



**J**ACK had not been home in seven years. They had gone quickly enough in the way that years will go, but now that he was back, it seemed as though they had been longer. He had missed so much.

It was not that things had changed. Of course, there were changes in the look of the town. There were few sleighs lined up along the main street; instead there were automobiles.

He had been thinking how the sleighs would jingle as the horses pulled the sleighs over the crisp winter snow. But instead of sleigh bells there were the sounds of firm rubber tires creaking over the frozen, snow-covered streets. There had been no automobiles used in that winter of seven years past but they had not been predominant. The sleighs had a chance. Now the sleighs were quite missing. The automobiles had charge.

He wondered if he stayed away for another seven years if he would see lights from airplanes and hear them buzzing over the buildings. Yet, even if he did, he did not feel as though the place would really change.

There was something about the town that would never change. They might build more modern shops, airplane landings might take the places of so many garages as the garages had taken the places of blacksmith shops, but the essential qualities of the town would never change.

Always Christmas would be Christmas here with its holly-filled windows, its wreaths over doors, its trees for Christmas lining the main street. Doubtless that was the way Christmas would always be in many places. But here it would seem more important. Christmas would be deep in the whole heart of the town which always expanded and became so generous and big and open at this season of the year.

Probably because it was, Christmas did seem different here from that of any other place.

He remembered the Christmas before. There had been gayly decorated shops, hurried, happy shoppers, lighted Christmas trees in the streets, crisp snow and Christmas greetings.

But it hadn't been the same. Christmas seemed to belong so much more to his own home. In that other place he had felt a little lonely and a little out of it. But here he had no feeling of loneliness. Even though he was just back and as yet had met few of the people he knew and had vaguely recognized some who were grown up now who had been children before he left, he did not feel out of it.

They might not recognize him, but he was at home and he was happy and loneliness had been banished from his heart in a gloriously complete fashion.

He had gone home as soon as he had arrived. And now he had come up to get the mail. It was not that he expected any mail. His Christmas cards and boxes of cigars and neckties and such would be sent to his business address, for it was not until the last minute that he had been sure he could make the long trip and reach home in time for Christmas Eve.



It Surely Was Wonderful to Be Back Again.

time for Christmas Eve. His telegram had come before him, but his presents had already been sent out, and his mail would be waiting for him at his office. To be sure, he knew the family would quickly and unobtrusively fill the seats to put in his place on the Christmas gift table. But the going for the mail was simply a desire to do what he had always done to bring with the people to see his own townfolk.

It surely was wonderful to be back again. Wonderful beyond even what he had dreamed it would be. He was lucky that the train had been on time and he had been able to have a long Christmas Eve.

Christmas trains, he thought, should always be on time. Moments at Christmas mean so much.

He was leaving the post office. He had seen a number of people he knew. Just outside he met a group of men who had been graduated from high

school in his class. They were picking up some of the now falling snow and throwing snowballs at a group of laughing, red-cheeked girls.

"You remember them," he was told. And then it was explained to him that these grown-up young people were the youngsters of seven years ago.

He joined in the snowball battle. Evidently he was a good shot, for a loud shriek from one of the girls proclaimed that fact.

"Oh, oh, that's not fair! Your snowball went right into my face. Luckily it was fresh snow or I'd have finished you!"

"I'm so sorry," he said to her and remembered her then as that little girl who had been used to help to load up on her bicycle and whose school bag he sometimes carried home for her.

She had been younger than he but she had always been such a good little sport, ready to enter into everything eager to try.

"For Jack, you remember me, don't you, Constance?"

Constance Adams gasped just a little. "Why, of course I do," she exclaimed. "But I didn't expect to find you hitting me with snowballs. That's a fine kind of greeting!"

How beautifully she had changed. All her same nice essential qualities seemed just the same, but her changes were merely additional attributes. She dressed with more taste than she had when a youngster, she was graceful now instead of tomboyish.

She was like the town. In its spirit, its homeliness would always be the same, no matter with what succeeding fashions and customs it kept pace.

"Look here," he said abruptly, "would you mind if I left the mail home and then came around for a nice chat with you?"

