

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT CHRISTMAS

A Little Blue Vase and a Ragged Urchin Furnished a New Theory About Santa Claus

THE mahogany clock on the oyster-white bookcase was striking 5 as Margaret entered her front door. She hurried across the living room and deposited her bundles upon the davenport. Then she pulled off her perky little black hat—bargain basement, price \$1.95—and with eager fingers unwrapped a transparent blue glass vase and held it in a caressing grasp.

It was only three days until Christmas and she shouldn't have bought it, of course, with all the things there were to get in the next two days. But she would tell Keith to consider it his present to her. She was sure he had not yet selected a gift for her, as she knew he was expecting to make some good collections before the 24th and would doubtless do some eleventh-hour shopping.

Margaret had glimpsed the vase in Parker's Gift Shop window among several enchanting bits of Venetian glass, as she was hurrying by. She had walked two blocks and then retraced her steps for another look. Unable to resist its allure, she had entered the shop and emerged shortly with eyes alight and a song in her heart. She possessed the exquisite vase.

But now, misgiving suddenly assailed her. She shouldn't have bought it. Still, it was only \$5. But this last year or so Keith had come to look upon \$5 as big money. Yes, Keith would be extremely annoyed.

Margaret went to the kitchen and switched on the electric oven. She buttoned a fresh delphinium-blue smock—the exact shade of her eyes—over her black crepe street dress and returned to the living room.

She placed the vase upon a mahogany tilt-top table directly in front of a window and stood off to see the effect. The vase captured the colors from the subdued Winter sunset, mirrored the red berries on the holly tree in the yard outside and the lovely English house across the street.

Margaret clasped her hands with a delight that was almost sensual in its intensity. She did so love beauty! Oh, she didn't care if Keith did grumble and frown his displeasure. For just to pause in the middle of a morning's domestic routine for a look at the vase would provide a more potent stimulant than any highball ever furnished a tired business man. "And heaven knows," she

awkward standing there against the table.

"I'm glad they weren't nasty about it," Keith said quietly, with a heavy sigh, as he at last threw himself down to rest. "I was afraid they might be, after the insulting letter I received yesterday. Fact is, I couldn't afford even that payment today. I'm getting mighty short at the bank."

"But the check from that contractor, Walter Brown, didn't you get it, as he promised?"

"He came around this afternoon with a hard-luck story. He couldn't pay a cent and Sam Hunter telephoned and alibied himself out of the \$150 he said he'd give me this week."

"And I suppose Tom Wilson's wife is going to have that appendicitis operation right away. You know, the one she's been intending to have performed after every 'please' statement from you for the last year and a half, or did he actually come in and give you \$5 on his \$160 account?" Margaret flamed. "Trouble with you, Keith, is you're too gullible; too easy. You've got too much unwarranted faith in people, especially debtors. Consequently, they put you off because they know they can, and then they go and pay the hard-boiled, determined creditors or else they buy a new car or an electric refrigerator or an electric ironer or some other modern necessity of life which I, apparently, will have to get along without for the rest of my life."

KEITH shook out the paper and frowned at the headlines. "Strikes and wars and rumors of wars again! What a world of woe we've made for ourselves, just from not trusting one another or from selfish short-sightedness," he murmured. "I'm getting pretty sick of the world if you ask me."

But Margaret was mad, too, and she was not to be diverted. "Pollyanna, pooh!" she sniffed. "Well, so am I sick of seeing the Joneses and the Smiths and all the rest of them who owe you using our money for things that you and Betty and I need. I happen to know," she went on, "that Sam Hunter's wife and their scatter-brained daughter are sailing for Honolulu for a month's vacation after the first of the year. I tell you, Keith, if you'd go at them right and be more ruthless, you could make them



By DOROTHY COX HESSE

Illustrated by Henrietta McCaig Starrett

money, she says, 'less it's for some candy and some marbles, maybe.'

"Let's go in this store and get warm," Margaret urged, giving the boy's arm a little push. A new warmth touched her heart as she tucked a pair of skates under that same shabby arm a few minutes later and saw the child's radiant face.

"Come," she said, "let's go to that store across the street where they keep pretty, warm sweaters and woolen gloves for little boys to wear when they go skating."

Before she sent him home, wearing sturdy, warm boots and a heavy blue sweater on top of his thin, short coat, Margaret gave the ecstatic child a sack of candy and nuts, a box of assorted marbles and, on a quick impulse, she tucked a holly wreath and a fruit cake, gayly wrapped in red cellophane and holly paper, under his other arm. "Take these to your mother," she said, "and tell her they're a gift from Mrs. Claus, same as yours."

AS SHE watched the boy vanish through the crowd, Margaret knew in a single, breathless, revealing moment that this unexpected interlude had given her a new angle. She had stumbled upon a truth that she often heard voiced but which had never really touched her with force. In the slang of the day, the idea hadn't "clicked."

And if it hadn't been for the blue vase she might never have discovered that the mere possession of things, beautiful or coveted, did not make happiness. Somewhere in the back of her mind she had doubtless believed in the trite and ancient dogma, but until today it had never come out into the open. But she knew now that it was the putting out of a hand to make another's way pleasanter that furnished genuine personal satisfaction. And that such little happenings had a way of making way for big events in people's lives.

If she hadn't coveted that beautiful dress she wouldn't have been in town today and seen the boy and therefore she might have gone on indefinitely without realizing the truth about the blessings of giving. Such little things to lead so far; bright little signposts, those coincidences, pointing the way to—what was the phrase that was going the rounds?—the more abundant life. That was it. This was a true interpretation of the more abundant life.

"Close your eyes," she caroled happily when Keith came into the warm kitchen bright with gleams of Santa