

The Substitute Mistletoe

by Wilbur D. Nesbit

If there is anything in the world more aggravating to a young woman than a young man who will not, or cannot, see that she favors him above all the rest, it has not yet been listed.

Prudence Milton as much as a year ago discovered that Alfred Ruthven possessed all the qualities that go to make a man noble and splendid and brave—no, not brave! A brave man would have proposed to Prudence long since. But Alfred, Prudence knew, was handsome and intelligent, and prosperous. Just one thing he lacked—self-confidence. Alfred was bashful on the love subject.

A great many men are so. They can discuss politics, the musical glasses, the drama, literature, art, science and the classics fluently with a young woman, but they shy away from the real heart interest like an aeroplane dodging a church steeple.

Why, Prudence had inveigled Alfred into long walks with her in the silvery moonlight of spring and the golden moonlight of summer—all to no avail. Once, in August, she was boating with him, and she had pretended to be afraid the boat would capsize.

"What would you do if it did?" she asked him.

Naturally she expected him to reply that he would plunge in after her and save her or perish in the attempt. Such a heroic remark as that would of course lead into a more passionate avowal of his reasons for being willing to lay down his young life for her—and then, of course, he could easily hop-skip right along to a request that, since he was willing to die for her, she might consider favorably a proposition to share his life with him, or words to that effect.

But when she asked him, with a tremulous shake in her lovely voice, and with a world of faith and trust in her lustrous eyes:

"What would you do if the boat capsized?"

He never even stopped rowing. He just said:

"It wouldn't matter much. The water isn't over three feet deep here."

Prudence almost capsized the boat from sheer vexation then. When a woman becomes vexed with a man because he does not realize that he loves

Come we now to Christmas eve. Prudence had, by ways and means familiar to the feminine mind, conveyed to the bashful Alfred the intelligence that she had made for him a Christmas remembrance. Never mind how she did this. You, if you are a man grown, will be able to hark back into your own past and bring up some instances of woman's diplomacy wherein she was able to tell you something without saying anything in particular. Just gave your intuition a chance.

Knowing this, Alfred knew that it was his bounden duty to reciprocate—



"That is, She Allowed Him to Put the Kiss Back Where He Got It."

and to reciprocate in advance. Always, always, a man must reciprocate in advance to a lady.

So Alfred might have been seen stepping hesitatingly up the steps of the Milton home on Christmas eve. He carried a small package in one hand. It was his intention to deliver this to whoever came to the door, with a message that it was for Prudence.

In answer to his ring no less a person than Prudence herself opened the door. Her eyes were sparkling, her cheeks were rosy, and in one hand she held a bunch of green stuff.

"Why, Alfred!" she exclaimed. "Come right in. I'm putting up the Christmas greens."

So Alfred came right in, shyly and slightly depositing the little package on a small table in the hall as he entered. Prudence led the way to the living

room, which was empty of other people, fortunately, at that moment.

"Won't you help me?" she asked. "I think it is such fun to decorate the house with the holly and stuff for the holidays. Now I've just been trying to tie this bunch to the chandelier."

She mounted a chair and affixed the bunch of green sprays to the chandelier. Alfred stood in dumb admiration. He looked at Prudence, and he looked at the green herbage which she fastened to the fixture. She looked down at him, smiling, then put out her hand.

"Help me down," she said. Alfred caught her hand to assist her to come from the chair.

Heroes are made in a moment. No man knows in what instant his soul may flame within him so that he will do and dare as he never dreamed of doing or daring. The philosophers call such times psychological moments. This was one. Alfred helped Prudence down, and it was quite natural and easy for her to find herself in his arms when she reached the floor. And then before she knew what he was about—at least, so she said—

—he had kissed her.

"Mis-ter Ruthven!" she exclaimed. "How dare you?"

"I—I—you know—the mistletoe!" he stammered, disengaging one arm and pointing to the decoration above her head.

"I forgot that," she said, demurely. And then Alfred found tongue at last and told her what she had wanted him to tell her all the year. And he asked her to be his Christmas gift, and she consented in what is so often called the time-honored way. That is, she allowed him to put the kiss back where he got it.

