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Selected Story.

May Trevor's Christmas Gift.

BY COUSIN EMMA.

The crimson curtains in Uncle John's handsome drawing-rooms were closely drawn, shutting out the swift snow-flakes that, as night closed in, fell from the heavy clouds. The ruddy light of an old-fashioned wood fire sparkled and danced on the walls, and on the laughing faces that were grouped around it—for Uncle John, above all things in the wide world, loved to have young people around him; and no music was so sweet to him as the music of little, light-hearted voices. Now, as the Christmas holidays were drawing near, he had filled his spacious mansion with youthful guests, and from his great easy-chair, at the corner of the hearth, watched their gay and happy faces, and fancied himself once more young.

Dear Uncle John was an old bachelor—that was too bad, the girls thought, he was so good, and in his youth must have been so handsome. Now, the frosts of near sixty winters had thinned and silvered the soft hair on his temples, but they had not dimmed the cherry light of his bright blue eyes, or added a furrow to his broad, open brow.

Uncle John had one little niece, May Trevor, the orphan child of his only sister. Years back—how well he remembered it—she was the pet and plaything of his boyhood, every dimple of her face cheek, every smile of her ruby lips, every motion of her fairy fingers, could bring to his memory as distinctly as if it were only yesterday, when he sat with his arm around her, showing her the pictures in the great books of his father's library.

Ida Vaughan was scarce more than a child when she was married, against the wishes of her father, a poor young man, and left her luxurious home for an attic chamber in a by-street of the same city. John, her elder and only brother, was not near to plead with old Mr. Vaughan for her forgiveness; he was traveling in Europe; but when the news came to him, over the waters, he hastened home, and reached it just in season to receive the blessing of his broken-hearted father.

One short year had passed away since her marriage, and it was on a dark and stormy Christmas Eve, that Uncle John, as he was entering his house, had a note thrust into his hand, bearing the few, almost illegible words—

"John, dear brother for the love of Heaven, come to Ida!"

With hasty, uneven steps, he followed the ragged boy, who offered to be his guide, until he found himself in the presence of the dying and the dead.

Ida, her bright eyes fixed on the cold statue-like figure of her young husband, lying on the bed by her side, was fast fading away to join him in the spirit land. Slowly she turned, as John entered the room, and held out her thin, white hands towards him. What a meeting after a separation of three long years! She drew his head close down to hers, and touched her white lips to his.

"Dear brother," she said in a whisper, "you did not know how much I suffered, but I have been so very happy too; while my husband lived, I cared not for cold or hunger, but I killed him to see me suffer. My darling Percy! he has gone home, and he bids me follow him. You will let us both sleep in the same grave? And, dear John, I want to give you all I have to give, my baby, my little May! She has brown eyes, like mine, and soft, light, curling hair; she is a dear baby, and you'll love her for my sake, dear John, won't you? And teach her to love her father's memory and mine? Oh, it is death—I cannot see you! John—put baby in my arms—good-by, Percy! Husband! I love you! And the low voice ceased forever."

And so it was, that Uncle John took the baby home and gave her into the care of a kind, motherly woman, who nursed her mother, and always lived in the family. Then he went abroad again, and for fifteen years wandered in foreign lands. There were no ties

to bind him to his home, no one but the little May, who, as soon as her hands could fashion the letters that went to make up the words "Dear Uncle John," never failed to write them to him. At length the wanderer tired of his dreary life. Age was creeping over him; five-and-fifty years wasted; for he could look upon them in no other light. Uncle John's life had not been without its romance. When Ida was a mere child, and he a young man, he had loved a fair young maiden. The day was appointed for the wedding; the morning sun shone on Mary Lile, dressed in her wedding robes, but cold as the marble that soon marked the spot where they laid her away to sleep.

And so Uncle John felt the clouds gather around his heart for the first time, and as they were dispersing, Ida's death gathered them again. But now he determined to return once more to his native land, and make May Trevor the sunshine of his weary heart.

