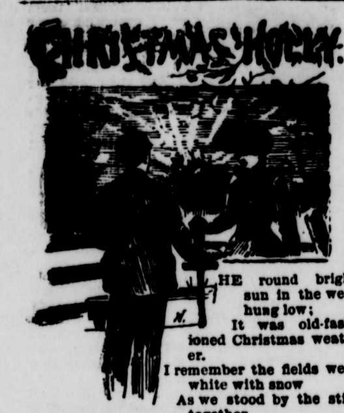
msa_sc5130_scm12191-0224 ©Maryland State Archives



THE round bright sun in the west
hung low;
It was old-fashioned Christmas weather.
I remember the fields were white with snow
As we stood by the stile together.

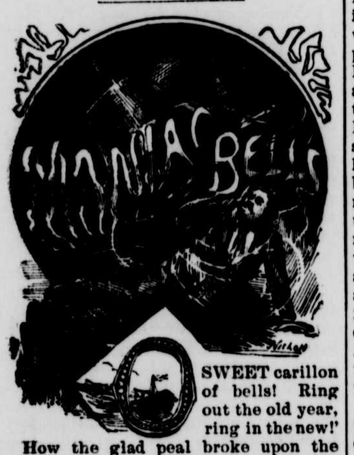
In the woods the berries grew thick and red;
Yet I lingered and called it 'Folly!'
When you said with a smile: "Let us cross the stile
And gather some Christmas holly."

But over the fields by the frozen brook
We went where the boughs were sprinkled
With snow; and deep in a sheltered nook
The waterfall faintly tinkled.
A brave little robin sang out in the cold:
It was only young lovers' folly,
But we listened so long to the redbreast's song
That we almost forgot the holly.

Then the light died out of the golden day,
And the moon showed her silvery bow,
And we never knew if our homeward way
Lay through rose-leaves or drifted snow.
One bright star shone in the pale clear sky;
And my mother said it was folly
To listen so long to a robin's song—
But we brought home the Christmas holly.

You stir not now from our ingle nook,
And my hair is white like the snow;
For the story you told 'mid the sunset gold
Is a story of long ago.
As hand clasps hand by the winter fire,
Do you deem it an old wife's folly
That my eyes grow wet with a sweet regret
When I look at the Christmas holly?

—E. Matheson, in Chambers' Journal.



SWEET carillon of bells! Ring out the old year, ring in the new!

How the glad peal broke upon the midnight silence and set the heart of one happy girl thrilling with a joy almost too keen for mortal to believe in—the joy of requited love! Ring out the long years of patient waiting and meek submission; ring in the coming bliss of living for the noblest man on earth!

Carmine Haughton was to be married to-day—this very New Year's day—to the lover who had been rejected by her parents seven years ago. The Haughtons were wealthy then, and she was the eldest, the flower, the loveliest of the four beautiful girls who went by the names of Carrie, Ju, Vi and Essie Haughton. Leslie Kenilworth was one of the richest physicians in Winnipeg now, and Carmine was neither beautiful nor wealthy any more. A wasting illness had robbed her forever of her loveliness, and her father's sudden death had reduced the family to comparative poverty.

Then, quite suddenly, Leslie Kenilworth had written to his old love, telling her he had a home worthy of her at last; that he had never forgotten her, and believed she had been as true to him, and that he would come and claim her whenever she bade him. What a day of joy and terrors that had been! Would he care for her now she was poor—and plain? For the first she feared not; but the last? Ah! the image in his constant heart was not that poor, scarred face.

She wrote him the truth, inclosed her photograph and waited mutely. But his letters only breathed the tenderest constancy. He urged her to be ready for a New-Year's day wedding, so that he might take her with him to Europe for a winter's sojourn before returning to far-off Winnipeg, and her mother and sisters gladly pushed on the preparations.

They had not met until last evening, the very day before the wedding, and when she beheld the tall, handsome gentleman who had come to claim her her courage altogether failed her and she hid her ruined face in her hands, weeping over its disfigurement. But he raised it with tenderest reverence, and, gazing into the tearful eyes, whispered:

"My Carmine's soul is lovelier than ever!"

And who could have doubted after that?

Plenty of willing hands had decked the church with flowers in honor of her wedding day—the quaint old church whose pealing bells had waked her to the new year and the new life. Its beautiful bell tower was but a stone's throw from the bride's chamber window, and its chimes were familiar to her as the voices of her friends. It struck the quarter before eleven—a bar of a sixteenth century madrigal—as the bride went up the aisle in her simple white draperies.

There she stood under the golden bell, with her gentle face seen, mist-like, through the vail, bending downward, and filled with a holy serenity. There she stood—but where was the bridegroom? The marriage was fixed for a quarter before eleven, and the steamer which was to bear them away started at twelve o'clock. Not a moment could be spared for delay; why, then, was not the bridegroom there to greet the bride?

