

*When
Christmas
Crossed
the
Peace*

By Nellie L. M^cClung

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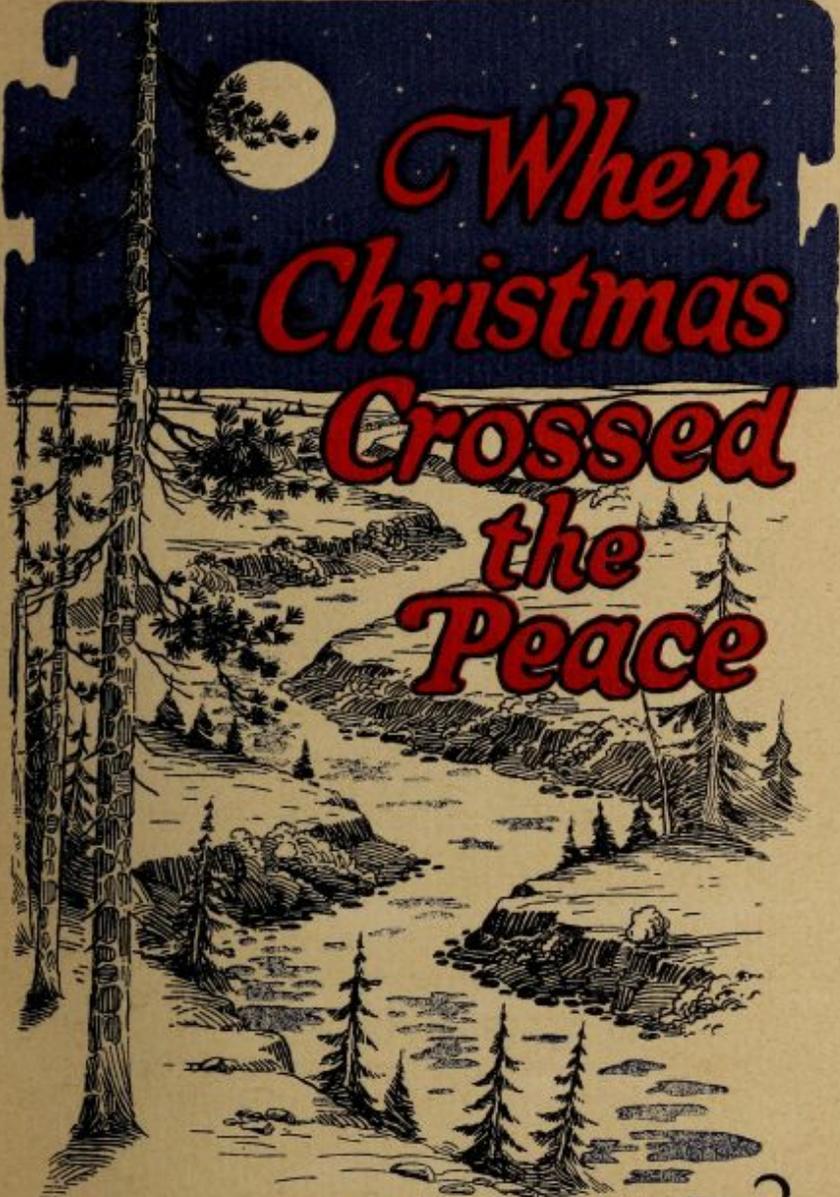
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**WHEN CHRISTMAS
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BY

NELLIE L. McCLUNG

AUTHOR OF
"Sowing Seeds in Danny,"
"The Second Chance,"
"Purple Springs," Etc.

TORONTO
THOMAS ALLEN
1923

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When Christmas Crossed "The Peace"

*Bringing the Joys of Christmas
to the North Country.*

The north bank of the Peace, in its autumn dress of tawny gray, was over-washed with the pale December sunshine, as the empty grain wagons returning from the Crossing, leisurely wound their way through the shaded valley below, over the gravelly road that roughly follows the turns in the river. Once in a while the road, emerging from the shrubbery, comes so near the stream that a full view of its placid, majestic, zinc-colored waters was given to the drivers; but their thoughts were not of nature, her beauties or her moods, and not even the mighty Peace, pursuing its even way, could lift the burden from their souls.

Bill Lukes, leaving his horses to follow, climbed into his neighbor's wagon, for Bill was a sociable soul, and craved the moral support that a kindred spirit like Dad Peters could and would freely give in this perplexing time, and the country north of the Peace had its grievances, too, in this year of our Lord nineteen hundred and nineteen, inasmuch as the hand of the law was laid heavily upon them.

Without preamble, the discussion began—

"I may be wrong," said Dad Peters, slowly, as he crowded the tobacco into his pipe with a blunt forefinger, "I may be wrong"—here he paused, as one who wishes to be fair even to an unworthy adversary—"but"—he leaned closer to his friend, as if the afternoon air might carry his words farther than he intended them to go—"but—I blame the whole thing on these darned women!"

Bill Lukes, his friend, threw out his hands in disagreement.

"What have they to do with it?" he said in surprise.

"Lots!" said Dad. "Lots! Look! They've got a society now at the Crossing, another at the Waterhole, another at Spirit River. They get speakers from Edmonton, and travellin' libraries. Then comes the nurses! livin' alone too, and that's no way for young women to live! They tell the women what they should have, and shouldn't have. Take my woman. She's lost four kids already always was resigned—always said it was the Lord's will but now you should hear her She used hard words ... bitter words ... harsh words, the last time it was mentioned, said it was my fault for not bringin' the doctor—and all that!"

His friend nodded sympathetically. "Maybe so—maybe you're right," he said, "maybe they've done it, I always knew no good would come of lettin' them vote. It upsets the home—I always said it would. But I don't just see how they could be at the bottom of this."

"O you don't see—don't you?" said Dad Peters, scornfully, "Can they write—or can they not? Have they education, Bill—did you never happen to notice—I'll say they have! Could they send a letter unknown to us—or could they send word by some of these foreign speakers—I'll say they could—And then here comes this young upstart—twenty-five years old maybe—no more—with the yellow stripe down his pant-leg—and he'll clean up the whole country—will he?"

"It looks as if he will," said his friend gloomily, "I was in at Barr's yesterday, and when I asked Jim if it wasn't about time for a drink—he twisted his face up until I thought he was going into a fit, and when I asked him where it hurt him, he crossed behind me quick and kind of hissed in my ear—'the house is haunted,' he says, and then I caught on that the new policeman was standin' in the door, with a grin on his face. I could have knocked him down."

"A pity you didn't," said Dad, indignantly, "served him right if you had—what right has this young pup to come here and arrest decent men, who ain't doin' no harm?"

"It's the law, Dad," said Bill, sadly. "It's the law—the law says a man can't buy liquor for drinking purposes; he can buy it to run his machinery, or preserve snakes—or shampoo his hair or clean his clothes or polish his glasses."

"O shut up!" said Dad, indignantly, "no one wastes good liquor them ways. But what I says is this: Up north here we're bound to be different—it's a cold country—and it's a lonesome country—a man needs somethin' to warm him and somethin' to cheer him. What is there that both cheers and warms!—and at the same time does no harm? In summer there's the flies, and sometimes the terrible heat—nothin' helps a man through like a little nip two or three times a day, all right..... This man comes along, and because he finds a bottle or two he seizes them,—that's bad enough,—but he fines the man that has them. It ain't reason—and it ain't fair—and here's the worst of it, Bill—he has no respect for God or man—he even found liquor in the magistrate's house, and made trouble!"

