

A Christmas Angel

by Donald Allen

A pretty young girl, well wrapped up against the cold night, and a half-grown boy carrying a large basket, were crossing the street when an automobile swung suddenly around the corner. To save themselves, the girl and the boy had to make a sudden retreat, and in so doing they dropped the basket and it was crushed under the wheels.

There were four young men in the automobile. They were singing and laughing and enjoying the license of Christmas eve. They jeered at the boy for dropping the basket, and they raised their hats in mock courtesy to the girl.

"Miss, I didn't go for to do it!" apologized the boy, who had been hired as a messenger, and who had been told that the basket contained food for poor families in the tenement beyond.

"I know—I know," replied the girl. "It wasn't your fault, but I'm so sorry. The sick woman and her children won't have the food and toys now, but I have a little change in my purse and I can still do something. You needn't go any farther; it is just across the street. Good-night to you."

"Missy," said the boy as she was about to move away, "you gave me a dime to carry the basket. Here it is. Give it to some kid up there who wants a mouth-organ. Oh, you must take it, and if you say so I'll wait here till them fellers come back and hit 'em with a rock."

"But how about your Christmas, Jimmy?" the girl asked.

"Oh, I can skirmish around, same as I always do. Night to you, and I hope that sick woman will get better."

The girl crossed the street and entered the hallway of the tenement and climbed to the third floor. Three children were waiting for her on the landing, and uttered glad shouts at sight of her. She had been there before and had promised them that she would come on Christmas eve. Within the poverty-stricken rooms called home a sick woman was lying on a bed. She smiled and was glad at sight of the girl.

She told them the incident of the auto and the loss of the basket, and then she counted over her scanty change and went downstairs to the nearest grocery. It was little she could buy. There would be Christmas eating, but no feast. The little stockings with their holes would be hung, but there would be no Santa Claus to fill them. The children stood with their faces to the wall and wept, and the girl held the hand of the sick woman and shed tears.

As they sat thus the door opened and let in the cold air from the hall. An old man stood outside. He was ragged and unkempt, and hunger had given him the face of a wolf. There was not a soft line in it. Peering out of his own door on the same floor, he had seen the girl come bearing packages. There was bread on the table before him.

The children cried out as they saw the look on the old man's face, and the girl rose up and barred his way.

"I want bread and I'll have it!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"But you can't take it from this sick woman and these helpless children."

"I tell you I'm hungry—I want bread! Why didn't you come to me first? I am old; there is no work for me, but I will not die like a dog. Stand aside! You will not? Then—"

He seized her by the arms and there was a struggle. The children were shouting for help, and the man-wolf was nearing the coveted loaves when some one entered and seized him and whirled him about and thrust him out into the hall, shutting the door on his snarls. The children ceased their cries and the girl looked up to see a young man standing in the center of the room, gazing around him.

"It is your fault!" she half-sobbed. "You were in the auto that almost ran me down. You laughed in my face as you raised your hat. But for you there would have been plenty of food and some presents here."

"Yes, I was one of them," the man answered. "It is Christmas eve, and we were out for a lark. Yes, I looked straight into your eyes, and in five minutes I was ashamed of myself. I came back and hunted until I found the boy. When he told me that you were a Christmas angel, and that he had given his last dime to help out, I was still more ashamed of myself and of my friends. Can you forgive me?"

"Yes, it is Christmas eve," she said in a voice hardly above a whisper as she seemed to listen to the merry shouts from the street. "There are tens of thousands of persons on the streets in merry mood, but what have we here? What have we in every room in this old rookery? Were you thinking of it when you crushed the basket I was bringing?—when you smiled into my face?"

"I was a brute," he answered. "I was bringing my little mite," she

continued in a deprecatory way. "I have a widowed mother to support, and I could not spare much. I was weeks saving up to buy what was in that basket. You are rich, perhaps. It would have been nothing to you."

The children stood hushed and awed, and the sick woman closed her eyes and wondered at it all. The young man and the girl looked straight into each other's eyes as they talked, and her words seemed to cut him like the lash of a whip. When there had been silence for a minute, and the old man-wolf was heard snarling as he paced the hall, the young man said:

"I am ashamed and sorry. Let that answer for the moment. Will you come with me?"

