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MERRY XMAS TO ALL.

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A MERRY XMAS TO ALL.

A Christmas Eve Reconciliation

HOMER GREENE

This occurred in the city of Albany, in the State of New York, on Christmas eve, in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and seventy blank.

Mr. Frederick Jury, attorney-at-law, closed the 45th volume of the New York Court of Appeals reports, and threw it on his table with a bang. He had been reading the case Darnall vs. Morehouse, reported on page 64, and had found there just exactly what he didn't want to read. The view of the law, entertained by the honorable court, differed diametrically from his own. He muttered something that sounded very much like the title of the case, but wasn't, rose from his chair, saw on his top-coat with a jerk that popped the lining in the sleeve; put on his hat, turned out the gas, and started for his home in as ill a humor as a man of eight and twenty years ever gets.

But the case in 45th N. Y. was not wholly responsible for his ill humor. Indeed it had very little to do with it. This savage mood had been a matter now, of some weeks' standing, and a matter wholly unconnected with the profession of the law. To tell the truth, he had quarreled with his betrothed. Neither of them could have told how the quarrel began, but the end of it was bad enough. The coolness between them had continued and increased for some days, until finally the strain became unbearable. Then, of course there was a scene. There were imputations and recriminations. He accused him of "envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness," and thanked the good fortune that had discovered him to her in his real character of unmitigated selfishness. Before it was too late. And he told her she hadn't learned the first rudiments of true affection, and that she had any heart at all, it was a mere lump of ice that was never touched by love, or sorrow or suffering, or any sweet emotion of humanity. Then she drew her betrothal ring from her finger and gave it to him, with a face as white as the ice of which he had said her heart was made, and he took it, with a bow as slim and courteous as though it had been their first meeting instead of their last, and said good night and turned away.

All that was three weeks ago. It might just as well have been three years as far as Attorney Jury was concerned. There was wretchedness enough indeed, in those three weeks to have lasted him the rest of his lifetime, if it had been evenly distributed. But he just kept right on with his professional work and sold his troubles to nobody, and allowed nobody to question him about them. But there was a peculiar look about his eyes, and a perceptible thinning of the compressed lips, and an unyielding expression in the close-shut jaws; and he had rapidly developed what his friend and law-partner called "a devil of a temper." It was almost equivalent to being frozen to death to speak to him. He wasted no words in unnecessary conversation, and his opinions were occasionally expressed with an abruptness of diction that was nothing less than startling. Oh! reader, hearts, who sang—

"I'd be to be wroth with one we love with work like madness on the brain."

It was barely five o'clock, but the winter night had already fallen, and the snow, that had all day been floating lazily in the air, came down, now, with a force and volume that was fast making out-of-door life a burden.

As Attorney Jury stepped out into State street and turned to go up the walk, the rising wind brought a great cloud of snow full into his face, and his temper was, thereby, in no wise improved. At the corner of Pearl street he stepped on to a Hamilton street car that was crunching slowly along over the snow-covered tracks, with the horses puffing and steaming ahead of it. He did not go inside the car. It was already filled with men and women and bundles. Besides, the merry Christmas spirit in there, as evidenced by the incessant talking and laughter, was not congenial to him. As the car turned up Beaver street an extra team was attached, but the speed was not thereby perceptibly increased. At the siding, on the steep incline leading up to Hamilton street, the driver halted his weary horses to wait for the passing of the down car. It was not yet in sight. Even the dreary tinkle of the horses' bells could not be heard. Five minutes passed; ten minutes went by. The merry passengers in the car had grown subdued and anxious. To Attorney Jury, standing on the rear platform, the delay had become un-

bearable. Nothing so exasperated him, of late, as delay, or forced idleness.

Finally, impatient beyond endurance, he stepped from the car, floundered through the deep snow to the sidewalk, and pushed on with an energy born of vexation up the dark and wholly deserted street. He hardly noticed the down car as it went by on Hamilton street, with its single passenger. At the corner of Hawk street he turned down toward Hudson avenue. A whim had seized him to go around by the residence of his former sweetheart. He had not been there in three weeks, and he had a morbid curiosity to see the place. No one would notice him on such a night as this; and there was a bare possibility that he might catch a glimpse of her through a window with curtains not drawn, or something of that kind. Not that it was anything to him, now, whether he ever saw her again. Oh, no, but then—

"Hup! Hello! what the— Why, Sonny, I came near upsetting

you; hurt you any?"

A diminutive bit of humanity struggled up from under Attorney Jury's feet, gouged the snow out of his eyes and mouth, and replied:

"No'p— Tay, Mithter, tell me where Tanty Tlawth livth?"

Jury bent down to examine the questioner. It was a boy four or five years old, too poorly and thinly dressed to be out in such a tempest as this, but a boy with an object in view. He was looking for Santa Claus, and his bright eyes shone in expectancy as he waited impatiently for an answer. An idea dropped suddenly into Attorney Jury's mind, and he said:

"Why, I'm Santa Claus, my boy; what do you want of Santa Claus?"

The child replied, with a touch of incredulity in his voice: "You don't be Tanty Tlawth, do you?"

