

Merry Christmas

Noel Clayton's Christmas The Story of a Home-Coming

Noel Clayton was tall and gaunt, with clear, candid, blue eyes, and his white hands, small and nervous looking, were as well kept as those of a woman.

He was thirty, and a splash of gray on either temple, a strand or two of white in his moustache, made him look older.

He was broad-chested and muscular—by all rules—he should have been a soldier—he looked an "open air" man, but for five years he had been writing short stories, novelettes and serials for the weekly press.

It was good, nervous work. His name was becoming known, for he had the happy knack of blending paths with humor. He had traveled widely, and an Australian bush idyl at the beginning of the week would be followed by a London society story, to be followed again by a story of rustic life in the dear West Country that he loved so well.

He lived quite alone, worked—and smoked—from morning to night, loved his profession, and had practically dropped all his friends—male and female—and when a fit of the not infrequent blues got him by the throat, threw his pen into the grate and ordered up his landlady's children, and pandemonium reigned for an hour.

Sometimes he gave them pennies, but not always—small coin of the realm is not always available to authors—but the romps were huge, and he enjoyed them.

Of course there was a woman at the bottom of the tangle of the man's life, and women complicate things sometimes—he would have said "always."

On one particular evening he was alone and writing, when Jim Courtney was shown in—and Jim was an old and tried friend—about the only friend the lonely, self-absorbed man had, and so the incomer sat down and lighted his pipe, and did not bother the author for quite a quarter of an hour, and then Noel rose and stretched himself.

"What is it this time, Noel?"

"Oh, the usual thing—love; and candidly, I am getting so sick of writing love stories."

"Ah, you feel like that?"

"Man alive, this is Christmas Eve, and somehow—somehow—my thoughts went back with a jump, and I remembered one Christmas Eve, when—"

"Your pipe's out, Noel!"

"Aye, so it is. Well there was one Christmas Eve when—"

"My dear boy, are you worrying about her still?"

"Yes," and then a long pause—

It is the privilege of chums to sit silent for a spell.

"And all this happened four or five years ago. I never heard the rights or wrongs of the story."

Noel crossed the room, and digging both hands into his pockets, looked at his chum.

"There is nothing to know. After the four happy years of married life, trouble came between us, lies came between us; and—here I am and it's Christmas Eve. Of course, our

post," and Chum went out while Noel turned again to his interrupted work.

Between each line on every page quaint turn of expression, quaint thoughts haunted him, a dead past spoke to him.

The girl-wife had been very sweet, very lovable, very beautiful—and had married two lives.

There should be a special place of torment for the person who deliberately comes between two people who love each other and smilingly warps two lives.

Pearl Clayton was as easily led as a child, a soft, emotional weak little woman, and when Noel returned from a few days' holiday he found the house closed and Pearl and Baby had departed.

Noel drifted a little bit, the shock unmanned him terribly, but his pen was his sole source of income, and it had to be plied if body and soul were to be kept together, and in a very few weeks he had, to some extent, regained his mental balance, and his work improved.

The eve of Christmas and the day itself appeals to most hearts, and on this particular eve Noel kept thinking back and thinking back while he wrote.

How well he remembered the extra-stocking he induced the nurse to knit, and how bulky it looked and felt on Christmas morning. And then

empty. There was a Christmas Eve party going on, and Mrs. Marsh and her progeny were attending it.

He had been writing for half an hour since Chum had left him, and felt the old familiar touch on his wrist. It was imagination, of course, he did not even turn his head, and then he was looking into blue eyes, in the round golden-curved framed face of a boy of four, who laughed up at him and presented a rosebud to be kissed.

"Goodness, child—where on earth do you come from? and who—who brought you? What is your name?"

"Eric," and the child began to make preparations for climbing a lofty knee.

"Who brought you here, Baby Eric? How did you come?"

Noel felt like an Irish member of Parliament, for "no answer was given," but a wee form, full of hugs and kisses, got fast hold upon him, and said gravely, and yet with a sweet air of command:

"Just come'd—and now if you're not too busy, mister Father—"

"Yes, my son."

"Praps—I'd better go to bed."

"But my child—my little son—who brought you here? Where is your mother?" and the tall man paced up and down. Of course, Chum had told the child to walk straight in—and the child had—straight in.

The author—his tiny son was on the floor now, saying things to the cat and it licked stamps off letters, and loves bacon and boiled eggs—thrust his hands deep into his pockets and looked down, sad eyed, at little Sunny-face.

"Yes, perhaps you had better come to bed."

If Chum would only come, if some

Glad Tidings of Great Joy



BY PROCKHORST, 1825

came school, college, and then married life.

