

## HIS CHRISTMAS GIFT

In the cosily-furnished sitting-room of a flat, situated near a busy London thoroughfare, a woman sat at a typewriter. Young as she was in years—not yet thirty—her silver-streaked hair and the grave beauty of her face told of a life in which sorrow played no small part. And, indeed, Marion Dane's story was a sad one.

Scarcely more than two years before she had counted herself the happiest woman in the world, with a husband who was still her lover and a child whom they united in spoiling. Then came the first blow—the loss of the little girl—and it had seemed to Marion that life could have no greater grief to give. All too soon came the bitter realization of her mistake, when, but a few months later, her husband was arrested on a charge of embezzling the moneys of his employer. That he was innocent she never doubted, but the circumstantial evidence was apparently conclusive, and he was sentenced to five years' penal servitude.

Five years! And little more than one had passed, spent in unremitting toil and strenuous but unavailing endeavor to find the real culprit, for that her husband was guilty nothing but his word would have convinced her, and John Dane had protested his innocence to the end.

The click of the typewriter ceased, for she had written a word which called up a crowd of memories—"Christmas." It was very near now and for her it meant nothing but an added poignancy to her grief. Save for the old servant, Martha, who lived with her, she was quite alone in the world, and Christmas is the time when loneliness comes most home to those who tread a solitary path in life.

She thought of the last wretched Christmas with a shiver, and then pictures of bygone joyous ones came to torture her. How happy they had been, poor as they were, for her husband was only a clerk. Her mind travelled to the gloomy prison where—herded with common criminals—he would spend the great festival, and, with an angry little shake of rebuke to herself, she resumed her task.

It was soon completed, and after reading and correcting the sheets she fastened them together and signed them—after a moment's hesitation—"John Laymond," her husband's Christian names. She had done this scores of times in similar circumstances, but never without the momentary pause and a passing doubt in her mind.

"Surely it cannot be wrong?" she murmured. "I have learned all from him; the thoughts are his, the words are those he would use, and, until lately, even the plots were his own. Besides, it is the name that sells the work now, and his stories gained that."

John Dane, like many others doomed to ignoble drudgery, had possessed ambition, and, partly to satisfy it and partly to augment a somewhat scanty salary, he had employed his evenings in literary work, only to discover that, though a few authors may be born, most of them have to be made, and that rejected manuscripts accumulate with astounding rapidity.

Of these apparently worthless productions, scarce a bare half-dozen now remained, for Marion—who had unbounded faith in her husband's ability—had turned to them in the hour of her need. Neatly typed out, they had, one by one, found resting places in various papers or magazines, until with the publication, in book form, of a story which caught the public fancy, "John Laymond" achieved a moderate popularity, which was not decreased by the fact that no one knew anything of him, and that he resolutely declined to be interviewed. His wife transacted all his business.

To Marion the thought that her husband would come out of prison a ruined man, disgraced for all time in the eyes of the world, and immediately, by the mere sinking of his real name, become a person of some consideration, gave profound joy. It seemed something of a fitting revenge upon a social system which could condemn an innocent man to infamy; and now that what she had striven for since the acceptance of the first story had become an accomplished fact, she guarded her secret like a miser his gold. Directly her means

she moved from the little suburban house to the flat in town, where she was known only as Mrs. Laymond.

Presently she went out to post her story, for which the editor of a great weekly periodical was impatiently waiting, and, having done this, she stood for a moment regarding the scene around her. It was not yet late, and the street was thronged with vehicles and pedestrians, many of the latter obviously engaged in Christmas shopping. She heard cheery greetings and good wishes on all sides, and the brightly-lighted windows were crammed with festive wares. Even the very street lamps seemed to be infected and winked with a knowing air of good humor. Upon Marion the effect was depressing; everybody seemed so happy, save she alone.

A moment later she reproached herself for the thought, as her gaze encountered a too-evident case of wretchedness. Standing before a provision shop, glaring into the window with almost ravenous eyes, was a thin, shabby-dressed man, and by his side a golden-haired mite of about five, with a pretty but sadly-pinched face. The child was warmly though poorly clad, but the man's threadbare frock-coat offered little resistance to the keen, frosty air, and he shivered visibly.

Suddenly an empty, gaily-decorated cigarette box—dropped from the top of a passing bus—attracted the child's attention and she ran into the road to secure it, heedless of an oncoming motor-car. Marion saw the danger, and, conscious only of the little one's peril, rushed forward. Snatching up the child she turned and jumped for the pavement again. She was barely in time, for the car whirled past just as she fell heavily over the kerb, but with her precious burden safe in her arms.

It was the rescued mite's companion who helped her to rise, his face deathly white, and with trembling hands. Marion was unhurt, but the child's forehead was cut and bleeding. Seeing that the inevitable crowd was gathering, Marion pushed her way through, still holding the little one.

"Come with me," she said to the man, who was trying to stammer his gratitude. "I live close by, and the child must be seen to at once, though I do not think she is much hurt."

