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Santa's Red Guide

By R. RAY BAKER



HE tall, rawboned sailor stepped whistling when he saw the automobile, although his lips remained pursed and vapor continued to form before his mouth.

He halted midway between the fog-bell and the lighthouse, and stamped his feet energetically on the beaten snow path, for they were cold in spite of heavy overshoes.

"Ben Clark's automobile," he said, and he did not say it joyfully. "He's cabin' on Marie again."

The door of the dwelling part of the lighthouse opened and a young man, dressed in a fur coat, came out, placing a cap, also of fur, on his head. He paused when he saw the sailor.

"Merry Christmas," said the fur-clad one, grinning, and he passed on to the automobile, climbed in, and soon was whirling away.

"Same to yuh," sang out the sailor, although he scowled as he approached the door through which the other had



A Light Shone Forth Into the Winter Night.

emerged. "Seems he's gettin' in a hurry about it. Christmas don't come till tomorrow."

There was nothing about the sailor to denote that he was a seafaring man, unless it was his rolling gait, for he was bundled up much as the other man, although his coat, instead of being fur, was an old fuzzy blue one.

Navigation had closed some months ago, because a large share of the lake had an icy blanket, and Harry Hammond was obliged to find other pursuits till spring. So he fished through the ice and helped keep the village of Bennett supplied with food.

His knock was answered by a dark-eyed girl of three years, who smiled brightly.

"Hello, Emeline," he said, and he took her in his arms and asked her about Santa and what she expected the old gentleman from the North to bring her.

"Big doll's what I want," she told him, trying to spoil the part in his hair, and frowning because there was not any there to begin with. "Dat's all—just big doll."

From the adjoining room came another dark-eyed girl of nineteen wiping her hands on an apron.

Harry placed the tot on the floor, and as he did so he discovered a picture standing on the table. It was of a very good looking young man.

"I see Mr. Clark left a present," Harry said, and immediately wished he had kept his thoughts to himself, for the girl flared up.

"Yes," she said with a tinge of defiance. "Ben Clark left me his picture. I hope you don't object."

The sailor studied the blue pattern in the faded red carpet.

"Wouldn't do much good if I did," he responded. "You an' he's gettin' pretty thick, Marie. I thought things was pretty well understood between you an' me—but that was before Ben commenced takin' you ridin' and shinin' up to you. A man with a car certainly does have an advantage over us poor guys."

Marie's cheeks grew red and she tapped her foot.

"Look here, Harry Hammond," she said in a voice that sounded like a ringmaster's whip cracking. "You nor no man is going to dictate to me. Mr. Clark has been very nice. Besides, he's a highly refined gentleman, and you—well, you're not, and you know it."

"Ben turned toward the door. "Mebbe I better step out o' it altogether," he observed.

He opened the door and was about to step out, when Emeline sprang into his arms. He kissed the child in the forehead, then put her back on the floor and went out, remarking to himself that "this sure is some merry Christmas."

That afternoon a storm that had been brewing for days vented its spite on the village and its surroundings, which included Clayton Point and the lighthouse. A raw, stiff wind carried biting pieces of hard snow.

"Mebbe Santa Claus tan't come," said the tot, as she snuggled up to the

older girl and listened to the howling wind.

"Probably not," replied Marie, who was gazing abstractedly from the living room window out over the frozen lake.

Marie was quite sure Santa would not come. Santa would have to be her brother Frank, who was Emeline's father, and he was at Sloan City, 20 miles away, helping an ice company

up next summer's supply. He had promised to bring something for Emeline's Christmas, but Marie knew he would not attempt the trip in the storm.

Frank was the lightkeeper and the government records showed Marie to be his assistant. Frank kept the light burning during the summer and in the winter found jobs of various kinds to perform.

About five o'clock, through the storm, Marie heard an automobile horn, and presently came a knock on the door. Ben Clark, blanketed with snow, stood there when she opened it.

"I can't stay," he said, "or I won't be able to drive back, because the road is drifting badly. I came because I heard some news you'll be interested in. Harry Hammond went out on the ice this morning with his dog team, and up at the village a fisherman just came in with the news that the ice had cracked and part of it went out. Hammond didn't have a chance in a thousand, especially in this storm. He surely must have drowned."

Marie started back, horror in her eyes.

"Harry drowned!" she cried. "It doesn't seem possible. Are you sure? Can't you do something? Take me out on the ice in your car. Perhaps he's still alive, lying somewhere on the ice freezing. The ice must be firm for a long ways out."

"What?" exclaimed Ben. "Go out there in this howling blizzard? The ice might hold up for a long ways, but I'd ruin the car and we'd stand a good chance of getting pneumonia, if we didn't get lost and wander into open water."

Early that night the villagers were startled to see a red bar of light shoot from Clayton Point. It was the first time in history that that light, which had guided many a ship through summer gales, had shone forth into a winter night.

Up in the light tower stood Marie looking through the great glass wall, striving to pierce the darkness and storm with eyes that were red from weeping.

"There's not much hope," she mused, "but there's just a chance he's still alive and the old light might help him."

For hours she remained at the post, watching and waiting, all but hopeless. Midnight found her asleep in a chair close by the light, exhausted by her long vigil.

A scream from below made her wide awake. She stumbled down the stairs and groped her way to Emeline's room. To her surprise a lamp was burning and there was Emeline seated on the bed, bouncing a doll, fully as large as herself, on her knee.

"Santa came!" cried the little girl, and now Marie realized that it had been a scream of joy that awakened her.

"Santa came!" repeated the tot. "I found this right on my bed."

Unable to understand, Marie went out into the living room and lighted a

lamp. On the lounge lay a man, his clothes crusted with ice.

She went to him and put her arms around him.

"Harry," she sobbed. "They told me you were dead; that the ice cracked and let you through."

The big sailor opened his eyes and yawned.

"I'm dead, all right—dead sleepy," he grinned. "The ice opened up, all right, but I was on the other side of the crack, an' by deavin' the dogs like the dickens I got over the danger place before she cracked on the other side. I got to Sloan City without trouble, an' comin' back I skirted the shore. At that, I'd got lost only for the ol' light."

She took one of his hands and found it cold, and rubbed it vigorously.

"But way—why did I go?" she demanded.

He tried to stifle another yawn, but didn't succeed.

"Well, Emeline was lookin' for Santa," he answered, "an' I couldn't let her be disappointed."

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