MARKDALE STANDARD

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A CHRISTMAS TREE FOR THE BIRDS

After you have enjoyed your Christmas tree turn it over to the birds. They are at this time sorely pressed to find food, especially if the winter is a severe one.

Take your Christmas tree out into the back yard and load it down with presents for the birds; that is, prepare a food tree for them. Once you try it, you will be amazed at how the birds will flock around the tree, eating, chirping, and enjoying themselves.

Try to make your tree look as much as possible like an evergreen littered with insect eggs and larvae. Only trees cut for this purpose should be used, for the hot liquid food I am going to tell you about will kill a live tree. Valuable fruit trees in the yard or orchard should not be used.

In preparing the food for the tree, melt beef or mutton suet and stir in other foods such as hemp-seed, white bread, meat, millet, poppy-seed, sun-flower-seed, ant eggs or dried berries, and then pour the food while it is at the boiling point on the branches of the tree. You should have about twice as much suet as any other kind of food, and in spreading it over the branches of the tree try to make the tree look as much like a tree covered with insect eggs and larvae as you can.

After the suet has cooled, if you will remain quietly near, you will soon see the birds flit into their Christmas tree and begin pecking off the fine presents you have placed there for them. I am sure that if you will try this annual meeting, and each one and Christmas. Should there be bird boxes already distributed about the home, the birds having grown accustomed to seeing you often, will probably fly to the food tree quicker than if strange birds have to be newly attracted in this way. But don't become discouraged if no birds appear the first hour, for they have not yet learned that you have given them a Christmas tree.

To make a special new Christmas tree for the birds, take an evergreen, if possible, but any kind of tree will do if you tie sheaves of wheat, cornstalks and evergreen branches all over it to make it dense. If it is a large tree it may be hung with wire baskets filled with suet, boxes with fronts removed, containing nut meats, millet, sun-flower seeds, wheat, cracked corn, bread crumbs, rolled oats, etc. Cocoanut shells cut in half and filled with dainties that the birds love can also be hung from the branches. Have several shelves on which place apples, lettuce, cabbage and vegetables. Of course, the suet preparation can also be used on this tree.

Other foods that they eat at this time of the year, but which are not especially suitable for putting on Christmas trees for them, are raw meat, pork rind, doughnuts, dog biscuits, boiled potatoes, peanuts and other nuts and dried fruits. These can better be placed on feeding tables, and if you prefer, you could give the birds a Christmas dinner instead of a Christmas tree.

At this season, too, birds need grit to enable them to digest their food properly. Sand such as canaries eat will do.

Have at least one or two deep boxes almost filled with cotton, where the half-frozen birds can find shelter and warmth. Many birds suffer from thirst during the winter. Heat a brick or large stone and place a pan of water on it.

"Though Christ a thousand times
In Bethlehem be born,
If He not born in thee,
Thy soul is all forlorn."

Everyone should regard Christmas as an occasion for clearing his heart of all grudges, for forgiving all offenses and all enemies. It is a good time to forget and to forgive, a good time to forget self and think of others.

The Princess of the Violin

By C. COURTENAY SAVAGE.

In spite of the light whirl of snow, which everyone said was seasonable, considering that Christmas was only three weeks off, there were a score of people waiting before the ticket window of the Thompsonville motion picture house. John Higgins, the proprietor, saw the crowd and smiled. He knew why they were there, twenty minutes before show time, and, with the air of a man regarding a great possession, glanced proudly at the showy billboard:

MARY JENNINGS
THE PRINCESS OF THE VIOLIN

He read the sign a second and a third time. Then he went quickly into the box office and opening the window, began to sell tickets.

It was half-past seven when Mary Jennings made her first appearance that night, sandwiched between a comedy picture and the big feature of the evening. She was a small woman, with dark hair and eyes, no longer really young, and in appearance, foreign to the stage. In her simply cut dress, she could hardly be called good-looking but she had a radiant smile that was all-enveloping. When the spotlight caught her as she entered from one side of the stage, there was a heavy roar of applause, which the lifting of her violin checked abruptly. Those out front did not wish to miss a single note.

