

man owning nothing but his hoarded wealth; and bright metal and handsomely printed notes could not speak to him, nor smile upon him, nor comfort him.

Bought love was hateful to him, and voluntary affection he could not win.

Mrs. Morrison trembled as she approached his house. Not a glimmer of light was visible within. The moonlight shone full on the door-plate, stoop, and railings. She lifted Ray up the steps, and timidly rang the bell.

Presently, heavy, slow foot-falls were heard, bolts were withdrawn, a lock turned, and Mr. Morrison opened the door. The first object that met his eyes was Ray's white figure and upturned face, the brilliant moonlight streaming over and past her, and penetrating the dark hall, enveloping his own form in its silvery light.

He started, and for a second a curious expression, half fear, half joy, flashed across his sunken features. Then observing Mrs. Morrison, he recovered himself and bowed coldly and formally.

"Will you come in?" he said, distantly, as if the invitation were forced from him.

"For a short time," was all Mrs. Morrison could say, as she followed him into the hall.

He led the way into a small room adjoining the parlor, which seemed to serve for dining-room, sitting-room, and office, handed her a chair, and remained standing, watching her with his keen blue eyes. Ray, perched on her mother's lap, returned the gaze with fearless, wondering eyes, and then surveyed the room with eager curiosity.

It was not a very attractive apartment at its best, but just at present it looked very untidy and dusty. The remains of an unfinished meal lay on the table; the fire was low in the grate, and several little cooking utensils occupied the pan. An open desk covered with papers, filled one corner of the room, and a stand crowded with pots of flowers, another. The mantelpiece did service for a medicine chest, and the closet for a cellar.

Ray's search for toys and *bon-bons* was unrewarded, and she hid her face on her mother's shoulder in silent disappointment.

Uncle Jim broke the silence which was becoming very embarrassing.

"Did you come to me on any special business, Mrs. Morrison?" he asked coldly.

"Yes, I came to ask you to help Albert out of his difficulties."

Mrs. Morrison breathed easier now, and collected her forces to answer and combat, if necessary, the old man's objections; determined to keep her temper, and submit with patience to an exhibition of his.

"Well, I have nothing to say to you farther than I told him," remarked Mr. Morrison, conclusively and roughly.

Mrs. Morrison's cheeks crimsoned at this decided rebuff.

"He explained his affairs to you," she said, with an effort, for she was unaccustomed to rudeness, and at first, it seemed to paralyze her powers of thought and speech.

"Yes, altogether too well. He has been acting like a fool with his money and now, that he has thrown away his own, he would be glad to squander some of mine. But he is not going to do it!"

"He only wishes you to lend him a sum that will not injure you," said Mrs. Morrison, gently.

"He'll have his share when I am gone like the rest of them. Can't he wait?"

"It would do him more good now. It would save his name and credit."

"That's very well. But his children have to live after him. See here! Do you know what his expenses were last year and this?"

"No, I do not," and Mrs. Morrison sighed as she admitted the fact.

"Well, I do!" and having relieved his mind by uttering a few expletives, Mr. Morrison proceeded angrily; "What does a young man want with a fast horse? Haven't he the use of his legs? I am near sixty, and I never had a fast horse in my life. When I go out I walk, that is, if the distance is within five miles. Another thing I saw was a bill for dinners at Delmonico's! Can't you give him a good enough meal at home?"

"I think he had business people—customers—that he did not wish to bring home."

"Look here! Mrs. Morrison. I wouldn't give a brass penny for a man's trade if I had to drug him before getting it. Those are the very men that are helping to break Albert. Lazy, luxurious sharpers; here to-day, and no one knows where to-morrow. Another item not paid for, is a pair of solitaire diamond ear-rings. I wonder who got them."

Mrs. Morrison flushed painfully, "I did. He gave them to me on the last anniversary of our wedding-day."

"He did, eh! Well, that's doing better than I thought. But I can't excuse either of you for this state of affairs. Albert must have lost his reason. And then to see you in the face of all this tamfoolery decked out in velvet and laces. A new idea of economy I declare!"

