



CHRISTMAS CARDS AND ROMANCE

A Yuletide Greeting that Brought \$40,000

Sir Adolf Tuck, head of the world-famous firm of Christmas card manufacturers, tells many a romantic story in which the Christmas card plays the leading role—among them the following.

Two lovers had a serious quarrel over some trifle and had parted in anger, declaring that they would never see each other again. Several months of severance and silence followed, until one Christmas morning the young lady received from her lost lover a card on which was a reproduction of Mr. Marcus Stone's well-known picture of "The First Quarrel." This gave the girl the opportunity she wished for; for she had long been sorry for her exhibition of temper. Fortunately she had a card on which was a reproduction of Mr. Stone's "Reconciliation," in which the two foolish lovers are blissfully reunited; and this she promptly posted to her suitor with the result that a few hours later she was once more in his arms; and the vows renewed at the happy meeting were repeated in the following June at the altar of St. George's, Hanover Square.

Some years ago, another of Sir Adolf's stories runs, a young doctor who was in high favor with a wealthy and somewhat eccentric aunt, had a quarrel with her in which heated words were exchanged, with the result that the old lady, in her anger, vowed that she would never speak to him again. Two years passed during which the obstinate aunt ignored the very existence of her nephew, whose anger had long evaporated and who was quite willing to make peace with her. He shrank, however, from writing a penitent letter, as he still considered that his aunt had treated him unjustly.

He was sorry for her in her loneliness, for she was a woman who had no friends, and he was the only near relative she had in the world. As Christmas was at hand he decided to send her a message of good-will—probably the only one she would receive; and, acting on this kindly impulse, he sent her a Christmas card, without any indication of the sender. Several more years passed in unbroken silence on both sides. The incident of the card was almost forgotten when one day the doctor, now prospering in Sheffield, received a letter from a firm of solicitors informing him that his aunt had died leaving him the whole of her estate, the value of \$40,000—and also the Christmas card he had sent her. She had, it appeared, recognized his handwriting on the envelope, and had been so touched by her nephew's kind thought of her that, although she still refused to make peace with him, she made a new will in his favor.

He was a different type in the story of one of our leading manufacturers. Many years ago the future Croesus was an out-of-work clerk, broken in health and heart. He had sought vainly for employment; his purse was empty; and in his despair he decided to put an end to a useless life. At a late hour on Christmas Eve he left his attic in Clerkenwell on his last walk to the oblivion of the Thames. He was walking down Chancery Lane with downcast head, when he saw something white on the pavement in front of him. He stooped and picked it up. It was a Christmas card, dropped by some careless man. On it was the picture of a child in a nightgown knocking at a door, and underneath were the words: "Open the door, Daddy! Mummy Kissed!"

At sight of the picture the tears filled his eyes. It was the exact presentment of the little daughter a few months before, leaving him—his only child—he had lost but alone in the world. Then as he walked over his broken down, and leaning on the railings near, sobbed his heart out. When at last he had recovered sufficiently, utterly exhausted by his weeping, he turned his steps resolutely homeward, holding the precious card, which had so providentially saved his life, to his heart. This was indeed the "turn of the tide" for him, for two days later he found employment. "I have never looked back. To that card so accidentally found I owe all I have and am. It is my dearest possession. It is always with me night and day."

It was a still more remarkable story years ago to one of our best-known barristers. One day, so he tells the story, when he was vainly waiting in his chambers for the briefs that refused to come, he received a newspaper from a friend in Melbourne, and was surprised to see an envelope caught in its folds which had been overlooked by the postman. As the envelope was unsealed, curiosity impelled him to open it, and he drew out a glittering card, bearing the photograph of a beautiful girl, with the words underneath: "With love and best Christmas wishes from Lenore."

So struck was he by the sweetness of the pictured face that he decided, instead of re-posting the card, to take it back to its owner, whose address, as given on the card, was curiously enough, quite close to his own bachelor rooms

The Waiting House—By Vincent Cornier

CAPTAIN JIMMY'S CHRISTMAS

By Frances Vale.

To Sir Giles Ayreton, the Master of Ayreton, it seemed that his great house was waiting—waiting for something or for someone.

Why, he did not know; only the impression was profoundly with him. A sense of expectant stillness seemed to brood above that beautiful structure of stone and oak, founded on the rocks that bound the marshes from the moaning sea.

It was Christmas Eve, and the marshes were gripped by frost, and under the blue-white moon a skating party from Cliff House mingled its laughter with that of the villagers. The hiss and clang of steels and the hollow rumble of the ice came clearly up to the study in which Giles Ayreton sat—and he feared.

