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THEIR EVE OF NOEL

BY Virginia Leilia Wentz

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"MERCI, monsieur!" cried the concierge as he cheerfully took the silver coin. "A happy Noel, monsieur!"

Lansing Drake entered the little passage on the broad Avenue du Maine, shaking his shoulders, for his back ached. He had been working at the Louvre for five steady hours—till the very last fraction of light held out. Why not? What part had he in the festivities of these happy French people? Was not he one of the homeless ones, separated by the width of an ocean from his family?

In his studio apartment he threw himself on a divan with a pipe and a Journal Amusant. But the Journal was full of allusions to the season, and somehow he sighed. The eve of Noel—Christmas eve! It had been the very best time of the year over there in his dear southern home. What were they doing now? Getting the things ready for the trees, and tying up the wreaths of holly with red ribbon, and hanging a branch of mistle—oh, pshaw, what right had he to think of such things tonight?

A clatter of sabots across the flagstone court—the small daughter of the concierge fetching water from the common tap; from the Boulevard Montparnasse the toot of a St. Philippe du Roule train and then sil-

then the window was lifted. She threw out some crumbs to some cold looking sparrows. The last rays of the winter sun touched the fine, white parting that separated the burnished waves of hair.

If he only dared speak to her! She might misjudge him before he had a chance to show his intentions. But he would do it. He would seize the moment while this fit of madness lasted and speak to her. In saner mood his courage might be unequal to it. He hurried out of the room and stood, hat in hand, in the court close to her window.

"I am your neighbor across the way, mademoiselle," he said. "It is a month since I first saw you, and I've been wanting to know you so much, so much. I have no means of obtaining an introduction, and at the risk of your displeasure and your scorn I have ventured to speak to you tonight, to tell you how the little Christmas carol you sang just now somehow new straight to a fellow's heart and made him think of home and all the old familiar joys of the season."

He held out a card. His hand shook a trifle. But the girl did not notice. She was looking at him steadily, after the first start of surprise, the color coming and going in her cheeks. But in her eyes was no fear, no displeas-

I told you a little while ago it was your friendship I wanted. I was wrong."

She made no answer, but stretched out her little gloved hand to him, then drew it back quickly unnoticed, a singular smile on her lips.

"You've known me for a few hours only," he went on in a steady voice, "and I understand what you think of me for speaking like this. If I had known you for years and had waited and had the right to speak and keep your respect"—His steadiness did not carry him to the end of his sentence.

Then she laughed joyously, delicately.

"You are mistaken," she said. "I have known you for years. I used to chum with your sister Gertrude at school, and you used to come down from your university, and we'd take walks. And we went up to all the meets to see you run, and you used to win. You called her your 'kid sister' and me 'the other kid,' and you kissed me once. You've forgotten the little girl who stood silent in corners and looked at you with wide eyes. But I couldn't forget. I used to have Gertrude write me all about you till she married that missionary and went to live in China. And then I had your photograph—the one in your track suit."

"And now to think for a whole month now you've been living opposite to me, across the court, and I never knew it! Ah, Lansing, I've felt for years you would come to me, and when I saw you tonight my first impulse was to stretch out both hands and be so glad, so glad. At once, though, I saw you'd forgotten, so I determined not to tell you who I was. I wanted you to recall. When I spoke of your having a sister just named Gertrude, I made you recall, but I'm glad you didn't, because it's me, all me, as I am, that you love, and it's so good that way."

A little later through the frosty air the midnight bells of Noel rang out clear. Then at the last, very softly, from a darkened room across the court, Lansing Drake heard a verse of the old Christmas carol he had sung at his mother's knee:

The ande lay on the ground;
The stars shone bright—
He bowed his head in his hands for
The great gift that had come to him—
When Christ our Lord was born
On Christmas night.

Mother's Coronation Day.

That first Christmas was the mother's coronation day. Each recurring Christmas perpetuates the memory of her great glory. In public and in private celebration of it hers should be the central figure. Solemn gladness akin to the Creator's satisfaction in his "very good" work should fill her soul.

In Mr. Harrison S. Morris' beautiful poem, "Incarnation," we read how a laborer, laden with "a tray of tools, a timbered frame," walked in the sunshine through a city street.

Not knew that out of myriads one
Beside him saw a shadow run
That clasped the centuries in its shade.

But like a living spirit, there,
In even footfall at his side,
A shadow walked the pavement wide
With bended head and humble pride
And angled cross against the air.

It was as if the dateless sun
Proved the years, the far abode,
And, lo, upon the sordid road
The cross worn Nazarene trode,
Holding the journey never done.

Every mother who holds her baby in her arms repeats, unconsciously or consciously, the story of the incarnation. The blended shadow "clasps the centuries," past, present and to come, and eternity itself "in its shade."—Marion Harland in Independent.

