

Christmas day had come around at last.

Stöger had had a revelation. He had not been inside a toy shop for years and hadn't the slightest idea of the glories which the holidays cause them to assume. But he had been moved with a very worthy desire—that of buying a whole toy shop—and was just returning to the house with all that he could possibly carry. As he passed the office he glanced towards the window. There, each one trying to get the best view of Stöger, were all his employes, from the oldest clerk down to the messenger boy.

Somewhat frightened they withdrew on being discovered, but the expected storm did not break; for when Stöger entered he shouted "Merry Christmas" in the heartiest manner.

"Wouldn't it be better to take a holiday than to stand at the window and catch cold?"

No one loitered in following this pleasant suggestion, but as they reached the hall they stopped long enough to examine the small roll of money which Stöger had given to each as he wished them a pleasant holiday.

With mutual good wishes they separated, thinking to themselves that the old fellow "isn't so bad after all."

Otto was the last to leave, and as he passed Stöger motioned to him. What passed between them must have been something quite unusual, as Otto blushed and his eye brightened. He stammered a few words and sought to grasp Stöger's hands, who without further ado pushed him out of the office.

"Where are you going now?" he called, as he saw that the young fellow was about to leave the hall. "That isn't the way to Miss Rosa. It's a shame that one must suggest the matter to you!" —Evening was beginning to fall and in the widow's room the dusk was deepening. On a couch before the fire, which shed a pleasant glow over all, lay the young woman. She was listening to Stöger and her pale cheeks suffused with color as he spoke:

"You dare not say me nay," he commanded.

She wanted to interrupt him but he would not.

"You cannot know how I hunger for sympathetic associations. My life was dry and bitter, but the laughter of your children has brightened all. I thought to have done with the world, but now I long for it and again wish to participate in its joys and its sorrows.