Mary Jennings had played the violin since childhood and she could make the instrument laugh and sigh, weep and sing and dream. As she swayed the bow over the vibrating strings, so she swayed the hearts of those who listened. She was not a great artist. She played with the divine temperament.

To-night, she played three semi-classical melodies and then, with friendly smile and words, asked her audience to tell her what they would like. The first two "request" pieces came quickly and then with a joyous clamor they called for Home, Sweet Home—old-fashioned, forever beloved Home, Sweet Home. Just as a certain great singer has always sung that ballad best, so it was the choicest number in Mary Jenning's repertoire.

After she had bowed acknowledgement to their sincere applause, they settled back for the feature picture and Mary Jennings' work was over until it was time for the second performance.

To-night, as she entered the small, scrupulously clean dressing-room to await the second call, she found John Higgins there, and with him a stranger whom he introduced as Mr. Helm.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Miss Jennings," Helm said cordially. He was a large man and by his general appearance, a man of success.

"Yes, he's been waiting to see you—says that he has something very important to say" Higgins spoke almost eagerly. Then—"I guess you folks can get on without me. You played wonderfully to-night, Miss Mary, better than ever!"

"Thank you," Mary Jennings said, smiling, and the stranger, noting the light in her eyes, concluded that the violinist and the theatre proprietor must be more than mere business friends.

"I understand that there are always great houses when you play," Helm said as the door closed.

"Yes, they seem to like my playing." The woman motioned her visitor to a chair and seated herself on the top of her trunk. She was very curious and slightly awed.

"That's what I came about—your playing. One of my advance men heard you in Pembroke last week. He sent word to me and I followed you here. I heard you play this afternoon."

"Yes—?" she asked uneasily.

"And I'll hand it to you—you can play."

"Thank you," she smiled again. There was a long pause. Each was thinking.

"You don't know who I am, do you?" he asked presently. "You don't place me?"

No, she did not place him.

"I'm Carlos Helm, the concert manager. I'm getting ready a big world tour for one of the bands that I sent out. We're looking for soloists. I think you'd do for one of them—"

"I? For a world tour?"

"Maybe. I'd like to try you out." He was abruptly business-like.

"I don't know—" she said softly.

"No, neither do I. But I could soon find out. Suppose you plan to come into Ottawa next Monday. We're having a big concert there in connection with a drive they are holding. I'm going to have four or five big musical numbers and they're providing the speakers. There's sure to be a crowd and if you get across with that crowd—well, you'll be able to go with any crowd."

The woman's eyes sparkled but she did not speak.

"Now about money. I'm not going to drag you before the public and then have some rival manager grab you up if you make a big hit. How much do you make playing around at these small town theatres? Not much, I'll wager."

"I average a hundred dollars a week, though, of course, I seldom get an engagement in the summer—that is, July and August."

"A hundred a week. And you're paying your own expenses," the man smiled. He had an easy task before him.

"I'll give you fifty dollars and expenses to play in Ottawa. You'll only have to do four pieces. If you go over right, I'll give you a hundred and fifty a week and travelling expenses to begin with. Afterwards you'll have more."

"I'll have to think about it," she said softly. "I—it sounds wonderful!"

"Yes, that's right—think about it. Show up at the Auditorium in Ottawa about three o'clock on the twelfth. That will give us time for a rehearsal. I've got to run now for my train. Good-bye!"

He was gone from the room before she could really answer him. She sat there on the trunk, wide-eyed, but blind to the things about her, until the call for her second performance roused her.

The applause was as generous as usual, but it had lost flavor. Ottawa! A world tour! Was she dreaming?

When she went back to her dressing room, John Higgins was waiting.

