CICILY SPENDS CHRISTMAS IN A NEW YORK HOTEL

IT was pretty hard, Cicily Randall murmured to herself as she stood looking out of the window of the big hotel into brilliant, busy Fifth avenue, it was pretty hard to be away from home on Christmas day without a single brother or sister or mother or father or Christmas tree or anything to make Christmas day worth while.

"And without a single friend, too. I never thought I'd be alone without a friend on Christmas day."

She pressed her nose against the pane this time, although the governess had told her that it was not at all polite to do this, but, big girl as she was, almost 13, she felt that the tears were very near the surface and she didn't want Miss Monk to know that she was crying because she couldn't be at home for Christmas.

She was here in New York to stay until after Christmas, just because Greataunt Truesdale, for whom she was named, and who had been papa's faithful second mother when his own mamma died, had chosen to sail for Europe on the day after Christmas and had particularly requested that Cicily, her favorite, should be detained in New York for a day or two so that she might bid goodby to her greataunt before going down to New Orleans for the holidays. Greataunt Truesdale wasn't due from her western home until Christmas night and Cicily's Boston school had begun its Christmas holidays two days before, so that Miss Monk had come up from New Orleans to meet her and there they were, penned up together for Christmas day.

Cicily's vision was blurred for an instant, but when she brushed the tears out of her eyes the blur was still there, and as it was a bright Christmas morning she was sure there was something odd about this. Then she discovered that it wasn't a blur at all; it was an object hanging outside the window that darkened the glass. Cicily looked at it in wonder. No, she could not be mistaken; the dangling object that had appeared so unexpectedly was certainly a stocking, a red stocking and a long one. Cicily was sure it was the longest stocking she had ever seen.

Cicily laughed; she couldn't help it; the stocking was such a ridiculous affair, so full of bulging packages that it looked like a string of large bumps.

"Oh, Miss Monk, look," cried Cicily. "May I see what it is?" Miss Monk was so busy with her time table that she didn't quite hear what was said, so she murmured an absent minded "yes, dear," and Cicily opened the window and began pulling in the monstrous stocking.

It was very heavy, so heavy that she could scarcely get it into the room. For a moment she was not quite sure that it was meant for her, but on looking at it more closely she saw a large card, "For the little girl in red." Cicily glanced at her frock, and knew that there could be no doubt for whom it was meant.

As she took firm hold of the stocking the strong cord by which it was suspended from above loosened, so that Cicily was left with the stocking in her arms. She glanced up with an idea of catching a glimpse of the unexpected Santa Claus, but nothing was to be seen but the facade of the hotel, with its rows of window boxes towering far up into the sky. Cicily drew the stocking into the room and straightway started to examine its contents.

First, in the very top of the stocking there was a bunch of mistletoe and holly. Then came a most fascinating round package, which Cicily unwrapped, trembling meanwhile with excitement. The package contained a beautiful rosy apple, not a real one but a perfect imitation. There was a box concealed in the middle of the apple, and in the box Cicily found a beautiful cake covered with chocolate on which was a large white T. Cicily looked at it wonderingly. She was used to mysteries, because the Randall home was full of them at Christmas time, so she knew that the T had some meaning which she must try hard to guess.

The next package was even more attractive in its gold and scarlet wrappings, and Cicily undid it hastily. It contained a beautiful yellow pear, not a real one but an imitation like the apple, and in the box which the pear concealed Cicily found another chocolate cake iced with the letter E.

More and more letters tumbled out of that remarkable stocking. Some of them appeared in white icing on chocolate colored cake, some marked out by red candies on white iced cakes, and some appeared in various colored icing on a yellow ground. They were inclosed in fruit and animal boxes, plum puddings, miniature trunks, musical instruments in gold and silver, aeroplanes of several varieties, bright colored boxes in silk and satin and tiny pieces of dolls' furniture. Some of the letters even appeared in little boxes hid in the widespreading skirts of tiny dolls, but whatever appeared at first glance it was sure to disclose in time a box concealed adroitly, and in this box examination invariably revealed a little cake with a letter on it.

The stocking was exciting enough in itself, but when she saw the contents of several of the boxes Cicily became convinced that she was on the track of something even more interesting, so she hurried as fast as she could to get hold of all the letters that were in the stocking. When the last box had been opened and the floor space around her was strewn with the bright contents of the stocking Cicily saw that she had these letters, which she arranged according to the colors, into the following groups:

Odro-og-to-het-der.

Miss Monk, who had been sitting quietly in the other end of the large room, suddenly became aware that something was going on in Cicily's corner that was quite unusual.

