

"Only Jones"

A Day-Before-Christmas Story in Three Parts

by Henry Kitchell Webster Samuel E. Kiser and Wilbur D. Nesbit

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PART THREE—Continued.

Jabez turned to look, then thought he wouldn't.

"And now," continued Ursula, "they're coming back into the car."

"Good-bye," yelled Jabez. The door stuck, as car doors will. When the man in the tan overcoat got it open, Jabez was gone. Looking eagerly out of the window Ursula thought she saw a man scuttling like a scared cat up a dark little cross street; she thought she saw him take a header over an ash barrel half submerged in an old snow bank, but she could not be sure.

Then she turned back and began gathering up what she could find of Mrs. Biggs' Christmas dinner. She was so busy at this and so intent on ignoring the thirty-two pairs of eyes which were trying to bore holes in her, that she was unaware that the conductor had come in and was standing over her.

"Fare, please," he said, coldly. "And," he added, "if that gent that just skipped out was wid you, you kin pay for him, too."

Ursula began tumbling over the things in her lap. "I'm—in a sort of gasp—" "I'm afraid," she said, "that I must have left my purse in the automobile."

The conductor was not an amiable man. "It makes no odds to the company where you left it," he began. "Ten cents, please, now." But at this moment a man who had been riding on the front platform with a turkey came back into the car. "Here's your ten cents," he said, and sat in the vacant place beside Miss Allen.

"I was taking this bird out to Mrs. Callahan's," he observed in his prosaic way as he tucked it between his feet. "I'm glad I happened to be on the same car."

It was Jones.

"I'm glad, too," said Ursula.

We now return to the man who fell over the ash barrel. McAdam, for it was indeed he, was not hurt, for the barrel was covered with a heap of last week's snow, shoveled up there from the street. He quickly decided that, for the moment, he was safest where he was. He crouched down in the snow behind the barrel "with listening ear," as Shakespeare says, waiting for the chase to go by. Two, three, five minutes passed and nothing of the sort happened. Only the snow, in which he nestled, slowly melted around him, became, in fact, uncomfortably slushy. Perhaps the pursuit was abandoned, or perhaps there was some trick about this apparent inactivity. He would try to find out.

Cautiously he lifted his head and looked down the street. Nothing to

penser, still obese, unimpaired by the stray leaves which had fluttered off it that evening, should have reposed. You know what had become of it. McAdam, happily for him, did not. He paddled around in the snow in search of it, then gave it up and collected from his various pockets his total cash resources. They came to two dollars and fifty-five cents. Would the constables accept his promise to pay? He was inclined to think not.

He uttered a sigh of despair, for without that friendly bulge in his hip-pocket he felt forsaken indeed, when his eye chanced on a lighted window across the street. "J. Schoenhoeven," was printed on it, "wigs and costumes." And then his eye lighted with hope. "Saved!" he murmured.

Snatching his chance when a fire engine went tearing down the avenue—on its way, no doubt, to some premature Santa Claus affair in a Christmas tree—he dashed across the street, up the stairs, into the shop.

"I'm going to a party tonight," he said to the young man in charge. "I want to wear something neat and handsome that—that'll keep my friends from knowing me."

Ordinarily, McAdam had only to appear to command respect, but falling over an ash barrel, staving in his hat, and lying for half an hour in the street had made him a good deal less impressive. At least it did not over-power the clerk.

"About what price?" he asked, coldly.

Jabez looked a bit sick at that. "Something about two-fifty," he said.

With a haughty wave of the hand, the young man pointed to a dingy heap upon the counter, the last of its race. "That's all we have at two-fifty," he said, and turned away with his nose in the air, leaving poor Jabez to paw over the disreputable, worn and dirty garments and wigs which looked as if they had done duty at scores of masquerade balls in the cheapest quarters of the city.

Reverend Arthur and Delancey reached the Allen's house at exactly eight o'clock, simultaneously with six little girls from across the street. In the hall they encountered Ursula. She bundled the little girls off upstairs.

"And I must be off, too," she said.

"We're just this minute up from dinner. We were dreadfully late getting home, and I have to dress. I wish I had time to hear how you two got out of jail."

"We didn't find it necessary to accompany the officers to the station," began Reverend Arthur, coolly.

