Part 2, 8 pages

Editorial and Holiday Fiction Section

BARRINGTON REVIEW

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A Friend of the Children of Every Land.

The Substitute Mistletoe

by Wilbur D. Nesbit

If there is anything in the world more aggravating to a young woman than a young man who will not, or cannot, see that she favors him above all the rest, it has not yet been listed.

Prudence Milton so much as a year ago discovered that Alfred Ruthven possessed all the qualities that go to make a man noble and splendid and brave—no, not brave! A brave man would have proposed to Prudence long since. But Alfred, Prudence knew, was handsome and intelligent, and prosperous. Just one thing he lacked—self-confidence. Alfred was bashful on the love subject.

A great many men are so. They can discuss politics, the musical glasses, the drama, literature, art, science and the classics fluently with a young woman, but they shy away from the real heart interest like an aeroplane dodging a church steeple.

Why, Prudence had inveigled Alfred into long walks with her in the all-very moonlight of spring and the golden moonlight of summer—all to no avail. Once, in August, she was boating with him, and she had pretended to be afraid the boat would capsize.

"What would you do if it did?" she asked him.

Naturally she expected him to reply that he would plunge in after her and save her or perish in the attempt. Such a heroic remark as that would of course lead into a more passionate avowal of his reasons for being willing to lay down his young life for her —and then, of course, he would really hop-skip right along to a request that, since he was willing to die for her, she might consider favorably a proposition to share his life with him, or words to that effect.

But when she asked with a tremulous shake in her lovely voice, and with a world of faith and trust in her lustrous eyes:

"What would you do if the boat capsized?"

He never even stopped rowing. He just said:

"It wouldn't matter much. The water isn't over three feet deep here."

Prudence almost capsized the boat from sheer vexation then. When a woman becomes vexed with a man because he does not realize that he loves her, you may go out and stake all your worldly possessions that sooner or later she will bring that man to his knees, or her feet, as you like to put it.

Let us pass lightly over the glorious days of fall, when Prudence allowed Alfred to call several times and find her in the kitchen with an apron on helping her mother put up jellies and preserves and things. Let us even pass lightly over the evening when she showed him the blister upon her fair white hand made by a sputtering drop of apple butter. Yes, pass lightly over it. Any one man, any man in possession of ordinary faculties, when a beautiful young creature held out a little white hand and showed him a blister thereon—not a big blister, just a sort of a beauty spot of a blister—would have taken that hand in his and all but wept over it. He would have asked her to give that hand to him and to come along with it herself, and would have sworn by high heaven and the marching stars and the sun and moon and sky that never again should that wonderful hand know the weary, grim days of toil! What did Alfred do?

He looked at the blister appraising ly—without taking those taper fingers from his—and he said:

"Stick a needle under it from one side and let the water out, then put a little powder on it tomorrow."

Shades of Romeo! Memories of Tasso and Beatrice! Was it any wonder that Prudence brought her pretty lips together in a straight line and registered a mental vow that Alfred should rue this speech some day? Let us now pass lightly on again to—

"That Is, She Allowed Him to Put the Kiss Back Where He Got It."

room, which, was empty of other people, fortunately, at that moment.

"Won't you help me?" she asked. "I think it is such fun to decorate the house with the holly and stuff for the holidays. Now I've just been trying to tie this sprig to the chandelier."

She mounted a chair and affixed the bunch of green sprays to the chandelier. Alfred stood in dumb admiration. He looked at Prudence, and he looked at the green sprays with which she fastened to the fixture. She looked down at him, smiling. Then put out her hand.

"Help me down," she said.

Alfred caught her hand to assist her to come from the chair.

Between the hands a moment. No man knows in what instant his soul may fleave within him so that he will do and dare, as he never dreamed of doing or daring. The philosophers call such things psychological moments. This was one. Alfred helped Prudence down, and it was quite natural and easy for her to find herself in his arms for a brief, wonderful minute. And then before she knew what he was about—at least, so she said—he had kissed her.

"Mister Ruthven!" she exclaimed. "How dare you!"

"I—you know—the—the mistletoe!" he stammered, disengaging one arm and pointing to the decoration above her head.

"I forgive you," she said, demurely.

And then Alfred found tongue at last and told her what she had allowed him to tell her all the year. And he asked her to be his Christmas gift, and she answered that she would be called the time-honored way. That is, she allowed him to kiss the kiss back where he got it.