May Trevor stood in the waning light of an October evening, by the cozy little fire in the drawing-room, when her uncle first saw her, and so like was she to her mother—his lost sister—that he could not speak for some minutes, but sank into a chair near her, and buried his face in his hands. Then May came up to him shyly and knelt down, and laid her sunny head upon his arm, gently taking his hand.

"Dear uncle," she said, and her voice was very much like the one the grave had silenced; "dear uncle, I love you; I am glad you have come home; won't you stay now?"

And then Uncle John opened wide his arms and took the tiny figure into them, and held her close to his great, kind heart, and wept over her, and blessed her.

From that night May Trevor's place was in the warmest nook of Uncle John's warm heart. She was his constant companion; he read with her, he talked with her, he taught her. He purchased a beautiful saddle horse for her own use; they drove together out into the country; he petted and caressed her until the old nurse shook her head, and declared Miss May was spoiled.

Indeed she seemed in a fair way for it, for Uncle John was the only person to whose words she would give the slightest heed, or from whom she would brook the least control.

May Trevor was just eighteen, as the Christmas holidays, with which our story opens, approached. All the girls at Uncle John's said she was pretty and charming. Miss Agatha Channing, the oldest of the party, was the only one who thought her at all capable of improvement. But then Agatha was so old—almost six-and-twenty!

Wallace Clifton—one of Uncle John's most highly esteemed guests, the only son of his earliest and dearest friend, a tall, grave man. Just returned from Europe, looked at May Trevor, and listened to her light, musical voice, and thought that she had a little more sedate, and quiet, she would have been very charming; but he never could endure so frivolous a young lady. And May, as it divining his thoughts, was wilder than ever, and laughed, and danced, and sang, and though a serious thought never entered her mind.

"How can I crave your pardon, my gentle reader, for this long digression? Did I leave you sitting, or standing, in Uncle John's drawing-room, while the curtains were drawn, and the gay fire-light flickered on the wall?"

Miss Agatha Channing, when the lights were brought in, proposed that Mr. Clifton should read aloud to them the new poem, brought in the morning, and lying with uncut leaves upon the table; and Mr. Clifton, urged by all, even by May, consented.

"Now," he thought to himself, "I will see if Miss Trevor can appreciate poetry—if she has any heart at all;" and he commenced reading in a low tone that well accorded with the spirit of the poem.

May Trevor sat at Uncle John's feet, her bright young head leaning against the arm of his chair, and her eyes fixed full on the reader's face. At length she shook the curls down over her cheeks, so that they were like a veil; and Uncle John felt the hand that lay in his tremble.

"On the pallet before her was stretched the form of an old man, Long, and thin, and grey, were the locks that shaded his temples. But, as he lay in the morning light, his face for a moment Seemed to assume once more the forms of his earlier manhood; So are wont to be changed the forms of those who are dying."

Mr. Clifton's voice sank while he read these and the following lines that terminate the beautiful poem "Evangeline."

Miss Agatha raised her handkerchief to her face, and every eye in the room

glistened; but May Trevor sprang quickly from her seat, and in a moment her light voice was heard singing gaily on the stairs.

How Miss Agatha wondered at "poor, dear May's frivolity!" How she wished that she had a little sensibility! And how Mr. Clifton wished she would keep her remarks to herself! And while they were busy with her, poor little May, with her head buried in the pillows, was sobbing her heart out, for the grief and disappointment of Evangeline. Why should she see these persons in the drawing-room see her weep—she who knew nothing about her, only that she was Uncle John's pet and heiress? And why should Uncle John, who hated to see her in tears, be worried and troubled by them? "Nothing but a story, either," May said to herself, wiping her eyes; "I won't be so foolish!" and she tripped down stairs and into the parlor, looking as bright and gay as though she had never shed a tear in her life.

Mr. Wallace Clifton, from his point of observation in a distant corner, half ashamed of himself for doing it, watched every motion of her graceful, girlish figure, and found himself saying—

"Little darling thing! if she had only more heart!"

