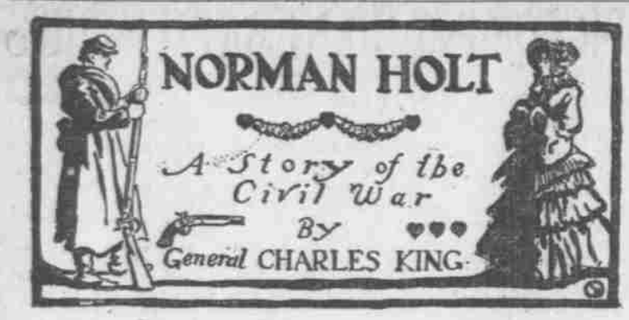

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Christmastime in Old Kentucky.

CHAPTER I.

Merrily squeaked the fiddles. Merrily rang the rafters with quip and jest and joyous mirth, with the stamp and swing and go of the dance. "Right han' across—now de lef'—dosydo—swing yo' padnuhs—all han's roun'" shouted Harkless, black major domo of Belleview, the doctor's famous homestead, and there at the sideboard, ladling out eggnog of his own inimitable composition, from the huge silver bowl that had borne for three generations the arms of the Holts of Surrey—there in dark blue clawhammer, with flat gilt buttons, in waistcoat of buff nankeen and in snowy-frilled choker, there stood the genial, jovial host himself. In two long lines the dancers advanced, retired, balanced and swung—fair, winsome girls on the one hand, bold, stalwart young gallants upon the other. Along the walls, on divans, sofas and chairs gossiped a dozen smiling matrons, a sprinkling of elder beaux. At every door and window were kinky, curly or turbaned heads and wide opened eyes of dozens of darky retainers, whose nimble feet beat time incessantly to the stirring music of "Unc' Pomp's" black orchestra. Three fiddles, a viol, a tambo and bones, all in expert hands, threw into the old tunes of "Moneymusk" and the "Virginia Reel" a verve and vim and spirit that time and again set even gray-heads to bobbing—even veteran gouty toes to tapping in irresistible sympathy. Festoons, garlands and wreaths of evergreen draped the walls, windows and the heavily framed portraits of by-gone Holts. Silver flagons and tankards gleamed on mantel and buffet; silver sconces and candelabra with crystal pendant prisms, and bristling with wax candles, shone and jingled on mantel, wall and sideboard; colored, opalescent lights glowed in dim recesses among the greens, glass and gourd bowls furnishing the enclosing spheres. Foxes' masks grinned above the broad fireplace where the coals of famous hickory logs were still alive. Foxes' brushes, hunting caps, crops, whips and spurs hung here and there upon the wall. Red-berried, sharp-spined, dark-leaved holly stood pert and prim in every nook and corner, while from the crossbeams overhead in the very center of the big bay-windowed room hung a single spray of paler, ashen green, amid whose curling leaves peeped tiny globes of creamy white, a sprig that vested the place beneath with strange and thrilling interest, a spot to be coyly shunned by every maid and eagerly sought by every man who knew the saving grace of the thrice blessed mistletoe, and brilliant were the device and strategem by which each sought to lure unthinking damsel within the enchanted limits, there to claim the forfeit of her forgetfulness, for these were the ante bellum days in the borderland of the Sunny South, this was an evening in the blithe Christmas holiday season and in an old Kentucky home.

And yet, long after 11 at night, only once or twice, despite the dangers of the dance, had damsel been fairly caught, and for those two Lorna Walton, a brilliant belle from Louisville, was rightly chargeable, for her gown was a creation Kate Ray, of Lexington, gave more thought to than any man in the room could claim. She was gazing at this, thinking only of this, when suddenly swung beneath the enabling parasite and summarily kissed by Henry Holt, the doctor's eldest son. That she was shamed, stung and startled, for the room resounded with applause and laughter, helped her not one whit. She flew at him with blazing cheeks and eyes and furiously threatening little hands, but he was long and lithe and an expert dodger. "Ah'll pay you some day, Mistah Harry Clay Holt," had to be her sole satisfaction for the time being. Nor was she mollified when, hardly 20 minutes later, and possibly through the same cause, pretty Lou Ward was trapped and pinioned and, despite frantic struggles, fairly kissed by a very good-looking young guest from Ohio, a comparative stranger at Belleview. It wouldn't have been so bad, said Miss Lou, had it been one of their own set, because Kentucklans are always, or nearly always, cousins, and, if not, have known each other so long and well they are just as good as related. "But this Mr. Malloy," said Lou, "isn't one of us at all. Besides, anybody could see, any girl at least, that what brought him to Belleview was no Kentucky girl. It was Miss Lane from across the Ohio."

