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Holiday Prodigals

Walter Joseph Delaney



CHRISTesther Marvin at blank surprise estimable persons came to the porch and

viewed Uncle Gregory Thearle just departing. To the fence was tied the fattest, sleekest

calf they had ever seen, "Why, what is this?" inquired Mr. Marvin, staring vaguely.

"Can't you see-fatted calf! It will do for Christmas, eh? You'll need it. I'll be over later; good bye till then and Merry Christmas!"

He went his way waving his hand mysteriously and chuckling and shaking with half suppressed joility.

"He must mean the boys. Oh, Seth, can it be that they are coming home?" palpitated Mrs. Marvin.

"I don't know, but there is some hidden mystery in the actions of our relative. You know he always liked Bob and Tom and Ned. Perhaps he has kept track of them,

Mr. Marvin sighed and he had reason to do so. And his loving loyal helpmeet cheerlessly echoed the aspiration. tears in them. Then Seth went to the woodshed and came forth again holding a hatchet and a saw.

"Where are you going?" inquired Esther curiously. "Over to the woods. I'm going to

get some evergreen and holly. It is as well to be prepared for a surprise." Just as fall had set in the three sons of the worthy couple had left home secretly one night after writing a note, honest and respectful, announcing that they had heard of positions in a distant factory, and realizing that a mortgage on the home and hard times were distressing the dear old father they felt it their duty to do something toward the family support.

For three months regularly there had come a draft for quite an amount, but no other word from the runaways. life and now it was Christmas time And now-on Christmas eve-there

were three glad, grateful visitors to the little cottage: Tom, Bob and Ned once more rested under the dear old home roof. The news got about town. The lads were popular and had many true friends. Three, particularly, arrived with their sisters just as the prodigals wished and hoped. And in the evening the same welcome coterie made the old home cheery with their chatter at the supper table. Then appeared Uncle Gregory. He winked and blinked at his three prime favorites, the boys, and brought two

turkeys for the holiday feast. "But the fatted calf for the prodigals," he queried chucklingly. "So appropriate, and it will last a week." And an hour later Uncle Gregory clossomed forth in his most felicitous



He Brought a Fatted Calf.

style. He handed a folded legal look ing document to Mrs. Marvin "What is this, Uncle Gregory?" she

"Release of the mortgage these dear lads hoped to pay through their own exertions, but they are only boys, if good ones, and the task was too heavy for them. And, by the way lads, here's a bank book. I consider you a good investment and I have donated what will take you through college and prepare you for battling with the world-well educated men."

"I declare!" murmured Mr. Marvin and there was a catch in his throat. As to Mrs. Marvin she came up to the old man and placed her loving arm about him and kissed him fervently. "Yes it is a genuine surprise, indeed,"

voiced Mr. Marvin. "Blessings come thickly when we most need them." And the three charming girls were more beautiful to the returned prodigals than ever, and old Uncle Gregory seemed to renew his youth amid the glowing happiness of that gloriously

appy Yuletide hour. "It will be mistletoe and kisses next Christmas," he insinuated, with a chuckle for the three lovely girls who each sat close to their admiring lover and who felt that the Christmas bells were ringing especially to celebrate their Christmas happiness.

"Prodigals returned!" murmured Uncle Gregory raptly, "but practical ones. Dear, me! truly this is peace on earth, good will toward all men" and he left for home smiling through his happy tears, and singing the refrain of a happy, merry old Christmas song.

They consider a horse a fool, beare hanging over the marriage Il- ings. their divorce decree is dry?

cense desk almost before the ink on The women who were so keen jealous, but not too jealous; good, Many a man has been well roasted to vote are now assuming the men's bad; but he never can be too rich to or being too raw. right not to vote

A Christmas Movie



echoing out and reverential and Mabel Durand sat in the parlor of her cozy little flat aburally brought

Her face was not a happy for her memories were freighted with a sadness that had shadowed her life for nearly ten years.

close friend of her brother, now dead, and both had been employed in the prosperous mercantile house of her father. He, too, had now passed away and Mabel was alone in the world, except for her little daughter, Erma. only ten years old. The little one came tripping joyously into the room at that moment.

"Oh, mamma," she cried, "what do you think? Our neighbor in the next flat, Mrs. Brayton, wants us both to be ready in an hour to go with her to

Mrs. Brayton had been a cheering element in the lonely life of Mabel Durand for over two months.

Mrs. Durand had more than once during their brief acquaintanceship conversed with the neighbor she seemed to especially like about her past history. It was a tragic one. Two years after her marriage to Rodney Durand her husband had been arrested and sentenced to prison for embezzlement from her father.

"I loved Rodney and I always shall," insisted Mabel. "There must be some mistake in the fearful charge they have brought against him."

"There is none," replied her father sternly. "He has disgraced us. He stole from me boldly."

Still Mabel hoped and walted and at the end of two years when Rodney was released from prison she bore silently the reproach of never hearing a word from him.

So Mabel had talked of her broken again and the occasion brought a sad remembrance of those days in the happy past when she and little Erma had known a tender-hearted husband and a gentle indulgent father.

Mrs. Brayton, chatted casually all the way to the theater and told her she had seen the picture play twice and was greatly impressed by it.