"He didn't!"

"He did—sure. If any place should have been safe, it was the magistrate's house. What's our institutions comin' to when a magistrate's house even can be searched. Well, they tell me he confiscated what he found—and you know yourself Bill, it was prime good stuff that the magistrate always kept—but it's gone! There's no hope of getting a drop now, and in two weeks it's Christmas! It will be a lonesome one in these parts." Bill Lukes thoughtfully stroked his chin, on which a three weeks' growth of whiskers resisted the free passage of his hand!

"It's sure tough, Dad. Ain't there no way? What's wrong with goin' to the Crossin'—the policemen there are good fellows—and bringin' out some,—the other towns ain't safe, I know—but the Crossin'?"

"I've had all I want to do with the law," said Dad, dejectedly

—"when I paid my fine...."

"I didn't know he had caught you, too, Dad!" exclaimed his friend.

"When I paid my fine—the magistrate made it as easy as he could—and says he, 'Mr. Peters, I have no option but to fine you,' says he; and he reminded me—the young pup did—that the next offence was jail!"

"But, Dad—we could keep him busy down our way—and you could slip down to the Crossin' just the day before, and bring it out, pretending it was Christmas things—or something."

"You don't say!" cried Dad, "sounds awful easy to hear you tell it,—and who'd take my place when I was sent to jail? No sir! I don't fancy it. This fellow is a darned crook—anyway, he must be, or he wouldn't know everyone's business so well. Tom Sneddon had a few bottles hid in a load of hay he found it! John Wallace had his box sent in as usual marked 'Books' just as he had always done, and it always came through every other time—but this time, though there wasn't anything dreepin' from it nor nothin' to excite suspicions—just a plain box of books, he nabbed it. The undertaker shipped in a few coffins last week, gettin' ready for the winter trade, and he went through them! as quick as they were put off the train. That's what I call insultin' the dead!"

"Did he find anythin' in the coffins?" asked Bill, eagerly.

"Sure, he found it—ain't I tellin' you—he found it—there's nothin' safe or sacred any more—we might as well give up—

and settle down to ginger tea."

"Give up nothin'!" said Bill Lukes, "surely one policeman can't run all this country north of the Peace. Darn it all—he can't be everywhere at once! We've got the money and we'll have it for Christmas, anyway. I'll bet Bill Adams ain't afraid of him—Old Bill will talk up to him!"

"Bill Adams has been sick," said Dad gloomily, "he's been down with pneumonia, I hear, with the nurse waitin' on him. He's gettin' better though—they say the nurse scrubbed his house—and then scrubbed him, in spite of all he could say."

"Well, that wouldn't hurt Bill, none."

"No, but I'll bet it was an awful comedown on a man like Bill, that's never had it to bear, to be bossed around by a woman. It's different with us, we're sort of hardened to it, but Bill has led a free and happy life. He's never had his spirit broke like some of us, and I guess that's why he isn't as easily scared as we are. Bill Adams may be willin' to risk it."

"He's our last chance, as you might say."

While Dad Peters and friend Bill Lukes were discussing the arid conditions of the land of their adoption, the same subject was being taken up from another angle in the home of the latter.

In the big kitchen, the early twilight of the December day was reflected in the face of the tall woman who kneaded her

bread on the long, unpainted table. Her movements were slow and hopeless. She wore a flannelette wrapper, as faded and anemic as herself, and as she worked she sighed deeply.

Sitting on a stool, made of tomato cans and covered with gaily flowered cretonne, her daughter was peeling potatoes—and taking a delight in peeling them, much deeper than was necessary, just as a protest against prevailing conditions. All her life, she thought, she had "peeled thin," and what good had it done. Madge Lukes threw back her mop of red hair indignantly. There was rebellion in every movement.

"It's no use, Madge," her mother began, in a voice as colorless as her face, "it's no use—there will be no Christmas this year—the weather has gone against us somewhat, and your pa is that cross there's no livin' with him! Let us just get on with him in the easiest way—it's the best way, after all."

The resignation in her voice, the pathetic droop of her mouth, was like a spark in the long dry grass. Madge's eyes flamed with indignation, and two brilliant spots of color burned in her cheeks.

"Ma, you're too dead easy with him, you've lost all your pep these last two or three years. I remember when you used to stand up to him, but now you're so darned full of resignation, you make me tired. You're just as much to blame as he is—always takin' the quiet way because it's easiest. Why don't you ever stand up to him like you used to?"

Mrs. Lukes stopped her work, and looked wide-eyed, at the furious face of her daughter. "O Madge," she managed to say,

"don't talk like that."

"I will talk," cried Madge, "and you'd be better if you talked more. What right has he to hog up every cent—and blow it in for his own pleasure, and then get so cross when he's sobering up, that we can't live with him—you work for this money—so do I—so do the boys—but he has the spendin' of it—you've been too blamed easy, Ma."

Mrs. Lukes mechanically attempted the defense of her husband, "You shouldn't talk that way, Madge, about your pa and me,—we've done the best we could, only we've had some trials too these past years, and we've kinda lost heart, and if he gets a little off once in a while, you mustn't blame him. It's just so he can forget all his troubles." ...

"O, is that it?" said Madge, "Ma, you sure are easy—you'd make excuses for the devil—if he was here! That's why is it? Why did he drink in the good years, then? Why does he drink every chance he gets? Oh, I know it keeps him hot in winter and cool in summer, keeps him dry when it rains and from being parched when it don't rain, makes him better when he is sick, and keeps him from getting sick. But, it doesn't keep him from making fool bargains, and giving away things when he goes to sell them. It doesn't keep him from being so cross that Bill couldn't stand him, and left home. We've been here five years, and we've all worked harder than he has, but he handles the money, and doesn't even give himself a good time with it. Now, Ma, you may be willing to slave all your life, but I'm not. I see nothing ahead but hard work and sour looks, and I won't stand it."

Mrs. Lukes began to cry, with her face twisting pitifully, but without a sound. Madge, whose back was to her, did not see. "There's no fight left in me, Madge, I'm beat—clean beat," she said at last, through her sobs. "I have fought and fought, and there's no good in it. It's better just to quit fightin'; it's like that piece of paper out there, caught on the fence, flappin' in the wind. Small good its flappin' does it—it just tears itself to pieces—that's all it does; that's just like me—only I've quit—I'm done flappin'!"

Madge sprang to her feet and threw her arms around her mother's heaving shoulders.

"Don't cry, ma," she cried, "it will be all right; I'm a brute to talk to you that way—I just got too sore for a minute. I didn't mean what I said about not standing it—Sure I will, I'll stick by you ma—I'm all that you have now, that's any help, and I'll sure stay until the kids are all raised anyway—you bet I will, I won't leave my ma!"

