

A Messenger from Santa Claus

By J. F. HENDERSON

(Copyright)

"I never did see Santa Claus, but I've seen his messenger," said Billy, gravely.



"His messenger!" gasped his astonished mother. "Why, Billy, who put that idea into your head?" "Didn't you ever see him, mamma?" "See who?" "Santa Claus messenger." "Of course not, child." "Well, I did," stoutly declared Billy. "I saw him down by the big gate yesterday. And he's got to bring me a new sled."

A ripple of laughter went round the family circle. Billy's mother rose and took him by the hand.

"It is this little fellow," she said, and led him from the room.

When the child was snugly tucked away between the sheets his mother bent down and kissed him.

"Good-night, darling," she whispered. "Tomorrow is Christmas, and maybe if you are a real good boy Santa Claus will bring you something. But good little boys don't tell lies, Billy—remember that."

Doris Lathrop sighed even as she crowned a soft pillow that was Billy drifting away into the land of dreams. She was just about to go to bed when the universal merry hum of the Christmas season came to her ears. It was deep and low, and it came from the heart of the house. It was the hum of the husband who had been away for years, and who was now home again. It was the hum of the wife who had been away for years, and who was now home again. It was the hum of the child who had been away for years, and who was now home again.

But there had been a change to the terrible tragedy. Less than a year ago her father had died, and his deathbed he had murmured that he was the real slayer of his arch-enemy, Duke, that in the madness of exasperation he had struck the blow that made him a homicide; that his son-in-law, Jack, had been the victim of his rash act, and that Jack—noble, quixotic Jack—to save his wife's father, had deliberately diverted suspicion to himself by disappearing from the community.

Christmas day had an snow-covered air. "What if Billy had no present?" Doris Lathrop thought as she sat at the breakfast table. "What if he had no present?"

"I don't know," she said, looking at the front door. "The little boy could have gone outdoors this cold morning."

Doris stepped into the hall. The front door was wide open. She hastened forward to look out, and who should she see but Billy coming up the walk, leading by the hand a tall, trampish-looking stranger with a bushy gray beard and dragging behind him a magnificent new sled!

"Here he is, mamma!" cried Billy in great glee. "This is the messenger from Santa Claus. See the sled he brought me. Now, mamma, I didn't fib, did I?"

Doris fell back in dismay. Billy and his new-found friend came up the steps and into the house.

"I couldn't help it, ma'am," said the stranger, apologetically, as he took off his disreputable hat. "The child insisted on my coming to the house, and I—I—just couldn't resist."

Doris gave a piercing scream. "Jack! Jack!" she cried out wildly. "I know that voice—I know that voice!"

She snatched the long gray beard from the man's face and dashed it to the floor.

"Jack!" she faintly articulated, and fell swooning into the strong arms of her husband.

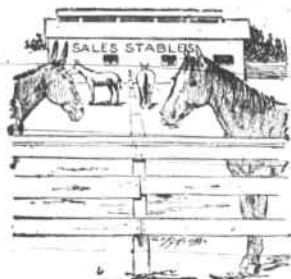
And at that moment the bells in the neighboring town broke forth in a shower of joyous Christmas greetings.

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Three Christmas Days Together

By F. B. EMERY

(Copyright)

Christmas day dawned bright and clear, but Mildred Hudson was anything but cheerful.



For a year she had been looking forward to the time when her lover was to ask her father for her hand, and now everything must come to an end. Could the daughter of Willis Hudson, merchant-prince, waste her life upon a mere architect who could hardly support himself? Such an idea was beyond belief and while the young man tried to show that he had been successful in his calling and that the future promised more, the older man became more violently enraged as the minutes passed and finally told the

"pauper" to leave his house and never to return until three Christmas days came together. Then he could have his daughter as a Christmas gift. As a man of honor John Dean could only submit to the decision until he could convince the wealthy man of his mistake.

Now it so happened that Willis Hudson had men and ships in his employ—men who sought out the uttermost parts of the earth for what they could find to please their master's eye. Jewels and trinkets, rare foreign wares, delicate perfumes, rare fruits, soft fabrics and countless curiosities came to him each year through his faithful assistants, and Mildred was always allowed to choose whatever she wished whenever one of the captains returned from a voyage.

The Christmas breakfast had been rather less cheerful than usual and it was with a feeling of relief that Mildred obeyed her mother's call to her chamber to get ready for the day.

Capt. Zeno had just returned from a long voyage and had a few little presents he wished to give her. Mildred hastened to the library, anxious to let her thoughts dwell upon more cheerful subjects.

Just as she entered the door the young captain stepped forward, saluted and wished her a Merry Christmas, adding that although he was a day late with his greetings it had been impossible for him to see her the day before, and anyway, it was just as well to wait, for he had many business matters to talk over with her father, who did not like to discuss business matters on Christmas day, so he had not entered port until about two hours ago, and had let the sailors celebrate Christmas all day yesterday.

"Why," exclaimed Mildred, "to-day is Christmas, Capt. Zeno. You must have lost your reckoning on your last trip."

"No, Miss Mildred, yesterday was Christmas. Do you suppose I could sail clear around the world and be so forgetful of Christmas? Our records are perfect."

Just as she spoke the bell rang again and Capt. Jonas came in loaded down with numerous bundles, which he presented to Mildred.

"I brought these to you to-day so that I can leave here to-night and spend Christmas with my family to-morrow," said Capt. Jonas.

"To-morrow?" asked Mildred. "Why Capt. Zeno has just been trying to make me believe that Christmas was yesterday."

"It is to-morrow," said Capt. Jonas.

"I don't to-morrow," said Capt. Zeno just as emphatically, "yesterday was Christmas day and I can prove it."

"And I can prove it is to-morrow," said Capt. Jonas, warmly. "You must think I can't keep my records straight."

Both the worthy captains were fast reaching a point where it meant give in or fight, when Mildred's younger brother, Max, who heard the noise, came in, and asked what was wrong.

Mildred told him, and after a minute he asked: "How far did you sail, Capt. Jonas?"

"Clear around, boy."

"And which way did you go?"

"West, all the way."

"And how about you, Capt. Zeno?"

"Same thing, only east."

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