His dog, late companion of his lonely watch, was restless. A few branches of waxen honesty which stalked up from a blue Venetian vase, sat on a bureau beneath a plaque of Dante, were trembling; yet no air moved. The fire of logs had ceased from spluttering, and burned in blue-flamed stillness. Yes—all was brooding—brooding—waiting!

Ayreton shivered and got up from his deep chair. Moving to the window he hung apart its heavy curtains and looked down on the moonlit majesty of the marsh. A beautiful sight—caught his breath in his throat before the wonder of it all. Ayreton Marsh, on that Christmas Eve was like a mighty fire opal across which strange shadows moved. Under the chill moon glow, bright ruby braziers of coke glowed. Torches hung orange mats of brilliance before the flying feet of the skaters; music trembled, and somewhere, far beneath the winging wild fowl, a choir of unaccompanied voices, carolled of the glory of the dawn.

Then a moan grew over the waters and Ayreton sighed and thought he understood. A storm was threatening. That deep toge rowling over the sea was a sinister herald—snow, with all the speed of a black nor'easter behind it, was driving in to land—and now long wedges of driven geese split across the glaring face of the moon and all the night was sound. Lemon edged the storming vapour of the snow clouds come. Under them and across them ran the bitterly flickering flames of their innermost lightnings and from them fell a sea-hail which became on land a whirling snow. And then the moon went dim. Where had been silence was now the thunder of the hammering surf back like the devilish howl of the wind above the dunes and round the harbor, walling.

Giles Ayreton let the curtains close and turned away from the window, smiling complacently. He would have a cigar now; his strange mood, engendered by such simple phenomena, was starkly explained—what a fool he had been! Yes, he would have a cigar—perhaps a glass of wine beforehand; what a fool!

Then . . . he stopped! For his dog was no longer the quietly lovable companion of his solitude. It was rigid there, in the centre of the wide study, a snarling, bristling embodiment of ripping muscles and quivering flesh. Its jaws were bared and its jaws showed, blue-grey and dripping wet with froth. Its eyes were like great illumined cornellans, split by vitric almonds of green light. It growled in its throat . . . and, behind it, the shaking springs of hollowly dropped their rattling discs, with slithering sound, one by one, down the polished bevel of the old bureau.

thing's gone mad," he told himself. "It's—the dog to spring!"

"But the dog did not spring. On the contrary, it backed away . . . and moved its blazing eyes from viewing its master's face to follow the movements of something, invisible, at his side! Whatever the thing was that moved, Ayreton could not divine, but the hound was watching it steadily—watching it!

Back, ever backwards; the dog retreated until at length it was brought up hard by the collision of its haunches with the bureau drawers. Like a mad thing it slewed about at the impact, and snapped—at wood. That was sufficient. The terrible bondage under which it had lain, was loosed. No longer did it gaze across the room at that which was terrible. The glare in its pupils died low, and as near as it was possible for it to portray—it affected shame; the shame of cowardice.

Then came the whisper. Sir Giles Ayreton heard it—a distinct and very clear whisper: "Cuhlain—Cuhlain, good dog then!" There was spoken an endearment of the hound! And it? It grovelled low and went across the floor, showing pleasure and adoration and wild fear-amingled. Then, it rolled over—feigning death. With one ear cocked for applause, one eye slightly opened, it lay there—regarding the effect its trick was making. . . . on the one for whom it was performed.

Then Ayreton knew his wife was in the room. And she had lain in death for three long years. For none other, would Cuhlain exhibit that trick, which chanced to be the only one it knew. Lady Ayreton had spent patient weeks of the wretchedly gawky puppyhood in teaching it to feign death at her word. On reaching maturity its serene dignity vetoed any other attempts . . . only one trick.

"Myrtle! Myrtle!" Ayreton called her name hoarsely, fearfully. "I hear." Soft as the rush of fainting music, in his brain fell answer: "Giles—I hear."

That monosyllabic reply was made in such a manner as to focus instant and surprised attention. The returned skating party saw an ashy cheeked, wild-eyed and gauntly drawn man before them—instead of the tall and ruddy-faced Master, whom always they had regarded as the soul of bluff geniality and good humor. Ayreton looked as though he was recovering from a long illness. His hands trembled and his hair was dank. "I say—anything wrong, dad?" that was Anthony's swift concern. Sir Giles took a grip on himself. "No—er—no; that is—the dog has—has been acting strangely, y'know! Rather odd, getting very old—must have him destroyed, I think . . . a bad five minutes, I assure you!"

A gasp sounded very clearly in the room. It came from Marion Shephard. Swaying as though about to faint she steadied herself by outstretching one hand to ward back from the wall. She looked across at Sir Giles Ayreton and ignored the clustering about her of her friends.

