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The People's Press.

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For Twenty Years.

A Christmas Story.

It don't seem much of a story to tell, though it was a tough one to live. You see, it was more than twenty years ago that my twin brother and I sold out our homestead in New York, and went to seek our fortune. All the rest of the family were dead, and we two were the more attached to each other for that.

Well, we tried mining, and we tried trading, and we tried everything we could think of, but nothing seemed to prosper with us; we only grew poorer and poorer.

Finally, we thought of the idea of separating, so as to work two fields at once, before the loss of our capital was gone. There was great talk just then of some new gold region, and we agreed that one of us should go there and try his luck, while the other stayed in San Francisco and carry on a little business we had started there.

Of course, everything was partnership. I never thought of an interest separate from his, and he, I knew, felt the same.

Well, the question arose which of us should go. It wasn't very tempting, the mining life, and neither of us was anxious for it, and so we drew lots to see who should go.

The lot fell to me. There was another reason why I didn't want to go, besides the uncomfortable life, but I wouldn't tell Bob; for I wouldn't drive him off to the mines, and I knew his generous heart so well, that I was sure he would insist on going, if he were aware of all.

But—well, the truth is, in a word, I was in love, and couldn't bear to leave my darling Susie to fight the world alone—she was a music teacher, poor thing!—for other fellows to fall in love with!

However, I submitted, of course, to the lot, and made my preparations to go. It was a sad heart that I bore around to Susie's rooms that night, and I couldn't bear to tell her; but, bless you! she sooner saw my face than she knew something was coming, and she braced herself up to meet it, and she asked me a question—After we had spoken of the weather, and the book I had brought her the day before, at last she said, quietly:

"Well, Ralph, what is it? I know you have had news for me." "It's bad for me, Susie, and I'm afraid it will be bad for you; though you know—"

"I couldn't go on, and she spoke again, brave as she always was: "Ralph, you know I'm used to misfortunes. Tell me at once." "So I told her, and she bore it nobly—as I know she would—though I was the only friend she had in San Francisco, except her pupils."

But I had thought of another plan to make my going a little easier. That was, to make her my wife before I left, so as to leave her in the care of Bob, and relieve her from the hard life she was living.

After some little persuasion, she consented to it. So, a day or two afterward, we three—I had told Bob—went into a quiet church, and Susie was given to me to cherish and protect till death.

Braze little woman! how trustfully she gave me her heart, and how basely I failed her! How ready I was to believe— "But let me go back, I took her to our cozy boarding place, which was indeed a home to us, installed her as his mistress, made every provision that love could suggest for her comfort, enjoyed the bliss of a few hours' honey-moon, and then left her."

I needn't speak of that. It was hard, I tell you. Ah, well! For an old man now—older by sorrow than by years; but I shall never forget the fresh, dainty look of my darling, as I left her on the steps that bitter day—a bride in the morning, a widow at night. And I never did forget it through all the black years, though it seemed as though the very memory of it would drive me mad.

Well, I went to the mines, and I tried, foolishly, eagerly, for my heart was longing to get back to her. But I could not succeed. Mails were not then established, so I did not hear from my dear ones; but all the harder I toiled, for never a thought of doubt entered my mind— I was only too glad to have my dear brother to care for her, and save her from all rough contact with the world.

I grew morbid and bitter, and at last I wrote to an acquaintance in San Francisco, asking for tidings of my brother and wife.

The friend was not so neglectful as the wife and brother.

Soon—too soon—I got a reply. I can see it now, in letters of fire, in the following strain: "MY DEAR BROTHER:—I have made inquiries concerning your wife and brother, as requested. But the only information I can gain, is that they have disappeared from hence a few months ago, telling me you were where they were going, but evidently having plenty of money."

What more the letter contained I never knew; that much of it was burned into my brain, and at that point I lost myself. They do say I was a saving maniac. Perhaps so; I do not really know.

I only know I found myself an old man, blind before my time, like a tree struck by lightning.

Yet, I could not feel angry. How could I blame him? Was I not mad to leave him, with his loving heart, to care for a tender young beauty like my Susie? How could I help loving her? Wasn't she all that was lovely? He was not to blame, poor fellow.

