GIFTS

BY NORMA PATTERSON

The clock upon the mantel chimed six and Anna Holcolm knew that she could no longer hide behind her closed eyelids or deceive herself into believing that a few kind, velvet hours of night separated her from a day she did not see how she was to face.

Little lusty, crowing shouts came up through a window opened to the frost. There would be bright red sleds out on the snow and little new mittens on happy hands deftly forming snowmen. There would be drums and horns and go-mobiles and holly-decked windows and laughing backlogs in wide fireplaces.

Once, perhaps, in the life of everyone there comes a Christmas devoid of meaning; a Christmas when that inconveniently registering organ called a heart must be put away in a vault, the door closed and the combination thrown away and all the sign posts of the day passed without recognition or salutation. Anna faced such a Christmas to-day.

Her mind, seeking escape, fled back to last Christmas. How perfect it had been! She and Jamie had planned to make it a culmination of happy Christmases, with each of their children's choicest wish gratified. There were three reasons for this: Van, who had won honors in college and fame for his football squad, deserved it; Marie, who was not altogether happy in spite of a successful first season, needed it; as for Shirley, it was a last desperate snatching after this son of theirs who was slipping away from them.

Jamie, running a hand through his quickly graying hair, had said:

"If Van still wants that roadster, all right."

"But, Jamie, isn't that extravagant? You see, Marie has set her heart on . . . pearls."

It was usually this way for them, Jamie for Van, she for Marie. Both would have loved to be for Shirley but he was such an outlaw he put himself beyond the pale of happy plannings.

Jamie thought a minute, made an impulsive gesture. "Get her the pearls!"

Anna knew they shouldn't afford it, but Marie had been moody and upset. It was on account of that smooth-tongued, dark-eyed De Mond, a blase fellow with an extraordinary fascination and the habit of turning its full light on one of the season's choicest and youngest. Last year it had been little Julie Sandow; this year, Marie.

"And Shirley?" ventured Anna.

"God knows what Shirley wants!"

He had been expelled from two prep schools and was hanging by a hair and three conditions to a third. Where he spent his time and his father's money, Anna dared not think. Lately he had been growing more reckless and impudent to his father.

She had said, "We've opposed him so long. Suppose we . . . it might have a good effect, Jamie, if we let him have his way just once? He's wild to study aviation."

But Jamie, so down on this one wayward child, so impatient of his wildness, could not risk him in the air!

"It's only another mad whim. He's not interested in the science of it or the mechanical part. It's just the up-and-going of the thing. He's run all the paces on earth. Now give him the sky! He needs an iron hand, that young man."

Van brought a bunch of colloge friends home for the holidays. Marie had a dance on Christmas evening. Shilrey, overjoyed at his father's permission to study aviation (yes, Jamie had given in as he always did) was actually on hand and conducted himself with credit. The house glimmered and sparkled and shone like a fairy scene. Jamie and Anna, dog tired but with set smiles, danced with the youngsters.

"They do look happy, don't they?" sighed Anna contentedly.

It was then that Jamie, after years of fatherly indulgence, burst out in the middle of the dance, grew indignant in his toes, made enormous gestures in the path of whirling couples.

"Why shouldn't they be happy? They've had too much . . . that's the whole thing in a nutshell. Never satisfied . . . howling for the moon . . . got no idea of the value of a dollar. What on earth have they ever done in return for all that's been done for them?

It had been rather comical and pathetic too. Anna, trying to quiet him, grew uneasy beneath the spangles of a new black dress. Had it all cost Jamie more than he could afford to spend? He looked tired and old around his eyes. Rebellion rose in Anna's heart. Her own toes grew indignant!

"It's not right," she thought. "I'm going to put a stop to all this sacrifice on Jamie's part. They don't appreciate their father. I've given too much thought to the children and not enough to Jamie. From now on it's going to be Jamies first."

But there was little time to put her resolution through. For, a few months later, Jamie . . . had gone. Out of health and security; out of her love and her life . . . gone.