Later that evening Alfred said to her:

"Do you know, I don't believe I ever would have had the courage to propose to you if it hadn't been for that mistletoe."

"That mistletoe!" she laughed. "Alfred, that mistletoe is smilax. I don't believe it would have worked at all if it had been real mistletoe."

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JUST SO.



"Ah," we say to our friend, whom we observe counting a large roll of bills before starting out, "going to buy something to fill some one's stocking?"

He looks at us with a merry, holiday twinkle in his eyes and replies: "Yes. I'm going around to buy a wooden leg for my brother."



"In the Kitchen With an Apron On, Helping Her Mother Put Up Jellies and Preserves and Things."

her, you may go out and stake all your worldly possessions that sooner or later she will bring that man to his knees, or her feet, as you like to put it.

Let us pass lightly over the glorious days of fall, when Prudence allowed Alfred to call several times and find her in the kitchen with an apron on helping her mother put up jellies and preserves and things. Let us even pass lightly over the evening when she showed him the blister upon her fair white hand made by a sputtering drop of apple butter. Yes, pass lightly over it. Any sane man, any man in possession of ordinary faculties, when a beautiful young creature held out a little white hand and showed him a blister thereon—not a big blister, just a sort of a beauty spot of a blister—would have taken that hand in his and all but wept over it. He would have asked her to give that hand to him and to come along with it herself, and would have sworn by high heaven and the marching stars and the sun and moon and sky that never again should that wonderful hand know the wearying stress of toil? What did Alfred do?

He looked at the blister appraisingly—without taking those taper fingers in his—and he said:

"Stick a needle under it from one side and let the water out, then put a little peroxide on it tomorrow."

Shades of Romeo! Memories of Dante and Beatrice! Was it any wonder that Prudence brought her pretty lips together in a straight line and registered a mental vow that Alfred should rue this speech some day? Let us now pass lightly on again.

Alfred Potts Hereby

By Wilbur D. Nesbit



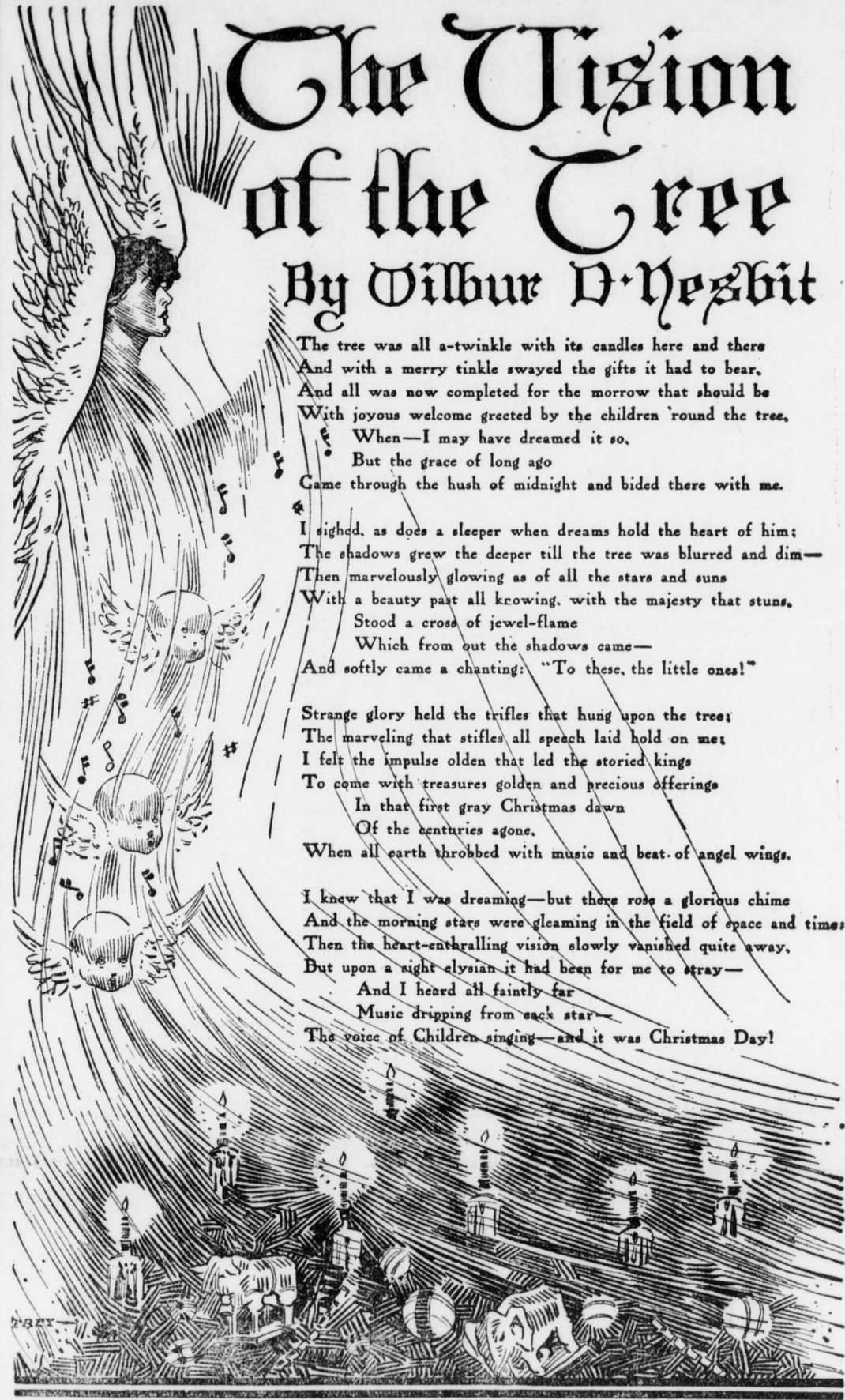
TODAY when me an' Willie Smith an' Alfred Potts an' Spot McKay an' some more boys we's playin' with Got talkin' some 'bout Christmas day