"What did he want, Mary?" he asked quickly. "He said that he was a concert manager. Does he want you to work for him?"

She nodded.

"Yes, he said that I was a good player. He said that I might have an engagement with one of his bands making a world tour. I'm going to play at a concert for him next Monday, the twelfth—to try me out."

For a minute the man did not answer. From out of doors came the faint sound of sleighbells as some of the audience drove homeward.

"It—it's mighty fine for you, Mary," he said slowly, "but you'll never get any better friends—any folks that like you more than we do."

"I know," she answered him quickly. "Still it's my chance, and after all, I'd never get any more money than I'm earning now as long as I play in these small towns."

"Money! It don't seem right for you to have to be earning money—why—"

"I know," she interrupted him, "I know that you have this theatre and there's the farm that has been such a paying proposition but, John!" a sudden tenderness came into her voice. "I love to play. When I came past the front of the theatre to-night and saw that billing, The Princess of the Violin, it seemed to have made up for all the rough places I have travelled. I've been very happy playing here in the small towns but now I want my chance to be great. We can always be wonderful friends, can't we, John?"

The man nodded but had no word for reply.

It seemed to Mary Jennings, as she entered the taxi-cab at the Ottawa Station the following Monday that she had never been more calm. And she should have been excited! At her feet was a bag containing the handsomest dress she had ever owned. On the seat beside her was her violin, a valuable instrument, bought after years of saving and self-denial. With these as her allies she was going to face her first metropolitan audience.

The orchestra had concluded its first number and a member of parliament was speaking when she came from her dressing-room, violin in hand, to stand near the wings. It was almost time for her to play. Helm, seeing her standing there, came forward, smiling.

"Play like a million dollars to-night and that contract will be ready in the morning. And don't be afraid."

She nodded. She was not afraid. If anything, she was too unafraid!

She went slowly forward. There was a sprinkling of applause and she lifted her bow to play. She went through the four numbers, two programmed numbers and their encores, playing with all the skill that had made her a favorite in the rural districts that hailed her as a princess. The audience, used to greater violinists, perhaps, but unable to resist the emotion of her music, gave her a more than hearty welcome and a most hearty recall.

She had only been in her dressing-room a minute before Helm knocked.

"I was out front," he said quickly. "You made good."

"Do you really think so?"

"Sure—you'll do. I'm not going to hand you any bunk that you're great but you've got something that gets them and that's what counts."

"Then you really think that I could play for big audiences—in big cities?"

He nodded emphatically.

"I have always wondered," she said quietly, "and now—" her eyes sparkled.

"Well, you've had your answer. You got across. You're staying at the Palace Hotel, aren't you? I'll call you up in the morning and we'll talk contracts."

He turned and started from the room but suddenly stopped.

"Say, by the way, I've a couple of open concert dates that I've got to have someone to fill. There's one in Kingston next week, another in Belleville and—" he stopped, looking at her keenly as if weighing his own wisdom. "Then there's the big Christmas festival in Montreal on the 24th. Say!" he was suddenly enthusiastic. "You can play the kind of stuff that the mob likes to hear and you play it well. I'll put you on at the Christmas festival. That'll make every paper in the country mention your name."

The little woman clasped her hands before her. To play at the Christmas festival in Montreal was a dream that few ever realized. Her eyes were wide as a child's seeing its first Christmas tree. A tear of happiness glistened on her lashes. Yes! She would play to them the "kind of stuff" that they liked to hear. She would make every newspaper man mention her name. This meant success, the will-of-the-wisp that she had been blindly pursuing for nearly ten years.

"How wonderful!" she breathed.

"I guess you can do it!" Helm said bluntly. "Good-night! I'll call you in the morning."

It was several minutes before she moved. She stood there, thinking, thinking, her brain almost numbed by the glory that had befallen her. This had been her day of days!

When she went back to her hotel she sent half a dozen telegrams, each one cancelling an engagement to play in a small town. Mary Jennings told herself that these telegrams were the knives that cut her free for a wonderful world-wide experience.