The financial crash followed. Van had had to leave college on the eve of graduation. Marie had dropped her plans. Shirley gave up aviation. And after a bewildered season of grief and of trying to calm and comfort three stricken children conscious of seeing too late their father as he had been, Anna had sold the big town house and had brought them back to the little home where she and Jamie had started housekeeping, where all the children had been born. They had kept it for sentiment's sake. It had proved their refuge. Arriving a week ago, they were settled just in time for the holidays.

It was going to be a hard day for them! So different from every Christmas they could remember. For their sake she must meet it, walk along with the heartbreaking hours and shove the day finally over the sill of night and into the wide healing space of the past.

Anna rose. The day was gray and frozen. Clouds hung just above housetops, and smoke, incense rising from happy hearthstones, ascended into the lowered heavens like prayer going straight to the throne.

As she dressed, her mind went back to those first Christmases in the house when the children were small. A torn place on the wall paper had reminded her. Van had done it with a new, exploring knife. She remembered the very suit he had worn that day. And she had dressed little Marie up in a gorgeous pink sash. And baby Shirley had actually reached a fat hand for a candle.

Suddenly, the old days rushed about her with a glad returning flutter like little hands welcoming her home. They crowded into her heart and filled it with happy memories; family jokes, household expressions, happy incidents, all the dear simplicity of those early, struggling days before Jamie had begun to make money.

She stepped into the hall and the echo of little feet seemed to come from grey corners, sending her arms out in hungry longing. How often in the early morning she had stood just here, thankful that through another night all had been well with her brood. She felt, as she tiptoed past the rooms where they now lay asleep and down the stairs that after all her babies slept there yet, instead of the three sophisticated young people they had grown into.

Anna had to grope her way across the lower hall but she opened the living room door on a blaze of light. She caught her breath in astonishment. Holly and evergreens had transformed the place into a miniature forest. A roaring fire on the hearth lighted every crisp leaf, every red berry into a very hallelujah of color.

"Mornin', 'Mis' Holcolm!" It was Belle, the old negro servant who had been with them through everything. "Dem chilluns done it las' night aftah yo'd gone to bed. Dey been hidin' dat misseltoe fo' two days. Yo ought to 'uv seed 'em a-fixin' up las' night fo' ter su'prise yo'. Dey sho had a jubilee!"

A little bewildered at this unexpected attention from her three, Anna turned to the fire, lifting a staying hand quickly to her throat. There was the old chair that had always sat in the chimney corner. It had been a scarecrow even in the old days, but Jamie had rested there in the quiet evenings after his work. Her babies had climbed upon the arm of it. How had it come there?

"I foun' it yistiddy in a secon' han' shop," said Belle, understandingly. They wuz no mistakin' it and I tidied it up a bit. It b'longs yere!"

Anna reached a hand for the rough black one and they stood together gazing into the past, tears shining in their eyes. Then came the sound of footsteps. The children were coming.

Unconsciously Anna braced her shoulders, calling upon all her strength to face them without breaking down. For the first time in her life she stood alone on Christmas morning to greet them and extended empty hands—not a gift for them did she have. It was her empty Christmas!

The door swung open. They stood on the threshold, Marie, arm-in-arm with each of her brothers Anna, gazing at them saw a wonderful thing happen. At sight of her tear-wet face their own expressions crumpled—the old, old habit of bringing their grief to Mother—then recovered . . . rose . . . mounted . . . something seemed to lift them out of themselves. She knew at once they had planned it all upstairs and it was taking the strength of three, linked close together, to put it over.

"Merry Christmas, Mother!" they cried in chorus.

Merry Christmas! They had dared to say it. Her own courage leaped up to meet theirs and she spoke the words she thought she could never say again. "Merry Christmas, darlings!"

And the little heroic berries upon the wall shouted and the fire danced and their hearts stood shoulder to shoulder in a white, triumphant moment. Together they had touched and faced and passed one of the hardest places in the day.

