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## BENEFACTOR

### A Christmas Story

By HOWARD FIELDING

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He had decided to lay Amy's affairs before Langdale as a simple matter of business, just as if he had been dealing with an officer of a bank, to ask Langdale to consider it and give an answer on the following day and, having thus put off the decision, to lead the conversation to the precise point which Langdale had reached at a bound.

Before the two men could come together upon any common ground the arrival of important visitors broke off the session. Langdale excused himself courteously and gave his hand to Macmillan.

"I'm glad you came to see me," he said. "You've done me a considerable service."

"Well, I really don't see"— "You have, Richard; you have indeed. And I won't forget it. I always keep you in mind at this time of year. Goodby, goodby."

In a daze of disappointment, perplexity and self-reproach Macmillan departed. He had bungled the interview in all ways. He had accomplished absolutely nothing for Amy, for Langdale, for his own conscience. The account of the occurrence which he gave to Amy had no clearness to his own intelligence, but seemed quite satisfactory to her.

"You must see him again," she said. "You have influenced him. He feels it and is grateful. Of course you can't know just what it was that you said that gave him light, but I am sure that he saw a way to carry out his plans more honestly. That's what he meant when he spoke of your service to him."

"But, my dear Dick, is there any other possible explanation? Try to be reasonable. He said you had served him. How else could you have done it?"

The next day was Thursday and business practically ceased for the week. There was really nothing of importance that Macmillan could do to avert the doom that would fall on Monday, yet he went to town about noon and forced himself to face several discouraging and useless interviews. At 3 o'clock he went to his little office, beaten and disheartened.

There was a letter on the floor, and he recognized Langdale's envelope. It gave him a shock, but no real hope, for he had not even succeeded in telling Langdale what he wanted. He would not have been surprised to find a check for \$50. Under the circumstances a man of Langdale's peculiar notions of humor might have found amusement in such a gift.

diversity of fortune, there was not a man whose heart sang louder for joy. If he had been able to communicate with Langdale and express his sense of gratitude the day would have been perfect, but Langdale was celebrating Christmas in some secure retreat, no one knew where.

On Saturday morning Macmillan went to the city and spent an hour or more in his office. He was at work there and singing as he toiled when there came a tap at the door. Macmillan admitted a young man, whom he presently recognized as a clerk of Langdale's.

"Mr. Macmillan," said this man, without so much as a bow by way of greeting, "did you receive a letter with a check in it?"

"Yes," answered Macmillan cheerily; "I received it Thursday afternoon."

"You haven't cashed it yet?" he asked.

"But I have," was the reply. "I needed the money right away."

The young man sank down in a chair.

"I'm knocked out, I guess," he said in a high keyed voice. "I'm done—that's the truth about me."

"Why, what's the matter?"

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MORGANTON, N. C.

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### SAFETY DEPOSIT BOXES FOR RENT.

After the coffee cups on a December morning the Rev. Richard Macmillan and Miss Martha, his aunt, discussed a matter of conscience, that same hard one which has busied so many heads and pens and is known by the name of "matted money."

There was a certain rich man named Langdale, who had married a young girl a cousin of Macmillan's sister. The young clergyman had received various small favors from Langdale at Christmas not only to himself, but for Aunt Martha and Miss Amy Branford, to whom Macmillan was engaged. In particular he had had for the last three years, since Mrs. Langdale had been pastor of the so-called Sandstone church of Southfield, a check which was a contribution to the charity fund of the church.

A letter from the man who had thus described him was waiting for him on this day, and as he read it he muttered, "This kills me for the sixth time."

It was Curtis Langdale's habit to lunch in his office between 12 and 1. As Macmillan approached the door of Langdale's private office he was surprised to meet a physician with whom he had a slight acquaintance, a man of some distinction in the medical profession. Macmillan uttered a hasty word of salutation, but the other passed him without a glance.

Langdale's aversion to doctors was well known, and Macmillan had no thought that the visitor had come upon a professional errand, but at sight of Langdale the incredible became probable. An uncanny change had taken place in the man's aspect. The lines in his strong face were not only deeper, but greatly different in their significance. He looked ill in body, as in mind.

Surprise was instantly succeeded by sympathy in Macmillan's mind, and the conventional "How do you do?" had a real import.

"Oh, I'm all right," answered Langdale. "Never better."

"Well, that's good news," said the clergyman. "It was a bit anxious, having met Dr. Hayward in the hall."

"Dr. Hayward? Who's he?"

his enemies are saying such hard things of him? Perhaps you might advise."

"Precisely," said he, laughing in a sort of nervous desperation. "That's just what Aunt Martha said. And I'm sure you both have exactly the same idea. Goodby, dearest. I'm going to New York."

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"Dr. Hayward? Who's he?"

"No, sir," responded Langdale; "you'll see no doctors here. I can bunko my own stomach for nothing. Do you own the tall man in the gray suit?"



HE FOUND AMY ENGAGED IN A SNOWBALL BATTLE.

own stomach for nothing. Do you own the tall man in the gray suit?"

"Yes."

"That's a seventeenth cousin of mine from Omaha. He's looking up the family. Going to write a history of us."

Macmillan was perfectly sure that the man was Dr. Hayward, but he supposed that Langdale was ashamed of having called in a physician after all the abuse which he had heaped upon the profession.

accounts for the bluff that they're making. They think I'm going to break down. What do you think about it?" he demanded upon a sudden impulse, for he had caught a look in the detective's eye. "What change do you notice in me? Come! You're a keen eyed chap. Tell me!"