And she? Did she not love me, and was he not my twin brother? What so strange that, seeing his love, she should grow to return it? What should I do? Should I search them out and blast their lives forever? Should I come with my ignoble revenge and tear her from his arms? Would she love me for it? Should I get back my wife and brother?

Oh, no! I had been gone long enough to give her a divorce—she had undoubtedly got it, and was even now his wife. His wife! Oh, God, and I could live!

Weeks, months, years, dragged on. I scarcely know they passed. Mechanically, I worked on. Fortune, no longer sought, showered gold on me. I feared naught for it, but instinct prevented me from throwing it away. Gambling was utterly repugnant to me. No form of dissipation infested me. I was an old, old man at thirty. I only worked and thought, and lived over the old days—my one brief day of perfect joy.

I never cursed the. The hurt, was too deep and too sharp for curses. From the depths of my torn heart I picked them.

Well, twenty years rolled on, and I had got to be forty-five years old, feeling and looking more like sixty-five, bent and stiff and gray-haired.

One pleasant Christmas day, in my wanderings, I came on a traveling party of miners, bound to the gold regions. I joined them. Frontier fashion, and was soon seated at their fire, exchanging news of the Indians and from the States. I chanced to mention my name.

"We've got a namesake of yours in camp," said one fellow. "Have you?" I said carelessly. "It isn't a common name."

"No; and that's why it's odd," said he. "Besides, you somehow remind me of him, though you're much older than he. By-the-way, what he comes?"

I turned—something, I knew not what, shot through my mind, and knew my brother. My heart gave one great bound. I forgot my wrongs. I saw only my dear other self, the companion of my boy-hood. I sprang forward. "Robert! dear old boy! is it you?"

"He looked at me eagerly—incredulously. 'Ralph! it can't be you!'" "It is!" I cried, and—well, I don't know as I'm ashamed of it—I embraced him like a schoolgirl, and wept.

And so did he, poor fellow, though he could hardly believe the wrecked old man was his brother.

But what struck me, even then, as strange, he did not shrink from me, nor act as though he had injured me.

"What I do say, Ralph. Oh, there has been some damnable mistake! Hear my story. After you left us, I struggled on with the business, though not succeeding very well. Susie dropped at first, but soon grew cheerful, and began to plan for your return."

His words brought the dear little creature so plainly before my eyes, that I sunk to the ground and covered my face.

"As weeks and months and years passed on," he went on, slowly, "her cheeks grew thin and pale, and a hungry look came into her eyes—I saw she was pining, and wrote letter after letter to you, but no word would come. There came to me in a simple envelope, directed to both of us, a draft of five thousand dollars, with not a word to tell how or from whom it came. Of course we knew it was from you, but whether gift or legacy, who could tell?"

"We instituted new inquiries. Nothing that love could suggest was left undone. At last we were forced to conclude that you were dead.—By my advice the money was invested in a farm some distance from San Francisco, and Susie went to live on it, while I started out on a sort of vagabond, wandering life, in hopes at last to find your grave—for we never believed you could be alive these long years, and never let us hear from you. That life I have lived for fifteen years, returning once in three or four years to see to the comfort of Susie; and now I find you—"

"You find me," I interrupted, "a wreck—a miserable wreck, who has blasted three lives by his criminal weakness, his childish credulity in believing evil, and who will soon rid the earth of his presence," and I started to go, for verily despair had seized upon me.

"That should have believed that horror for so many years, and find it all a stupid mistake, that I should have thrown away my life, the blessed love of my true wife, the warm affection of my brother, for an idle scandal! It was too much to endure."

Robert laid a detaining hand on my arm. "But Susie, Ralph! what shall I say to the loving little woman who has suffered so much for you?"

"Let her still believe me dead," I said, gloomily. "Nay, brother; let me rather restore you to her. Ralph, go home, and let us be so happy together as to partly make up for these years of mistakes and error and grief."

Well, he persuaded me, and soon I was eager enough, myself. Now the gold I had despised was valuable, as it could add to Susie's comfort. I gathered it up, and we started for home.

