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BY-AND-BY.

There's a little mischief maker,
That is stealing half our bliss,
Sketching pictures in a dreamland
That are never seen in this.
Dashing from the lips the pleasures
Of the present while we sigh;
You may know this mischief-maker,
For his name is By-and-By.

He is sitting by your hearthstones,
With his sly, bewitching glance,
Whisp'ring of the coming morrow
As the social hours advance;
Loitering, mid our calm reflections,
Hiding forms of beauty nigh;
He's a smooth, deceitful fellow,
This enchanter, By-and-By.

You may know him by his winning,
By his careless, sportive air;
By his sly, obtrusive presence,
That is straying everywhere;
By trophies that he gathers
Where his sombre victims lie,
For a bold, determined fellow
Is this conqueror, By-and-By.

When the calls of duty haunt us,
And the present seems to be
All the time that ever mortals
Snatch from dark eternity,
Then a fairy hand seems painting
Pictures on a painted sky,
For a cunning little artist
Is the fairy, By-and-By.

"By-and-By" the wind is singing,
"By-and-By," the heart replies;
But the phantom just above us
Ere we grasp it ever flies,
List not to the idle charmer,
Scorn the very specious lie—
Do not believe or trust in
This deceiver, By-and-By.

ONE MAD ACT.

A STORY OF CHRISTMAS TIME.

JENNIE DAVIS BURTON.

CHRISTMAS, but as different from our ideas of Christmas-time as the antipodes.

A traveler had left Africa three days before, and was pushing on with a feverish restlessness through the mountain regions, sometimes following fragments of those grand old roads, lasting relics of the glorious days of the Incas, sometimes losing himself, as it seemed, in the very heart of the tropical forest. Everything there, was on a magnificent scale. Giant palms reared their feathery heads high above the neighboring groves; trees gorgeous with flowers from top to bottom were stunted by comparison, and yet stood a hundred and fifty feet in the air; abrupt chasms yawned beneath until distance was lost in the eternal darkness of their unfathomable depths; and above, huge precipices rose one above another, like gigantic steps leading straight up into the very vault of heaven itself.—Amid all the grandeurs of the lower third of the mightiest mountain range in the world, the tops of whose sierras are lost amid eternal snows, where nature has put on the garb of the stupenduous and sublime, this man had come, hoping to escape from that self-consciousness whose raging passions made his life a hell.

He had an Indian guide and a pack-mule for his train, but had left both at the cabin where he had passed the night, and gone tramping quite alone up the steep bridle-path, which led through almost impenetrable wilds.

It was Christmas-day, and all over the Christain world a *Te Deum* was being sung, "Peace upon earth and good will among men," was being preached from thousands of pulpits and instilled into millions of hearts.

It was a day full of happy hopeful meaning suggestive in numberless homes of bright hearthstones and the one family reunion of the year of good cheer—the big brown turkey laid out in state, flanked by speckled pudding and sparkles like champagne—of light hearts and merry faces, of bands of pine and scarlet berries of the tall Christmas-tree and the children's carnival.

It was to escape recollections of these that had sent Randolph Braxton an aimless wanderer among the Andes, but memory is as remorseless as fate and the picture of the Christmas past rose before him blotting out tropical scenery and brilliant sunshine, and overwhelming his inner being with the blackness of desolation and despair.

He stood upon a plateau, which was scarcely more than a ledge, where bright emerald moss was piled a yard thick, on which the footsteps of an army would not have made a sound. He held his clasped hands toward heaven, and lifted his face, dark with sudden fury, and though he uttered no word it was as if he had called down heaven's direct wrath upon his adversary.

And then, as he returned to retrace his steps through the vast solitude, he found himself face to face with another man.

A man so like himself that for the brooding shadow on Randolph Braxton's face, the one might have been taken for the other. The eyes of the two met, the new comer half recoiled with a look of horror, then recovered himself and took a step farward, holding out his hand.

"Dolph, old fellow!"

