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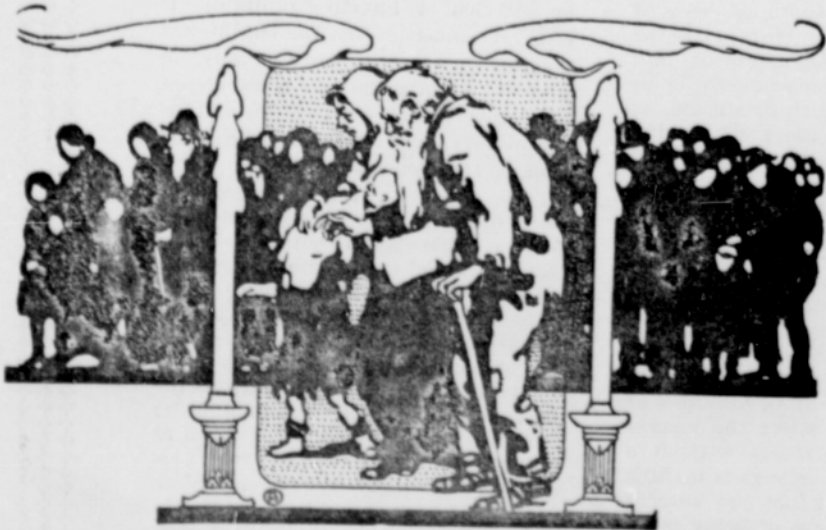


The earth has grown old with its burden of care,
But at Christmas it always is young.
The heart of the jewel burns lustrous and fair,
And its soul full of music breaks forth on this air
When the song of the angels is sung.

It is coming, Old Earth, it is coming tonight!
On the snowflakes which cover the sod
The feet of the Christ Child fall gentle and white,
And the voice of the Christ Child tells out with delight
That mankind are the children of God.

On the sad and the lonely, the wretched and poor,
That voice of the Christ Child shall fall
And to every blind wanderer opens the door
Of a hope that he dared not to dream of before,
With a sunshine of welcome for all.

The feet of the humblest may walk in the field
Where the feet of the holiest have trod.
This, this is the marvel to mortals revealed
When the silvery trumpets of Christmas have pealed,
That mankind are the children of God.



Lonely on Christmas.

Christmas is a boning season. The wanderer times his roamings so they draw him to the family board for the great birthday.

The first Christmas away from home is a sorry one, and the bride who must decide between spending the day with his or her family has need of much grace to make the break in favor of him.

Because the home ties are so strong at the holidays Christmas day brings some of the loneliest hours of the year to those with whom home is only a memory.

It is not a pleasant thought that there is no one who cares whether our Christ may be happy or not. It is a thought that once allowed to root brings bitter ness of soul. Instead of watering loneliness with tears smother it with kind

thought for others.

Do not sit moping the day away; distract yourself; force content; go into the highways and byways for company rather than sit alone.

You may not have money to spend; you may fear rebuffs from advances to comparative strangers, but there is scarcely one among our acquaintances with whom we cannot come into close Christmas touch if the desire be with in us.

The thing is to have the Christmas spirit so strong within us that it soars above unhappy environments.

As Dr. van Dyke has put it in his "Christmas Prayer for Lonely Folks":

Lord God of the solitary,
Look upon me in my loneliness
Since I may not keep this Christmas in the home
Send it into my heart.

Have Christmas in the heart, and the dreaded day will be passed, not in sadness and loneliness, but with inward comfort to sweeten it into forgetfulness of a happier Christmas long since gone.

Peace on Earth.

Peace? Yes; that is after all and above all our Christmas gift. To make joy for others, to behold their joy, to rejoice in it, is the joy unspeakable. And why? Because it is godlike and divine. Even so the Father joys in our joy, and the Son perfects his joy in completing ours. Peace is the product of passing out of the human into the divine element and activity. No man is peaceful who cannot share, in some faint way at least, in the experiences of his Father and his God. That is the only real absorption into the divine, the perfection of which heathen philosophy has dreamed as its highest goal, but which the gospel alone has brought to light and made accessible and attainable.

How much our Christmas Sunday has in store for us! May we all indeed realize its richest treasures and feast our souls upon them. May it be the happiest of happy Christmas days that comes once more to us. As we hear our children sing, may it be the echo of the angel's song, and as we unite with them in praising Christ the Lord may his peace enter into our hearts and abide there forevermore.

FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON.

To live content with small means; to seek elegance rather than luxury and refinement rather than fashion; to think quietly, talk gently, act frankly; to bear all cheerfully, do all bravely; to await occasion, hurry never—in a word, to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious grow up through the common; this is to be my symphony. Channing.

