INASMUCH: A CHRISTMAS STORY

BY ADA MARIE.

What was Christmas to Miss Venner? Simply the twenty-fith of December, a day to be observed as custom decreed by the church; going and gift giving. She heard the pealing of Christmas bells, listening to the Gloria in Excelsis, bat neither joy bells nor anthem was in her heart or on her lips; she gave gifts, but they were of the hand and purse, and were received in a matter of course manner which made her wonder if there was such a thing as real gratitude in the world. She tried to do ber duty to the utmost on that day, even the next of kin-mostly second and third cousins-to dinner, listening with calm indifference outwardly, tho' with supreme inward contempt to their flattering speeches, not even wincing when volatile Fanny would exclaim: "What lovely china! rememder me in your will, Cousin Alcia." Or when Cousin Henry would say: "I quite envy you that buffetyou must leave that to me." Although the fact of their constantly reminding her that she was not immortal, and so often refreshing her memory as to their liking for certain of her possessions, made her resolve to endow some charitable institution when she made her will. "Perhaps a home for disappointed old maids," she would say bitterly. Not that she was so very old-thirty-six her next birthday-but she was so pale and grave, and banded her abundant brown hair in such a prim, old maidish fashion, and had an habitual frown on her forehead that gave a hard look to her otherwise handsome brown eyes and made her seem far older than she

Years ago, Obristmastide had its joy for her; when she the happy young girl, Alcia, and before that as the child Allie, when father and mother love made every day sunny and joyous. As Alcia, there was handsome David Carruth who had eyes and ears for her alone, and with whom she used to exchange Christmas gifts from young girlhood to young womanhood. Now, as stately Miss Venner, she had nobody-nobody.

Alicia Venner's great trouble was when her mother died; her next. when father brought widow Marvyn home to take her mother's place: then there was Helen Marvyn-a step-mother was enough without a step sister. The second Mrs. Venner was neither better nor worse than step-mothers in general; but Alcia could never please her, and finally ceased to try. And Helen, her as a paragon in all respects, became obnoxious. But what matother? They were not affilianced: was not a prominent figure.

How well she could remember a bright night of years ago, a night the long wearisome days that tols pointed at her; a still, small voice, rose vied with each other in fragant another. It was finally settled that your heart, not of kind words," said offerings. David picked her a rose he had received a telegram from the still, small voice, "Inasmuch as she remembered-they had been for a long walk, a walk during of business probably; then it was these, ye did it not nuto me ;" and which they were both strangely si he said:

have been too happy to talk."

her unresisting form to his side,

you..." then sound of an spell and brought them back to a ne'er do well. All this left Alicia Venner; "yet they have had their

in answer, will you, dear?"

mortification to Mrs. Venner.

Alicia went staight to her room, The years passed by oneventfulhad not learned that-

"Too soon, too soon, The poon will be the afternoon, Too soon to-day be yesterday."

tongue.

weeds," ran on the gossip.

And David Carruth, he's gone off to would give to all the cousinsmentary faintness and fallen, but no loving thoughts and happy fantor a friendly chair-back.

mented, "Straws tell which way the love, a cheerful pastime.

She remembered now he drew of as connected with Alicia Venner's the weather. "disappointment."

As he passed out of Alicia's life, blew in fitful gusts, driving before "Alciai, do you love me; will sorrow and trouble came to fill it little flocks of sad-faced, with--her father's sudden death, her ered leaves, drifting them here and opening door, and a sharp voice step-mother's lingering illness there, even into the carriage, where calling, "Alcia! Alcia! comeright in which was fatally terminated by they lay a shivering handful. out of the night air," broke the the paragon Helen's elopement with "Poor things!" thought Miss

she hasn't much beart anyway."

py to quarrel. "To-morrow." - Miss Venner but once, when rumor what would be write, and what said that he was married to a Calshould she say! She knew, well ifornia heiress-the re-rental of the enough, and wishfully framed a Carroth place for a number of years reply in her mind. She was up made it an accepted fact that he betimes in the morning, out on the bad no intention of returning to his dewy lawn, lingering over the rose native village for some time at least. bushes, as if they had caught the So the only change the passing secret of the unfinished sentence, years brought to Miss Venner was and might be caressed into parting that of growing older and statelier; with it. Morning gave place to yes, and ticher; everything she noon, noon to night; but no letter, touched was with a Midas hand She watched and listened the long her mill property had trebled in evening, and went to bed heavy- value-her investments were wisehearted, but hopeful. "To-morrow, ly made—but what cared she? She perhaps," she thought, as she longed gave, indeed, liberally to the poor; and waited for time to pass. She but her gifts were of the hand, and anaccompanied by smiles, kind words, or wemanly sympathy.