"We must do something about the Christmas tree, today, Uncle John," said May, the next morning.

"Yes, darling, I am going to see all about it, and you are not to know anything, or do anything, until you see it lighted Christmas Eve. But here is something for your Christmas gifts," and he placed in her hand a roll of bills.

"Ah, how rich Uncle John has made me! See Mr. Clifton, see, Agatha; one hundred and fifty dollars for Christmas gifts! Isn't he good?" and she slipped away to put on her walking dress, and in a few minutes was ready to join the party who were going with her to purchase Christmas gifts.

CHAPTER II.

It was a clear, cold morning, when an amicable struggle, through many obstacles, down into the poor, miserable garret, in an out-of-the-way street, far away from the great thoroughfares, and upon the rocky face of a sleeping boy, who aroused himself and sprang from his miserable bed to the window.

Jack Frost had been very busy all the long winter night; such pretty pictures as he had painted all over the glass; turrets and spires and pine trees and little old men with big heads, and little old women with sunshades and big poke bonnets. And the boy put his warm red lips up, and breathed on the pictures till they faded quite away; then he got down and sailed his shoe in a basin of water, after he had broken the ice in it. The shoe was among the icebergs up in the Polar Sea. Happy childhood! that can draw beauty and pleasure from what brings only pain to the wiser ones.

Harry Littleton's gay laughter ere long aroused a young girl, who turned wearily on her pillow and opened her eyes. A moan of pain from her parched lips brought the boy in a moment to her side, and awoke also another and younger girl, who had slept all night in her arms.

"Dear Emma, are you sick?" both children asked. "What is the matter?"

"I've a very bad headache. O, Grace, I am afraid I am going to be very ill, my lips are so parched and dry," and she laid back her head upon the pillow and moaned.

In a moment Grace was bathing her head with ice water; and Harry hastened to build the fire.

"We've only one more hod of coal, Emma," he said, "and it's very cold—what shall we do when this is gone?"

"God will provide. He has never let us yet," sighed Emma, pressing her hot, thin hand upon her white brow, and closing her meek brown eyes.

"I'm hungry, whispered Harry, when the bell clock from a church near by struck eleven, and no sign of breakfast appeared; "can't Grace get my breakfast?"

Again Emma sighed.

"There's not a crust of bread in the closet, dear sister," said Grace, coming and laying her head close down to Emma's—"not a single crust. What shall we do?"

"Harry, you must go and beg," said Emma, in a tone of despair. "I cannot work, and God alone knows how long I may be ill."

"I will try first," said Grace; "perhaps I may be able to sell some of my pictures; you said they were remarkably pretty, and well done. If I cannot sell them, I will beg for Harry and you, dear Emma." And wrapping carefully half-a-dozen pencil sketches in an old newspaper, Grace Littleton tied her hood over her dark curls, and

went forth into the cold, bleak street. Her gown was old, and her shoes were worn, but she had a certain grace about her, which neither poverty nor age could take away. She threaded her way timidly through the crowded streets; but she was not for her heart was full of hope. She went to the poor Emma—her hope and her despair—she sat at her bedside. What she should do, those three poor creatures knew not, and as the tears filled her eyes she looked up into the bright blue sky and thought of the blessed words—

"Consider the ravens; for they have no store-house nor barn; and God feedeth them. And then she bounded along, and entered the book store where she was going to try and sell her pictures, with a light heart, for were not Emma, and Harry and she, of more worth than many ravens?"

Grace advanced timidly to the counter, for a gay party stood near it turning over the engravings, and talking in merry voices, so different from Emma's! She opened her package, and stood with the pictures in her hand, waiting for a glance from one of the very busy looking clerks.

May Trevor was the first to observe the child, and struck by the beauty of her countenance, she beckoned her to a distant part of the shop, and with a sweet, encouraging smile, drew from her simple story.

