

# CHRISTMAS FOR TWO

THOMAS L. MASSON



IT IS a common mistake to suppose that we are creatures controlled by reason. In reality, we are the children of impulse. Our environment often forces us to conclusions which seem to be based upon reason, but are due to a multiplicity of outward sensations impinging upon our minds.

If I had been a reasonable being, I should never have fallen in love with Miss Galbraith. It was an illogical proceeding, because it made my presidency of the Bachelors' club, which I had formed three years before, extremely uncertain—or, at least, it seemed to make it uncertain.

Nothing was more desirable than my club. We had every comfort, in addition to good fellowship; and the fact that we were all members did not preclude us from the society of women. Indeed, it gave a zest to that society, for it seemed to surround us with an additional safeguard.

Miss Galbraith's father had left her several millions. She owned the building in which our club was quartered. The agent had called on me only three weeks before Christmas to tell me that we must either sign another three years' lease, or vacate on the 1st of January. There were twenty-two of us, and we had already agreed—it was in the constitution—that the club should be immediately disbanded if any member got married. We all knew Miss Galbraith, and we were all in love with her; but as yet no man had been sufficiently disloyal—or successful—to break the spell.

I caught Fenson, our vice-president, calling on Miss Galbraith one night; and afterward, in the club rooms, we had it out.

"Look here, old man," I said, "it seems to me that you are taking chances. Of course, you don't care about the money; but you can't play around here. Why, the future of this club depends on your keeping away from that girl!"

"You're a nice man to talk," said Fenson. "What in the world are you doing around here? You ought to set a better example."

"Of course, you ought," repeated Van Olcott, coming up. "Why, I had some sense of honor about it myself; but when I saw you going, I made up my mind that I might as well go, too."

"That's the way you fellows all reason," I said hotly. "Why, during the week, the entire club is around at Miss Galbraith's! The other night we couldn't get a quorum to discuss the renewal of our lease. At any moment some member may get her."

I said this without much fear. I had reason to believe that if the club was disbanded, it wouldn't be anybody's fault but my own.

"She's bothered to death," I added.

"It's a shame, fellows, for able-bodied men like you to annoy a young girl like that!"

I felt so sympathetic about it, indeed, that the next afternoon I called on Miss Galbraith to learn the facts.

"Is it true," I asked, "that the fellows in my crowd come around here constantly? I suppose it must be so, as I meet them here all the time. That's the reason why I came this afternoon," I added softly. "The evenings are too crowded."

The dear girl looked tired.

"Yes, it is true," she replied. "You know that twenty-two young men, constantly succeeding one another, are rather trying."

"It's wearing on you, isn't it?" I said. "Dreadfully. I am going away." I experienced a sudden shock of pain.

"Oh, don't say that!" I exclaimed. "I'll do something about it. I'll make them pass a resolution that they aren't to call so often—say, one man a week during the year. Anything to keep you here!"

"Oh, I'm only going away for Christmas!" she said. "Just for a rest. Dear old New York! I hate to leave it at this season, but I know how it will be. They never could keep away, and I shall break down if I don't get a few days off."

The thought made me boil.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed. "This is a pretty mess, isn't it? Here's a bachelors' club, sworn to remain single, and all of us working nights to go back on ourselves and to bother the life out of you. We're actually driving you away from town at the best time of the year. It's a shame!"

"Never mind," she said softly. "I need a change, anyway. I am going to open up my country place, and have a real country Christmas." She looked at me appealingly. "How would you like to run down there for the holly days?"

Her words went through me like an electric shock. So I was the chosen one! I had suspected it for some time.

"Do you really mean it?" I asked.

I could see even then the magnificent stretches of country surrounding her beautiful estate, and the stately mansion in the center. Everything was there that the mind or heart could wish, and I was to be lord of it all. Not that I cared for the money—I felt that she knew that.

"Certainly I mean it. You can run down the day before and stay over for a few days. My aunt will chaperon us. Now, you must go, as I have some business to attend to."

It seemed too good to be true. For the next week I went about as one in a dream. Luck was with me, even the elements, for the day before Christmas dawned unclouded, and gave me the opportunity to run my car down to Miss Galbraith's instead of taking the train, which I detest.

It was only a seventy-mile run. I arrived at six o'clock. As I stepped into the hall, I noticed an unusual commotion. Suddenly, from behind a pillar, a form sprang forth. It was that of Fenson.

"Hello, old man! All the boys are here!"

"The boys!" I exclaimed. "What the deuce do you mean?"

At that instant I gazed around me. The hall was piled with merchandise, like a warehouse. Boxes of candy of every conceivable shape mounted to the ceiling like a pyramid. A mass of the latest holiday books to were d aloft on the other side, and in the center were flowers, ranged in geometrical masses. Her Christmas gifts.

"Good heavens!" I cried again, as from all the four corners of the establishment there issued, one by one

the twenty-two members of my club. "Can it be?"

They sorrowfully grouped themselves about me, and Fenson, burying his head on my shoulder, almost wept as he replied:

"Yes, old fellow, it is too true. She has invited every man Jack down here to spend Christmas with her, and an hour ago she skipped back to town all by herself!"

There was a solemn pause. The truth was painful, but we felt that we must meet it like men.

"Boys," I whispered, "we could follow her back; but, inasmuch as we are all in the same boat, I move that we stay here for the holiday and have a ripping old time, and that the secretary be immediately empowered to telephone her agent that we will take another three years' lease."

"Second the motion," said Fenson. And it was carried unanimously. (Copyright, Frank A. Munsey Co.)

LOOKED THE PART.

Stranger (in the wild west)—Who acted as Santa Claus in your camp last Christmas?  
Alkali Ike—Cherokee Charley. We tarred and feathered him for hoss stealin'.

Christmas Proverbs.  
Santa Claus makes the heart grow fonder.  
A fair exchange is no Christmas gift.  
The kissed girl doesn't dread the mistletoe.  
One-half the world doesn't know how the other half spends Christmas.

A pretty girl needs no mistletoe.  
A Christmas present in the stocking is worth two in the store window.—Woman's Home Companion.

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"Hides from his creditors."



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