



Home Again!

A Christmas Story

It was to be such a surprise. One of those once-in-a-lifetime thrills. Not only did it have an element of the unexpected, but to happen at Christmas. That was the crowning glory of it all.

Then to fall so flat. Anticipation, it has been said, is nearly always more exciting than realization. But this was to have been the outstanding exception. It couldn't be anything else. But it very nearly was.

Marion often had pictured in those long, weary, tiresome fourteen months what form the reunion would take. In her active mind, with a knowing smile creasing her pretty, careworn face, she had worked everything out to the last detail. All but one little detail; one that anyone could have overlooked, one you hardly could be expected to consider. But that was the one that brought the black abyss of hopelessness and despair very close to realization.

She had prayed; oh, how she had prayed. At night, by herself, when the house was quiet. She and Shirley, who suddenly had sprung up into a ten-year-old, had even taught the baby to pray. Sitting in the dim light of the living-room, with the two children kneeling before her, she had first delighted them with her softly amusing story of how things would happen. And then, her arms spread protectively about them, she would offer a prayer for his early and safe return.

Only fourteen months! Dear God in Heaven, sometimes—most of the time—it felt like fourteen years. Dear Jerry! What was he doing with himself. Who had been looking after him with the same care and love she had lavished upon him. Not a seargent-major, surely? She smiled. How much longer? She asked herself.

And then it came—the message. Like a bolt from the blue. Long sought and yet quite unexpected. It was almost too good to be true, especially when it happened just before Christmas.

The message itself was terse enough. But that was to be expected. Marion knew and understood the strict censorship regulations that could reduce a telegram that originally was full of love and understanding to this:

HAVE LANDED EAST COAST STOP WILL ARRIVE HOME ON LEAVE CHRISTMAS EVE. JERRY.

Despite the brusque, business-like nature, didn't it hold a world of promise and fulfillment?

She hardly knew what to do first. Christmas Eve. Why, that was tomorrow! So much to be done and so little time in which to accomplish the multitude of arrangements.

After a few moments of distraction during which she wandered about in aimless fashion, not knowing quite what to do first, Marion pulled herself together. For the first time in months, she began to sing. Not a drab song of war to which her ears and mind had been accustomed, but a gay love song. Her lover was returning from the field of battle. For Christmas!

Shirley, of course, was still at school. Classes would not end until this afternoon. But she could withhold herself no longer. She

her throat and held back the words she had intended to say. And despite the horrid bombings he had experienced repeatedly during the past few months, he looked so well, so fit. Oh, it was grand to have him back, even for a short time.

Jerry embraced his wife and held her tenderly for a long time. And then she was ready with the endless stream of questions she had to ask him. She was surprised and hurt, therefore, to have him ask her to hold her enquiries. Hardly a word of explanation either, except:

"Just dropped in for a few minutes, honey. I've got a lot of people to see, you know. Been away for a long time, and I'd like to round up some of the gang and have a little fun."

Marion said nothing. But she felt that he must have noticed the hurt in her eyes. That she could not help. And when he rose from his chair and walked to the door, with a hurried good-bye thrown over his shoulder, she could hold back the tears no longer.

What have I done to deserve this? she asked herself over and over again, the tears streaming down the lines of worry that had come to crease her face during the past fourteen months. How could he treat her so? The "gang" coming before her. Nor had he enquired about the children Shirley and the baby who had been born shortly before he went on active service. Oh, the bitterness of it all. To her mind, blinded by tears, hopelessness and despair, there was no possible excuse.

The door slammed again late that night. But Marion was not there to welcome the newcomer. That it was Jerry, she had no doubt. At the same time, she felt this was no time to break down the icy reserve that had grown about her heart and that of her daughter during the long hours of the afternoon and evening. This was no time for sentiment, although her heart cried out for him. Shirley had sobbed herself to sleep.

"Marion," she heard his voice in the hall.

"Yes," she replied coldly.

"Will you come and help me for a moment?"

Slowly, and with aching heart, she descended the stairs. He stood in darkness at the bottom.

"What is it?" she asked wearily.

"Come into the living-room with me, dear. I have something to show you."

All desire to touch him, to be close to him had deserted her, and she moved quickly ahead of him into the large front room where she had awaited his first coming with so much pleasure and anticipation.

This room, too, was in -darkness. And Marion wondered why. The light had been left burning when she went upstairs to prepare for bed.

She could feel Jerry standing close behind her. And suddenly, the lights flashed. She beheld the Christmas tree she had bought for his homecoming. But it was no longer almost naked of decoration. No longer did a few strips of tinsel try pitifully to enliven the green branches. All about it were piled dozens of parcels, all shapes and sizes, and wrapped in gay Christmas paper.

She turned to him, and a tear ran slowly down each cheek.

"Oh, Jerry," she said, "why did you do it?"