MARTHENA'S DUTY

It Did Not Prove to Be a Sacrifice

By CLARISSA W. LAIE

Marthena Judd locked the school-house door with a little sigh of relief and walked slowly down the village street toward home.

There came a clatter of hoofs on the road, and Lionel Forbes rode gallantly around the bend and pulled his big black horse to a standstill beside Marthena.

"How do you do, Miss Judd?" he asked, smiling down at her from his brown eyes.

Marthena's eyes were dazzled by Lionel Forbes and his too evident beauty. The sudden interest of Sharon's richest young man in the humble schoolteacher was flattering. Marthena Judd was pretty in a pale, delicate way, but one always thought that she gave promise of greater beauty when she could have a rest from teaching the robust youngsters of the village school.

While Marthena smiled and blushed under the bold glance of Lionel Forbes, Miss Myra Finney, who kept the postoffice, peered from an unobstructed corner of the window and made comments to her sister Susan.

"If I had a child in Marthena Judd's school I would put my foot down about one thing!" said Myra after Lionel and Marthena had walked slowly on.

"What's that?" asked Susan lazily. "I'd put a stop to her flirtation with Lionel Forbes. It sets a very bad example to the children. Why, Susan, she's all took up with him so's she's forgotten to come for her mail, and here's a letter from her brother Henry way out in Wyoming. He don't write very often. I wonder if there is anything the matter."

"Marthena writes to him every Sunday," remarked Susan. "Let me see—Henry lost his wife, didn't he?"

Marthena blushed and then paled when she read her brother's letter.

Dear Marthena—I am wondering if you can't take pity on me and come out here and keep house for me. You needn't do any real hard work; Lee Sing, the Chinaman, does that, but it does need a woman's hand out here, and I'm plain lonely some for you. It was different when Ida was alive, but you know how it is. I'll pay you what you get for teaching the Sharon kids, and you'll have a horse to ride and anything else in reason that you want. Do come. Send me a telegram and I'll meet you at Bitter Tree whenever you say. Your loving brother, HENRY.

Marthena's face paled as she read the letter. It was so plainly her duty to go to poor Henry, but her dawning love for Lionel Forbes held her back. If she went away now his too feeble heart would seek another. Yet, knowing this, she yearned after him. He had opened the rosy doors of romance to Marthena Judd. He would forget her if she went. And yet it was her duty to go to her brother.

She would let Aunt Hepsy decide. Aunt Hepsy was a large, capable woman who ruled her family of grown sons and daughters with an iron hand. She had spared a small gabled room for Marthena Judd, her orphaned niece, and Marthena's board money paid for music lessons for the three girls.

Aunt Hepsy read the letter and then settled her gold framed spectacles on her nose.

"Marthena, it's your plain duty to go to Henry," she said. "He's doing splendidly out there on the ranch. He's getting rich, so Larry Barnes wrote to George. You know Larry went out there, and Henry gave him work on the ranch. Seems Larry's a foreman or something out there. I s'pose you've

forgotten all about Larry Barnes now that Lionel Forbes is sweet on you; but, Marthena, you can't place any dependence on Lionel. He's a butterfly, always running after some pretty girl, and—now, don't get mad—you asked my advice and"—

Aunt Hepsy looked after Marthena's flying form with disapproval in her eyes.

"Don't it beat all," she asked of the empty air, "how folks will ask your advice and then fly all to pieces if it don't suit their ideas?"

It was a heavy hearted Marthena who packed her trunks and bade farewell to the little Maine village where she had lived all her days.

The train left Sharon and the old life far behind. While the ache of parting was still in Marthena's throat the novelty of travel interested and comforted her. Five days later Marthena entered upon the rolling prairie land that to her eastern eyes seemed like a dust colored sea bounded by the purple hills rising and melting away against the horizon as they sped on.

At Bitter Tree her trunks were dumped out on the platform, and the train went on into the golden glory of the sunset, while Marthena stood there feeling strangely small and forlorn until Henry's big voice and Henry's strong arms greeted her.

She looked at him with wondering eyes. Henry Judd had gone forth from Sharon village a tall, lanky New Englander dressed in ill fitting store clothes. The man before her was big and stout, and his cowboy hat and shirt and his corduroy trousers tucked into high heeled boots gave him the look of a stranger. But the old merry look was in his eyes and he put his

the sister into the buckboard and took his seat beside her.

"Hold on to your hair, sis," he advised. "These bronchos are walking on their hind legs today."

Marthena Judd never forgot that wild ride across the prairie. The ponies actually pawed the air as they started forth, and then in a spirit of recklessness they galloped madly for miles and miles, while Marthena held her breath and Henry laughed as he put one arm around her and drove the ponies with the other hand.