Christmas came and went all these uneventful years, a dull, joya "To-morrow" came-but no let- less season to her-tor in the conter-the third day she was heavy- templation of her own misery she eyed and heavy-hearted, and when lost sight of the happiness of the great blue eyes. the village gossip ran in for a world; and only vaguely recalled friendly call, Alicia listened apath- the blessed fact that our Saviour etically to her wearisome talk-not was born on that day. Yet there taking the trouble to defend this had been a time when she sang and that one, as she often did, from Christmas carols, and read the the attacks of her slanderous sweet old story of Bethlehem in Judea with tearful eyes and thrilled "Mrs. Judge Baker has got a new heart. When the simplest thing, a black henrietta cloth almost covered gift of roses : a "Merry Christmas," with crape-suppose she thinks or the quick tender glane's of dark folks'll measure her sorrow by her eyes, filled the whole day with joy. Now it was nearing another, at "Most likely," asserted Mrs. Ven least it was near enough to talk of ter?" -and Miss Venner bad already "Then there's that girl who lives subscribed generously to various at the Marvin's-folks do say she impending church festivities. By isn't any better than she should be. and by, when the day came, she California all of a sudden. Hoity money, probably-she was too intoity! what's the matter!" and she different toward them to select turned her beady black eyes keenly articles suitable for each, and she upon Alicia, who paled, and would did not care to embroider slippors, have been overcome by her mo- cushions and watch cases; she had cies to imprison with silks and ner. White the gossip inwardly com- wools, and make the labor one of

wind blows; I reckoned I'd find out There were times when this lonefrom being constantly held before if Alicia knew that he was going." ly woman realized how far apart But Alicia regained her self-pos, she was from others, and felt that session, and so skilfully-parried the the distance was of her own maktered it-had not she David? and gossip's questions that with all her ing, when conscience reproached were not they all in all to each shrewdness she was not quite cers her from her apathy and selfishness. tain whether she did or did not One such day she sat reading her he had not said, "I love you," in so know that David was so soon to morning lesson (she read her Bible many words-but in looks, in tones leave. Once in the solitude of her daily in a datiful, mechanical fashs in a quiet air of proprietorship he room, Alicia thought over the ion) she read on carelessly until the had said so many, many times; and strange departure with much heart- sentence, "Inasmuch as we have she, dreaming as young girls will, ache and many misgivings, though done it unto one of the least of never pictured a future in which he she did not really doubt her lover. these my brethren, we have done it With true womanly faith and trust unto me," arrested her attention. she watched and waited through It seemed a reproachful finger when the moon laid white fingers lowed for tidings of him; none saying: "You have not taken in the on the lips of nature, and hushed came, but the village folks com- stranger, or visited the sick and in breathings into profound silence; mented much upon his absence, prison," "I have given of my subwhen the white rose and the red some ascribing one reason, some stance, she thought; "but not of his guardian-some urgent matter ye did it not to one of the least of reported that he had decided to Miss Venner with the solemu, chidlent-the silence born of perfect remain in California; the last rumor ing sentence ringing in her ears. content. As they neared the house being confirmed by the rental of closed the Bible and uneasily paced the Carruth place for a term of the room until a servant informed "Alcia, there is much I meant to years; and after a little the "nine her that the carriage waited at the have said to night; but some how I day's wonder" was over, and David door : for it was her custom to ride Carroth forgotten, or only spoken every day, no malter how inclement

