

HER POINSETTIA

"Why is Christmas so wonderful and yet so sad, to you, our dear, dear Angel of the Choir?"

This came from the slender lad, a chorister in All Saints Cathedral on a sunny slope in Southern France.

"Ah, my blessed boy, come and let me hold you near my heart and I will tell you about my love for the Christmas flower—the glorious Poinsettia! Have you not noticed me as I decorated this altar and the aisles and wreathed the feet of our Baby Jesus, that I was lavish with the Poinsettia?"

Yes, he had.

"When the World War thrust its cold steel into my world, it took the love of my youth, my first love. We had been students together—he became a great doctor. We were married and lived in Lille. Those joy days—joy days! Seems like the very angels smiled and sang for us alone, when, on Christmas eve, God gave us a son. My very heart sang, 'Peace on earth.' I recall our pretty home (we always had been blessed with more than our share of worldly goods) was a veritable hot house of Poinsettia. So since then this magic Christmas flower has seemed to be a part of my life."

Clasping the slender little hands of the choir boy, she stopped, seeming to forget she was talking.

"Do, dear Choir Angel, tell me more of your story."

Looking into his fine, big eyes, she said, "Oh yes, my son, I was trying to shut out your eyes from my heart."

"Do go on," said youth's eagerness for a story.

"As I was telling you, the baby came into a beautiful love—a beautiful home—on Christmas eve into a bower of Poinsettia. The sweetest memories of my baby cling around his morning bath. I left it to a no French maid. I seized upon this hour to love and fondle my darling. Upon the back of his little neck there was a bright, red spot. I kissed it a million times, calling it my Christmas Poinsettia. Ah, that little white neck—that bright red spot! My heart dies within me when I see a Poinsettia. But I would decorate the wide world with them, if I could. The cruel war reigned and all France was to arms. The doctors were called—my life seemed to ebb out at every pore. My first beloved answered—leaving my baby. I worked day in and day out at the Red Cross headquarters. Oh, how madly I worked! Coming home at night to kiss my blessed baby's neck—my Poinsettia!

"A year dragged by, and God had been kind; my husband had leave of absence, and on Christmas Eve would be home. The world fairly reeled with the joy in my heart. Christmas Eve and all the Poinsettias I could find made a crimson welcome that warmed his soul. "Farewell, ma chérie, another six months and the war will cease." Oh, how my soul said these words over to me. But still another six months, and Christmas Eve again. No news from the trenches. My beloved was behind the fighting line, hoping, hoping, hoping for a leave home for Christmas Eve. Did I wait for assurance? Not I! Praying for his coming, I decorated our home as never, never had I done before, in Poinsettias. The hours dragged by. No voice. No call. No sound on the terrace. And at the bedtime hour my baby and I were standing by the portrait of our beloved, when suddenly, like a sword in my heart, I heard my maid exclaim: 'Monsieur, it will kill her—it will—oh, Monsieur, it will kill her!' I hear my baby; walking to the door I saw a stretcher, covered with the flag of France. Looking, I saw our friend and great surgeon facing me as he said, 'Wounded, my dear child.' In a few hours my first love, my only love, closed his eyes. I looked up at the crimson Poinsettia. This time they seemed great drops from my heart.

"This was my baby's second Christmas. The war consumed the world by this time, and Lille was falling. Gathering my baby and my maid, I prepared for flight. Being obliged to go to the Red Cross headquarters, I went for my last time. Coming back for my escape with my baby—lo, I found my baby gone—my maid gone! I cannot tell you more tonight, dear."

"Please, please! I could not sing in our Christmas carols, if I could not hear

you found your baby—your little Poinsettia."

Closing her eyes to his view, she said, "No, I never found my baby. This is why, when I came back to Lille, I gave by life and my money all to work among you children—you orphans of the war. This is why I sing for you and with you. This is why I buy every Poinsettia in the street. This is why I love you little boys. Christmas Eve, this is, and near the hour my baby was sent on Christmas Eve—this is Poinsettia night for me."

The little face filled with love and sorrow for his Angel of the Choir. He looked up, saying: "How long since the war—I was a baby boy, I guess. I lost my whole family in the war—or they lost me. I guess I was a poor family's child—because I am not anybody—but I am some day going to be, the good priest of All Saints tells me. I lost every one—or they lost me."