After that evening Alfred said he hated—

"Do you know, I don't believe I ever would have had the courage to propose to you if it hadn't been for that mistletoe."

"That mistletoe!" she laughed. "Ah, fond, that misguided is soulful. I don't believe I would have worked at all if it had been real mistletoe."

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A Simple Gift.

When one wishes to send little more than a remembrance at Christmas one does not care to go to a novelty that can be made by the girl who paints to a match scratcher in the form of a card.

Have an oblong background of colored cardboard, and on it paint a quaint figure out from fine emery paper in soft tones of brown, brightened by gay touches in the costume. It is then cut out and pasted on the back, which may be left plain or painted with scenery to correspond. Sometimes these scratchers are done in entirely monochrome. Children with fluffy, long-skirted colonial or Oreuse figures, or quaint Dutch peasantry can be copied in colors.

"In the Kitchen With an Apron On, Helping Her Mother Put Up Jellies and Preserves and Things."

Come we now to Christmas eve. Prudence had, by wave and means familiar to the feminine mind, conveyed to the bashful Alfred the intelligence that she had made for him a Christmas remembrance. Never mind how she did it. She did it, and there you are. Alfred would be able to back back into your own past and bring up some instances of woman's diplomacy wherein she was able to tell you something without saying anything in particular. Just gave your institution a chance.

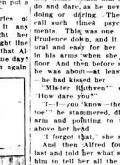
Knowing this, Alfred knew that it was his bounden duty to reciprocate—and to reciprocate in advance. Always, always, a man must reciprocate in advance to a lady.

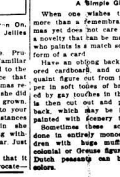
So Alfred might have been seen stepping hesitatingly up the steps of the Milton home on Christmas eve. He carried a small package in one hand. It was his intention to deliver this to whoever came to the door, with a message that it was for Prudence.

In answer to his ring no less a person than Prudence herself opened the door. Her eyes were sparkling, her cheeks were rosy, and in one hand she held a bunch of green stuff.

"Why, Alfred!" she exclaimed. "Come right in. I'm putting up the Christmas greens."

So Alfred came right in, shyly and slyly depositing the little package on a small table in the hall as he entered. Prudence led the way to the living





A Christmas Angel

by Donald Allen

A pretty young girl, well wrapped up against the cold night, and a half-grown boy carrying a large basket, were crossing the street when an automobile swung suddenly around the corner. To save themselves, the girl and the boy had to make a sudden retreat, and in so doing they dropped the basket and it was crushed under the wheels.

There were four young men in the automobile. They were singing and laughing and enjoying the license of Christmas eve. They jeered at the boy for dropping the basket, and they raised their hats in mock courtesy to the girl.

"Miss, I didn't go for to do it," apologized the boy, who had been hired as a messenger, and who had been told that the basket contained food for poor families in the tenement beyond.

"I know—I know," replied the girl. "It wasn't your fault, but I'm so sorry. The sick woman and her children won't have the food and toys now, but I have a little change in my purse and I can still do something. You needn't say anything. It is just across the street. Good-night to you."

"Missy," said the boy as she was about to move away from him as a mimic to carry the basket. Here it is. Give it to some kid up there who wants a mouth-organ. Oh, you must take it, and if you say no I'll wait here till them fellers come back and bit 'em with a rock."

"But how about your Christmas dinner?" the girl asked.

"Oh, I can skirmish around, same as I always do. Night to you, and I hope that sick woman will get better."

The girl crossed the street and entered the hallway of the tenement and climbed to the third floor. Three children were waiting for her on the landing, and uttered glad shouts at sight of her. She had been there before and had promised them that she would come on Christmas eve. With in the poverty-stricken rooms called home a sick woman was lying on a bed. She smiled and was glad at sight of the girl.

She told them the incident of the auto and the loss of the basket, and then she counted over her small change and went downstairs to the nearest grocery. It was little she could buy. There would be Christmas eating, but no feast. The little stockings with their holes would be hung, but there would be no Santa Claus to fill them. The children stood with their faces to the wall and wept, and the girl laid the head of the sick woman and shed tears.

As they sat thus the door opened and let in the cold air from the hall. An old man stood outside. He was ragged and unkempt, and hunger had given him the face of a wolf. There was not a soft line in it. Peering out of his own door on the same floor, he had seen the girl come bearing parcels. There was hope on the table before him.