Home! I had not spoken the word in fifteen years. As we went, Robert tried to prepare me for a change in Susie.

"She has had a life of sorrow as well as you, Ralph, and you must remember she isn't the girl of eighteen you left. She is nearly forty years old."

"As I drew near, I seemed to grow young again, and I wanted to rush through without stopping a moment. But Robert refused, and he wanted to get me into civilized clothes, and under the hands of a barber. He wouldn't take such a wild man of the woods home to the little, waiting wife."

So we stopped a few hours in San Francisco. I had my long white hair and beard trimmed, and my dress arranged to suit Robert, and hastened on toward home.

"As we approached the blessed spot where my darling lived, I could scarcely breathe, and I dreaded to frighten her to death. In sight of the house, I sent Robert ahead to tell her, and basely hid in the shrubbery, where I could look into the window."

There she was! the same dainty figure—the same lovely face; but dressed, oh, my God! in widow's weeds, and her bonny brown hair thickly sprinkled with silver.

I saw her rapid, eager conversation. I saw the color come quickly to her face, then leave it as pale as death. I saw her turn to the door, and fly. And I sprang to meet her and—

Well, I can't tell about that.

On hearing her story, I found that Robert had left out the tale of his own griefs. That he had warmly loved a gentle girl, but never let her know it; had sacrificed his own happiness to spend his life seeking me, and caring for my wife; that she had married another, and Robert was forced to see her the very unhappy wife of a poor, miserable wretch.

A NORSE CHRISTMAS.

BY M. E. WINSLOW.

Far up in the country where the north wind holds carnival nearly all the year, where the snow (water-sprite) sits on the rocks and walls out his doubts about his salvation; where the stroak-like laments the icy fetters which bind up the streams and thus interfere with the music lessons he is good-naturedly ready to give to mortals; where Garm, the giant, sobs and sighs over the husband turned to stone on Christmas eve, which stupid mortals think is the wind drawing through the fir tree and the roaring and fretting of the sea, and where the winter sun only peeps out for an hour or two every day, just to see how the world is getting along without him—stood the maiden stream looking earnestly toward the South. A dreary prospect lay before her. In the far distance the trackless forests of spruce and fir, and between snow, snow, nothing but snow—pale, fair, glittering and unbroken—a great icy barrier between her home and the outer world, a fair, mocking mask that hid all the darkness beneath it, and held every beautiful thing in its grasp of death, or at least so it seemed to the untortured young heart which had not yet learned experimentally the faith that sees warm mother-love underneath the embrace of the cold snow.

The maiden's could not but be rosy, her eyes could not but be blue, and the few locks which strayed from under her close coilure could not be other than the pale, flaxen gold, saved to the crest; but there was a shadow on the fair brow, a wistful, far-off look in the blue eyes, and something like tears had frozen into bright crystals on the long eye-lashes, unpaired to follow the circling flight of the birds overhead.

"Not yet," she thought, "not yet. He promised to spend the Christmas in his home, but he has not come yet. Who knows but the treacherous streams at the south have given way, and the *fosse-grins* (water-fall sprites) have drawn him into their ice-cold caverns? Who knows but his horse has taken fright and dashed his slender sledge to pieces? Who knows but that he lies buried beneath the treacherous snow? Oh, little birches, free to go whither you will, lead I that the power to understand your language which the bonder of King Olaf had, I would send ye out to seek for my Olaf, and come back and tell me where he is, and wherefore he cometh not; I would make you the bearers of many a message of greeting, and I would have you tell Olaf to listen to his Alenna's cottage-home. You would be pitiful and gentle, birches; for are there not among you the swallows who perched upon the Cross and cried sorrowfully: 'Console, console, console Him, and the turtle dove who said: 'Karric, Karric, Karric' (Lord) when no eye-pitied and no man adored, but perhaps you would not find him; who knows; who knows?' And as though she had somehow learned the bonder's secret, the birds fluttered down close to the maiden's cheek, and a voice seemed to whisper in her heart: 'God knows, He knew where the manger was at Bethlehem; He guided thither the feet of the Eastern sage; He led the cohorts of announcing angels; trust Him with all your interests on Christmas Day!'"

