

FANELLA'S CHRISTMAS SUPPER

By SUSAN GLENN

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TO Miss Fanella Fenway the flurry of Christmas snow was not beautiful as she hurried through deepening twilight.

Though possessing a certain distinctive air, her coat was pitifully thin and inadequate. Though neatly blackened, her shoes leaked and she wore no rubbers. It is small wonder that the storm seemed merciless and cold. But when she turned in at the big stone gateway, her shoulders straightened proudly.

"The old Fenway place," she murmured, glancing about the gloomy, unkept grounds, "and I am the last of the Fenways."

"If you were not it would go hard with them," interjected that other half of Miss Fenway's nature that was always ridiculing her Fenway pride. "Unless," with malicious emphasis, "they chanced to be also impervious to cold and hunger!"

Miss Fanella's lips trembled as she unlocked the great front door—upon no condition did she ever leave or enter the house by any of its other numerous entrances.

She lighted the small oil lamps that stood on the marble top of the hall buffet, placed her coat and hat on the carved rack, and peered closely into the great mirror.

"Tomorrow is Christmas, and your birthday," she whispered accusingly "and—no one has remembered it! Not one of your old friends! You are alone."

"Of course, I am alone," spoke the Fenway pride complacently. "Who is



"I Have Dreamed of You Sitting Here."

there in Whelan that I care for? All the old families with whom we associated are gone. It is my misfortune that I am left alone in the old house."

"Why need you be alone? There are people all about you, common people to be sure, but kindly and good. And there is—Nelson Travers!"

"A common farmer!"

Miss Fanella could almost believe she heard a real voice in the old hall with all the Fenway pride and scorn in it, a voice alarmingly like her stately mother's.

"It has been settled these fifteen years," she said, picking up the little lamp wearily. "Why must it be gone over again every Christmas?"

Through the great cold rooms the light moved dimly, until she entered what had been the butler's pantry in the old regime. Here a small stove diffused a half-hearted sort of warmth, and a little table and a leather chair were drawn close.

"Here dwelleth the last of the Fenways," she said derisively. "Yet too aristocratic to associate with ordinary mortals!"

From her worn leather bag she drew a letter she had found awaiting her at the postoffice. There were few persons using such stationery who still remembered to write to her.

"Dear Miss Fenway?" she read, "are you still alone at the old place? If so, why can you not come with me to Japan this winter, and help me with the children? There will be no one in our party but ourselves. Please let me know by the first of January."

There followed a page of details. The letter was signed by an old school

financier.

Miss Fanella's hand trembled, her face was drawn and white. "A nurse maid," she moaned at last bitterly, "a common nurse maid! She put it kindly, and it is kind of her to think of me in my destitution, but that is what it means. Yet, isn't it better than cold and loneliness and starvation? I'm tired of being different from other people. I'll try being as common as the commonest for a while."

Suddenly the great bell pealed through the resounding old rooms. She lifted the little lamp in wonderment and threaded her way again through the icy gloom. No tradespeople called at the house, and certainly not at the big front door! And generations of superiority had taught the neighbors the futility of calling at the Fenway portals.

Nelson Travers stood in the porch, the big white flakes heaped upon his broad shoulders.

"Good evening, Fanella," he said as if he had parted with her but yesterday. Tomorrow is your birthday, I believe, and Christmas, too. Will you come for a ride with me?"

Miss Fanella gasped, as well she might. This, after fifteen years of silence! Had it taken him so long to recover from the repulse of old Madam Fenway?

"I—what will the neighbors think?" she gasped.

"You are thirty-six tomorrow, are you not, Fanella? Isn't that old enough to act as you please regardless of the neighbors?"

"I suppose it is, Nelson," she admitted with a smile. "But where?"

"Will you trust me this once, Fanella? I promise to bring you back whenever you wish."

Miss Fanella looked into the white night. Was she dreaming, or could this unlikely thing really have happened in the deadening monotony of her life?