He grinned. "Well, it's Christmas, isn't it? Had to get a couple of presents for my little wife and daughters, didn't I?"

"I know." Her heart was light again now, her lips smiling, but she sobbed as though she might never stop. "I know," she repeated, "but why did you walk out so quickly this afternoon without even asking about the children?"

He put his arm about her waist and led her to a big easy chair. He sat down and pulled her on his knee.

"Well, when I saw that Shirley wasn't home and the baby was upstairs, I decided I'd like to have them see me on Christmas morning for the first time. Sort of Santa Claus in person with lots of gifts. And I knew if I stayed around, that would all have to be forgotten."

"And then, I knew you would want to go with me to buy the gifts, but I felt I must go by myself. Something special, you know, first Christmas at home in three years. I'm sorry, Marion."

"Sorry for what?" she responded gayly. "Why, it's more wonderful than ever now! But don't you dare do it again!"



This Christmas

On this eve of Christmas, what can we say?

We can repeat, despite everything, that moving quotation of truth and beauty which King George spoke for his people on Christmas Day two years ago:

"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year—Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown, and he replied 'Go into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than the known way.'"

And let us not betray ourselves into believing that everything on earth today denies Christmas. It may deny its merriment, its joy; it does not deny its essential spirit of man's immortal longing for peace, for the truth which Christmas tells. It is for that spirit, for the message that came to Bethlehem two thousand years ago, that millions of men today are fighting and prepared to give their lives.

Down more than nineteen hundred years since the first Christmas the world has been scarred by wars, and often threatened by tyrants, but notwithstanding all the sorrow that came to it; despite all the blasphemous lies, the spirit of Christmas lives on: deathless in its message. Long after the tyrants of today have passed into oblivion it will still exist—the greatest, truest, most wonderful thing in the hearts of men.

And peace need not necessarily be in the spirit of Christmas. James Russell Lowell once denounced war in uncompromising, unforgettable phrases, yet when the North rose to defend what he thought the cause of freedom, he penned this invocation to Peace:

"Come, Peace! not like a mourner bowed For honor lost and dear ones wasted, But proud, to meet a people proud, With eyes that tell of triumph tasted—"

"Come, such as mothers prayed for, when They kissed their cross with lips that quivered, An' bring fair wages for brave men, A nation saved, a race delivered!"

The truth is that not often in the world's history has the spirit of Christmas, its true meaning for men, been more strikingly exemplified than in the spectacles

Interview With A Christmas Porker

(Last year, readers may recall, our roving reporter took it upon himself to interview and obtain for public consumption the thoughts and reactions of a Christmas turkey, also for public consumption. So gratifying were the results, the gobber having placed himself on record on a number of questions of general concern, that we have asked our reporter to undertake to interview a representative of another species of potential Christmas dinner, namely, the common hog.)

"I saw that piece you did on the turkey last year," this walking Christmas dinner told me when I introduced myself, "and believe me, brother," he added, a trifle wistfully, "that baby had the right kind of spirit. Never let 'em know you're jittery about the future. That's my motto, too."

She left me then for a moment and nosed about the sty as if reflecting upon the import of her remarks. Perhaps it was the way she waddled about, but I began to find the place increasingly noisome; the odor, I found, was particularly offensive, and I suggested we might continue the interview elsewhere. Somewhere a little more refreshing, but, oozing back to where I stood leaning on the wooden enclosure, she was adamant on the point.

"You must understand," she said a little reprovingly, "that this is new to me, granting interviews and the like. And I must say I feel more at home in my own habitat. Helps my nervousness."

"Now, those questions you wanted to ask me. How do I feel about Christmas? Ha, Brother, you've got something there. I think I'll answer your question by asking you another. How would you feel if you were being sent

to the chair next week?" She looked up at me with a sly glance, and I did not have the heart to pursue this line of questioning. "What do you think of the general world situation?" I asked her instead.

Once again, she waddled about the muddy sty. If she had been able to put her hands behind her back, it would have been perfect. "Well now, brother," she said finally, "that's something else again. I'm glad you asked, though, because that one factor changes the whole complexion of things. You know, of course," she went on, almost confidentially, "that most pork products are being sent overseas this year to feed the long-suffering Britons and our Canadian soldiers over there."

"Other years, it has merely been a matter of cold-blooded slaughter of my kin just to stuff the receptive but not necessarily empty stomachs of fat people like yourself who feel they must have a succulent pig for Christmas dinner. I must emphasize that we have resented that. And resented it strongly; as strongly, indeed, as your pernicious habit of comparing greedy persons to pigs. It's unfair," she wound up dramatically, "it's unconstitutional."

And I swear that, in her stirring emotion, she flipped her curly tail.

We Can Dance, Can't We?

Dancing at Christmas time is equally as necessary and can be made as enjoyable for all ages as the traditional dinner and other good things and good fun which accompanies the festive season.