The children cried out as they saw the look on the old man's face, and the girl rose up and faced the sick woman and shed tears.

"I want bread and I'll have it!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"But you can't take it from this sick woman and these helpless children," she said.

"I tell you I'm hungry—I want bread! Why didn't you bring me some first? I am old, there is no work for me, but I will not die like a dog. Stand aside! You will get more!"

He seized her by the arms and threw her to the floor. The children began shouting for help, and the man-wolf was tearing the parcels. He selected some one uttered and seized him and whirled him about and thrust him out into the hall, shutting the door on his oaths and snarls. The children ceased their cries and the girl looked up to see a young man standing in the center of the room, gazing around him.

"It is you!" she half-sobbed. "You were in the auto that almost ran me down. You laughed in my face as you raised your hat. But for you there would be no plenty of food and some presents here."

"Yes, I was one of them," the man answered. "It is Christmas eve, and we were out for a lark. Yes, I looked straight into your eyes, and in five minutes I was ashamed of myself. I came back and hunted until I found you here. When he told me that you were a Christmas angel, and that he had been robbing you, I felt that I was still more ashamed of myself and of my friends. Where is the basket?"

"Yes, it is Christmas eve," she said in a voice hardly above a whisper as she seemed to listen to the merry shouts from the street. "There are tens of thousands of persons on the streets in merry mood, but what have we here? What have we in every room in the old rookery? Were you thinking of it when you crushed the basket, I was bringing?—when you scuffled in to my face?"

"I was a brute," he answered.

"I was bringing my little mite," she continued in a deprecatory way. "I have a widowed mother to support, and I could not spare much. It was weeks saving up to buy what was in that basket. You are rich, perhaps. It would b've been nothing to you."

The children stood hushed and awed, and the sick woman closed her eyes and wondered at it all. The young man and the girl looked straight into each other's eyes as they talked, and her words seemed to cut him like the lash of a whip. When there had been silence for a minute, and the old man-wolf was heard shuffling as he paced the hall, the young man said

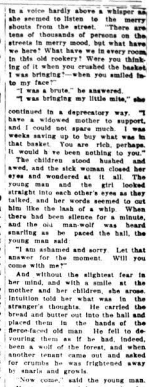
"I am ashamed and sorry. Let that answer for the moment. Will you come with me?"

And without the slightest fear in her mind, and with a smile at the mother and her children, she arose. Intuition told her what was in the stranger's thoughts. He carried the bread and butter out into the hall and placed them in the hands of the fierce-faced old man. He fell to devouring them as if he had, indeed, been a wolf of the forest, and when another round came out and asked for crumbs he was frightened away by snarls and growls.

Now come," said the young man.

Up one street and down another for an hour, they went. Wines and jellies and fruits, they bought for the woman in bed, stinted was starvation more than disease—food to last for days and days. They selected, next, gifts and new stockings to receive them—what ever money could buy and the two could handle into their arms, they picked up. And all the time, though neither one knew the name of the other, they talked and laughed and were like children in their delight.

The return to the tenement was like the arrival of a lord and his lady. There was something for other children, too, and a policeman, pausing in



"I Have a Widowed Mother to Support, and I Could Not Spare Much."

the lower hall, heard such shouts of happiness and such childish laughter that he glanced up the dimly-lighted stairs and said to himself:

"Old Santa must have changed his route this year and come among the rich."

And at a late hour, when the Christmas angel and the guardian walked downstairs together and she was put into a cab for home, they still talked and still laughed. Once did they hear that they would ever meet again. She had lacked him for his brusqueness. She was hoping that he would see that she had forgiven him. He had been almost brutal. He was hoping that she had seen his better side. No cards —no names.

"Good-night," they said at parting; and when he raised his hat she knew that it was in courtesy instead of fealty.

Days later, when the girl visited the old tenement again, the sick woman and the children had vanished, but had left word behind for her. The man-wolf was still there, but lapsed of growling and showing his teeth, he was tame. In another room were light and air and food and comforts in abundance, the girl found the mother and her children. It was a glad surprise, and to the look of inquiry on the widow, no longer in bed, whispered

"He did it! He did it all!"

One evening, when long weeks had passed, the young man was waiting at the door of the girl who had come from her place of daily employment.

"I have been to see your sick mother," he said, quietly. "She says I may call. What does the Christmas Angel say?"