

### Under the Mistletoe

By M. P. Heatherington

(Copyright by Western Newspaper Union.) It was an ideal Yuletide. The sweet notes of church chimes throbbing out melodiously, "Peace on earth, good will to men," announced it; laughter, smiles, gay greetings among the street crowds emphasized it. Two men going in the same direction, strangers one to the other, yet oddly mutually involved in a fateful circumstance of the hour, unconsciously lessened their gait to catch the final notes from the distant belfry.

He in advance, swarthy, evil-eyed, bearing a neatly covered box under his arm, uttered an ugly, sinister chuckle.

"Before that hour strikes again—this!" he hissed malevolently rather than uttered, and he tapped the box and strode on, grim with some profound purpose.

The man ten paces behind him, young, handsome, neat, but none too fashionably clad, carried a thin, square package suggesting a canvas, for his was an artist's face, and he was an artist—Chase Merwyn.

Had he spoken his heart's thought he would have whispered softly:

"Before this hour strikes again I shall have said good-by to all I love."

He of the sinister semblance strode on and turned into a fashionable residence though he was. Unconsciously like a shadow, the other kept almost even pace with him. Under an arc lamp Chase Merwyn paused to look over the package he carried. His objective point was a mansion, a dazzling place of light and luxury, and before it the sinister-looking man had halted a poorly-dressed fellow struggling along without an overcoat, and blue and pinched with the cold.

The twin were conversing and the man with the box handed it to the other, pointed to the doorway of the mansion and passed on. His messenger proceeded up the steps, which Merwyn mounted also. It was in time to see a servant open the door and to hear the other say:

"A present for Mr. Worthington; to be opened tomorrow."

"Oh, of course that," smiled the servant, taking the box. "I will place it with the other gifts. Ah, Mr. Merwyn," and the servant stepped aside to admit him.

"For Miss Worthington," said Merwyn, handing his gift to the other. His gift was a picture he had painted, and with it was a letter.

Slowly Merwyn descended the steps. He paused for a few moments on the pavement to take a last look at the home that held so much for him. A slinking figure approached him from the shadows.

"Mister," he stammered, "I'm poor and I need the gold coin a man gave me for delivering a box to that house tonight, but—"

"Ah, I remember!" observed Merwyn, recalling man and circumstance. "A gold coin is so rare for a trifling service," resumed the other, "that I was suspicious. Then again I didn't like the face of the man who gave it to me; I followed him. He met some others like himself. I heard him laugh over an explosion about midnight."

"Great heavens!" ejaculated Merwyn, comprehending, and was up the steps in a flash.

"Quick! Quick—open!" he cried to the servant, just setting the chain on the inside.

"The music room!" uttered Merwyn excitedly and hurried thither, turned on the light switch and made a dash for the table. He remembered the shape and size of the box. His eyes made out one corresponding to it.

Merwyn gave it a fling through the window, there was a flash, and outside a detonation that shook the house. Some flying object thudded against his head and he fell to the floor.

It was Christmas day when he opened his eyes. He lay upon a couch pulled directly under the chandelier. Daylight was streaming into the room. The wrecked window frame was barricaded. His head was bandaged, and seated at a little distance was Esther.

"Oh, I am so glad!" she cried as she noticed that his eyes had opened. "The surgeon has just left, and papa—he says you saved us all and that you are a hero! And the beautiful picture you intended for me—it was riddled with window glass, but—I found the letter. Why did you write so sadly?"

"Because—because I feared to write all the truth," Merwyn confessed.

"The man who warned you told us enough to have us guess the truth," spoke Ethel, confusedly changing the subject, and then she followed the glance of Merwyn. His eyes rested on the mistletoe right over his head.

"Why this is Christmas morning, sure enough," fluttered Esther, "and we are the first—"

"Ethel," spoke Merwyn irresistibly, "I love you!"

His arms were lifted towards her and a world of pleading was in his long eyes. She did not hesitate. Their lips met that strangely beautiful Christmas morn—under the mistletoe.

