

The Major's Christmas

By Martha Pattie



HE major felt a vague sense of personal grievance. It was Christmas morning. Everything was most agreeable at the hotel. As he had distributed his customary gold pieces to the "bella," the telephone glass, the check-room boys, his waiter and the head waiter, and the chambermaid on his floor; he felt oddly disturbed.

"Carrier, my boy," he told the tall, gray-haired image in the mirror. "You're getting sentimental. You're thoroughly disappointed because there isn't a soul in the world who can call out a 'Merry Christmas' to you, and mean it from the bottom of his heart. You're like a boy with nothing in his stocking. I'm ashamed of you, sir; I am indeed."

Yet that didn't help matters. He wandered around the deserted hotel corridors in the morning feeling utterly lost. Nearly every one seemed to be going out to dinner to some place where he was urgently desired. Four times he strolled over to the desk and looked casually at his box, but there were no mail and no presents for Maj. Robert Lee Carter.

The last time he had really decided to give up and ring up some business associate to take dinner with him at the hotel. But he saw a letter in his box, and the clerk handed him a curiously shaped parcel, rather bulky and oval. He took it up to his own room, and opened it with a funny little thrill of anticipation.

By George, he was wrong. There was somebody, he didn't know who it was, but there was somebody who had remembered him. The last wrapper fell off, and he stood staring down at a little homelike wicker basket, filled with mistletoe. A card on top read, "Love and Merry Christmas from Pam."

Pam? He remembered no Pam. He opened the letter for enlightenment, and as he read, his heavy gray eyebrows drew closer together, and every now and then he ejaculated, "God bless my heart and soul!"

"You won't remember me at all, but I'm Pamela Grayson, and my mother was your sister's daughter, so I'm your grandniece, see? Mother died about a year ago, just after we came north, and I have been here alone ever since. I didn't even know you were alive until cousin Florrie, of Carter's Landing, down home, wrote and told me to share this mistletoe with you, for she had gathered it in the old oak grove where you used to go when you were a little boy. Here's wishing you a merry, merry Christmas, and I wish I knew you, because it does certainly get fearfully lonesome here in New York holiday time when you haven't any one of your very own."

The telephone bell rang sharply just as the major was about to say "God bless my heart and soul" once again. But he lifted the receiver, and smiled at the voice that answered his call.

"Delighted, Ralph, delighted, my boy, but you see, I am going to have a young lady guest here to dinner with me, my grandniece, sir, from Virginia. Now, instead of my joining you in your bachelor apartments, supporting you join us, and try and compensate to her for having a surely old chap for a dinner partner. Name's Miss Pamela Grayson. Come right down."

Then he smiled, and kept on smiling in the oddest, kindest way. And he leaned back in his deep leather chair, and lit a cigar, and watched the smoke rings form overhead, and smiled at them. He had four sisters. Pam's grandmother had been the youngest. And now somehow, they were all gone, as he thought, "the way of the roses," and he was alone. He had rather lost track of all the nieces and nephews and grandnieces and grandnephews. Sentiment does not thrive in the New York atmosphere, yet as he looked at the letter, he felt an odd glow of pride, and he held the little basket of mistletoe out at arm's length, smiling retrospectively. Many a time he had gone up to the old oak grove to gather it for his mother to decorate the great hall at Christmas. And now this little Pam—

The major rose suddenly with quick intention. Five minutes later he was on his way up to the address in the letter. Upstairs two flights he climbed, and tapped at the low top door with its modest card:

"Pamela Grayson."

She stood at the easel with her back to him, a big blue apron on, and she was singing.

"Oh, holy town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie, Above thy deep and dreamless sleep The silent stars go by."

The major stood at attention, but when she turned and caught sight of him, she gave a little cry of joy.

"Hello Bob! How did you come so soon to me?"

She, but she was bonnie, chosen by the major approvingly; very much like her grandmother in her girlish, soft brown bands of hair around her small head, and wistful, childish gray eyes. It took him about ten minutes to coax her into a "real" dress, as she said, and down into the waiting taxi.

And how fast she talked. There were years to catch up, she told him, and as long as there was only the two of them left in New York to uphold the pride of the Carters—

"There's one more, child," warned the major. "But he is very distantly connected, very. He is about your age—my cousin, but he is to dine with us, Ralph Carter."

Pam sat very still, and did not speak, looking straight ahead of her. "Ever hear of him?" asked the major.

"I just love his shadow," said Pam solemnly. "If it's the same one, I've tried and tried to paint pictures that would sell, and finally I coaxed an old dealer on the avenue to let one of my Virginia gardens stand in his window awhile. You know Aunt Annabella's rose garden with the sun dial, and the old white coach house in the back? Well, it was snapped up by a Mr. Ralph Carter. And he wanted to know if I had more Virginia scenes. So I sent down the oak grove at sundown along in November, with a big orange harvest moon stealing over the edge of the hill, and he bought that. And now I'm painting the old flagged walk under the grape arbor, with it all sunshiny, and Mammy Martha Ann coming along from the outdoor kitchen with a big covered platter of fried chicken, and he's going to take that."

The major leaned back his head, laughing and shaking with pure enjoyment. Up on the Hudson, at Hastings, stood Ralph Carter's bachelor home, and he had made it almost a replica of the old one in Virginia.

Successful in every way in New York, he had clung to the old southern traditions almost fiercely, this tall, lean, clear-eyed lawyer.

"And so he's been hanging your pictures all over his walls," exclaimed the major. "God bless my heart and soul, child. This is certainly a merry Christmas for us all."