And Miss Lane was a damsel many a man would have followed further, a maid many a man would be pardoned for singling out, even in the midst of a bevy of Kentucky women on their native heath. She was above the middle height, slender, yet with rarely rounded form. Her hands and feet were long and slim and exquisitely molded. Her hair was almost a chestnut brown, soft, shimmering and gloriously abundant, but her face was one no man could look at and forget—oval, delicately chiseled, with the softest curves and merriest dimples. Her eyes were radiant, of deepest blue, shaded by long, dark, curving lashes and overarched by thick, heavy brows of deeper brown than her glossy hair. The nose, straight and small, one never seemed to see simply because of the beauty—the witching beauty—of the soft, sweet mouth, between whose red portals gleamed two rows of snowy, faultless teeth. Set such a head on a full, rounded neck, above pretty, sloping shoulders, all dazzling white, and there is witchery enough to compel the regard of an anchorite, if ever such a being existed, and to try the asceticism of St. Anthony. This night, even in that room full of borderland beauty, she moved in girlish triumph, the belle of a Kentucky ball, and the fair young face was flushed with the consciousness of her power. Barely 17, without a care in the world, brimful of health, content and gladness, the idol of a proud father, the joy of a devoted mother, she lived and moved as though smiles and sunshine alone could light her pathway, as though sin and sorrow had no place on earth, no lodgment in the hearts of those that hung about her.

Barely 17, reveling in the delights of a pretty girl's first season, she had come with her parents to be the guest of the master of Belleview at this charmed holiday season, and to help celebrate the return of Norman, his younger son. The friendship between the elders was of long standing. Hotheaded, impulsive, often at fault, Dr. Holt was none the less beloved by a wide and ever-widening circle, despite the fact that his occasional quarrels had overrun the borders of his chosen state and overflowed into Ohio. McIntyre & Lane, attorneys and counsellors-at-law, had long been his closest associates outside the limits of his own commonwealth. The wife of his youth and middle age, his devoted helpmeet, the fond mother of his stalwart boys, was McIntyre's only sister, and all Kentucky knew the stanch old squire doctor would never take another in place of her who for seven years had been sleeping in the peaceful churchyard close at hand. A sister, the widow of a gallant soldier, who fell at Buena Vista, came and kept house for him the year after his treasure was taken away, though for many moons he had fiercely repelled the idea of having any one. Time, high health and the demands of his profession and his neighbors had gradually restored the old geniality and kindliness, but the balance wheel, the gentle monitor and guide that so often and so long had curbed the impetuous will and unreasoning impulse, was sorely missed. In more ways than one the proud, high-mettled old gentleman had fallen into error since her demise, and the latest and worst instance was in the case of Norman—Norman McIntyre as she had fondly named him for her beloved father—Norman whom she had loved with a tenderness unspeakable—Norman, for whom, despite all his pride in his first born—young "Harry of the West"—the hot-headed sire seemed to hold in especial favor—Norman, whose chosen career he had practically closed.

