HOLME'S CHRISTMAS

BY STACY E. BAKER

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IT was Christmas eve. Holme, a stranger in his own land, strolled lonesomely through the streets of his own city nor knew one of the shoving, impatient shoppers who elbowed him from the points of vantage in front of the gift laden windows.

It was seven years since he had been home. His mind mused over his many adventures in foreign lands as he almost affectionately gave shove for shove and forced his way up crowded Broadway. These people were his people—kin of him, fellow citizens. The spirit of the night permeated his whole being.

He thought about Jessly and wondered what had become of him. Probably he had married pretty Beth Allen, and as this thought occurred to Holme a curious little tremor thrilled up from his heart, saying as plainly as a heart can say, "We remember Beth, you and I, my master, and that is the reason why we are come back — to find out."

"DICK!"

Once Holme had asked Beth Allen to marry him, and—

"Dick!"

Pale as a statue, the man turned. There at the curb, both hands held out to him, was Beth.

"You!" he gasped as he strode toward her.

"Even so," laughed the girl. "Me! And this is the best Christmas present of all!" Two hands closed convulsively tight over his, and her low voice whispered: "Don't be surprised at anything. I will explain later. And so," she said aloud, "you thought you would surprise me, you naughty boy, and come tonight. I didn't expect you until tomorrow."

She turned quickly, and Holme now noticed that she stood just beside an automobile in which was seated a stranger.

"Mr. Crenton," she said, "this is Mr. Richard Holme, my fiance."

Stone faced, without as much as a flicker of an eyelash, Holme acknowledged the introduction.

Crenton was eying him grimly. Evidently this broad shouldered youth with the bronze of warm climes on his beardless cheeks did not appeal to him. "Surly brute," thought Holme as the tubby little middle aged one merely nodded in response to the other's polite acknowledgment.

And meanwhile Beth Allen, tall, slim and handsome as ever, was babbling of things beyond the ken of the youth—"his handsome present," "his letter" and other allusions too subtle for the comprehension of Holme.

He eyed the girl keenly. She seemed sane, and there were in those clear, well deep eyes only a boundless delight and enthusiasm over the wanderer's return.

Fiance! Beth Allen had refused to marry him seven years before, and this had resulted in the man's voluntary exile. Now she referred to him as her fiance!

Truly explanations were needed.

His old love of the girl had pulsed instantly into life again as her warm hands met his. His travels had been useless.

"You must get in," Beth was chattering on. "I am done with my shopping, and we will return to the house. Boyton, home." This last to the chauffeur.

Not a word of explanation came from Beth as the machine silently sped over the frost jeweled streets, but she talked continually of everything — everything but what Holme wanted most to know. In due time they drove up in front of her home, and the three dismounted and entered

"HA, HOLME!"

"Ha, Holme!" There was genuine pleasure in the voice of old Major Allen as he strode forward to clasp the hand of the errant in his warm grasp. "Quite a surprise! We didn't expect you until tomorrow. Gad, sir, it seems good to see you!"

The eyes of the youth were on the maid, and he knew in his heart that he wanted her more than he had ever wanted her before. But now she was silent. As her father continued talking one little hand patted a dusky strand back into the ebon mass of her hair. She was beautiful. She was more to be desired than ever.

"And to think," the major was saying, his fine old face alight, "that you and my little girl here have been engaged all these years and we knew nothing about it. Well, I am glad, Holme; extremely glad. There is no one in the world whom I would rather she would have."

The gray veteran had a most sincere admiration for Holme that had manifested itself directly after the youth had "done things" at the battle of San Juan Hill.

Through all the conversation following Crenton was almost boorishly quiet. He responded to questions in throaty monosyllables. His brow wore a heavy frown. All in all, Holme thought Crenton a clog to the joyousness of the evening. He wished that he would go, and finally this is just what Crenton did. After making his adieus to the girl and her father the sullen one turned to Holme. "I suppose I will see you again?" he drawled, a sneer in his voice.

"I doubt it," returned Holme, extending his hand, "at least not right away. I have been gone for some time, and—er—I shall devote the most of my time to my fiancee, and after our marriage we have planned an extended trip."

He looked across at the girl to see how she accepted this Munchausen flight. She smiled.

After the departure of the discomfited Crenton the old major left the room. Holme turned curiously to the girl. She was gazing at him, shame in her eyes and the bright red spots coming and going high on her cheeks.

"I—I can explain," she began eagerly. "Honestly, Dick, I can explain."