The organ rang out the carols, and, at the feet of the lovely lady and little boy there fell a large wreath of Poinsettia, having been insecurely hung at the feet of Jesus. Stooping to pick up the flowers, the collar of the surplice turned back on the little boy—then she speaks: "Ah, what is that? What's that I see?" As if mad the lady cried, "What—what—what is that—that I see—" and she fainted.

The Priest was heard saying to the boy, "My child, tell me what happened." The boy told his conversation with his angel of the choir. Slowly the truth burst upon the mind of the Saint of the church. "Proof—still I must have more proof." Summoning to him the officer in charge of the orphans of the district, he questioned him.

"Father, I know not his name; I know that six years ago he was brought to me by a Red Cross worker, saying the enemy had stolen him, intending to place the child in a hospital filled with their own wounded in order to keep our French guns from being turned upon their wounded. In some way they got them out. This worker rescued the French baby."

"He was about two years old?"

"He was."

"Come with me."

As they walked towards the ante-room of the choir, the officer added, "There is a brown, round birthmark between the wrist and elbow of the left arm, sir."

Entering the room, the beautiful lady turned upon her couch and smiled.

"You fainted, my child, at the Christmas service."

"Yes, Holy Father. You see, my grief is finally killing me. I see things, I see things. I—I—Oh, I thought I saw my baby's neck, even the little 'beauty spot' I used to call my Poinsettia! I had worked hard all day with my flower I loved, and I think it was too much for me. Then, too, it was Christmas Eve."

"Could you bear a great joy on Christmas Eve, even as you have borne great sorrow—could you? Tell me, my poor child, could you bear a great joy?"

"I have borne much; I can bear anything now, but I guess there isn't much joy for me at Christmas Eve."

Calling the little boy and his church guardian, they came to the side of her couch, and gently the happy, knowing Father of All Saints bent down the head of the boy, and slipping back the surplice band, she saw the red "beauty spot." Wild eyed and trembling, she cried aloud once more. Tearing the sleeve of his left arm, she wildly threw it apart, exclaiming, "My lost baby—my lost baby!"

The scene was too difficult, even for the church men. Bowing his head, the father said, "God be praised for Christmas Eve—and a Poinsettia!"

MARTHA BROADBENT.

MOTHER MINE

Art thou not an angel pure,
Scent disguised from heaven, sure?
Dear, thou art too good for true,
Kind and tender, loving too,
Mother mine.

Thou art loved by one and all;
Small hearts gladden at thy call;
God Himself looks from above,
And admires thy heart of love,
Mother mine.

HILDA BROWN.

DADDY JIM

A face was pressed close against the cold window pane; it was a face old and wrinkled, and seamed with Time's furrows. The eyes were sunken, but, withal, bright, greedily—even hungrily—drinking in the beauty of the scene within the ranch-house.

If outside the house the wind vented its rage in one of its blackest moods, inside was the other extreme; all was a blaze of riotous red and green color. A huge tree stood in the center of the room, glittering with candles and festooned with ornaments. Gifts—numberless—were piled around its base. The room was filled with laughing, joyous people, who had no thought for the black night without. One of these was a girl of fifteen, who was surrounded by several others her age.

"O girls, we mustn't forget all about Daddy Jim tonight! He ought to have been invited. He is just like a child about Christmas. I feel sorry for him, all alone there in his little cabin. Poor old fellow! He probably would be too shy, however, to come among so many people," she said.

"But Mary Jane—" began another girl. "Look!" the oldest interrupted. "There he is now!" And she pointed towards the window. All of them gazed where she pointed. The old man was wistfully gazing at the box of candy a tiny tot held, and consequently, did not see at once the battery of eyes focussed upon him. When his gaze shifted, he started and cringed, shame-facedly. All at once he disappeared. The four looked at each other and nodded. Then they put their heads together for a conference, which ended by their slipping out of the room quietly.

When Daddy Jim's lagging feet finally brought him to the door of his meager little cabin, he paused on the step and sighed. Pushing the door inward, he stopped aghast. Tears began to stream down his cheeks. The sight before him was overwhelming that his strength began to give out and he collapsed weakly into a chair, staring wildly about.

