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The Holiday Spirit Caught
and Held Before Your Eyes

Beasley's Christmas Party

BY
BOOTH TARKINGTON

SYNOPSIS

PART I.—Newcomer in a small town, a young newspaper man, who tells the story, is amazed by the unaccountable actions of a man who, from the window of a fine house, apparently has converse with invisible persons. The youth goes to his boarding house, the home of Mrs. Appertwaite, next door to the scene of the strange proceedings, bewildered.

PART II.—Next morning he discovers his strange neighbor is the Hon. David Beasley, prominent politician, and universally respected. Telling of his last night's experience, he is markedly interrupted by a fellow boarder, a Mr. George Dowden. Later, with Miss Appertwaite, he is an unseen witness of a purely imaginary jumping contest between Beasley and a "Bill Hammsley." Miss Appertwaite appears deeply concerned, there apparently being no possible explanation of the strange proceedings.

PART III.—The reporter learns that Beasley and Miss Appertwaite had at one time been engaged, and that the young lady had broken the engagement because of Beasley's "lack of imagination."

PART IV.—The "mystery" of "Simple-doria" and "Bill Hammsley" is explained by Mr. Dowden. Beasley is caring for a small boy, Hamilton Swift, Junior, a helpless invalid bodily though more than ordinarily bright mentally, the son of dear friends who are dead, and "Simple-doria" and "Bill Hammsley" are creatures of Beasley's and the small boy's imagination, Beasley humoring the little sufferer by the "play acting."

PART V.—The reporter becomes acquainted with David Beasley and is invited to his home, where he meets Hamilton Swift, Junior, and his circle of "Invisibles" which Beasley and George Dowden have made very real to the child.

PART VI.—Beasley is a strong candidate for his party's gubernatorial nomination, his chief enemy being one Simeon Peck, a small-souled, mean-thinking individual. The reporter is sent by his city editor to see Peck who declares he has "something on" Beasley. Peck and a number of his cronies, with two reporters set out for Beasley's house, which Peck declares is the center of Christmas festivities to which Beasley has not deigned to invite his party's workers, to whom, however, he looks for support in his political aspirations. Assured of his coming triumph, Peck invites George Dowden, as Beasley's closest personal and political friend, to join the party, taunting him with the fact of his not being considered good enough socially to be entertained by Beasley. Watching from the outside, they see Beasley and his colored servant Bob, though apparently alone in a brightly illuminated room, with a magnificently decorated Christmas tree, seemingly entertaining a large number of guests. Miss Appertwaite has joined Peck's party, and, considerably mystified, they await developments. They hear David Beasley (Dowden declares, for the first time in his life) make a speech, his only auditor apparently being Old Bob, though he talks as if addressing a large gathering. Following the speech, Beasley, by himself, dances a "quadrille," with amazing facility to detail, and a full complement of invisible partners. Peck is silent, insisting that Beasley is crazy and that he will have the news "all over town" tomorrow. Miss Appertwaite is bewildered. The dance concluded, the watchers for the first time become aware of the presence of Hamilton Swift, Junior, and all realize that David Beasley—in Miss Appertwaite's opinion a man of no imagination—has devised the whole scheme to give pleasure to his little crippled ward. The reporters promise Peck the story will be "all over town" tomorrow, and that individual realizes how greatly the human interest of the story will strengthen Beasley's position. He retires crestfallen. Miss Appertwaite, Dowden and the young reporter join Beasley's "party," the young lady humbly begging the admission of "just one fool. It's Christmas time!"

Then into the vision of our paralyzed and dumfounded watchers came the little wagon, pulled by the old colored woman, Bob's wife, in her best, and there, propped upon pillows, lay Hamilton Swift, Junior, his soul shining rapture out of his great eyes, a bright spot of color on each of his thin cheeks.

He lifted himself on one elbow, and for an instant something seemed to be wrong with the brace which was under his chin.

Beasley sprang to him and adjusted it tenderly. Then he bowed elaborately toward the mantel-piece.

"Mrs. Hunchberg," he said, "may I have the honor?" And offered his arm.

"And I must have Mister Hunchberg," chirped Hamilton. "He must walk with me."

