

The Custard Cup

Florence Blagham Livingston

CHAPTER XVIII

Christmas in the Custard Cup.

"I'm going to invite Bonnie Geraldine to the tree," caroled Lettie on the final morning of the Christmas preparations.

It was the climax of her hospitality, and was so considered by the family. Mrs. Penfield had agreed to men, women, children and dogs; but when it came to hens, her enthusiasm waned. Her formal objection was based on Bonnie Geraldine's timid nature and the temperamental anguish which she might endure if forced to meet society in the mass, but Lettie proposed to ease the sensibilities of the young Plymouth Rock by bringing her in a box, tethered to remain therein. The matter was discussed, but left to circumstances for final decision.

Lorene and Dick Chase had returned from their honeymoon and had accepted their invitation.

"We'll ask her to sing," decided Crink, who had a wary eye out for the entertainment of the guests whom Lettie was zealously assembling.

"Indeed you won't!" exclaimed Mrs. Penfield, looking up in shocked surprise from the candy bag she was making out of an old net curtain. "I'd be 'shamed to death if you asked Lorene. Why, Crink, don't you know she's been in a choir for a year and been paid for it? 'Tain't never polite to ask a person to sing free after he's learned how."

"Botheration!" cried Crink. "Ain't that the outer limit? Well, say, Penzie, I could just tell her how grand I think she sings, and maybe she'd offer. Couldn't it?"

"It has been done," smiled Mrs. Penfield. "That's about the only polite way to manage it."

Lettie, down on the floor with Crink and Thad, untangling scraps of colored string that had been collected through many months, looked up in dismay. "Landy gracious, Penzie, have we got to watch ev'rything we say to the party?"

"Now you've got it," chuckled Uncle Jerry, the expert corn-popper. "Minute you go in for high life, you get into difficulties." He emptied the final contribution into the pan of fragrant popped corn and guided the "old malds" into a cup. Turning, he looked down on the three solemn youngsters with a twinkle in his merry eyes. "Seeing as you're going in for parties, there's a few rules you'll have to learn. First one is: There's two things you ain't never to talk 'bout 'fore outsiders. One's your soul, and the other's your toothbrush. They're your own private property, and nobody else cares a hang."

"Huh!" scoffed Lettie. "If that's all there is to it, I got it learned a'ready."

"'Tain't all there is to it, Lettie," laughed Mrs. Penfield. "If it's rules you want, I'll give you one that'll be simple to remember, and it'll cover the whole ground, too. If you want folks to have a good time in your house, all you got to do is to forget yourself and feel friendly. If you'll keep those two things working in your heart, you won't go far wrong in any entertainin'."

"Caroline," commented Jerry Winston, with mock reproof, "you can sure be depended on for taking the short cuts."

"I shouldn't wonder," she returned, good-naturedly. "I like the easy way 'cause it's so much easier. Besides, I never heard that you got any more blackberries 'cause you was scratched with nettles while you picked 'em. Seems like a lot of folk measure results by the pain they suffered bringin' 'em about. Lettie, you'd better turn your candy out on a plate, and we'll figger how much to allow to a bag. I'm going to season the popcorn while it's hot."

He picked up his hat. "I'll be back in a little while. I got a notion I can rustle something for the dinner tomorrow."

"Oh, Uncle Jerry," protested Mrs. Penfield. "I got ev'rything planned. We're going to have—"

"You wait till I get back 'fore you plan," interrupted Uncle Jerry, and he went out so quickly that Mrs. Penfield's expostulations fell on the empty air.

Repeated countings failed to shake the conclusion that Plain Mixed had yielded only forty-eight candies. Three were apportioned to each tiny net bag of popcorn, since only the younger guests were to receive this particular treat.

Early in the afternoon Mrs. Sanders rang the bell at Number 47 and brought three parcels tied with red ribbons.

"They're for the children," she smiled.

"Oh, my dear," said Mrs. Penfield, overwhelmed. "Why, it wasn't right for you to bother 'bout—"

"Don't say that," interrupted Mrs. Sanders. "It's been the best thing for me that ever happened. Mind how I

hain't called you over for one of those—those attacks lately? Well, when I've felt one coming on, I've gone to work on these things—hard." She pointed to the gifts. "They've been what's saved me—but I thought: maybe the children could use 'em. That's what started me making 'em, but I got more good out of 'em than anybody else will."

"You're a dear friend," acknowledged Mrs. Penfield warmly. "I hope you—you'll have a brighter New Year."

"I'm planning to do diff'runt; that's one thing sure. I'll tell you about it pretty soon."