When the scribbling fit was on him Pearl used to draw her low wicker chair close to his writing table, knitting, or daintily fingering white material, soft and downy and fluffy, for the prospective wearer, and the few remarks she made seemed to chime in and identify themselves with what he was writing; but, of course, all this happened five years ago.

One odd little trick Pearl had, and Noel remembered it this evening—and missed it.

When his pen was working extra busily she used to lay the tips of her fingers upon his right hand—just where hand meets wrist. She did not incommode him in the least. He declared her touch inspired him; they were such pink-tipped fingers, and so small, and he had often written with the tiny touch on his wrist almost unconsciously—only peeping up from time to time at a sweet oval face, into deep violet eyes love lit.

But, of course, this was five years ago.

So he wrote on, feeling a little bit sorry that Chum had not stayed, for after all, he only had another half-hour's work before him, and then they could sit and chat, and perhaps drown the sound of the bells that he knew would ring out in a few hours.

He was just in the frame of mind to summon his landlady's children, but except for himself, the house was

thing would only happen to break the silence, a silence only cleft by the sigh of a child.

The church was only at the end of the street.

He could hear the bellrings shuffling along the frosty pavement, in a few minutes—and he bent to his work. Half asleep, half awake, he was conscious of the old, almost forgotten touch upon his wrist—a dream doubtless—but he could not shake it off, and then he looked down.

Knelling as of yore beside him, blue eyed, tear-dimmed, was Pearl.

"I have returned, Noel." It was a quavering little voice, but it thrilled him.

How like she was to their child. And then the bells clashed forth their message, "Peace on Earth, Good-will Towards Men," and to two hearts they carried a sweeter, deeper message still.

No word was spoken. A small figure, in a smoking jacket that reached to his heels, stood at the dividing door, an eager face turned to either.

And husband and wife kissed silently.—New York News.

As to Santa Claus.

With our modern fangled notions Fairy tales no longer do; 'Steal of coming down the chimney, He has now gone up the flue.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

With a Christmas Gift.

At Christmas time long years ago
"Good will to men" the angels sang,
"And peace on earth" their message rang

Across the sky's celestial glow,
At Christmas time
Long years ago.

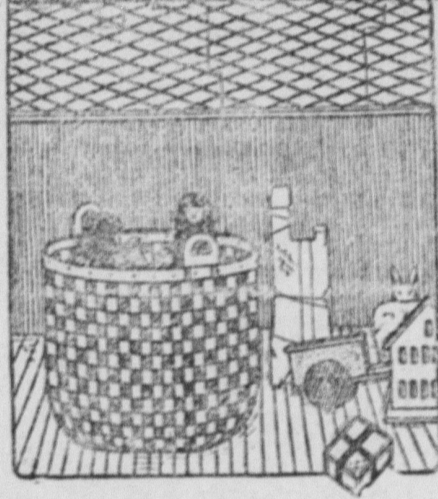
At Christmas time that comes today
This message of good will I send—

The loving wishes of a friend
That comes today.

At Christmas time in future years—
And all the other days besides—
May life for you always provide
Its laughter all unmixed with tears
At Christmas time
In future years.

—W. R. Murphy, in Christmas St. Nicholas.

BRIGHT EYES AND DOROTHY JANE A CHRISTMAS STORY OF TWO DOLLS



Bright eyes and Dorothy Jane met for the first time on Christmas Eve. They were being hurried over the city streets in a delivery wagon, and their intimate association with each other in a big wicker basket naturally led to a conversation. They were dolls—Dorothy Jane a big rag baby, homely and poorly dressed; Bright Eyes a finely clothed young lady, whose bright tints of cheek and hair were the work of French artists. Dorothy Jane was going to meet a "little mother" in an East Side tenement house on the morrow, and Bright Eyes was on her way to the big brownstone house on the West Side, there to open and close her eyes and say "Mamma" to the only daughter of a rich merchant.

Bright Eyes did not deign to notice poor Dorothy when she remarked that the noisy animals in the Noah's ark, at the other end of the box, were worse than those in the Zoo, and rather rudely crowded the poor little rag baby in disgust. At the next corner the driver removed the ark, with its noisy animals, and there was more room in the basket. Dorothy lifted her head and put her painted face close to the ear of Bright Eyes and whispered: "You are prettier than I am, I know; but can't we be friends, anyway? I never talked to a foreigner before. We had some dolls from China in our department several weeks ago, but I couldn't understand what they said. How do you shut your eyes that way when you lie down? How nice it is." Bright Eyes sat up and looked at the flat little painted face of Dorothy Jane with evident amusement.

"You don't pretend to call yourself a Christmas present, I hope?" she said. "You must have been put together in the dark. I don't see what pleasure you can find in existence."