"What are you doing, Cicily?" she demanded, coming over to see and uttering a series of astonished exclamations on her way. "What in the world have you got there?"

She looked even more astonished when Cicily explained how the stocking had come through the window and about the letters that were hidden in it. Even Miss Monk became a little excited when she saw the collection of bright objects that had come out of the stocking, and there was a little pink glow in her cheeks as she looked carefully over the letters with Cicily.

"I do believe that it's a message of some sort which you are bound to make out for yourself," said the governess finally, with an air of keen discernment.

"I think so too, Miss Monk," said Cicily politely. She did not tell the governess that the fact was perfectly obvious, for she knew that Miss Monk was always bewildered by puzzles.

"It's very difficult," said Miss Monk.

Cicily smiled demurely. Then she reached out and changed the little cakes with their bright letters around a little. The message then read:

"Odor-go-to-the-red."

She was interrupted by a shrill little cry from Miss Monk and, looking down, saw the governess had arranged the letters in the following order:

"Go to the red door."

Cicily embraced the governess excitedly. "Oh, you dear thing!" she cried. "Of course that's it. Wasn't I stupid! The red door, and it must be in the hotel, because if it were outside it would certainly name the street." She ran quickly to the door, followed by Miss Monk, who was now quite as interested as herself, and, after locking the door carefully, the two started on a quest for the red door.

There were certainly no red doors on the corridor. A hasty glance up and down convinced them that all the doors within sight were ivory white. At the farther end of the corridor sat a young lady clerk, who took charge of all the messages that were sent up to the rooms by visitors. Cicily and Miss Monk approached this young lady, and Cicily asked breathlessly:

"Oh, I beg your pardon, but could you possibly tell us where there is a red door in this hotel?"

The young lady was used to strange demands from the guests of the hotel, so she merely stared a little more pronouncedly than usual at Cicily and said politely: "I don't know, but I can inquire from the clerk in the office."

She picked up a telephone and repeated Cicily's question to the clerk down stairs and then she listened for quite a long time, while a rather pleasant expression appeared on her dignified countenance.

"They're not quite sure," she said finally, "but they think that if you go down to the second floor in the elevator and inquire along the corridor they may be able to tell you where the red door is."

Cicily and Miss Monk started for the elevator in a walk that was so quick that even in Miss Monk's case it developed almost into a run, and in a moment they were on board the elevator being quickly wafted to the second floor.

"It's rather odd," said Miss Monk, "it really is rather odd to ask us to inquire along the corridor. I should really have supposed that a bellboy or a maid would have been sent with us."

They were walking along the corridor by this time, and as if in answer to Miss Monk's remarks at this very moment what at first glance appeared to be a bellboy came into view from around a bend.

Cicily and Miss Monk stopped short and looked at this personage in sheer amazement, for if it were a bellboy he was the strangest one they had ever seen.

He wore a uniform like the other bellboys, but in reality he was not a boy at all, he was a bird, a gigantic bird with a befeathered head and a beaked face like any other bird and clawlike feet, which came out from beyond his green uniform. Cicily was the first to recover from her astonishment. This she felt at once must be the person who would tell them where the red door was.

For a moment Miss Monk hesitated, but Cicily drew her along and presently they came up to the bird bellboy.

"Certainly, miss," said the bird politely in a high shrill voice when Cicily told him what she wanted. "We have a great many red doors in stock. Which one would you like?"

This was a poser, and Cicily looked quite bewildered until Miss Monk came to the rescue.

"We'll try them all," she said with dignity.

"Certainly, madame," said the bird bellboy, as any well bred bellboy would have done, and he turned and led the way in an opposite direction from the way they had been going.

Presently they turned off the main corridor into a much narrower one, which seemed a great deal less expensive and luxurious than the other parts of the hotel which they had seen. Now, as she looked at him he waved his wing around in a comprehensive sweeping fashion. "There they are," he said complacently.

Miss Monk and Cicily stared at him. It was all so strange that Cicily was prepared not to be astonished at anything, but Miss Monk said sharply, "There what are?"

"The red doors," said the bellboy, pointing to the doors along the corridor. "Don't you see them?"

"Why, those doors aren't red; they are green," declared Miss Monk and Cicily in one breath.

They could not help feeling a little cross at the bird bellboy, and they were just about to tell him that he must not be facetious at their expense when they were interrupted by a loud chuckle, and turned to see that a very strange looking person had come softly up behind them.

