

The Free Press Short Story  
A CHRISTMAS TELEPHONE

ALICE E. ALLEN

DOROTHY left her playthings in a heap on the floor. She pulled her chair to the telephone on the desk. She climbed into it. Her curly head reached the mouthpiece. She unhooked the receiver and put it to her ear, just as father did. "Number?" said a voice so quickly that Dorothy jumped. "Two-two-nine-six," she said clearly. That was what father said. In a minute, close to Dorothy's ear, it seemed, another voice spoke. "Hello!" it said pleasantly. "Is this Santa Claus?" asked Dorothy as much like her father as possible. "Yes," said the voice, sweetly. "What is it?" Dorothy hesitated. "You don't sound just like Santa Claus," she said. "Well, I am," the voice laughed. "But who is that—some little girl?" "I'm Dorothy Grant."

Doesn't he always? Why should he ask if he could? Father chuckled. "What number did you ask for, Dolly?" he said. "Two-two-nine-six," said Dorothy, "the one you always say." "Father gave a long, low whistle. Then he asked: "Was Santa's voice deep and gruff?" Dorothy shook her head. "It was low and sweet and every little way it had laughs in it," she said. After Dorothy had gone her happy way to dreamland Mr. John Grant went to the telephone. "Two-two-nine-six," he said. In a moment there came to him a voice, low and sweet, with laughs in it. "Is this Miss Annie Claus?" he asked. "Yes. And this is Mr. Grant?" "Yes. You had a conversation with my little daughter this morning, Miss Claus?" "Yes—bless the child. How did she know me and my number?" "She didn't, but—bless the child—she tried the only number she remembered and found you. She was trying to get Santa Claus."

"Santa Claus?" "Yes." Annie Claus laughed. "I understand now," she cried. "That was why she asked if I were deaf yet—and about. How funny and sweet and dear of her! Well thanks to her and to Evelyn, I've played Santa's part, and had the loveliest Christmas I ever had so far." "It was good of you, Annie," said John Grant. "Good?" Annie Claus questioned. "One would do anything for Dorothy." "Would you?" "Anything one could," amended Annie in an auspicious hush. "You have Evelyn's gifts ready?" asked Mr. Grant. "All ready. You should see—" "And Dorothy's?" "Dorothy's?" "The one thing she wants—she told me, Annie. Is it ready?" "Not quite." "Not quite?" "Yes, Annie, to-morrow is Christmas, and Christmas gifts must be given on Christmas."

"A mischievous little laugh rippled over the wire. "Dorothy stipulated that in the selection of her gifts her father must be pleased," said Annie Claus. "That needn't bother you. You have known his preference for a year and more, haven't you?" "Yes, unless he has changed his mind." "He hasn't, Annie, and never will. Don't you believe that?" "Ye-es." "Well?" "Come over to my Christmas tree to-morrow night, you and Dorothy. Evelyn will be here. We'll talk things over." "Thank you; we'll come, without fail. But Dorothy—and Dorothy's father—will be sadly disappointed if Dorothy's gift isn't ready." "Perhaps it will be." "Annie—really?" "But Annie Claus had rung off."

Young people are often urged not to be ashamed to say, "I don't know." The advice is sound; yet there is another side to this matter. Some of you are too willing to say, "I don't know," and to keep on saying it. You are not ashamed of being ignorant, nor of remaining ignorant. A young fellow was taking dinner with friends when a certain book came up for discussion. Nearly every one at the table had a positive opinion about it, and the woman who sat next the young man asked him how he felt, more doubtless, from a kindly wish to draw him into the conversation than because she was particularly interested in his idea. His answer was evasive, however, and left her none the wiser. A friend who dropped into the youth's room at the boarding house the following evening, found him reading the book in question. He had been ashamed to say, "I don't know," and had determined that he would never again have to say it, at least when to say, "I don't know," was concerned. The world's wisest have to say, "I don't know." In a sense it is nothing of which to be ashamed. You young people who accept ignorance complacently and make no effort to turn "don't know" into "do know," however, are in the wrong. When an unwillingness to confess ignorance drives you to change your mind into the knowledge, it is lucky for you that you are ashamed to say, "I don't know."

Miller's Worm Powders will not only expel worms from the system but will induce healthful conditions of the system under which worms can no longer thrive. Worms keep a child in a continual state of restlessness and pain, and there can be no comfort for the little one until the cause of suffering be removed, which can be easily done by the use of these powders, which are very effective.

The Oil of the Farmer.—A bottle of Dr. Thomas' Electric Oil in the farm house will save many a journey for the doctor. It is not only good for the children when taken with colds and coughs and for mothers who suffer from pains and aches, but there are directions for its use on sick cattle. There should always be a bottle of it in the house.

LITTLE JIM

"Christmas Eve" sighed little Jim, a newspaper boy, who stood gazing in a toy-shop window. The poor little chap was blue with cold, his clothes were in rags. "Oh! Gee! Don't I wish I were some kid that was going to get that bicycle. Jumping gravy, I'd take the skin off anybody's nose for that. Oh boy!" Just then a big car stopped at the curb and a lady stepped out. She looks like Mrs. Santa Claus," thought little Jim, "with all those fags. And look at the glass she is wearing on her hands."

