

# GARLAND'S GIFTS

By HOWARD FIELDING

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I WAS one of the Marshall heirs, expecting a fortune and weakly waiting for the contest of the will to be compromised. Meanwhile I was a species of errand boy for Oliver Garland, who seemed to be some sort of capitalist. I never had the faintest comprehension of his business.

I met him first at the Harvard club one evening, and we took a fancy to



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CELIA BEING USUALLY THE LAST.

each other, though he was very much older. That evening, as he informed me, was the twentieth anniversary of his wedding. His wife was long in her grave. In return for this confidence I told him that I had spent all my money and must go to work. The result was that I became his errand boy, though he treated me like a friend. This relation continued for months. One day toward the middle of December he told me a queer tale about having sent money to some poor relations on the Maine coast for a year and a half. They were his cousin's widow and her son and daughter. Recently he had received a letter from the son which led him to believe that none of this money had been received, whereupon he had sent a check—the other remittances having been in currency—which also seemed to have gone astray. He showed me the stub marked "Celia K. Garland, Nov. 27, '07, \$250."

I could not understand this story—in fact, I never expected to understand any story of his, for he always omitted all the essential particulars—but I agreed to go to Easterly Harbor and see what was the matter. It was arranged that on the next day after my departure he should mail another letter in a pink envelope of unusual shape and I should watch for it. I was to say nothing to anybody and conceal the fact that I came from him. But at the last I was to play Santa Claus for this family in magnificent fashion, for which purpose he gave me some checks signed in blank and a letter to a banker named Manning in Belfast, an old friend of Garland.

On Saturday, Dec. 14, I arrived at Easterly Harbor and found my way to the Garland house, where it was believed that I could secure board. I was, in fact, welcomed with the most charming courtesy.

And here I received a surprise quite characteristic of Garland and his errands. The household consisted of the mother, whose name was Lucy; a cousin of about her own age, who was called Aunt Kate; the boy, Frank, and the most beautiful blue-eyed, golden-haired girl who ever existed. And she was Celia!

Surely nobody but Garland would have failed to tell me that he had sent his benefactions to the daughter and not the mother and why he had done so.

It was possible, of course, that at the time when he began to send the money Mrs. Garland may have been prostrated by her recent bereavement, in which case Celia would have been the natural head of the family, for Aunt Kate seemed not quite of sound mind, her great affliction tempered by God's mercy and her own lovely nature into a gentle, dreamlike detachment from the world's realities.

It required no detective skill to discover that this family was in very narrow circumstances and that Garland's remittances had gone astray. I waited with great interest, therefore, for the test letter, or, rather, for the day set for its arrival. The truth is that I had no expectation of seeing it, having made up my mind that the whole series of letters had been stolen in the Easterly Harbor postoffice.

But the letter came. I saw Frank take it from the box at the postoffice. Right at the foot of the steps he met his sister.

"Nothing for you, sis," said he. "This was dire. I had not for an instant dreamed of theft by a member of the family. What should I do? After some hard thinking I decided to state the facts to Garland in the mildest possible manner, not condemning the boy unheard, but merely asking for authority to question him. A reply by mail could not be expected be-

fore the fifth day, and meanwhile I might observe Frank and try to solve the riddle of his conduct.

He seemed a good boy, but somewhat secretive and mysterious. He had built a little house for himself at the rear edge of the garden, and though he lacked any direct instruction in carpentry the work had a distinct professional finish. There he spent most of his leisure, working with tools and often making salable articles, but chiefly occupied with some invention, his sister told me.

Frank would admit me to this house, but not to its secrets. An end of its single room was always screened off. I became more and more firmly convinced that the solution of the whole mystery lay behind that screen.

There was no way to get into the little house unobserved in the daytime, and at last I resolved upon a burglarious midnight entry.

Upon the evening which I had selected for my amateur burglary Celia and I sat a little later than usual by the fire, and it was some while past 12 when I crept out of the silent house and across the back garden and broke into Frank's den.

The first object that met my eye when I had removed the screen completely staggered me. It was an upright piano covered in the usual way for shipment, but absolutely unmistakable. A placard was attached, and, bending forward with my candle, I read the words, "Celia, from Uncle Oliver."

There were several smaller objects whose shape did not disclose their nature, and I saw that Frank's own name was upon one of them. The boy must have played Santa Claus with his uncle's money. But how had he managed to buy the things and "



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"I READ THE WORD 'CELIA.'"

have them carted to that house without his mother's knowledge?

"May I inquire," said a voice, "what you are doing here?"