"Well, that's good," said the newcomer with another chuckle. "Poor old Birdie didn't know which was which. You see, he's absolutely color blind because he's a snowbird, and looking so much at all that white has hurt his eyesight. He never can tell red from green. Indeed, I find it pretty hard to do so myself. The two colors are pretty much alike."

Cicily would have liked to tell this person that she didn't think red and green were at all alike, but she was so interested in finding out what he was like himself that she said nothing. He was a four footed creature, with a brown soft coat like a deer, and very remarkable horns, in which some scarlet ribbon and bells were twined. There was nothing unusual about his looks if you considered him as a creature of the forests, except that he wore upon his forehead in front of his horns a little cap, which was fastened with a rubber band and which bore the word "Porter" in as large letters as it would accommodate.

"I've just been taking up some boxes for the room with the red door," explained this porter, "and I'd be very glad to show you the way there."

They had hardly gotten off the elevator before the reindeer began to go like mad down the corridor. It seemed to Cicily that he must be an elderly reindeer or perhaps he was not used to traveling on anything but ice and snow, because he got over the ground very awkwardly when he tried to go fast. Nevertheless, he made good speed and Cicily and Miss Monk and the snowbird followed him eagerly.

Suddenly they turned sharply around the corner and there, sure enough, was a red door. It was the reddest door she had ever seen, Cicily thought, and she was quite sure it was a very unusual color for a door. The reindeer made straight for it, and as Cicily followed him she heard a strange and attractive gurgle behind the red door. What it was she could not just at the moment remember, she was so excited over what was happening, but she was perfectly certain that she had heard the noise before.

The reindeer reached the door first and knocked with his horns. Cicily and Miss Monk were so interested that they could scarcely wait for those within to answer. They were not required to be patient very long, however, because as soon as the reindeer knocked there was a rustling sound within and the door flew open.

Cicily and Miss Monk drew back in amazement, for, whatever else they had expected, they had never for once dreamed of the sight that then and there met their astonished eyes, for there, in a very large room, which was full of Christmas—just as full as a Christmas tree filled with bright things, and all manner of Christmas trimmings could make it—there were the Randall family drawn up in line to welcome them, the Randall family from New Orleans, with all their Christmas stockings in their arms, and black Nancy, beaming all over with Christmas smiles, holding the baby, who was gurgling away in the delightful manner that was, in the opinion of the Randall family, sacred to that baby alone.

Cicily gave a wild rush and caught her mother in her arms. "Oh!" she cried, "it doesn't seem possible that you are all here for Christmas day—all"—and she looked around the smiling circle—"all but Tom and Cousin Ned and Uncle Marius."

But just at this moment she was confronted by two other smiling faces that looked at her, one from over the top of a queer, feathery mass, which seemed very much like the discarded plumage of the bird bellboy, and the other, which grinned up at her from under a pair of branching antlers.

"Cousin Ned and Tom!" gasped Cicily, "and I never dreamed it was you. I thought it must be just some one in the hotel, and now," she added happily, "every one of us is here—every one but Uncle Marius, and I suppose he couldn't get away."

She was interrupted by a knock at the door and there stood a very nice looking person, who was just the sort of uncle that any girl would like to have.

"Oh, Uncle Marius!" cried Cicily, whereupon the nice looking person replied in a cozy, comfortable voice: "Poor old Santa, he couldn't get here before. Because he has been so awfully knocked about that he was obliged to take a long nap."

"You see," explained Cicily's brother Tom, coming hastily out of his bellboy disguise, "we weren't going to let you have Christmas up here all by yourself, even if Greataunt Truesdale did have to see you just before she sailed, and so here we are, the whole kit and kaboodle of the Randalls, with all their Christmas fixings. We fixed it up with the hotel people, and we did just what we pleased at this jolly old place since we got here yesterday afternoon. And haven't we hustled? Well, I guess! You know that snowbird disguises and antlers for reindeer don't grow on every bush. We meant to have the stocking ready at your bedside when you waked up this morning, but we got a room right over yours, so we dangled it down at you instead, and I must say you bit beautifully."

Cicily found the mystery clearing up gradually, and she bestowed a Christmas hug on her brother Tom and one on Cousin Ned, which they expressly stipulated that they forgave in honor of the day.

"And now," said her father, "for the Christmas merry go round and then for the stocking emptying," whereupon every Randall seized hold of every other Randall and they danced around the Christmas tree until they were exhausted. And fun! Well, if you ever want to know which the Randalls consider to have been after all the funniest Christmas they ever had, just ask them and they will respond, one and all, from father to the baby, "Our hotel Christmas."