"I will call and see Emma," she said, when Grace finished. "And now you can go and see if Mr. Parker will purchase your pictures."

"What a sweet little creature!" exclaimed Miss Agatha Channing, for the first time catching a glimpse of the child's face, as she held her pictures up to Mr. Parker. "What lovely eyes! Mr. Clifton only look!"

Grace felt the warm blood rushing up to her brow, as she found herself the centre of attraction to the gayly dressed ladies, and she hung her head in painful confusion.

"She would not like it—she asked Emma not to tell who did it for us, and I must not."

"Have you any pictures at home, Grace, that you could let me have?"

"Yes, one or two; one is a sketch of Emma—that I'd rather not sell—and the other is Harry, sailing his shoe in a bowl of water; he calls it his boat."

"Ah, I should like that!" said Mr. Clifton; "suppose I go home with you now and get it; do you think Emma will have any objection?"

"I have a very pretty new house, our Christmas gift!"

And holding out her hand for him to follow, she tripped gaily along, until she entered a retired street and passed at the door of a pleasant, but small cottage.

"This is our new home, and this is Emma, sir," she said, ushering him into a light, airy apartment; "and—oh, I did not know Miss Trevor was here, she is so half frightened, lest she had done something wrong, the more she saw a deep flush rise to May's fair cheek. But Uncle John sat near Emma, with such a pleasant face, and Emma looked so happy and lovely, though still pale and thin; and Harry in a corner busy with a miniature ship seemed so content—that Mr. Clifton, standing in the door-way, could not speak."

This then was May Trevor's Christmas gift! This was why the friends at Uncle John's received such paltry trifles. This dear, beautiful young maiden, who stood near Emma, with trembling tears on her pure eyelids and a flushed cheek—this was the thoughtless girl who laughed at his serious conversation, and sang a gay song over "Evangeline!"

Wallace Clifton forgot all about the awkwardness of his position. He only wished he could throw himself at May's feet and kiss the hem of her garment, and call her what he felt she was most like—an angel. But there were all those realities before him, preventing his speaking to her, so he tried to talk seriously with her, as if she were a foreigner to the subject; he could never make her sit beside him a moment; she would never sing with him, though his voice was a very fine tenor; she would never even sing herself when he was in the room.

May was really incomprehensible, and Miss Agatha, by her hints and intentions, would fain have had him believe her heartless and miserly also.

All that Christmas Eve Wallace passed in trying to solve the riddle, but in vain; and May's laughing "good-nights," only recalled him to himself.

Christmas Day, and though the air was sharp and cold, nothing would serve May's caprice but Uncle John must order out the horses, and take her a short drive.

"This ugly pain in my shoulder," expostulated the old gentleman. "I'll wrap a big shawl all around you, dear uncle," returned May. "But it is so cold—let Wallace take you!"

"Mr. Clifton is not Uncle John!"

And in proof of her words, May threw her arms around Uncle John's neck and gave him a succession of kisses that made Mr. Clifton, who pretended to be reading, sincerely wish that he was Uncle John, just for the time being.

At length Uncle John was prevailed upon, the more readily, perhaps, from the fact that Agatha Channing wondered how poor dear May could be so careless as to wish to expose his health to the raw air of that Christmas morning; and they left the warm drawing-room, for the keen outer air.

"Well upon my word, Mr. Vaughan is a queer old gentleman to be so led by a girl like May Trevor; isn't he Mr. Clifton?"

"Very lovely!" replied Wallace, at random; upon which Agatha favored him with a little keen railway, that caused him to prefer the street to the drawing-room. Slowly he sauntered along until he reached the shop where Grace sold her pictures, and it occurred to him that he would stop and inquire about her.

At the door, he met the child herself just coming out, with bright eyes, and a package of drawing materials in her hand.

"May I wish you a merry Christmas, sir?" she asked, at once recollecting his face.

"Thank you for it, little maiden, and I wish you in return, not one but many."