Once more came the words from out the shadows, sinking like dim thoughts into his brain: "You hear me—Giles?"

"Yes—yes—oh, yes! I hear you! What—what is it, Myrtle—what do you want?"

"Rest!—is there no rest then, beyond death?"

"Rather ask me what I want; my time with you is short, and I must—"

The thin voice was fading, swiftly. Ayreton heard it, drifting back into the silences of all shadowed things, then, very calmly: "What—do you—want, Myrtle?" he called.

The voice returned to his thoughts. "Peace and forgetfulness, Giles—and—forgiveness."

"Forgiveness—forgiveness—what have you—what did you do, Myrtle, that calls for my forgiveness? No man ever had so true and dear a wife as you! Oh, Myrtle, before—"

"Stop—stop!" the voice commanded. "I told you—my time with you is measured out by seconds—listen!"

And as a story, soundless, came her message. A mundane, miserable little story it was that came to him from out that vast and shadowy region of the supernatural that mankind holds to ensnare the travelling souls of outermost darkness from their rest . . . a simple story.

Their eldest son, Basil, had not been to blame—so she who had been his mother averred in voiceless thoughts within Giles Ayreton's brain—Basil Ayreton had not been blame-worthy. The simple story shook the man with its tremendous purport until he went . . .

The voice told him that it was . . .

But, they brought those shipwrecked men to the kitchens of his huge house and warmed them back to life for his awakening. And when they roused him, to go down to his eldest son, sacred from the sea, he forgot his English conservatism and kissed the lad! . . . So did one Marion Shephard, but hers was only the natural instinct of a woman, welcoming back to her arms her long lost mate.

Re-union—peace—the while the bells of Christmas morning rang in splendor beneath the roseate sky, across the grey, cold marshlands and the gleaming wreckage, where the wild fowl called to a world that was white and hushed under snow.

Christmas in Italy

Last year I spent Christmas in Italy. As I sit by the blazing logs my thoughts drift back to the land of sunshiny and macaroni . . . People tell you that the Christmas spirit is not to be captured anywhere but in England. That is true in a sense. In a foreign land there are many familiar things one misses—carol-singers, holly and the Christmas numbers of the magazines.

In Italy there are compensations. My thoughts turn rather wistfully to the shops in the gay little town where I dwell. For a good time before Christmas the Italian shops begin literally to shine and sparkle.

But there was a story told, among the servants, of the imprints of muddy sea boots in my Lady Ayreton's death chamber on the night before her burial . . . and a locket that was about her neck, containing a portrait of her first born, was open, damped as by tears—all awry. And a withering sprig of rosemary lay on those still white hands—and the window of that chamber, open, had clattered to the night from which her son had come, to which he had returned . . .

And now—what would you have me do, Myrtle?"

"Forgive me—do you forgive me?"

"As I—I would have done in life, Myrtle—had you told me. Had you told—me."

He heard a sound like a sigh—a broken sigh, after sobbing. "The sea!" She seemed very far away; her voice was fainting in the distance. "Danger for—Basil—bring him—home."

"The sea? What do you mean—stay!—tell me! Myrtle—stay!"

But she was gone. He waited—listened—called and prayed. She did not answer.

As I sprang in his chair, he was oblivious of the sounding, snapping rockets over the howling sea. He did not hear the thunder of the impact when the tramp steamer "Scarholme" piled herself on the rocks where they went down to the snarling deeps. He did not hear the hellish grind of steel plates on basal, nor yet the hideous tearing of great girders by the clamorous waters . . . How was he, unconscious, to know that, under the bitter magnesium flares lit from the harbor walls, and the flaring pitch-craft frung from the tilted deck of the craft, the lifeboatsmen succeeded in rescuing all of the "Scarholme's" frozen crew?

Captain Jimmy Smith lived in a funny little house on the beach. Once it had been the cabin of his old schooner, Skimmer; now it was the only home Captain Jimmy and his cat Vixen had.

In the summer time he sold fish and clams and lobsters to the summer cottagers, but in the winter he had hard work to keep the little cabin warm and find food for himself and Vixen.

It was the day before Christmas, and the beach was rough with ice. "Snow!" said Captain Jimmy, as he left his little house and went up toward the village. His pipe was between his teeth, but he was not smoking—he was out of tobacco.

He smiled sadly because he knew that he would have a lonely Christmas. He had no wife or children, and he was very much alone. The poor are often forgotten.

By the time Captain Jimmy had bought some flour and salt pork, and a little coffee it was dark and snowing fast. So when he heard the sound of children crying he stopped in surprise.

"Hullo!" shouted Captain Jimmy, and the crying stopped at once. In another minute he almost tumbled over two little children who were running along the beach path.