"Keep back!" cried Randolph Braxton, hoarsely. "What brought you here? Satan must have sent you here to tempt me, but the more fool you to have ever come. You might have known that you and I could not meet and both live. No simple chance has brought us face to face here. Why have you followed me here?"

"To be reconciled to you, brother."

"Brother!" repeated the other with a bitter sneer. "For one year I have owned no brother. My life has but one impulse left—to take revenge. Oh, cower and turn pale, fool! you have tempted your own fate."

"Randolph, are you mad? Listen to me."

"I listened to you once, to my lasting grief and desolation; your false tongue shall have no chance with me again. Go down upon your knees and ask heaven to receive your soul, if such a vain prayer will give you any comfort in your dying hour."

"Dolph, Dolph! You would not murder me in cold blood?"

"Would I not? It is no better than you deserve, but my life is not so desirable that I fear to risk it in giving you a chance for yours. Are you armed?—Take this. We will take three paces from this spot, turn and fire when I give the word. Pick up that pistol and do as I say. I swear I will shoot you in your tracks like the dog you are if you refuse to do it."

He had flung the weapon at the other's feet, and he, hesitating, could do no less than obey that last, imperious command.

"Heaven bear witness that you force me to do this," he cried, in great agitation.

The only answer which his brother vouchsafed was to motion him to his place. A moment later two pistol shots rang sharply out upon the air, and then Randolph Braxton stood upon the ledge alone. The other had thrown up his hands and staggared back, with a single groan had fallen—fallen headlong down the abyss. What was the story in the lives of those two which led to this tragical end? We will go back one year and see:

"And that is your home, Aglae. What will your friends say to receiving me?—Oh, I am afraid!"

"Afraid!" laughed Aglae Braxton merrily. "My dear, I am the only daughter of the house, and you are my guest.—When that is said, enough is said. On that recommendation, my dear, stately old papa will welcome you cordially, mamma will take you to her arms, and nobody will ask any questions. Here we are, and welcome to Braxtonia."

Braxtonia itself was a Virginian estate; the house long and low, by no means a stately or imposing structure, but roomy and comfortable, and overflowing with holiday guests.

"We have worn out their patience by being the latest arrival, I suppose, and nobody is on the lookout for us," said Aglae, springing down from the carriage, and leading the way into the covered porch. "Oh, here is a sign of life at last one of our boys, Justian. Neal, how dare you? Put me down instantly!"

A tall young fellow coming out of the dim hall had caught her up as he would have done a child.

"How do, sis? It *is* you at last. We were about giving you up as one among the missing, and the governor has seriously reflected whether he should advertise 'Lost strayed, or stolen, a little brown girl, with a red dress and a horrible temper. Marked with seven freckles on the end of her nose, with a catty propensity for scratching, and a happy knack of pulling hair.' I inclined to the belief that you had deluded some unfortunate youth into an elopement, but mamma—bless her credulous heart!—stuck to it stoutly that your affection for French and Geometry would not permit you to tear yourself away from the scene of your enticing studies, though, like the last rose of summer, you bloomed there alone. Oh, if you insist in that dignified tone, down you go of course. I beg your friend's pardon!"

"Miss Talcott, Neal. Never mind my wild brother, Justina. His head isn't quite level, but his heart is in the right place, as you will discover," and Aglae flashed a mischevious glance at Neal, who paid his compliments in some confusion as Miss Talcott threw back her vail, and lifted to his sight the lovliest face he had ever seen. Ordinarily, he had a hearty contempt for his sister's school-girl friends, and had given his boisterous greeting without a thought of the slight, small figure standing in the background; but he reddened consciously as he made his bow to her, and wished he had repressed his boyish exuberance for once.

"And that was your brother, Aglae?" said Justina, as she sat in the apartment which the two girls were to share jointly, sometime later of the day. "Do you know, I had formed an idea from your manner of speaking of 'our boys,' that they were little fellows in jackets, considerably younger than yourself? An odd mistake, of no moment, of course but still I wish I had known."

