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BESSIE.

(Copyright, 1900, by American Press Association.)

"WHERE is the tree?" whispered Mrs. Philander anxiously as her husband shook the snow from his coat and carefully wiped his feet on the brand new doormat.

"Couldn't get one," returned Philander moodily.

"Couldn't get one! Why not, James Philander?"

"I forgot it, Bella, until just as I got off the train, and as that was the last train from town I couldn't very well walk back and look up a tree. By that time the shops would all be closed and"

"Walk back! Such nonsense! Of course if you haven't thought enough of the children to buy them a tree"

"My dear," interpolated Philander desperately, "don't say another word. I'll find a tree somewhere tonight if I have to rob the church of the Sunday school tree!"

"I shall walk into the woods and dig one," returned Philander, with dignity.

"Well, you could do that, James, but it is 11 o'clock now and there is no moon. You will lose your way."

"Nonsense!" returned Mr. Philander. "I hope I know my way around Rose Heights. I saw a very handsome pine tree in that strip of woods back on the Turkey hill road. I could walk there blindfolded and lay my hand upon that tree," he asserted rashly.

"Very well," returned Mrs. Philander reluctantly. "I hate to have you go, James, but the children will be so disappointed. The presents are all ready, and I have been up in the attic and got the base for the tree and all the ornaments—in fact, everything is ready except the tree."

"The tree will soon be here," said Mr. Philander grimly as he jerked on his arctic and turned up his coat collar. "Just bring me the spade from the woodshed, please," he added.

"A spade, James! I thought they chopped trees down. The ground is frozen."

"Of course, the ax by all means," replied Philander irritably. He was vexed with himself for having forgotten to order the tree, which was one of the necessary adjuncts to the Philander Christmas. He had never forgotten it before. He meant to order it that morning and have it sent to his suburban home later in the day, but an important business matter had driven from his mind until his wife's greeting when he opened the door recalled it to his attention.

He sallied forth, bearing the ax, and waded through the newly fallen snow to the corner of the street, where he turned toward Turkey hill road. The snow was only six inches deep, and the walking was not so bad. Gray clouds hung low, and there was a thick flurry of flakes as Philander turned the corner. When he reached the strip of woods it was snowing heavily, and he could only guess at the location of the particular pine he had in mind.

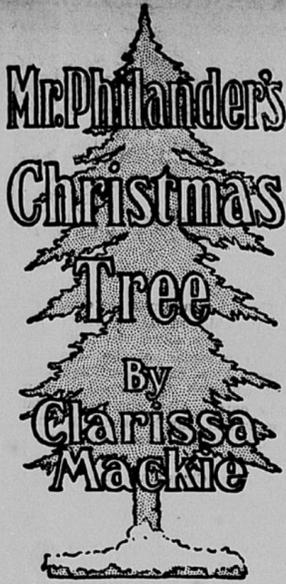
He whistled cheerily as he walked along, for his spirits were rising. He felt a warm glow stealing over his tired frame as he anticipated the delight of the three small Philanders when they beheld the so-called tree that they had so warmly admired a short while before set up in their own parlor, ablaze with candles and rich with gifts.

Mr. Philander stopped and thrashed himself vigorously with his arms. There was a faint grayness in the air that was reflected from the fallen snow, and there was the tickling rush of flakes in his eyes. When he reached the very opening in the woods where they had admired the tree he turned around and looked carefully up and down the road. Of course he could see nothing, nor was there the faintest tinkle of bells. It was a very lonely spot.

Mr. Philander knew that the strip of woods was private property, and he also knew that he could make it all right with Lake, the owner of the woods, on the following day, as Lake lived four miles away and it was impossible to ask his permission now.

Although Mr. Philander had stated that he could put his hand on the tree in the dark, he found it rather a difficult thing to do after all. He lost himself several times in the dense thickets, and all the tree trunks seemed unfamiliar to his touch. Then, all at once, he emerged from the under brush, and spied boughs of pine brushed his face.

"Hit it, by Jove!" he exclaimed. He dug the snow away from the trunk and with a few lusty blows laid the tree low and dragged it trailing through the snow. He lost his bearings once or twice, and finally, at a moment when he almost despaired of reaching home



that night, he found himself standing before his own gate.

He carted the tree around to the back door, and with Mrs. Philander's help it was taken into the house and set up in the parlor.

Mr. Philander thawed himself out in front of the kitchen stove and quaffed fragrant coffee that his grateful wife had prepared.

"It is a beauty, James," she said gleefully; "the finest we ever had. How delighted the children will be. I am sorry, though, you are so tired, dear."

"Oh, I'm all right now, Bella," said Philander cheerfully. "I was worried after I found that I had forgotten the tree, but I closed out that deal with Wells today, and I was busy every moment."

"How lovely that you got the contract, James!" cried his wife excitedly. "That is a fine Christmas present for you!"

"You bet your life it is," returned Philander jocosely. "Now let us get the tree ready for the kiddies. Everything handy?"

"There isn't a thing for you to do, dear, save to hang them on the tree," said his wife, leading the way to the lighted parlor, where the tree stood, its symmetrical branches glistening in the light and exuding a fresh balsamic odor.

"By Jove, it is the handsomest tree we ever had!" exclaimed Mr. Philander, surveying the shapely conifer admiringly.

They were soon at work, and presently the beautiful tree blossomed forth in glistening festoons of gold and silver tinsel. A radiant star tipped the highest point, while daintily decorated gifts burdened the branches and were heaped at the base.