"I won't be home until ever so late," she said, "or only for a moment at any rate. I should be there now to



It Was Late When They Got Back to Her House.

get the baskets with the presents. I haven't delivered any of my gifts yet."

"Couldn't I come, too?"

"Indeed yes, you'd be a great help in carrying the baskets. I always did like school-bags and baskets carried for me."

She looked up at him and laughed. The general snow-balling had stopped. Groups were going off together, all bent on their Christmas Eve activities.

"I'll be obliging," Constance said. "You take the mail down and I'll be ready as soon as you come. I won't keep you waiting. They do that, don't they in stories?"

She stopped, a little embarrassed. "Besides I want to get through," she said. "I've no more places where I must go."

He smiled in his eyes like a beautiful dream almost like a girl's. "I won't keep you waiting. I won't keep you waiting."

He said it over and over again to himself. Nor did he keep her waiting. He was there in scarcely any time at all. His family had understood. They had seemed happy that he had found himself so quickly at home in the town. It was what they had always feared he would not be.

What a gay thing that was—taking around Christmas presents in baskets, in wishing people Christmas cheer and holiday greetings, in having doors opened to one where a whiff of balsam and shadows of freelight sent a glow over one's whole heart and mind and soul.

It was late, very late, when they got back to her house. He supposed he should wait. He supposed he should keep quiet—for a little longer than this. But he couldn't. Besides, it was Christmas and at Christmas, feelings weren't supposed to be hidden. One wasn't ashamed of sentiment, one didn't barricade one's affections.

"Connie, you may say I don't know, but I do," he began. "I knew at once. I think I've always known. It has been there, unrealized perhaps, but you know even as a kid you were unusual. You weren't like any of the others—all nice enough—but you."

"I wish I'd made a hit with something other than a snowball," he smiled.

"I'm rather glad it was with a snowball," Constance answered slowly. "It was like getting back at once to the days when I was a child and you were so nice to me and let me be included in so many of the older boys' and girls' games."

"I'd like to include you, is ever so nice to include you, in my whole life," he said gently. "Couldn't you tell me that you wouldn't keep me waiting?"

"Well, maybe I could," she said very seriously, "and maybe I'd mean it, too! Merry Christmas, old dear!"

"Only six years older, young smart, but Merry Christmas just the same!" And the old town just seemed to sparkle and twinkle that Christmas Eve as it never had before.

**Gifts Made of Ribbon**



A wisebag full of joy awaits any member of the family who wakes up Christmas morning to find herself possessing a bit of finery like the pretty bag, or the garters shown here. The bag is simply made of two pieces of wide, black ribbon cut rounded at one end and sewed together. Two shirred tucks are run in above the seam. It is lined with colored silk and gathered into a fligree silver mounting. Narrow black and pink satin ribbon is shirred over flat elastic for the garters, which are finished with bows and rhinestone ornaments.

**Gay Holiday Aprons**



Here is a gift that everyone, from grandma down to the youngest subdeb, will rejoice in at Christmas time—and long thereafter. It is a gay and quaint pinafore, made of brilliant, flowered cretonne, bordered and finished with black satin, and is prettiest in cretonnes having a black background with many-colored garden flowers blooming against it. The black satin borders the bib and pockets and makes the long shoulder straps.

**Parchment Torchers**



Among other unique devices for softening electric lights are the fashionable parchment torchers which may be bought ready for painting. They may be tinted with soft yellows and reds blended together, or decorated with floral or other decorations. One who is not clever at painting can get beautiful effects by cutting out designs from crepe paper, pasting them on the torchers and then painting over the entire surface with this, transparent, amber sealing wax paint.

**Ribbon Vanity Case**



Santa Claus will find himself distributing a lot of new vanity cases this Christmas, for nothing is more popular as a gift. Here is a rich and elegant homemade one, that requires about twelve inches of gold brocade ribbon, six inches wide, and about eighteen inches of rose-colored satin ribbon for lining and pocket. The case is bound with narrow gold lace and two tiny brass rings are sewed to the top. A gold cord, attached to the bottom of the case, slips through these rings and serves to close and suspend it. The little pocket carries compact, powder, rouge and any other desired fitting.

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