"I did not know until three weeks ago that there was any necessity for it."

"Then he was able to give you your regular allowance up to a month since," and a gleam of something like satisfaction crept into the old man's sharp eyes bent on Mrs. Morrison's agitated face.

"I never had a regular allowance," she said, innocently.

"And how the devil did you keep house?"

"I ordered what was needed."

"That was the way, was it? Just got what you fancied, week in and week out. All the delicacies of the season, without knowing whether you would have a roof over you the next month or not. No wonder ruin has overtaken you. This is the new idea of marriage. Let me suggest that in future you take care to find out your husband's income. Be sure of what he can allow you every week. If it is only five dollars, live within it. If he can't give you the five dollars every Saturday night, look out for danger ahead. That is my advice, and that is all I can afford to give you. I don't know much about you, but he don't deserve anything more."

"Yes, he does," and Mrs. Morrison rose to her feet, her eyes flashing, and the words coming fast and emphatic from her lips. "He does deserve more from you. So far he has never asked you for one dollar. He is a credit to the family, and you know it. He has worked hard ever since he was put at a business. He may have been foolish, but he has not been wilfully dishonest. He has nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to hide. Another man would love such a nephew, and uphold him if it took every cent he owned in the world."

"I thought you were rich. People told me he married a wealthy man's daughter," said Mr. Morrison, sneeringly.

"I own our house. I am willing to mortgage it or sell it, whichever is best for Albert. My brother will loan him twenty thousand dollars on it, if you will also agree to assist him. But it must be done now, to-morrow."

"You live in too expensive a house for a young couple," Mr. Morrison interrupted, sharply. "Time enough to occupy such a house as that fifteen or twenty years from now. But then the young people now-a-days must begin where their fathers were satisfied to leave off. You ought to rent your handsome house furnished, and move into a small one in a plain neighborhood; like this, for instance."

"I am quite willing to live in a small house. That would be a very trifling sacrifice. I am anxious to do anything that will be for Albert's good."

"Mamma, is that Santa Claus?" inquired Ray, at this critical moment, having surveyed Mr. Morrison's long white beard, and untidy gray hair for some time, very intently.

"No, Ray. Oh! no."

"What is the child's name?" asked Mr. Morrison, quickly.

"Rachel. She is called after her father's aunt."

"Yes. My only sister." His voice perceptibly softened.

"How many children have you?" he inquired, with some sign of interest in the question.

"I have four," Mrs. Morrison answered, secretly wondering at his sudden curiosity.

"All girls?"

"No, the eldest is a girl."

"Does she look like you?"

"Yes, very much. The others resemble their father."

"Sit down a few minutes. I have a proposition to make to you. I had a housekeeper, good enough in her way, but she went off like a fool and got married. You say you are willing to make sacrifices. If I help Albert out of his difficulties, will you come and keep house for me? Don't look so frightened; let me explain. I am pretty ill-tempered, but I never go off this floor. Go up, if you like, and see the rooms. There are enough of them, and there is some furniture in them."

"I do not understand," faltered Mrs. Morrison, too much surprised to grasp the old man's idea. "About Albert and the children?"

"You must bring them all here. I want you to keep the house. I'll give you a regular salary, enough to feed and clothe your children and pay what servants are necessary. You will earn the money by attending to my comfort—you can manage it to suit yourself. That is my proposition. If you say yes, you can go home and tell Albert to be here before eight o'clock to-morrow morning. If you don't like it, leave it. I can offer nothing better."

"I accept it," Mrs. Morrison said quickly, scarcely believing that she had heard aright.

"When will you come then? Why not say the day after to-morrow? You must put your house in an agent's hands to rent furnished, and then you have nothing to do but pack your trunks and send them here. You see the condition the place is in."

"I will come the day after to-morrow," said Mrs. Morrison. It was an effort to recover her voice and self-control. Mr. Morrison's matter-of-fact, cool, business tone admitted of no demonstration or emotion. He seemed to regard the affair in the light of a simple business transaction, in which each party was to observe the terms of the contract, nothing more.

"Will you look at the house to-night?" he inquired after a slight pause.

