you if I would board me."

"Board you! Why, I never thought of taking boarders. What put it into your head?"

Florence's lips quivered. "Just because you were alone, like myself. I wouldn't be any trouble and—oh, Miss Dane, I could be so happy here with you!"

"Where do you board?"

"With Mrs. Elmer. There is to be a vacation of two weeks at the holidays, and I must stay there."

Miss Dane recalled what she knew of Mrs. Elmer's housekeeping and shuddered.

"You poor child! Of course you can come here. There is the other bedroom downstairs, always warm, and the place opposite me at table. Why, Miss Nesbit, I believe they have been waiting for you."

Florence threw both arms round the other's neck. "I can't thank you; there are no words to tell you what it means to me. I walked by your window three times before I could get courage enough to knock! Oh, you don't know how glad I am! It is like a beautiful Christmas present."

Miss Betty started, remembering her own longing for Christmas remembrances. Would not this girl's presence in the house be to her, in her loneliness, a gift that would partake of the Christmas spirit?

The days went by quickly. Much to Miss Betty's surprise she found herself busy with preparations for the coming holiday season.

There were the children in Florence's room. Miss Betty became almost as enthusiastic regarding the surprise planned for them as was the girl teacher. Then Miss Betty not only gave her usual contribution of money for the Sunday school tree, but she promised to go with Florence and help trim it. The basket for the church poor was filled to overflowing. To the one for Mrs. Carpenter Miss Betty added one of the hand-

kerchiefs she had purchased for herself.

"I suppose it is foolish to send a woman in her circumstances such a nice one," she said, in a shame-faced way to Florence, "but women like—well, they like pretty gifts on Christmas."

Florence bent her sunny head and kissed Miss Betty. "It is dear instead of foolish. Why, Miss Betty, that is the Christmas spirit, giving the best."

The day before Christmas was clear and cold. There was no snow, but the earth lay brown and bare in the grasp of the frost king. Just as the shades of evening were beginning to fall Miss Betty emerged from the church where she had been all the afternoon.

"Come home to supper in an hour, dear," she called back to Florence, who stood in the doorway, her sunny head outlined against a mass of dusky evergreens. Florence nodded a smiling assent, and Miss Betty hurried on. She stopped for the mail and found a card from the express office. Calling there she received the package from the florist.

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Miss Betty was home by that time. In a trice she had the stoves open and the kettle on. As she took the scarlet carnations from the box and inhaled their spicy fragrance, a gurgling laugh broke from her lips.

"What a dunce you were, Betty Dane, to go and buy yourself Christmas presents! Why, I have given them all away but the book, and I wish there were some one to whom I could give that. I have learned that the blessedness of Christmas is in giving, not in getting."

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"Is Miss Florence Nesbit in?"

"Miss Nesbit will be here in a few minutes. Will you walk in and wait for her?"

"Indeed I will, ma'am. I am the child's uncle, and I have just come home from a long stay abroad to find that my poor sister lost all her money before her death. The idea of Florence teaching school when I've more money than—Eh! Why, you are Betty Dane!"

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"Yes, Jack; I am Betty Dane!"

The man came a step nearer. "Betty, I was a hot-headed fool in the old days. You were right to throw me over and not to answer my letter, but it hurt. It hurts yet. Betty, for I have never loved any other woman."

The little spinster had grown very pale. Should she speak? It cost her a great effort to put aside her fatal shyness, but she did it.

"I never knew there was a letter, Jack; it did not reach me. I have been true to your memory all these years."

Florence came five minutes later. She found Miss Betty in the arms of her uncle, Jack Patterson. It took some time to explain matters. The delight of the girl almost equalled that of the elderly lover.

It was while they were at supper that Miss Betty looked up to say:

"Oh! I am so glad I bought that book! You don't understand, Jack, but I've a Christmas present ready for you."

Mr. Patterson's eyes twinkled.

"That is fine. I am sorry, Betty, that I have nothing to offer you, nothing but love."

Glad tears dimmed Miss Betty's sight. Her heart's hunger was satisfied. The perfect human gift—the image of the Gift that brought Christmas to the world—was hers.—Washington Home Magazine.

USUAL MISFITS.



Pat Lady—Going to hang up your stockings, are you? What do you want in it?

Midget—I'm lookin' for an automobile. What are you?

Fat Lady—Oh, I'm hoping for a diamond ring.—Chicago Daily News.

FIXING CHRISTMAS DAY.

Why the Holiday Is Always Celebrated on the Twenty-Fifth of December.

There are no definite allusions in the writings of any of the disciples of Christ as to the date of His birth, nor has there ever been produced proof of any character as to the exact period in the year when Christ was born. There are, very true, occasional references to the event in the Scriptures, indicating that the nativity occurred in the winter season.

The institution of the anniversary dates back to the second century of Christendom, and it has been since uniformly celebrated by nearly all branches of the Christian church with appropriate rejoicings and ceremonies. The frequent, and somewhat heated, controversies, however, relative to the date of Christ's birth early in the fourth century led Pope Julius I. to order a thorough investigation of the subject by the learned theologians and historians of that period, which resulted in an agreement upon December 25, and that decision seemed to have so settled all disputes that that date was universally accepted except by the Greek church, says the American Queen. While this date was never changed, the reckoning of it is made according to the Gregorian calendar, which was adopted in the latter part of the sixteenth century, and upon which computations of time in nearly all civilized nations have since rested.

Christmas Adam.

Mamma—You have addressed your letter "Mr. Santa Claus Adam." Why did you put the Adam there, dear? That isn't Santa Claus' name.

Bobbie—Well, who is the Christmas Adam, then?

"What Christmas Adam? I never heard of one."

"There's a Christmas Eve, and there ought to be a Christmas Adam, I should think."—Kansas City Journal.

Thoughtful.

"How kind of papa!"

"What's he sent?"

"A quantity of presents for baby, and on each are directions what to do if he makes himself sick with it! And here are the medicines, too!"—Brooklyn Life.