As Mrs. Penfield went back into the house, Lettie came dancing in from a trip to the yard to feed popcorn to Bonnie Geraldine.

"Oh, Penzie," she cried, "what do you s'pose I done? You couldn't guess, ever. I wished Mr. Wopple a Merry Christmas. Wasn't that a queer thing? But I was feeling so happy that I forgot all 'bout how mean he is—and ev'rything. And minute I said it, he was real decent."

Mrs. Penfield laughed. "I guess you'd think he was decent all the time if you was decent yourself all the way through," she commented mildly.

"What? Ain't I—"

"Why, of course you're not. That's what's the matter. What do you s'pose Mr. Wopple thinks of a little girl that has to beat a temper gong and storms around and says sharp things?"

"What does he think of me?" Lettie repeated slowly. "Why, I never thought of that. My landy Goshen! I'm gonta study it out after Christmas and see what there is in it."

"It'll be a good scheme," agreed Mrs. Penfield briskly. "And now see here, children, I'm going to let you open these here presents right now, if you want to, 'cause there may be something in 'em that you'll want tonight."

There ensued a small whirlwind in the kitchen. Amidst a great rustling of paper and many shrieks of joyous surprise, the gifts were drawn forth:



The Gifts Were Drawn Forth.

a brown serge dress for Lettie, a gray sweater for Crink, a little suit for Thad. Mrs. Penfield's regret was that the donor could not have stayed to know the ecstasy which her thoughtfulness had brought to three children, inexperienced in the ways of gifts.

Excitement rose again to a dangerously high point when Uncle Jerry returned with two wild ducks and a bag of rice. Would there be a Christmas dinner the next day in the Penfield household? Would there?

Everything was ready for the party, and the financial score ran like this:

Carfare for tree	30 cents
3 yards tinsel	10 cents
6 candles and holders	10 cents
Candy	10 cents
Popcorn	10 cents
Tablet paper	10 cents
Manila envelopes	10 cents
Spool of thread	5 cents
Stick of candy	1 cent
Total	86 cents

It was a wonderful evening. The three young Penfields went through it as in a happy dream. They could no more believe in its reality than the caged bird can believe in sudden freedom. Here was not merely a good time, but the climax of bliss, the essence of things long hoped for. The air was full of the pungency of fir boughs. And there was the tree itself in a corner of the living-room, its branches hung with tinsel. Lettie's three yards of this ethereal trimming had been separated into cunning lengths and disposed with an appearance of abundance. And candies! They could not be denied. Six of them! There were our strings of popcorn in a graduate terrace; walnut shells, decorated with whatever paint had offered; eggshells also, with bright pictures affixed! And what matter if the contents of these latter had gone to the nourishment of other tenants in The Custard Cup? The decorative possibilities had been saved for the Penfield tree.

And then the presents! For every child: a pictorial eggshell, a picture puzzle, a net bag of popcorn and candy; for every adult, an appropriate blot and verse, and a picture puzzle!

The hardest thing was to wait till half-past seven, the hour at which the guests were bidden. At twenty-five minutes past, the candles were lighted, a schedule which precluded the waste of wax without a justifiable number of observers. It was the

touch. A long-drawn "Oh-h-h!" expressed the complete gratification of all the Penfields. From that time on, fairyland was an open book. Thad's blue eyes were unbelievably wide, and he tiptoed about in an awed and silent ecstasy. Crink was full of important errands, having gratuitously assumed responsibilities for salient features of the evening.

As for Lettie, she was not the same child that had straggled into Mrs. Penfield's kitchen three months before, undernourished, blindly resentful against the harshness of an unthinking world, ready to fight anything and anyone to keep her starved soul in her starved body—a creature forced by the indifference of society into reversion to elemental instincts, to primitive pugnacity. Without volition she had been shot into a scheme of things that had no place for her, that frowned upon her with heavy disapproval. She had been saved from the attitude that might have followed—the attitude of a society that later holds up its hands in a shock of horror and repudiates the menace that its own carelessness has nurtured. It will always be so until that society ceases to segregate its human strays, to be housed in correct stone buildings and fed from long-handled spoons, and rouses to the inalienable right of the individual to individual care.

Tonight Lettie was radiant. She might later know joy that would be broader and deeper, but it could never more fully inundate her capacity. Her thin cheeks were beginning to take on the curve of health; her black curls were neat and glossy; and she was wearing the new serge dress presented by Mrs. Sanders. As she flew busily through the rooms, she stopped now and then for a look of indifferent disdain at the temper gong. Could it be possible that she had needed that—or ever would again? In her present state of beatitude, certainly not. The hours of happiness are not the hours of trial.