An' how we must buhhave real well, 'Cause all our pas an' mas they said Ol' Santa Claus can always tell What boy has mischuff in his head, Why, Alfred Potts he say to us: "It's nothin' but a lot o' fuss! Don't you buhlieve your pas and mas— There never was no Santa Claus!"

An' nen we tell him 'tisn't so, 'At we heard Santa come last year An' see his sleigh tracks in th' snow— An' he has sleigh bells, 'cause we hear An' where th' chimbley is we see Th' soot all scraped off in th' back An' 'at shows where o' Santa, he Comed down th' chimbley with his pack. But Alfred Potts, he sniff, like this, An' say: "You don't know what you miss By not a bein' bad, buhcause There never was no Santa Claus!"

Nen me an' Willie Smith an' all Th' other boys, an' Spot McKay, P'tend we hear somebody call Us to come home, an' slip away An' we won't play with Alfred Potts Buhcause we know 'at he is bad When we think of th' lots an' lots Of Christmas 'at he have had. I tell my pa what Alfred said An' he laugh some an' shake his head An' say 'at Alfred's chance is slim, 'Cause Santa won't buhlieve in him!

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The Vision of the Tree

By Wilbur D. Nesbit

The tree was all a-twinkle with its candles here and there And with a merry tinkle swayed the gifts it had to bear, And all was now completed for the morrow that should be With joyous welcome greeted by the children 'round the tree,

When—I may have dreamed it so, But the grace of long ago Came through the hush of midnight and bided there with me. I sighed, as does a sleeper when dreams hold the heart of him; The shadows grew the deeper till the tree was blurred and dim— Then marvelously glowing as of all the stars and suns With a beauty past all knowing, with the majesty that stuns, Stood a cross of jewel-flame Which from out the shadows came— And softly came a chanting: "To these, the little ones!"

Strange glory held the trifles that hung upon the tree; The marveling that stifles all speech laid hold on me; I felt the impulse olden that led the storied kings To come with treasures golden and precious offerings In that first gray Christmas dawn Of the centuries ago, When all earth throbb'd with music and beat-of angel wings.

I knew that I was dreaming—but there rose a glorious chime And the morning stars were gleaming in the field of space and time; Then the heart-entrancing vision slowly vanished quite away, But upon a sight elysian it had been for me to stray— And I heard all faintly far Music dripping from each star— The voice of Children singing—and it was Christmas Day!