"He tells me," said Beasley, "he'll be mighty glad to. And there's a plate of bones for Simple-doria."

"You lead the way," cried the child; "you and Mrs. Hunchberg."

"Are we all in line?" Beasley glanced back over his shoulder, "Hooray! Now, let us on. Ho! Music there!"

"Br-r-ra-vo!" applauded Mister Swift.

And Beasley, his head thrown back and his chest out, proudly led the way, stepping nobly and in time to the ex-



"You Lead the Way," Cried the Child; "You and Mrs. Hunchberg."

ploring measures. Hamilton Swift, Junior, towed by the beaming old man, followed in his wagon, his thin little arm uplifted and his fingers curled as if they held a trusted hand.

When they reached the door, old Bob rose, turned in after them, and, still holding, played the procession and himself down the hall.

And so they marched away, and we were left staring into the empty room.

"My soul!" said the Journal reporter, gasping. "And he did all that—just to please a little sick kid!"

"I can't figure it out," murmured Sim Peck, pitiously.

"I can," said the Journal reporter. "This story will be all over town tomorrow." He glanced at me, and I nodded. "It'll be all over town," he continued, "though not in any of the papers—and I don't believe it's going to hurt Dave Beasley's chances any."

Mr. Peck and his companions turned toward the street and went silently.

The young man from the Journal overtook them. "Thank you for sending for me," he said, cordially. "You've given me a treat. I'm for Beasley!"

Dowden put his hand on my shoulder. He had not observed the third figure still remaining.

"Well, sir," he remarked, shaking the snow from his coat, "they were right about one thing; it certainly was mighty low down of Dave not to invite me—and you, too—to his Christmas party. Let him go to thunder with his old invitations, I'm going in, anyway! Come on. I'm plum froze."

There was a side door just beyond the bay window, and Dowden went to it and rang, loud and long. It was Beasley himself who opened it.

"What in the name—" he began, as the ruddy light fell upon Dowden's face and upon me, standing a little way behind. "What are you two—snow-banks? What on earth are you fellows doing out here?"

"We've come to your Christmas party, you old horse-die!" Thus Mr. Dowden.

"Hooray!" said Beasley.

Dowden turned to me. "Aren't you coming?"

"What are you waiting for, old fellow?" said Beasley.

I waited a moment longer, and then it happened.

She came out of the shadow and went to the foot of the steps, her cloak falling from her shoulders as she passed me. I picked it up.

She lifted her arms pleadingly, though her head was bent with what seemed to me a beautiful sort of shame. She stood there with the snow driving against her and did not speak. Beasley drew his hand slowly across his eyes—to see if they were really there, I think.

"David," she said, at last. "You've got so many lovely people in your house tonight, isn't there room for— for just one fool? It's Christmas time!"

(THE END)

A Christmas Eve In Camp

By
F. H. Sweet

ALF a dozen unshaven, red-shirted miners were gathered about the dingy counter of Bilger's, the one store in camp. It was Christmas eve, and they wanted something extra for their dinner on the morrow—just to keep them in mind of the day, they said. But there was little novelty in the forlorn remnant of cans upon the shelves, or in the half-empty barrels and boxes under the counter and massed in the corners of the room. One man found a stray box of sardines, and took possession of it with the remark that, while it was not "Christmasy," he could have the satisfaction of knowing he was eating the only sardines in camp; another drew out a can of Boston baked beans from behind a squadron of tomatoes; while a third, of more investigating and determined turn of mind, hunted among the boxes and barrels until he actually discovered a can of Cape Cod cranberries.

This brought the entire group of Christmas hunters into a compact, caving circle; and while they were anxiously debating the pro and con—especially the con—of a division of spoils, the door opened quietly and a stoop-shouldered, watery-eyed man entered.

"Have you got any toys?" he asked, hesitatingly.

The storekeeper stared, and unthinkingly, as though by preconcerted arrangement, the group around the canned representatives from Cape Cod turned and stared also.

"Any—what?" the storekeeper asked blankly.

