

Christmas Sweets



S NOW had been falling in the mountains many days before Christmas. Down in the sunbright valley mother and little Nina gazed up at the shining peaks and were homesick. They would gladly have forgotten snow, but father was in a mountain cabin all alone.

"Will he hang his stockings by the stone fireplace?" asked Nina, "and don't you s'pose he'll be 'vited somewhere to dinner?"

"I wish we had stayed with him," said mother. "If he can live through the winter in the mountains, so could we."

"But he told us 'no,' don't you remember? He said he brought us to southern California on purpose so we could live always in a summer land."

Mother sighed. The little family had been west only a few weeks when father was offered a position as book-keeper for a lumber company away up in the Sierras. Living in the mountains had been delightful through the summer, but at the first hint of cold weather the tent home was packed, father bought a cabin and sent mother and the little daughter to the valley.

Father was an artist and he declared that he should like nothing better than to paint pictures of snowy peaks with no one to interrupt him and nothing else to do but to guard the company's property.

"It is a wonderful chance," he had insisted.

Mother and Nina had tried to believe he was right; but the little bungalow which they rented already furnished, seemed but a poor excuse for a house.

"I wish I could see him hang up his stockings," continued Nina. "Oh, I wish I could put this penpiper I'm making in the very toe of it!"

Mother made no reply. She wished so much that she, too, might help fill that lonely stocking in the mountain cabin.

"Oh, mother, mother!" exclaimed Nina, dropping her spool and scissors and springing to her feet. "I have a beautiful idea! You always have to keep your Christmas presents, don't you? You never can send them back, can you?"

"Curcily not," was the answer.

"But, mother, s'pose you wish your Christmas present hadn't come. Would it be very polite to tell the ones that gave it to you that you were getting along nicely without their Christmas present and that you really didn't want it?"

"Why, of course not, Nina. We must think of the loving thought behind the gift, even if Uncle John had send no stakes this very winter."

"I see how silly I was, mother's neck."

"On, I have such a beautiful idea," repeated Nina. "We'll ride on the stage with the Christmas box and give ourselves to father for a Christmas present. He wouldn't return his Christmas present, now, would he?"

"Would you be contented, Nina, to live up there all winter?" asked mother. "You must remember that we will be four miles from Fredalba. You will have no little girls to play with, no school, no Sunday school, no—"

"But, mother, can't we have a school with you for the teacher, and a Sunday school? Can't I have a whole row of snow men to play with? And, mother! we'll have a real Christmas!"

Thus it happened that two passengers went up the trail on the last stage of the old year.

"Anybody going to meet you in Fredalba?" asked the stage driver. "The weather is pretty severe up here a few thousand feet higher. Had lots of rain in the valley and that means snow storms in the mountains."

"No one will meet us," said mother. "but we know the trail from Fredalba and our burros are there, although we didn't expect to see them again until next summer."

"You can telephone from Fredalba," suggested the stage driver. "They tell me your husband has a telephone out at camp."

"But we're Christmas presents," explained Nina; "so we must surprise him. Don't you know that to-night will be Christmas eve?"

"If the wind doesn't come up, you'll be all right," the man replied, but unless I'm mistaken, there's a heavy snow falling in the mountains this minute."

At Fredalba every one advised mother and Nina not to attempt the trail until morning. This time it was mother who would push on. "We know the trail so well," said she, "and the burros know it better. In two hours we can reach camp."

"It seems to me," said the stage driver as he watched the two disappear around the curve, "it seems to me that some folks haven't any sense," and shutting his lips in a determined fashion he went to the telephone and called for Nina's father. "I'll tell him his folks are coming and to go out to meet them," he explained to the men standing near. "Otherwise the poor fellow may have a surprise he won't like on Christmas day."

To the stage driver's dismay there was no answer to his call. Father's cabin in the Sierras was evidently deserted.

"See here," said he to a friend, "you call Brown up in half an hour and tell him that his wife and daughter are on the trail."

"The wires are down," declared a big man who came in at that moment from outside. "No use trying to tele-

But for the Faithful Burros They Could Not Have Kept the Trail.

were thoroughly frightened. They couldn't talk except to urge the burros on. The wind took their breath.

"We won't be Christmas presents, I'm afraid," sobbed Nina, through chattering teeth.

"Say your prayers," suggested mother. "It is all we can do now."

They had long since dropped the reins and trusted the burros to choose their own way. Mother recalled story after story of men who had perished on those mountain trails and she blamed herself for ever attempting such a journey. Suddenly a welcome sight appeared before the struggling travelers.

"The lights of Mr. Dean's cabin!" exclaimed Nina. "Oh, mother! We have reached Mr. Dean's ranch and we're still alive! To-morrow we'll see father!"

A funny thing then happened. Both burros began to bray. Mother and Nina laughed and cried at the sound. Instantly the signal was answered. Robert Dean flung open the cabin door and in a flood of light beheld his visitors.

"Well, well, well!" he exclaimed. "Who told you that we're having a Christmas dinner here this evening, turkey and all? Why, Miss Nina, your father is or was at the table!"

The next thing Nina knew she was in her father's arms and mother was removing her wraps.

"Are we frozen or anything, mother?" asked the child.

"No we're all right and so are the burros," was the reply.

"Oh, how glad everybody is!" the little girl exclaimed. "And I'm hungry—and—father, we're your Christmas presents!"

Father, for some reason couldn't say "thank you," but didn't speak of returning the precious gifts and it is doubtful if anywhere in the valley below there was such happiness as filled the mountain cabin that Christmas eve.

Why She Stood There.
"Don't you think," suggested a young man to his partner at a dance, "that we should move farther up the room out of the draught?"
"Oh, well, if you like!" replied the girl, snappishly.
It was only when they moved away that the youth noticed that they had been beneath a large bunch of mistletoe.

A Useless Present.
Aunt—Yes, Johnny, Santa Claus brought you a baby brother.
Johnny—Great Scott! Another present that ain't any use!

Conscientious Workman.
At the Union league of Philadelphia a few days ago the veteran shipbuilder, Charles H. Cramp, related a curious incident of a skilled caulker named Brown, who, after many years of service at the Cramp shipyards, obtained a more important position at the navy yard. This man came of a family which had been employed at Cramps' for three generations, since the early part of the last century, and was extremely conscientious. So keen a sense of duty did Brown possess that, although he had been placed on the regular salary list at the navy yard, nothing could induce him to draw his pay for the days he did not work. He had not been accustomed, he said, to get paid except for working days, and he was not going to "rob the government" when work was slack.

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