This proved to be the case. The injury was a mere scratch, but Marion would not leave her little guest until she had been fed and was quietly sleeping. Then she rejoined the father—for such he was—whose wants had been attended to by Martha. The poor fellow was profuse in his gratitude, and her sympathy soon drew his story out.

"It is the common tale of a weak man crushed by misfortune," he began, bitterly. "My name is Robert Western, and it is not yet two years since I had all that a man needs—a position by which I could live, an angel for a wife, and my little girl. Then my wife was taken away, and I think all that was good in me died with her. Perhaps you cannot realize what it means to lose—"

He paused awkwardly, and Marion said, in a low voice, "I think I can; I have lost both. You have still your child."

"Forgive me," the man murmured, brokenly. "I should have known that such pity as you have shown me, an outcast, could only be begotten of grief. Yes, it is true I had my little girl, but, wretch that I was, I still rebelled. I sought the weak man's consolation, and trod the road to ruin recklessly. In a few months I had been warned again and again, and then the inevitable end came—I was dismissed. I had been with the firm ten years, but I cannot blame them; I had every latitude. Since then I have had chances, only to throw them away, and now—I am a beggar."

Marion listened to the sordid confession with moist eyes, and, so far from exciting her contempt, it strengthened her resolve to aid him. She measured his misery by her own and knew its despairing depth.

"What is your work?" she asked. "I was a clerk in the offices of Messrs. Corder and Wayne, the City merchants," he replied.

Had he been looking at her he must have noticed the sudden start and the deadly pallor this reply produced in Marion. With an effort she controlled her emotion, and said, quietly—

"The name seems familiar. Was there not a prosecution by that firm some time ago?"

"Yes," replied Western. "One of their clerks, named Dane—my



A COLD CHRISTMAS.

Girl (reading)—"Cold feet are usually caused by indigestion, brought on by over-eating." There, Jimmy, now we know wot's the matter of us!

senior—and he got five years for embezzlement."

"He was innocent!" Marion cried, almost harshly.

The astonishing change and the deep conviction in her voice startled Western, who looked up and flushed as he met her scrutinizing gaze.

"I have always thought so myself," he muttered, awkwardly.

Marion's eyes never left his face. At the sight of his confusion a sudden suspicion had been born in her mind. This man—easily tempted—had been on the downward path at the time the crime was committed. She remembered his name now, and that at the trial it had been shown that he was one of the two others who had access to her husband's falsified books. What if in his reckless despair he had taken the money and skilfully fixed the theft upon his fellow-clerk? His increasing inquietude intensified her suspicion, and she resolved to strike boldly.

"You know that he is innocent," she said, sternly. "Even as I, who am his wife, know it."

Robert Western sprang to his feet. "I—I—you—you are his wife," he cried, "and you saved my little girl's life!" He paused suddenly, as though an idea had arrested his words, and, sinking into the chair again, hid his face in his hands.

Marion watched him with misery and triumph battling in her heart. She felt sure of his guilt now, and if only she could persuade him to play the man, John Dane would regain both liberty and fair fame. Threats, she recognized, were useless, since she had no proof. Her one hope lay in appealing to his honor, his gratitude, and, perhaps—well, he had been a gentleman once. She waited until he looked up, and then her eager appeal rang out.

"Mr. Western!" she cried. "You have told me of your sufferings, and now I ask you to think of what my husband has endured, and must endure for years unless you set right this terrible wrong. Deprived of all he loves, branded with shame, and forced to herd with felons—he, an innocent man. I do not know how you were tempted when you committed the crime, but to let another suffer for it is infamous—cowardly. You ask that I have saved your daughter's life. I ask you for my husband's liberty and honor in return, and if you have one spark of manhood remaining you cannot—dare not—refuse."

She was standing before him now, her hands outstretched, and a world of passion in her voice. Western,

bowed and stricken, was silent for some moments, and then, in a low voice, he asked:—

"And my little girl; what would become of her? She has no one but me."

"She shall stay here," Marion cried, eagerly. "I swear to you that she shall take the place of my own lost baby, and—she shall never know the truth."

Western looked up, and Marion knew that she had won. There was an expression of fixed resolve on his face which seemed to wipe out the marks of weakness and dissipation.

"I will do it," he said. "I will give myself up to the police and clear your husband's name."

The words had but left his lips when a ring came at the door. A cry of surprise from Martha followed, and then the door of the sitting-room flung open and a grey-haired man entered.

"Marion!" he cried, and in an instant she was in her husband's arms.

"And you are really free, John?" Marion asked for the twentieth time; it was so difficult to realize, even with his strong arms about her.

"Yes; the real culprit has confessed at last."

"But I don't understand," Marion said, and her wondering eyes turned to the figure in the chair, whom her husband now noticed for the first time.

"Western!" he cried. "How came you here?"

It was his wife who answered the question, briefly relating the events of the evening, and concluding with Western's determination to at once right the wrong done to his fellow-clerk. Dane's features took on a singular expression as he listened.

"Western," he said, "do you realize what prison-life means to an educated man? Have you thought of the physical discomfort, of the grinding ignominy of being herded like cattle in pens with the very dregs of humanity, of the awful mental starvation? Were you prepared to face all this?"