"Well, sir," he said at last, "aside from your general appearance, which isn't what it was, I notice a kind of something in your speech, a sort of hesitation. Now, there was a man I knew who got into a state where if he wanted to say 'dollar' he couldn't think of the word, and sometimes he'd say any old thing, perfectly ridiculous. I believe they call it aphasia."

"Yes," said Langdale, paling, "that's what they call it."

An attendant entered, bringing Macmillan's card.

"Here's the fellow that put us on to Hayward," said Langdale. "I thanked him heartily, but of course he didn't know what I was talking about. Well, he'll have to wait now till Hayward shows up. He's my first duty now. I'll give him a jolt, and then he'll run to his employers, of course, and you'll see where he goes."

Langdale was waiting grimly when Hayward's presence was made known

"I was thinking about a man who is waiting to see me," said Langdale, and, to his own surprise, he now spoke sanely enough. "Would you mind stepping into this other room while I see what he wants? He's a minister and a relative of my wife's, and I don't like to keep him out there with the rabble."

"Certainly," said Hayward and entered the adjoining room.

Langdale sank into his chair and tried to bring the word "doctor" to his lips, but he had not succeeded when Macmillan entered.

"Mr. Langdale," said the clergyman, "I want to speak two words, one for myself and one for an unfortunate young man in your employ, a Mr. Tunbridge. It appears that in drawing a check to my order he mistook the amount. He has had great trouble and is suffering from what I should call nervous prostration. Probably a little rest will bring him round all right, and if I may venture to speak in his behalf I would urge you to grant him a bit of a vacation, with perhaps a friendly word or two to start him on his recovery."

"What did he do?" said Langdale.

"He drew the check for five thousand."

Langdale stopped him with a gesture. The door between the two rooms

"Poor fellow!" he said. "Poor fellow! This is really my fault. I've noticed that Tunbridge was breaking down. He's done quite a number of queer things around the shop. I ought to have given him a vacation long ago. Now I'll stake him to a good one, so don't worry about him, and, as for his tale, it's mere moonshine. I told him to draw the check for \$5,000, and I signed it with great good will. I understood that you needed the money to pull Miss Branford's property out of the fire, and, heaven knows, I'd like to see you do it. And, besides," he continued, with the expansive freedom of a man who finds that he is lying exceptionally well, "besides, I owe you something for yourself. Yes, sir; I've never had the law laid down to me as you laid it down. It made me see that business in the right light, and what with that and all this talk in the papers and my wife's conscience (which she generously shares with me) I've decided to let the whole thing go. Those fellows have made me a decent proposition, and I'm going to accept it, and then I'm going to take my wife to Europe for six months and have a nice, quiet time. She's been begging me to go, and now I'm going to do it as a sort of belated Christmas present. Mind you, this is all confidential."

"But, my dear Langdale, all this money—"

"My dear Richard, it's a Christmas present to you and Amy, so say no more about it."

As to any expressions of gratitude which he may have had the grace to utter Macmillan retained only a vague memory. He was so completely unmanned that he thought best to go to his office and be quiet for a few minutes before transacting the business which was now so easy.

He had barely had time to address a few appropriate remarks to Amy's picture and indite one brief letter when a knock at the door announced Dr. Hayward. The distinguished physician had come to make a little explanation. Doubtless Mr. Macmillan had remarked some change in Mr. Langdale of late. Doubtless he knew of Mr. Langdale's prejudice against doctors. Mrs. Langdale, however, was a very sensible woman and had been reasonably anxious about her husband, so she had prevailed upon Dr. Hayward to depart from the usual routine of professional life and call upon a patient in noc.

"I'm afraid I gave Mr. Langdale a hint," said Macmillan. "I deeply regret it."

"Oh, that's all right," replied the doctor. "It makes no difference now. You've done more for him than I could. If he stops this confounded scandal and goes away to Europe he'll be all right. How you ever persuaded him to do it I don't know."

"I cannot understand it any more than you can," responded Macmillan.

A WESTERN WONDER.

There's a Hill at Bowie, Tex., that's as big as last year. This wonder is W. L. Hill, who from a weight of 190 pounds has grown to over 180. He says: "I suffered with a terrible cough, and doctors gave me up to die of Consumption. I was reduced to 90 pounds, when I began taking Dr. King's New Discovery for Consumption, Coughs and Colds. Now, after taking 12 bottles, I have more than doubled in weight and am completely cured." Only sure Cough and Cold cure. Guaranteed by W. A. Leslie and Burke Drug Co., Druggists. 50c and \$1.00. Trial bottle free.



THE DOOR BETWEEN THE TWO ROOMS WAS OPEN, AND HE DARED NOT CLOSE IT NOW.

to him. He had prepared a greeting consisting of the single word "doctor," which he knew would startle Hayward more than any other utterable sound. The door opened. Hayward entered. Langdale drew breath to speak, but what was that word? The word, the word! He knew the meaning as well as ever in his life, but not the word. His brain, but of them all he could catch only a phrase that Gridley had used, and it was that which he uttered: "Perfectly ridiculous."

"I beg your pardon," said Hayward. "Time-time was what Langdale needed-time in which to triumph over his enemy in his own brain, whose state must be concealed from this man at all costs."

was open, and he dared not close it now, and doubly he dared not have Hayward hear this story. Rich lunatics throw away their money. That is why they are locked up by anxious relatives. If Hayward should report this to the Dey street crowd they would withdraw even the proposition which they had made.

And with that proposition Langdale was now content. He had seen the handwriting on the wall. A man who can't say "doctor" when he tries is in no state for a long and bitter warfare of wits with clever enemies. His one idea now was to keep his condition from Hayward's knowledge. But his decision to accept the proposition of the Dey street people he desired Hayward to know and report, for the reason