

Merry Christmas!

By Helen Morton

IT WAS enough to make one hate Christmas! Betsy was so tired that she could hardly stand. This counter in the middle of the aisle had become a nightmare to her. The crowds hurrying by, pulling the neckties off as their coats brushed against them, fingering them over and then tossing them back on the table carelessly.

Still, it was good to have a job, even a temporary one. For she had been without work for a long enough time so that she had "eaten" and all her possessions she could borrow money on.

No time to be standing here thinking, though. That fat woman looked as if she was going to buy several ties. "These are very nice, madam. And so reasonable; 35 cents a piece, or three for \$1.00. This is an exceptionally pretty one," and Betsy showed her a navy blue. But the fat woman dropped the ties and hastened away with her friend, leaving a pile of ties on the floor.

Wearily Betsy leaned over and began picking them up. "Let me help?" a friendly voice asked. Betsy looked up into a handsome face, curly brown hair, deep blue eyes, and a mouth that curved into a smile at the surprise in Betsy's eyes.

"I want to get some ties for my family. I've been up here the past few weeks, and so I don't know what the kids want, but I think it'll be safe to give 'em ties. Socks are so commonplace."

"Your brothers?" Betsy asked as she held up one or two she liked particularly.

"Yeah. Three brothers and a sister. She's about your age, I reckon. What does a girl like, anyway, when you've only a little to spend?" He looked imploringly.

"Let's get the brothers fixed up first, and then see about her. How's this for the 17-year-old?" Betsy inquired.

"Fine. You know, I'm tickled pink to be able to do anything for the family. I struck a bad spell, was down with flu for three weeks, and lost my job. I just got another last week. But I'd have hated to have the day go by with nothing from the big boy." His face was shining.

"I'll have them wrapped as gifts. Then you go over to the counter there and select something for your sister. Here, I'll take you over and get a girl from my home town to wait on you. She'll help," and Betsy went along with him.

"You're not a city girl, then? No wonder you were so helpful. I'm



"I want to get some ties for my family."

scared of these sophisticated girls in most of the shops. That's because I've been here only a few months, and in my home town everyone knew everyone and it was, well, it was different. Say, you don't think I'm getting fresh, do you? I'm just so homesick." His face was red with embarrassment.

It was Betsy's turn to look troubled. "Sure, I know how it was. I don't chatter away with every customer this way, either. I'm like you new here, and lonesome for my own people. I was hating Christmas time, with so much confusion and no real Christmas spirit. So I'm glad you told me about your family."

She turned him over to Marie at the women's wear counter, and went on with her tie selling. They seemed prettier, fresher and more attractive, than they had before the curly-headed fellow had come along to buy some.

ONLY a half hour off for supper, then she'd have to work until the store closed at nine. Christmas eve meant lots of last minute gifts to be bought in this big city. As she turned away from her counter to go out to eat, a friendly voice sounded at her shoulder.

"If you're going to snatch a sandwich, do you mind if I go along and we learn something more about each other? Your friend told me you'd have just a little while for lunch, and I want to get acquainted, if you'll let me." It wasn't just a "pick-up." This was a homesick boy, wanting to talk with a small-town girl who knew his language.

There was just a moment's hesitation before Betsy said, with a grin, "Sure enough. Lead me to the lunch counter. You're no more lonely than I've been. As it is, I really feel like I can say 'Merry Christmas' when tomorrow comes."

Yuletide Shower

By Elizabeth Eastman

"I WISH we could do something exciting — something different at Christmas." Peggy looked out at the winter landscape as she spoke.

"For instance?" Vivian Clark glanced up from the magazine.

"Something like making someone terribly, tremendously happy." Peggy came closer to her sister as she answered, and Vivian saw that she was very much in earnest.

"I've been thinking," Peggy went on, "how wonderful it would be to bring something thrilling — something unforgettable — into someone's life. I don't mean like helping with the baskets and the entertainments at the church; we've always done that; but a sort of special something, for one particular person."

For a minute youthful voices surrendered to silence. The gay little clock on the dresser made audible sound. Suddenly Peggy jumped to her feet. "I've thought of something!" she cried breathlessly, "something really different! You know Sara Werby — she's been an invalid for 10 years — shut in from the world except for a few friends who run in every now and then."

"But what can we do for her? We do visit her occasionally, and have always taken her a little Christmas gift. You know she's much too proud to accept charity."

"Who's talking of charity? What I have in mind is something that will just thrill her. I'm going to write to Mona Muir — you know, she runs that department on the Star — and I'm going to tell her how wonderful Sara has been, and ask a card show-er for her."

Vivian whistled through her teeth. "Well, that is a grand idea, Peggy. I know she'll be thrilled."

"She's bound to be! Think of the postman stopping with loads and loads of mail every day." Peggy's blue eyes were dancing.

"But suppose people don't write? You know how busy everyone is at Christmas." Vivian's face reflected the doubt in her words.