"Run! Run!" called several voices from the little redhouse with its white window frames, "come and help, the sun is setting, and there's much to do."

It was a poor, bare little home into which the maiden entered. No superfluities of life fell to the lot of the Norwegian bonders (peasants). Round the stove stood heavy benches with curiously carved backs, against one wall several bolts were fixed like the burth of a ship, and the space between was filled by a chest which held the holiday wardrobe of the family; opposite stood an immense dresser, and shelves round the room held cheeses, cakes of *slad* bread (the ordinary dark bread, baked on a griddle once a year), and strips of rein-deer-meat. At the broad open oven door stood the mother in her short stiff gown, slipping in the white laces of various fantastic shapes, tasted only on the one great Yale festival. Takla, the next sister, was carefully measuring flour for the *skoper* (zwickbrot), while little Transsachs stood at the chopping-board preparing the coiffish which, with Vitor Grot, (white grand) made of rice, meal, milk, sugar and cinnamon, constituted the canonical Christmas dinner. Alenna's sentiment did not interfere with her householdery, and soon her bare arms were plunged into flour many shades darker than themselves, while her hard wooden shoes whirled her short, red petticoat about the kitchen, and her fresh young voice broke forth at intervals in snatches of Scandinavian hymns and chants.

Suddenly the door burst open, and in rushed a group of three merry boys, shaking the snow from their shoes, and depositing in a big pile on the floor great piles of corn, wheat and barley, which had been left unthreshed for this very purpose.

"I thought Loki and his trolls would have had me," said Galmur, "and so they would, but that the birds knew what I was about and flapped and fluttered so with their wings, and shrieked and cawed so that the daimons were frightened and retreated to their caves. If they had come on I should not have had much help from Hilmer here, he was looking off at the sunset and dreaming away as usual."

"I thought I saw," said Hilmer, and then blushed and passed.

"Saw what, my son?" said the pale, sickly father looking up from his book in the corner.

"I thought," said Hilmer, thus encouraged, "that I saw the end of the rainbow bridge, and I wondered if Asgard really did lie over beyond the sunset, and if we could ever cross should our shoes be clear enough as the old Saga tells us. And then I thought how sad it was that they should have killed Balder the beautiful, and that everything should grow ugly and poor-like,—like this house," said the boy, with sobs in his voice.

"Come here, my post-boy," said his father.—"Balder the beautiful was but the reflection sent long before-hand into the minds of the old Northernmen, of the glorious Lord Jesus, whose birthday we celebrate at Yule. True, he was crucified and slain by evil devices, but he rose again to build his rainbow bridge over which our purified feet may indeed some day walk to Asgard, which lies father and yet nearer than the setting sun; and you know He is born again every Christmas morning in the hearts of those

who buffet him a nest of loving thoughts and kindly desires. When the Christmas morn rises on your life, Hilmer, nothing will seem ugly or poor on which it shines; and Galmur, all the evil trolls, the giants, the fairies with their clay-colored faces, birds, bills, owls, eyes, misshapen figures, even the old's (house-spirits) will always flee away from those who, by deeds of kindness and mercy, are following in the footsteps of the gentle Conqueror."

"It's quite dark," shouted Grot from the door where he had been taking an observation; "I can't see the stars quite clearly, it must be four o'clock, and the birds have all gone to bed long ago. As time we were at work?"

Soon all the village, wrapped up in woollens and furs, was out in the still frosty air. Big and little, old men and maidens, little children carrying sheaves of wheat, sheaves of corn, ladders, ropes and lights. The boy-students to the roofs of barns, the gables of houses, and finally to the church spire itself, and everywhere they bound the sheaves of the harvest home kept to celebrate Christmas. The girls lapped up the bundles, the strings and the nails, and held up the lights, singing Christmas-while quaint old carols of the peace and good will that came to earth with the Christmas-tide.