"You're young, Madge," said her mother, patting her back gently with her rough hand, "and I wouldn't blame you—there's not much life for you here—I've often thought lately that there's a sort of curse on people that venture too far. We had no need to come so far, when there was lots of land back home—but he would come—and I have been easy—just as you say—but there's a curse I know it, on them that's too venturesome. We're too far a way here, too far—we're behind God's back—he can't see us at all, and all sort of evil spirits get in their bad work on us, and God doesn't know. I see it when the northern lights hiss out at me like a nest of snakes, and even the cows, I ketch whisperin' behind my back when they

don't think I know whisperin' and mockin' at me, and wantin' to tell me something—and there's noises in the house at night, wantin' to warn me about somethin'—I hear them—but I won't answer them—It's best not to answer them—I'm hopin' they will give it up if I don't answer them! They always get worse at Christmas, tauntin' me that my children have never known a Christmas since we came up here. They tell me there's no Christmas, north of the Peace and there never will be. They mock us, and remind me of the fun I had when I was a little girl—back in Nova Scotia. We always had a Christmas tree, with candles and clove apples, and tissue paper balls, and a doll for the little girls. But here there's nothin' but hard work and sour looks. Christmas will never cross the Peace!"

Madge's eyes were filled with alarm as she listened. Never before had she heard her mother speak such words, and a grim possibility now stared her in the face. But with characteristic wisdom, she gave no indication of her fears, but began to talk about other things.

"It's gettin' in on ma," she thought, in horror, "she's goin' queer—she's slippin'. Well, now, there has to be something done—and done quick!"

Her first thought, in her hour of need, was the nurse, Miss Downey would know!

Across the fields of grass and poplar scrub from the Lukes' home, and about a mile distant, stood the nurse's house, with a grove of poplar trees sheltering it from the north-west; a

roughly built house of logs, with long windows in each side, and half-sized ones in the ends, with the smoke curling bravely up from its rusty stove pipe, for the nurse was "at home," during a temporary lull in the condition of the neighborhood's health.

A fire burned cheerfully in the big wood range, and a small tea kettle threatened to dislodge its lid, in its bubbling exuberance. The nurse set it back on the stove, where its boiling died slowly away, but suddenly changing her mind she put it back on the very hottest place, where it caught up its speed again, and burst into a thunder of bubbles.

"I like the sound of it," she said, as if in explanation. "There are not too many cheerful sounds in this house, though I'll never admit that I am lonesome—a nurse must never be lonesome, sick or tired; that's the first lesson. Diana! do you hear me? I'm following out your instructions." She addressed a large text-book, over which she had spent many hours in her days of training, which occupied the position of honor on the "library" table.

The nurse's home was divided into four rooms, although no such partitions were visible to the human eye. But Miss Downey, strong in youth and imagination, saw in her one big room, a living room, clearly defined by the library table filled with books, the Morris chair beside it, placed well under the bracket lamp on the wall, and on the floor the one and only rug. The kitchen could be located easily by the presence of the range, a small table, and on the wall a row of shining tins. The bedroom and dispensary were harder to distinguish, for their boundaries overlapped in a confusing way.

The bed itself was screened from view, by curtains of blue, dyed to match the table runner—but the dressing room consisting of one mirror and one packing box, also draped in blue, was clearly a part of the dispensary, for, below the blue curtains, stood bottles and boxes and packages whose pervading odor was faintly reminiscent of hospitals.

"I'll light both lamps," said Miss Downey, as she rolled up her blinds and tied the crochet rope below, "so any one who passes will know I am at home and will drop in, and now for the Elijah box, and see what my supplies are!"

Behind the house, and sheltered in summer by trees, stood the improvised refrigerator, made by sinking a box in the ground, there being no difficulty at this season of the year about keeping it cool. Removing the stone, which kept the lid in place, Miss Downey beheld the offerings of her grateful patients. One chicken, ready to serve, one bottle of cream, one roll of butter, a jar of pickles. Inside she had found bread and potatoes, two pies and a cake, left by anonymous contributors. So there seemed to be no reason to fear that unexpected company would cause any embarrassment.

Returning to the house, she put the chicken in the oven and prepared a pot of potatoes, and set her table.

"There will surely be some one over to see how Bill Adams is," she said hopefully, as she set out her best cups and saucers, "when they see the light and know I am home," but the night came on black and starless, and in spite of the beacons which gleamed from each window, no one came, and she was compelled to eat her chicken dinner alone.

When she went back to the refrigerator to replace the part of the chicken her visitors should have eaten, she saw the northern lights that were darting and shooting across the sky with tongues of violet, amber and opal, and with a rustling sound like the crumpling of silk, folding and unfolding, creeping and rushing in a way that fascinated, yet awed her, and when Tinker-Bell, her little dog, who followed her everywhere, turned her little nose skyward and broke into a dismal cry Miss Downey sought the shelter of the house, with its reassuring warmth and light.

But the north window drew her, and putting out the lamps, she stood gazing in wrapt attention at the panorama of the sky.

"Now they look like pink-edged sheets on the line, in a perfect gale," she said, "and if they are not taken in, that fancy edge will soon be nothing but a fringe! And now they are advancing like the cadets at school" and unconsciously she began to sing the marching song which she had so often played at home "and here come the girls in white in a fan drill, with pink and blue sashes, with the colored lights on them. They will be training for Christmas now, every one will be there but me!"

Then a blur of homesickness shut out the glory of the sky, and the brave Miss Downey, so calm and resolute and determined to obey Diana's precepts, came as near to tears as a self-respecting nurse can come over her own griefs!

Suddenly, outside, Tinker-Bell began to bark in sharp little

staccato yelps, as if she could not find words to express her excitement. "Here is something that will surprise you," she seemed to telegraph back, and so impressed was her mistress with the note of honesty in Tinker-Bell's voice that she lighted both lamps and hastily arranged her hair at the glass, and dabbed a little powder on her nose, to be ready for anything.

Soon a clatter of horse's hoofs, mingled with the dog's bark, and a heavy knock sounded on her door.

She flung it hospitably open, and beheld a young man in uniform, who politely bade her "good evening" and waited for her invitation to enter.

The invitation came readily for she was glad to see any one, any one to whom she could talk, and as she stirred the fire, she asked her visitor if she could not offer him something to eat.

"Don't start me off unless you have plenty on hand," he laughed, showing a fine set of teeth, "for I haven't had anything for twelve hours."

"Why, where have you been?" she asked in surprise.

"I am on my way to the Crossing," he said, "from Spirit River, and there's some sort of an agreement, it seems, that they won't feed me—I am Sergeant Woods of the A.P.P., and I guess I am in wrong with the men, anyway, for I have been rounding up the bootleggers. But even women turned me down to-day."

His face was so solemn and rueful, the nurse laughed in spite of herself.

"Surely not," she said.

"You bet they do. The last house I went to was Bill Luke's over here, and that poor, white-faced, stoop-shouldered wife of his said to me, 'I wouldn't dare to let you come in—pa wouldn't like it.' But the girl spoke up—I guess pa hasn't got her subdued, and said, 'go to the nurse's house—she is at home, and she'll feed you, she's not afraid of anything, and she's got lots of grub on hand. So if you are not afraid, and if you have lots of grub on hand, we can proceed—I can do the rest.'"

When Sergeant Woods had satisfied his hunger, he looked at her quizzically.

"Do you know what I am wondering?"

"No," she said.

"How you come to be here, a young girl like you, in this wild place."

"It's not wild," she said, "and I'm not young. I was three years overseas, and I am a graduate nurse."

"Well, you're young," he re-affirmed, "and you are living alone."