The story was already all over Kentucky, though hardly a fortnight old. The lad, in his 21st year, was at West Point, standing well up in his class and wearing the chevrons of a cadet Sergeant. Eighteen months more would graduate and establish him for life in an honorable profession, for which he was eminently fitted, when he fell out with a senior, a cadet Lieutenant of his company, and after the manner of the corps, challenged and fought his adversary, who, in truth, had been the aggressor, and had used his official position to vent a personal spite. There was a girl at the bottom of it all. There generally is. The sympathy of the battalion, almost to a man, was with the Kentuckian, but, as ill-luck would have it, the affair was brought to the attention of the commandant in a way he could not ignore. The regulations were explicit, and court-martial had to come. The finding was guilty, the sentence dismissal, but it was coupled with the unanimous recommendation of the court for clemency, based on "high character and soldierly record," and the Secretary of War commuted it to confinement to barracks for a brief period and the loss of his Seargent's chevrons. Everybody felt confident that when June came around Norman Holt's name would again stand high on the list of cadet officers. Norman himself knew that he had gotten off easily. It was the old doctor who went wild in his wrath, who had hurried on to Washington and thence to the Point, arguing, denouncing, raging. Regulations be damned, said he. In an affair between gentlemen the only regulations governing the case were those of the code, which every Kentuckian, every Southerner, every man except a base-born mudsill must recognize. His son had been put upon and insulted by a fellow-cadet, no matter what his battalion rank, and had simply acted as a gentleman in demanding reparation. "I'd have disowned him if he hadn't. He served the scoundrel perfectly right, suh." The doctor looked for triumphant acquittal. He would have considered even official commendation only right and proper under the circumstances. He listened in amaze to the order promulgating the findings and sentence, and than in an outburst of rage, ordered his son to write instantly his resignation, and Norman, smarting under the lash of the implied reprimand, yet secretly reluctant and doubting, obeyed the father's mandate. In vain did the commandant, himself a gallant and distinguished Southerner, try to reason with the irate Kentuckian. Holt would have fought Hardee right then and there, and only a limited few at the officers' mess were aware how narrowly a meeting was averted. They got the fire-eating physician away from the Point and "on to Washington," where, rabid old Whig that he was, he more than relished the opportunity of having it out with the Virginia Democrat who signed the order that swept the chevrons from Norman's sleeve. A man of mark and influence was Dr. Holt in the border states, but Kentucky and Tennessee, by presenting candidates of their own for the Presidency in the momentous election just decided, had defeated the party to which they were naturally allied, and to the wrath of the South, had opened the doors of the White House to a rank abolitionist, "an obscure rail splitter," "a son of the soil, who sprang from a hovel." Holt went to denounce and upbraid, but found a Cabinet that could outdo him at both. He was stunned by the reproaches of the President's backers and advisers. The President himself he could not see at all. He found that for the first time in National history Kentucky was not a name to conjure with at Washington. The border states had betrayed and knifed the great Democratic party, was the cry, and turned the Nation over to the nigger worshiper. The doctor wanted to fight Floyd, the War Secretary, but found the Capitol full of amazed and disgusted statesmen, in whose mouths the very names of Kentucky and Tennessee were opprobrium. Kinsmen of rank and influence surrounded the wrathful borderer and whisked him away, taking Norman with him. The second week in December found him home again, and, forgetting, for a time, at least, his bitter rage in the joys of hospitality. Then Belleview was thrown wide open for the holidays. Norman should be welcomed by the prettiest girls to be found in the West, and Norman should be hailed henceforth as a Kentucky gentleman, and no starving subaltern in the Army of an obnoxious Government. Holt had retired from practice three years before, young Dr. Woodrow succeeding to the good will and the bad debts. Holt had inherited wealth, a beautiful home and estate. He had a dozen hunters, dogs by the score, and he hardly knew just how many Ethiopians—he never spoke of them or treated them as slaves. He had his boys, Hal studying law with McIntyre & Lane at Cincinnati, and Norman—well, Norman should have a few months' rest after the years of iron-clad idiocy they called discipline at that infernal pauper school on the Hudson. He should look about him and take his choice of a profession. He should go to college, read law or study medicine, or stay at home and hunt, ride, shoot and be the young squire. But before they had been home a week the fond, hot-headed old father had seen beyond all peradventure that the boy was already repenting his action and pining to be back at the Point. Never in his life had Norman been happier, despite the monotonous routine, than in the Autumn days just gone by, when, on battalion drill or dress parade, he marched as left guard of the left flank company, wherein every Kentuckian in the corps seemed to find his soldier station.