What difference did it make, anyway. Henceforth she would be only a nursemaid. She looked back into Nelson Travers' honest eyes pleading with her to trust him. About her the stately old furniture upon which her pride had fed so many years, pleaded in vain.

"Yes," she said, "I'll come. I do not know how far I shall go, though."

The man stepped into the old hall and held her coat. His lips closed over his displeasure when he felt the weight of it.

She did not remember the worn gloves on the hall table, and only thought about locking the door when she saw Travers slip the key into his deep pocket.

Wrapped in robes, she seemed unconscious of the storm, realizing only the pleasant sensation of companionship and warmth.

She was not even surprised when he drew up before a low, ample house and lifted her carefully to the doorstep.

"I'll be in in a minute," he told her. "Take off your wraps and get warm."

Miss Fanella, her heart beating high at her own audacity, opened the broad door.

The wide, low rooms within opened pleasantly together, lighted by candles on the mantels, and by softly shaded lamps.

"How pleasant," said Miss Fanella aloud, going to the open fire, and thinking of her little stove in the butler's pantry.

"I have dreamed of you sitting here," said Travers quietly, coming to her. "And now I am going to ask you to eat supper with me—a Christmas supper, you know."

"I shall be most delighted," answered Miss Fanella with a smile. The Fenway pride was mute for once. It was a quiet supper. Fanella poured the tea, conscious that her companion's eyes were following her, and she enjoyed herself with a fierce, defiant sort of enjoyment.

"Fanella," said the man, leading her back to the fire. "I will bless you forever for coming with me. I wanted you, to see my home, to understand just how simple and unpretentious it is. I know I am only a 'common farmer,' but I've always loved you, Fanella. I cannot endure it to see you live as you do, alone in that great house. Won't you let me take care of you, dear? I know I am not good enough for you. I realize what it must seem like to you here, but—"

"It is comfortable and—beautiful, Nelson." Her voice broke over the words. "But I do not deserve it. I was not fair and honest with you—for I cared, always. I let my pride, and my family interfere!"

"Oh," she cried, shaken by sudden, fierce sobs, "why did you never come back? They always do in stories—I could not believe it was all over when you went away!"

"Do you mean," said Travers, "that you would have given me a different answer if I had come back, Fanella?"

She held out her hands—true Fenway hands. "Don't you know, dear, that all women are privileged to change their minds?" she asked.

"What a fool I've been, Fanella," groaned Travers, holding her close. "Fifteen years! Tell me, when did you repent your coldness?"

"Before you had reached the gate," whispered Fanella, penitently.

For the Old Folks.
Cora (aged ten), to Reggie (aged eleven)—Yes. The games are a wretched bore. But, then, it's Christmas, you know, and the old people do so expect to enjoy themselves.

THE CHURCH MOUSE.

THEY stood in the deserted vestry of the church, facing each other angrily for the first time in their lives. Then suddenly Janet swept the diamond from the third finger of her left hand and held it forth. "You will oblige me by taking this back," she said bitingly.

He stood looking into her eyes, growing grayer of face as he saw the stubborn anger that reposed within them. "Which means that our engagement is broken, and that I may not hope for its renewal," he replied very low.

For an instant their gaze met as the glittering thing, lightly held, was passing from hand to hand; then as she released it and before his grip had become secure there was the slip of a nervous finger and with a tinkle the ring fell upon the iron grating of the floor register. Faintly they heard it go bounding far down the metal pipe which led to the furnace below, each supposing it lost forever in the flames and not knowing that in its fall by some strange fate it had bounded through a small hole in the pipe and now lay amidst the rubbish of the church's basement. For an instant the girl's eyes softened, then hardened again and she turned them aside. Upon the floor in a corner of the room the little church mouse was sitting upon its haunches, and she nodded towards him. "To be renewed when the little church mouse brings it back to me," she returned coldly.

They turned their backs upon each other and walked away.