It was a bleak morning : the wind

reality. David hastily kissed her. Little time for idle repining; then day-their tender, group, baby- the little fellow by the wayside-he prostrated her on a bed of sickness should again be a vigorous flow I will write to-morrow," he said, pride came to her rescue-should hood, their bright youth, their says his father and mother are dead, from which she never tose. As there through their benumbed veins-"all that I would have said to-night she, a Venner, publish to the world splendid prime, when they were so I am going to care for him for were no near relations to care for should ag no be tender, green leafand do not keep me in suspence for that she had been slighted, scorned, right royal in crimson and gold the present," said Miss Venner, buit Jack, and as it was a poor parish age, and bird songs in their bereft trifle | with ! She, instead, studied | now comes surset, old age to them | spologetically. That sentence rang in her ears to repress all natural feeling to and to me." Then Miss Venner, Dinah obeyed her mistress, and tifully supplied with children, a come in fall so gently, transforming the for years after, and second to her become matter-of-fact, practical, watching a mad whill in them, spied Jack-for he said his name was mittee of ladies acting mon the block and rugged fields into a soft, to have been prompted by and devoted herself to business. a little figure crouching by the John, but that his mamma called matter had decided to consign him white expanse, and thought that it some mocking fiend of fa-thless. Her study was not without effect; wayside and crying le erly. A boy him Jack was soon comfortably to an orphan asylum. for she grew cold stately, and came of perhaps five or six wars, clothed placed before the fire with a bowl. Lattle Jack experty welcomed over the sins and sorrows of the "One would suppose that you to be called Miss Venner. Not that in a worn grey anit, that had been of bread and mak. were old enough to know better the ossification that changed the neatly patched, but from which the "Now, Durah, see that the baths I'm so glad you're comed back," be touched her heart with a soothing than to be standing around on the impulsive young girl, Alicia, to the patches were becoming ripped and room is very warm, and find me said, seizing her hand and holding influence and made her feel thankdamp grass a whole evening; Helen calm, dignified Miss Venner, was were the sport of the wind; laded, something to put on him in place of it up to his rosy cheek to warm it. fee, for the first time in years, that went to bed two bours ago," said easity accomplished : instead, it well darned red stockings, a pair of these tathered clothes." Mrs. Venner, with acerbity, draws was a process of daily, hourly pain, shabby shoes out at the toes, and a Not so easy, messy; spect you all the picture-books, then I that she had it in her power to give ing comparisons, as usual. That Neither was the result when lattered straw hat completed his duano what you's talkin bout watched and watched." David Carruth, the richest and most schieved, onlinely salisfactory-but attire; and thus insufficiently clad, Chillians clothes in dishouse! Noth. There was an odd little sensa- dealt by; and, while she was about eligible young man in the vicinity, it descived the world, which said, he crouched close to the old stone in but inthe bed-gowns up in de tion about then Venner's heart-it it, some other children might be should prefer Alicia to the faultless "Miss Venner got over David Car- wall, as if seeking for the warmth ole chist." Helen was a source of constant rath's going off quickly enough; and comfort that by some mis- "Just bring them down. Now somebody watching for her and and deliver in person necessaries chance had been denied him by the Jick, you are to be bathed, then you genuinely glad to see her. "How and delecacies for the infirm old world. Dead stalks of golden-rod, may have more to eat, and go to would ven like to stay with me all women to whom she usually sout making no reply-she was too haps ly, bringing tidings of David to tall mulleurs, and busches of milk-bed. Do you like to be here to weed that had lately given up their "Wouldn't you sooner be here'n questsoned. silken freight, surrounded hun, and out in the cold !" with every gast of wind swayed to: "Why yes, of course," answered the 'sylum ?" wards him, as it they were moved Miss Venner. with pity for his forlorn condition, "Well then," said Jack, nedding "Well, then," said Jack, as if he Miss Venner came home at the and longed to extend the comfort his head with an air of satisfaction, thought it answer enough. Then close of the afternoon, tired, but humanity seemed to withhold.

what is the matter," she said. He ing out time-yellowed parments to dress. obeyed; but the child made no re- air. ply, and only southed more, seeming The child looked with halt-fright had a gleam of sanshine in them rather have the money then jim frightened. Finally Miss Venuer ened expression at binah's black now, and Miss Venuer no longer, cracks to eat and drink and wear, left the carriage, daintally picked face, then east an appealing glance idty passed them, and restlessly another told her she was growing her way through the reeds and over loward Miss Venner. little wait.

"Why are you here, and why do and I will wash him." you cry ?" she asked.

cause I'm awful cold and bungry, yer dress an' all yer fixins."

"I don't live nowhere; papa and splashing and splutteringmamma's in the ground, and I want "Are you goin to put soap on my she will give him the china; she will if they came from his bundles, and to die cause people 'o tryin' to put face ? Cause if you be, I'll shut my make him her heur, defraed m me in the 'sylum-oh, oh!" and the eyes" said Jack, ageny of grief.