"I'm not very much alone," she corrected him. "I board around—though generally I get home at night if I am not too far away. I have been away three nights now, but that was because I had a bad case that I couldn't leave."

"Where were you?" he asked.

"I was with Bill Adams."

An exclamation broke from him. "Bill Adams!" he cried, "the worst old soak in the country. Do you mean you stayed in his shanty—that dirty little hole?"

"O, you should see it now," she said proudly, "and you should see Bill. I shaved him, trimmed his hair, gave him the first bath he ever had, and cleaned his house!"

He looked at her with increasing wonder. "That's no work for a woman," he cried.

"Well, have you seen any man volunteering for the job?"

"No," he said, "and I won't be likely to."

"You see, Mr. Adams was a very sick man, delirious and threatened with pneumonia."

"Off on a bat, I suppose," he said, quickly.

"Very likely, anyway he was very sick. I did not probe the past, and he was very repentant."

"The old bounder."

"Aren't you glad he was repentant?" she said, opening her eyes very wide. "And he told me all his story. He was a member of parliament once—and studied for the ministry."

"Church and state have both had their deliverances!"

"And he is going to remember me in his will!—and he called me 'Dolly' when he was delirious, and he said I was an angel."

"Well, I am glad the old rascal hits the truth once in a while," said Sergeant Woods, gallantly.

She laughed light-heartedly, with a color in her cheeks that made the whole room glow.

"What does he say about this bootlegging business that he has been carrying on?"

"We argued quite a bit about that," she confessed, "you see Mr. Adams claims that he is doing a real service in bridging the gap—as he says, between the thirsty homesteader and the supply. He says in this cold climate, so far away and so lonesome, people need something. He says it transmutes this dull existence, changing drab to rose. Those were his words, and he says if the women would drink, too, it would be better for them, and he spoke nicely of you. He said you were an officious young man, who took the law seriously, but he said you would find just as he had found, that human nature could not be changed by laws, and quoted 'The Kasidah' of somebody, to prove he was right. He says no one has a right to interfere with another, and quoted this verse:

"Do what thy manhood bids thee do,
From none but self expect applause;
He noblest lives and noblest dies
Who makes and keeps his self-made laws."

The sergeant made a gesture of impatience:

"That is another way of saying 'Do what you like, mind your own business and let the world go to the devil if it wants to.' That's an easy philosophy, if a person has neither heart or conscience."

"I told him that," said the nurse, "Oh, I told him, and I rubbed it in by asking him where he would have been if I had simply minded my own business and left him alone to mind his."

"And what did he say to that?"

"He said, 'Hell,' and I didn't contradict him; I told him he got it right the first guess!"

"But aren't you afraid?" said the Sergeant, "going into such places and dealing with such people? Have you no fear?"

"Of course I have," she said, "I'm often afraid I won't arrive in time, or that I'll fall asleep when I should stay awake and to-night I was afraid I had not enough chicken for you, and I am often afraid—this is my biggest fear—that I'll get lonesome—dead lonesome—and chuck it all and go home."

"That's what I'd do," he said decidedly.

"You would not," said the nurse, shaking her head, "you've a harder job than mine, but you stick, because you think you should."

"I just can't make you out," he said again, "you are too

young and too pretty to be wasting your life out here. You could practice your profession just as well in a city—and have some of the pleasures of life."

"I know," she said, simply, "I suppose I could, but I've changed my mind on what constitutes pleasures. I got that overseas—just as you did—I want a hard job, a real job—I liked cleaning up Old Bill Adams. It's great to get really next to people, and change the current of their thoughts. He felt like a different man when I was through with him, and put clean sheets on his bed, and clean pillow cases, and a Red Cross night shirt on him. It comforts me to be able to do this. I also like their grateful words."

"Are they always grateful?" he asked wistfully.

"Not always, at first they rebel. Old Bill said he'd be hanged before he'd let me wash him. I told him the hangman would have to hurry then, for the water was nearly ready. He grumbled all the time, but I didn't mind. I just scrubbed all the harder. But they are all pitifully grateful afterwards."

"I should say they would be," he said, with a face full of admiration, "you're a wonder, I'll say!"

Then he knitted his brows thoughtfully.

"My work is different," he said, after a pause, "I am a spoil-fun—a blight—they think I am just trying to spite them. With you, all is well, for they don't want to be sick, but they are sore on me, for they do not want to be good, and I am as tired of the job as they are, if they only knew it."

"Why do you stay, then?" she asked. She wanted to tell him that she was equally curious about his choice of work.

His jaw set squarely, and there was a look in his eyes that to her quick understanding answered her question without words.

"I'm not going to fall down on the job now that I've started.... It isn't just that either. It seems too bad to let these bootleggers degrade the settlers—for the sake of money—to peddle this awful stuff in this country where the people have endured so much, especially the women. Pioneering is surely tough on the women, and when their men sag down and drink, and so become de-socialized, there's nothing left for them. No wonder they go crazy! I often think what a hell a woman's life is, when she has to live with a drunken man—slobbering, dirty, foul-mouthed, with the subsequent ill-temper and the gradual degeneracy. It isn't coming to these women, after all they've come through..."

"I like the game, too, matching my wits against theirs.... and I have been able to put the fear of the law into most of them, too, all but your old Bill. I would have had him, too, for I caught him red-handed, but the magistrate, who is a friend of the whole gang, said I hadn't the right number of his section, and let him go. But I'll land him yet! They are determined to have a blow-out on Christmas, and the gang at the Crossing are going to supply it. They have barrels of it cached there somewhere—I am going there to look around and see if I can find it. If you can keep old Bill in bed until after Christmas, it may help, for he has been the go-between, I understand. He receives contributions from all the thirsty ones, and then makes as good a bargain as he can with the gang at the Crossing—and

keeps the change. So, keep him bed-fast, will you, in the interest of a sober Christmas?"

"I don't believe I can hold him that long," she said. "He proposed this morning before I left—that's a sure sign of returning health!"

"The old devil!"

"O, he did it very nicely, with quotations from Omar Khayyam and the Kasidah! It was really very sweet about the loaf of bread and the jug of wine underneath a bough."

"Then you don't mind proposals?"

"No—not from sick men—professionally—we consider it a good sign."

He looked at her again, with his quizzical smile.

"I'm not feeling real well myself to-night," he said, laughing

* * *

The next day, Miss Downey received a hurried visit from Madge Lukes, who burst in, with dishevelled hair and burning cheeks, and with eyes full of terror:

"Ma's had a breakdown, Miss Downey," she cried, "and is actin' queer."

Miss Downey began to pack her little black valise.

"Tell me what she is doing, Madge."

"She's working around just the same, but she's talkin' to herself all about Christmas, and what she will get on the tree, and all that. She's just gone kind of queer and childish, and pa is scared stiff. He wishes now he had let her go to Edmonton to the convention, when she wanted to, but he said then there wasn't any money to spend that way. She's just like a child, Miss Downey, and it's terrible to see her."

"I'll go over with you, Madge," said Miss Downey. "Now don't let her think you notice anything wrong."

When they reached the house and went quietly in, there came to the ears a sound of singing, a rhythmical chant with a hand-clapping accompaniment, that brought Miss Downey back, it seemed a hundred years, back to the old, old days before the war, when all the world was young.