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Little Henry Finds Out

by Wilbur D. Nesbit

M A called me to her day before yesterday and sed she wanted me to help her do something.

She had a peecce of pencil in her hand that was about a inch long and to sharpen it, and she had a lot of notes made on the back of a bill from the dressmaker.

Henry, she said, I am puzzled to deeth to know what to give your pa and your Unkel Wilyum for Christmas. I do wish you would kind of pump them and see what they would like to hav, and then tell me, without giving it away to them what you are trying to find out.

All right, ma, I told her, and tried to get a peek at her list to see if she had me down for the maggiezine revolver I want.

But she folded up the paper and put it away.

So that night when pa and Unkel Bill was sitting in the library talkin about the way senator Tillman had better look out or he will be playing in a drama that has a press agent, or else he will be crackin a black snake whip around in Unkel Toms Cabben, I ast pa what he thot was the right kind of a Christmas present.

You otto be satisfide with what you get, my young man, he sed, without coming around and hintin.

I aint hintin, I told him. I just wondered what your idee would be about one for yourself.

Grate Scott! he sed. Has it come to this? It is bad enuff to haite fork over for the fool things yure ma buys for me without havin to pay for something you get for me.

I dont want to get you anything, I sed. I just want to get yure idee about what you want.

Unkel Bill spoke up and sed most men could tell what they wanted better by tellin what they dont want. What would you like to hav, unkel Bill? I ast him. Well, now, he sed, there is lots of

things I would be glad to see in my stockin on Christmas morning. If I was a woman of course I would yern for dimund bracelets and necklaces and rings and gold watches that I could pin on me somewhere where a pickpocket could get them without pickin my pocket. There never was a pickpocket that could pick a woman's pocket, except one that lived in Nook York, and he had been marrid forty times, and he confessed that the reason he get marrid so monny times was just becous he wanted to

You wate till you get marrid, pa spoke up reel quick.

Finely pa and Unkel Bill they got me to tell them about ma astin me to find out what they wanted, and then they laffed and laffed, and Unkel Bill sed it was a refreshin indication of the change that was takin place when a woman even thought of thinkin about what you wanted. He sed they usually went ahead and got what they wanted you to want.

You tell your ma, pa sed, that as neer as you can lern what I want is more hair on my hed, my wisdom teeth filled, and rockkin chares that I want bump into with my legs when I get up in the mornin.

And if she asts you what I want, unkel Bill sed, you tell her that I am noncommittal to a degree, but that you think I would prefer a tobacco pouch that has sashay powder inside the lining, a collar and cuff box with pink satin inside of it, a cigar cutter that I can hang on my watch chane whenever I want to feel pertickierly ashamed of myself, a silver handled pencil that she can borrow from me the day after Christmas and never giv back to me, and a smokin set made out of hammered brass that I can sell to somebuddy for finger bowls.

That's rite, pa sed. But the best Christmas present for a man, unkel Bill sed, is to pick out a fifty dollar present for him, that he would haite pay for when the bill comes in, and then not get it.

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"Henry, She Said, I Am Puzled to Death to Know What to Give Your Pa and Uncle William for Christmas."

lurn where a woman keeps her pocket. It was a matter of profeshual pride with him, becous he sed there was no profit in pickin a woman's pocket when all you got was a bunch of samples and a button hook and a powder rag and betwens thirty and forty cents.

But I dont see what pickin pockets has to do with Christmas presents, I sed.

DARK OUTLOOK BEFOREHAND. "Mamma," asks the little boy, "how can Santa Claus get into our flat, when we haven't any chimney—nothing but a steam radiator?"

"He will probably slip in by the basement door, darling."

"It's all off then," says the lad, with a surprising vigor in the use of slang. "That janitor will put him out of business before he can unpack his sack."

HER ONE BIG WISH. Sister Sue—Johnnie, do you know what I would like most? Brother Johnnie—No, What? Sister Sue—I saw a fat lady at the circus last summer and I wish I had her stocking to hang up on Christmas night.