"Home!" cried Henry as he turned in between two rail posts and with a last clatter of hoofs and scattering of sand and gravel the ponies stopped at the broad porch of a pleasant ranch house that overlooked the Bitter Tree valley with a glimpse of the shining river at the bottom and the everlasting hills beyond.

Henry made her go straight to bed, and he carried her supper to her in the little room that he had furnished for her with all of a man's clumsy tenderness.

"Larry Barnes went to Choco with me, and we picked out the stuff. Larry said he remembered that blue was your favorite color, so we got everything blue and white. Larry chose the pictures. He said the one of St. Cecilia there looked like you. Great fellow, Larry! Now, you close your eyes and go to sleep. Get up when you like and order what you want for breakfast from Lee Sing. Good night."

With Henry's kiss on her brow Marthena went to sleep with a little smile on her lips and awoke to the glory of a perfect morning.

After she had leisurely dressed she went down to the veranda, where Lee Sing, with many polite gestures, invited her to breakfast. While she sat there she heard the mad clatter of hoofs and saw a horse galloping around the yard. From the distant corral came a shout as one, two, three, more horses leaped the gate and followed the first untamed animal. Three cowboys mounted on horses pursued the runaways, with lusty shouts and lariats held ready for action.

Marthena wondered vaguely if Larry Barnes was one of these cowboys who rode so fearlessly and so gracefully. She went to the edge of the veranda

and waved her table napkin at the vicious black horse that pawed the steps, and he scuttled away to fall a victim to the lariat of the most graceful rider of them all, a bare-headed slant with blue-black hair and a skin bronzed like an Indian's.

Then Marthena, when it was all over and the horses had been driven back into the corral, realized that she had displayed unwonted enthusiasm. She had not only waved her napkin frantically at the victorious riders, but she had cheered them on to greater efforts, so that she went back to her seat with scarlet cheeks and shamed eyes.

A step sounded behind her and she looked up to see the graceful, brown checked rider who had flashed white teeth at her as he captured the black horse.

There was a strange familiarity about him that puzzled her.

"Don't remember me, Marthena?" he asked, holding out a big hand.

"Oh, Larry—Larry Barnes!" cried Marthena. "What have you done to yourself? I didn't recognize you."

"I hope the change is for the better," said Larry gravely.

"It is. Oh, it is!" cried Marthena, with such evident admiration in her tone that both of them suddenly laughed outright in the pure joy of youth and perhaps in the discovery of something that both of them had lost.

"Henry's gone to Choco," said Larry, sitting down on the railing of the veranda, "and he has delegated me to give you your first riding lesson. Cherry is the prettiest little pony you ever saw, Marthena, and Henry and I picked out the saddle the other day, and"—

"Thank you for helping Henry choose the things for my room," said Marthena gratefully. And she wondered why Larry blushed so furiously and changed the subject. She felt very kindly toward him.

"Well, sis," said Henry that night at supper, "you look as rosy as can be. How do you like the saddlebrush?"

"It's heavenly!" cried Marthena so heartily that Henry laughed aloud, and Larry, who had been invited to supper, blushed deeply.

"Then you don't want to go back to Sharon?" teased Henry.

"Never!" exclaimed Marthena. "I'll tell you when I do, Henry."

"I'll wager that will be never," said Henry, but he said it to himself so that no one could hear. He had read the signs of reawakened interest in the betraying eyes of his sister and Larry Barnes, and he was very glad. Larry was a capital fellow, and Aunt Hepsy's letter about Lionel Forbes had been disquieting.

Three months afterward Marthena and Larry came in from a long ride with the glory of perfect happiness shining in their faces. Henry, standing on the veranda smoking his pipe, smiled tenderly as they came up the steps.

"Blessings, my children!" he said heartily, for he had read that day in a paper from Sharon that Lionel Forbes had married a girl from the city, and he knew that Marthena would receive the news with indifference.

Marthena, standing in her little bedroom that night amid all the pretty blue and white furniture chosen by the two men who loved her devotedly, smiled through her tears as she knelt down to say her prayers.

"It's wonderful!" she murmured. "It's marvelous how the path of duty leads one to love and happiness!"

December.

Oh, holly branch and mistletoe
And Christmas chimes wherever we go
And stockings pinned up in a row—
These are the gifts, December!
And if the year has made thee old
And silvered all thy locks of gold
Thy heart has never been a-cold
Or known a fading ember
The whole world is a Christmas tree,
And stars its many candles be.
Oh, sing a carol joyfully
The year's great feast in keeping.
For once upon a December night
An angel held a candle bright
And led three wise men by its light
To where a child was sleeping
—Harriet F. Holgrett



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