"This is the way we comb our hair,
Comb our hair, comb our hair,
This is the way we comb our hair

Early on Sunday morning." chanted Mrs. Lukes, rocking herself and clapping her hands, with every appearance of enjoyment, and entirely oblivious of her surroundings.

"This is the way we tie our shoes,
Tie our shoes, tie our shoes"

sang the nurse, with appropriate motions.

Mrs. Lukes took it up eagerly: "I couldn't remember what

came next," she said, beginning to sing again.

"Now, listen," said the nurse, drawing a chair up in front of her patient, "we must get ready for the Christmas tree, everyone will do something, and we must get the baking done for the supper. How many chickens can you get ready?"

Mrs. Lukes looked bewildered for a moment, and then, throwing back her tangled grey hair, said to Madge, "How many can we promise, mother? Mother always does a lot," she added, in a whisper to the nurse.

"All right," said the nurse, "but you must help her, it won't do to leave her all the work, she's not very strong, you know."

"O, I love to get ready for Christmas," she cried, clapping her rough hands together in delight, and fairly beaming with excitement, but teacher, hear me say my piece:

"This is the way we wash our clothes,
Wash our clothes, wash our clothes,
This is the way we wash our clothes,
Early on Monday morning."

"That's fine," said the nurse, stroking her work-worn hands, tenderly, "now help all you can with the chickens."

Out in the kitchen, Madge held to the nurse in a paroxysm of terror.

"Is she goin' to die, nurse—for if she is, it's all my fault I

scolded her yesterday some thing awful for being so easy on pa, and she broke down and cried, and said she was plain beat, and had no fight left in her, and then this morning she began to talk about Christmas, and all the fun they had at home when they were all young, and she just talked on and on, and for a long time I was likin' to hear her so full of talk, but all at once I saw her eyes were starin' queer, and then she began to sing like you heard her. Will she die, nurse, oh nurse, will she die?"

"No, she won't die," said the nurse calmly, "she'll be all right, Madge, but we've got to have a real Christmas, a great big bubbling, sparkling Christmas, full of excitement and surprises, with candles and sparklers and drums and candy and mysterious parcels; where every one sings and dances and shouts and laughs and forgets their troubles. We've just got to, Madge! Harness your best horse for me, Madge, I am going around the neighborhood to invite everyone to the hall for Christmas night, and to get all the women to start to cook. This is going to be one grand occasion, Madge, and you and I will have to see it through. Don't be frightened, Madge, I'm full of hope that it will bring your mother right and save the other women from going queer! They haven't enough excitement in their lives, and it just gets them!"

The round of the settlement which Miss Downey made, revealed the fact that a Christmas celebration was just exactly what the people wanted, and hams and chicken were eagerly volunteered, also pies and cake. The supper was easily arranged for; the program to follow, was more difficult, though Fred Ross reported that there were two great singers, a man and his wife from Winnipeg, just come to Wintering Hills, and he would try to get word to them to come over. Donald Ross,

under the witchery of the nurse's smile, offered to do the Highland Fling if anybody would lilt for him, and Miss Downey agreed to be responsible for the music. There was a young Englishman, lately come to do the chores at Wilson's, who could sing, and another one of whom he knew, would play the concertina. Mrs. Peters knew a girl who could whistle, and she would get word to her somehow.

After her fifty mile drive, and her hard talking, it was late that night when Miss Downey got back to her house, and it was a tired, but happily excited nurse who crawled into bed behind the blue curtains; with Tinker-Bell, beating the floor with her foolish little stubby tail, offering congratulations on the day's work.

When the bright light of another morning poured into the room, Miss Downey awakened with a sense of heavy responsibility. There were so many difficulties. How could she ever make the bare hall look like Christmas! Her tour of investigation had revealed that there was in the neighborhood one flag, belonging to the school, a few sheets of tissue paper, now in the hands of the school children, being turned into flowers and balls; a red cashmere shawl which could be draped over the box on which the Christmas tree would stand, two dozen candles that would help to light the tree. But what to put on it, and where to get any music? And how to be sure that the people would get out? Black walls of trouble rose before her, as she lay watching the morning sun-shine which made a bright patch on the floor.

But when she got on her feet, and set a fire in the range, she was herself again, resourceful, self-reliant, full of youth and optimism.

Of Sergeant Woods, she had seen nothing, and wondered if he had yet returned from the Crossing. Unconsciously she found herself arranging the meal she would have when he came again, and as the day passed without a sick summons she was glad to be at home to give a welcome, she told herself, to "anyone who happened to come."

Madge had come over to tell her that her mother was still happily rehearsing her "piece," and cooking for the Christmas supper.

Two days before the eventful day the news was brought to her by Madge that Bill Adams was "out," and she thought he had gone to the Crossing on his usual errand, for Madge said her father had made some excuse about having to go to Dunvegan and would not be able to come to the hall on Christmas night. She feared that the men had arranged their gathering place where Bill would bring them the "goods," and the Christmas celebration would go on as in previous years.

On hearing this, a wave of rage filled the nurse's heart. This, then, was all they cared for their families, or their happiness. She wished now, just for a brief moment, that she had let old Bill die—it would have made a happier Christmas in the settlement, but that thought passed, and in its place there came a happier one; old Bill Adams had not got the liquor yet, and maybe he wouldn't get it, the whole supply might yet be discovered and seized. The picture of Sergeant Woods as he

had sat by her fireside a week ago, so square-jawed, clear-eyed and resolute, came back with a reassurance that warmed her heart. She was not fighting alone! She believed he was still at the Crossing, waiting for just this contingency!

It was four o'clock that afternoon, just as the pale yellow winter sun was settling behind the grove of trees, that a wagon came up to her door.

"Somebody sick," she said, with a sinking heart. For once she had no joy in her profession, a "case" might take her to the other side of her district. But as she looked, she saw that the sick one this time had come to her, for the driver carefully removing the robes, was preparing to lift some one from the wagon.

She was beside him in a moment.

"It's the policeman, Miss," said Dad Peters, with ill-concealed enjoyment, "broke his leg on Brick's hill, his horse rolled over on him, hard lines, too, right in his busy time, but he was dischargin' his duty when it happened, weren't you, Sergeant, trying to keep the north bank of the Peace dry! But fate went against you, didn't it Sergeant? We sort of thought this was the best place to bring him, Nurse. Bill Adams said he was a lucky dog, and he only wished he was in his place."

The sergeant groaned, as they laid him on the nurse's bed; there was bitter disappointment on his face.

"Go over and get Madge Lukes," said the nurse, in her even voice, "I'll need her to help me to set this leg, and tell her to bring over a horse, I want her to do something else for me."

Mr. Peters was in such an amiable mood, he would do anything. Fate had been kind beyond his dreams.

"Certainly, Miss, anything else?"

"Nothing else," said Miss Downey, "thank you, only be sure to tell everyone about our Christmas entertainment. We want everyone there. And now a Merry Christmas, Mr. Peters, and don't fail to come and bring all the family, we want to make this a great day for the children."

Mr. Peter's face revealed a flicker of embarrassment as he went out.

"Well, girl!" said the patient as she threw aside the curtains and began to remove his overcoat. "I fell down on my job, didn't I? and those damned rascals have the laugh on me!"

She had her most professional air now, as she sterilized her hands.

