

The Christmas Fellowship of Miss Mab

ISABEL GORDON CURTIS  
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Little Miss Mab sat staring into the radiant heart of a wood fire. It lacked only two days of Christmas. She had not yet invited anyone to share the hospitality of her small home. Never since she had been left alone in the world, and that occurred when she was 17—had she known a lonely Christmas, there were always some forsaken creatures ready to turn gratefully to the shelter of her home. All these festivities had brought a certain heart warmth and happiness which lingered for months, but it had not meant fellowship or sympathy.

"I believe I want a little bit of Christmas to myself this year," Miss Mab whispered to herself. "It's a hard work, all the fixing! I do love to see the old women and the star-eyed boys and girls fill themselves up. What they want, though, is the eating! They don't know 'nother' about fellowship. When a woman steps over the 40-line-an has been alone all her life, there's a sort of longing for fellowship—ain't there, Maltie?"

The gray cat arched his back and rubbed his plump body against Miss Mab's dress. "It's a fine dinner," observed Miss Mab in her solitary musing. "It's a fine enough dinner to deserve fellowship." She rose and walked to the front window. "I might just as well out with what is on my mind," she said. "I know who I want to invite as well as can be. All that's troubling me is the propriety of it. Now if the little thing hadn't a father, I'd take her in and keep her—longer Christmas too."

"She was watching a six-year-old girl who lived in the big boarding house across the street, which was thronged and lonesome as Miss Mab expressed it. Every afternoon about five the child lingered on the steps and watched eagerly till a man turned the corner—a tall, round-shouldered, thin, sickly-looking man. As soon as she caught sight of him she started like a wallflower down the street and always slung his lunch box on his back and lifted her to his breast. They did not seem to talk. The head with its brown curls was laid contentedly on his shoulder and occasionally the father bent to rub his cheek against the child's pale face. He climbed the steps with the little girl in his arms and shut the door behind him.

A CHRISTMAS BARGAIN

JUDY is my chief anxiety," wrote Judy's mother, Mrs. Phoebe Pringle, to her sister, Miss Jane Pringle. "Just as soon as we know that the bank in which we had deposited our little all had failed, Ethel went to work in the straw factory and Jerry is learning dressmaking. I am sorry to say that Judy is still a little flighty—very fond of pretty clothes, and not so sensible as the others. Judy often help, but I don't know what she can do."

"Judy! Judy!" Miss Pringle means Susan Jane," said Miss Pringle to herself. "Well, I can't have her here, and that's all that is." Nevertheless, this is the letter that made its way by the next day's mail to the small gray house, under the shadow of a great bald-pate mountain, where poverty had blown in at the door. "Dear Sister Phoebe: I have been thinking that it would be handy to have a spry young girl to help me in the store. But she must be sensible and have good judgment, besides being spry, because I may want to send her to the city to buy goods. If you think your youngest, Susan Jane, can learn to do as I want her to send her along."

"Sense and good judgment! Why, Judy won't do!" exclaimed Hetty, with stately frankness, when she read the letter. This seemed the general opinion of the family, but nevertheless it was decided that Judy should go. "They don't think I am good for anything," said Judy to herself. "But they shall see."

She looked back through the blinded tears at the little gray house. There were handkerchiefs waved from it as long as the stage was in sight. Hetty, the only boy, who was lame, waved his cap on the end of his crutch. "You're not prattling and that looks as if you might have some sense," said Aunt Jane, by way of greeting. But the parrot was polite and entertaining, and the little dry goods shop fascinating, and Poppleton's main street was gay. Slowly, but surely, Judy's spirits rose.

Of course the new assistant made some mistakes. But she rearranged the shop windows to the great satisfaction of her aunt, who was inwardly conscious that she herself was not "spry" and lacked an eye for color. And she advanced several new ideas which Miss Pringle instantly recognized as improvements. Christmas was coming—an anxious time in shopkeeping—and Aunt Jane was educating her niece up to a great undertaking. She had long dreaded the necessary trip to the city for goods, on account of the faintness that was apt to come upon her when she was in crowds, and now she was beginning to think that she might trust Judy to go in her stead.

Judy's taste could certainly be trusted, and she was self-reliant and a ready reckoner. With a definite and exact list of the articles wanted, Miss Pringle decided that her niece could go to the city and buy the Christmas goods. "There are always Christmas novelties and attractive bargains," she said. "I am going to give you \$20 extra, and leave the purchases to your discretion. What would they say at home?" "What would they say at home?" Judy felt several inches taller as she walked to the station.

The list first. It was long and uninteresting. Experience had taught Aunt Jane just what kinds of fancy soaps and sponges would sell best, and those articles were all set down in rigid detail. But while she was making these unexciting purchases, Judy's heart and eyes were all the time wandering in search of the fascinating Christmas novelty, by which she meant to convince Aunt Jane of her business talent.

