THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

— By —

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"Father Nolen, isn't there a Santa Claus, and won't he bring me what I want for Christmas?"

Thus spoke 9-year-old Juan Fernandez one Christmas Eve as he lay upon a cot, emaciated and hollow-eyed from the ravages of tuberculosis. Although Juan spoke in a whisper he was eagerly [illegible] as he looked imploringly at the priest, who stood bending over the cot administering to the dying boy. The priest knew the boy's life was ebbing fast and his heart was touched by the child's faith in Santa Claus. Therefore he resolved to see that Juan's wish was gratified if possible.

"Yes, my child, there is a Santa Claus, and God will have him bring you what you wish, if Saint Nicholas has it," Father Nolen replied. "Now, tell me your heart's desire."

"Oh! I am so glad, Father, because mother and Sister Rena told me Santa Claus could not grant my wish. But I knew now he will."

"And what do you wish, Juan?"

"Father, I want to see my big brother, Sanchez, who has been gone a long time. All none of us knows where. Ever since he left us, mother and Rena have prayed for him to come back, and many times they have cried. I have prayed for God to tell Santa Claus to bring Sanchez home tonight so mother and Rena will be happy again. I know it is a big way to Santa Claus, but if he shakes his reindeer hard enough, can't he?"

[illegible] sick chest and too pallid and became silent. [illegible] the priest. Father Nolen gazed [illegible] Santa Claus would be [illegible] The priest thought of the [illegible] who for centuries had cherished a belief in St. Nicholas, whose coming each year gladdened the hearts of children throughout the Christian world. Father Nolen knelt by the cot, bent over the wistful fevered little boy, placed his hand gently upon the withered brow, smiled through his tears, and, without knowing how he was to have Santa Claus do what seemed the impossible, spoke softly, kindly, yet with the confidence of desperation.

"Juan, my son, Santa Claus surely will bring your brother home tonight so that your mother and sister will be happy again," the priest replied.

A ghost of a smile flitted across Juan's pallid face as he put his bony little paw in the priest's hand and whispered: "Thank you, Father; I know now there is a Santa Claus who remembers good little boys and girls."

Juan's strength was going and he lapsed into semi-consciousness with a smile upon his parched lips. The priest arose and turned from the cot. The boy's mother and sister were standing there with tears staining their crimson cheeks, although both were stifling sobs and trying to be brave. Father Nolen beckoned to Mrs. Fernandez and Rena to follow him into an adjoining room. All three knew that Juan wa snear unto death—a matter of hours until his soul would pass into that great beyond from whence there is no return. They also realized how utterly impossible it seemed for Santa Claus to bring Sanchez home that Christmas Eve for he was in prison with four months of a twelve months' term yet to be served. Sanchez had shot a man with whom he had quarreled and was paying the penalty in a Southern prison camp.

Father Nolen spoke first as if to comfort [illegible] the weeping mother [illegible] "There must be a way," he said. "God will point the way. Santa Claus to get Sanchez home [illegible]

[illegible] request is [illegible] Father Nolen will [illegible] to accomplish [illegible] strong as [illegible] in Southern [illegible] Sanchez [illegible] on the [illegible] all possible [illegible] time and there fast in a mental fog [illegible] existed.

The women and the priest [illegible] silently pacifying when there came a knock. Rena hesitatingly and swung open the door. A handsome, well-set-up youth of 20 years stood upon the threshold.

"Come in, Hosea," Rena invited as she introduced the visitor to the priest. The youth entered the room and sat in a chair pushed forward by Mother Fernandez. Father Nolen related what had transpired in the room where little Juan lay wasting away. The priest reiterated his belief that God would point a way for Sanchez to shake prison shackles and come home to the bedside of his brother, so that the child's heart might be made glad and his faith in Santa Claus go with him to the grave. But how?

Faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, only these can push aside the curtain that hides the unseen and picture the way to the supernal beauty beyond. Hosea and Rena were sweethearts. They were to be married in the spring. Both were romantic, as are all youthful lovers. Now, Hosea and Sanchez were not warm friends, because the latter did not look with favor upon his sister's choice of a husband. But Rena and Juan, he loved them both. The beauty of Juan's simple faith in Santa Claus struck a sympathetic chord in Hosea's romantic soul and his youthful heart was touched by the dying boy's plea. Hosea still was young enough to remember vividly with what pleasure he had looked forward as a child to the coming of Santa Claus.

Hosea spoke quetly yet with great earnestness as he unfolded his plan for Santa Claus to grant the child's last request. "I am willing to take Sanchez's place in prison so he may come home to Juan and remain with him until death," Hosea said. "Father Nolen, don't you think Judge Milton will let me go to jail as hostage while Sanchez is free, with the understanding that I shall be released when Sanchez returns to prison?"

