

**CHRISTMAS FOR TWO**

By AGNES HOWARD BUTLER.



M A L L Thomas Moore was born an orphan. So far as he was concerned, his brief history began and ended at the Children's home. His big sister Lily, who was six and therefore should have known better, told vague tales of a real Mother and a little house in the country where they had cocoa every day for breakfast. This last condemned the whole story. At the Asylum one had cocoa only on Sunday, and this festive event redeemed a day otherwise devoted to religious exercises.

The two children sat on the edge of their chairs in the bleak asylum parlor, where three holly wreaths in the curtainless windows proclaimed that it was Christmas. Both were dressed in the institutional blue and white check, and there was a red stain on each of their faces which told of the recent and vigorous application of soap and water. Lily was dream and roses with appealing long-lashed eyes that would have secured her a home many times over if she had been willing to go alone. No one wants to adopt a boy. Even the blonde ones were unclaimed, so what chances had Thomas, brown as to hair and eyes and skin, although anything but somber in effect? The overworked Matron had reluctantly given up the idea of "placing" the two children together. A desirable home had been found for the girl with two prim maiden ladies and little brother had to remain behind. So the tiny folks were to spend their last Christmas together with Lily's new guardians.

"Sister will come every Saturday to see Brother," said the little girl, who accepted the coming separation with a child's strange fatality, although her heart was aching.

"Yes," assented Brother noncommittally. He was less concerned with future happiness than with the pleasing prospect of a day in new surroundings.

A carriage drawn by a fat slug of a horse drew up to the curbing, two ladies got out and cautiously ascended the slippery steps.

"Miss-Priscilla-red-headed and Miss-Mattie-pull-her-hair-back," announced Thomas, who had his own way of

characterizing people.

"Tommy! Tommy! Don't call them that," wailed Lily; "say Miss Priscilla and Miss Mattie or maybe they won't want me."

At this awful thought even Thomas was abashed, so it was the shy little Lily alone who slipped from her chair and offered her hand to the two ladies as they entered the room followed by the Matron. Miss Priscilla shook hands in a matter of fact way, but Miss Mattie bent to kiss the children as she helped them on with their wraps and gathered up the meager parcel that contained Lily's personal belongings.

"Shall we go now, Sister?" she ventured. The dominant chord of her existence had always tinkled a soft accompaniment to the leitmotif of the decisive Miss Pris.

"Yes," assented the latter positively, "and we will return the boy precisely at five," she added to the Matron, who had been hovering over Lily with good-byes and admonitions.

The coachman carried both children down the icy steps and they bore themselves with becoming modesty, as if accustomed to such care, while the orphans in the front ward watched enviously, and one of them opened the window wide enough to call down:

"Aw, Tommy's coming back anyhow," as a salve to their slighted condition.

When the big house was reached there was a delightful holiday smell in the air of evergreens, oranges and freshly burning driftwood. Lily was taken upstairs to come down later, her blonde beauty radiant in the white lawn and blue ribbons in which Miss Mattie had dressed her. With a child's adaptability she seemed to fit in perfectly with her surroundings in contrast to Thomas in his coarse blue gingham and heavy shoes. She would bring the spirit of youth to a house, long accustomed to the decorous ways of sober middle age. A black and white Japanese spaniel, with a nose so short that he seemed always on the point of a sneeze, jumped up beside her and laid his head affectionately on her arm.

"What a picture," sighed Miss Mattie.

"Don't spoil the child," rejoined her sister, with a glance at small Thomas, who seemed rather out of it. "Come, it's time for the tree."

A white-capped maid shoved aside the portieres and revealed a tree, glittering with tinsel and heaped around with various ribbon-tied packages. There was a satisfying smallness, a cozy "portion for two" feeling about this fat little tree, in contrast to the usual spindly, sparsely trimmed evergreen at the Asylum, which was so large that it never seemed to belong to anyone but the Board of Directors.