"We—"

"I'll hear all about it later," she interrupted. "Now run along and help Mr. Jones with the Christmas tree in the music room; you know—"

"Ah, Mr. Jones is here," said Delancey. "Has Mr. Mc—"

"Mr. Jones dined here," said Ursula, turning toward the stairway. "You must help him get through with the tree, because he has to dress. He is going to be my Santa Claus, you know."

My Santa Claus! If they had known she regarded it in just that light they would have fought for the part themselves. Well, it was too late now.

So they went to the music room to the menial occupation of "helping Jones." But Jones said they could do nothing for him; indeed his expression of fact was so vivacious when they all but set fire to the tree with a cigarette that they retired in good order to the great hall, where they gloomily discussed Jones and the good luck that seemed to attend him. He certainly had scored on them more than once already in the course of this eventful evening and their love for him was not increasing with noticeable rapidity.

"Think of him dining here in his morning coat," observed Delancey.

"He makes himself useful," said Reverend Arthur. So they stood where they commanded a view of the great front door, lazily looked over the new arrivals and waited for Ursula's reappearance on the scene to make it worth while taking part.

James stood by the big door grandly admitting the guests. The bell rang downstairs where he could not hear it, but a footfall on the porch or the crunching of a carriage in the drive told him when anyone was coming. So he was a good deal surprised not to say startled, at hearing without any preliminary sound whatever, a faint rat-rat on the door.

He opened it a little way and was still more surprised at seeing no one there. Then, as he was about to close it again, he was electrified by a hoarse whisper:

"Open the door. Let me in."

Opening wider, he made out a dark figure with a venerable beard in the shadow of the doorway. This was scandalous.

"Be off, now," he said severely. "No beggars allowed."

"Beggars," said the hoarse voice, as though something were choking it.

"I'm a friend of Miss Allen's. Stand aside, you fool, and let me in. Quick! They'll see me in a minute."

"You look like a friend of hers! You do indeed! Come, be off now, or I'll turn you over to the police."

"I'm her Santa Claus. That's why I'm dressed this way," shouted the applicant, furiously, but not forgetting caution so far as to come out into the light.

"You're drunk," said James, advancing into the dark, courageously intent on flinging the intruder off the porch.

It was a false move. Disreputable he looked, drunk he might be, but the unknown was certainly quick. Before James had fairly got clear of the door he had shot past him into the vestibule.

The light revealed the full horror of him, a tunic of greasy red cotton flannel with dragged tufts of white along the edges. Red worsted tights, of which the less said the better. A pair of yellow oilcloth boots, broken and muddy, and over his head and shoulders a torn tangle of frowsy white hair. And this hideous travesty prefigured Santa Claus! Here was the saint of Christmas, the jovial old gentleman who brought gifts to all and about whose knees the sweet little children were to cling while he stroked



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ed their hair and patted their innocent cheeks.

Upon this blasphemous parody James sprang with a cry of horror. But the parody was more than he bargained for, that was evident in less than five seconds. However, reinforcements were at hand. Rev. Arthur rushed to the rescue, and a little behind came Delancey.

The door stood wide open. The scuffle was plainly to be seen from the street, and two men, one in a tan overcoat, were rushing across the lawn, intent on taking a hand of their own in the affair. Altogether it was lively while it lasted. But it was short.

As the two men from outside dashed up the steps the big door swung to with a click, and Jones, who had closed it, said, in his quiet way:

"Get up. Get up. Don't you know his voice? It's McAdam."

They scrambled to their feet. It is safe to say that unless they knew his voice they could hardly have recognized him. The disguise by now, at least, was effective.

They looked at him aghast. Then, as they heard Ursula's step on the stairs, James, with, as Shakespeare says, "one auspicious and one dropping eye," helped him to his feet.

Jabez pulled off his wig and dropped it on the floor. He tugged impatiently at his beard. "The damned thing won't come off," he said, with something like a sob. "It's glued on!"

Ursula stood before him. Pretty much everyone else in the house was there, too, for the sound of the scuffle had been audible all over it, but his experience of the last two hours had reduced him to his element. There was an epic simplicity about him. He saw only Ursula.

"I've come back," he said. "I wanted to speak to you, so I came back—"

"Come in here," said Ursula. She led him through the crowd into a little reception room and closed the door after her.

