

Miss Kinglake's Experience.

What Came of Her Plan to Make Money for a Christmas Gift.

By GEO. HIBBARD.

MISS DOROTHEA KINGLAKE opened her already large eyes, and, if truth must be told, parted her rosy lips. She gave a little gasp of astonishment. When the idea had come, how it had arrived, she could not imagine. Still in some unaccountable way the thought had entered her mind, so strange, so amazing, so daring, so unprecedented, so unconventional, so revolutionary, that she was shocked into erectness from the gilded chaise lounge on which she reclined. Certainly such a conception was not in the least in accord with her very luxurious, modish existence. She glanced about the pretty Louis-Quinze room which was her boudoir. In the tender light, with the sweet silence, such an actuality was a strange intruder.

And yet when she had worked at the problem as she had, ought she not to expect some commensurate outcome? Exactly as she knew she was pretty, without exactly admitting it to herself, she was aware that she was not stupid, though she only considered this fact sometimes as a justification for certain impatience and weariness. Therefore, when she gave herself to the subject, bent her whole mind to the solution of the question, might she not hope to reach some novel conclusion? But such a result!

"Jack," she said on the preceding afternoon, as they sat for a few minutes alone, "what shall I give you for Christmas?"

He looked at her with an intensity which, in the half-light, she did not note. His silence, however, surprised her.

"Why don't you answer?"

"I-I was thinking," he replied with a sudden, broken laugh, "what I want."

"What do you want?" She continued plaintively: "I believe I have exhausted everything. I began when I was a little, tiny girl and you were a Junior at college, with a paper cutter for your room. In your senior I followed it up with a silver inkstand. I have run through the gamut of match boxes, cigarette cases, cravat pins, studs, books and riding crops. The year before last I gave you a set of old sporting prints. Last year, as a particularly risky venture, I essayed a picture of myself in a beautiful frame."

"That," he announced in a low tone, "was best of all."

"The frame?" she inquired. "My powers of invention have given out. My imagination ceases to work. I can't think of another thing."

"I should like," he replied slowly, "something new."

"There it is," she commented. "You are so exacting. What shall I do?" She had always known him. Long before, when he had appeared so immeasurably old, she had admired him with all a little girl's adoration. As time had passed a change had come about. She was the one who directed him, obeyed. Still much of the former relation had continued, and she carried to him all of her problems—sure of him always; she had counted on him to ride out with her on her first pony and play tennis with her, now at balls she depended on him to help her when she was bored by any one. When she held her fan in a particular way he was at her instant command.

Really her Christmas gift has always been so usual, so unimaginative for one of her known originality. He should have something different and she pondered the subject with a soft, little wrinkle in her smooth brow. Suddenly the inspiration had come, simple like all great discoveries, though catastrophic in its upheaval and overthrow. Why had she been so long in doubt? Of course, there was but one method, one course to pursue. The thing itself was of little consequence. She could find endless objects to give him. The embarrassment indeed was only the embarrassment of riches. But if she gave to him something purchased with money which in some manner she earned herself, that would be exceptional, unprecedented, surprising, significant, delightful. There would be some meaning in it.

But how? In what fashion was the result to be accomplished? She almost laughed aloud at the drollery of "the rich Miss Kinglake" setting out to make money. How much should she need? She reflected that gaining money must be very difficult. She had heard that. People seemed to find so much trouble in doing it that this must be so. She determined to be very modest.

What could she do? With this call to action she sat up, and, resting her chin on her hand, fell to thinking vigorously. How did girls earn money? She was aware that thousands of them did, though the means was far beyond her knowledge or experience. As she reflected she recalled the columns in the newspapers with the declarations

of people seeking employment and the announcements of employment offered. She might try them. Quickly, something which she had seen and not noticed at the time flashed before her half-closed eyes. A simple sign. How had she happened to remember it unless in an unconscious expectation of such need? She recollected that in the window of a large department store hung an inconspicuous white placard "Girls Wanted." That, she meditated, must mean work—must necessarily imply pay.

What if she should—? She fairly held her breath with the excitement of the mad scheme. "Apply from five to six." She could see these words also. Glancing at a little gold-mounted table she observed the hour. Half-past four.

She sprang erect. The touched the bell. When he maid appeared she stood like a girl Alexander, ready for new worlds to conquer.

"Telephone that I want the automobile," she directed. "And give me the simplest and shabbiest dress I have."

The day had just broken when Miss Dorothea Kinglake stole down the wide stair into the big, dark hall. Occasionally, in a hunting country, she had seen the sun rise when arising herself for a particularly "early meet." Sometimes on a yacht she had observed the first pale glow in the east. Never before had she known anything like the cold, grim winter morning. She had long before established an independence which permitted her to take such an unusual step. She might be supposed to be breakfasting in her room. When she did not appear later her absence would be accepted unquestioningly.