"Take it easy, Beth," soothed the young man, half afraid the girl would become hysterical. "There are really no explanations needed unless you want to tell. I am only too glad to let the matter continue just as it is."

The girl gazed at him with eloquent eyes.

"Do you really mean that—after this? After this brazen thing I have done can you marry me?"

"Can I?" exclaimed Holme. "Try me and see!"

"Listen!" began the girl. "I am going to tell you all. Years ago, Dick, when I refused you, I fully expected to marry you later. I thought you would ask me again, and you—didn't.

"Since you went away father somehow came to the belief that I had refused you in order to sacrifice myself to him. I have been doubly affectionate toward him since my mother died—poor old man—but he looked upon my continued—er—coldness toward matrimony with distress, and to alleviate this I told him that I was engaged to you; that we were to be married upon your return from India.

"I didn't think that he would mention it to a soul. I thought I had cautioned him that it was a secret engagement, but it seems I did not, and I verily believe that he has told it a dozen times to every one who has called here during your absence.

"It was terribly embarrassing to me, but I knew you, and I hoped in the event of your returning single—this was the biggest bogy—you would acknowledge the engagement and then later I would release you."

"I shall not accept a release," murmured Holme.

The girl continued: "Crenton has been a most persistent suitor. He has money—millions—but no manners." She shuddered. "Oh, I never could marry that man, but—but I believe he guessed my secret. He used to smile whenever your name was mentioned and leer—positively leer—at me. I hated him, but I was afraid.

"THANK GOD!"

"You can imagine with what mingled feelings I saw you as we came from that store. I waited for you at the curb. I—I couldn't do otherwise. Besides, I wished to show that persistent Crenton that at least I knew you.

"Then I became bolder, and I introduced you as my fiance." The girl's face was crimson. "And now," she finished sadly, "we must cancel the engagement. I—I can't literally throw myself at your head, you know, and then accept your whole souled offer to let the farce continue."

"But it isn't a farce," protested the man. "I love you, and I want you to marry me if you will. Why, dearest, that is why I came home."

He strode over to the girl and lifted her chin until her eyes were level with his.

"Thank God!" he said and kissed her

A WHITE CHRISTMAS.

THERE is one way to make a white Christmas even though there may be not a flake of snow in sight. Let the whiteness be in your heart. Put aside all thoughts of guile. Forget all the big or little bitternesses you may be entertaining against some other person. Cast out all envy, all covetousness, all unkindness. Endeavor to harbor in your heart only such thoughts and feelings as the Nazarene knew when he dwelt by Galilee. Cultivate human brotherhood. Practice Christian charity. Look beyond and above your workaday horizon. Get out of yourself. Get into the hearts of others.

Then you will be sure of a white Christmas this year.

The Sleepwalker

By ARTHUR EDWARDS

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And so, my boy, you're going to the city to take a position in business. It's more than seventy years since I did the same thing myself.

When I was your age I was apprenticed to a New York china merchant. The apprentice usually lived in the family of his employer, and I lived with the Van Horns. Mr. Van Horn's office was on the ground floor of his house, the living rooms being upstairs. The house stood on the bank of the East river, and from it we could see the ships in which he was interested come in to the slips on the other side of the street, poking their bowsprits almost in at our windows.

I was but fourteen years of age when I was apprenticed to Mr. Van Horn. He had but one child, Katherine, who was twelve, to whom I soon stood as a brother. Before the term of my apprenticeship had expired we had become lovers, and I preferred to remain where I was rather than accept a position that would separate me from Katherine. But of this Mr. Van Horn was ignorant.

Meanwhile Mrs. Van Horn had died, and her place in the household management was taken by a housekeeper, a middle aged widow named Clark. Mrs. Clark had no sooner come into the family than it was apparent that she aimed at marrying Mr. Van Horn. By that time I was nineteen years old and Katherine was sixteen. It was natural that we should unite against the common enemy, for Katherine was up in arms against any one who aspired to take her mother's place.

During my boyhood I became a somnambulist. The first time I walked in my sleep I awoke to find myself standing before a mirror brushing my hair. I was terribly shocked and, running to my bed, covered my head and lay trembling till morning. Another time, when the bowsprit of a large ship extended over the house, I found myself one night on the bowsprit. I saved myself from falling into the street by catching a rope. I had gone on to the roof, got on to the bowsprit and was shinning down.

