

Beasley's Christmas Party

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

SYNOPSIS

PART I—Newcomer in a small town, a young newspaper man, who tells the story, is amazed by the unaccountable actions of a man who, from the windows of a fine house, apparently has conversed with invisible persons, particularly mentioning one "Simple-doria." The youth goes to his boarding house, the home of Mrs. Apperthwaite, next door to the scene of the strange proceedings, bewildered.

PART II—Next morning he discovers his strange neighbor is the Hon. David Beasley, prominent politician, and unaccountably respected. Telling of his last night's experience, he is markedly interrupted by a fellow boarder, a Mr. George Dowden. Later, with Miss Apperthwaite, he is an unseen witness of a purely imaginary jumping contest between Beasley and a "Bill Hammerley." Miss Apperthwaite appears deeply concerned, there apparently being no possible explanation of the strange proceedings.

PART III—The reporter learns that Beasley and Miss Apperthwaite had at one time been engaged, and that the young lady had broken the engagement because of Beasley's "lack of imagination."

PART IV—The "mystery" of "Simple-doria" and "Bill Hammerley" is explained by Mr. Dowden. Beasley is caring for a small boy, Hamilton Swift, Junior, a helpless invalid bodily though more than ordinarily bright mentally, the son of dear friends who are dead, and "Simple-doria" and "Bill Hammerley" are features of Beasley's and the small boy's imagination, Beasley humoring the little sufferer by the "play acting."

PART V—The reporter becomes acquainted with David Beasley and is invited to his home, where he meets Hamilton Swift, Junior, and his circle of "invisible" friends, which Beasley and George Dowden have made very real to the child.

VI.

Autumn trailed the last leaves behind her flying brown robes one night; we woke to a flurry of snow next morning; and it was winter. Down town, along the sidewalks, the merchants set lines of poles, covered them with evergreen, and ran streamers of green overhead to encourage the festive shopping. Salvation Army Santa Clauses stamped their feet and rang bells on the corners, and pink-faced children fixed their noses immovably to display-windows. For them, the season of seasons, the time of times, was at hand.

To a certain new reporter on the Dispatch the stir and gaiety of the streets meant little more than that the days had come when it was night in the afternoon, and that he was given fewer political assignments. This was annoying, because Beasley's candidacy for the governorship had given me a personal interest in the political situation. The nominating convention of his party would meet in the spring; the nomination was certain to carry the election also, and thus far Beasley showed more strength than any other man in the field. "Things are looking his way," said Dowden. "He's always worked hard for the party; not on the stump, of course," he laughed; "but the boys understand there are more important things than speechmaking. His record in Congress gave him the confidence of everybody in the state, and, besides that, people always trust a quiet man. I tell you if nothing happens he'll get it."

"I'm for Beasley," another politician explained, in an interview, "because he's Dave Beasley! Yes, sir, I'm for him. You know the boys say if a man is only for you, in this state, there isn't much in it and he may go back on it; but if he's for you, he means it. Well, I'm for Beasley!"

There were other candidates, of course; none of them formidable; but I was surprised to learn of the existence of a small but energetic faction opposing our friend in Walwright, his own town. ("What are you surprised about?" inquired Dowden. "Don't you know what our folks are like, yet? If St. Paul lived in Walwright, do you suppose he could run for constable without some of his near neighbors getting out to try and down him?")

The head and front (and backbone, too) of the opposition to Beasley was a close-fisted, hard-knuckled, risen-from-the-soil sort of man, one named Simeon Peck. He possessed no inconsiderable influence, I heard; was a hard worker, and vigorously seconded by an energetic lieutenant, a young man named Grist. These, and others they had been able to draw to their faction, were bitterly and eagerly opposed to Beasley's nomination, and worked without ceasing to prevent it.

