The Free Press' Short Story

Why Bessie Barrett Was So Happy-

KATE M. CLEARY

Was it ten, yes ten, long years to-night Shall I bless him again before I die?" HE most diffident and modest of

knocks it was. Perhaps because it was so very diffident, so very modest, it irritated all the more the peculiarly alert nerves of Mr. Godfrey Kirke.

"Oh, come in, come in!" he oried The tone held less of invitation than of resentment. Indeed, he was both angry and disgusted. Here he couldn't have half an hour to himself to read the Fortnightly, without some one coming hammering at his door.

"Oh, it's you, is it? Well, what do you want now?" His brusque permission to enter had been accepted. An elderly woman had entered the room. She had a small, pale

withered face: a kind face, though, pleasant, nun-like, gentle. She was dressed in a worn dark gown. The net fichu. crossed over her slender shoulders, was clasped by an old-fashioned medallion. "To-morrow will be Thankingivingeve," she said: "I wished to know if I might prepare for the day after."

An originally handsome apartment, this in which the old man sat, and it had been handsomely furnished. Now both the room and its belongings bore the mark of creeping poverty, or extreme peurlousness. The master of the house, seated by the centre table, seemed to share the character of the room. He too, had been handsome once. Now he was expressive only of age and indigence, from the threadbare collar of his limp dressing-gown to the tips of his

thin and shabby slippers. "Prepare what?" he growled. "Why, a turkey, sif; or a pic, or-or i

bit of cranberry-sauce, sir-" He looked so fierce, her words died to

her throat. "Turkey! And where do you suppose I can get the money to spend on turkey? And pie! To make us all sick, and bring doctor and doctors' bills down on me! And," with a snic of disgust, "cranberry use butter." sauce—the skinny stuff! No, Mrs. Dotty. A bit of bacon and some bread will be good enough for poor folks like us-good

enough." His housekeeper, for that was the unenviable position Mrs. Dotty occupied in Godfrey Kirke's household, resolved to make one last appeal.

"But I thought perhaps on account of the child," she began.

"The child-the child!" he repeated. trascibly, "I'm sick of hearing about her. other. I'm not a rich man! You know that, Mrs. Dotty."

sort. She shut her lips tightly, and said nothing. "I'm poor, I tell you," whined on

Godfrey Kirke, "and I can't stand the expense of her. What is she to me, any-

Indignation made Mrs. Dotty quite bold for once.

"She's your own granddaughter, sir. That's what she is "

"Well. I didn't ask for her, did I? I never wanted to adopt her What right had her mother to make such a poor hand of herself by marrying Tom Barrett, and then come back to die here, and leave me her girl? Eh? She's an expense, I tell you, that's all. An expense!"

The Lord help us, but he's getting chair back from the table, worse than ever!" murmured the woman, as, with a being that was downright disrespectful, she slammed the door behind doesn't matter in the least."

"You - you, Miss Bessie!"

She started, as she looked up, and saw Bessie Barrett standing so near her She was a slim, brown-haired little thing, of about seventeen. She was clad in an ill-made gown of coarse maroon cashmere. Her eye were large, gray, just now very sorrowful. Her lashes and brows were quite black. The delicate features thad a pinched look, and the pretty lips were paler than should be the lips of one so young

"Yre; and I -heard "Oh, don't - don't mind, dear" said Mrs Dotty soothingly, putting a hand that looked like wrinkled from on the girl's arm. "He is just a cross, soured,

kinely old man " "I do mind!" Bessie passionately cried "Oh I do! I sha'n't stay here! I sha'n't be an expense to him any longer will go away somewhere!"

She broke down in a fit of bitter weep-"Now, Miss Bessie, dear, you mustn't

ery that way: you really mustn't. ! loved your mother before you, and I love

But the poor, little old comforter was almost crying herself. Years before, the Kirkes were the people of wealth and position in that after another had come upon the house. First, the wife of the master died. Maud, crime was poverty. He was

and his heart was | followed him, leaving their child to its grandfather, Godfrey Kirke. To the latter had come the final blow when his -Anon, conty-son, Robert, his hope and pride, had run away to sea. Then in the house, day," which since the death of the mistress had been a cheerless and dreary place,

began a rigid reign of miserliness and

consequent misery. Bessie broke from her friend, and ran you no longer." unstairs and into her own little, bare room. There was no fire in the grate. though the day was cold with the penetrating damp of a wind from off the

tossed, greenish and turbulent. "but it can't be worse out than in."

mended cloth gloves. Then she went he looked piercingly at Mrs. Dotty. quietly down and out. In the desolate house the day wore

wearily on. The old man, plodding in solitude over his accounts, anxiously ed. She felt quite confident the girl was striving to answer for every cent of ex- at Devers'. penditure, and refraining from lighting lamp or candle till his weak eyes were eve, came, went. Bessie did not return. strained to the utmost, was a pathetic She was at all times the very quietest of . illustration of the economy that is more girls, but oddly enough, old Godfrey contemptuous -than - admirable.

his pencil and rang the bell. Mrs. Dotty lamp-shade. A mere child-but he missresponded. Mr. Kirke kept but one other ed her. servant (if Mrs. Dotty could correctly be

which were tea, bread, butter, two cups, Bessie," two saucers and two plates. Mr. Kirke poured out his tes, shook a little of the old silver bowl, added carefully a few a journey for her. When she returned drops of milk and cut a slice of bread.