It was with unusual satisfaction that the Philanders retired that night. They were loth to leave the resplendent tree, but utter weariness drove them to bed.

It was daylight when the first delighted shriek from a small Philander awoke his tired parents. Mr. Philander groaned dismally. He ached from head to foot, and he was sick from lack of sleep. Mrs. Philander was equally tired; but, with the self-annihilation of mothers in general and mothers in particular on Christmas morning, she got up and went downstairs to enter into the joys of the happy children.

When Mr. Philander came downstairs to breakfast the children gathered about him eagerly.

"Father," asked Jack, the eldest, "is this the very tree we saw last Sunday when we walked along Turkey hill road? Is this the very tree?"

"Who told you that, Jack?" asked Mr. Philander sharply.

"Oh, mother did. I told her I had seen it somewhere before, and she said it was that very tree."

"I fought Santy Claws brought it!" wailed Bessie, dragging her new doll remorselessly by its flaxen hair.

"An' I finked it came that way, too!" protested Robin indignantly.

"It's a Santa Claus tree, babies, so don't feel bad about it. Run away and play," said Mr. Philander reassuringly. Then he turned to Jack. "Yes, it's the very same tree, my boy," he said proudly.

"It doesn't look like it, father," said Jack bluntly.

"Doesn't, eh? What's the matter with it?"

"Oh, nothing. It's fine, but it isn't the tree we saw," insisted the boy obstinately.

"Never mind, never mind," returned Mr. Philander good naturedly.

He sought his wife, who was helping Norah with the breakfast. "Our tree was a great success, my dear," he said genially.

"It is beautiful," replied Mrs. Philander happily. "The children are so delighted."

"Well, I'm glad of that. I was telling Taylor yesterday morning going down on the train that Christmas was not Christmas without a tree, and he said that it wouldn't be Christmas at their house, then, for they were not going to have one."



JACK.

my Taylor! We must invite him over to see the children's tree this afternoon."

"Yes, indeed, that will be an excellent plan. Suppose we invite a few people to spend the evening and enjoy the tree with us. We can put on some small remembrances and have a jolly time," said Philander, warming up to the subject as he proceeded.

"That will be delightful," agreed Mrs. Philander. "Let us ask the Taylors."

"Sure, we'll ask them!" chuckled Philander. "I'll show Taylor the way to keep Christmas."

That afternoon Mrs. Philander bustled herself in preparing for the evening's entertainment. The Taylors had accepted gladly, and so had the other invited guests, and Mr. Philander, who was the soul of hospitality, walked about and rubbed his hands with pleasant anticipation.

He made sundry trips to the cellar for apples and cider and cracked great bowls of nuts. He carried in huge arm loads of wood for the fireplace and surveyed the roaring blaze with complacent satisfaction.

It was at that moment that Jack Philander burst noisily in. "Oh, father, what do you think?" he began breathlessly.

"Well, my boy, what is it now?" asked Mr. Philander indulgently as he warmed his coat tails comfortably.

"I heard Mr. Taylor telling some men that somebody chopped down the tree from his front lawn last night!"

"What tree?" asked Mr. Philander absently.

"Why, that tree—you know, the Norway pine that stood on their front lawn!"

"What a pity!" exclaimed Mrs. Philander. "Mrs. Taylor told me it was the pride of her husband's heart."

"How did it happen, Jack?" asked Philander, with interest.

"Mr. Taylor said his wife heard some one chopping about half past 11 last night, but she didn't think anything of it, and this morning they found the tree was gone—only the stump left."

"That's very strange," observed Mr. Philander. "Hard luck for Taylor."

"And, father," continued Jack earnestly, "I was in the woods on Turkey hill road today and that little tree we saw last Sunday is there yet. You didn't cut it down. I knew that one wasn't it!"

Mr. Philander paled slightly.

"Why, father," pursued the terrible Jack with a directness born of sudden revelation, "this is Mr. Taylor's tree! I knew I'd seen it before!"

Mr. Philander shrank from their horrified gaze.

"The Taylors will be here in a few minutes, James," said Mrs. Philander coldly.

"My dear, I must have got turned around in the storm, but the Lord only knows how I got in Taylor's yard."

"It's on the other side of the woods, father," said Jack sympathetically, "and I guess you walked right through and into Mr. Taylor's yard."

"I must have done that," groaned Mr. Philander. Then with sudden inspiration he stripped the tree of its ornaments and candles and carried it through the house into the back yard. He scratched a match, and in five minutes the Philander Christmas tree was a charred ruin.

"Too bad, old chap," said Taylor commiseratively as Philander agitatedly explained the absence of the tree. "That's one reason why I don't believe in Christmas trees. They are apt to take fire, and there you are. I am glad it happened before we arrived!"

"So am I," ejaculated Mr. Philander. But all the little Philanders agree that it was the most beautiful Christmas tree they ever had.

The Maid's Chance.

"Do you ever lose that umbrella of yours?" asked the maiden.

"No; I don't," replied the man sternly. "The person who takes that umbrella will have to take me."

"Do I understand that to be a proposal of marriage or a threat?" inquired the miss sweetly.—Philadelphia Inquirer.

The Woman Question.

Little Willie—Say, paw, what is the "woman question?" Pa—It's numerous, my son. For example: What shall I wear? How does my hair look in the back? Is my hat on straight? etc.—Exchange.

Up and Down.

Algernon Arduppe—Can't you make me any better rate for room and board than what you advertise—\$5 up? Mrs. Hamand—Yes. In your case it will be \$5 down.—Chicago Union.

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