### Old Bill's Gift

By Octavia Roberts

(Copyright by Western Newspaper Union.) Bill, more familiarly "Old Bill"—he had never been known to mention a family name—looked around his "haven of holiday comfort," as he termed it, with a chuckle of supreme satisfaction.

"It's great!" he gloated, "with only one thing missing—a Christmas tree."

Bill was a character. The townspeople designated him a tramp. Somehow, however, the appellation did not seem to fit. He did not drink nor swear. He did not beg. His willing ways had made him popular, and when Bill was "down on his luck" and passed a doorway hungry-looking, his wants were generally provided for unsolicited.

It was the day before Christmas. Behind the patient gleam in "Old Bill's" eyes lurked some sentiment of memory that impelled him to celebrate. This especial year he had been preparing for the event with the eager ardor of a school boy. Bill had made no confidants. Quietly and enjoyably he had laid his plans.

These were now perfected. A week back Bill had "gone to house-keeping." He had discovered an old abandoned barn just beyond the town limits. The lower part had lost doors and windows and was bleak and cheerless indeed. A rickety stairs, however, led to a room in one corner of the loft. It was cozy and warm and at one time had been a harness room. Here Bill had "camped." He had fished out an old oil stove, a cot, a table and chair from the town dumping heap.

A particular housewife had presented him with a roasted chicken because one side was slightly charred. On the rude table beside it were half a dozen homemade doughnuts and a real mince pie.

Bill took a last look at the goodly array of comfort then went out to seek a branch of arbor vitae which would serve as a Christmas tree.

As he neared the barn on his return he came to a speedy halt.

A light glowed over at one corner of the place. It proceeded from a lantern set in the feed box of a manger. In the manger itself across the stale hay it contained a blanket was spread, and, swathed in coverings upon this, as revealed by the lantern rays, lay a little sleeping babe.

Near by a serious-faced man was shaking the snow from his shoulders. Beside him, seated on an old suitcase, was a comely but care-worn woman.

The man began to speak. Bill, agape, drew into the shadow and listened. It was to hear enough to learn that bad luck was driving these homeless ones from their former home, penniless, on foot, to the father of the wife, ten miles further on. The storm had driven them to temporary shelter.

The husband and father had taken a well-thumbed volume from his pocket. He began reading aloud. It was of "an upper room," of a master and his beloved disciples, of a supper never to be forgotten in the memory of mankind.

Bill stood like one transfixed. What tender chord had been struck that he closed his eyes! He was back forty years in memory, at his mother's knee. How vivid, how appealing—a picture she had shown him of the Christ-child in a manger, of the devoted father and mother, as here before him, a prototype of that holy eve so real, so touching—the First Christmas!

A mighty thought moved him as he quietly spoke:

"Friend, upstairs you will find comfort till the storm is over. Call it a Christmas greeting—see?" and was gone.

"I'll strike out for Farmer Dale's haymow," shivered Bill, after half an hour's desultory wandering, and he turned about—to start, to shout out, and then to run.

For there in the distance the familiar farmhouse showed no illumination within, but beyond it a glare shot up—a haystack on fire!

Bill reached the farmyard. The wind had blown the flames against one gable of the house and it was burning. He ran to the stable for a pitchfork. Then began a fierce battle. Bucket after bucket of water he carried. The last spark was dashed out, and Bill sank exhausted to the ground as the farmer and his family, visiting at a neighbor's and attracted by the blaze, came rushing upon the scene.

"Yes," declared Farmer Dale, two hours later, as he showed Bill up the stairs and into a comfortable chamber, "this is your room, and you will sleep here, and you're a free boarder long as you like, understand? Why, there'd be no house to sleep in if it wasn't for you!"

Old Bill was a long time getting into bed. Like to a child he sank into a peaceful slumber, his softened spirit in radiant dreams wandering through that "upper room" filled with the souls of those, however humble, who had helped to make true "Peace on earth good will to men."