"Butter has gone up three cents in the last week," he said. "I can't afford to So he munched his bread dry, with a

sense of exaltation in his self-imposed penance. He would not open the poorhouse-door for himself by using butter. But, somehow, the rank tea tasted ranker than usual. Surely the bread was sour. And the gloom outside the small

circle that the lamplight illumined seemed singularly dense. What was wrong? What was missing? What was different? He paused his hand falling by his side. The child-as he and Mrs. If it isn't one thing she needs it's an- Dotty had always called her—the child day." was not here. She used to slip in so quietly, take her seat, and when her Mrs. Dotty smiled a hard little smile to Mrs. Dotty knew nothing at all of the as softly. Yes, little as he noticed her, away. She knew how many friends

> bell sharply. when she popped in her mild old head, lously and pleasantly conscious that she There was no need to particularize. Mrs. had given the bard-hearted old man a Dotty cast a swift, searching look around,

> "Isn't she here?" There she knocked. No answer. She solemnly. Thanksgiving-eve! In his

> opened the door, went in. The room wife's time the house used to be so gay

Hastily she descended the stair "She is not in, sir " "Where is she?"

"I don't know, sir "

Mrs. Dotty.

"Did you see Miss Bessie?" "Yes'm. Passin' westward a couple of

hours ago yes'm."

peared before him. "Has the child come in?" "Do you know why she went out?"-

"J suspect, sir." 'Well, speak up."

"Bhe did."

"Well," grimly, "I hope she won't!" The child had a sulky fit. She was ocean. She went to the window, and probably at the house of some neighbor. stood there looking out across the flat She would return when her tantrum brown marshes, to where the waters had passed off. All this he told himself. Still he sat in his lonely room till long "A horrid day," she said, with a shiver, after midnight, listening, listening. When he finally went to bed it was to roll and She put on a short old Astrachan jac- moan till daylight, in the vague wretchket, a little felt hat and a pair of much-jedness of unhappy dreams. At breakfast

> "Home yet?" She was not really in the least alarm-

Noon-the noon before Thanksgivingmissed her sharply, strangely. She used The dusk, the dready November dusk, always to bring him his paper, hand him was filling the room when he laid down his plate, draw the curtains, arrange the

All forenoon it rained. Toward eventermed a servant), and she absolutely ing the rain ceased, and a fog, a chill, refused to enter the protesting presence smoky, blinding fog, began to creep up from the Atlantic.

"If you don't mind," said Mrs. Dotty, making her appearance with a shawl The meek housekeeper withdrew. Ten over her head, "I'll just run over to minutes later she brought in a tray on Devers' and see what is keeping Miss

"Do!" he answered She had spoken as if the distance were sugar he was about to use back in the not worth considering, but it was quite

> she looked white and scared. "She ish't -there-hasn't been." "Hark!" said Godfrey Kirke, holding up one lean hand.

> "That is only the carrier with the

"Ask him if he has seen her?" Mrs. Dotty went into the hall. Almost instantly she returned. "He has not. He says there is the body of a young woman, at the town

"What!" Godfrey Kirke leaped from his chair, "He says that the body of a young girl was found in the East Branch to-

Godfrey Kirke sank back in his seat. meagre supper was over, glide away just herself as she closed the door and went she was generally there. He rang the Bessie had. She shrewdly suspected if she were not found at one place, she "Where is she?" he asked Mrs. Dotty, would be at another; and she was malic-

Long the latter sat where she had left Without waiting for a reply, she turn- him. Thinking. For the first time in ed and ran up the stairs to Bessie's room, years he was thinking, sadly, seriously,

and cheerful on that night, so filled with comfort and bright anticipations; so odorous with the homely fragrance of good things in the kitchen, so delightfully merry with the brisk bustle attend-Impatiently Godfrey Kirke pushed his ant on the morrow's festivity. Now it was desolate, dreary, darksome with de-"You ought to know, it's your bust- pressing and unutterable gloom. Whose ness to know. But it doesn't matter - it fault was it? His! decidedly Godfrey Kirke as savagely relentless to himsel

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Tokay

Down to Hanna in the kitchen went in this moment as he would have been would she have to be thankful for on