I turned like a flash, and there was Celia. Before I could answer her she had seen the outlines of the piano.

"What is that," she cried, "and who are you? Have you come from Mr. Garland?"

There was no help for it now. I had to tell the story, dealing with Frank's unbelievable conduct in the most generous and light-hearted spirit as a mere freak of youthful folly.

"But these things can't have cost all that money!" exclaimed Celia, horrified and heartbroken. "He must have stolen the rest."

"Pianos are expensive," said I, "and we don't yet know what the other things are. Let's have a peep at this, which seems to be intended for your mother."

It looked like some sort of chair, and so it was—the most dilapidated, the most pathetic, the most laughable wreck of a chair that ever was seen. A card fastened upon it bore this lettering:

COUSIN LUCY,  
GENUINE ANTIQUE, GUARANTEED  
BY  
COUSIN OLIVER

"That chair has been in our attic for forty years," said Celia.

I turned to the piano and lifted an end. It came up like a balloon. The thing was a framework of wood, cleverly built and protected by a cover borrowed from a citizen of the Harbor who had recently received a real piano.

"These merry jests," said I, "acquit your brother. If he had touched that money he certainly would not joke about it."

We stood dumb with utter perplexity. "You are sure the money was sent to me?" said Celia at last. "I can't understand. Oh," she cried suddenly, "was it Celia K. Garland?"

"Yes. Isn't that you?"

"No; it's Aunt Kate. Her first name is Celia. No doubt Mr. Garland used to call her by that name."

"They were friends in youth?" I asked.

"I suppose so," she replied. "Aunt

Kate, of course, was not always as she is now."

"She lives in a gentle dream," said I. "What was it that disturbed her mind?"

"I never knew," answered Celia, and after a moment's pause, "Let us go back to the house."

Celia lighted the sitting room lamp and bade me wait. She was gone only a few minutes and returned with an enameled box, which she placed on the table.

"I took this from her room while she slept," said she. "Is it right?"

"Yes," said I. "It seems right to me."

She opened the box, which contained only some trifling keepsakes and a package of letters tied with a faded blue ribbon. At the top was the pink envelope, at the bottom a letter post-marked more than twenty years ago, upon the day of Oliver Garland's wedding. The others had been received within a year and a half, perhaps a dozen in all. None had been opened.

It was the wedding date which solved the riddle for me, revealing the old, long hidden, sad romance. Garland had broken this woman's heart and dethroned her mind. I already knew that the man had married an heiress.

His attempt to make Aunt Kate his almoner was a clumsy effort to assuage his conscience. Upon her side the gap of years was nothing. She had laid the new letters with the old, unopened.

I sat down that night and wrote to Garland the mere facts, without my explanation. Next day I began the execution of a counter-joke upon Master Frank. I went across to Belfast, cashed a check, bought a piano and some other things as near as possible to the line of the boy's Christmas jests and had them shipped across to me at the Harbor, but not sent to the house. I wrote an account of this matter to Garland, from whom I had had no word.

The days slipped by. On Dec. 23 I received notification from the local telephone office that some one wished to speak with me. It proved to be Manning, the Belfast banker.

"That check has come back no good," said he.

"For heaven's sake, why?" I demanded.

"It cost me \$18 in telephone tolls to find out," said he, "but I know now. Garland has gone to smash and has skipped. Present whereabouts unknown. I look to you to make good."

"All right," said I. "I'll see you tomorrow."

I returned at once to the house and told Celia the whole truth. The girl was aghast.

"They can put you in prison," she cried.

"No, they can't," said I. "Nobody can do any tricks with me any more. It is my turn. I came here as Oliver Garland's errand boy to help you, and this is the end of it. Give me the right to do it in my own proper character. Celia, if you will put your hand in mine and trust in me—if you can do it, if your heart prompts you—I will be a weak man no longer. I will fight this world to its knees."

It seemed a long time that we stood quite still, looking into each other's eyes. Then I felt her hand in mine.

The rest was easy. I saw Manning next day and made him take my note. I crammed it down his throat.

Then I went to New York, and for about a week I raged around among



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"I TOOK THIS FROM HER ROOM."

the Marshall heirs like a mad bull until they were all so frightened that they didn't dare to stay alone in the dark. Then the strongest of us got together and forced an equitable settlement over the heads of the lawyers. In February I returned to Easterly Harbor a rich man, with a reasonable self-respect under my waistcoat.

Oliver Garland's letters still lie in the enameled box. So they shall lie until Aunt Kate is gone. Then Celia shall open them, bestow the money in charity and burn the letters unread

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