

Miss Betty's Christmas Gift

By HOPE DARING

Let me see! To-day is—yes, it is the tenth. Just two weeks from to-morrow is Christmas!

Miss Betty Dane, spinster, stood before a calendar which hung on her sitting-room wall. She was a plump little woman, upon whose face a faded pink flush still lingered. Her brown eyes were shy, and the brown hair rolled back from her brow was threaded with silver.

"Christmas!" she repeated, as she went back to her rocking chair. "I suppose a Christian woman ought not to say such a thing, but I dread the day," and Miss Betty wiped her eyes.

"I ought to be ashamed, and I am," she went on, rocking to and fro, "but it's dreadful never to have a Christmas like folks who have a family. Now I'm not repining because I'm an old maid, for I never saw the man I'd think of, not for years, anyway," the dull pink in her cheeks burned to crimson. "I haven't a relative in this part of the country, and I am so shy and bashful that I never get close to people. Sometimes I envy people, women, I mean, who get the pretty, dainty gifts that love prompts."

She sat a few minutes in silence, then resumed her half-articulate murmur: "If I was poor—I mean needy, for I am not rich—the church would send me

A little later she stood by the dresser, the shades lowered, and her purchases set out before her. After her usual fashion Miss Betty communed with herself: "You were foolish, Betty Dane, to pay a dollar and a half for a china cup and saucer when you have more than two dozen of them now. But it is a beauty," touching the fragile porcelain with a caressing finger, "and there's nothing nicer to give a woman than china. There are two handkerchiefs. They are the sheerest, softest linen, and the embroidery is beautiful. I am not so sure about the book. The girl at the store said 'The Blue Flower' was one of the best-selling books of the season. But I did something worse than buying these things."

Miss Betty paused. Her eyes sparkled, and she trembled with excitement. "You ordered two dozen red carnations sent up to yourself on Christmas eve. Yes, you did, Betty Dane. Well, I suppose you had a right to, only it's too bad there is no one else."

With a sigh she commenced her preparations for supper. The momentary depression passed as her mind dwelt upon her day's outing. When she sat down to her supper Miss Betty was at peace with all the world.

The table was spread with snowy linen, glistening silver and pretty china. There was a quaint, old-fashioned silver teapot of fragrant hyson, bread, a pat of yellow butter, creamed potatoes, thin slices of pink ham, a dish of blackberry jam, and a plate of rich dark fruit cake.

The windows of the dining-room faced the side street. In her abstraction Miss Betty had forgotten to lower the shades.

kerchiefs she had purchased for herself.

"I suppose it is foolish to send a woman in her circumstances such a nice one," she said, in a shame-faced way to Florence, "but women like—well, they like pretty gifts on Christmas."

Florence bent her sunny head and kissed Miss Betty. "It is dear instead of foolish. Why, Miss Betty, that is the Christmas spirit, giving the best."

The day before Christmas was clear and cold. There was no snow, but the earth lay brown and bare in the grasp of the frost king. Just as the shades of evening were beginning to fall Miss Betty emerged from the church where she had been all the afternoon.

"Come home to supper in an hour, dear," she called back to Florence, who stood in the doorway, her sunny head outlined against a mass of dusky evergreens. Florence nodded a smiling assent, and Miss Betty hurried on. She stopped for the mail and found a card from the express office. Calling there she received the package from the florist.

"I am so glad I ordered the carnations," Miss Dane said to herself. "Florence will be delighted with them. In the morning she shall take a few over to Miss Bliss, who is sick. I know Florence will be pleased with the cup and saucer. It seems almost providential that I bought it, for she does love pretty china. And I'm glad I have that other handkerchief for our minister's wife. Mrs. Perry is a real lady, and she don't have any too many of the pretty things women like."

Miss Betty was home by that time. In a trice she had the stoves open and the kettle on. As she took the scarlet carnations from the box and inhaled their spicy fragrance, a gurgling laugh broke from her lips.

"What a dunce you were, Betty Dane, to go and buy yourself Christmas presents! Why, I have given them all away but the book, and I wish there were some one to whom I could give that. I have learned that the blessedness of Christmas is in giving, not in getting." She soon had the coffee and the water for the oysters on the stove. As she brought a dish of salad from the pantry she heard the door bell ring.

Miss Dane went forward and opened the door. A man's voice asked: "Is Miss Florence Nesbit in?"

"Miss Nesbit will be here in a few minutes. Will you walk in and wait for her?"

"Indeed I will, ma'am. I am the child's uncle, and I have just come home from a long stay abroad to find that my poor sister lost all her money before her death. The idea of Florence teaching school when I've more money than—Eh! Why, you are Betty Dane!"

Miss Betty looked up into the bronzed bearded face.

"Yes, Jack; I am Betty Dane!" The man came a step nearer. "Betty, I was a hot-headed fool in the old days. You were right to throw me over and not to answer my letter, but it hurt. It hurts yet, Betty, for I have never loved any other woman."

The little spinster had grown very pale. Should she speak? It cost her a great effort to put aside her fatal shyness, but she did it.

"I never knew there was a letter, Jack; it did not reach me. I have been true to your memory all these years."

Florence came five minutes later. She found Miss Betty in the arms of her uncle, Jack Patterson. It took some time to explain matters. The delight of the girl almost equaled that of the elderly lovers.

It was while they were at supper that Miss Betty looked up to say: "Oh! I am so glad I bought that book! You don't understand, Jack, but I've a Christmas present ready for you."

Mr. Patterson's eyes twinkled. "That is fine. I am sorry, Betty, that I have nothing to offer you, nothing but love."