"It is late. Another time, I think."

"Yes, I understand. Well, send Albert

to me early. Are you afraid to go home alone?"

"No, not now," was Mrs. Morrison's almost inaudible reply. Mr. Morrison ended the interview by leading the way to the door and opening it. His "good night," was abrupt and final. Before Mrs. Morrison could return it, the door was shut and bolted, and retreating footsteps were audible.

The distance home seemed to have shortened magically. Budded with new life and unnatural strength, holding Ray close to her bosom, dizzy with joy, without a thought of self, or the difficulties of the task she had promised to undertake, Mrs. Morrison hurried along and reached her own home in safety.

Her ring brought her husband to the door. His surprise at seeing her and Ray on the step became almost incredulity when she told him in low, panting tones where she had been. He watched her excited manner, flushed cheeks, and bright eyes in which tears of delight were sparkling, and his haggard face lightened in expression.

"What is it, Gerty? What have you done?"

"I have seen your uncle. Oh, Albert, it is all arranged! It will all come right! He will see you to-morrow! He has agreed to help you, and I have promised to go to his house, and take care of it for him!"

"You! Gerty?" Mr. Morrison's astonishment was too great to be expressed in words.

"Yes. It was his proposition, and I accepted it."

"But, my darling, it is simply impossible. What you keep house for him? It would kill you in a month. Uncle James must be mad!"

"But he will do nothing for you unless I keep my promise. He thinks we are too extravagant, Albert. And I could learn to be economical, I am sure. There is room enough for us in the house. Let me try it, at least."

"Gerty, you can not mean it! My wife an upper-servant for my uncle! He laughed bitterly, and his mouth quivered.

"You are putting it in the worst light, Albert. Let us try to consider it in its best. Think of yourself, not of me. I can be happy anywhere if you are free from anxiety. The knowledge that your business is saved will recompense me for any trouble. We can not stay here, and your uncle's idea is to rent the house as it is, and move quietly to his. I am perfectly willing to do as he proposes, Albert. It is no sacrifice—it is a pleasure if it saves you from ruin."

"Gerty, I have been foolish, but not intentionally so. I never thought of bringing you to this. I can not bear it. Talk of something else. Forget this!"

"Forget it—how can I? Archy was here while you were asleep. He said that nothing could be done without your uncle's help."

"Did he tell you that?"

"Yes, and I knew that you had spoken to your uncle without success. Listen to me, Albert. This must be done. There is no other alternative. You shall not be disgraced while I can prevent it. If we act right now, we may have our own home again. Say you will go to your uncle to-morrow and let me keep my promise. I have been an idle, extravagant woman all my life. Perhaps I deserve this change of fortune."

"But not that I should be the cause of it. Why should uncle James make such a proviso the alternative? What good can it do to him to break up our happy home? He could leave us here in peace without hurting himself. You are not accustomed to hard work, and pinching economy, such as he would force upon you. He has no right to meddle with my family."

"But, Albert, these considerations are trifling compared with what we gain in agreeing to his proposal. Am I really so helpless that you can not trust me in this? Of what value are my brains if I can not use them for you and the children? I am not a mere doll to be dressed, and petted, and shielded from all harm. I would rather keep house for Uncle James than see you looking as you have for the last month. I can be perfectly happy there if I know that you love me, and that I am necessary to your comfort, and working for your sake."

"Then have your way, Gerty. Let us try it, but if we have bartered our happiness for fortune and reputation, I shall never forgive myself for this night's work."

"I'll risk the consequences," was Mrs. Morrison's reply, and then having gained her point, she laughed and cried for joy, and then carried Ray up-stairs and finished her cry while the little one went to sleep.

Two days after, Mr. Morrison went down town lighter-hearted and better tempered than he had been for many a day, and his wife had the house put in order, and packed her trunks, displaying an amount of energy and foresight altogether at variance with previous experiences.

Uncle James had done everything necessary to sustain his nephew's business credit, but although exhibiting unlooked-for generosity in every other particular, he was immovable on this one point. He would have the family in his own house, or

he would have nothing to do with them whatever.