"A modern Damon and Pythias!" exclaimed the priest. "It is a big and unselfish offer. Truly the spirit of Christ, who died to save men, still lives, and the day of miracles has not passed. Come, my son, we will be off to see the judge. I believe it can be done."

Rena torn by two emotions, love for her brother and Hosea, and grieved by the thought of her lover going to prison, even in so worthy a cause, smiled, cried, threw her arms around her sweetheart's neck, kissed him and wished him Godspeed. Mother Fernandez, overjoyed with the prospect of her oldest son's return, thanked all the saints in a fine lad like Hosea.

It was mid-afternoon and the Fernandez home was five miles from the courthouse, where Judge Milton was presiding over an important trial that had dragged for days. It was ten miles to the stockade where Sanchez and other prisoners were working for various offenses instead of serving terms for various offenses instead of being fined. To be freed that day, no time must be lost. Father Nolen [illegible] and motored to the Fernandez home that day in his car. The aged priest in the driver's seat "stepped on the gas" and [illegible] the courthouse. Locally unknown [illegible] the priest and the youth were in the courtroom. A bailiff was induced to carry a message to the judge asking that Father Nolen be permitted to the court. Judge Milton beckoned to the priest to come forward to the dais, while he interrupted argument of an attorney whom he ordered to stop speaking while the court took a recess. The judge and priest were in earnest, whispered conversation, while learned counsel twirled spectacles, piqued at the interruption, wondered what could be more important than his client's business, glared at Judge Milton and Father Nolen and gave Hosea, who sat near by, a haughty look. Once the priest was seen to nod toward Hosea and in another instant Judge Milton dipped pen in ink and wrote rapidly for several minutes, handed the paper to the priest, shook hands with him and wished him Godspeed. He then announced that argument in the case at bar would be resumed.

Father Nolen, clasping the paper tightly in one hand and clutching Hosea's arm with the other, strode rapidly from the courthouse, where they leaped into the car and began a wild ride of ten miles over rough roads to the stockade where Sanchez was paying his debt to society for breaking the laws of the state. Arriving at the prison camp, the priest presented the document to the superintendent who read and re-read it, shook his head and muttered something inaudible. But while the prison official was plainly disinclined, he recognized the signature of Judge Milton as genuine. It was signed by R. H. Milton, County Judge, and read:

"Release Sanchez Fernandez in the custody of Father Nolen and imprison Hosea B. [illegible] as hostage until the said Sanchez Fernandez returns."

The prison [illegible] a guard for [illegible] and was [illegible] as hostage he was [illegible] to the priest, [illegible] to him the person [illegible] Sanchez divested himself of prison garb and donned civilian [illegible] Hosea slipped into the striped suit, the badge of a felon. With hasty adieus and more muttered thanks and a promise to Hosea to return in a few days, Sanchez strode rapidly to the automobile, where Father Nolen was waiting to play the role of Santa Claus and whirl him to the bedside of his brother, Juan.

The sun had sunk behind the Western hills and darkness had settled over the land when the priest halted his car in front of the Fernandez home. With a "God bless you my son; hurry to Juan and tell him that Santa Claus has answered his prayer," Father Nolen left Sanchez to greet his loved ones alone, climbed back into his car and drove swiftly toward the city, conscious of having been instrumental in bringing joy to a family that had experienced but little of happiness. On his arrival at home he found Judge Milton awaiting him. The Judge handed the priest a telegram from the Governor which stated that, in keeping with the yuletide spirit, he had ordered an immediate and full pardon for Sanchez and the release of Hosea.

Judge Milton explained to the astonished priest that he had communicated with the Governor by telephone, and the executive, after hearing the story, was so impressed with the self-sacrifice of Hosea and so touched by Juan's sublime faith in Santa Claus, that he had tempered justice with mercy and had exercised clemency, saying as he did so, "There is a Santa Claus!" and he will live forever to gladden the heart of childhood.

AMERICAN LEGION OPPOSES NON-PARTISAN LEAGUE

SALINA, Kans., Jan. 10.—Lines were drawn sharply here today in the contest arising over the entry into Kansas of the non-partisan league movement.

While A. C. Townley, head of the league, was conducting mass meetings for those interested in the movement, at another building not far away representatives of American Legion posts from all parts of the state, together with others opposing the movement were laying plans for a state-wide organization to check the league's activities and bring about the departure from the state of those behind it.

Plans of the opposition were not announced definitely, but it was stated that a campaign of "education" would be the basis and that the anti-league organization would flood the state, especially the rural districts, with literature attacking the league's principles and its alleged unpatriotic conduct during the war.

The non-partisan league controversy came into existence ten days ago when Townley, accompanied by several assistants, arrived here and announced that efforts would be made to organize in the state. The local post of the American Legion declared its opposition to the movement and adopted resolutions asking Townley to leave the state.

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