I quote the invaluable Mr. Dowden again: "Grist's against us because he had a quarrel with a clerk in Beasley's office, and wanted Beasley to discharge him, and Beasley wouldn't; Sim Peck's against us out of just plain wrongheadedness, and because he never was for anything nor for anybody in his life. I had a talk with the old nutten-head the other day; he said our candidate ought to be a farmer, a 'man of the common people,' and when I asked him where he'd find anybody



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more a man of the common people than Beasley, he said Beasley was 'too much of a society man' to suit him! The idea of Dave as a 'society man' was too much for me, and I laughed in Sim Peck's face, but that didn't stop Sim Peck! 'Jest look at the style he lives in,' he yelled. 'Ain't he fairly lapped in luxury? Look at that big house he lives in! Look at the way he goes around in that big car of his—and a nigger to drive him, half the time!' I had to holler again, and, of course, that made Sam twice as mad as he started out to be; and he went off swearing he'd show me, before the campaign was over. The only trouble he and Grist and that crowd could give us would be by finding out something against Dave, and they can't do that because there isn't anything to find out."

I shared his confidence on this latter score, but was somewhat less sanguine on some others. There were only two newspapers of any political influence in Walwright, the Dispatch and the Journal, both operated in the interest of Beasley's party, and neither had "come out" for him. The gossip I heard about our office led me to think that each was waiting to see what headway Sim Peck and his faction would make; the Journal especially, I knew, had some inclination to coquette with Peck, Grist, and Company. Altogether, their faction was not entirely to be despised.

Thus, my thoughts were a great deal more occupied with Beasley's chances than with the holiday spirit that now, with furs and bells and wreathing mists of snow, breathed good cheer over the town. So, little, indeed, had this spirit touched me, that, one evening when one of my colleagues, standing before the grate-fire in the reporter's room, yawned and said he was glad when tomorrow was over, I asked him what was the particular trouble with tomorrow.

"Christmas," he explained, languidly. "Always so tedious. Like Sunday."

"It makes me homesick," said another, a melancholy little man who was forever bragging of his native Duluth.

"Christmas," I repeated—"tomorrow!"

It was Christmas eve, and I had not known it! I leaned back in my chair in a sudden loneliness, what pictures coming before me of long-ago Christmas eves at home!—old Christmas eves when there was a Tree.

My name was called; the night city editor had an assignment for me. "Go up to Sim Peck's, on Madison street," he said. "He thinks he's got something on David Beasley, but won't say any more over the telephone. See what there is in it."

I picked up my hat and coat, and left the office at a speed which may have given my superior the highest conception of my journalistic zeal. At a telephone station on the next corner I called up Mrs. Apperthwaite's house and asked for Mr. Dowden.

"What are you doing?" I demanded,

when his voice responded.

"Playing bridge," he answered.

"Are you going out anywhere?"

"No. What's the trouble?"

"I'll tell you later. I may want to see you tonight before I go back to the office."

"All right. I'll be at home all the evening."

I hung up the receiver and made off on my errand.

Down town the streets were crowded with the package-laden people, bending heads and shoulders to the bitter wind, which swept a blinding, steel-like snow horizontally against them. At corners it struck so tumultuously a blow upon the chest of the pedestrians that for a moment it would halt them, and you could hear them gasping half-smothered. "Ain't like bathers in a heavy surf. Yet there was a gayety in this eager gale; the crowds pressed anxiously, yet happily, up and down the street in their generous search for things to give away. It was not the rich who struggled through the storm tonight; these were people who carried their own bundles home. You saw them; toilers and savers, tired mothers and fathers, worn with the grinding thrift of all the year, but now for this one night careless of how hard-saved the money, reckless of everything but the joy of giving it to bring the children joy on the one great tomorrow. So they bent their heads to the freezing wind, their arms laden with darning bundles and their hearts uplifted with the tremulous happiness of giving more than they could afford. Meanwhile, Mr. Simeon Peck, honest man, had chosen this season to work hard if he might to the detriment of his fellow-men.

I found Mr. Peck waiting for me at his house. There were four other men with him, one of whom I recognized as Grist, a squat young man with slippery-looking black hair and a lambrquin mustache. They were donning their coats and hats in the hall when I arrived.

"From the Dispatch, hay?" Mr. Peck gave me greeting, as he wound a knit comforter about his neck. "That's good. We'd most give you up. This here's Mr. Grist, and Mr. Henry P. Cullop, and Mr. Gus Schulmeyer—three men that feel the same way about Dave Beasley that I do. That other young feller," he waved a mittened hand to the fourth man—"he's from the Journal. Likely you're acquainted."