"Heave ho!" called Captain Jimmy, and he put out a long arm and gathered the little ones close to him. "What are you doing here?" he shouted, for the wind was screaming now.

They tried to explain, but Captain Jimmy couldn't understand a word they said; they cried so much, and at last, half dragging, half carrying them, he hurried them into the warm little cabin where he lived.

When the kerosene lamp was lighted the two children stopped crying and smiled at Captain Jimmy.

"Are you Thanta Claus?" one lisped, and the other little girl who looked exactly like her, giggled and lunged to Captain Jimmy's big hand.

"I love 'oo, Mistor Thanta Claus," she whispered.

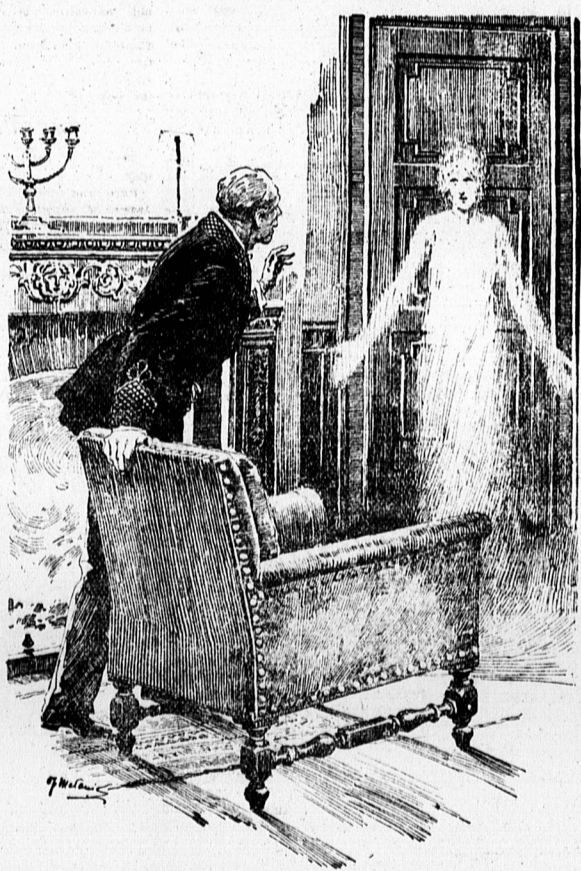
"Bless your sweet hearts," cried Captain Jimmy, his eyes full of tears. "I guess I'll have to be Santa Claus tonight! I can never get you home tonight in this howling blizzard!"

The two little girls smiled brightly and took off their red cloaks and knitted caps and leggings and rubbers.

"We're lost," said one of the twins, and she told a long story of how they had gone to walk with nurse, who had suddenly run away and left them to the woods. "We hollered, but she wouldn't come back," said Linnie, sadly. "My mamma scolded her this afternoon."

"By and by, after the twins had said their prayers and were sound asleep on Captain Jimmy's bed, while Vixen purred at their feet, Captain Jimmy walked the floor and whistled a tune.

"I reckon that Santa Claus could never get down my little stove pipe!" he chuckled. "So I'll just have to fill those two little stockings myself!"



"Myrtle! Myrtle! Myrtle!" he almost screamed the words as, in an agony of fear, he staggered from the window to claw at the back of a chair.

you nocturnal revellers—see you when you're changed. I say, what a storm—what a storm!"

Deliberately he turned to the window again; deliberately he had dismissed them to their rooms. He heard them shuffling out of the study, crestfallen, disturbed—he heard the heavy door sink softly in its place. Then his daughter-in-law laughed . . . his son answered by a deep toned snatch of a carol . . . someone said something about a midnight ghost hunt . . . chattering voices took it up—then came more laughter and a silence.

But the Christmas cards!—the saints and angels, kindly gnomes dance under the moonlight and gay little cupids running races in the snow—got all done to pattern, but seeming to be someone who enjoyed the job.

In Christmas week there was a Fair—a fair. One morning we woke to find the Piazza and the Via Madonna full of stalls. Where they had come from I know not. In Italy stalls of fruit and toys and hats will spring up in the most unlikely places with the rapidity of mushrooms.

If you want to catch a few stray moments from your lost childhood go for a stroll through an Italian fair. There you will find all the things you don't want and yet your eyes will be charmed and your fingers continually dipping into your purse. Watch the children as they drift down the long line of toy stalls; their eyes big with longing and their hands gripping tightly the few centesimi they were given to spend.

So young did I become that I purchased a balloon filled with gas. I tied it to the button of my coat. Soon afterwards it escaped and I watched it rise rapidly and disappear into the deep blue of the sky.

But the Christmas Pudding, some home-lover will ask? Is it to be