"It is the story of the life of s wronged, misjudged man," she said, "and I know it will interest you." The screen outlined the course of business in a modern counting room.

Then as there entered a new figure, little Erma pressed close to the side of her mother and exclaimed: "Oh, mamma, that actor looks just like the picture you have of dear, ab-

Mrs. Durand gasped and tottered



in her seat. The gentle, soothing hand of Mrs. Brayton steadled and quieted

"Do not be startled or excited, dear friend," she whispered. "I had a purpose in bringing you here, as you will soon know, perhaps gratefully. The principal of this movie is Rodney Durand, your husband and my brother. For his sake I have got acquainted with you; for both your sakes 1 have brought about this climax.

The story of the embezzlement crime was faithfully depirted and it showed another as the real criminal-her own brother. Her husband had taken his blame, bearing the penalty and reproach to save her brother from disgrace.

At a critical moment her brother had sent a full confession to Rodney. taking the blame for the crime. In plain view Rodney, in the action of the piece, destroyed it.

"Do you comprehend now?" ques tioned Mrs. Brayton softly. "Oh, how we have wronged my poor, dear Rodney," sobbed Mabel. "Can you forgive him? Will he ever forgive me? Oh, that I could find him."

"You shall," and when they reached home, Mrs. Brayton left her friend for a few moments to reappear with he

Higher swung the gladsome chime bells, merrily echoed the happy sweet voices, and beside the little Christman tree that had been trimmed for Erma those three earnest souls joined in the joyous knowledge that their path would lead together from the threshol of that Christmas eve into broad sun my pastures of love and happiness.

They used to say of some girls that | Before marriage a fellow tells a cause after it has been rescued from they wore their hearts on their girl he is not half good enough for a burning building it will try to rush sleeves, but we guess if they desire her, and very soon after marriage back into the flames again. But what the men to see them these days they she convinces him he was entirely cany you say about the birds who have to wear them on their stock- too cautious in his estimate.

A Holiday Romance



served Rolfe Darlon hopefully, as he awoke from a night of profound slumber and glanced out through the street window of the chill

bleak lodging house where he was one of wanderers who had no other home. office room of the institution he paid She had wedded Rodney Durand, a little attention to the lounging crowd of idle and battered men. He paused only to address an old man with a pair of crutches by his side. He slapped him in a friendly, familiar way on the shoulder.

"If I can only get a snow shovel," he observed, "I will see to it that your meals and lodging are well provided for over Christmas."

"Bless you, my friend!" murmured the other gratefully. "You have been very kind to me," and Darlon left him with a genial good-by and started forth for a day of hard, earnest work.

Darlon was passing some cottages adjoining one another when the door of the nearest one was opened and a pleasant faced lady beckoned to him. "You look as if you were seeking work," she said. Would you clean off this sidewalk and a path to the coal

shed for half a dollar?"

By the end of an hour he had his task completed. "You must come in and share our lunch, if you will," invited the young lady. Chancing to glance through the



Springing Free of the Roof.

young girl battling with the heavy snow with a frail broom.

"She doesn't make much progress," he observed to his hostess. "If you will lend me your shovel I will soon clear a path around the house for her." He lifted his cap politely, explaining his purpose. Alice Brill, young, frail, grateful, bestowed a winning smile upon the friend in need. She announced frankly that they could not afford to pay for the service offered. "You needn't worry about that," he declared lightly. "It will make me feel the better for doing a little act of

kindness, so near to Christmas." Darlon regarded Alice Brill with more than ordinary interest. He had heard the girl and her father in the next house discussing their neighbor. It seems that the father of Alice had sold some store property in the town for over four thousand dollars, representing about all he had in the world

He had hidden it in his bedroom some one forced open the window and Brill awoke next morning to find his ittle fortune gone. Darlon worked sturdily at sidewalk and garden paths and had pretty near-

ly completed his task when Alice came out on the rear step. "I wonder if it would be too much to ask you to get the ladder and climb up to the kitchen roof and push off

the massed snow there." Darion was only too glad to grant the request. He was pushing the last shovel of snow over the eave troughs when he startled Alice, who had come out again to watch the progress of his work, by springing free of the roof. waving a dark object in his hand.

"I found it lodged in the gutter spout, where it must have fallen from the hand of the thief," he announced breathlessly. "It is a pocketbook filled with money."

Just that it was, and Rolfe Darlon a welcome spectator to the wild delight of the Brills, lingered long in the house, blessed by the gratitude of Mr. Brill and his beautiful daughter, What more natural than that they should invite this cherished guest to Christmas dinner, for a royal one they were sure of now, but Darlon surprised them and congratulated himself in appearing neat, trim and in a new suit, for at the lodging house that evening he found an unexpected letter from his estranged uncle containing a liberal remittance and asking him to return to the home roof and forget that they had ever quar-

Merry Christmas, indeed it was for that little group, and when Rolfe Darion bade Alice Brill good night after day of rare enjoyment and happiness, he wondered if the ardent hope of his soul might become a reality before another suletide celebration in his winning of a Christmas bride.

A wife wants her husband to b about getting equal rights with men but not too good; bad, but not too

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