At that time there were no safes such as we have now. A modern safe compared with the strong box of that day is like an ocean liner compared with one of the caravels in which Columbus crossed the Atlantic. I well remember the strong box Mr. Van Horn kept in one of the rooms on the main floor of his house, a room he used for his private office. It was covered with strips of iron interlaced like basketwork. But it was opened by a big iron key that would now serve for a stable door.

All of a sudden Mr. Van Horn began to miss important papers from his strong box. He confided his loss to Mrs. Clark, and there was at once a great change in his treatment of me. It was plain to me that she had not only opened his eyes to my relations with his daughter, of which he had been oblivious, but she led him to suspect that I was stealing his papers.

She herself was oblivious to nothing that was going on and had not only discovered that Katherine and I were lovers, but that we stood in her way to become Mrs. Van Horn. But Mr. Van Horn was a secretive man, and, though he was seriously poisoned against me and was ambitious for his daughter to become the wife of an eminent man, he pretended to disbelieve the charge against me, preferring to set a watch upon me without letting any one in the house know that he was doing so. He slept with his door open at the other end of the hall, on which my room also faced, and since he was a light sleeper it was almost impossible for me to leave my room without his knowing it.

Well, one night I woke up from one of my somnambulistic walks, and my astonishment was as great as, if not greater than, ever before. I was standing in the counting room on the main floor, Mr. Van Horn was standing in the door that opened into his private office, while by the light of a candle Mrs. Clark was seen kneeling beside the strong box.

"Go to your room," said Mr. Van Horn to me.

I lost no time in doing so, but soon recovered from the shock of my sudden awakening from somnambulism, for I saw that my physical defect had made a great change in the situation. The next morning I saw Mrs. Clark packing to leave, and before noon she was out of the house, never to return.

As soon as she had gone Mr. Van Horn called me into his private office and told me of the loss of his papers, his consultation with his housekeeper and her turning his suspicions against me. The night before he had heard me get out of bed and, going himself into the hall, had seen me start on what he soon became convinced was a somnambulistic tour. He and I were both in our bare feet and moved with a catlike tread. When he saw me go down into the office it occurred to him that I was stealing his papers in my sleep. But instead of that I was leading him to the thief, who was at that time engaged in removing more papers from his strong box.

Considering that I had saved him from the toils of a bad woman and that he discovered Katherine's strong love for me, Mr. Van Horn consented to our engagement and afterward, when we were married, made me his partner.

A Few Christmas Suggestions

DIAMONDS, WATCHES, FOBS, BRACELETS LOCKETS, CHAINS, BROOCHES, CUFF LINKS, NECKLACES, LAVALLIERS COMBS, HAT PINS, SCARF PINS, ETC., ETC.

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We have all the standard makes, such as the Hamilton, South Bend, Elgin, Waltham, etc.

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Fancy mantle clocks, kitchen clocks, silverware, hand painted china, and a full stock of fine picture moulding.

I FRAME PICTURES

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Ladies' set rings in all styles and sets. Plain band and signet.

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A complete line of the celebrated Victor Talking Machines and Records.

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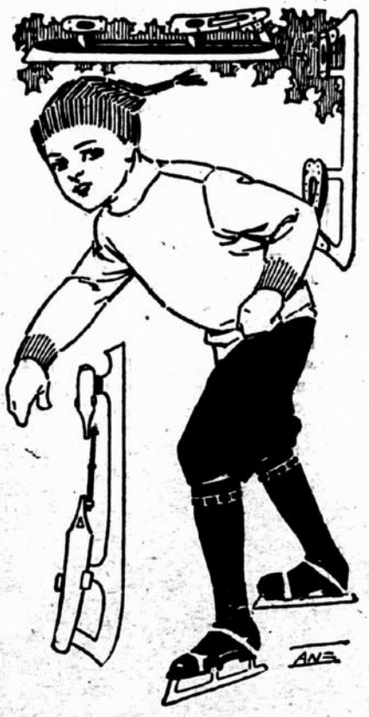
A Sensible Christmas Present



Is something that will prove useful to the person who receives it. It will then most certainly be appreciated and that is what you desire, is it not? Would not a fine new

MAJESTIC RANGE

please your wife? It would most certainly delight her and give her a stove upon which she could prepare the best Christmas dinner of your life. Then supplement the stove with a few necessary utensils, of which we have a magnificent line.

We have skates for the boys and girls; carpentering tools for the husband; cutlery of all kinds and hundreds of articles that would make sensible Christmas presents.

STOVES, SHOT GUNS, RIFLES, FINE CARVING SETS, SILVERWARE, FANCY LAMPS, GRANITE WARE, NICKEL PLATE WARE

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