They rode together for hours each day, father and son, and by every means in his power did the doctor strive to reconcile the boy, and to divert his thoughts. Norman rode, as do so many Kentucklans, as though born to the saddle, but he couldn't be in saddle forever. The long Winter nights were on them now, and there were hours when he could mourn unseen. Holt noted and thought and acted. The jollities he had planned for Christmas week were all well enough, but something had to be done at once. Old friends were the Waltons of Louisville, the Rays of Lexington, and they were begged to come without delay, and come they did, and much they made of Norman; but there was small chance for sentiment—there seldom is where lad and lassie have been chums from early childhood. Lorna and Lou had romped, played tag and ridden double with him time and again, and they were too near his own age. Loyally the boy welcomed them and paid homage to them, but every Kentuckian would do that. They were in saddle every morning. They chased the fox by day and danced by night, but when the girls and their mammas were gone to bed and the doctor would fain have taken his boy to his heart and probed his soul in search of symptoms of reviving content, Norman would steal away, but not to sleep, for Holt could hear him moving restlessly about his room, and well he knew what that meant.

And this was the state of things at the opening of Christmas week, and then came the Lanes from Cincinnati, and then a change. Duty as host demanded of the son that he should neglect none of his father's guests—that even old chums like Lorna and Lou should have just as much of his time and attention as those who were later arrivals. The old-fashioned hostelry in the village, too, was filled with friends who could not be housed under even the spreading roof of Belleview. Henry's room was given over to Mr. and Mrs. Lane, and he had doubled up with Norman. The register at the Asholt inn was filled with names the Nation knew and all Kentucky loyed. Holt and his stalwart sons had every

Mr. J. Burnett Malloy.

moment occupied, and the father noted with joy the passing of the shadow that fate, not he, had thrown about his younger hope, his pride, his little Benjamin. It was half a week before he fathomed the explanation, and then he hailed it in exultation and rejoicing. One thraldom had succeeded another. The bondsman to soldier servitude of the months gone by had surrendered to a new commander; all dreams of military honor and glory were banished by one overpowering dream of love. The lad, almost from the moment of her arrival, had met his fate in Daisy Lane.

Judge McIntyre had been unable to join them. Cares had multiplied upon the senior partner with advancing years, and his health had suffered. Lane, the junior, young still and vigorous, felt a secret anxiety as to his friend and helper, for such had McIntyre ever been. He owned to Holt he hated to come away and leave the elder man, but the judge had insisted. McIntyre's investments had gone wrong, said Lane, and he was brooding, worrying a great deal.

"I'll go up and see him after the New Year," answered the doctor, heartily, "and take Norman for a look into Cincinnati society," and he wondered that Lane should say so little to support the plan. He wondered more that afternoon at Lane's evident surprise and even disapprobation over the coming of a new claimant on the doctor's hospitality. Old Harkless entered the library where the two were seated in earnest chat, and bowing with grave dignity presented on a silver-salver a letter to his master.

"Why, this is from Mac, now!" sa'd Holt, as he scanned the superscription under his spectacles. "Introducing Mr. J. Burnett Malloy. I don't like that new-fangled way of dividing a name. Let's see," he added, as he drew forth the enclosure. "This will be handed you by Mr. Burnett Malloy, son of my esteemed friend, Hon. T. M. Malloy, state Senator, one of our foremost men and influential citizens. The young gentleman is visiting in Kentucky, and as he will be a day or two at Asholt, I bespeak for him the welcome you would accord to me and mine. Where's his card?" And the doctor picked up the square pasteboard. "Glazed!" he exclaimed. "Where'd he learn that bourgeois business? Mr. J. Burnett Malloy! Staying at the inn, is it? Well, Harkless, tell Marse Henry I want him. We'll call and bid Mr. Malloy to dinner. Know him, Lane?"

But Lane was already on the move for the door. He stopped, half-turned, colored, hesitated and then spoke.

"Yes—that is, slightly. I wish Mac didn't know them at all."

CHAPTER II.