Crowding about her they covered her with kisses and surged into the breakfast room. Anna, who had braced her strength to cover the three of them, felt the responsibility of courage lifted from her shoulders. They were seeing to her, instead of her seeing to them. Her babies were like this and she had not known!

How Anna had dreaded this breakfast, recalling the costly presents she and Jamie had given them on other Christmas mornings. To-day when even a little gift would have meant so much, she had nothing. But they had gifts for her, the packages lay by her plate.

"You've gone and bought something," she reproached them gently, "after our agreement."

"Open them!" they cried eagerly.

She chose the largest one. Out of the wrappings came a black silk cape, warmly lined.

"I made it, Mother, out of the lining of that black spangled evening dress."

"You made this!"

It was a little queer. Anna could see now. A seam puckered, in one place; the hem pulled. Here was a real accomplishment, learned in secrecy, toiled over, sewed, pulled out, sewed again—for love's sweet sake.

"It's lovely! I'd no idea my girl could sew."

"Just you wait!" Marie wagged a bright head, indicating future triumphs.

"Open the other," cried Van and shoved his gift forward, his eyes bright, his face aglow.

It was a savings bank book and in it a single modest entry. It was hardly the price of a pair of gloves such as he had worn in other days but he spoke with elation. "I've saved that much already, Mother!"

Anna thought of another bank book that had been thrust across that table long ago, another voice, like Van's, saying, "I've saved that much already, dear!" Some day she would tell Van. Just now she could only smile mistily into the face of her tall, splendid son.

The third gift was an envelope. From within Anna drew a sheet of paper on which Shirley had written:

"I've given up cigarettes, Mum,
because he didn't smoke 'em."

She tried to speak but her lips quivered and tears blinded her eyes.

Marie, the new responsible little Marie, jumped up from the table and saved the situation in the nick of time.

"I'm making molasses candy, everybody! Hurry up with your breakfast and come help. You know that big old black pot, Mother? The iron one? I found it in the shed and scrubbed hours on it. Candy wouldn't be candy unless it was cooked in that same pot. There never was any that tasted like yours used to. Did you use vinegar?"

They plunged noisily into the kitchen.

When the boys had blistered their fingers and Anna's porous, immaculate candy lay in a platter beside the dingy efforts of the others, somebody said something about the attic. There was a wild stampede for the stair. Her grown-up babies!

Anna heard their shouts coming back from beneath the shingles, and presently strange things began to appear on the living-room rug. An air gun that had banged terror into the hearts of stray cats and chickens; a train that ran on a circular track; drums and blocks and soldiers; a piano that tinkled yet.

Down on their knees before the fire they went, romping with their own childhood. Could they be the three dissatisfied young people, bored with everything that city life had to offer?

Dinner was announced and there was a great hurrah over the turkey . . . nobody had expected one. Belle wouldn't tell—it was Santa Claus! And the pudding . . . just look at that! Anna realized that they were blindfolding her and leading her past the dreaded hours that she had planned to face bravely for their sakes. She knew too that they had grown very dear and very tender, like the fulfillment of her dreams of them.

When dinner was over they gathered once more about the fire. The firelight on their faces, they grew quieter, more serious. The talk turned to the future. It came to Anna that her children had been playing with life. Could they really like earnest living as she and Jamie had liked it? Or were they playing a part, just for to-day?

They talked of their father, not with the bitterness of first grief but calmly, as if he had taken his place among them. Van said, "I remember something father told me about that once."

And again, when Shirley was asking for advice, "I believe that Father would have looked at it this way."

Anna reached a hand across to the old chair, and firm, understanding fingers seemed to close over hers. He was not gone! He lived again in Van's steady purpose, in Shirley's softened tempestuousness, in Marie's sweet eyes and loving face.

Now, at last, she saw what the children had done. They had led her gaily through the day and in love and self-forgetfulness had found their own way back to happiness.