The young man from the Journal was unknown to me; moreover, I was far from overjoyed at his presence in the group.

"I've got your newspaper men here," continued Mr. Peck, "because I'm goin' to show you somepin' about Dave Beasley that'll open a good many folk's eyes when it's in print."

"Well, what is it?" I asked, rather sharply.

"Jest hold your horses a little bit," he returned. "Grist and me knows, and so do Mr. Cullop and Mr. Schulmeyer. And I'm goin' to take them and you two reporters to look at it. All ready? Then come on."

He threw open the door, stooped to the gust that took him by the throat, and led the way out into the storm.

"What is he up to?" I gasped to the Journal man as we followed in a struggling line.

"I don't know any more than you do," he returned. "He thinks he's got something that'll queer Beasley. Peck's an old fool, but it's just possible he's got hold of something. Nearly everybody has one thing, at least, that they don't want found out. It may be a good story. Lord, what a night!"

I pushed ahead to the leader's side. "See here, Mr. Peck—" I began, but he cut me off.

"You listen to me, young man! I'm givin' you some news for your paper, and I'm gittin' at it my own way, but I'll git at it, don't you worry! I'm goin' to let some folks around here know what kind of a feller Dave Beasley really is; yes, and I'm goin' to show George Dowden he can't laugh at me!"

"You're going to show Mr. Dowden?" I said. "You mean you're going to take him along with us on this expedition, too?"

"Take him!" Mr. Peck emitted an acid bark of laughter. "I guess he's at Beasley's, all right."

"No, he isn't; he's at home—at Mrs. Apperthwaite's—playing cards."

"That's right," said Grist. "Gentlemen"—Peck turned to the others—"when we git to Mrs. Apperthwaite's, jest stop outside along the fence a minute. I reckon we'll pick up a recruit."

Shivering, we took up our way again in single file, stumbling through drifts that had deepened incredibly within the hour. The wind was straight against us, and so stingingly sharp and so laden with the driving snow that when we reached Mrs. Apperthwaite's gate (which we approached from the north, not passing Beasley's) my eyes were so full of stinging tears I could see only blurred planes of light dancing vaguely in the darkness, instead of brightly lighted windows.

"Now," said Peck, pointing and turning his back to the wind; "the rest of you gentlemen wait out here. You two newspaper men, you come with me."

He opened the gates and went in, the Journal reporter and I following—all three of us wiping our half-blinded eyes. When we reached the shelter of the front porch, I took the key from my pocket and opened the door.

"I live here," I explained to Mr. Peck.

"All right," he said. "Jest step in and tell George Dowden that Sim Peck."

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out his eyes and I went to the newspapers, and all I want is to see this here ball in print tomorrow, an see what the boys (that do the work at the primaries) have to say about it—and what their wives'll say about the man that's too high-toned to have 'em in his house. I'll bet Beasley thought he was goin' to keep these do's quiet; afraid the farmers might not believe he's jest the plain man he sets up to be—afraid that folks like you that ain't invited might turn against him. I'll fool him! We're goin' to see what there is to see, and I'm goin' to have these boys from the newspapers write a full account of it. I you want to come along, I expect I'll do you a power o' good."

"I'll go," said Dowden, quickly. He got his coat and hat from a table in the hall, and we rejoined the huddled and shivering group at the gate.

"Got my recruit, gentis!" shrilled Peck, slapping Dowden boisterously on the shoulders. "I reckon he'll git a change of heart tonight!"

I motioned toward the front door. "Simeon Peck. He thinks he's got something on Mr. Beasley. He's waiting to see you."

Dowden uttered a sharp, half-coherent exclamation and stepped quickly to the door. "Peck!" he said, as he jerked it open.

"Oh, I'm here!" declared that gentleman, stepping into view. "I've come around to let you know that you couldn't laugh like a horse at me no more, George Dowden! So you weren't invited, either."

"Invited?" said Dowden. "Invited where?"

"Over to the ball your friend is givin'."

"What friend?"

"Dave Beasley. So you ain't quite good enough to dance with his high-society friends!"