And without the slightest fear in her mind, and with a smile at the mother and her children, she arose. Intuition told her what was in the stranger's thoughts. He carried the bread and butter out into the hall and placed them in the hands of the fierce-faced old man. He fell to devouring them as if he had, indeed, been a wolf of the forest, and when another tenant came out and asked for crumbs he was frightened away by snarls and growls.

"Now come," said the young man. Up one street and down another for an hour, they went. Wines and jellies and fruits, they bought for the woman whose ailment was starvation more than disease—food to last for days and days. They selected, next, gifts and new stockings to receive them—whatever money could buy and the two could bundle into their arms, they picked up. And all the time, though neither one knew the name of the other, they talked and laughed and were like children in their delight.

The return to the tenement was like the arrival of a lord and his lady. There was something for other children, too, and a policeman, pausing in



"I Have a Widowed Mother to Support, and I Could Not Spare Much."

the lower hall, heard such shouts of pleasure and so much childish laughter that he glanced up the dimly-lighted stairs and said to himself:

"Old Santa must have changed his route this year and come among the poor."

And at a late hour, when the Christmas angel and her guardian walked downstairs together and she was put into a cab for home, they still talked and still laughed, nor did they know that they would ever meet again. She had lashed him for his heartlessness. She was hoping that he would see that she had forgiven him. He had been almost brutal. He was hoping that she had seen his better side. No cards—no names.

"Good-night," they said at parting; and when he raised his hat she knew that it was in courtesy instead of irony.

Days later, when the girl visited the old tenement again, the sick woman and her children had vanished, but had left word behind for her. The man-wolf was still there, but instead of growling and showing his teeth, he smiled at her. In another place, with light and air and food and comforts in abundance, the girl found the mother and her little ones. It was a glad surprise, and to the look of inquiry the widow, no longer in bed, whispered:

"He did it! He did it all!"

One evening, when long weeks had passed, the young man was waiting at the home of the girl when she came from her place of daily employment.

"I have been talking with the mother," he said, quietly. "She says I may call. What does the Christmas Angel say?"

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A Simple Gift.

When one wishes to send little more than a remembrance at Christmas yet does not care to use cards, a novelty that can be made by the girl who paints is a match scratcher in the form of a card.

Have an oblong background of colored cardboard, and on it paint a quaint figure cut from fine emery paper in soft tones of brown, heightened by gay touches in the costume. It is then cut out and pasted on the back, which may be left plain or painted with scenery to correspond.

Sometimes these scratchers are done in entirely monochrome. Children with huge muffs, picturesque colonial or Grouse figures, or quaint Dutch peasants can be copied in colors.

Christmas for Two

by Clarissa Mackie



The crowded east-bound train disgorged two passengers at the little red station and then thundered on its busy way.

A long stage, rusty and ramshackle, backed up to the platform and the driver's lusty "All aboard!" brought the girl and the young man hurrying into its dismal depths.

"I s'pose you're for Ferguson's place," remarked the driver as he turned the horses skillfully in the narrow space.

"Yes," said the man rather gruffly. "I thought there would be a carriage to meet us."

"So there has—so there has! Been prancing around her for two or three hours, but I guess they got disgusted; anyways, they left word for me to stay here till the train came in and if anyone was bound for their place to bring 'em along. The train's four hours late as it is, and I don't suppose them servants want to be kept away from their Christmas dinner."

"How long will it take us?" asked the girl.

"A matter of an hour or so," was the unconcerned reply.

The girl stifled an exclamation of annoyance and she drew still farther away from the vicinity of the morose young man. The latter turned up the astrakhan collar of his overcoat and dropped his chin into its depths.

They had started forth that morning so joyfully—Polly Standish and Derrick Gordon—newly engaged and blissfully happy. Things had gone wrong from the very beginning. Polly's aunt, who was to accompany them, or the short stay at Ferguson's hospitable country house, had failed to put in an appearance, and consequently had been left behind. That was vexatious. Then the train had been delayed by snow drifts and during the four hours' wait in the cold train Polly and Derrick had quarreled.

"Nice Christmas day," volunteered the stage driver in his queer, cracked voice, as they squeaked over the hard-packed snow.

"Very!" returned Derrick, sarcastically.

There was a long silence as the strong white horses plodded up the steep incline of the mountain. Here the snowfall had been light and only served to dust the dark green pines and hemlocks with a white powder.