"In what asylum !"

thing to eat ?"

you?" said the child, looking up in viort's love of little children.

then took her seat in the carriage. "I suppose I shall take him up here ma'am ?" Miss Venner glanced fashion; finally he shyly said: at the child and thought a moment! -be was ragged and dusty-but, "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto mamma died " one of the least of these," said the

"Put him beside me; it is warmer

bere," she replied shortly. The motion of the carriage, and the childs fatigue soon caused him to fall asleep, and Miss Venner found herself pressing kisses upon him, as she felt the pressure of his little fingers close to her hear!" head on her arm, and looked down on the tattered bat with the bright bair gleaming through its rents, a sensation of self-torgetfulness and of actual interest in the little strauger took possession of her. The child awakened when the carriage stopped, was carefully lifted down and Miss Venner led bim up the steps; he paused at the door and pulled back, his fears returning; then looked up in her face with a searching, beseeching glance, said:

bolding up her hands.

the stones, and approached the "Inasmuch," thought she-"No How could she be little with all when a girl, and, above all, the

"Soo, honey, you nebber washed pillowed on her heart, "I'm tryin' to die; and I'm cryin' a chile in de days ob yer life! Spile

laces, called for an apron and en- and story. "After you! No. What do you tered upon her labors. She was want to die for, where do you hve, rather awkward about her selfwhere's your papa and mamma?" imposed task, and there was much in the fiesh of the next of kin." She-

child rocked back and forth in an Miss Venner was fond of art; and they questioned her regarding him. Then Miss Venner sat down by pictures of sadsfaced Madonnas, and her intentious, they found her the glowing fire, and put her free aureoled saints, and Raphael's and "Don't know-just in the sylum." Merillo's wonderful children hang themselves that he was indeed a of mind. Little Jack pulled her "Haven't you any brother or sis- about her rooms; but here was a thern, and he not likely to be reliving embodiment of art; art in its moved, Indeed she hardly knew her "Haint get nobody;" he sobbed, devinest form. As she washed she intentions, save that she meant to you to tell me bout these pictures. "Like myself," thought Miss Ven- grew enthusiastic-bright golden keen and care for hom. Feeling ner; then she patted him on the hair, soft, sunny blue eyes; smowy, that there was no one to dispute shoulder, and took out her hand- pink-tinted flesh, graceful curves her claim she did not hasted to kerchief and wiped his tear-stained and dimples; what wonder that of arrange the future at hough she alface. "Will you come home with such is the kingdom of heaven, she ready found herself to king forward me and get warm and have some- thought, for strangely enough, her to a time when he, a nobe youth, morning lessons for days past had "You won't put me in then will been upon the one theme - our Sa- She was wont to prefute the future.

a half-trustful, half-pleading man. The washing finished, Jack was arrayed in one of the little old gowns, awaited by those who would profit "No, no-bring the blankets and wrapped in a shawl, and put by the by it. She calmly fored the fact, to divert his attention from it; but; wrap the little fellow in them," said fire to finish bis supper. There he Miss Venner to the coachman, and rocked quietly for a while, alternate among her abundant brown locks ly watching the fire and looking up for gray bairs; in closely scanning

"Please may I sit in your lay. Nobody bain't held me since my sigh a little, as she dri one after-

satisfaction, he pathetically asken: "Please, won't you kiss me! Nobody hain't kissed me in a long time."

Stately Miss Venner surprisedly while the small arms were folded about her neck; and then and there the case of Miss Venner's ossification commenced.

'Shall I take him up and put him in my bed, honey?" asked Dinab. "No," answered Miss Venner, shortly, "you may make a little bed for him in my room to-night."

trary, he went in willingly, and Miss her little charge-questions to ask looking with her at the wintry the happiness that might have been Venner hastily summoned Dinab, __then a long drive to the distant landscape. The snow was falling hers, now too late! Had the words her chief-of-affairs, to bring him town from which the child said he soitly in great feathery flakes that that had so far fallen short of ful-"Lor' massey, boney, ob all de'- clergyman, had been dead nearly and messengers, received with fered, shut in there, face to face with spisin things!" exclaimed Dinah two years; the mother, left with eager, out stretched arms by the that agonizing scene of centuries "Yes, Dinah, 1 suppose it is a sewing; but over-work and the care they draped tenderly and pityingly, day a heart was undergoing martyr-

Miss Venuer on her return. "Oh, world, typical of his mercy. It wit's been so lonesome; I looked at Coristmas was near at hand, and