"You would have refused to come home with me, and I had set my heart on that. And I really had no intention to deceive at first. We are always teasing each other here, and I make it a matter of duty to patronize the boys, just as they presist in treating me like an overgrown baby, instead of a mature young lady of eighteen, who will graduate with honors at the close of the term. It was only after you refused an invitation from Virginia Reis, when she held out as an inducement the prospect of numerous flirtations, that I discovered your error, and conceived the luminous idea of keeping you in the dark. Now, don't look so woe-begone, please, or I will never have the courage to complete my confession! It is all your fault if I have condescended to 'ways that are dark and tricks that are' *not* vain! You are such a shy, timid thing afraid of your own shadow I verily believe. You seemed so averse to meeting strangers that I spoke of our expecting guests as a 'few friends,' which was the truth. It is that the house is literally packed from top to bottom, and we will have an animated time for the next month, or this Christmas at Braxtonia will differ very much from all preceding it. Now, you may scold if you like, but it is too late to help yourself or disappoint me.

Miss Talcott did not avail herself of the permission given, but there was a troubled look upon her face which gave Aglae a thrill of compunction.

"What an odd girl you are, Justina!" she broke out presently. "A misanthrope and a regular Braxtonia at your age, what will you be by and by? I wonder what any man ever did to you to make you hate the whole race of men as you do?"

Justina's gray eyes dilated with an expression which looked like sudden terror, and she shivered in the mellow warmth of the room.

"I begin to realize that I was chilled through with our ride," she said. "What makes you think that I do hate men, Aglae?"

"Oh, everything in general and nothing in particular. Mainly, I suppose, that you never have a word to say on the subject of lovers, like all the rest of us, and even that surly old Graybeard of a German professor sets you all atremble if he comes on you suddenly. You poor little timid dove! how are you ever going to fight out the battle of life alone I should like to know? You will have to fall in with my plan, if only in obedience to the law of self-preservation."

"Your plan?" questioned Justina.

"Such retiring innocence would never suspect I had a plan if I didn't tell her outright. Well, never mind; wait until you see Dolph! He is the one perfect idol for my adoration, is my brother Dolph. Neal is a rattlepate, but Dolph is an angel! There is an exception to every rule, and you have my free permission to hate all created men if you only make him the exception."

"Aglae!" aghast. "Oh, Aglae, I am sorry, sorry that I ever came. Whatever comes of it, don't blame me."

"Silly child! There can nothing come of it except what we would all wish, and if not that there will be no harm done, rest assured. Come in!" There was a tap at the door, and at her command a tall, gaunt old negro woman made her appearance.

"Oh, you are Samantha, I suppose," said Aglae, after a momentary stare.—"You see, Justina, my own little maid of old has married and left us since the last vacation, but I don't feel the loss so much since a sojourn at Madame Joliet's has drilled me into waiting upon myself. You may unpack our trunks, Samanth. Let me see; what shall I wear to-night?"

"De big trunk, honey?" asked the woman, advancing to take the key. "Oh massiful sakes!"

Aglae looked at her wonderingly. She was staring with eyes and mouth open, as if in unbelieving astonishment, at the still little figure crouched in an easy chair before the hearth. Miss Talcott was looking straight before her into the leaping blaze, but every vestage of color had gone suddenly out of her face, leaving it as emotionless almost as perfect as if cut from Carara stone. There was an instant of intense silence, then the black woman trotted forward and fell upon her knees.

"Miss Crecy! Bress de dear Lord, how you come here, chile? Now de good Lord let ole Say lay down and die, comfo't'ble and contentious, since she see dat sweet face once more. Nebber tought to do it, nebber! Miss Crecy, honey! Hain't ye got jes' one word for de ole 'omen what nussod ye and lubs ye like yer wor her own?"

Justina moved, and looked with her steady fixed gaze into the pleading dusky face before her.

"What does the woman mean? I suppose, Aglae, the poor thing takes me for some former mistress of her own. Do get up, that's a good creature."

The woman's mouth opened, but a flash in the eyes of the girl stopped her words; a stupid blank crossed her countenance, then she got upon her feet again, slowly.