"What are you talking about?" Dowden demanded, impatiently.

"I reckon you won't be quite so strong for Beasley," responded Peck with a vindictive little giggle. "when you find he can use you in his business, but when it comes to entertainin'—oh no, you ain't quite the boy!"

"I'd appreciate your explainin'," said Dowden. "It's kind of cold standin' here."

Peck laughed shrilly. "Then I reckon you better git your hat and coat and come along. Can't do us no harm, and might be an eye-opening for you. Grist and Gus Schulmeyer and Hank Cullop's waitin' out yonder at the gate. We've havin' kind of a consultation at my house over somepin' Grist seen at Beasley's a little earlier in the evening."

"What did Grist see?"

"Cabs drivin' up to Beasley's house—a whole lot o' 'em. Grist was down the street a piece, and it was pretty dark, but he could see the lamps and hear the doors slam as the people got out. Besides, the whole place is lit up from cellar to attic. Grist come on to my house and told me about it, and I begun usin' the telephone; called up all the men that count in the party—found most of 'em at home, too. I ast 'em if they was invited to this ball tonight; and not a one of 'em was. They're only in politics; they ain't high society enough to be ast to Mr. Beasley's dancin'-parties! But I would 'a' thought he'd let you in—anyways fer

"Gentlemen"—Peck turned to the others—"When We Git to Mrs. Apperthwaite's, Jest Stop Outside Along the Fence a Minute."

Peck's out here and wants to see him at the door a minute. Be quick."

I went into the library, and there sat Dowden contemptively playing bridge with two of the elderly ladies and Miss Apperthwaite. The last-mentioned person quite took my breath away.

In honor of the Christmas eve (I supposed) she wore an evening dress of black lace, and the only word for what she looked has suffered such misuse that one hesitates over it; yet that is what she was—regal—and no less! There was a sort of splendor about her. It detracted nothing from this that her expression was a little sad; something not uncommon with her lately; a certain melancholy, faint but detectable, like breath on a mirror. I had attributed it to Jean Valjean, though perhaps tonight it might have been due merely to bridge.

"What is it?" asked Dowden, when, after an apology for disturbing the game, I had drawn him out in the hall.

"I happen to know that he'll be there all evening."

Mr. Peck smote his palms together. "Grist!" he called, over his shoulder, and his colleague struggled forward. "Listen to this: even Dowden ain't at Beasley's. Ain't the Lord workin' fer us tonight?"

"Why don't you take Dowden with you," I urged, "if there's anything you want to show him?"

"By George, I will!" shouted Peck. "I've got him, where the hair's short now!"

"I've got him, where the hair's short now!"

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IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL Sunday School Lesson

(By REV. F. B. FITZWATER, D. D., Teacher of English Bible in the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.)
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LESSON FOR DECEMBER 17

JESUS AMONG FRIENDS AND FOES

LESSON TEXT—Luke 10:38-42; 11:14-54.
GOLDEN TEXT—Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.—John 15:14.
REFERENCE MATERIAL—Luke 1:34, 35.

PRIMARY TOPIC—Jesus in the Home of Friends.
JUNIOR TOPIC—Jesus Among Friends and Foes.
INTERMEDIATE AND SENIOR TOPIC—Friends and Enemies of Jesus.
YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULT TOPIC—Christ's Methods of Dealing With People.

1. Jesus in the Home of Friends (Luke 10:38-42).

There is no place where true character is so clearly revealed as at home.

1. His Reception (v. 38). Martha was the head of the home, therefore she received him. It would be a fine thing if all homes were open to receive Jesus.

2. Mary Sitting at Jesus' Feet (v. 39). She, of fine spiritual discernment, knew that sitting at the Lord's feet and hearing His Word was that which would please him most.

3. Martha Cumbered About Much Serving (v. 40). Both sisters loved the Lord. It would be impossible to say which loved the more; but Martha was bent on providing a fine meal for Him. She was trying to do so many things that she was on the verge of distraction. This had so completely got on her nerves that she found fault with Jesus for permitting Mary to leave the kitchen to listen to His teaching. Not only did she criticize her sister and Jesus, but she assumed the authority to command Him to send Mary back to the kitchen to help.