"We'll have to play sit-down games," decided Crink, surveying the tight rows of chairs which he had borrowed for the occasion.

"Yes, Crink," laughed Mrs. Penfield, "but you can see how lucky 'tis that this was a barn. If it hadn't been built big 'nough for horses, we couldn't never have this grand party."

Even so, the only thing that made the space sufficient was previous engagements on the part of several tenants. In consequence, there were only thirty-five who gathered and squeezed happily into the borrowed chairs; but they all brought their most flattering exclamations and used them freely. Even Mr. Wopple smiled, by which token the jollity of the others may be imagined.

Game followed game, and the merriment increased as by its own momentum. Crink Penfield was noted in conference with Lorene Chase, and shortly thereafter it was made known that she had a new Christmas song. Enthusiasm grew. She gave them more songs. Her clear voice filled The Custard Cup with melody.

All this time the tree stood waiting, but its turn came at last. Impressively Dick Chase read off the names; with prodigal flourish the little Penfields made distribution. Surprise was unparalleled. Exclamations were doubled, trebled.

And even this was not the end. Rather it was the prelude. Because immediately thereafter, refreshments were served. They were Crink's contribution, and his pride in this acme of hospitality was well-nigh suffocating. A few days before Mr. Drake had given him a large tin box of cakes which a wholesale delivery boy had dropped on the floor. The cakes, assorted to begin with, had been further



Never Before Had They Had So Wonderful a Feast.

and unseparably assorted by the fall; but there were a few whole ones, and these had been skillfully arranged as top layers on the plates which were now passed. Mr. Drake's Christmas to Crink had been a small package each of sugar and raisins and a dozen oranges. Crink, in an embarrassment which had all but choked him, had asked if he might have lemons instead of the oranges. The exchange had been made, and the one dozen had become two, a marvelous piece of fortune, because everybody knows that one lemon is equal to two oranges any day when it comes to flavoring a given amount of water.

It was a long time after the paper plates and cups had been gathered up before the party dispersed and left the Penfields to happy memories. Not alone memories, either! The tree was still there, and Christmas day was yet to come.

"My landy goodness!" cried Lettie. "I don't never want to see anything sweller'n that party was. It sure hit the stars for class."

"I guess we're pretty rich," piped Thad, skinning a finger of fir to determine exactly how sticky it was.

"We sure got rich feelings," agreed Mrs. Penfield. "And that's as much as millions of money can put inside you."

"Yes, I s'pose so," corroborated Lettie, politely but with evident reservations. "Say, Penzie, wouldn't Mr. Wopple beat you stiff? He wished me a Merry Christmas."

Mrs. Penfield laughed. "Land, Lettie, what do you think folks are—hard-and-fast little sticks of wood? They mostly ain't nothing 't all except what you think they are. Chances are, if you think a feller is mean, you're just confessing the way you acted to him first."

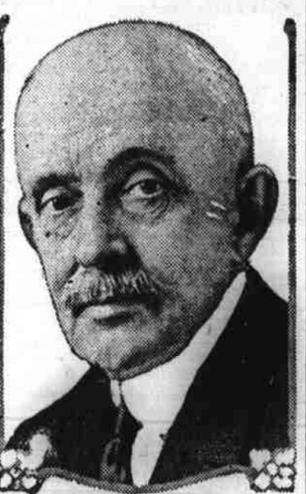
"My patience!" sighed Lettie. "Life is awful hard to get used to."

"Well, by George!" broke in Crink. "I'm glad this here Christmas ain't over yet. There's still them roast ducks to be et tomorrow."

TO BE CONTINUED

Popular Lecturer to Be Heard at the Redpath Chautauqua

One of the features of the long, successful platform career of Dr. E. T. Hagerman, who will lecture here at the coming Redpath Chautauqua, has been the large number of return dates which he has been called upon to fill. Time after time he has returned to the



DR. E. T. HAGERMAN.

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NOTICE OF SALE BY TRUSTEE

By virtue of a power of sale contained in a certain deed of trust executed by James Fuller to the undersigned trustee on the 16th day of Sept., 1918, and duly recorded in Book A. V. at page 353 in the Reg. of Deeds office of Union Co., I will, Monday, May 7th, 1923, at 12 o'clock, m., at the Court House door in Monroe, N. C., sell to the highest bidder, for cash, the following described real estate, to-wit:

A certain tract or parcel of land lying and being in Union Co., N. C., adjoining the lands of Mrs. Bettie Bundy, H. D. Griffin, C. H. Richardson and John Blakeney, and being all of the lands on the north side of a ditch running east and west which said ditch commences on the west side of the said H. D. Griffin's line and runs due west from said line along the said ditch 41 chs. to a stone; thence 2 chs. less 7 links to a stone in John Blakeney's east line; thence 11 1-2 acres by estimation, more or less and being the same lands as conveyed by N. S. Matthews and wife to James Fuller by deed dated Sept. 16th, 1918.