They had reached the top of a steep incline and were rolling evenly over a level stretch when suddenly, without an instant's warning, the stage crashed down and precipitated the passengers and luggage in an ignominious heap under the driver's seat.

"Are you hurt?" asked Derrick coldly, as he assisted Polly to her feet.

"No, thank you," she said stiffly, as she peered out from the curtained window.

The driver was soothing the frightened horses and his nut-cracker face was knotted anxiously.

"Lost a wheel, by gorry!" he said, ruefully. "Smashed it to flinders!"

Derrick had crawled out and stood beside him.

"This is the dickens of a mess—how are we to get to Ferguson's place? Are we near a telephone—or where are we anyway?"

Luke Sanders scratched his ear thoughtfully. "I took a short road across—'tain't the usual route to Ferguson's and we ain't near nobody! Ten miles from anywhere. The only thing to do is for me to ride one of the horses into the village and send back another wagon. You and the young lady better get out and move about a bit and keep warm. You might build a fire—there's plenty of fuel." He was unharassing the horses as he spoke.

"Why can't we all ride—or better still, Miss Standish can ride one of them and I will walk beside her. We will get there much quicker and can keep warm and have something to eat. We're almost starved." Derrick glanced quickly at the stage where Polly's pale face was framed in the darkened opening.

"Can't nobody ride Bob-white. A jumpin' kangaroo ain't nothin' to that horse if anybody gits on his back! Just you stay here and make yourselves comfortable and warm and I'll be back in the course of an hour or so." He tethered the ferocious Bob-white to a tree by the roadside. Then from the space under his seat in the stage he drew forth a basket covered with a white cloth.

"This here basket has got a Christmas dinner inside—my wife fixed it up for old Miss Benton down to the ford but I can stop and get another basketful for the old lady. You two are welcome to it." He clambered on to the waiting horse and smiled as his horny hand closed around the generous bank-note that Derrick slipped from his pocket.

"Merry Christmas to you and your wife, sir," he called back over his shoulder before he disappeared around a turn in the road.

Derrick did not dare to look at Polly

Standish; he knew she was sitting proud and defiant with a contemptuous curl on her red lip. Instead, he stared away through the aisles of trees, made into golden paths by the later afternoon sun.

It was too bad that Christmas should have turned out so disastrously for them both. There was to be a jolly party at the Fergusons and in the evening a Christmas dance. Perhaps Ralph Ferguson would send forth another conveyance for them—but it would go by that other road. They were marooned on the short cut.

A glimpse of Polly's woeful face brought a revulsion of feeling. Poor little Polly was cold and tired and he was acting like a brute.

Without a word Derrick approached a small clearing in the middle of which grew a young pine tree.

It was the work of minutes to gather an armful of wood and broken branches and to clear a space of snow. Presently a bright fire crackled cheerily and then Derrick brought cushions and blankets from the stage and prepared a place for Polly.

"Come, Miss Standish," he said politely. "If you will draw near the fire we will have some dinner."

"I'm not hungry," said Polly, holding her hands to the blaze.

"At least you will sit down and wrap this blanket around you—so," insisted Derrick.

"Thank you," said Polly without enthusiasm.

From the blanket Derrick produced a large plate loaded with a generous Christmas dinner. There were turkey and cranberry sauce, stuffing and mashed potatoes and gravy, turnips and celery, and a whole mince pie.

Derrick managed to convey half of the dinner more or less daintily to the plate and this he placed before Polly. "Eat," he said sternly. "You will need the nourishment before we reach Ferguson's."

"I am not a child," said Polly resentfully.

Derrick did not reply. He fell to his own dinner with a vigorous appetite and it was not until he turned to give



"This is Our Christmas Tree, Polly Dear," said Derrick, in a Low Tone.

Polly some mince pie that he discovered that the weary girl had eaten a little of the dinner and then fallen asleep in her nest of blankets.

For a long time he watched the changing lights on her sweet face as the branches tossed in the wind; then, softly he arose and approached the little pine tree standing in the middle of the clearing.

The cones were silvered with snow and it looked like a Christmas tree decorated for a festival.

Derrick opened his sult case and brought out sundry white packages. These he tied to the tree with colored cord. Gay toys for the Ferguson children were added until the little tree stood forth bravely in its fine attire.