After a moment of rapturous silence Lily hugged a real dolly, and Thomas fell upon a toy horse. Being of an investigating turn of mind, it was soon minus saddle and bridle

**PREPARING FOR HIS ANNUAL JOURNEY**



and the tail was about to follow when Miss Pris created a diversion by lighting the tree so that he might see it in all its glory before he went back. The early winter twilight began to shadow the room as she rang for tea. Then thoughtfully she hung Tom's coat by the fire to warm in preparation for his cold ride.

The tea-wagon appeared. In honor of the day it bore the Martha Washington set of colonial tradition, a cherished heirloom whose egg-shell fragility had been guarded from destruction through five careful generations. Besides the usual tea service, there was a pitcher of milk and thin slices of bread, spread with raspberry jam, and a plate heaped with bananas.

It was wheeled into place before Miss Mattie, whose transparent hands had barely lifted the teapot, when with a whoop of joy the riotous Thomas made descent. Heedless of his sister's warning cry and poor Miss Mattie's horrified gasp, he grasped the handle of this novel push-cart, shout-

ing: "Bananas! Bananas!"

The peculiar fatality which pursues small boys in a drawing-room swooped down upon him. There was a crash and a tinkle of silver as the wheels met the edge of a heavy rug, and Tom, the devastator, sat amid the ruins.

"Oh, Miss-Priscilla-red-headed! Miss-Mattie-pull-your-hair-back! I didn't mean to break it; don't send Lily back to the 'alum 'cause I'm bad, and be my Muvvers, too," he concluded breathlessly.

It was Miss Pris who picked him out of the debris, and as his short arms met around her neck and his tear-streaked face went down on her shoulder, she looked across at Miss Mattie and as one who has at length arrived at a happy decision, she announced:

"You take the girl—the boy is mine." (Copyright, 1914, by Western Newspaper Union.)

**HER BEST CHRISTMAS**

C O M E on along, Sandy; I'll treat to dinner at the Metropolitan!"

Sandy, a tall girl who didn't look her thirty years, was busy glancing over a typewritten sheet and for a moment did not answer. Bob stood watching her, taking in the delicate lines of her face and the beauty of the "sandy" hair, which, when he was alone and forgot that Sandy was a newspaper woman and his "pal," he was pleased to call golden.

"Cut that out, Sandy. You'll be back. I have a check and it's Christmas Eve. I'm for a treat. I say—did you hear me ask you to go to the Metropolitan? You take it as calmly as if I had asked you to go around to Otto's lunch counter. Deuce take it! Why can't you be a little enthusiastic?"

Slowly the girl raised her head. More than a sheet of copy had been holding her attention. But she caught Bob's frown and immediately the mother instinct in her was aroused. She broke into her usual comrade laugh.

"All right, Bob. The invitation overwhelmed me. The Metropolitan? But I couldn't, Bobby dear. My shirtwaist is soiled and you yourself said there was a hole in my beautiful brown coat."

"Oh, come along! I was only joking. You'd outshine all the women at the Metropolitan if you went there in a khaki suit. I wish you had a little more vanity. Women are awfully tame when they haven't."

"Come, now, you know I'm vain of the fact that I haven't any vanity. Don't call me tame. I won't go to the Metropolitan with you if you do. Somehow I feel—"

"Fiddlesticks! Get on your hat. I'm going. The idea of a newspaper woman's feeling! Cut it out!"

The Metropolitan was filled with the "vulgar rich" in holiday attire; but Sandy and Bob were happy in true bohemian style as they sat at their little table chatting and joking like two boys. Sandy never would play the woman—that was the only objection Bob had to her.

"I say, Sandy, I bet you've no plans

for tomorrow and I'm coming to take you out. I've a great plan. Put on that brown silk and play you're a woman for once."

"Yes, a sweet, young, clinging feminine creature with my heart on my sleeve! 'Twill be charming, of course. Do you really think I could play the part?"

"Stop joking, Sandy. You never will take me seriously. You will go, won't you?"

"I'd like to please you, Bobby, but I really must be home tomorrow. I

have work that must be done, and besides I have a feeling that I ought not to go."