"Of course," reiterated Jury; "of course I'm Santa Claus—to all intents and purposes; what do you want of me?"

Doubt gave place to confidence in the boy's mind.

"Well—tay!" he answered; "my mama, te's sick; te is; and to want a— a plathter, and a bottle of— of— And tay, Mithter Tanty Tlawth, I want a tied."

Jury's temper was vanishing and his heart was softening in the presence of the little wail.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"Oh! way off—there."

The tiny fore-finger pointed in three or four different directions successively. The child was evidently lost.

"What's your name?" asked Jury.

Some indistinct words, which could not be understood, tumbled out of the tiny mouth. Jury tried again.

"How did you get here?"

"I tumbled up the tepth; my mama, te's tick; te is."

Here was a clue, at last. The little wanderer's home must be beyond the steps that lead down into the ravine on the other side of the city. Jury determined to find it at any rate and, taking the child up in his arms,

and shielding him as much as possible from the storm, he hurried through Hawk street, gathering further information from his newly discovered disciple on the way.

On State street a woman turned and looked after him suspiciously, and a policeman, standing in a sheltered corner of the new capitol thought better of an apparent attempt to follow, and retreated to his covered nook as soon as the driving snow struck his face. Against the steps the storm swept with unchecked fury, and the deepening snow upon them rendered the descent hazardous and slow. But once at the bottom, the child recognized his surroundings, and gave distinct directions for finding his home. It was a long way still; up Canal street, and across by a side street, to a row of very cheap and very shabby cottages, whose multitudinous imperfections were kindly hidden by the darkness and the heaping snow.

"Here't where I live," said the child, and Jury put the burden out of his aching arms at the door of the



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last cottage in the row. The little fellow reached up, turned the knob, pushed open the door, and said, "Tum in." Jury started to go in, but on the very threshold he stopped short in stupefied amazement; for there, before him, in the little, poorly furnished room, stood his quondam sweetheart—no less utterly astonished than he.

"Alice!" he at last found voice to say, "what—what does this mean?"

Woman-like, without answering his question, she exclaimed: "Why, Fred! how—how did you get here?"

"I found this budget in the street," said Fred, closing the door and advancing into the room; "in Hawk street, on the other side of the city, and I—I—" Fred was getting ashamed of his soft-hearted humanity—"I have brought him home. But, Alice! you?"

"I came this afternoon," she replied. "A widow lives here, with a daughter of sixteen and that little boy. The girl works in papa's factory, you know, and she sent word that her mother was ill this week and she couldn't come to work, and I—I"—blushing at her tender solicitude for those in trouble—"I came over to see if I could help them. And while I was here," she hurried on, "the baby disappeared and couldn't be found anywhere, and Eliza has gone out to look for him, and I couldn't leave the poor woman alone, so I stayed. They are very poor, Fred. They are in need of some better food and some more fuel, and I think there ought to be a doctor, you know."

Fred put on his hat and turned to the door.

"Why, where are you going?" she exclaimed.

"I'm going to get 'em," he replied, and in another moment he would have been gone; but, in that moment Alice had run to him and thrown her arms around his neck, and half-whispered, half-cried: "Oh, Fred! how could I ever, ever say that you were selfish!"

"Simply because I said you were heartless, my dear; and I said an unpardonable falsehood."

They were alone in the room. The boy had disappeared. There was a sound as of childish explanation, in another apartment, and a woman's weak voice in chiding and in soothing.

"Now go," said Alice, disentangling herself at last from her lover's arms; "and be sure to come back for me." He bent down and kissed her again, and went out into the night.

It was still snowing, but he felt that every flake that kissed his cheek was a blessing.

Over across the ravine the lights of St. Agnes twinkled dreamily through the mist of snow that dimmed and softened them; and all along the silent street the high, white covering of nature hid the scars and blemishes and dull decay that man and time had wrought, and made all things beautiful and pure as a young girl's love. And Jury wondered that he had never, in all his life before, seen a fall of snow that could compare, in lofty beauty and sweet suggestiveness, with this. It might have taken him fifteen minutes and it might have taken him two hours, to get to North Pearl street; he didn't know and he didn't care. But he hurried with all his energy. He stopped at the grocer's and he stopped at the doctor's, and when he went back up the ravine, he was in a covered sleigh, and it was so filled with boxes and bundles that when they were carried into the sick woman's house, Eliza, who had returned from an unsuccessful search, to find the little truant at home, didn't really know where to put them. And the boy who had found Santa Claus clapped his little hands in glee, when the painted sled was brought in, and shouted with the sweet persistence of childhood: "Oh, Mithter Tanty Tlawth, I finded YOU, didn't I?"

But when the covered sleigh left the widow's door, it bore a more precious burden—Oh! a far more precious burden; a burden which Attorney Frederick Jury WOULD hold in his arms where the gas lamps were straggling, and call her his "re-betrothed."

Sweet and mellow, through the storm, came the single stroke of the nine o'clock bell. Sweet and tender—Oh! how sweet and tender—came the good-night kiss of lovers reconciled.

And the soft snow fell, and the Christmas Eve grew long, and the spirit of the Christ Child rested down upon the whitened earth.