And yet it was a very presentable young man, well garbed and groomed, who came instantly to meet his callers at the inn. The doctor had had no opportunity to draw from Lane the reasons for his reluctance. Henry had come at once in obedience to his father's message, and, while Norman and the other young knights were galloping through the forest aisles with Belleview's fair guests, the father and elder son had driven into Asholt, close at hand, to honor the Judge's note. Henry had met both Malloys, the State Senator and his heir, yet knew them only slightly. The former, he said, was frequently closeted with Judge McIntyre. The latter belonged to a young and lively set, with whom Henry had little in common. Henry was studious and ambitious, was not a society man, and so appeared but seldom at the blithe gatherings for which the Queen City in those days was famous. Young Malloy had traveled abroad—something few Americans could say two generations ago—and had abundant means and fair manners. The elder struck Henry as being coarse and pushing, but polish was not to be looked for in the professional politician. Henry was not in the confidence of Mr. Lane, and, therefore, could not say how he regarded the Malloys, but thought it possible the junior partner disapproved of the son, on general principles, as a possible suitor, for Henry remembered having heard that young Malloy was deeply smitten with Daisy's beauty. And then came the youth himself to greet them, and to accept, with evident pleasure, he doctor's cordial bid to dinner that evening.

"Sorry we haven't a room for you at Belleview, suh," said the Kentuckian, "but the women folk are there in force, and several of our guests have to put up here. If they give you a comfortable bed it's all you'll need. We expect you to spend your waking hours with us."

Mr. Burnett Malloy, in expressing his thanks, displayed much gratification and a fine set of teeth. He arrived just exactly at the appointed hour and appeared in black evening dress, which at that time was rarely seen in the West or South—most men wearing a frock coat and shirt collars of remarkable pattern, and not a few still appearing in the frills and wristbands that had been the mode of a much earlier day. Mr. Malloy was taken round the circle by the beaming host and presented individually to every man and woman, old or young, in the big, low-ceilinged, old-fashioned drawing-room, and after the kindly manner of the day, by men and women both, he was greeted with a cordial handshake. Mr. and Mrs. Lane were civil, were courteous, yet somewhat constrained and distant. Daisy gave him a swift glance from her soft blue eyes, a faltering hand and colored to the brows as she met his gaze, and this, too, despite the fact that her mother had warned her of his coming.

"Did you have any intimation, Daisy?" Mrs. Lane has asked, as they were dressing for the late dinner, and the child had fought in vain against that telltale flush as she answered: "He said last week that business might bring him to Asholt."

It so happened that at the moment of Malloy's entry, Norman Holt was in an adjoining room, the library, with Miss Ray and her mother. Wax candles by the score filled the drawing-room with soft, yet brilant light while the library seemed in shadow. The Rays were full of interest and sympathy in Norman's West Point life—there was a lad at home whose whole ambition was to win a cadetship—and they were listening in absorbed attention to his description of barrack days, when suddenly he saw their eyes wander to the other room, and then almost instantly, in surprise, and surely not in pleasure, seek each other. There was something so significant in the glance that passed between mother and daughter that Norman turned instinctively to note the cause, and turned just in time to see two forms in the conventional evening garb of two distinct epochs—his father in the blue, gilt-buttoned swallow tail, the presentable young stranger in the solemn black, with white, ecclesiastical-looking tie. It was at the instant when Mr. Malloy was bowing low over Daisy Lane's half-extended hand, it was the instant when that telltale blush suffused her lovely face, and, looking back from her to him, the jealous eyes of the young soldier noted unerringly the eager, joyous, almost impassioned gaze of the newcomer. He could think of nothing else, when, a moment later, at his father's summons, he, too, extended a welcoming hand to the unheralded, yet evidently expected, stranger. The eyes of the two met in straightforward, steady gaze, the soft, dark brown of the Kentuckian, the steely gray of the guest, and the hands seemed at first to miss each other, somehow, and, when they met, the sturdy clasp of the Northerner found only faint response.

Then Harkless threw open the folding-doors, and with his elaborate bow announced that dinner was served. Then the doctor, blithely saying, "Give your arm to Miss Lane, Mr. Malloy," gave his to Mrs. Lane, and Norman fell in toward the rear of the column, escorting Lorna Walton, deaf even to her joyous prophesy of a splendid run for the morrow.