"Polly!" he called softly. "Polly!" Polly sat up with startled eyes seeking his face. For the instant she had forgotten their misunderstanding, but suddenly their light clouded.

"Come here, Polly, and see our Christmas tree," urged Derrick.

Reluctantly she came, a rose flush straining her pale cheeks. But yet her red lips were obstinately set in a straight line.

"This is our Christmas tree, Polly, dear," said Derrick in a low tone. "Yours and mine! Shall we be happy and enjoy not only this one, but many, many others after, please God? Say, dear."

"Oh, Derrick, how wicked of us to quarrel when we should be happy! I am so sorry!" sobbed Polly in Derrick's coat sleeve.

"And so am I—and now I'm glad," said Derrick after a time. "Now, let's enjoy our own particular tree before anyone comes! I shall be Santa Claus—and you may be Mrs. Santa Claus!"

"I have things in my bag, too," blushed Polly as she hastened away.

An hour afterward Ralph Ferguson brought a sleighload of merry-makers in search of them. Together they sat demurely on a log before a dying fire. Near by stood a little pine tree, powdered with snow, and dripping with hanging cones.

"You're just in time for the biggest Christmas tree you ever saw," said Ralph as he gathered up the lines and clucked to the horses.

"We've had our Christmas tree," said Derrick mysteriously, while Polly smiled back at him out of happy eyes. (Copyright, 1910.)

Anthony Riggs' Fortune

by Clarissa Mackie



"Christmas comes but once a year—and when it goes I'm glad of it!" misquoted Mr. Anthony Riggs, looking sourly at the toe of his slipper.

As Anthony Riggs lived all alone in the big house, there was no one to reply to his unpleasant remarks. Downstairs in the kitchen his one servant clattered noisily about her work. Everywhere else in the house it was very quiet. And there is no silence like that of a great house which has once known the joyful clamor of a large and happy family.

Years ago Anthony had had a love affair, but it ended most unhappily. The girl had married another man and Anthony Riggs had been left to develop into a morose old bachelor—and not so very old at that.

"Christmas comes but once a year—and I'll try to get as far away from it as I can," misquoted Mr. Riggs once more, as he kicked off his slippers and reached for his shoes. When he was buttoned tightly into his fur-lined ulster and his sealskin cap was pulled down over his ears there was nothing to be seen save a pair of very bright brown eyes and an aristocratic nose.

Once in the snowy streets Anthony Riggs found himself nearer to Christmas than he had been before. The shops were overflowing with holly wreaths and branches of mistletoe, toys and games and candy and nuts. Beautiful gifts were displayed in the windows and many happy, expectant faces were pressed against the plate-glass panes.

"Please, sir," said a small voice at Anthony's elbow, "can't you give me a job carrying your bundles?"

"What bundles?" frowned Anthony. "Your Christmas presents—what you're going to buy, sir," said the little boy, respectfully.

"I'm not going to buy any presents," replied Anthony quite fiercely. "Here's something for you—go and buy your own gifts and don't bother me!" He thrust a dollar bill into the eager little fingers and strode on, unmindful of the curious glances of those who had overheard his conversation with the little lad.

A glittering window full of jewels threw a flashlight on his memory. It was in that same shop he had once purchased a ring for Mary Wood. The ring had been returned to him and he had flung it into the farthest corner of his desk. It was there now.

He turned away and sauntered on. In front of his own church, friendly hands drew him into the brightly lighted basement of the edifice where the annual Christmas bazaar was in progress.

There was a merry throng of men, women and children moving to and fro among the booths devoted to the sale of fancy articles, toys and candy. Super tables occupied one end of the room and in an obscure corner a fortune teller's tent was made of gay shawls. In the middle of the room stood a gigantic Christmas tree, loaded with gifts wrapped in tissue paper.

"Ten cents will entitle you to a gift from the tree," explained his guide.

"I don't like presents," said Anthony grimly.

Deacon Smithers smiled quizzically. "Very well, suit yourself, Anthony! There is the fortune teller—perhaps she will predict a happy future for you! There is the supper table, that will insure you a good meal—and the booths—pay your money and take your choice!" He moved away and left Anthony Riggs standing pale and cold in the midst of the happy crowd.