A minute replica of the ranch-house scene was before him. A tree with gay red, green and silver balls, threw its shadow across the room, the fire in the grate catching the various colorful tints and timidly pointing them out. Boxes, baskets and books were heaped around the bottom of the tree.

Daddy Jim awoke from his stupor instantly when he caught sight of one object—a picture of the Madonna. Sobbing piteously, the old man clasped it to him. Finally, he stumbled across the room and picked up a miniature and a Bible and then returned to the fire.

He opened the Bible to the family record and sought out these entries: Grace Barnes—died Christmas day, 19—; Jimmie Barnes, Jr.—died Christmas day, 19—.

"Grace! Grace!" he cried. Oh, that I might see your face again!"

Placing the miniature and the picture side by side, he seemed to find some similarity by his eyes of love and longing, perhaps.

"Oh, the bitterness of this life! Grace, Grace, come back to me for one moment! How well I can remember those three short years we had together with our little Jimmie. And it was one Christmas, that gives so much, yet takes so much! Oh God! Is it all for naught?"

Daddy Jim fell into a reverie over these things. It must have been Mary Jane, he mused, who loved Grace's memory though she had never seen her. Yes, it must have been she who did all this. Thus musing, he fell asleep.

With the first light of day, Mary Jane was up and slipped away to the little cabin. The weather had changed overnight; the sky had become calm and serene. Azure blue was tinted with the gold of the sun, flecked with the white of the clouds.

"Just like so many brave and tender spirits gone to their reward," said Mary Jane to herself as she sped along.

Coming to the hut, she saw the door open and went in, thinking perhaps Daddy was eating breakfast. But she soon saw her mistake. A figure was seated by the ashes of the fire, asleep? If so, very unnatural, it seemed. Mary Jane stopped in awe. No; she was in the presence of death; not of a grim,

forbidding death, but a peaceful, contented and patient death. Daddy Jim wore a smile on his face, which, curiously, seemed to have lost years. In his hands were clasped the Bible and the pictures.

Mary Jane wept softly; her mother had told her of the sorrow of Daddy Jim's youth,—the death of Grace and little Jimmie. She understood and sympathized. Christmas had been kind to him; it had united him with his loved ones.

HELEN FELDER.

ANXIETY

Christmas Eve! In a big armchair, in front of a blazing Yule log, sat a girl, gazing pensively into the flame. She was a beautiful girl; her delicate brunette coloring and regular features would have delighted any artist.

Suddenly, she rose from her chair, and stood, for a moment, as if poised in indecision. A look of mingled expectancy, apprehension, fear and disgust crossed her lovely countenance. She began to feel madly in all her pockets, in the folds of her dress, and even in her sleeves; her face constantly twitching, as if she were struggling with some emotion mightier than she! Then she dashed across the room to her coat, and fumbled in its pockets; desperation was apparent in her every movement. Frantically, she ran to her muff, and hastily drew from it something soft and white, just as a mighty tremor shook her whole body—Ker-choo-oo!

"Darn that hay fever!" she cried. "I found my handkerchief just in time!"

ELIZABETH STONE.

DREAMS

Minutes of High Life Meeting

Helen seemed to be surrounded on every side by a sheer cliff, impossible to be scaled. All around her was black darkness, impenetrable, terrifying. In her hand she held a newspaper, but this was blank. Harrassed, she was attempting the apparently impossible thing—to fill that paper with material. Everywhere she went, faces appeared to her out of the darkness, only to vanish again. These faces were those of her will-o'-the-wisp fellow-staff members, whom she was vainly endeavoring to persuade to help her. She moaned over and over as she assigned innumerable articles to invisible people, not knowing whether they could hear her. Growing frantic, she shouted and called them and moaned when she received no answer. Walking around the abyss in which she was situated, she stumbled and fell—down, down. With a dull thud she hit a hard substance.

"Helen, Helen! What on earth is the matter?" called Mrs. Forbis. Helen was lying on the floor by the bed.

ONE NIGHT A LONG, LONG TIME AGO

One night, a long, long time ago,
While shepherds kept their sheep,
A light shone down from heav'n, and lo!
They heard a song of peace
A long, long time ago.