It was a splendid run! The day had been superb—fine, clear and with a frosty rime that lent exhilaration to every hour in the open air. And now Christmas Eve had come and a second dance and even a larger gathering. Time and again during this evening that followed the splendid run of the day, laughing girls and gallant men found themselves comparing notes and going over and over again the stirring events of the chase. Whether because he had grown unusually wary, thanks to such frequent hunting, or because of the nipping frost, Reynard had proved a teaser. Hounds, huntsmen and the merry party had run long miles in vain, and as some brooks were broad, some fences far too high for all but the most daring

Daisy Lane.

and skillful, it had resulted that "the field" split up into a dozen little parties dispersed all over the country. It followed that toward 5 in the afternoon, when almost all the riders had returned to Belleview, there were still four guests abroad. Hounds and huntsmen, bedraggled and disappointed, had come trotting back by an hour after noon. The elder women, who had driven out in open carriages, to see what they could of the sport, had long since returned to the solace of tea. Miss Walton and a cousin, Louisville girls, had ridden in with Henry Holt and Mr. Goodloe, just ahead of the hounds. Norman, guiding Lou Ward by a short cut across the fields, had reached home earlier still, and was striding about the premises from gate to stables, still in riding dress, and obviously nervous and fretful. Four of the party only were missing, but had it been only one, and that one Daisy Lane, so far as Norman was concerned the rest had returned in vain. At 1 o'clock a belated, darky huntsman reported that he had seen Marse Blanton and Miss Ray at the ford of the Middle branch. Miss Ray's horse has cast a shoe, and they would stop at Sparrow's to have another set. That would account for them, but who had seen Miss Lane and Mr. Malloy?

Unaccustomed to cross-country riding, though a graceful horsewoman, Daisy had refused a broad jump early in the day, and taken to the highway. Norman, at that time, was well in the lead, guiding Kate Ray, who rode like a bird. Malloy, if was observed, though a fair rider, and sitting one of the best hunters in the Belleview stables, seemed to care little for any honors of the chase that might separate him from the girl whose beauty so entranced him. He, too, flinched at a ditch his hunter could have cleared in a bound, and cantered away to place himself again at Daisy's side. From that hour they were lost to the rest of the hunt, and practically to the world. Not a soul had seen them. There were thick woods along the Middle fork, and a labyrinth of cattle trails and bridle paths, but the one fox that drew the long, stern chase seemed to scorn the cover of those nearby copses, and had led on like a rocket, straight for the spire at Hardin Hill, nearly nine good miles to the north. Branching from the pike, a country road bore away for the hills, and as the chase was in plain view, it was reasonable to suppose the pair had followed, yet men and women who took that route declared to the contrary. Was it possible, then, that, preferring to be alone, they had deliberately chosen the byway that led to the long belt of forests? Mrs. Lane was looking anxious and annoyed when, after luncheon, she came out and joined Norman at the gate. Mr. Lane was eager, she said, to mount and go forth in search of them. It was this that determined Norman Holt. "Tell him I'll go, and at once," said he. "They have possibly got bewildered in Buford woods." His fresh horse was ready, and he was away in less than three minutes. They heard him winding his hunting horn, faint and fainter as he sped northeastward, and that was all until nearly 6, when the watchers saw the trio coming slowly in together, Norman afoot. Not until they reached the door were matters understood. Daisy, white one minute and flushed the next, was riding Norman's horse. Malloy, plausible and smiling, was explaining what had happened, and Norman, without a word to anybody, was leading to the stables Daisy's pretty mare, which had gone, suddenly, unaccountably, pitiably lame.

