Christmas Invitation

By Katherine Edelman

JACK TRESLAR hunched his broad shoulders deeper into the big chair, turning a new page of his book. He was reading a Christmas story, trying hard to become absorbed in the tale.

A sharp ring from the telephone brought him to his feet. Who could be calling him on Christmas eve?

A strange voice responded to his "hello." "I hate to bother you on Christmas eve, Mr. Treslar. But I'm ringing up to ask if it would be possible for you to come and spend Christmas with me. My name is Bevan Willers. I live out at Richmond. I have a big home, and—"

"But—but I don't even know you, Mr. Willers. There must be some mistake."

"I want you!" the low voice was emphatic. "Will you come or not?"

Jack repressed a quick exclamation. "I—I had thought of spending Christmas—" he began.

"Wouldn't it be possible to change your plans? I have a feeling they could be side-tracked easily."

Jack thought of the lonely Christmas he had been anticipating. Aft-

He ascended the steps leading to the massive door.

er all, there might be something to this unusual invitation.

"You are right about my plans," he admitted. "They are rather in the air. But—but going to spend Christmas with an utter stranger took me back for a moment."

"That's why I thought you might come." There was a note of disappointment in Bevan Willers' voice. "I probably got the wrong man, however."

Jack thought again of the lonely Christmas before him. And before he could debate the question, he heard a voice inside of him answering, calling through the wire to Richmond, "You got the right man, Mr. Willers. I'm coming."

An hour later, bathed and dressed, Jack Treslar was speeding along the frosted highway to Richmond. Following the detailed instructions that had been given him, Jack found the long winding drive leading from the roadway. What a secluded, ghostly place, he thought, as he drove under the snow-sprinkled trees.

BEVAN WILLERS was waiting. In the dim light from the chandelier, his tall bent figure seemed grotesque. "I have let the servants away for the evening," he said, his bony hand motioning toward the end of the shadowed hall.

Jack Treslar felt a twinge of fear as he followed. Here he was—alone in the house with this strange old man. Anything could happen. There wasn't another residence within blocks. Then, his adventurous spirit reasserted itself, and he looked smilingly across the table at Bevan Willers. "Well, what's it all about?"

A dead silence was the only answer. Gray eyes under heavy bristling brows stared at him intently. Jack stared back unflinchingly.

Then a hearty laugh rang through the library. With amazement Jack saw the old man straighten up in his chair. Years seemed to fall off his shoulders. The twisted, grotesque appearance vanished as if by magic. He spoke quietly.

"I'm not crazy," he began; "I'm just a lonely old fellow, ticketed as a sort of recluse. The true facts are that I've been trying for years to write. Yesterday I got word that a story of mine had been accepted."

"But I still don't understand your strange invitation, and—" Jack interrupted.

"I'm coming to that," Bevan Willers continued. "The hero of my book is a daring, adventurous fellow. A man willing to answer a strange call that came in the night. I got intrigued with the fellow, and began thinking. Wondering if there was any young fellow who would act as he had done. So I rang the first hotel that came to mind and described my hero. Young, unmarried, interesting sort of chap. Pretended his name had slipped my mind for the moment. They connected me with your room. You know the rest."

Jack stretched out his long arm across the desk, and gripped the old man's hand. "Now that I'm here, Mr. Willers, do you still believe you have got the right man." There was wistful entreaty in his dark eyes.

"I don't just think—I'm absolutely positive."

Christmas Tree Useful During Rest of Winter

AMHERST, MASS.—In northern states where Christmas heralds the coming of cold winter weather, the tree that warms the living room December 25 is being put to work the balance of the winter outdoors. According to Arnold M. Davis, extension horticulturist at Massachusetts state college, fir trees can make excellent "feeding stations" for birds and offer them cozy shelter on frosty winter nights. Suet is often tied to the branches. The tree is also used to protect climbing plants, or the branches can be ripped off and laid as a mulch over low-growing plants or bulbs. Northern beekeepers find the trees handy as windbreaks.

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