So Mrs. Morrison bravely commenced her new life by taking possession of her portion of the house early in the afternoon of the day decided upon. Her servants who had chosen to remain with her, surveyed the new scene of their labors with undisguised contempt. But having expressed their disgust at the untidiness of the house, and the small-sized rooms, they began to make it more presentable and comfortable.

The carpets and furniture were new, and good in quality, and after some judicious sweeping and dusting they did themselves justice. Uncle James had thoughtfully absent himself. Edith and Bertie lent their assistance in having everything pleasant before papa should come home, and Tommy and Ray followed mamma from garret to cellar searching for Santa Claus, and losing themselves in wonderful closets and unexpected corners. Finding that they were perfectly happy in the delusion that the house belonged to Santa Claus, Mrs. Morrison made no effort to undeceive them. Tired as she was with the labors and excitement of the day, she unpacked several boxes, and placed in the dining-room many of the tasteful accessories to which her husband's eyes and hands were accustomed, things unheard of in Uncle James' domestic economy.

Then she peeped into the kitchen, looked into the sauce-pans, complimented Jane on her success in restoring order and cleanliness, and having arranged her pretty hair and changed her dress, sat down with the children around her, to welcome her husband.

Fortune favors the brave. The first evening was on the whole a success. Uncle and nephew arrived together, both hungry and absorbed in the business affairs which had occupied their entire day. Mr. Morrison kissed his wife and children, and took in the surroundings in silence. Uncle James shook hands with his niece, nodded at Edith, and patted Bertie on the head. Tommy and Ray eyed him from a safe distance with undisguised admiration, and exchanged confidences behind an armchair.

"His hair is white," said Tommy; "but where are the boys?"

"It is not Christmas," said Ray, conclusively.

"Well! I know that," reflected Tommy.

Either the well-prepared dinner, or the children's faces around the table, affected Uncle James so decidedly, that he looked rather pleasant, and made several vain attempts to coax Ray on his knee.

The little creature evaded every effort with timid grace; and having taken refuge behind her mother's chair, renewed her inspection of the old gentleman's face.

"You don't know who I am," he said to her, intercepting one of her rapid glances.

"Yet, me do."

"No, you don't."

"You is Santa Claus," persisted Ray.

Old Mr. Morrison looked pleased at the odd fancy. "Come and tell Santa Claus what you want him to bring you on Christmas-Day," he urged.

Tommy forgot his bashfulness instantly, and perched on his granduncle's knee, began a breathless summing up of the wants of the four children, but Ray's timidity and awe were not to be overcome by any visions of toys or sugar-plums conjured up by Tommy's vivid imagination.

The week that intervened before Christmas-Day was a trying one to Mrs. Morrison. Her husband, however, seemed contented in view of his altered position with regard to business, and this knowledge mainly sustained her spirits and courage.

The plunge once taken, Mr. Morrison felt it the least; on his wife the heaviest burden was laid. Uncle James' tastes and whims had to be consulted, and the servants were disposed to be cross and pert, acting as if conferring a favor by living with her. Perhaps the change from liberal supplies to the careful buying now so necessary, caused the alteration in them. She had been so bountiful hitherto, purchasing in quantities, and never restricting or limiting the magnates of the kitchen.

Now, matters were different. Mr. Morrison had little money to give her, and the old man's allowance, although sufficient if carefully managed, would not provide for any extravagance in food or dress.

Besides, she was determined not to ask her husband for money. Her anxiety to have all the claims on him settled, so that they could return to their old home as soon as consistent with their means, was as great as his.

To further this object was now her care. She marketed cautiously, calculating every expense with an exactness and rapidity surprising to herself; but her capabilities had been hitherto a sealed book, only for want of a motive to call them forth.

On Christmas-Eve, she had paid for everything used during the week, provided the dinner for the following day, and was the happy possessor of twenty dollars over and above her expenses.

So far Uncle James' salary, as he thought fit to call it, had lasted very well; but when she sat down that night to debate about presents for the children, her mind misgave her.