Jones herded the mob back into the drawing rooms. James went back and opened the door again, looking, except as to his eyes, as though nothing had happened. But Rev. Arthur and P. Wilmering remained frozen where they stood and gazed at each other.

This is what was happening behind that closed door.

"Before you say anything to me, Mr. McAdam, I want to ask for your good wishes," said Ursula.

"My good wishes!" he echoed.

She held out her hands and he saw that she wore no rings but one solitary brilliant upon a third finger.

It was a moment before he comprehended.

"So my account is closed out," he said. "I wasn't in time to cover my margins after all."

"It wasn't a matter of time," said Ursula, blushing a little, "but you do give me your good wishes, don't you?"

"All of 'em," he said, shaking hands. "Can I have a cup of coffee?"

After he had had it he felt enough better to look up his two rivals. He found them at last, in an obscure cor-

ner of the great hall, gloomily, as would have said, watching the festivities in the drawing room.

There was a complex tissue of emotions to be read in his face, but a smile of pure good humor dominated it.

He had not asked Ursula which of them was the successful one. At the time he hadn't cared. But now he was puzzled to, as it were, pick the winner. Whichever he was, he looked exactly as the other must feel.

"Well," said Jabez, with what cheerfulness he could muster, "which one of you fellows do I congratulate?"

"What?" shouted Reverend Arthur.

"Whose ring is it she's wearing?" demanded Jabez. "One of you ought to know."

"Not I," said Reverend Arthur. Again echo answered:

"Not I."

And then a sickening silence enveloped them. Jabez was merely puzzled, but the hearts of Reverend Arthur and Delancey were like lead in their bosoms, the lights were blurred in their eyes and the knowledge of defeat took for the time all the joy out of life. Not one of the trio spoke, for there was nothing more to be said.

In the drawing room the tide of fun was rising steadily. Expectation stood at tiptoe. It was nearly time for the Christmas tree. For the moment the leaders of the merriment had disappeared. Ursula and Jones were nowhere to be seen.

Weren't they, though?

Suddenly Jabez laid compelling hands on the other two. They turned and followed his look.

There were two figures in the dark—the almost dark recess at the far end of the hall. This was a children's party, but these weren't children.

And then, in a moment, Reverend Arthur and Mr. P. Wilmering Delancey knew where Jones had hung the mistletoe.

"I'm going to get out of this," said Wilmering.

"I think I must be going myself," said Reverend Arthur.

"I can't go," said Jabez.

"My car is here," said Delancey. "We could make a dash—"

"I never could get out of it," said Jabez. "They're waiting for me on the sidewalk."

"Possibly," hesitated Reverend Arthur, "if I were to go first—"

dressed in such a manner as to create a diversion—"

"Reverend!" exclaimed Jabez, "you're a brick." He opened a door that happened to be at hand. "I guess we can change clothes in here," he said.

Five minutes later Jones and Ursula came upon the product of the metamorphosis. First they gasped with astonishment and then howled with delight while the reverend gentleman wriggled in sheepish embarrassment. But a few words sufficed to make clear to them the situation and then they jumped into the game with a will, adding touches here and there to Reverend Arthur's picturesque if not handsome costume.

"But you need the wig to make you complete," said Jones. "Here it is."

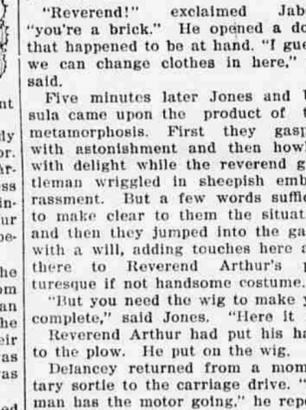
Reverend Arthur had put his hand to the plow. He put on the wig.

Delancey returned from a momentary sortie to the carriage drive. "My man has the motor going," he report-

ed.

THE END.

A SICKENING SILENCE ENVELOPED THEM.



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WHEN CHRISTMAS TIME COMES ROUND

S. E. KISER

When Christmas time comes round it seems
As though the long, long years
Roll back and take away our cares
And dry up all our tears;
I don't know why it is, but when
The great day comes along
I get to feelin' young again,
And kind of turn to song,
And whistle and go on just like
A boy would. I'll be bound,
The old world seems to brighten up
When Christmas time comes round.