"Feeling be darned! If you had fewer 'feelings' and more feeling for a poor fellow—What's the matter, Sandy?"

The girl had cast a glance over the room and had grown suddenly

pale. She closed her eyes for a moment. Bob had caught the pailor.

"Oh, nothing. I had a little twinge of that old neuralgia."

Thus the chasm was bridged and the dinner ended happily. If anything, Sandy was gayer than usual.

Four o'clock the next day Sandy's heart was beating loud. Her "studio," as she was pleased to call it, wore its very best attire. Even the inevitable typewriter was out of sight.

She was older, older by six years, than when he had last seen her, but happiness made her wondrously beautiful. Bobby would have lost his wits.

If he should not come! But he would come. If he should come and the dream could not be realized! But he would not come unless he could.

A rap at the door!

"Miss, there's a shentleman a-askin' for ye. Should I send him in?"

"Yes, Mary." The tones were perfectly calm. Six years of patient waiting had not been without their power.

"Margaret!"

"John!"

"I knew you would come. I saw you last evening. I knew you would find me. Oh, John, I am so happy!" She rested her head on his shoulder to hide the tears.

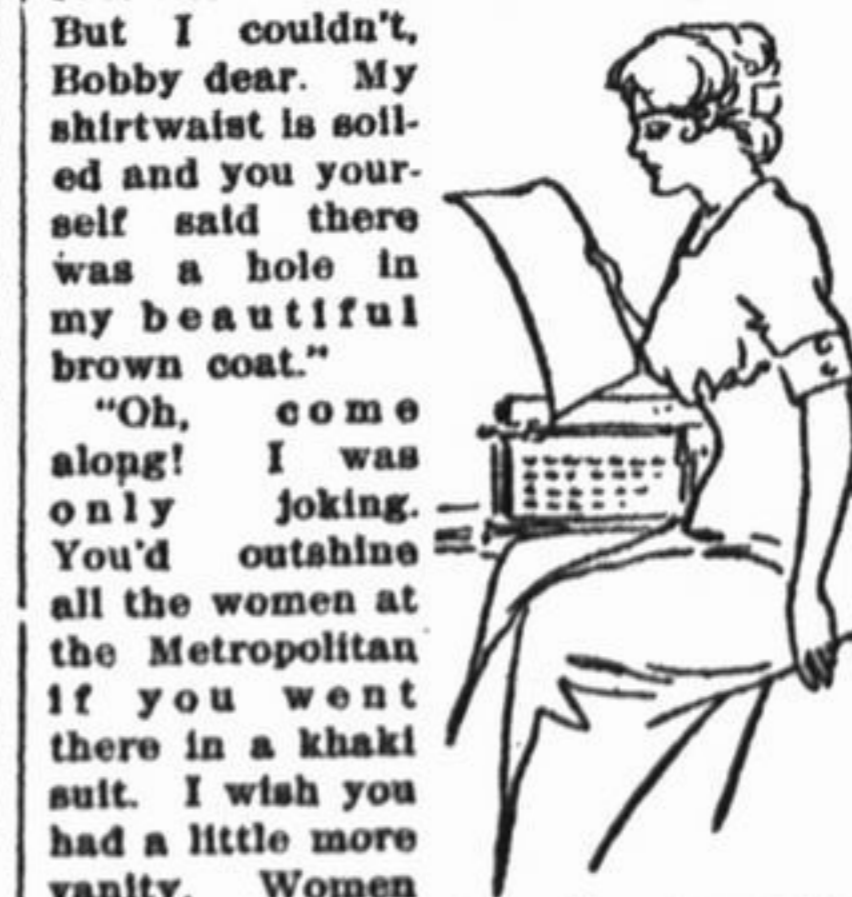
"My Margaret, now and forever!"

"And Constance?"

"Constance is gone—and she wished it to be."

A long silence.

"Sit down, John. There is your chair. How often have I pictured you in it. Let me think. Let me get my breath. I knew you would come. I wonder what Bobby will say! He thinks I have no heart. But—it was to be."—New York Mail.



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