"Axes yer pardon, young Miss," she said. "Dat's it, t'ought you was 'nudder pusson. Dunno what put it in dis yer foolish ole noddle to make such a mistake."

"Then you are really sure that you do not know Justina?" asked Aglae.

"Sartin sure. Nebber seed her afore—nebber!" reiterated Samantha, shutting her mouth grimly over the words and going silently about her task. And yet Aglae could not get over the thought that there had been a mutual recognition; but she was not of a suspicious nature, and so let the matter drop out of her mind as a thing of no consequence.

For a day or two Miss Talcott mingled among the guests at Braxtonia very shyly; she seemed to shrink from notice, was quiet and constrained; then gradually the timidity gave way to a natural, captivating grace, she was metamorphosed imperceptibility into an arch, sparkling, fascinating little beauty, whose glances and smiles set inflamable masculine hearts afire.

"You have put temptation before me," she said to her friend, "and I am not strong enough to withstand it. I did love society once, and this seems like a glimpse of Paradise." The speech, merrily begun, ended in a sigh.

"Once!" repeated Aglae. "What a Muthuselah we have grown all of a sudden! How long ago, if I may venture to ask, did Miss Justina Talcott, not yet emancipated from boarding-school thraldom, revel in the joys of society?"

"All my life. Did you not know I was raised in society? But that was before I lost papa, and I do not often speak of it." A certain reserve in her tone forbade further questioning, and Aglae remebered that she had worn mourning when she entered Madame Joilet's establishment one year before.

While this conversation was in progress in the friends' apartment, another was being held below stairs, of which Miss Talcott was the interested subject.

"Dolph, old fellow!" Neal Braxton laid his hand upon his brother's shoulder, as they chanced to meet quite alone in the smoking room. "Are we both done for in the same way?"

"I fail to understand you, Neal."

"Oh, yes; we generally fail to understand where we haven't the desire to do so. But believe me, it will be better to speak plainly and act fairly now. There has never been a harsh thought between us yet, Dolph; let's make a compact here and now that there never shall be. I am dead in love with the little Talcott, so are you. Shall it be a fair field and no favor, each for himself and neither to speak until Christmas-Day, and then no hard feelings over the result?"

The brothers' hands met and were clasped over that compact, and though Neal rattled off his hopes and fears, Randolph said not a word. His nature was one with intense depths; he had capacities for good or for evil, yet unfathomed and unsuspected even by himself. His brother's words grated hard upon his super sensitive ear. "Dead in love," and *his* passion was an adoration too sacred to be breathed in idle words.

Christmas-day! A royal Christmas, clothed in ermine, adorned with gems that sparkled with iridescent rays—in other words, fresh snowfall, and icicles glittering in the sun. Just as evening fell, Dolph found his opportunity, and in a burst of impassioned eloquence such as had never passed his lips before his story was told.

"You love me?" repeated Justina, a sudden catch in her breath, sudden terror in her eyes. "Oh, forgive me! I was warned of this' but I would not accept the warning. I blame myself more than you can blame me, but I never thought this could come so soon."

"That is no answer. I love you; I ask if you love me. It seems presumptuous to say so, but I believe that you do. Look me in the eyes and tell me it is not so, and I will never trouble you again with my unhappy passion. But if I am blest with your love as I have dared to hope, all earth shall not keep us asunder. Look at me, Justina, and tell me if it is so."

But she did not look; her beautiful face was all pallid and drawn as if with some terrible inward struggle. "Oh, if I dared!" she breathed to herself, but lover's hearing is sharp, and he caught the words.

"What is to prevent, Justina?"

"The slight impediment of another husband, young sir. It is a very interesting tableau, and I regret the necessity of spoiling it by warning you that I do not permit any man to use that manner and tone toward my wife."

Both started. The door had opened silently, and upon the threshold stood a strange figure, a tall old man with iron-gray hair and beard and eyes like "pent-up fires," gleaming beneath shaggy brows' a man harsh alike in mein and feature, who remained for a moment gazing upon them with a kind of savage triumph, which made the girl he had claimed as his wife shiver and cower in deadly fear. Behind this apparation came Neal, and pushing his way past he reached his brother.

