

A BIT OF CHRISTMAS

By C. E. WYMAN

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It was Christmas morning and very, very cold. Every few minutes a trainman would come through the car, watching carefully a dial faced thermometer and stopping to turn screws of the heating apparatus in persistent attempts to keep the pointing finger at 70 degrees.

Despite the discomfort of close air, which was none too warm at best, the passengers in the main wore joyous faces and didn't seem to consider the numerous packages and bundles an annoyance.

From a wayside station, which looked as if it had never been neighbor to any house where human beings lived, a poor little girl entered and dropped into a seat where an overcoat told that its owner was probably in the smoking car. The child did not notice this, and in her ignorance of travel it would have made no difference if she had. She might have been eight or ten years old, but that air of self reliance was hers which poverty's child often acquires very young, yet there was nothing forward or "bold" in her appearance. Her dress was of the scantiest—a thin cotton gown, barely concealing the lack of suitable underwear; a little worn shoulder shawl and a battered straw hat.

When the conductor appeared the hand which presented her half fare ticket was red with cold, but the small person lifted to him a wonderfully frank face and confidently informed him that she was going to grandma's for Christmas and that the package she clutched in her other hand contained cookies for grandma.

The conductor smiled down at her. A pitying smile it was, as he thought of his own well fed, well clothed children, with whom he expected to eat a late Christmas dinner when his run was over. The smile lingered on his face as he passed to the next seat and saw that its occupants had heard.

Two women sat in the seat, strangers to each other and as unlike as two persons made on the same general principles could be. One was tall, dignified, young, wrapped in costly furs, everything about her showing the person who never lacked money or leisure; the other, stout, jolly, elderly, comfortable—a kindly and well to do woman. The two had traveled miles and miles side by side with not a word passed between them.

Now both sat with eyes fixed on the forlorn bit of humanity in front of them. Suddenly the younger woman opened her traveling bag and took from it a soft gray shawl. It was at least two yards long and half as wide.



"Nor would I if I could dissolve the melancholy That makes her so adorable—my lady of the holly!"

Folding it together, she touched the little waif, saying in a low tone, "Stand up, my dear." The child obeyed wonderingly, and this woman in the costly furs placed the folded shawl around the small shoulders, crossed it in front and, bringing the ends to the back, pinned them securely.

"It is yours to keep," she whispered—"a Christmas present." Then, turning to the woman at her side, she said apologetically, "I really did not need it myself." There was a blink of tears in her eyes.

"Well, now," the older woman exclaimed in admiration, "you just set me to thinkin'! I'm really ashamed that I didn't think of doing something myself. Here, I've got two pairs of mittens for my grandson—just about her size—in my hand bag, and he can't wear out more than one pair this winter. Besides, I can knit another. It's nothing at all to knit mittens." She was busily undrawing the strings of an enormous silk bag, but her glasses were blurred, and her fingers were clumsy

with waste. "What's your name, little girl? Katie? Well, hold out your hands, Katie. My! Aren't they a good fit! There's another Christmas present to keep. And here's a frosted cake. Just eat it right now, Katie. Your grandma won't need it, with all those you've got in your bundle."

The child again obeyed. She did not say, "Thank you." Possibly she did not know how, but she seemed to glow all over, and her eyes returned thanks even if her timid lips did not.

"I'm proud to know you, my dear," the roly poly, comfortable woman said now to the young lady, for she had been saying to herself all the while; "You're the right sort. I can see that."

"And I am proud to know you," the other responded, almost shyly offering her hand, which was quickly buried in a big, warm grasp. "We all long to be of service at Christmas time, you know."

At that instant the man of the overcoat sauntered in to resume his seat.

He gave a low whistle of surprise at the happy little traveler next the window, glanced at the two women and comprehended the situation. His right hand made a quick dive into his trousers pocket as if to get some money. In another instant he withdrew it and reached up to the rack overhead and lifted down a large paper bundle. Taking the bundle across the aisle to an empty seat, he opened it and took out a smaller package from among many others. Untying this package, he brought to light a flaxen haired doll dressed in the latest style and resplendent in a large picture hat. This he placed in the little girl's arms, saying, "From my little daughter, who would rather you should have it." Then he lifted his hat courteously to the women, took his overcoat on his arm and strode off to find a seat elsewhere. Rich little Katie!

SANTA CLAUS A STRANGER.

He is Officially Unknown to Uncle Sam's Mail Agents.

The postoffice department does not know Santa Claus. The old saint has no official existence so far as Uncle Sam's mail agents are concerned. This is due entirely to the fact that Santa Claus lives everywhere at the same time instead of having a single local habitation like other people. It is very sad, but it cannot be helped. Letters which children address to Santa Claus or Kris Kringle must go straight to the dead letter office.

Some time ago an effort on behalf of the children was made to induce the postoffice department to permit postmasters to open all letters addressed to Santa Claus and turn them over to the parents of the child correspondent or to some local organization having a Christmas fund to spend, but the attorney general for the department rendered an adverse decision, holding as follows:

If postmasters were granted authority to open all such letters and select those which they thought proper to deliver to persons applying for them, there would be temptation and opportunity for postmasters and other employees to open letters indiscriminately, some of which contain inclosures of value, and give us an excuse for such action the authority granted by the department.

The department's legal adviser also was of the opinion that, if permission were granted to deliver such letters to benevolent societies and individuals, it would be difficult for the department to draw the line where benevolence ends and commercialism begins. Many persons desire such letters for use in newspapers and magazine stories, the name of the child of some prominent public man attached to such a letter making it especially valuable for that purpose and often correspondingly embarrassing to the parent of the child. Furthermore, the opinion states, such a practice would violate the principle of the sanctity of the seal, which is one of the best features of our postal system, and the department would continually be open to serious suspicion.

Gumdrops. Will—I see that Cook says Peary stole his supplies. Phil—Sorter here takin' candy from a baby, eh?—New York Tribune.

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