The Navy's Christmas.

Christmas in the regular navy is observed as one of the big holidays of the year. Starting off with a grand dinner in the middle of the day, discipline is from then on relaxed, and the fun is fast and furious till sundown, and often the evening is enlivened by amateur theatricals. The vessel is gayly decorated with bunting, and at each mast-head are lashed if procurable.

Self Help.
Dashaway—Well, Uncle Jasper, how are you getting on with your Christmas dinner?
Uncle Jasper—Fust rate, sah. Colonel Winterblossom done giv me a present of a fine fat turkey, sah.

Dashaway—That's very strange. I just left the Colonel, and he didn't say anything about it.
Uncle Jasper—No, sah. He's got to count dem turkeys fust.

When Mistletoe Was Banned.
Because of its association with pagan rites the mistletoe was for centuries forbidden a place in English church decorations at Christmastide, and it was not even mentioned in old rhymes until the seventeenth century. In Hertick's time, although the holly and ivy had for two centuries previous been the subjects of various poetical effusions.

Circumstances Alter Cases.
Crawford—I thought you were perfectly delighted with the Christmas present your wife gave you.
Crabshaw—At that time I didn't know she'd had it charged.

How It Was Done.
She—The idea! And we weren't even standing under the mistletoe!
He—No. I did that sub rosa!—Brooklyn Eagle.

In Christmas Land.
Mistletoe just overhead—
Touch one spray above!
Holly berries just as red
As the lips of Love.
Christmas skies of blue and gray,
Heaven in bright view,
And the sweetest gift today
Just the lips of you!

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IF HE ONLY DARED SPEAK TO HER!

lence. Drake was picking up his paper again when—

The snow lay on the ground;

Ah, it was the quaint old English carol, with its liquid, sweet melody, which he'd learned at his mother's knee, and it was the American girl across the court who was singing it:

When Christ our Lord was born
On Christmas night.

No wonder the tears came to his eyes. That particular carol and that particular girl made up a combination to which he was a bit sensitive. If the truth had been dragged from him. Just that very morning he had written home:

"There's a little American girl opposite. I don't even know her name, but the mere sight of her keeps me straight. She's all alone, and she's evidently studying music. As for her singing, she has the most beautiful voice the good God ever saved from a lost violin, a voice to make you pray, little mother, to turn your laughter to tears, to turn your tears to laughter."

From the day when he had first seen her, watering her geraniums on the sill, the window across the court yonder had become a sort of shrine. And at each new glimpse of her an unformed prayer of thanks surged up within him that a creature so lovely had been sent by heaven to keep the word "gentleman" staleness, to make it a thing to strive for and to take a cleanly comfort in.

She was a stranger too. It was a bond between them. Tonight perhaps she was suffering like him from homesickness and loneliness. How soon he could make her forget all that! They could have a revelation of their own and a jolly little supper, laughing together in sheer happiness of a mutual understanding of the Christmas spirit abroad. Unchaperoned? What would they need of a chaperon, they two—two toilers for the sake of art, comrades in arms made equal in rank by the blessed chance of being both strangers in this wonderful old Paris?

There was a moving gleam of something behind the geraniums yonder. The cheesecloth curtains stirred, and

ure, rather the expectancy of an explorer who, venturing far, finds the present good, though that to come be unknown.

Presently they went out and hailed a fiacre.

"Where shall it be?" asked Drake. "Laure's? Voisin's? Peter's? No, I have it. Marguery's."

So they drove to Marguery's, and Drake ordered a bouillabaisse (to be quite reasonable) and a langouste mayonnaise and a bird and some sweets.

They had a very jolly little supper indeed, and no end of amusement watching the merry looking French people at the tables, all devouring bouillabaisse and other nice things.

"And to think," cried the girl as the clock struck 11, shivering with pretended alarm, "that I'm sitting here at this hour, unchaperoned, in a French restaurant—with a man who hasn't even been conventionally introduced!"

"Don't!" cried Drake abruptly. "Come! We must be going home. It is a bit late."

She was silent while they left Marguery's and hailed a fiacre. Then she broke out in a queer little voice that was low and tremulous:

"I think you must have a sister. You take such good care of a girl."

The fiacre rolled into the glare of an overhead arc light, and he saw her looking at him with a half mysterious, half divine gratitude.

"Please don't do that," he answered in a husky voice. Something inside him was pounding furiously. Something at his temples beat and throbbed.

"Don't do what?"
"Look like that!"
She not only looked like that, but more so.
"Young man, young man," laughed she, with mock warning, "I fear you are wishful of turning a girl's head."
"The Lord be good to me!" he broke out, his pent-up passion of dreams rushing to his lips now that the barrier fell. "Don't you see it's because I—well, I'd hoped to pass the evening without telling you that I loved you—that's why I was hurrying you home."