It was hours before she slept and from a fitful slumber her telephone rudely aroused her. It was a telegram from John Higgins.

"Cannot release you from engagement Christmas Eve. Have made all arrangements for gala performance. Will release you all the rest of the week."

The message angered her. How dare he! When Helm later called her on the telephone, she told him of Higgins' message.

"Did you sign any kind of contract with him?"

"Yes, a little slip of paper."

"H-m! That probably constitutes a contract. Perhaps I can buy him off."

Mary Jennings said that she hoped that it would be possible.

"Well, don't worry about it," Helm assured her. "I've got a lot of work for you to do. I've just had word that Albrie, who's been playing in a concert town with a pianist and Madame Shavet, the soprano, has been taken sick. I want you to fill in his dates for a few days. Can you start this afternoon?"

Could she start? She could have been ready in twenty minutes!

It was ten days before she returned to Ottawa and Carl Helm's office. She had not heard from him for several days and was anxious as to whether she was to start for Montreal at once, or if by any chance, she would be forced to play the Christmas date at Thompsonville.

Thompsonville! Suddenly she almost hated the name. For ten days she had travelled in luxury and lived at the best hotels. She had been playing before audiences who wore evening clothes, who applauded correctly, who understood her music. Of course, the small town folk had been fond of her, and John Higgins loved her. But everything was changed now and surely it was a right change.

She found that Helm had gone West but had left an order for her. As she feared, he had not been able to break the Thompsonville engagement. She was to keep it and then report back to Ottawa. He would be back the day after Christmas and then the contract for the long tour could be signed.

She was disappointed, so much so that she considered playing sick and so cheating Higgins after all. She shivered at her smallness but argued with herself that she was right. For a whole day she moped about her hotel, one minute deciding that she might as well go, the next determining that she would never play in Thompsonville again.

In the end, however, duty won, duty plus a queer little feeling of resentment. She would go down to Thompsonville! She would play as she had never played before! She would wear the gorgeous gown that she had bought with the thought of her Montreal engagement in mind. She would show Thompsonville what it would be missing in the years that were coming!

It was after noon when she arrived, and she went at once to the theatre to find what part she was scheduled to play in Higgins' gala program. She found the lobby trimmed with evergreen and in a frame of holly was her name with the familiar Princess of the Violin heading. The stage, too, was gayly decorated. A piano was on the stage and the organist of the Methodist Church, the best local musician, engaged especially to play her accompaniments. She found, too, to her surprise, that there was to be no afternoon performance, and only one that evening. Higgins, so the man at the box office told her, had gone to his sister's but would be back at seven. Her accompanist would meet her at four to practice.

There seemed to be nothing else to do but go back to her hotel room and put in the long afternoon. Last year, she, too, had been invited to John Higgin's sister's for over Christmas. But now a change had come. She had begun that change herself.

At four she returned to the theatre to rehearse, then back to the hotel for a lonely meal and the dragging hours until the evening engagement.

She dressed herself more than carefully that night and the mirror reflected her image as a handsome woman in startling raiment. She had not seen Higgins. She wondered if he were avoiding her. She hoped not, for, after all, she liked John. He had been very, very kind to her and, with him, friendship had blossomed into love. She smiled when she realized that if she had wished, she might be Mrs. John Higgins of Thompsonville, instead of Mary Jennings with the sure prospects of a glorious career before her.