The holder of the notes secured by said deed of trust having demanded sale of the said premises to satisfy said notes.

This 6th day of April, 1923. R. W. LEMMOND, trustee.

State of North Carolina, Department of State, CERTIFICATE OF DISSOLUTION.

To all to whom these presents may come—Greeting:

Whereas, it appears to my satisfaction, by duly authenticated record of the proceedings for the voluntary dissolution thereof by the unanimous consent of all the stockholders, deposited in my office, that the Clark Motor Company, a corporation of this State, whose principal office is situated in the town of Waxhaw, county of Union, state of North Carolina (T. R. Nisbet being the agent therein and in charge thereof, upon whom process may be served), has complied with the requirements of Chapter 22, Consolidated Statutes, entitled "Corporations," preliminary to the issuing of this Certificate of Dissolution:

Now, Therefore, I, W. N. Everett, Secretary of the State of North Carolina, do hereby certify that the said corporation did, on the 4th day of April, 1923, file in my office a duly executed and attested consent in writing to the dissolution of said corporation, executed by all the stockholders thereof, which said consent and the record of the proceedings aforesaid are now on file in my said office as provided by law.

In Testimony Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal at Raleigh, this 4th day of April, A. D. 1923.

W. N. EVERETT, Secretary of State.

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Having qualified as administratrix of the estate of Arthur S. Helms, deceased, late of Union county, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons having claims against the estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at Monroe, N. C., on or before the 10th day of April, 1924, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate will please make immediate payment.

This 10th day of April, 1923.

MRS. GEORGIA HELMS, Administratrix of Arthur S. Helms, deceased.

John C. Sikes, Attorney.

NOTICE OF SUMMONS

North Carolina, Union County—In the Superior Court.

Henry Mattox vs. Maggie Mattox. The defendant above named will take notice that an action entitled as above has been commenced in the Superior Court of Union county, N. C., to annul the bonds of matrimony heretofore existing between the plaintiff and the defendant on the grounds of adultery of the defendant; and said defendant will further take notice that she is required to appear at the term of the Superior Court of said county to be held on the ninth Monday after the first Monday in March, 1923, at the court house of said county in Monroe, N. C., and answer or demur to the complaint of said action or the plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief demanded in said complaint.

This the first day of March, 1923. R. W. LEMMOND, C. S. C.

TRUSTEE'S SALE OF REAL ESTATE

Under and by virtue of the provisions of a certain deed of trust dated February 3, 1921, registered in Book A. 1, page 176 of the office of Register of Deeds for Union county, which deed of trust was given by Abraham Lincoln and wife, Lillie Lincoln, and default having been made in the payment of the note thereby secured, at the request of the holders of said note, I will on Monday, the 14th day of May, 1923, at the court house door in Monroe, Union County, North Carolina, sell at public auction for cash, to the highest bidder at twelve o'clock, all of the following described real estate:

Lying and being in the City of Monroe, N. C., beginning at the south east corner of the intersection made by Jerome Ave. and Boyte St., and runs with said Ave. S 86 E. 145 feet to a stake at an alley; thence with western edge of said alley S. 3' 4' W. 50 feet to a stake. corner of lot No. 14, Block 5; thence with northern boundary of lot No. 14 aforesaid, N. 86 W. 145 feet to a stake in the eastern edge of Boyte St. N. 3' 4' E. 50 feet to the beginning, containing 50x145 feet square, and being Lot No. 13 in Block 5 as shown on the registered plat of Vann Heights addition to the city of Monroe property.

This April 12, 1923. JOHN C. SIKES, Trustee.

NOTICE OF CITY ELECTION

Notice is hereby given that an election will be held for the purpose of electing a Mayor and five Aldermen for the City of Monroe, North Carolina, on Tuesday after the first Monday in May, 1923, it being the 8th day of May, 1923.

The polling place in said election shall be at the court house in Monroe, N. C., at which place the Registrar and Judges of election shall provide six boxes, one for ballots for candidates for Mayor and one for candidates for Aldermen from each of the five wards of the City respectively.

J. G. Rogers is appointed Registrar and Duncan Huntley and Paul Griffith Judges of Election.

This notice shall be published in the Monroe Journal once a week for four successive weeks, the date of the first publication being thirty days or more preceding the date of the election.

By order of the Board of Aldermen, March 22, 1923. J. H. BOYTE, City Clerk.



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