Visions of school bills, bills of shoe-makers, dress-makers, milliners, and hosts of unlooked-for incidental expenses rose up before her, and she closed her pocket book put away her bonnet, and concluded to do without everything that was not a necessity.

Her husband laughed at her when she told him the result of her long reverie and then drew out his purse.

"My pet, if you want some money for presents, take it." She looked at him earnestly.

"Could I spend it on unnecessary things consistently?"

"Well, no Gerty, not consistently. It will be a long time, I fear, before we can hope to indulge our tastes as we once did on a Christmas-Eve. If I could stand again, as I was this night two years ago."

"It is possible, is it not?"

"Yes, if you help me as you are doing now. Gerty, this Christmas has brought me something, and that is a better knowledge of the wife whom I thought I understood thoroughly. I was a very ignorant man until a week ago. But for this trouble I might have died, and never appreciated you, as you deserve, never have known the real worth and ability of my own wife. So, you see, I have received my Christmas gift, the richest ever sent me, the most precious."

"And now you have given me mine. To be understood and appreciated is the greatest gift a woman can receive."

"And prosperity, Gerty, was not tending to bestow these upon us. Adversity disclosed the jewels that were nearly lost forever. In the future, whatever cares may arise, I shall know where to come for counsel and help, as well as for comfort and sympathy."

"I think I should feel perfectly happy this minute if I only had some little things to put in the children's stockings," said Mrs. Morrison, playfully. "They have hung them in the kitchen chimney, with such perfect faith in finding them full in the morning."

"I think their faith will be rewarded. Just now I saw uncle Jim bringing in some very suspicious packages. Perhaps he would like to appear in the character which Ray persists in ascribing to him. He has so few pleasures, Gerty, and he has been so kind, if he takes this out of our hands we will not grudge it to him."

Christmas morning was ushered in by a very unusual commotion in uncle James' quiet house. Mrs. Morrison was awakened by cries of delight and exclamations of joy, mingled with the hurried pattering of little feet on the staircase; and then the four children rushed into the room breathless, to tell the tale.

"Santa Claus is down-stairs!" screamed Tommy, who was minus his jacket and shoes.

"Santa Claus, Santa Claus!" echoed Ray, excitedly, "him tumbled down the chimney."

"It's uncle James," shouted Bertie, "and oh! papa, you ought to see him.—Oh! hasn't he got lots of things. Why, he is sitting on a big sleigh, and he has a whole crowd of toys on his back. Come and see him."

"I am sure it is uncle James," said Edith, "because he laughed when Ray went up and put her hand on his beard. But he will not speak to us."

"Let us go back!" shouted Tommy, "he may fly away;" and off he ran, followed by the others.

When Mr. and Mrs. Morrison reached the dining-room, a novel sight was presented to their astonished gaze. Uncle James, artistically arrayed as Santa Claus, was engaged in distributing to the children the contents of a large pack. Dolls, wagons, steamboats, guns, whips, drums and boxes of sugar-plums lay scattered about them, while each examined the treasures in detail, and exclaimed afresh over the beauties of every toy.

Every member of the household was remembered, and on Edith's white throat glistened the heavy chain and monogram locket that she had ceased to think of.

"Come, Albert, help me out of this sleigh," said uncle James, unfastening his snow-flaked cloak, and removing his long, gray wig and beard that had somewhat disguised his features. The children shouted with delight.

"I told you so! I knew it was Uncle James!" cried Edith, running to kiss him. Ray sprang on his knee unasked, and clasped her arms around his neck.

Uncle James looked delighted, and gazed triumphantly around him.

"This is my Christmas gift," he said.—"You can not tell how happy it makes me. But for this little child I should be alone this morning, as cross and miserable as ever. She has made me understand and appreciate Christmas-Day."

Two gentlemen, traveling in Scotland, were discussing the fare at different hotels. One observed at his hotel he had tea so strong it was necessary to confine it in an iron vessel. "At mine," said the other, "it is made so weak it has not strength to run out of the teapot."

A week filled with selfishness, and the Sabbath stuffed full of religious exercises, will make a good Pharisee, but a poor christain. There are many persons who think Sunday is a sponge with which to wipe out the sins of the week.