There had been a scene, it was believed, between Mrs. Lane and her charming daughter the instant they reached the seclusion of their room. Daisy had slipped out of saddle even before Mr. Malloy could leap from his and assist her to dismount. With flaming cheeks she had hurried up the steps to the broad-colonnaded portico, forcing a smile for the benefit of the women thronging to meet her, yet hastening past them to her mother, who, at the library door, where she had been in anxious conference with the doctor, stood waiting, and at once led her to the stairway. Not until late in the evening did the child reappear. Dinner had been sent to her that she might rest and be in readiness for the event of the holiday season—the Belleview ball. But they had been dancing over an hour before she came down, and every woman present knew she had been weeping. Norman, too, despite the demands upon him as host, was far from being his usual self—was fitful, nervous, absent-minded. Malloy, however, seemed thoroughly at his ease, buoyant and debonair, dancing assiduously with one girl after another and striving to be agreeable to all, to all at least until Daisy's late appearance. The thing that observant women could not fail to note was that Norman Holt never once addressed him during the entire evening and spoke only awkwardly and with cold restraint when compelled to answer his remarks. It was long after 10 when Mrs. Lane and her daughter finally joined the party in the ballroom. The mistletoe bough still hung conspicuous and threw its potent spell on all beneath, but maids and matrons were shy and guarded now, and mindful of the previous eve. There had been fun illimitable over Kate Ray's capture. She was one of the most popular girls in all Kentucky, and men and women both were her frank, devoted friends. There had been laughter and what might be called polite applause when pretty Lou Ward was fairly trapped by the stranger within their gates and, taken utterly by surprise, was most respectfully but palpably kissed by that well-groomed, well-mannered young man. Lou herself hardly knew whether to laugh or cry. It was at herself, or her "own stupidity," she was most incensed, not so much at him. Yet even in the holiday season, and under the mistletoe, wasn't it impudent? Even if he had caught her fairly, which she denied, he should not really have kissed her, said Lou. He should only have—made believe. That's what a Kentucky gentleman would have done. "Isn't Henry Holt a Kentucky gentleman?" asked Mrs. Walton, laughing, for she had her doubts as to the limitation thus ascribed to the guild. "I don't remember that he spared Kate." Miss Ward pouted in high dudgeon. She was not good at argument. She found little or no sympathy till she happened to catch sight of Kate Ray, and all that young lady would admit was that Mr. Malloy was a man who never neglected opportunities. It developed that Kate had met Mr. Malloy when visiting Cincinnati, and, further, without so saying, she had impressed Miss Ward with the belief that Mr. Malloy was responsible for one of the youngest and loveliest of the assembled party.

With every appearance of frankness, with every expression of proper regret, he had told the story to man after man, and to the women who witnessed their return—told it practically as he had told it to Norman, when that keen young scout and rider came upon them in the depths of the Buford wood. He declared he had heard the distant bay of the hounds coming from over the treetops, indicating that Reynard had turned sharply eastward when near Hardin hill, and, in his inexperience, as he frankly said, he reasoned that the fox was now making for the woods. Why not ride directly thither, and be foremost in the hunt? Miss Lane evidently longed to be up at the front again, but could not take the higher fences. He persuaded her to gallop, as he said, in the direction of the sound, and away from the trailing field. But once within the wood the bridle path became crooked, narrow, intricate. The sounds were deadened, and in less than half an hour he found himself bewildered. Then, in crossing a shallow ditch, Miss Lane's pretty mount strained her off hind leg in some mysterious way, and, evidently in great pain, could not set foot to earth. Malloy found a seat for his partner on a fallen log, and followed a path to the open fields to the north, hoping to see something of the hunt, but succeeded only in hailing a negro, who promised to go at once to Belleview seven miles away, and bring the phaeton for Miss Lane. Then he rode back to her and waited—waited long hours—and strove to comfort her by the assurance that aid must soon come. Not until after 3 did they hear the mellow notes of a hunter's horn winding through the forest, and Malloy's shout in answer brought Mr. Holt to their retreat, and Mr. Holt could tell the rest. It seems that Mr. Holt had stripped off the saddles, reset Miss Lane's on his own fresh horse, and started them home, while he followed afoot, leading poor hobbling Nellie Gray. It was most unfortunate, but nobody, said Malloy, was to blame except himself, the narrator, unless it was the darky field hand, whom he had liberally tipped to induce him to go with all speed to Belleview. It is easy to shift blame to black shoulders, yet it was pointed out to Mr. Malloy that the policy of wisdom was never to pay an Ethiopian in advance; he was apt to spend the money and have his fling before giving heed to his errand. But the answer was prompt: The negro wished to hire a mule, and could not without money, which was how the guileful bondaman secured his fee in advance. To his father's guest Norman would make no sign of the suggestion that occurred to him on the spot. The negro must have been an alien and a stranger who could not get a mule to ride to hospitable Belleview. There wasn't a darky within a radius of a dozen miles that wouldn't jump at the chance of going even afoot, for never came messenger, black or white, to Belleview's gate that went away unblessed, unfilled. Aunt Chloe's kitchen was famous for its good cheer—famous as the doctor's sideboard. The story about the messenger might be true, but there was one man too bitter and too jealous to believe it, yet too true a son of his father and of his state to express doubt of his father's guest.