"This is the happiest Christmas morning, since papa and mamma died," continued Grace, encouraged by Mr. Clifton's pleasant smile.

"Why so?" he inquired.

"We are so happy—Miss Trevor—I forgot, I forgot, and she blushed scarlet at her carelessness."

Mr. Clifton's face brightened up with an eager expression.

"I should like to know," he said.

about as full of faults as we poor devils are."

An amused expression on Mrs. Lyman's face was her only answer.

Mr. Graham sat for some minutes in moody silence, and then said, reaching for his hat as he spoke: "Come, sis, let's go over to Uncle John's. We'll be sure to find smiling faces there, and can manage, perhaps, to pass an evening very pleasantly. It's a pity a fellow can't take some comfort at home."

"I was a little conscious of this hesitation," Mrs. Lyman replied.

"Well, Charley, just wait until Bertie's jacket is done, for he is very anxious to wear it to school to-morrow, and then, if Nellie is asleep—glancing at the cradle where lay the six-months old baby—I'll go with you."

As the clock struck seven the little garment was pronounced finished, and was placed by the kind aunt where Bertie could not fail to see it when he first awoke in the morning. Baby was now soundly sleeping, and Mrs. Lyman, after putting on her hat and shawl, stepped to the door of her sister's room and said: "Mattie, we are going to Uncle John's. We shall not be absent long; but do not sit up for us unless you choose to."

"Very well," was the reply, but the tone in which the words were uttered, told plainly that the speaker took but little interest in what was going on about her.

"Now, Charley," said Mrs. Lyman, as soon as they were fairly in the street, "I shouldn't have consented to come with you to-night, were it not that I wanted, as Aunt Hannah used to say, to give you a 'good big piece of my mind.'"

"Why, what for Kate? What great crime am I guilty of?"

"The crime of destroying your own happiness, and the happiness of those dearest to you."

"What do you mean? What can you mean?"

"I think, Charley, you spoke very harshly to poor Mattie."

"Perhaps I was rather cross, but Kate, that woman tries my patience dreadfully. She goes moping around, looking as forlorn and disconsolate as though she had not a friend in the world."

There must be a cause for it."

"Yes, I suppose; but I think it would puzzle a lawyer to find out the cause."

"Don't you remember when she was otherwise?"

"Don't I remember? I think I do. There wasn't as pretty a girl for miles around as Mattie Standish was. I was proud of her in my courting days."

"Yes, I well remember what a devoted lover you were. Our garden was robbed of its choicest flowers to be made into bouquets for Mattie. If fruit or confectionery was sent from the city, the very next was selected for that same Mattie. The latest magazines and papers were found on her table, placed there by my brother Charley. In short, nothing was too good for her."

"That's so Kate; and those were jolly times. I wonder if Mattie has forgotten them?"

"Without heeding his last remark, Mrs. Lyman continued: 'I had a beautiful rose-tree at home, Charley, that was given me by a dear friend. As long as I watered it and tended it carefully it repaid me with many fragrant, beautiful blossoms; but after it had been in my possession a few months I am sorry to say, I shamefully neglected it. Sometimes, for days together, I did not go near it. It faded and dropped. I renewed my care of it—but it was too late. My rose tree died, and I learned a lesson. Take care Charley, that your Mattie does not share the fate of my rose. She has a peculiarly sensitive nature, and will not bear neglect any more than a tender plant will.'

"But, Kate, Mattie knows that I love her as well as I ever did."

"What reason has she to think so?—I was reading, not long since, of a gentleman who had visited in a great many families; and among them all, he had found but very few really happy ones. The cause of the unhappiness, he said, was not so much the want of love as the want of care to manifest it. That is just where the trouble lies. If a man should tell you that you did not love your wife and children, you would be tempted to knock him down—you would, at least, call him a liar. But Charley, what is love worth that is never expressed in words or actions. Play the lover again, my dear brother, and take my word for it, you will have no cause to complain of Mattie."