A week passed, and the little church mouse prowling about in the darkness of the basement, saw something through the gloom that glittered even more brightly than did his own eyes. Cautiously, hungrily, he approached it, smelt of it, felt of it with his gray whiskers, then stood it up before him. Its glitter fascinated him. Surely this glistening thing about the size of a kernel of corn must be good to eat, and he tried his sharp teeth upon it. Yet gnaw as he would, he could not even scratch it, and at last he decided that it was only good to play with. He was a little thing, and half starved as are all church mice, so it came to pass that it was not long before he had worked his head and forelegs through it and was running about with it encircling his middle, a very small creature wearing a diamond saddle with a gold girth. It was fun for a time, but he soon became tired of it and tried to crawl out. He could not. Becoming panic stricken he fled frantically up the stairs.

Janet, alone and very unhappy, sat in her pew at the Christmas morning service. It was rather chilly in the church and she slipped one hand into her muff. Then she gave a start, for within it she felt a small, struggling thing with something round and hard about it. Involuntarily she closed her hand, and as she did so the little church mouse popped out of the muff and scampered away, leaving the round object in her fingers. She drew it forth. It was her engagement ring.

The last of all to leave her pew, Janet stepped into the vestry upon her way out. Dick was standing before a window with head bowed, looking older, grayer of face than he had a few weeks ago, and she saw the deep unhappiness that lay in his eyes. She approached him, looking up at him with the old expression which he knew so well. Softly she slipped one hand into his own, and as his fingers gently closed about it he felt something hard, round and familiar within his grasp. He raised her hand. The engagement ring—his own—encircled her third left finger.

"The little church mouse brought it back to me. Listen while I tell you," she said, drawing a trifle closer. For a moment her voice murmured.

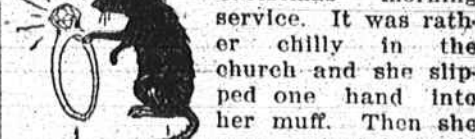
"Is it not wonderful!" she exclaimed, half awed, as she finished. His eyes lightened.

"Wonderful, dear! It is far more than that. It is a miracle of His Spirit wrought upon His day—His token of love everlasting and that even we are not forgotten."

Tightly his arms closed about her.

HARRY IRVING GREEN.

A Christmas Time Saver.
To save the minutes on Christmas eve and leave time for the many things that are bound to come up, shut off from the children one room in the house suitable for the tree a couple of weeks before Christmas, and gradually accumulate there all decorations and presents. The tree can be trimmed a day or two before the holiday, and the presents wrapped more quickly and easily because they are all by one place. The children, too, will enjoy the mystery that centers around an inaccessible room.—Housekeeper.



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HOLIDAY SUGGESTIONS



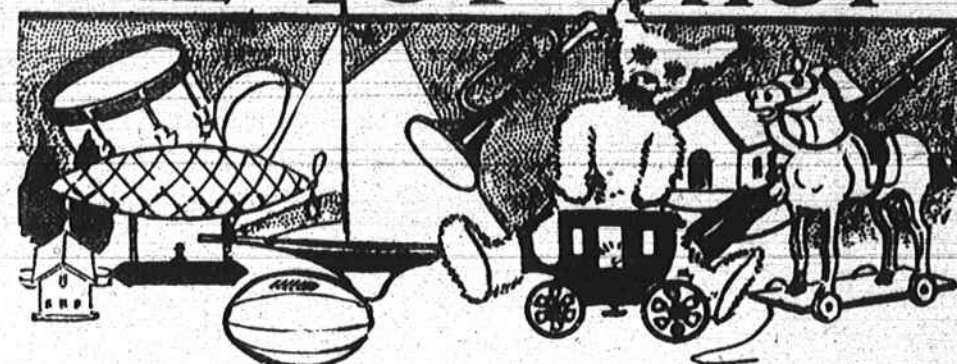
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