Through a maze of narrow tracks and crooked trails young Holt had led them to the light, Malloy talking volubly, Miss Lane silent and disturbed. Once in the open, southward fields, Norman pointed out cross country roads for them to follow through various plantations and estates, and bade them gallop on, but again did the Cincinnatian take the wrong turn and a 20-minute detour. Again did the trio come together, Daisy by this time almost tearful, but Malloy as buoyant as ever. Again did Norman start them on the short cut to the pike, and wave them on, grimly setting his teeth and towing poor limping Nellie through the stubble, but now who knows what wayward impulse seized upon the girl! Was it to punish one lover or to encourage another? Miss Lane declared herself too tired to gallop, and half distrustful of her escort's topographical sense. "I'm not going to lose the road again," said she in so many words. "I mean to stay right here by Mr. Holt. If you are in a hurry, Mr. Malloy, ride home and tell them we're coming."

Long, long afterward did she recall that ill-considered speech, and the effect it had on each. Malloy's keen face turned almost white, and a strange glitter leaped into his steely eyes. Norman Holt flushed to the very brows, but for a moment neither spoke. Malloy gazed out over the rolling landscape to where Belleview's tower was glinting in the slanting sunshine, until he had steadied himself a moment, then calmly enough replied: "I'm not skilled in backwoods tricks. Perhaps it will be just as well to take no more chances."

"Why, I believe Mr. Holt could guide us home if it were pitch dark," impetuously spoke the lady. "Couldn't you, Mr. Holt?"

"I have guided a lost party to Belleview on a black night," was the reply. "You see, I've known these trails almost from babyhood. I dare say if I had to I could do it again."

She was thinking of that homeward ride, and of Norman's words, and not of Malloy or of his exploit of the previous evening, the ravished kiss that Miss Ward was so lamenting. She sat there by her mother's side, strange contrast to the girl who had been so radiant the night before, refusing now every invitation to dance. She was still tired, she declared, and unaccountably stiff and sore. She had been so little in saddle since the Spring. "If you dance tonight with one," her mother had said, "you cannot refuse others, and Mr. Malloy will be sure to ask for all you can possibly give him." Daisy was playing wallflower, a role to which she was utterly unaccustomed, but men swarmed about and persisted in their importunities, especially Malloy. Norman Holt alone did not repeat his request for a dance. Even as midnight approached, the hour at which all were to join in one cup of wassail to the honor of Father Christmas, there were men who hovered about her chair and begged that she reconsider. Seeing this, with an odd, semi-possessive manner, Malloy placed himself at her side, and, despite averted looks and a decidedly cold shoulder, hung there undauntedly, a sort of single-headed Cerberus, warning off all comers, until the midnight hour chimed from the old Dutch clock in the broad hallway, when, glasses in hand, the whole assemblage gathered about the glad, genial host. There were men that night who spoke of it before they sought their rooms, and thought of it again and again in the years that followed. Never had the master of Belleview seemed in blither, gayer mood, his ruddy face wreathed in smiles, his kindly eyes twinkling in joy and hospitality and benediction on all around him. Even the servants had been summoned in, Harkless at their head, and in broad, black circle, turbaned poll and kinky crown, encompassed round about the bevy of fair women and brave men. To each was given a brimming glass of the doctor's famous mixture. Its fragrance arose to the very rafters, and then all other sounds were hushed, as the doctor, beaming on them, lifted up his glass and voice. Only three days before had come the startling news that South Carolina, spoiled and petted child of the family of states, had declared all bonds annulled, all ties severed and proclaimed her secession from the union. No man could tell to what it might lead. No thinking man could fail to see that, grave and momentous, a crisis had come in the onward sweep of our National life. Even here, in the midst of all the Christmas joys at Belleview, there had been grave faces among the few elders, but tonight's the old doctor's was unclouded.

(To be continued.)

CHRISTMAS AT BELLEVIEW.

That Settled It.

Miss Fortysummers—Jack, what sort of woman have you idealized as a wife when you marry.

Jack (yawning)—Oh—any old thing.

Miss Fortysummers—Sir!—Ohio State Journal.