"It was a narrow escape for us," said Neal, his voice thrilling with indignation. "Norwood gave me the following clue:

"'If you want to know more of this enchantress who has been turning all your heads, write there,' he said, giving me an address. 'I advise you to do it before the mischief she makes is irretrievable. I am not among her victims, but I don't care to see my friends victimized, though I'm not the sort to hunt any woman down.' Well, I did write, though I wouldn't admit to myself that I suspected her, and to-day without knowing him I saw that man at church watching her with a look that made me long to knock him down. Afterward I followed him, meaning to accomplish my desire, heard his story, and brought him here.—She is a vile adventuress with a husband living—*that man.*

"That man" and the "adventuress" were facing each other. Suddenly she brought her hand from amid the folds of her silken dress, and carried something to her mouth; then looked at him, her eyes full of a desperate calm.

"You will never torture me again," she said. "Dolph!" her face and voice softened as she turned to him. "Bless you for the love which would have blest me, had not an inevitable barrier been between us. I dare to tell you this, now that I have cheated *him.* I have taken poison, which I have carried about me for two years in preparation for this moment."

What followed was always like some vague, horrible dream in Randlph Braxton's memory; a confusion of frightful invectives and an outpour of abuse in that strange voice; a vision of Justina falling back in her chair, with a ghastly, death-stricken face, and of poor old Samantha wailing over her.

"My own chile! My own chile! Gone forebber and forebber, and dat ole vilyun killed her sure as he broke her heart long ago—'deed did he! Oh, de poor bressed lamb! Tried in sufferin', 'deed was she, de whitest, purest angel dat ebber trod dis yerth."

And amid her sobs and tears and writhings, the old servant poured out a tale which turned the blood of her hearers cold; of a child-wife, bought with a price from a father who, whatever his faults, had been indulgent to her, and treated by her husband after the first glamor of the ill-made match was over, with a brutality which might have driven her mad, which did drive her to flight at last, but not until she had borne for years with uncomplaining meekness, and was in fear of her very life. With that tale ringing in his ears, Randolph Braxton broke from all, well nigh mad with horror, and rushed out into the darkness of the night; but not until Neal had laid a restraining hand upon him, and essayed to utter words. Randolph turned.

"Curse you!" he cried, fiercely. "But for your meddling she would have told me all, and I would have saved her from him. They say in there that it was he killed her, but I tell you it was you—*you*—you!"

For one year, the evil passions which became dominant upon that night, held sway with him; they grew, they blackened his whole soul, and upon the next Christmas-day, reddened his hands with his brother's blood.

Five years since that day, Braxtonia lay with its sharp outlines lost in the gathering twilight, and with lights shining out here and there; and a wanderer and an outcast on the face of the earth was going home at last. Going home to confess his crime, and to plead his repentance and his good works since as an atonement, for if ever man truly repented after overwhelming sinful madness left him, it was this one; If ever man strived humbly and persistently by a life devoted to charitable deeds, to self-repression and self-purification to expiate one dark crime, it was this one. And at last home and friends were close before him. Were they? For years he had had no word; death might have been in the circle there and he never have heard.—But no! The parlor lights were ablaze, and showed him within, the old father and mother, Aglae and a gentleman who was Aglae's husband.

Then he was within the hall and his hand upon the door, but there a rush of weakness came over him; he turned and entered a room near at hand, meaning to collect himself before he appeared to them, and stopped all at once as if turned to stone.

A vision, rising from the depths of a great chair there, moved forward with outstretched hands, and a glad, incredulous light upon her face.

"Justina!" he said in an awed whisper.

"It is Randolph, at last. Not Justina, but Lucrece!" And before the others were made aware of his presence, he sat down there and she told him the story. The poison which she had taken was neither so quick or so sure as she had thought; skillful medical aid had been instantly called, and after a long and uncertain battle, she was saved. Meanwhile

(Continued on Fourth Page.)