She looked about furtively. To make her exit without notice by an early servant was desirable. Successfully, without observation, she slipped through the door and through the porte-cochere. The light was still dim in the leaden sky. Snow had fallen overnight and the ground was gray with it. The deserted Avenue she scarcely knew at this hour. Indeed, she scarcely seemed to recognize the world into which she had emerged. The distance was considerable to the downtown district, and she had determined to take a car. Eight o'clock was the hour at which she was to be at the store. Ten minutes was all she had in which to reach her destination.

Obtaining the place on the preceding afternoon had been easier than she anticipated. She had left the automobile at a corner, and made her way into a crowd of waiting girls. Almost immediately they were headed into a hallway. A man came forward, hurriedly. Inspection was brief. Question were few. At the holiday season an unusual number of extra helpers had to be obtained unexpectedly.

"You'll do," said the official, with a glance at her. "We can always make use of a girl of good appearance whether she knows anything or not. What's your name?"

"Mamie Taylor," she answered. She had thought carefully, and this name had struck her as both unnoticeable and characteristic.

"Report tomorrow morning to the manager."

She was reporting. She had stopped a car and entered. She stood swaying unsteadily in a mass of pale, sleepy eyed men and women. No one heeded her. She had never felt so alone in her life. At a corner of the block, cupped by the great shop she got out. She saw many hurrying in her direction. Following with a persistent sense of unreality, she found herself one of a long line approaching a desk.

"Mamie Taylor," snapped the man without looking up.

"Yes—yes, sir," she said timidly.

"Number 523. Go to the Toy Department."

Number 523! Was she a convict to be catalogued? To the strangeness of the situation was added almost the loss of personality. Who was she? Was she herself, to be checked off in this fashion like one of the wagons of the establishment? Dazed, she moved aside.

"Come! Get a move on," some one commanded.

By questions not always too civilly answered she at last reached the place she sought. In the basement, brilliant with sizzling arc-lights, the heat, the hard reticence and confusion further confounded her.

"The manager?" she gasped.

"I'm him," a small, nervous person declared pompously.

"Five hundred and twenty three, you can begin to dust and condense this stock at once."

"Condense?" she murmured, gazing helplessly after the potentate, who moved on majestically.

Turning quickly, she saw an impostor. "Say, you are green!" spoke a harsh high voice.

ling being. Certainly the girl was about her own age. The sallow, powdered face; the unblinking, staring eyes; the lines about the mouth, however, made her at first sight appear older. Only on closer inspection might one note the still girlish roundness of the cheeks, the youthful redness of the mouth. The yellow hair was brought forward in a heavy wave, low over the forehead, drooping almost to the eyebrows. The gold filling of a tooth, saliently displayed, showed between the rapidly-moving lips.

"I don't know what 'condense' means," said Dorothea hopelessly.

"Put the goods together so they'll take as little room as they can," snapped the girl. "Here, like this."

With an impatient yet skillful movement she collected a number of smaller objects in an incredibly small space.

"Guess you won't be much good," she went on censoriously. "You don't look as if you'd got the sand. What's your name?"

"Mamie Taylor," Dorothea answered timidly.

"I'm Miss McCloskey—Miss Maggie McCloskey," continued the other. "Now, Miss Taylor, why ain't you doing something?"

"What?"

"Got to explain everything to you?" Miss McCloskey continued with every appearance of anger. "Now, you just dust those things and stand ready to sell when the people begin to come. When the prices bother you, ask me. Course you don't know how to fill out a check?"

She explained in hurried, aggressive tones, giving every indication of growing indignation.

"Washin' my time this way," she complained acrimoniously, "as if I hadn't somethin' better to do. See, you don't want to get left. There's some would take the last birdseed from a mouthing canary. I got to hustle myself. Christmas comin' an' the money I'd saved for a present for Mr. Pittman advanced to Annie Taggart for rent, or she'd 'a' been put in the street. Course he'll think I've gone back on him an' some other girl'll be givin' him somethin'."

Miss McCloskey's hard eyes were clouded for a moment.

"Love ain't the sure thing it looks. If I had what I deserve and was the head of this department—as it is, what I'm to do for a new dress for the Columbia Ball on Christmas Eve I dunno. An' Mr. Pittman, he's a great dresser himself an'll notice in a minute."

She hurried away, putting vigor into a lagging worker; then arranging to better advantage some article for sale. Dorothea was left bewildered and almost breathless. Automatically she moved about, dusting and ordering. Gradually she came to see more clearly. On every side were toys. Above her, strung in wreaths, were smaller trinkets. About her feet, so that she almost stumbled over them, were piled the heavier and larger playthings. Everywhere were Christmas greens and signs, "Merry Christmas" in scarlet and gold letters showed among the decorations encouragingly. Glancing at her companions, she found a mockery in the words. Hurried, anxious, nervous, they bent to their tasks. Dozens of girls flitted and prattled. None were old, some were very young and pretty.

"My!" said one, gazing at a doll in gorgeous raiment which displayed an insolently satisfied, waxen countenance. "I'd like to have her myself."