Perhaps it was because he did not know what else to do that Anthony awaited his turn at the fortune teller's tent, and once within its dim recesses he felt foolishly aware that the future held nothing for him that he did not know.

The gipsy's dark head was concealed in the folds of a lace mantilla; from the flowing sleeves of her red velvet bodice, two slim brown arms and hands flashed out and caught his large hand. The lace-draped head bent over his palm.

"You have had much sorrow," said the gipsy in a low musical voice, "but much of it has been your own making! Do the things I shall tell you and you will live to be very happy and see your dearest wish gratified!"

Anthony smiled sardonically. "And the three things I shall do?" he asked.

"The day after tomorrow is Christmas day. Tomorrow night you must make three persons happy. Find three persons who are poor and needy and sorrowful and take them to your home and provide them with a bountiful dinner; have gifts for them and when they have gone away blessing you—then, you may receive a gift yourself."

"What will it be? I don't want a gift—I haven't kept Christmas for years," protested Anthony, as he placed some money on the table.

"Time you did, then! Don't forget—

or you will lose your last chance of being happy. And stay—" A slim hand arrested his going.

"Yes?" Anthony's voice was very cold.

"Be sure to have that ring in readiness—you may need it!"

And the next instant Anthony found himself elbowed out of the tent by impatient waiters at the door, and without another glance about the decorated room he left the church and went home, much perturbed.

Of course, Anthony Riggs knew that the fortune teller could be none other than some member of his church who was familiar with more or less of the detail of his life and habits. He was surprised at his own lack of indignation because his private affairs had been discussed by a stranger—indeed, he almost felt a glow of gratification that he was still numbered among those to whom something wonderful might happen.

"I'll try it, anyway," said Anthony that night as he blew out his candle. "It can do no harm."

It is a simple matter to make poor people happy. Anthony Riggs found it so. The day before Christmas was marked by a series of galvanic shocks for the servant maid in the basement of Anthony's fine house. Before night the pantries were filled with delicious viands and the smell of spices and mincemeat pervaded the house.

Anthony's three persons became six, for it was so easy to add another one and still another to the little company he had invited. They were old men and women and they enjoyed the feast of good things with a pleasure that made Anthony's heart ache as it had never ached since the day when Mary Wood had sent back his ring.

At last he sent them home in carriages laden with the remains of the dinner and with many gifts that would add comfort to declining years. The best gift of all was that Anthony Riggs had promised not to forget them—he would be their benefactor till they had passed into the hands of the great benefactor.

When he was alone in the brightly lighted parlor, with the blaze of the chandelier falling on the silver threads in his black hair, Anthony thought



"And You—You Meant What You Promised?—That Happiness Would Come to Me?"

of the bitter years he had wasted—years in which he might have made many persons happy. The reward of good deeds was warm in his heart this night and he forgot that there was not one to offer him a gift with loving words. He had received the greatest of all gifts—the love and gratitude of his fellow men.

The door softly opened and a woman crept in, small, slender woman with dusky hair and dark eyes shining like stars.

Anthony Riggs did not look up. He had forgotten that the fortune teller had promised him a gift that night. On his little finger was a small ring set with a single pearl.

"Anthony!" The visitor's voice was low and musical.

"Mary Wood," said Anthony hoarsely; and then with a glance at the black lace draped about her head, he added:

"You were the fortune teller last night?"

"Yes."

"And you—you meant what you promised?—that happiness would come to me?"

"It has come, Anthony," she faltered drawing near to him. "We were so mistaken—you and I—and the years have been long. I am free now—they said you needed me and that night when I saw your bitter face I knew you needed the influence of a greater love than mine before we met."

Anthony Riggs took his sweetheart into his arms. "I have found the greater love, Mary, and its root is pity. My love for you will be better and worthier because of my love for the poor and needy. And tomorrow—tomorrow you will marry me and become my Christmas gift in truth?"

"Yes," said Mary Wood.

And so Anthony Riggs slipped the little pearl ring on her finger.

(Copyright, 1910.)

A Way Out of It.

Anna was making Christmas presents.

"Oh, dear, this doesn't look nice," said she.

Little Helen, looking on, remarked in a sympathizing tone:

"Oh, well, auntie, you can give it to some one who is near-sighted."