Pam was rather grave, though, as they went through the splendid red and gold corridors of the great hotel. The dinner was to be very select and private up in the major's reception room and she wondered what this distant cousin would be like.

He was all she had wanted him to be. Even Pam could find no fault as she sat next to him at the round table. And oh, after years of lonely striving among strangers, how it made her cheeks glow and her heart beat to hear these two, the splendid old major and Ralph, vie with each other in their delightful courtesy and compliments.

"You don't know how good it is to find some one of your very own," she said, when the major had gone out after the dinner was over.

"Don't!" said Ralph, smiling down at her. "I've put in about fourteen years up here, and only the major to give me a cousinly greeting now and then. I'm mighty glad to find another one, even if she is a nine-month one. The major tells me he's going to take a house for you and himself."

"Why?" Pam caught her breath quickly. "I didn't know that."

"So I will see a great deal of you, I hope."

He stopped and looked into her eyes. Someway they swayed under his gaze. The major's voice hailed them.

"God bless my heart and soul, boy, can't you see she's under the mistletoe. I hung it there on purpose."

Ralph stooped, and pressed a kiss on the warm, half-drunk pink cheek, while the major drank their health, while the major drank their health, while the major drank their health.

"And to our next Christmas together, the little Pam, and you, my boy, and this old chap who'll never be lonely again."

"To next Christmas," pledged Ralph. "Will you kiss me then, Pam?"

DOROTHY'S CHRISTMAS GIFT

by A.E. ZUCKER

AY, believe me, the fellows were glad to see me last night," said George Porter to the family at the dinner table. "Professor Porter said I looked like a college man, and all the fellows said I had changed a great deal since September."

George had just arrived a few hours before for his first vacation home from college. He had, indeed, been very anxious to get home again, among his old friends. The weary hours on the train he had whittled away by telling the other boys about all the dances he was going to attend with Dorothy Smyth, "some classy girl from Bryn Mawr."

In the course of the dinner Professor Porter could not but take down his son a little. The all-important fraternity man was roasted considerably for his overbearing manner. However, George took it all with the stolid dignity of the captain of the freshman football team. As a matter of fact, he had sunk considerably in his son's estimation.

After dinner George's older sister Mary asked him whether he was going to call up Dorothy for the Christmas dance at the Lindley's.

"Aw, pawaw, here a fellow works his head off at school," said George in his best bluff, "he comes home for a little rest, and then you expect him to dance. And half the girls at school have it on Dorothy anyhow."

"What are you going to give her for Christmas?" said Mary, hiding a smile, for she knew just how George felt about Dorothy.

"Gee, I never thought about that, and I've got ten cents to my name." This last statement showed just how good a time he had with his fraternity brothers the last days before vacation.

"Make it C. O. D., George. Call on dad; he'll give all you'll need." "Not on your life," came back George. "A college man must be able to shift for himself. Why, half the fellows work their way. I'll go out to earn the money myself tomorrow. Besides, I've been roasted enough."

True to his word George Porter was out early the next morning looking for remunerative toil. A window-card in a large cafeteria, "Help Wanted," arrested his attention. He strolled up to the fat proprietor, seated behind the cash register, and honored him by offering him a college man's services.

"Any experience in the kitchen?" he was asked.

In spite of the fact that the total of George's kitchen experience consisted of a few evening's fuddermaking at Dorothy's, he said boldly, "I sure have."

"Where?"

This confused him a little. "Anywhere at a friend's last winter."

"So you've been at Friend's cafe? Well, I'll take you. A dollar and a half a day and meals. Just go to the kitchen and get a white coat."

George had bluffed and he was going to make good the bluff. He rushed around at a great speed sending the soiled dishes to the kitchen. Accidentally he picked up half a piece of lemon pie the owner of which had just gone to the ice water faucet to replenish her glass. "Wait a minute with my pie, if you please," said the old maid victim of George's zeal. "No, I won't take anything back out of the mess on your tray either. You go and get another pie for your expense."

The hero of many a football battle showed a yellow streak. He bought the pie for the injured owner. Probably one to his pager over "the old hen" he next scattered the silver all over the floor. Without the least thought of sanitation he replaced it on the stand. Suddenly the boss told him to carry all the silver to the kitchen to have it washed. Here the angry Irish cook gave him a hot reception. "Why didn't you just take it to the kitchen and back. The silver would have thought it was clean, but now they kicked to the boss. Take a new, he has no idea of cleanliness."

Christmas shoppers coming into the cafeteria reminded George of his pie. One dollar-fifty was not much, but he would not ask dad for more under any consideration. Finally he decided on something that has been the last resource of many a young man—a box of candy.

When George was about to leave Dorothy at the door, she had a question after the dinner on Christmas night, she turned to him to say, "All the presents I filed your box a candy box. It was the sweetest thing. And Donald says he saw you working for it. You shouldn't go to so much trouble just for me, George."

"Trouble, Dorothy? Don't mention it. And with somewhat of an effort I've been able to get you a present."

When George was about to leave Dorothy at the door, she had a question after the dinner on Christmas night, she turned to him to say, "All the presents I filed your box a candy box. It was the sweetest thing. And Donald says he saw you working for it. You shouldn't go to so much trouble just for me, George."

"Trouble, Dorothy? Don't mention it. And with somewhat of an effort I've been able to get you a present."

"What would she say?"

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ST. NICK'S GALOSHES

JANE OSBORN

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She Stood at the Easel With Her Back to Him.



"I Sure Have."



"I Put the Presents You Brought in With the Rest."