Glad tears dimmed Miss Betty's sight. Her heart's hunger was satisfied. The perfect human gift—the image of the Gift that brought Christmas to the world—was hers.—Washington Home Magazine.

Save Us from Our Friends.

Once upon a time a man who had experienced a prosperous year in business thought it would be a gracious thing to share his good fortune with his wife, so at Christmas he presented her with the finest diamond necklace he could purchase. When the neighbors saw it they set their heads together and decided that the man had made the gift for the purpose of keeping peace in the family. They wondered what his wife had caught him at, and each invented a bit of scandal to fit the case.

Moral—The easiest thing in this world is to be misunderstood.—J. J. O'Connell, in Town Topics.

A Christmas Nuisance. Felice and I, we never meet From one year's end unto another; I seldom think of her, and she Has precious little use for me. Yet every Christmas we repeat That awful gift-exchanging bother; We're fettered to it, wrist and wrist, Each has the other on her "list." And though we're both heart-sick of it, We neither one would dare to quit. —By Susie M. Best, in Town Topics.

Hard on Brown. "Jones has it in for Brown and is planning an awful revenge upon him at Christmas." "Going to send him an infernal machine?" "No. He's going to give Brown's children a graphophone."—Denver Times.

Thoughtful. "How kind of papa!" "What's he sent?" "A quantity of presents for baby, and on each are directions what to do if he makes himself sick with it! And here are the medicines, too!"—Brooklyn Life.



"YES, JACK, I AM BETTY DANE."

a basket Christmas morning. Well, I'm thankful that I don't need that, and I always give something to help fill the baskets as well as money for the Sunday school Christmas tree. Mrs. Deacon Green will send me a mince pie. She has done it every Christmas for ten years, and I always send her a plate of my crullers. I will send Mrs. Carpenter a chicken and a few other things; she will return an elaborate note of thanks, every line beginning with a capital letter. There's Niece Tillie. She never fails to send me the new baby's picture. On the rare years when there is no new baby she sends me a card. Such things are all well enough, but they don't mean—"

Miss Betty stopped, rose, and walked aimlessly into the adjoining dining-room. After a few moments she returned to her former position. A determined look was upon her face. "I'll do it. Why shouldn't I? The day after to-morrow I'll go to the city, and I will buy dainty little things, such presents as a woman ought to have at Christmas. I will pretend to myself that they mean the love I am so slow learning to live without."

On the morning of the second day following Miss Dane left the village on the nine o'clock train. She did not return until four.

As she walked briskly homeward from the depot, her arms filled with packages, she was overtaken by Mrs. Hall.

"Why, lands sakes, Miss Betty! You don't mean to say as you've been to the city, do you? I didn't know as you was calculatin' on goin'."

"Well, I have been there," Miss Dane answered, a little defiantly. "What'd you go for? You've got a new hat already, and your cloak was new last winter."

"I went to do some shopping." "Land sakes! What'd you buy?" "Miss Betty threw back her head, her brown eyes staring straight ahead of her.

"I bought Christmas gifts. Good-by, Mrs. Hall," and, turning a corner, the half-frightened spinster hurried down a street that led directly to her own door. Mrs. Hall looked after the plump little figure, baffled curiosity depicted on her face.

"Miss Betty is altogether too close-mouthed. It ain't becomin' to a woman as lives alone."

Miss Dane soon reached her own home. It was fast growing dark, and as she entered the sitting-room the gleam of the coal stove seemed like a welcome.

"I'm glad to be back, but I am not sorry I went," she thought as she carefully laid her parcels on the bed. "It is going to be a cold night. I'll start the fires in the dining-room and kitchen before I put these things away."

She glanced that way nervously when the door bell rang.

When she opened the hall door the light from the lamp in her hand fell upon a fair girlish face framed round with sunny hair. Miss Betty recognized her caller as one of the teachers from the village school.

"Good evening, Miss Nesbit. Will you walk in?"

Florence Nesbit followed the mistress of the house to the sitting-room. As soon as she was within the room the girl began speaking:

"Oh, Miss Dane, my errand is a strange one! You know I am a stranger here, and I have been so homesick! I haven't any home—my mother went away from me a year ago. I looked in your window as I walked by. You looked so cozy and homelike, I just came in to ask you if I would board me."

"Board you! Why, I never thought of taking boarders. What put it into your head?"

Florence's lips quivered. "Just because you were alone, like myself. I wouldn't be any trouble and—oh, Miss Dane, I could be so happy here with you!"

"Where do you board?" "With Mrs. Elmer. There is to be a vacation of two weeks at the holidays, and I must stay there."

Miss Dane recalled what she knew of Mrs. Elmer's housekeeping and shuddered.

"You poor child! Of course you can come here. There is the other bedroom downstairs, always warm, and the place opposite me at table. Why, Miss Nesbit, I believe they have been waiting for you."

Florence threw both arms round the other's neck. "I can't thank you; there are no words to tell you what it means to me. I walked by your window three times before I could get courage enough to knock! Oh, you don't know how glad I am! It is like a beautiful Christmas present."

Miss Betty started, remembering her own longing for Christmas remembrances. Would not this girl's presence in the house be to her, in her loneliness, a gift that would partake of the Christmas spirit?

The days went by quickly. Much to Miss Betty's surprise she found herself busy with preparations for the coming holiday season.

There were the children in Florence's room. Miss Betty became almost as enthusiastic regarding the surprise planned for them as was the girl teacher. Then Miss Betty not only gave her usual contribution of money for the Sunday school tree, but she promised to go with Florence and help trim it. The basket for the church poor was filled to overflowing. To the one for Mrs. Carpenter Miss Betty added one of the hand-

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