On Christmas Day, for instance, if we all had 40 minutes quiet dancing to soothing music instead of 40 minutes dead sleep after the main meal we should feel more fit and happy because the unusually heavy meal would be well digested from the exercise and that would banish that headachy feeling which spoils so much essential enjoyment on this one day of all days in the year.

It is a time of joy, and the natural thing to do is to "dance and be merry." Just what kind of dances? Any old dance! Christmas time is a reunion of families; therefore the dancing should be such that all can join in, all ages, even those who are so old they can only shuffle. Therefore dance what you like, how you like, but the young folk should dance as gracefully as they know how.

In The Christmas Spirit

The conception of Christmas varies with different individuals and is tied up with childhood recollections. To those who live in the colder climates like ours, the mood of Christmas brings thoughts of winter twilight, with snow falling softly in large, white flakes, of log fires crackling on the hearth, of the quietness of a white blanket which festoons, decorates, and softens the rough, rude aspects of the landscape. On the other hand, to those who are accustomed to warmer climates, thoughts of Christmas may bring visions of poinsettias blooming by the door, or of palms dancing in the sharpened breezes of winter.

To all of us it means goodwill, an increase in our feeling of kindness toward those about us, and remembrance of some friends we may have forgotten somewhere during the year.

This year, of all years, we fortunate people on this continent should cherish and promote our traditions. We should indulge in all those comforting little rituals which etched themselves so vividly on our consciousness as children. A candle burning in the window, the ceremony of decorating the tree, and holly wreaths on the door will take us for a

Modern Christmas dancing at home has accomplished the impossible and made of the whole nation one huge family. Why? Because most home dances and parties during Christmas rely on radio dance music which means that millions of others in thousands of homes all are dancing at the same time to the same tune and therefore real "goodwill among men" has come to a reality in our midst.

The Christmas dance breaks down all artificial barriers which grow up in the family among some of its members, who have to live unnatural lives in modern business. For instance, that jolly old-time dance "Sir Roger de Coverly" would be out of place in a modern ballroom but at home during Christmas it gives as much heart fun as ever it did in days of yore. Why? Because it can join in however stiff and aged, and all become animated by the gay hilarity of the rollicking music. Grandpa and his high school daughter are at once in the swings and hopping turns, and the laughter is riotous long after the music stops.



Of course there is a serious side to the home dancing during Christmas. Children and young folk naturally like to give a display of what they can do. Let them do it. Exhibition dances among young couples for a prize produces pleasure and not a little pride among parents, while competition in all the newest steps is always a source of great interest.

CHRISTMAS TREES

The Christmas tree which all Canadian boys and girls regard as essential to traditional Christmas celebration, was introduced into England from Germany by Queen Victoria. The custom of loading the young spruce tree with gifts originated with the ancient Romans, who used them at the Saturnalia, a feast held in honor of Saturnus, the god of agriculture and civilization.

Reconsecration

During September of this year, the Government of Canada decreed one week as Reconsecration Week, during which time all loyal Canadians would rededicate themselves to the task before them—riding the earth of noxious Nazism and making it free once more for all men to live in peace and harmony.

We must go further. Every day every Canadian must rededicate himself to the task. As Christmas rolls around again, it is only fitting that we should stop and take stock and renew our vows. It is appropriate, therefore, to reproduce once again the popular poem written by John J. Freeland as the eyes of the nation turned to Parliament Hill in Ottawa on September 17, 1941: Eternal Father, prayerfully we yield

Today our Homage; for on Thee, Oh Lord, We lean, not only as our certain shield, But, too, as our exceeding great reward.

Grant, Lord, the blessing that we humbly ask For all our Arms, on Land, on Sea, in Air; Thy blessing, too, on those whose humbler task

Here met, upon this Hill, beside this Hall That wakes the memory of a past travail, We, before God, reconsecrate our all; In this we shall not falter, shall not fail.

An Expert Carves The Turkey

To stand or sit? That is the first big question.

Better stand, Mr. Man-of-the-House, unless you are a past master of the art.

Be sure the turkey is placed on the platter with the breast bone towards the carver. That is one of the cardinal rules, according to carving experts.

Cut off the leg first, separating it from the bird by cutting down through skin next to the body and by twisting the leg downward and outward.

Cut apart the upper and lower parts of the leg at the joint, twisting the drumstick slightly to enable the knife to cut through. Remove the bone from the dark meat of the upper leg and carve meat into slices, cutting downward and at an angle.



extra warm plates nearby on which to lay the slices of turkey as carved.

To keep the turkey fast to the platter, use four ingenious little pins that "anchor" it to the platter.

These small suction cups are pressed on the platter so that the pins will be inserted along the backbone of the turkey, when the bird is placed on the platter. They are invisible to use and save tempers and tablecloths—not to speak of embarrassment.