

A Christmas "Burglary"

By SAIDEE ESTELLE BALCOM

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HE night-watchman at Plympton, possessed of a due sense of his importance, was called "Sergeant" Moore. He had become aware that the distinctive title was one in general vogue with metropolitan police systems and he was proud of the designation.

The day preceding Christmas was always one looked forward to by the doughty sergeant, for it was upon that occasion that his conscience allowed him to accept little marks of approbation.

"Hey, there, sergeant!" generally prefaced the bestowal of something in the shape of a gift.

"It's duty I have to attend to all night long," he told his wife. "They



say there's a regular band of burglars on the move."

Now two problems of fate were to work out a strange series of circumstances, in the Christmas eve events, appertaining to the redoubtable sergeant. The first was that the little town jail had burned down the week previous. The second was that a new family had moved to town early in December, comprising the Waynes—father, mother, a charming daughter of seventeen and three young children. As Moore passed their place he noted that it was all dark, the family probably absent at some local entertainment, and he caught the echo of a sound resembling the tipping over of a piece of furniture. Then from an open window a form protruded.

"Burglars!" muttered the sergeant, and made a dash for the presumable despoiler.

"Hold on!" spoke the latter excitedly. "It's all right."

"Oh, is it?" purred Moore derisively. "What's that?" and he made a grab at the protruding pocket of the young man.

"If you'll allow me to explain," began the latter. "I know the people who live here."

"Oh, yes, very particular friends! Cordially invited you to break into the house at any hour of the night! And this—a new muffler and a pair of gloves. Say, you come with me," and the sergeant marched his captive from the spot.

"If you'll only let me explain," pleaded the young man, but Moore was deaf, blind to all but duty. Fifteen



minutes later the captive found himself locked into a stone cellar, and the sergeant handed its key to his wife, saying:

"You might pass in a jug of water and a plate of bread to my catch through the window; it's got no sash to it. I'll drop around again soon."

The young man in retirement was pacing about in the dark and anathematizing his officious captor when Mrs. Moore timidly approached the window.

"Here's some water and a little food," she said, "so you won't suffer," and just as she passed the things in she uttered a shriek and crouched down trembling. Two men had suddenly appeared, real burglars this time.

"Oh, sir!" whispered the woman through the cellar window, "they may kill the children! And then there's all Tim's half yearly pay in the bureau! Please help me. Here's the key to the cellar door," and something tinkled on the floor. Something else then transpired. The released captive located and knocked down and tied hand and foot the prowler within the house. Then coming unawares upon the armed bandit outside he toppled him over, rendered him helpless, and seemed to enjoy the excitement of it all.

"I am Roscoe Walden and I am engaged to Ethel Wayne," he explained an hour later to the bewildered sergeant, after the latter had transferred the two criminals to limbo. "This is the first time I have visited their new home, and I got in surreptitiously to place a present on the Christmas tree as a surprise to my lady love. I don't want the Waynes to know I am in Plympton until after she finds it."

There was a rare spice of adventurous excitement for pretty Ethel in her devoted lover's unique experience when he recited the same the next morning. And meantime Sergeant Moore was gaining popularity and the community's good will by detailing his heroic act which had signalized Christmas eve in the apprehension of two desperate criminals who, but for him, might have had the entire town at their mercy.

Christmas Chimes

By G. F. PFRIFFER

(Copyright.)

HE village chimes rang out a mellow strain clear and vibrant as golden beads dropped into a crystal dish, but Adam Marsh drew his worn fur cap down closer about his ears and scowlingly took a shortcut towards his desolate home.

He had neither chick nor child, only money. He hardened his soul against jule-tide suggestions and tried to glory in scouting the humanizing influence of home, social friendship and "the folly called love!" Then he came to a sudden halt and sprang behind a tree. There was a light in the room where he slept. Against the lamp light there was outlined the figure of a roughly dressed man standing at an open bureau. Marsh stole to the kitchen, took down an ancient horse pistol



and, gliding to the door of the lighted room, burst it in.

"What are you doing here?" he shouted out. "Hands up!"

It was rather a weak than an evil face that confronted him. Its owner looked crestfallen, rather than sullen.

"I—was looking for something to eat," he stammered out.

"That's likely outside of the kitchen, isn't it, now!" snarled Marsh derisively.

"Well then, finding nothing in the kitchen I hoped I could pick up some little trifle that would bring me a meal. Say, I'm not a genuine bad one. I never touched a cent that was not my own until this very day. And this has so shamed me, that all I ask

is strength to carry back what I took."

"Yah!" jeered Marsh. "Sort of robbing Peter to pay Paul, hey? Now then, I'll run no risks of your turning on me. Empty your pockets," and the man disgorged a rusted jackknife and something that glowed with the glint of gold.

"Back to yonder corner," ordered Marsh raspingly. "What's this?" and his nimble fingers clutched a locket and chain the other had placed on the table.

"It isn't yours, nor mine!" burst out the intruder. "Say, I must take that back where it belongs. Listen to me. It was ten miles down the road, in a wretched little hovel. In the front room was a pale, wearied woman attending to her sick husband. In a back room was a little angel of a girl



child, asleep on a torn thin blanket. I noticed the chain and locket around the child's throat. I sneaked up and took it. I've a wife and two little tots in the city; lost my job and was tramping, looking for work. I was frantic as I thought of their wretched Christmas and hurried away to sell the trinket and steal a ride home on the bumpers. Don't shoot!" for Marsh, opening the locket and scanning the portrait within shook from head to foot, and with glaring eyes viewed the locket as though it were some bogging wrath.

Ah! how it recalled to him the bright, sunny-faced daughter he had shut out from heart and home the day she eloped with Rodney Blair. He had never sought to learn of her fate. And now the locket she had worn he had strangely found, cherished and protected by her little child with his picture still in it.

"My man," he said, "if you will take me to where you found the people you tell of, your dear ones shall have a Christmas, indeed."

"I'll do that for nothing," half sobbed the penitent fellow.

Little Cora Blair was sobbing in her mother's arms as Adam Marsh reached the doorstep of the home of the unfortunates. He heard her say: "Oh, mamma, can't we search for my pretty locket? Every night when I say my prayers and ask a blessing

for the dear grandfather I have never seen, I shall miss seeing his picture." "Merry Christmas and—forgive me!" spoke Adam Marsh, pushing the door open. "Alice, I've come to make up for my cruelty and neglect." And when the penitent had faithfully returned from the village stores with a heaping basket full of Christmas cheer and gifts for the little one Marsh had ordered, he started for the city with a warm, snug roll of bank notes in his hand.

"Now see my own home and the Merry Christmas of my dear ones!" he jubilated. "Oh, I'll never stray away from the straight path and them again," and in a wild ecstasy he sang in accord with the chiming bells: "Peace on earth and good will towards all men!"

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