Mrs. Whittler's Strategy

BY TOM MASSON

"DON'T you think, dear, that it would be nice to spend our Christmas in Florida?" Mr. and Mrs. Whittler were sitting in their cozy back parlor. As she spoke Mrs. Whittler turned to her husband with an anxious look of interrogation.

"Never," exclaimed Whittler. "Why, we couldn't afford it. What an idea! I couldn't dream of such a thing. Florida! I should say not!" "I merely mentioned the matter," said Mrs. Whittler, seeing her error. "It is of no special consequence."

"At the same time she eyed sadly a package of time tables and steamboat circulars that for the past week she had been surreptitiously collecting. To go to Florida had been the dream of months. And now it was ruthlessly shattered. Still, Mrs. Whittler did not despair. "Well, if we don't do that," she said at last, "we must have a nice Christmas dinner, mustn't we?"

"The thought of a dinner brought Whittler to himself instantly. "You bet!" he said, rubbing his hands. "We'll have the best the country can afford!" "I sometimes wish," said Mrs. Whittler, after a moment, "that we had a handful of children. It seems a pity to sit down to a Christmas dinner all alone."

"Well, why should we?" said Whittler. "Can't we ask some one to?" Mrs. Whittler looked off into space with her eyebrows closely knit, as if the problem were too great for her to master on the instant. At last she said slowly: "How would it do for you to ask Aunt Jane? She's getting along in years, and it may be our last chance to pay her any attention."

"Yes," responded Mrs. Whittler. "We shall, of course, have to ask Emily. We couldn't ask one without the other." There was a pause. Finally Whittler spoke again. "I suppose," he said, "if we ask Aunt Jane and Emily that Uncle Henry and Georgiana will feel it."

GLOOMY DAYS

THEY BELONG WITH THE RECIPIENT, BUT THEY MUST BE WORN JUST THE SAME.

"Look at the trouble that is being stored up there," sneered the morbid pessimist as he pointed to a group of women around the necktie counter. "It would be funny," he continued, "if it were not so tragic. Why it is that lovely woman with all her eye-complishments cannot select a necktie for a man is one of the things that rank with the unfathomable mysteries of life," says the Philadelphia Inquirer. "I would sooner send a blind man to buy me a warranted sound horse than I would select the services of a woman to select a necktie."

"Think of the fat man that will wake up on Christmas morning to find in their stocking a genuine emerald baby pink necktie that will look like a consumptive shortening when it reposes on their beautiful expanse of white shirt bosom. Then on the other hand, bones, the human skeleton, will probably get delirium tremens when he is made the recipient of a spotted necktie like enough to make a shawl for grandpa. Of course, neckties will do for the nice, dignified old gentleman who never wears anything but a little black bow, but a bowing saah of passionate heat. While the gay sport on the other hand will get something that would look nice on grandpa, and so it will go on down the line."

"On the Christmas necktie! What tragedies are written in its name! The pessimist paused. Then he added thoughtfully: "I would, though, rather have my wife buy me a necktie than pick out my cigars."

The Mistletoe. Few connect the mistletoe with the wild beliefs of our Norse ancestors, but it plays a conspicuous part in the custom of hanging branches of this plant in common among our Norse nations. The legend is that Baudur was "bit by a mistletoe dart" at the instigation of Loki, and in preparation for this injury the plant is dedicated to his mother Frigg, so long as it does not touch the earth which is Loki's kingdom. That the plant was held in veneration by the pagans is inferred from a passage in Virgil. The Druids always gathered it at the winter solstice and cut it with a golden sickle from their favorite oaks. The oaks with mistletoe upon them were always sacred to the Druids and marriage were the powers ascribed to the plant.

Modern Christmas. The happy of the "19th century Christmas" seems to have possessed chiefly of brandy, mulled wine and punch, drunk in enormous quantities, a "good old-fashioned way" of keeping Christmas, the loss of which need not quite move us to tears. When Christmas comes, we eat and drink less than we did, but the meeting of friends, the performance of kindly deeds for others, the greater readiness to forgive and to forget—this is the essence of the true Christmas spirit, and it is as strong to-day as ever.

Giving and Receiving. It may indeed be more blessed to give than to receive, but when the former luxury is lost within one's honest reach, it is blessed, too, to receive from those one thoroughly loves.—George S. Merriam.

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SHE DREW OUT THE PARASOLS

Jane's eyes, and her determination to do what was known at Crow Hill as "the square thing."

"They were bought at a bargain," she said at last, in a faint, but firm voice. "I can sell you the whole for \$20."

The bargain was very soon concluded, and then Miss Betty was suddenly seized with curiosity. "It doesn't seem like Miss Pringle to keep parasols," she said, looking around.