"I found out where the cache was, and was just on my way to seize it, when my horse broke through into a badger hole on Brick's hill, and falling on my leg, on the frozen ground, smashed it below the knee. Old Bill, accompanied by Dad Peters, found me, and lectured me soundly on the whimsical ways of fate. Now look, is there any way we can head off this old rascal? Can you think of anything—I've made a mess of it. Can you think of anything?"

"Sure, I can," said Miss Downey, as she arranged the splints on her library table. "I have it all thought out."

"Well, for God's sake get at it," he cried, sitting up. "Don't mess around here with me. It has to be done in a hurry if you are going to stop it. He may get his supply in the next six hours."

"No hurry," said the girl, quietly. "Your leg must be set first. You see I am a nurse by profession, and a moral reformer and community leader only in my spare time. Just now I have one thought, one care, that is you."

When the leg was set, and Madge Lukes instructed as to what to give him to eat, Miss Downey suddenly retired to the dispensary and dressing room, carrying the police uniform, cap, boots and all. When she came back she was fully dressed, and as she put the revolver in her holster, she said, "I'm glad you are not any bigger; I can stuff this coat out with my sweater, it doesn't look so bad, does it?"

She revolved slowly, to give him a complete view. Her golden hair was completely hidden by the cap.

The sergeant, wide-eyed, raised himself on his pillow, at the sound of her voice, then fell back in astonishment.

"I'm Sergeant Downs, a friend of yours, who came to spend Christmas with you," said the nurse, quietly, "now tell me where the cache is, and I'll see if I can head off my old friend before he reaches it, or failing that, to meet him coming back, and seize his load."

The sergeant seized her hands impulsively. "Oh, girl," he cried, "you're a wonder!"

With Sergeant Woods well out of the way, the pathway of Bill Adams in his official capacity of bootlegger for the north bank of the Peace, was singularly free from danger, and when he saw his friend Dad Peters driving away with the helpless sergeant in the bottom of his wagon the old man's soul was lifted on the wings of song. From his brief but varied experience of studying for the ministry, little remained but his knowledge of hymnology. From it now he drew deep consolation, and out upon the quiet roadside there floated out a real paean of praise:

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm."

He stopped many times on the road to tell the joyful news that the young sergeant had broken his leg, and thus the last barrier between the dwellers on the north bank, and perfect happiness, was removed, and Christmas would be Christmas once again, and many of the home-bound travellers went laughing on their way.

The short winter afternoon soon drew to a close, and a darkness only relieved by the northern lights, fell on the road. Sergeant Downs, urging her horse to a gallop, quickly covered the distance, until the long hill at Allie Brick's made her slacken her pace.

Down in the valley a dog barked, with re-assuring sound, and as she walked her horse down the long hill, she had ample time to lay plans. To catch up to Bill, follow him to the cache, under cover of the night, then arrest him red-handed, and make the seizure, seemed to be the simplest course, and yet the problem of what to do with the liquor bothered her.

Then she began to think that Bill, so notorious was he for crooked dealing, would have to hand over the money to the Peace River dealer before he would even be told where the liquor was, and this thought took hold of her so strongly that she determined to push on with all speed to the Crossing.

Her hypothesis proved to be the correct one. She caught up to him at the river, and crossed on the ice just behind him, and passing him going up the bank, called a cheery "goodnight" just to be sure she was not mistaken.

The answer came back in Bill's voice, very cheerful and very much like a benediction. Bill's heart was light and gladsome.

They reached the livery barn about the same time, and succeeded in rousing the man who slept in the hay-loft, who came down the ladder in a drowsy and ill-natured mood: "Pity you folks can't travel by daylight," he grumbled.

"Christmas time, my dear fellow," cried Bill, slapping him on the back, "and all that Christmas means of good fellowship and cheer, where spirits blend and friend holds fellowship with friend. Don't be of a sour temper at Christmas, good fellow of mine, are we not awake too at this late hour, each pursuing our

own course, hoping to find happiness—my young friend here, whose horse shows evidence of hard riding, no doubt pursues the same elusive fairy, and I trust with the same hope of finding her. Hope of happiness moves the world to-day."

"O, all right, Bill, all right," he said, quite mollified when he saw who it was, "I'll see you around to-morrow, I suppose."

"O, sure," said Bill, genially, "looking up a few of my old friends, you know; 'blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.'"

The sergeant had tied her horse in the stall, and in kicking the bedding under him, the livery man's sharp eye caught the gleam of the yellow stripe in the murky light of the stable lantern, and gave the alarm by a loud cough.

Bill Adams' tone at once became studiously careless, as he replied:

"I expect to be very busy to-morrow, buying a few things, commissions from all the neighbors, you know, we are so far out, our people don't get in often, and whoever comes to town is loaded down with errands. Nobody minds that, though, for at Christmas time, by Jove, all the pores of a man's heart are open, you know."

Suddenly a feeling of fear smote Nurse Downey's stout heart. Her lack of knowledge as to police procedure made her fearful that her disguise would be discovered, and having to deal with the "gang" so skilled in evil ways, so full of craft and guile, gave her a sudden weak, helpless feeling.

Of the old man in front of her, she had no fear. Had she not scrubbed him, shaved him, fed him, scolded him.

She determined on a bold stroke!

"Well, goodnight, Sim," said Bill to the livery man, "good-night, and be good!"

He started off down the street toward the welcome light of the Peace Hotel, about a hundred yards away, but the street on which they were travelling was in inky blackness, for everybody had long since gone to bed. The nurse followed close behind.

Stepping up behind him, she laid a detaining hand on his arm, and in her deepest voice said quietly:

"William Adams, you are under arrest!" and before his astonished lips could utter a word, she had slipped the handcuffs on him.

"But I haven't done anything," he cried, trembling, "search me, and you won't find anything."

She backed him over against the wall of a building, and with her flashlight, went through his pockets, until she came to the great roll of bills.

"What are you doing with so much money?" she asked sternly.

"Just came in to get things for Christmas," began Bill, glibly, "we're having a big Christmas treat out at our hall, and

some of us just made a little collection to buy a treat for the kiddies—Christmas time, you know, and all that, when friend meets friend."

His teeth were clattering with fright.

"Now see here," said the sergeant grimly, "you're lying, of course, and I know you're lying. The whole gang are known to me, and I know where the cache is, and all about it. The cache is in Bill Fraser's old barn; I did not break my leg, as you see, that was all part of the game, to throw you off your guard. I got on my horse, and followed you."

"My God!" cried the old man, "I'm no match for you. I could have sworn that leg hung limp. Oh! I'm too old, I guess to play the game with young fellows like you. I thought I was pretty cute, but I'm not!"

"That's all right, Mr. Adams," said the sergeant, generously, "you're cute enough, but you see you are caught fairly, and I could send you to jail, but I have my own reasons for not wanting to do that."

The old man's breath was coming hard.

"Now, we'll make a bargain; I'll keep the money to-night, but to-morrow we will make your lies come true. I will send a friend of mine, a nurse, to go around with you to help you with your shopping. She won't know but what you are the benevolent old man who wants to give the kids a good time. I won't appear at all, it would arouse suspicion if the people saw me with you, for every one knows I came here especially to get you. Well, I've got you all right, but no one need know it but

just you and me. I know, maybe better than you, the people you are to buy for, and I'll give you a list, and the nurse will help you through. How much money have you here?"