"Toys," the man repeated looking at the cowering faces with abashed embarrassment—"things to play with, I mean, like children have at Christmas. You see," with a curious mingling of apology and pride in his voice, "my little ten-year-old boy came in on the stage just now—clean from his grandma's, back to Missouri. I've been sendin' for him these two years, but couldn't seem to get to it till I struck a vein last month."

He lurched heavily against the counter. His watery eyes began to fill, partly through his condition and partly from some long dormant tenderness which was beginning to reawaken.

"The boy's consider'ble childish," he went on, rousing himself a little at the consciousness of being listened to by men who usually passed him without recognition, "an' likes things to play with. So, bein' it's Christmas, an' he jest comin', why, I thought maybe I'd better hunt some toys."

"Of course," cried Dobson, the sheriff, heartily; and "Of course," "Of course," came promptly from others of the group.

And then they looked about the store inquiringly, eagerly, in search of something that would please a ten-year-old boy who was childish, but there was little they saw; only huge miners' boots, pyramids of picks and shovels and barrels of flour and beans and pork; and on the shelves, tobacco and canned goods, and a small assortment of earthen and tin-ware; and then, at the far end of the store, a bar for the accommodation of those who were thirsty.

There were no dry and fancy goods and notions upon the shelves, no show-cases upon the counter, no display in the one dingy window. Such things would begin to make the appearance only with the coming of the first woman, and that was not yet.

"Rather a slim show for playthings, Dobson," said the owner of the cranberries, after a fruitless search with his eyes from one end of the store to the other. Don't s'pose a pack o' playin' cards would do?" as his gaze paused hopefully on an extensive assortment of that popular article.

"They has pictures on 'em."

"Wouldn't do at all," answered Dobson decidedly. "They ain't moral; an' the first kid who patronizes us has got to be brought up moral. Say, you," to the watery-eyed man, who was edging towards the bar at the far end of the store—"none o' that!"

"None o' what?" asked the man querulously. "I ain't steppin' on your toes."

"No, but you are on the kid's. See here." His voice had an incisive ring which had made many stronger men tremble. "You ain't walkin' the same line you was twenty-four hours ago. Then you was a poor, no-count drunkard, who'd a right to dig his grave without opposition from nobody; now you're markin' out a trail for that kid to follow. See? Me an' my friends here ain't no call to interfere between father an' son," dropping his voice to an easy, familiar tone, and placing a hand encouragingly upon the tremu-

ous shoulder, "so long as the ratner makes a good deal; but when he slumps,"—his voice was still soft, but the steely glint returned to his eyes—"then me an' my friends step in. Sabe? Bein' the first kid in camp, we've constituted ourselves his guardian—just like every man in the place will do soon's they hear of his bein' here."

He turned back to his companions. The watery-eyed man, after one long, wistful, farewell glance toward the bar, resumed his fruitless search of the goods. There was nothing now to divide his attention; he knew the men with whom he had to deal, and realized that henceforth the bar was to be as far removed from him as though a wall of granite intervened. But, to his credit be it said, even with the realization came a new firmness to his eyes.

"What's that on the top shelf?" he asked suddenly.

"That? Oh, that is—I dunno," hesitated the storekeeper, as he took down the object in question and examined it critically. "It got in with some goods a year ago, an' has been up there ever since."

"Why, you chump!" cried the cranberry owner derisively, "not to know a jumpin' jack when you see one! I've bought lots of 'em to home for the children. See!" and he pulled a string which sent the acrobat tumbling up over the top of his red pole. "Just the thing for a kid."

"Just the thing," repeated the watery-eyed man, drawing a small bag of gold dust from his pocket: "it'll make the boy laugh."

As he was going out, the owner of the cranberries stepped to his side.

"Here, take this along with you," he said, relinquishing the can to which he had been clinging so fondly. "It'll help to make out a Christmas for the boy."

"And this, too." "And this," added the owner of the sardines and the owner of the baked beans; and then Sheriff Dobson pushed before them and slipped something light and heavy into the hand which held the jumping-jack.

"It's a nest-egg for the kid," he said gravely. "Now you better go home an' fill up his stockin'; an' to-morrow you can tell him Merry Christmas from us all."

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