Miss Venuer could butass-ni.

while Miss Venner laughed quietly, he heared his carly head confidently happy; leeling that she was re-Miss Venuer signalised the coach. "Spects I'll tote him in de wash- on her shoulder, as he stood beside warded for his treable by the gratiman to stop. "Go ask the child room now" said Dinah, after spread her chair and gently touched her deation with which her visits had

> longed for one to succeed another, young, that she looked as she used Dinab, you get everything ready those questions to answer, or rest- still small voice was no longer reless with that bright fittle head proachful,

spread all ober an ole burt, com- the hall to meet ber. Are you after me, '" and the child Nevertheless, Miss Venner tucked mented shrew! Dinah, who dearly

But if Jack diverted and laterested Miss Venner, he was a thore meour rights D' they choused. When forget year" should choos her decliouse years. always seeing herself a lovely old and thek grim delight to looking in vain. winkles. Sometimes, when her

mean of er consulting her mirror. Miss Venner consented to hold "What makes you book in the who had been closely watching her.

andwrinkled, old and ugly "

lovely, I think.

Miss Venuer turned to the wina long, long time since she had been "lovely" to anybody. Years age; how different ! then she sighed

queer proceeding for me. I found of a sick child, and great at its death whispering assurance that there

where most of the homes were plett- branches. Miss Venner watched was God's mantle of charity spread gifts. Jack most be bountifully was strange, very strange, to have made happy. She would purchase the time and be my little boy?" she money. Jack was to be left in charge of Dinah, lest he became too "Hadn't you'd rather be here'n in wise in Christmas matters; for ask questions he would -questions that would require skillful parrying.

been received; for although one The short, dark December days woman did say that she would

"Dad you meet m, dulyou see 'mf? "Dat child's jest like heating ham leagerly asked Jack, running into

"Whom? What do you mean? looked at her with tears in his upher silken gown, pinned back her loved her mistress, and knew her "Why Donah said mebbe you'd see Santa Clause-she guessed you'd gone to talk with bim about

> "Well, Juck, I did see a great will adopt hon. She is demanted; many pretty things that lacked as

> most reticult, and desided among to the tender in avery happy frame

"Oh auntie," he arged, "I want got down a great one; and its full of the awfollest folks-is it a really book, and be they true peoples? Just see! he said, bringing Fox's Martyrs and potting the volume in

Miss Venner explained it to the boy as best she could; then endeavored by talking of other things

"And there's a wickeder pictur" an this, Its just awful," said Jack into Miss Venner's face in a wistful her features for grow's feet and shutting his eyes tight and making a wry lace, "And somebody's put search was rewarded, she would a mark so as to find it next time-

It was indeed "awint," a scene of direct horsor, and the mark was a him, and when he was scated to his gives so long'-cause you thinks letter which Miss Venner took in you's pretty, auntier" asked Jack her hand so that she could better see the picture that so terrified Miss Venuer shook her head sad. Jack. The letter was sealed, she y. No, no; I'm getting to be gray noticed, and naturally she turned it over to look at the superscription ---Jack was indignant. "No such Miss Alice Venner-and in David carefully drew the robes around the rosy mouth, and holding the thing," he said stoutly you is just Caruth's hold, careless chirography! The wrapper was timed-yellow and discolered with mildew. When had she dow to hide a suspecious meisture to put away one of his letters withbeen so heedless and indifferent as gathering in her eyes. It had been out reading! She broke the seal and slowly drew the letter from its wrapper -- a few fragments -- the withered leaves of a rose fell from it, and a sweet perfume, like a sweet "Is you lonesome?" asked Jack, old memory, came with them; then "Lor massy ?" exclaimed Dinah, gently caressing her head and look; she read - read impassioned words "I rec'on de worl' am comin' to an ing at her with his blue eyes full of that even then stirred her pulse and pity: "When mamma breased like flushed her cheeks. The words Miss Venner had something to do that she said "i' was 'cause she was she watched and waited for that "this ain't the 'sylum is it ?" On and something to think of the next so lonesome after paper" then he long time ago. Oh, the weaty morning. Clothes to provide for moved a chair to her at e and stood years that had passed since thencame. She found that the father, a came so swiftly, so sileatly-heav-s filling their mission, dambly sufsmall means, had added to them by great trees, whose bear boughs ago; did they know that in this later