Dorothea recognized that, in another sphere of life, the speaker would have been merely a schoolgirl.

She was so small and frail indeed that, when she sank, looking furtively round, into a large toy chair, she appeared nowise out of place.

"I don't know how I'm going to get through to-day," she moaned, putting her hands to her head with the dullness of pain showing in the blue pupils under the long lashes.

"Number hundred and five," snarled the manager, who was passing, "the house don't pay you to take your ease."

The girl stood up with a terrified stare. Dorothea's white teeth closed sharply. Her little foot stamped as she stepped forward.

"Now you look out!" warned Miss McCloskey with a retaining hand on her shoulder. "No use mixin' in other people's business. We got enough to do to look out for ourselves."

Still Dorothea saw that with a great air of unconcern the vigorous dame drew near the smaller and younger girl. She observed in her hand the contour of a marshmallow. With a quick movement the fabled delicacy was transferred.

"What's the trouble," commented Miss McCloskey, as if taking up a subject already under discussion when Dorothea was next brought near her, "is this: the most of us has others that's got. Now, Pearl Clark's got a crippled brother and a baby sister, an' her mother, who's a widow lady, is sufferin' just now with bronchitis. She's pretty, too, as things go, an' well—it's harder for some nor others."

"How terrible!" exclaimed Dorothea impulsively.

"It's all in the day's work," continued ain't as strong as a horse."

The morning advanced. When, however, Dorothea thought the time must be ten, she found it nearer nine. In the close air, in the discordant din, the minutes dragged like hours. Few people had appeared. As each one

crossed the floor the "salesladies" stood in readiness. Eleven o'clock had passed before the rush began. Then a steady stream of purchasers filed the place. They crowded before the counter. They jostled each other. The riot grew. Dorothea would never have found the courage to accost any prospective buyer, much less cut her from out under the attack of any of her companions. Only because the crowd was so great that all were engaged and there was no one to "wait on" her, a stout, belated customer was unattended. She gazed about impatiently.

"If you girls were attending to your business instead of chatting—" she began, looking squarely at Dorothea.

"Can I do anything for you, madam?" she asked humbly.

"Certainly," croaked the woman.

"Haven't I been waiting here for a quarter of an hour? I want a doll in the latest fashion. A real stylish one."

"Will this do?" Dorothea asked, displaying a flaxen-curled, red-checked figure clad in white with a wide blue-ribboned straw hat.

"That!" fumed the female contemptuously. "Do you call that up to date? Why, there ain't no fashionable look there. When were hats like that wore? Before the flood, I guess."

Dorothea produced another and more modish example.

"A suit of that sort!" condemned the woman. "They went out last year. No, I'm not to be put off with any old stuff."

Obediently Dorothea displayed another and then another, only to find it unsatisfactory. Still the next failed to meet the requirements and yet one more. She took down doll after doll. She opened box after box. The time employed was considerable, the demand on patience great.

"Well," declared the massive shopper at length, "now I'm sure. I was only lookin'. I'll go somewheres where they have things."

She departed with as near a flourish as her size permitted. Dorothea sighed. When she had done a thing well she had always been praised for it. Failure annoyed her.

"Why didn't that woman buy?" demanded the manager, who had been watching.

"There was not what she liked."

"What's that?" he retorted. "You're here to sell what we've got, not what they want."

Dorothea's eyes flashed. Then she remembered. With an effort she remained silent.

"Yes, sir," she said meekly. The department was packed. Motion was difficult. On one side at last she discovered a small boy. He stood somewhat apart from the mob, as if intimidated by it. His gaze was fixed on a large and glittering Christmas tree.

"Geel!" he muttered to himself.

"Couldn't I use that?"

"May I help you toys," she asked gently, making her way toward him.

His clear, ten-year-old eyes rested thankfully and trustfully on her.

"I want'er git Christmas presents," he confided.

"Yes," she said.

"I got ninety-five cents," he declared proudly. "An' I want presents for Edna an' Maud an' Tommy an' the baby." I

"We'll certainly find something," she declared confidently.

She was obliged to take his hand to lead him carefully through the throng. Carefully they hunted through the place. They gravely inspected rocking horses, play-house, express-carts, locomotive engines and steamboats.

"They're too high," he said finally with a depressing realization of the limited purchasing powers of money, even of ninety-five cents.

"I thought that I'd have enough," he went on. "I made it sellin' papers, an' I thought it was goin' to go," he finished, struggling manfully against disappointment.

"Never mind," Dorothea exclaimed. "We'll find something that will be very nice. Just wait."

Again they made the round, giving their attention to less magnificent articles. Dorothea put down on a check each purchase made. At length, reaching the last, she found that the list stood:

Trumpet.

Top.

Noah's Ark.

Paint-box.

"An' the baby," he murmured.

"True," ejaculated Dorothea, "the baby. And this is ninety four cents. The child-eyes were fixed reverently on a clown, splendid in red stripes. (Continued on Page 12.)

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