"I believe that I am happier than you are tonight," said Dorothy Jane, but her lip quivered.

"Why?" asked Bright Eyes. "Don't you know that I am going to live in one of the finest houses in the city, and be shown to members of the '400'?"

"What do you mean by the '400'?" queried Dorothy Jane.

"You poor, neglected, uneducated little thing," said Bright Eyes. "Tell me, where are you going, anyway?"

"I am going to little Jennie Reed, whose mother does washing for a living. I am so anxious to see her, because her mother, when she bought



me, told the clerk that Jennie had not been very well since her papa died, and she hoped that I would cheer her up on Christmas Day. If Jennie is

like her mother I am going to love her."

Bright Eyes was laughing by this time, and interrupted to say, "You must be a missionary rag baby then. How funny!"

"That's what I am," cried Dorothy, "and unless Jennie expects too much of a rag baby, I believe that I will make her happy. Do you think that the little girl where you are going will love you?"

Bright Eyes moved uneasily in the box and was slow to answer. Finally she said: "I don't know whether she will love me or not. I don't care. I am pretty and they will show me to everybody. I like the idea of moving in high society, and won't worry about their loving me."

Dorothy Jane knew nothing about society, and did not fully understand Bright Eyes' idea of life. All she

thy Jane grew from day to day, until the neighbors talked about it. Whenever Jennie went, Dorothy Jane was with her.

Bright Eyes, on the other hand, had a hard time of it. When she arrived at the house she found that there were many other presents costlier than herself, and, moreover, a little old rubber doll was the favorite of her mistress.



All her visions of coming out into fashionable society faded away before a week had passed. She never went out of doors, but lay tucked away in a closet. One day, Jip, a little fox terrier, mistook her for something else. Before he was through the

MADONNA IN CONTEMPLATION.



CARLO DOLCI, 1616-1696

could think about was Jennie Reed, and whether or not they would be happy together. "Get that big French doll out, Bill," said the driver to his assistant, as the wagon suddenly stopped. It startled Dorothy Jane, as she had about made up her mind to tell Bright Eyes that she had missed entirely the object of life when she made love secondary. All she had time to say, as she put an unshapely rag hand in one of Bright Eyes', was, "Make that little girl love you." But Bright Eyes tossed her head scornfully as Bill ran with her up the brownstone steps. "If you ever get up into high society call on me," were her parting words.

Bill complained bitterly to the driver about being overworked after he had handed Dorothy Jane over to Mrs. Reed, on the fifth floor of the East Side tenement house. Mrs. Reed took the rag baby and quietly sat her in the fireplace, facing Jennie's little bed.

When Mrs. Reed had kissed the sleeping child and tiptoed out of the room, Dorothy looked around for other Christmas arrivals. At first she saw no one else, and began to feel the responsibility which had been thrust upon her of being little Jennie's whole Christmas. Finally, however, she spied a little pink candy dog, and he told her that he, too, was there for Jennie.

The next morning Mrs. Reed peeped into the room in time to see Jennie jump around in an ecstasy of joy, with Dorothy Jane clasped close to her breast and the pink candy dog in her hand.

The affection of the child for Doro-

thoom was gone from her cheeks and her hair and one arm were chewed off. So the next day Bright Eyes was just looking over the top of the ash barrel, in the basement arcaway, when Jennie Reed, with Dorothy Jane in her arms, rang the basement bell.

She had come to get the washing. Bright Eyes recognized Dorothy at once and called out with all her former haughtiness crushed and broken: "Oh, you dear old rag baby; you were right after all." Then Jennie went away, and the dolls never met again.

—New York Mail and Express.

Christmas Chimes.

By Arthur Stringer.

From town and tower, with tilt and tune,
A gust of chimes takes flight
Where that dim golden boat the moon
Drifts slowly down the night.

Like startled birds, it swings and climbs,
Alone, aloud, afar;
A thousand-plumed flock of chimes
That float from star to star.

They tire, and fall, and turn, and cease—
Joy's homing birds—and then
For one glad Christmas Day of peace
Nest in the hearts of men!

Mount Sporis, near Glenwood Springs, Colo., 14,300 feet above sea level, is to be made into a summer resort. Among the unique attractions will be the perfection of a natural toboggan slide.



baby was only a mite—a wee, blue-eyed, golden-haired mite; couldn't walk, crawled, you know; but we were awful chums, and when she went and took our mite—well," and the man's laugh hurt his own ears. "Well, then I took to writing love stories—love, old chap, with a happy ending—bishops, bridesmaids, bouquets and blessings, and"—his temporary excitement had left him—he added drily: "And it pays! Now go, old chap. I must get my stuff gone for the early