By this time the door of Uncle John's house was reached, and there was no time for further conversation. They were met as had been predicted, by smiling faces; and the evening might, indeed, have passed very pleasantly, if Mr. Graham had been in a mood to enjoy it. His sister's words had made

a deep impression on his mind; and, though vexed at her plain talk he could not but acknowledge that she was right.

At an early hour they were on their way home, but more than half the distance was passed over before a word was spoken by either. Mrs. Lyman was beginning to fear that she had seriously offended her brother, when he said: "Kate, I was almost angry with you, but I've come to the conclusion that she is more than a fool."

"I've noted like a fool—Mrs. Lyman's tie for what I alone was to be. I'll turn over a new leaf, and I can win the roses back to my cheeks."

"Spoken like yourself, my dear brother. Only live your courting-days over again, and you will again have reason to be proud of Mattie. Now, Charley," continued his sister, "just stop at Warner's, on the way home, and buy a basket of those nice oranges; then call at Osgood's, and get the latest magazine. Take them as a present to Mattie, and see how she will receive them."

Mrs. Lyman went directly home, finding Mrs. Graham still busily sewing, gave her a good-night kiss, and went immediately to her room. Mr. Graham came in soon afterward, and placing the oranges, with the book, in his wife's lap, said, "Here, Mattie, is a present I got on purpose for you—lay aside your sewing and enjoy those good things."

Mrs. Graham gave her husband one quick surprise look, and as she had done once before that evening, burst into tears.

"Why, Mattie," said Mr. Graham, "have I been so neglectful of you, that a little act of kindness like this affects you thus?"

"Oh, Charley!" said she, as soon as she could command her voice sufficiently to reply, "I thought you had ceased to love me, and was just grieving myself to death over it."

"No, Mattie, I never and cherish; but God helping me, I promise anew to love and cherish you tenderly 'till death do us depart."

"It was all that was needed to make Mattie the cheerful, loving Mattie of old."

Mrs. Lyman was awakened the next morning by Charley's clear ringing voice, as he sang the words of that most beautiful of Scotch songs—

"Her voice is low and sweet,
She's all the world to me,
And for Bonnie Annie Laurie,
I'd lay me down and die."

"Ah!" said she, with a smile, "I didn't take a lawyer to find the reason why Mattie went moping about the house."

"Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them."

There is a scheme on foot in New York to found an asylum or home for literary men and artists who are poor or disabled. The scheme is a noble one, but as a similar institution failed several years ago on the general principle that the authors and artists were too proud to accept public favors, it is thought nothing will be done with it. It will be remembered that Bulwer, Dickens, Jerrold, and other literary men worked very diligently to get up an authors' home at Knebworth, which they succeeded in doing only to find that it could not be carried on because the people whom they sought to benefit could not be induced to leave London poverty, where they felt a degree of independence they could never feel at Bulwer's fine seat. The plan of bestowing aid through an author's fund like the Royal Literary Fund of Great Britain is more feasible. This charity is kept strictly private, and amounts annually to about £2,000.

AN ARTIST SQUAD.—The square Matilda, mentioned in the dispatches, as one of the chief mediators with the Modoc Indians, is a woman of no mean capacity. Living with an American, she keeps his house tight and snug as any white woman could. Whenever not occupied with house-hold cares she is busy over her pencil and paper; she has a roll of sketches, partly copies, but principally originals. With a stump of a pencil and any casual scrap of paper she will strike off at eight an American, an Englishman, a German, a Chinaman, a Madoc, or any eccentric character she may chance to see, and her heads are wonderfully correct and graphic. If she had received an education, or enjoyed any privileges except those afforded by the rudest backwoods, she would have been heard of in the art world. Matilda is a woman of strong, dark face, glittering eyes, slow and deliberate in speech, and of an iron will—a good type of her race.

Brown—How's your wife, Jones? Jones—Poorly, always poorly. She's afraid she is going to die, and I'm afraid she isn't, so I've got a doosid pleasant time of it, altogether."