"The lady went into the store and after inspecting the toys in the window, she decided on Jim's bicycle. "Poor Jim bit his lips to keep back the tears, turned away and started across the road and stopped in front of the big car just as it started. "They took the limp body to the hospital. The lady looked kindly at little Jim, for he reminded her of her own little boy at home who was hanging up his stockings for Santa Claus. Kissing the dirty face, she gave the doctor orders to spare no expense. But Jim did not rally as he should. All night long, he talked about the lady who bought his bicycle, while the nurse soothed his aching head with her cool hand.

"There's something on the child's mind," said the doctor. "Something about a bicycle." "I believe I know," said the lady. "I just bought one and was leaving the store when we ran the child down. I wonder if Santa Claus were to leave him the bicycle and toys like other children to-night, if it would help to make him well?" "It might," said the doctor, "but he is so run down and starved I doubt if he will be able to get around in a month." Towards morning, little Jim gained consciousness, and as he opened his eyes and looked around in amazement he saw the beautiful red bicycle. "Why there is a train and a new suit, shoes and stockings and everything." Rubbing his eyes, he looked at the nurse. "I ain't in Heaven am I?" "Oh, no, Sonny, you're right here on earth," laughed the nurse. "Good morning, son, Santa Claus was pretty good to you, wasn't he?" said the doctor.

"They ain't all mine, are they?" said the little fellow weakly. "You're sure there ain't no mistake?" "No, sonny, they are all yours, Santa Claus doesn't make mistakes." "What is your name, Sonny?" asked the doctor. "Jimmy Curran." "Where is your home, Jim?" "I ain't got one." "Have you no father or mother?" asked the lady. "No I ain't. They're dead, and I sell papers and sleep at the Army Hall. I ain't never had any one and Santa Claus never gave me nothing before."

The lady kissed him. "How would you like to have me for a mother, little Jim?" "You?" opening his eyes wide. "Gosh! Now I know who you are. You're Mrs. Santa Claus."—Dorothy Hardy Cook.

DO YOUR FRIENDS LAST?

Some young people have a new set of friends every six months. They visit them in January, and hear constantly of John and Lily, Alfred and Marie, and if they come around in June, they make the acquaintance of Walter and May, Harry and Elizabeth. The others have vanished as completely as if they had never existed. Home young people wear out their friends by continually appealing to them for assistance. Not long ago a young man owned that he had lost a good friend by asking him for frequent loans, and he was very indignant about it, too. "Fred has a fine salary," he said, "and I knew he could let me have ten or twenty dollars now and then, without ever feeling it. I didn't always pay him back right away, but he knew he would not lose any money by me. But after a while he began to find excuses when I asked him for a loan, and at last his manner changed toward me completely. I haven't any use for any one who isn't ready to help a fellow when he can, and so I just called the whole thing off." That experience could be duplicated in innumerable instances. One who feels that he is being made use of, is likely to resent the fact with a thoroughness that makes an end of friendship. Do not impose on your friend, by asking him to help you out in things when you could as well help yourself.—William Yale Snyder.

TOO BUSY FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT

A prominent employer has said that he does not wish any young man to work for him who is too busy to improve himself. Some young people who have finished school, and taken their places in the ranks of wage-earners, need to keep this statement in mind. To be too busy to improve one's self renders one an unsatisfactory worker. Self-improvement is not necessarily a thing that takes a great deal of time. It should, however, be systematic. One of the important things about it is holding the lines of progress steadily before one's eyes. Fifteen minutes a day given to improving reading is worth more than an hour and three-quarters spent on the same reading, some leisure evening in the week. The time is the same, but when the thing is done every day, the entire day is toned up thereby. There is less danger of slack work and silly amusements, if the thought of making the most of one's self is emphasized every twenty-four hours. It should be remembered, too, that there is no lack of harmony between improving one's self and having a good time. Hearing fine music contributes to such improvement, but this may become, if it is not now, one of the keenest of life's joys. Good reading comes to be a vastly greater pleasure than the reading of trash can possibly be. Do not become frightened by the name "classic," for it is a term that includes any number of delightful things. No one is too busy for self-improvement.—Gordon A. Gleason.

THE DICTIONARY THAT'S USED

There are plenty of dictionaries that seem to be regarded rather in the light of ornaments. The owners keep on mispronouncing words, misspelling words, using the wrong word, when all the time there is a dictionary at their elbow. Get the dictionary habit. If you are not exactly certain whether the "o" or "i" comes first in the word, do not write the two just alike and put the dot somewhere between. Look it up and be sure. If you hear a word pronounced in an unfamiliar way, do not conclude immediately that it is wrong. Go to the dictionary and be sure it is not a slang, with help at your elbow. The dictionary that is used goes far toward making the difference between a cultured person and an uncultured one.

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