When all was finished, they went home and followed the example of the birds by going to bed, and if thoughts of Olaf and his unaccountable absence did keep Alenna awake far into the night, perhaps to her as so many other watchers, came in consequence the soothing echoes of the Bethlehem Christmas hymn.—"Get up, shouted a little voice in the darkness, get up, I'm sure I heard the door open, and sure enough, there lay on the floor some trifling Christmas gifts for the little one of the flock.—And so the sun went on for hours, every now and then a hand and arm would be thrust thro' the open door, a mysterious parcel dropped with a label on it, which, being deciphered by the light of the great Yule-log kindled grate, proved it to be a Christmas gift for some member of the family, from an unknown donor, who escaped at once into the outer darkness and the snow. Very simple were the gifts: carved toys made of native pine and fir, knitted woolen stockings and mittens, whips, birch-rod canes, bird cages, nets, a few books, and the like, but all were warm with the love which sent them; and the fun was the guessing from whom they came—an amusement finally stopped by the mother's call to prepare for church. It may be that Alenna's heart was not keeping a very 'Merry Christmas,' as she walked towards the church in the chill morning twilight, and that a Lutein music mingled with the gladness of her Christmas hymns. For, among the little gifts marked in her name that morning, that one was not, which she would have recognized under any assumed handwriting, and which would have been sure to be the thing of all others to meet her present need and taste. But it is always darkest just before dawn, and joy cometh with the morning." The sunshine was close at hand, the stars were fading, a faint purple streak appeared in the East, as sleigh-bells tinkled outside of the church, and Olaf knelt at the Christmas Festival by the side of his betrothed.

The long service was over, the congregation which comprised almost every living soul in the village, began to pour out of the church door, the holiday attire contrasting gaily with the pure snow; the clock in the steeple struck ten, and then it was seen that every roof, every pole, every spire, was alive with a fluttering population busily picking the wheat, barley and corn from their encircling sheaves.

"Some beings are happy to-day, if there are cares and sorrows on the earth," said the pale invalid father, who felt that perhaps he had made his last earthly pilgrimage when he went to church that morning. "The birds who are such a trouble to us in the harvest time, seem like the cares of this life, which often choke up our prospects; but let them alone and our Heavenly Father will take care of them, for not a sparrow falls to the ground without his notice."

"No," said Olaf, "they seem like the black trolls, where Loki sends to fight against all that Balder is striving to build up; but if we keep straight forward in the path of duty, doing the work God has set us, not turning aside from fear and weariness, nor even to please those we love best, the Christmas magic will change them into white-robed angels sent clear against the darkest midnight sky."

Alenna said nothing, but she thought. The birds seemed like prosaic, every-day duties, but God sometimes sends them with messages of hope and comfort to those who trust in Him.—And so they all talked of the birds. One told of the glacier-birds supposed to be the quietest spirit of the selfish men and women buried below. Another spoke of "Gertrude's bird," turned into a woodpecker as punishment for refusing to give her largest and lightest cake to our Lord; and still another told of the *git* who stole the scissors belonging to the Virgin Mary. But Olaf preferred more sensible conversation, and he told of his city life, with its cares and responsibilities, its ministry to the suffering in which the maiden at his side was soon to share, till Alenna felt as though the chimera, still peeping from the church, were wedding-bells, and that Christmas morning was shedding its benediction on her future life; and Hilmer the poet said: "Consist Olaf, I think the birds are most like the poor and sick, the starving and prisoners whom you visit, and of whom our Saviour said: 'Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these, my brethren, ye did it unto Me.'"

And then there was a sudden flash of light, and the great red sun appeared above the eastern mountains, while the snow blushed crimson, and the house-roofs were all tipped with gold, and all at once the fluttering ceased among the wheat and corn, and from thousands of little bird-chorus poured for a glorious Christmas carol of praise. "The angels themselves did not sing more beautiful than that," said Hilmer, while all the glad children clapped their hands and shouted, and the maidens broke out into the song so recently sang in the church: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will towards men."

The two parts of that song cannot be separated, said the old father; "we have no right to sing the one, or we shall forfeit the true Christmas spirit, if we have done something, such as our own measure, to show our good will towards the creature God had made. Then, indeed, though our cottage may be plain and homely,

Hilmer, though our hopes may be long deferred, Alenna, though our Christmas-fare be only very bread and codfish, we shall gladly obey the mandate: "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord."