As she stepped on to the stage that night, a chorus of "Oh's!" mingled with the thunder of applause. She checked it, almost imperiously, and played. First, there was a lilting waltz which showed all the fire of her art. Then, scarcely waiting for the silence, she played the ever-beloved Christmas lullaby, Silent Night, Holy Night. The hush of a great peace was over the house. A woman muffled a sob. Mary Jennings felt the spirit of her own music as if she were hearing another. It seemed to exalt her, to carry her above smallness and unrest. At their insistent demand she played the Christmas favorites they called for: Hark, the Herald Angels Sing, It Came Upon the Midnight Clear and Good King Wenceslas, A child in front started to sing familiar words. Mary Jennings nodded joyously to the little girl and called "Sing out, dear! Everyone sing!" And they did. "Come All Ye Faithful!" someone called and the words were reprinted from programs and box and gallery. They sang the melody, quietly, at first but in growing volume as the Christmas spirit that was in their hearts overwhelmed them.

"Come, All Ye Faithful!" A thought flitted across the brain of the Princess. How fairy they were these "common people"—in their daily lives in their love for her. She turned suddenly weary. After all, she had had but little sleep in the past ten days. It was hard to rest even when one travelled in luxury. She would play no more to-night.

"Oh, you've got to play Home, Sweet Home!" shouted a middle-aged man down in front and the whole house echoed him. "Yes! Home, Sweet Home! You've got to play that!" She smiled at them and touched her bow to the strings.

"Mid pleasures and palaces," the simple strain of the song floated from her violin, and then, "There's No Place like Home! Sweet, Sweet Home," and on to the finish of the melody. Obeying a strange, inward impulse she repeated the refrain, the bow wandering in its harmonies and variations. A sickness in her heart. The old song was right! The old song was right! There was "no place on earth" like the home. And to her, this little theatre with the people who knew her best with John Higgins and his sister was home to her. They loved her! There was not one of them that wore particularly correct evening dress; they might not understand her more difficult musical themes. But they loved her. Slip was one of them. After the last high, sweet note died, she took no bows, she had to hide the free-running tears. She tumbled to the little dressing-room and dropped to a chair. They were real people, her own folk. And in the world beyond jay what? Success? Money? Yes, but here were men and women who had driven miles through frosty air to hear her. After all, hearts were more than money, friendship more than fame.

There was a knock at her door. It was John Higgins. She smiled at him through her tears.

"Crying? What's up? You were more wonderful than ever," he said. "I don't wonder the big world calls you. When you played that Holy Night piece, I almost cried—my!"

He stopped abruptly. "What's up—dear?"

"It's nothing," she smiled wanly. "I'm just tired."

"That's all? Sure?"

"They all love me so, John! I've been wonderful playing in the big cities but—there is no place like home," and she sobbed outright.

He dropped to his knees beside her chair. He took her hands in his. "You don't have to be tired any more, Mary. You don't have to fiddle for city folks. You'll never have to work again, but just play when you will for the folks that love you best. Why—" he stopped.

She knew what he meant. That the big farm and the theatre could keep them. That he wanted to marry her. The thought was as the sweetest music that filled her soul. It soothed the ache in her heart.

"Holy Night!" she breathed softly, almost as if in prayer and leaned closer to him.

John Higgins understood. Through the silence of the little, barn-like room came to him the glorious message that Mary's heart had won home—she was giving him the best Christmas gift in his life, a true woman's love.

Christmas Carol

Hovering o'er with their snowy wings unfurled,
When all the earth seemed sleeping,
Their voices drift to the weary world,
Where shepherds their watch were keeping,
And the shepherds heard those bright angels sing,
The song that proclaimed a Babe a King.

See the great star shining, so wondrous bright,
So pure in its radiant glory,
Go follow its journey and mark its flight,
(So the angels told the story),
To you glad tidings of peace we bring,
Go hasten now to your Christ and King.

So they left their flocks and they went their way,
As told by those angel voices:—
The manger they reached where the man child lay,
(Hark! the wise men now rejoice),
Then their precious gifts at His feet they fling,
They knew that the Babe was their Christ and King.

It was long, long ago, in Bethlehem,
In a manger He was lying,
But He died for us, as He died for them,
His atonement satisfying,
And His voice now bids all His angels sing,
Come, hasten now to your Christ and King.

—Christina W. Partridge.

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