"There are twenty of the boys in on this," he said falteringly, "and they each gave me twenty-five dollars."

"All right," said the sergeant, taking off the handcuffs, "that's very good, now you go on to the hotel. Have you some money besides this? All right then, the nurse will join you at nine, and you can get at your shopping right away. I'll not appear at all. Now, goodnight!"

"Goodnight," said the old man, faintly, and started down the street.

The sergeant watched him until he saw him open the porch door of the hotel. The lightness had gone from his step, and for the first time the square light, which announced the name of the hotel to the world, had in it for him, no mellowing welcome!

When Nurse Crawford opened her door, a few minutes later, she was astonished to see a young man in the uniform of the Alberta Provincial Police, on her door step, and to hear him say in suppressed excitement:

"Kate, let me in! Don't say a word. Are you alone? All right then, pull down the blinds and listen to me. Did anyone say we would have a dull time when we came north?"

The astonished Miss Crawford, in her dressing gown, saw a young man enter, who hastily removed his cap, letting fall a shower of golden hair, and then with a whoop of delight, caught her around the waist and kissed her, with a resounding smack.

"Didn't you always want a policeman for a beau, Kate?"

"Why, Bess Downey, what have you been up to—you quiet little golden-haired beauty?"

"Show me your private office, before I say a word, or failing that, let me get in behind the curtains of the bed, before I unfold my tale of pure joy. Kate, I flashed my flashlight into a man's face to-night, and took his roll from him—and here it is," and she laid the fat roll of five dollar bills on the bed.

Her friend arose and locked the door. Then coming back, she said gently, but with the professional air that sent Miss Downey into peals of laughter, "Go on, Bessie, don't hurry, and don't get excited. Begin at the beginning."

When the story was told, the two girls sat along beside the fire, deciding what would be bought with the money, writing down each item as they thought of it.

First on the list was a phonograph for the hall. Then came candy and nuts and ready-filled stockings and dolls for the little girls, with doll carriages and cradles, books and drums and sets of tools. There were twenty-four girls and twenty-eight boys to be provided for, and fifteen women.

"You are to do the buying, Kate, and do get them something

gay and fancy," said Miss Downey; "perfume, boxes of candy, vanity cases, silk stockings, fancy collars, beads,—go strong on beads and fancy combs,—I'd put on one of your uniforms and go with you, only the old man would know me—he's one of my patients, you know, but remember this, don't get anything that is only useful. We want things that will glitter and sparkle, and look well on a tree, and oh, Kate, get lots of sparklers and crackers, and red and green candles, and big bells of red paper, and sleigh bells, and a big Santa Claus, and reindeers, and anything you can lay your hands on that is festive and gay!—and now Kate, I believe I'm hungry—it seems like years since I left home! and forty miles on horseback is some step."

* * *

The next morning, the storekeeper at the Crossing got the sensation of the season. The well-known Bill Adams, accompanied by the district nurse, Miss Crawford, made the rounds, and bought with a lavish hand their fancy goods and toys. Miss Crawford was particular to tell each proprietor of the generous part Mr. Adams had taken in making a collection among his friends to give the women and children a real old-fashioned treat.

Under the spell of her enthusiasm, old Bill swallowed hard, and his eyes were suspiciously moist as he modestly disclaimed the entire credit.

"We all got thinking about it," he said, "and remembering the days that are gone, when sleigh bells were ringing and glad hearts singing. Christmas seems to be a time to kind of spread

the joys around and shed the oil of gladness on each head."

"Pretty decent old scout, that old Bill Adams, after all," said the proprietor of one of the drug stores, after Bill had paid for every box of candy in the place, and the complete stock of perfume and balloons. "I always thought he was a tough old bird, but that just shows you never can tell."

The big packing boxes were loaded at last, and Bill started back with his precious load. What his thoughts were, on the homeward journey, will never be known.

The snow, which had held off so long, now began to fall, in gently gliding flakes, which came without haste through the quiet air, and as he drove through the spruce trees and pines, with his load of Christmas things, a queer feeling of detachment from the past came over him. When he arrived at the hall, he found the nurse waiting for him, and although he must have thought it strange, he said nothing, naturally.

Unloading the many boxes and parcels, he stayed to help her decorate the tree with the candles, sparklers and balloons, and was apparently much gratified by her many words of approval.

"How did you know so well what to get?" she asked him.

"They helped me a good deal in the stores," he lied genially, "and then of course I thought about it a good deal myself."

The nurse often stopped to look at him, in undisguised admiration, or at least, he took it for that!

"Come back as early as you can to-morrow," she said, when

it began to get dark, "I feel that you must help me to put the things on, and decide what we shall give to each person,—this is going to be the most wonderful Christmas I have ever known! It has all, or nearly all, been your doing, and I cannot tell you just how I feel about it all!"

"That's just how I feel too, Miss," he said, truthfully, "I can't talk much about it, it is all here!" and he tapped his heart dramatically.

* * *

By two o'clock on Christmas day, people began to arrive with their provisions, and soon the long tables were set up and filled with roast turkeys, chickens, salads, and jellies, cakes and pies. No one was gayer or happier than Mrs. Lukes, who had come over early, with Madge, to sweep out, and see if the lamps were ready.

"It's just like a dream," she cried happily to one of her neighbors. "It's just what I have been dreaming of, and I'm so happy I just feel I could fly! Just to know our children will have one real Christmas tree, makes up for all we've come through."

The tree, which the nurse and Bill Adams had finished dressing, stood on a big box, draped with the red shawl, on the stage, but it was not allowed to be seen until after supper, although there were many adventurous young souls who crept forward to get a peek, and came back shivering with delight.

At five o'clock, dinner began. The men and women, and small children "sat in," while the big girls and boys waited on

them, carrying plates of turkey and mashed potatoes and golden turnips from the reserves on the stove.

Mrs. Lukes presided at the base of operations, and made the coffee and cut the pies, and was everywhere at once.

At the proper moment, a hush fell on the audience, for the lamps were all turned low, and when the curtain was rolled back and the Christmas tree, ablaze with candles and sparklers, burst on the enraptured assemblage, there were little peals of delight and surprise from all over the hall.

Dolls with golden hair, dolls with brown hair, stretched their arms appealingly to their little mothers in the audience, while from every branch, a silver sparkler shot its white stars upward in a perfect frenzy of gladness. Balloons in red, green and white, tugged at their tie-strings and threatened to fly to the roof, and the presence of balls and drums, and engines and wagons, and mysterious bundles and boxes below the tree, set the young hearts dancing with expectation.

When the supper was over, and the last waiter had been fed, the nurse insisted that Bill Adams should speak to the people. "They are all asking who bought all these things, and you must tell them. It's only fair to all the men who contributed," her eyes were dancing with mischief, "Sure, you must speak, Mr. Adams, tell them about Christmas being the time when spirits blend and friend holds fellowship with friend, and all that. That's good stuff, and about the pores of the heart being open, and 'Blest be the tie that binds.'"

Old Bill's eyes swept her face in keenest scrutiny, "Where

did you hear that?"

"O, that's the words of a hymn, you know it, I'm sure."

There was no time for thought, for already the nurse was speaking, and a hush had fallen upon the happy company.