"Yes." The speaker's voice was firm, and his eyes met those of his questioner steadily.

"Knowing yourself to be an innocent man?" persisted Dane.

"Innocent?" It was Marion who spoke.

"Certainly," said her husband. "He is no more guilty than I am. The thief was old Solmay, the cashier, who confessed to it just before he died. Mr. Corder at once brought pressure to bear on the authorities and secured my immediate release."

Marion's eyes turned wondering to Western, and he smiled sadly as he said:—

"Yes, I acted a lie to you. I saw that you believed me guilty, and in a flash it came to me that here was my chance to ensure my little girl's happiness and make her some reparation. With you she would have every comfort, and, being young, would soon cease to miss me, and—well, I yielded to temptation once more. It was to have been my Christmas gift to her—my last and best."

He rose to go, but John Dane pushed him back into his seat again. "We've not finished with you yet, Western," he said. "And I've not told all my news. Marion, Mr. Croder has offered me my old post in the firm, at an increased salary, and—why, what's this?"

For his wife had taken a neatly-bound volume from the bookshelf and placed it in his hands. On the title-page he read the name of the story—a name he had grown to hate the sight of in the past as the manuscript came back with unfail-



THE ONLY WAY OUT.

Mrs. Casey—"I don't know what we'll put in little Patsy's stockin', Mike. He writ a letter t' Santy Claus axin' f'r a rale auttymobile, no liss."

Mr. Casey—"Shure, we'll drop a few drops iv gassyline in it an' I'll bet he'll be thankful he didn't git th' rist iv the machine."

ing regularity from publisher after publisher.

"My story!" he cried. "Published!"

"Yes, your story," replied Marion, adding, "I did not alter a single word, dear."

Like a man in a dream he learned how his brave wife had earned fame for him while he was suffering infamy, and, though, he said little, the love in his eyes made up her full reward.

"And as you won't need to go into the City again, perhaps Mr. Corder will give—" Marion paused.

"He shall," John said, heartily. "He can't refuse me that. What do you say, Western? You've had a hard lesson, and I don't think you'll fail again."

Robert Western stood up, a man once more—the slough of his old weakness cast for ever.

"No, I'll not fail again," he said. "No man can fail who has such friends."

He looked round, and Marion, divining his thought, said, softly, "She is in the next room."

He went out, and some time later, through the half-open door, she saw him kneeling by the bedside, his lips upon the hand of the sleeping child.

Outside, the busy life of the street went on, but it had a changed note for Marion now. Each boisterous greeting found an echo in her own heart, and everything seemed to be crying aloud, "A Merry Christmas!"—London Tit Bits.

## CHRISTMAS TAFFIES.

For ease of preparation, and certainty of success, nothing excels taffy, and the variations are so numerous as to be all-sufficient in the making up of a gift box. From a plain vanilla taffy nearly all the other varieties may be made. If working alone it is best not to boil too much at once, owing to the difficulty of pulling it before it cools. Stir half teaspoon cream of tartar through one and a half pounds coffee A sugar; add half pint water, and set over a brisk fire. Stir until dissolved, but do not stir after it begins to boil. When the bubbles rise large and thick, drop a little in cold water; if it breaks with a crack when taken between the fingers it is done. Pour at once into large platters or pans that have been greased. Pour half teaspoon vanilla over the surface, and throw the edges of the candy toward the centre as fast as it cools, until all is cool enough to handle. Grease the hands with a very little butter, and pull until white. If one has a large hook to throw it over for pulling when it begins to pull hard it will be much easier on the arms. When too hard to pull longer draw out to a uniform thickness and lay on slightly greased pans to harden, when it is easily broken with a sharp rap of a knife.

Lemon.—Cook the same as vanilla taffy; pour over it while cooling half teaspoon lemon extract, and a like amount of strong saffron tea to color a light yellow.

Strawberry.—Flavor the plain taffy with half teaspoon strawberry extract, and color pink with a few drops of fruit color or cochineal.

Chocolate.—As soon as the plain taffy is poured into the pan to cool, turn over it one and a half squares chocolate that has been melted over hot water. It will be well worked in in the cooling. Flavor with vanilla.

## THE CHILDREN AT THE GATE

Behold the children at the gate;  
All patient for your loves they wait;  
The cold winds toss their tresses sweet,  
The snows are spread before their feet.

Have ye no kindly words or arts  
To win, and warm them in your hearts?

There, where each face expectant is,  
Are lips that keep for thee thy kiss,  
Are lips that in the afterwhile  
Shall light thy pathway with a smile.

The night is cold; shalt these abide  
Safe at thy heart's warm fireside?

Behold the children at thy gate,  
And hasten! for they weep and wait;

The wind its icy vengeance wreaks—  
The blind snows pelt their pallid cheeks.

Hasten—for one day they shall rest  
Folded unto the Christ, His breast!

"What shall you do at Christmas-time?" asked the goose. "What the rest of the world will be doing—gobble!" said the turkey. But he didn't.