I'm tickled at the Jumpin' Jack
And all them kind of things;
I like to watch the toys that play
By windin' up the springs,
And somehow—don't know why it is—
Love seems to fill the air,
And I forget I've enemies
Or troubles anywhere;
And every little while I sort
Of listen for the sound
Of voices that have long been still,
When Christmas time comes round.

I wish that I was Santa Claus
And had a magic sleigh,
To visit all the children who
Look forward to the day—
The orphans and the cripples and
The poor folks everywhere—
All children that are good and kind
And don't forget their prayers;
I'll bet you that they'd all be glad
When they got up and found
Their stockin's fairly bustin' out,
When Christmas time comes round.

Oh, happy time of Jinglyn' bells
And hills all white with snow;
Oh, joyful day that takes us back
To care-free long ago!
I wonder if up there above
Where happy angels roam
They do not get to thinkin' of
The happy times at home,
And turn, in fancy, back once more
To listen to the sound
Of voices that have long been still,
When Christmas time comes round?

In the Spirit of Christmas Jollity

By S. E. KISER

Many a woman is known by the Christmas presents she takes back to be exchanged.

If there is a Christmas season in heaven the department store clerk will hardly want to go there.

The woman who looks for the price mark on her present generally gets mad if she finds it.

A good thing about some Christmas presents is that they don't last more than a day or two.

People who put off buying things they really need until after Christmas hardly ever find them in their stockings.

Some people don't permit their children to believe in Santa Claus because they selfishly want all the credit themselves.

If Santa Claus were a woman Christmas would always have to be postponed for a few days while she administered the finishing touches.

There ain't no Santa Claus, I guess, or if there is, why he

Don't know so very much about book-keepin', seems to me;

I ast him fer some rabbits and a pair of skates one year, and all he left was nothin' but a little sister here.

And last year when I wrote to him I said I'd like a sled and one of these here spaniel dogs that's kind of brownish red; but blame the luck, I didn't git a solitary thing

Except a cap and overcoat and plated napkin ring.

I've wrote him this year that I want a hook-and-ladder truck and magic lantern and a goat that I can train to buck,

And maybe a four-bladed knife, if he has one to spare, but I've told him plain and honest that I don't want things to wear

I'll try to keep be-levin' till he comes a round once more, but he's got to do much better than he ever done before;

If he brings another sister in the place of what I'd like, why, I'll quit be-levin' in him; from that minute, the old Ike!

Why the Colonel Gave It Up. "Colonel," said the beautiful grass widow, "why is it you so strongly object to the exchanging of Christmas presents?"

"I'll tell you," he replied. "I used to be as crazy as other people over the sending of gifts. There was a girl that I thought a good deal of in

those days, and a sister of mine who had been married only a couple of years was made glad by the arrival of a little one only about a month before Christmas. I thought a nice present for her would be a book on the care and nursing of infants. So I bought it. At the same time I bought a very handsome volume of poems for the girls."

"Yes?"

"They got mixed. I believe this Christmas present business is all foolishness."

Candor. "If I were to catch you under the mistletoe would you try to get away?"

"Of course I should—but I feel almost sure that I should not succeed."

An Exchange. "What did your mistress give you for Christmas?"

"A box of cheap handkerchiefs."

"What did you give her?"

"A week's notice."

A Lucky Man. He sees the sun through spreading rifts

He hears the wind sing songs of cheer

His wife will buy no Christmas gifts

And have them charged to him this year.

FAIR WARNING TO SANTA CLAUS.

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ISN'T YOUR NAME JABEZ, SANTA CLAUSE? HE ASKED.

be seen at first but the crowd hurrying along the well-lighted avenue where the cars ran. But when he looked again he had the doubtful satisfaction of seeing two dim figures—one unmistakably in a tan overcoat—lounging in an entry near the corner. McAdam sagaciously reflected that if they remained so cheerfully at this end of the street it must be because they knew there was no way for him to get out the other. Perhaps they would give him up eventually, but in the meantime—How warm and dry Delancey and Rev. Arthur must be in the comfortable police station!

Suddenly he straightened up. "Shucks!" he murmured, "it's Christmas eve. They'll be glad of a little peace and good will on their own account. I'll put it strong. Say two hundred apiece." He reached back to his hip pocket, where his joy-dis-