"But they will write," Peggy's voice was emphatic. "I'm going to hold the thought that Sara Werby will be just swamped with mail."

TOGETHER they penned the letter to Mona Muir on the big city paper. Later, between snatches of shopping, they discussed the possible number of cards and letters that would be delivered at the little cottage on Bank street. They both seemed to be more concerned with what Sara Werby was going to

receive than about what they themselves were going to get.

"It's funny how doing something for others gets a hold of you," Vivian said one day; "I wasn't nearly as enthusiastic as you at first, Peggy; now I believe I'm even more eager."

But their real happiness came on Christmas eve when they stood by Sara Werby's bed and saw the radiance upon her face. Stacks of letters, cards, and packages were piled everywhere, with postmarks from almost every state in the Union.

"It's the most thrilling thing that ever happened in my life," Sara told them. "I never knew there were so many wonderful people in the world. It will take me weeks and weeks to answer them all, but it's going to be loads of fun." Her brown eyes sparkled like a girl's.

"Imagine some of them will develop into lasting friends," Peggy ventured. "Vivian and I are so happy about it all — in fact, I think we're just about as excited as you are."

"You're pretty happy then," Sara Werby whispered softly, "for I don't believe there is anyone — anywhere — who is going to have a more thrilling Christmas than mine."

Outdoor Christmas Trees
Outdoor Christmas trees are not new. When in Alsace the folk there will tell you of St. Florentine, who centuries ago went out into the woods at Christmas time and placed lights, probably candles, on the trees.

A Straw for Remembrance
Reminding gay celebrants of the poverty of the Christ Child, Christmas feasts in Poland always have a piece of straw sticking out from under the dining table cloth.

Carols on Fields of Bethlehem
On the hillsides of Bethlehem, "where shepherds watched their flocks by night" on Christmas eve and Christmas morning, tourists from many lands gather annually to sing carols and remember the life and words of Jesus of Nazareth.

In Bethlehem for Christmas
Due to modern transportation one can leave America as late as the middle of December and be in Bethlehem in Palestine for Christmas, 3000 miles away.

Christmas Dinner

By Katherine Edelman

AS SOON as Darrel Thorpe got a chance to use the phone, he dialed his home. He must tell Edna, how sorry, how terribly sorry he was for what had happened this morning. All the way down on the car he had reproached himself for the hasty words he had said. He couldn't understand how he had spoken to Edna like that, and on Christmas eve.

He drummed impatiently on the desk as he waited. Edna was always punctual about answering the phone and doorbell. It was a way she had, going right through with things.

Which really was the cause of his flash of temper this morning. In her quick, decisive way, she had swept aside his idea of having old Mrs. Darby for Christmas dinner. The little lady, now down on her luck, had befriended Darrel when he had come to the city.

"I'm not going to have her!" Edna had declared emphatically. "We're

going to skip Christmas as much as possible — go out and eat somewhere — and miss all the rush and bother."

"I think that's a darn selfish way of doing," Darrel shot back. "Christmas is a home day, with a turkey, and a tree, and gifts, and above all, someone to share them with us."

Then, without waiting to see the effect of his words, Darrel rushed from the house, banging the door.

Now, he dialed the number three times, but there was no answer. Panic seized him. Had Edna believed that he meant what he had said? He had heard of young wives who had packed up and left for much less reason. What a brute he had been to flare up as he did!

THE morning was unbearably long. Inwardly fuming, he hung up the receiver, to answer an imperative buzzer from the inner office. It was about the tenth this morning. If it hadn't been for Wheatley, keeping him running around in circles, he might have been able to reach Edna long ago. And if the old man hadn't been in the same ugly mood yesterday, Darrel knew that he himself wouldn't have been on edge this morning, that he wouldn't have spoken to Edna as he had done. He blamed Wheatley as much as himself.

"You sent for me," he said stiffly, as he waited beside the desk. The big man did not seem to hear him. His eyes were glued on a closely typed statement. Darrel spoke again. Then Daniel Wheatley looked up, and rubbed his hand across his forehead as if trying to remember something.

"Oh, yes, yes," he began; "Mrs. Thorpe called before you got to the office this morning. I forgot to tell you. She left word that she was going marketing with a Mrs. — Mrs. Darby, or some such name. Also, she wanted me to be sure to tell you to bring home a Christmas tree and all the trimmings." There was a merry twinkle in Wheatley's usually hard eyes. "Looks as if you were going to celebrate Christmas at your house," he finished, with a laugh.

"We certainly are," Darrel grinned back; "we're going to have a real old-fashioned celebration of the day."

"Think your wife would object if you took a cranky old man to Christmas dinner?"

Darrel wondered if he were hearing things, then his quick wit jumped to the surface. "If you really mean that, Mr. Wheatley, I can assure you of a hearty welcome. My wife thoroughly believes in having people for Christmas dinner. At least, I am sure she does now." The last sentence Darrel whispered to himself.

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