From far away the sound of Christmas chimes came faintly. She fancied she could hear chanting voices:

"He gave his only begotten Son . . . that the world might not perish but have everlasting life."

The meaning of it all came swiftly, like the upward rushing of white wings. The Birth, the Life and the Death . . . she understood now. The true significance of the day touched home to her heart. She, too, had given what she loved best . . . that these might see the light!

Last Year's Failures.

What shall I do with last year's failures,
The foolish mistakes that are haunting me yet?
Shall I allow them to mar and embitter
The coming days with a vain regret?

Shall I gather up my last year's failures
And bind them into a sombre sheaf
Of ever-accusing disappointments,
And give them over to hopeless grief?

Shall I dig a grave and bury my failures,
Deep in the tomb of forgetfulness hide
From my own chagrin their ungainly faces,
And cover them up with my wounded pride?

No. I'll make a ladder out of my failures,
A ladder on which I can firmly stand;
Upon it I'll climb to the loft of successes,
Slowly but surely, hand over hand.

And so, after all, my last year's failures,
Which grimly arise my life to confound,
May, in the end, turn out to be blessings,
If I use each one for a ladder-round.

—Ida M. Thomas.

New Year's Eve.

I'm closing the Old Year's house to-night,
With all of its memories, sad and bright;
And somehow it gives me an aching heart
Because with the Old Year I must part.
In so many ways it has been to me kind,
That I feel ungrateful to leave it behind.

To-morrow I move to a house that is new;
But it's all so untried; the rooms may be few
Where I'll get the sun the most of the day,
And yet I must live in it, come what may.
At any rate, 'twill be clean, I know,
And I'll do my best to keep it so.

—Ida M. Thomas.

The New Year.

A flower unblown: a book unread:
A tree with fruit unharvested:
A path untrod: a house whose rooms
Lack yet the heart's divine perfumes:
A landscape whose wide border lies
In silent shade 'neath silent skies:
A wondrous fountain yet unsealed:
A casket with its gifts concealed:
This is the year that for you waits
Beyond To-morrow's mystic gates.

—Horatio Nelson Power.

NEW YEAR ENTERTAINMENT FEATURES FOUR SEASONS AND MONTHS OF YEAR

The four seasons and the months of the year will be featured in the entertainment planned for New Year's eve. Invitations read as follows:

Father Tyne
requests the pleasure of your company
at nine o'clock, December 31st,
to welcome a young guest
HAPPY NEW YEAR
who will arrive at twelve sharp
en route for the Four Seasons
and the months of the Year

Each guest is presented with a wee Cupid doll. Around his waist is a length of colored ribbon with a loop for attaching to coat button or frock. The two having Cupids with sashes to match become partners for

THE GAME OF THE FOUR SEASONS.

Four tables, each representing one season, are required for this game. Not less than two couples should be at any one table. The number above this is not restricted. It is a progressive game. Playing begins simultaneously at all tables.

SPRING.

On the table numbered 1 there should be sheets of various colored tissue paper, green wire, scissors and library paste. Here

The flowers that bloom in the spring, tra-la,
Have nothing to do with the case,

for each person is to make a flower of some sort. The couple whose flowers are most perfect progress to the second table labelled

SUMMER VACATION.

A road, buttons and dice are used in this game. The hostess should make the road previous to the evening. It consists of a 30-inch square of heavy cardboard, marked off, along each edge, with a six-inch road, divided into spaces by cross lines at intervals of two inches. The road takes a sharp turn to the centre of the board just before reaching the starting place. The centre is lettered "Perfect Vacation."

At intervals a picture of a lake, a mountain, a waterfall or some bit of natural scenery should be pasted in spaces. In some others there should be directions such as "A raise in salary, go ahead 2." "A lift in an auto, go ahead 5." "A rainy day, go back 2." "A train missed (or a boat), go back 5," or any chosen directions one cares to make.