The Great West in Council.
INDIANAPOLIS, Dec. 15.—The Democratic State Central Committee met pursuant to the request of the Democratic electors to consider the political situation. A number of prominent politicians, including Gov. Hendricks and State officers, are present in addition to representatives from each Congressional district.

Ex-Congressman Judson, who has been to Louisiana, being called upon, gave his opinion that the elections in that State had been quiet and peaceable, as in Indiana, and Tilden had carried the State overwhelmingly. He hoped the Democracy would have pluck enough to stand up for their rights and meet the crisis now. He was satisfied that they shall have war.

Gov. Hendricks was called on for his views, but the chairman reminded the meeting of the impropriety of one so personally interested speaking at this time.

Reports from all congressional districts were made by representatives present, stating that Democrats of the districts were covered, that Tilden had been legally elected, and Semmes his inauguration.

A resolution was adopted calling a convention of the people, regardless of past political opinions, at each county seat on December 25th, to select and instruct delegates to assemble in State Convention at Indianapolis on January 8th to consider public affairs, and take such action as will secure the full execution of the Constitution and laws. A committee is being appointed to prepare an address to the people.

A wealthy man died suddenly without leaving any will. The widow desirous of securing the whole of the property, concealed her husband's death, and persuaded a poor shoemaker to take his place. Accordingly he was closely muffled in bed, as if very sick, and a lawyer was called in to write the will. The shoemaker, in feigned illness, bequeathed half of all the property to the widow. "What shall be done with the remainder?" asked the lawyer. "The remainder," replied he, "I bequeath to the poor little shoemaker across the street, who has been a good neighbor and a deserving man."

Official Vote for Governor.

COUNTY	Catholic	Methodist	Other	Total
Adair	1,015	1,270	1,530	1,185
Alexander	589	815	820	2,224
Allegany	181	329	513	823
Ashe	1,018	1,391	1,288	1,392
Barren	761	726	1,063	2,550
Benton	1,452	1,231	1,558	2,541
Bertie	1,514	949	1,125	1,693
Bland	1,448	1,207	1,395	1,390
Branswick	798	2,111	1,090	1,090
Buena Vista	1,114	1,358	1,363	1,185
Caldwell	1,018	1,391	1,288	1,392
Calhoun	811	1,161	1,025	992
Caldwell	332	829	1,172	289
Camden	554	868	678	552
Carroll	728	1,062	1,147	703
Cass	1,456	1,415	1,467	1,628
Cherokee	1,018	1,391	1,288	2,418
Chatham	1,018	1,391	1,288	1,392
Cherokee	1,018	1,391	1,288	1,392
Clay	312	570	620	805
Clay	142	320	312	1,104
Clemmons	547	1,009	1,155	926
Colleton	679	1,024	1,432	757
Crawford	1,285	1,320	1,515	2,402
Cumberland	1,018	1,391	1,288	2,132
Currituck	349	749	594	391
Dartmouth	1,316	1,281	1,714	1,838
Davie	622	828	1,011	1,758
De Witt	1,018	1,391	1,288	1,244
Dare	5,622	1,474	1,651	3,549
Dorchester	1,114	1,363	1,454	1,540
Franklin	1,569	1,428	1,562	1,916
Gaston	688	928	1,233	814
Gates	514	727	949	499
Gravette	2,654	1,574	2,134	2,411
Greene	917	785	1,373	1,373
Guilford	1,831	1,849	2,150	1,500
Greatham	564	1,067	1,081	2,398
Halifax	693	795	1,050	749
Henderson	429	749	969	439
Hertford	625	832	797	824
Hertford	855	874	1,058	1,693
Hills	910	810	925	665
Jennett	991	1,728	2,356	1,239
Irwin	169	564	628	288
Johnston	1,274	1,481	2,056	1,751
Johnson	625	832	797	824
Leitch	1,274	911	1,115	1,494
Lenoir	900	959	1,125	643
Lincoln	189	634	747	255
Macon	611	634	856	812
Martin	1,018	1,391	1,185	1,149
McDowell	618	791	825	542
Mecklenburg	2,321	2,511	3,425	2,548
Mitcheal	628	829	697	725
Montgomery	638			