"You will be wondering, dear friends, who our Santa Claus is to-night, who has made all this happiness possible. We have him here behind the curtain, and now I am going to introduce to you one of our oldest and best known settlers, Mr. William Adams."

Too much surprised even to applaud, the people sat, and old Bill came forward. Under Miss Crawford's persuasion, he had bought a new suit, and had indulged in a shave and haircut, and the gasp of astonishment which broke from the people was a sincere tribute to his improved appearance.

"Dear friends," he said, "it's a long time since I've made a speech. Many years have fallen on my speech-making ability—years and—other things. But to-night is Christmas, and the spirits of Christmas are abroad and make us do queer things, things we did not intend to do—queer things but things which make us happy, too—I don't half understand all this myself, and I don't know why I am here. But," here he straightened up and began to expand like a dried Japanese water flower that feels the life-giving water beneath it, "it's only fair to the boys who chipped in on this to tell you that a bunch of us got talkin' about Christmas, a while back, and it being a time for a little jollification, and this year," he stumbled a little here, but the glowing faces before him gave him courage, "this year it

seemed best to spread it out, and make the fun reach over all the people—it seemed best! In fact we were led—that way—by an invisible hand—as it were—and we sure all hope you are enjoyin' it and that everybody is as pleased as I am. I never knew that a person could feel as good as this—without takin' anything. It's a new one on me—but I hope you are all happy—I sure am."

Cheers and wildest applause broke out then, and cries of, "You bet we are," "Good old boy, Bill," "you're all right," and when it had subsided, another thrill came for from behind the tree and hidden by it, the big square phonograph, with its doors opened wide, burst into song:

"Hark the herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled.

—it sang, in the silvery tones of the Welsh quartette, sang it in words so clear and triumphant, that on its strong wings of melody, tired souls were borne upward to the very gates of heaven!

"It's the singers from Wintering Hills," someone gasped, "it must be."

But Mrs. Lukes pressed her rough hands together, convulsively. "Now," she cried, happily, "it's Christmas; it's a real Christmas, with God in it. It has crossed the Peace!—it has come over to us! My dream has come true, I'm satisfied," and from her eyes the staring loneliness had all gone, and in their

depths had dawned a great new hope of better things to come.

While the tree was being unloaded, and the fun was at its height, the nurse slipped away, with a great basket of provisions for her patient.

"I'm neglecting you," she said, "but oh, the things I have to tell you when it is over—I can't let you go to the hospital at the Crossing to-morrow, I won't be through telling you. I'm going to bring old Bill home with me—I'll leave the teapot here where you can reach it. Now, chew your food well— isn't that a great brand of lemon pie? Keep your mind from worry, and if you feel the need of further instructions, consult Diana here beside you."

She was gone in a moment, and in spite of the two lamps—turned high—for him the room had grown dark.

* * *

"Come right in, Mr. Adams," he heard her saying at the door, "come right in—you've never seen my nice little house, have you? Oh no, I'm never lonely. You see sometimes I have a patient for a few days,—my private ward is over there behind the curtain; yes, indeed, I like your idea for weekly meetings in the hall. Now with the phonograph, and so many ready to help, we can have all sorts of good times. Hang your coat here, Mr. Adams. I would like you to meet my patient. He cannot get out of bed, so will you please come this way."

Throwing back the curtain in front of the "dispensary," the light fell full on the laughing face of Sergeant Woods.

"Mr. Adams, meet Sergeant Woods," said the nurse calmly.

"Haven't we met before," said the old man, trying to recover his composure.

"Yes," said the sergeant, smiling, "you very kindly picked me up on Brick's hill, and your friend Dad Peters, brought me here, two days ago."

"But you didn't stay here," exclaimed his visitor.

"Ever since, haven't I nurse?"

"For the very good reason," said the nurse, "that his leg is in splints."

The old man looked from one to the other helplessly, and sat down hard in the chair the nurse had placed for him.

"Then who the devil did I see, and who was it that——"

"That what, Mr. Adams?" asked the nurse, with more eagerness than regard for sentence construction.

"See here," burst from the old man, "did you break your leg or did you not?"

"I did."

"Well, why did you tell me you didn't, and that it was all in the game to throw me off the track, and why did you wave it round to show me it was all right?"

The sergeant looked at the nurse with lifted eyebrows.

"O, nurse!" he said.

"I didn't wave it," said the nurse, quietly, "I did not need to wave it; you could tell it couldn't be broken,—no one could ride forty miles with a broken leg, could they?"

"See here," said the old man desperately, "who held me up at the point of a revolver, in a dark corner at the Crossin', and took five hundred dollars from me."

"I didn't," spoke up the policeman, "I have been here all the time, with a broken leg."

Looking from one to the other, the old man slowly began to nod his head. Then he arose, and making a sweeping bow to the nurse, he said:

"Miss Downey, once again I offer you my hand in marriage."

With equal dignity, Miss Downey replied, "And once again I decline the honor!"

There was a silence in the room, broken only by the thumping of Tinker-Bell's tail on the floor, as she registered applause.

"Young man," said Mr. Adams, addressing the radiant face on the pillow, "young man, there's one awful lesson in this for you and me! We're poor fish, us men! We have a rough way of doing things. Your way was to arrest me, seize the stuff—send

me to jail—That's no damn good! I'd be swearing my soul away in jail—boys all mad—everything in a mess. Look at this girl—she skins my roll, but look what she does with it—what she does with me, she scrubbed me, shaved me, first, in my own house, then on the public highway, robbed me, but made me the best liked man in the neighborhood, makes everyone think so well of me—I think well of myself. I'm not old Bill Adams the bootlegger; I'm the man who brought the Christmas treat to the kids. She spoils my taste for booze, this girl, and has given me a taste—for my fellowmen. To-night coming out, I met a bunch of the boys who gave me the money, Dad Peters, Bill Lukes and the rest. They grabbed my hand and said, 'All right, old man, glad you done it?' They feel better, I feel better, every one in the settlement feels better, she did it all, she and your revolver."

"Mr. Adams," said the nurse, taking the old man's hand in both of hers, "you're wrong about the revolver. It was only a flashlight I used, and remember, the suggestion was yours, about buying things for the kids. You said it first—that gave me the idea. I saw it was the way out, and it has all been so fine! You played up well, too, Mr. Adams and we'll never give it away."

He turned to the bed and shook hands with the Sergeant.

"You remember what I said, sergeant, about a man alone being a poor stick! Profit by it! Not but that I'm willing to admit that as men go—you're some man!"

When Bill Adams was gone, she came back to her patient, and in her best hospital manner, beat up his pillows.

"I'm getting better, nurse!" he said, hopefully. "I'm feeling better every minute."

"Well," she said.

"About to-morrow, I will feel well enough to——"

She interrupted him quickly.

"It may interest you to know that nurses never accept proposals from their patients."

He knitted his brows and looked at her.

"When will you take me to the hospital?" he asked, after a pause.

"To-morrow—I would keep you here, but I may be called away any minute."

"And I won't be your patient then?"

"No."

"But you will come to see me?"

"Yes."

"But, nurse, no one can propose to a girl when he doesn't know her first name!"

"That doesn't matter," she said, "north of the Peace!"

And outside, right above the little house, the northern lights

pink and green and violet and amber, marched and flamed, and danced and looped, folding and shooting and darting—just as if they knew—and were glad!

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