### The City's Christmas Tree.

A woman, they say, thought of the first community Christmas tree. It was erected in Madison square, in New York city. There was something stimulating, something highly infectious, in the idea—for now cities and villages all over America are erecting Christmas trees in their public squares, says the Delineator.

They are wonderful things, these community Christmas trees, not for their beauty alone, but for the spirit they arouse in the towns where they are found. They are the village center for Christmas joy. Christmas services, without sectarian barriers, are held about them. Christmas carols are sung at their bases. None so poor or so world worn or so hurried but he must see, must thrill with friend and stranger alike to this tree for all the world. It brings the child in the manger to every soul in the community.

The Christmas tree is essentially a symbol of the north and of the home. Yet it is inextricably blended in our minds with our faith, which is desert bred.

Most of the great religions of the world were born of some solitary spirit who sought the lonely sand waste and there wrought out that which made the desert of his soul "blossom like the rose." He who gave us the great faith went again and again out into

the burning yellow barrens, where the tender, brooding, violet sky awaited him; where all the desert world, so fearful in its undornment, so overwhelming in its solitude, found focused in him all its pulsing radiance, as though in him were centered the heartbeat of the universe. In the verdureless, sand driven, star hung desert the Babe with his listening ear heard, with his dreaming eyes saw, with his throbbing heart felt, the faith that turned men's faces forever from the clod to the cross.

Why, then, should the fir tree stand in our public square, sign and symbol of that desert birth? Whatever its physical history, why should breathless thousands, hungry of body or of spirit, looking on the great pine tree hung with electric bulbs, backed by skyscrapers, topped by smoke, find in its incoherent beauty the urge set in motion by the desert bred Babe?

One would have said of the home Christmas trees that, after all, it was the gifts that gave them their glamour. There are no gifts on the community Christmas trees, yet thousands and thousands of us look on them with the thrill that belongs to faith alone. One wonders why.

Perhaps this is the reason: The community Christmas tree symbolizes that which the home Christmas tree does not. It symbolizes Christmas for all the world. It means that the dawn of real brotherhood is tinting our horizon.

It means, and particularly this Christmas it means, that in spite of poverty and bloodshed, in spite of greed and despair, there are in increasing numbers in the world those who would share with the world all that sacred beauty and hope that are the individual's holy of holies, the most difficult of all one's spiritual riches to share.

It is the symbol of green forest beauty, of the druid's wild faith, of the Teuton's largess and always of giving, giving. Not strange that forever in our minds it should be inseparable from the birthday of him who gave supremely; not strange, but utterly soul satisfying, that finally we have joined our hands and placed the Christmas tree in the market place—symbol that, at last, man may give himself to man.

"God bless us!" said Tiny Tim on Christmas day. "God bless us every one!" Dickens dreamed of a Christmas festival that should belong to all. His Tiny Tim, lame and wistful, might have foreshadowed the joy starved world that now crowds around the market place tree, saying as he said, "God bless us every one!"

Washington's City Christmas. "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men." This sentence, blazing from a brilliantly lighted electric placard raised almost to the dome of the capitol, reflected the predominant sentiment of thousands who assembled at the capitol

plaza to celebrate Washington's community Christmas. A giant Norway spruce, illuminated with glittering red, white and blue electric bulbs, the Marine band, a huge electric star at the east and a chorus of 1,000 singers with the capitol itself outlined as the background against the dark curtain of the sky, made a scene of impressive beauty. Tableaux representing the story of the Nativity were presented in the improvised amphitheater. In the audience were many men and women well known throughout the country, including high government officials.

Santa in the City. Santa Clays touched the bell which summoned his foreman. "Yes, sir," said the foreman, coming in from the shop.

"What are you working on?" "Doll flats, sir."

Santa Claus turned in his chair and regarded his foreman doubtfully. "Doll flats?" he exclaimed. "You mean doll houses."

"No, sir," the foreman answered. "These are for city distribution, where the children don't know anything about houses."—St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

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