One night a long, long time ago,
The wise men traveled far;
They brought their gifts of myrrh and gold
Under a brilliant star,
A long, long time ago.

One night a long, long time ago,
In a small Judea town,
Upon a stable-manger low
They laid the young Child down,
A long, long time ago.

BLANCHE HODGIN.

THE TIME OF THE PINE

Covered with a coat of white
That sparkles star-like in the night,
Stands the lonely little pine;
Worry not, for soon his time
Shall come when he shall be
The center of all joy and glee.
Christmas with its colors bright,
Candy, toys,—my, what a sight!
A happy day for us is born,
But, ah, the pine! His day is gone!

DOROTHY HARDEN.

THE OAK TREE

The old oak tree stood lone and bare,
Protected only by God's care.
Its branches grew in every way,
And touched the ground one rainy day.
Now in the winter see it stand,
All ridged in pearl by Nature's hand.
JESSIE TATE.

A TRIO

CHRISTMAS EVE

Gray clouds—flurrying snowflakes—cutting winds—it is the day before Christmas. The crowds hurry by, wrapped in warm furs, calling gay greetings to one another as they pass—out of this shop into that one, always hurrying, gazing with shining, sparkling eyes at the dainty gifts. Dusk falls silently on the snowy street, as above the noise and clatter is heard the clear, sweet sound of a bell, half-heartedly rung by a tired, shivering, hungry little Salvation Army laddie. He stands huddled beside a red iron pot, the bottom of which is hardly covered by the few small pieces of silver carelessly tossed into it by the hurrying shoppers as they rush past on their way home to hot suppers and a gay, happy Christmas.

SANTA CLAUS

Clap-clap, clap-clap—over the snowy roofs in his sleigh, drawn by prancing, pawing reindeer, comes our old friend Santa Claus, a fat, red-faced, jolly old fellow with a huge pack of toys on his back, filled nigh to bursting. Leaping merrily out of his sleigh, which is covered with little jingling bells, down the chimney he goes. In a trice he is standing before the crackling fire, warming his hands at its cheery blaze. He puffs and blows, his cheeks become rosier, his eyes brighter, and his fat sides shake with mirth as he thinks of the merry day to come.

Taking off the heavy pack, with a groan for its weight, he proceeds to fill the long row of stockings hung on the mantle, from the biggest, largest one to the tiniest, and daintiest of little pink socks. Then he turns and loads the boughs of the sweet-smelling Christmas tree with toys, books and candy. After hungrily eating the cake left for him on the table, he takes one last survey of his handiwork, smiles, and vanishes up the chimney. Again the household is quiet and sleeping, and soon even the silvery ringing of the sleighbells has died away in the cold, frosty air.

THE STAR

"God bless you, merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay—"

The children circle around the brightly-lighted Christmas tree, dancing and singing, with dolls, books and toys in their chubby arms, their little mouths crammed and stuffed with sweet-meats. Their cheeks are flushed and their big eyes shine with the excitement of the occasion, for has not Santa paid them a most mysterious visit, leaving them everything heart could wish? From the tiniest toddler to the largest child, everyone is happy—so happy that they cannot tear themselves away from the animated scene; and over all shines the soft light from the great, glowing star on the topmost bough of the dull green Christmas tree.

MARJORIE VANNEMAN.

THE CHRISTMAS CHIMES

Hark to the sounds that break upon the still and frosty air,
The melodies that waken slumbering echoes everywhere!
They are the songs of Christmas-time, to every heart so dear,
Now sweetly played upon the bells, chiming far and near.

How silently the whole world lies, and listens to the bells!
And with what sweet harmony their joyous music swells!

A purer re-awakening has come down to the earth;
The old world leaves its wretched past to greet a wondrous birth!

A silver-pealing chime rings out its melody alone;
And then they ring with one accord, all blended into one.

From every eved belfry they ring out, clear and sweet;
They peal and chime the whole night long, and then the morn they greet.

Oh, God, Who shaped with master hand the earth, and sky, and sea,
The full hearts of Thy children all, in love, are praising Thee!
Oh, help us to begin anew, at holy Christmas time,
A life as sweet, as pure, as true, as that which swells each chime!

ELIZABETH STONE.