RULES OF THE GAME.

Each player throws his dice in turn and moves his counter in the spaces according to the number indicated. No two buttons except those of partners can remain in the same space. The one arriving late must drop back five spaces. The partners who reach the Perfect Vacation first or get nearest to it win and progress to the third table which represents

AUTUMN.

Three large red cardboard "Rs" indicate that school begins in the fall. Each "pupil" or player is provided with pencil or paper on which numbers are written corresponding with those on the lists of questions in the centre of the table. Partners may work together, but secretly from the rest. The teacher (hostess) comes around and examines the papers, and the couple with the largest number of correct answers progress to the fourth and last table.

A list of questions and answers will be forwarded

Here are sample questions: What flowers wake up only in time for afternoon tea? Answer, Four o'clocks. What piece of furniture in the room represents a command? Answer, Stand.

WINTER.

Snow (absorbent cotton) and a small sled on which are piled numerous tiny wrapped parcels are on the table representing winter. There is

Each snowball contains a favor.

also a pile of white crepe paper cut into seven-inch squares, and some library paste. Each player makes a snowball by inclosing one of the packages in a wad of cotton, wraps it in the crepe paper and fastens the edges with paste. On each piece of paper is the name of one of the guests, which must come on the outside of the snowball. No person makes more than one ball. Here, as it is the highest table, the two who make the poorest snowballs go to the lowest table numbered one. When the last snowball is finished it may mean the end of the progressive game. The snowballs should be left piled on the table.

THE MONTHS OF THE YEAR.

Players are provided with pencils and paper and write down what they consider represents the months of the year, and which one, from the various things in the rooms. Here are a few suggestions: A large number "I" represents the New Year, January; a valentine, February; a toy rabbit or the picture of one portrays the March hare; an umbrella, April; a Maybasket, May; a bowl of roses, June, etc. A prize should be given the person guessing the most answers correctly. A calendar would be just the thing, or a diary.

NEW YEAR ARRIVES IN SNOW-STORM.

When the refreshments have been served, which should be shortly after 11, each guest takes one of the snowballs. At the stroke of 12 each person throws the one he holds to the person whose name it bears. So the New Year is greeted with a shower of snowballs, which, on inspection, prove to hold trifles, such as miniature mirrors, shovels, lanterns, lucky animals, etc., which can be bought for a few pennies.

Samantha Resolves.

I won't greet the New Year with a weary air and discouraged face—
I won't let my state of mind make mountains out of my molehills of work—
I won't let the word "drudgery" have a place in my vocabulary—
I won't be afraid to eliminate from my life Things, Customs and Traditions that keep my brain and my house cluttered—
I won't regard myself as a martyr or a heroine because I manage to get the meals on time and the mending done—
I won't scold and I won't nag—
I won't forget that soft words still drive away wrath—
I won't lose my sense of humor—
I won't forget to smile when I want to frown—
I won't forget to be thankful for my blessings.

Our New Year Talk.

We sometimes wish one another a Happy New Year without realizing that it is up to us to make one another happy. Happy New Years are not like weeds, which spring up of themselves; they are like orchids, which take a lot of careful cultivation. Many Happy New Years die young—of neglect and starvation.

Don't stop at wishing; do! Nor at thinking; act!—Get on with the job of happiness-making. What are you doing to make someone else happier?

Happiness, like charity, begins at home. There are people who can be as cheery as anyone could wish—except in their own homes! There are going to be fifty-two weeks in 1926. How many of them are you going to help make happy for those around you?

A happy father makes a happy family; a cheery mother makes a wintry day feel like June!

Seekers.

Hymn the finder of the theme,
Hymn the seekers.

—Joe Binyon

BRITISH TROOPS EVACUATE THE COLOGNE BRIDGEHEAD

The first material result of the Locarno treaties was the evacuation of Cologne by the British army of occupation. The above photograph shows the ceremony of the changing of the guard for last time.