Mrs. Dotty breathed a relieved sigh, father's petty rule. His! when Robert and forlorn old man. Bessle had probably gone to Rose Dever's ran away to escape the narrow obligahouse. The Devers lived almost a mile tions and unjust restrictions laid upon room. He looked at the dying fire in away. As a storm was blowing up she him. His! when the child his dead the grate. He wondered of what use would most likely stay there over night. risughter had left him could no longer would be to him now his twenty thou-About ten o'clock Mr. Kirke's bell endure his brutality, or accept from him sand in bonds, his eight hundred acres again tingled out. Again Mrs. Dotty ap- the scant support he so grudgingly gave. of meadow land, the money he had out His fault—all his! In those lonely hours at interest. He rose in a dazed kind of

on his harids with a groan. She overheard our conversation to- for him? He was as rich, richer, in- tory answer to all his self-condemnaprofessed poverty. He could have given drawer yonder, that he had always kept with a very angry Maud a competence, Robert a helping hand, poor little Bessie turkey and ple

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to another. His! when his devoted wife the morrow?-if, indeed, there was to-be had drooped and died under his ever- a morrow for her. For might not sheincreasing, arrogance, distation. His he shuddered at the thought be the girl when Maud married the first man who at the morgue? The others were gone, offered himself, to escape from her why not she? He-was just a wretched

He looked around the dim, shabby the whole rejentless truth dawned upon way, a shadowy purpose taking definitehim, as such truths will dawn, in most ness in his mind. He wished he had bitter brilliance. He dropped his head been better to Bessie; he wished-but what was the use of wishing anything

How different might not life have been now? There could be but one satisfacdeed- than he had ever been, though he tion. A shot from the revolver in the in readiness for possible burglars. rose. He moved toward the table. figure cast a fantastic shadow on the herwall. There might be thanksgiving for

He had the weapon in his hand. He

"It is the queerest thing," she said, coming toward him as she spoke. to Mrs. Parnimm's to see if she could get me work. I met Mrs. Nelson, and and every heart reigns supreme Thanks- twist man and man, but by a beautiful she asked me to go home with her. Dicky giving. was ill, and she wanted me to stay over night. She sent you a note. At least she sent the boy with it, but he lost it. and only told her so this afternoon. As soon as I knew that I started home alone -although Dicky was no better."

"Yes?" said Godfrey Kirke. He was listening with an unusual degree of in-"And to-night, when I was almost

here (Nelson's is quite two miles away, you know) I got lost in the fog." Her grandfather regarded her in the matches rushing together. amazement. What made her-pale cheeks so bright? What excitement had blackened her gray eyes?

"And-a gentleman who was coming here found me, and-and brought me home. Please thank him, grandpa. Here he is!"

With a incredulous, gasping cry, Godfrey Kirke retreated, as a big brown, muscular fellow came dashing in from the hall.

"Robert!" "Father!" Then they were clasped in each other's arms. A silence ensued, but-

"The hot tears sprang to the meeting For the heart must speak, though the

Enjoy tea at its best.

"I'm back from the sea .for good. father. And I chanced to find my little niece, Bessle, lost out there in the fog. A young lady, I vow! And I was think- the beautiful sentiments in the world ing of her as a mere baby yet! Just weigh less than one single lovely action;

his death, though there could never have He can have her-a year from to-day." an achievement and a quality of life. homestead is dazzling with lights and verb, "butter no parsnips." The only flowers, and why it resounds with laugh- conclusive evidence of a man's sincerity ter this Thanksgiving; why old Godfrey is that he gives himself for a principle, voice? He turned, dropping the revolver wears a brand-new suit, and a flower in Words, money, all things else, are comhis buttonhole; why Robert in his right- paratively easy to give away; but when not three feet away, fresh, fair, damp. ful place, looks so proud and pleased; a man makes a gift of his daily life and why dear, busy little Mrs. Dotty beams practice, it is plain that the truth, whatbenignly; why Bessig, gowned in snewy, ever it may be, has taken possession of "I shining silk, thinks this is a lovely old him. From that sincerity his words gain felt—badly yesterday, and I went over | world, after all; why Charlie Nelson is the force and pertinency of deeds, and

MATCH TRICK

On the surface of a small bowl of water place a number of matches, so that they have a star formation. Then get a piece of soap, dip it into the water in the centre of the star, and

the water the result is the opposite, all

LOVELY ACTIONS

think! She tells me Charlie Nelson wants and that, while tenderness of feeling and susceptibility of generous emotions are Well, Charlie is a fine fellow, ne: idents of life, permanent goodness is So now you know why the Kirke "Fine words," says one homely old proso blessedly content, and why in each his money is no longer the pale drudge magic, what ere-while bore the image and superscription of God .-- J. Russell

SAVED BY VULTURES

A farmer is South Africa was cutting a tree fell on him and pinned him to the matches will shoot away toward the the ground. He lay in agony for 24 If a piece of lump sugar is dipped into bor was called by a flock of vultures gathering, and a rescue party arrived just in time to save his life.



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