Mrs. Haughton, in her marvelous toilette of heliotrope plush and lace, who had been leaning back with folded hands in her abounding complacency, sat upright now and gazed sternly at the vestry door, by which the laggard should appear. The three beautiful sisters looked with meaning eyes at each other as though portending discomfiture. The pursy brother-in-law who stood beside the bride to give her away looked testily at his big gold watch.

Eleven o'clock. The great bell tolled it out, filling the shuddering walls with sound and breaking the electric spell.

With a start Carmine raised her head and looked round her. At the same moment the vestry door opened and the clergyman came quickly forward and whispered a few words to her escort.

"Can't be found—disappeared."

She heard these words, and put out her hands with a wild, imploring gesture to the rector. The next instant she had fainted.

"Come home!—hide yourself, poor miserable thing!" muttered the mother, in a passion of mortified pride, as she thrust her into the carriage at the side door. "I might have known he would desert you—but I shall never forgive him!"

They got her smuggled into the house and up to her own chamber without attracting too much attention, and as they shut the door upon her and her troubles, the gun of the departing steamer mingled with the pealing of the bells which counted twelve o'clock.

Of all the costly wedding-gifts that had been sent her, Carmine chose but one to cheer her in her solitude—a simple guard-ring Leslie had given her to hold the wedding-ring in place. That wedding-ring might never grace the thin hand now, but the guard should take its place.

Indignation ran high in the town of Elmsford over the insult that had been offered its most popular young lady. Parties of young men formed themselves into various committees for purposes of vengeance; but graver feelings began to prevail when it was discovered that Dr. Kenilworth's money still lay in the safe at his hotel, and that his traveling-trunks remained in his room untouched. It was ascertained that he had last been seen by one of the waiters leaving the hotel about eleven o'clock on the night before his expected marriage. He remarked to the man that he was going to take a look round the town, as he had not seen it for seven years. His purse was lying on the table in his room, along with some labels he had finished addressing, as if he had intended returning immediately. Could he have gone down to the docks to see the steamer? A search was quietly instituted, but in vain. Was it to be one of those "mysterious disappearances?"

Carmine noticed on the third day of the year that her mother, when she came up to pay her usual brief visit, did not abuse the lost man with her accustomed rancor. Nay, she even alluded to him as "that poor fellow."

"He is dead, then?" she whispered, sitting up and staring at her with her burning eyes.

"No—no—we don't know; but there is no trace, and—and it is very strange."

Carmine could not rest that night. All her hold on hope was torn away by that thought of death. She wandered up and down, clasping her hands and praying for mercy. A moaning storm kept company with her mood, and lashed the snow in flinty sheets against her window. Through the hiss of the tempest she could hear the tolling of the bells telling the quarters, now loud, now faint, as the wind howled past. Never before had they pressed themselves upon her attention as they did now. They seemed to be calling—calling—calling with human voices—calling to her for help!

The girl's mind was in a highly wrought state, her fancy disordered; that she knew, and she strove for composure. The faith, which had never for a moment failed her, in Leslie Kenilworth's truth made her feel as if his spirit were near her, his voice in the clanging bells.

As the blast died away before the coming dawn, and all things became still, this impression became so powerful that she softly opened her window and knelt down with her eyes fixed upon the lofty campanile; and no sooner had the bluish light limned forth its fretted spires, than her whole soul seemed to be drawn from her in the words:

"O! God of mercy, tell me how to help him!"

In solemn measure the hour tolled forth—six o'clock. As the sonorous echoes died away a wild voice spoke to her piercingly, as in her very ear:

"*Maniac bells! Maniac bells!*"

It was Leslie's voice! Had she lost her reason? What was that moving on the face of the campanile? A shred of paper? A hand? A beckoning hand?

"Leslie! Leslie! I am coming!" cried Carmine, as if he could hear her. Perhaps he did. The pale hand was withdrawn.

Five minutes later the sexton at St. David's Church was summoned to his door by a young lady without a hat, who said simply:

"Dr. Kenilworth is locked in the bell-tower. Come!"

Breathless with astonishment, he got the keys and followed her flying footsteps.

St. David's bells were managed by clock-work down below. The sexton vaguely remembered that he had gone up to see if it was all right on New Year's eve before the midnight chimes. He must have locked the missing man in among the bells.

Up and up they sped until they reached the low-browed door. A stone balcony ran around the belfry here, and strangers often came up to see the view. What more probable than for a man to stumble in the darkness through this open door and be lost for months?

"If he's alive he's crazy, among them demons!" muttered the sexton, as he slowly turned the lock.

Narrow rays of light shone into the place from the lancet windows cut in the walls, showing the monster bells hung in a circle over a skeleton-like bridge of planks, by which they might be reached. As the door was opened, the quarter after six set one bell swooping across the disk with a stroke which almost deafened Carmine, so mighty were the reverberations. At the same moment a scream broke from a dark heap under one of the window-loops, and it seemed to cower closer to the wall. It was Leslie Kenilworth, the missing bridegroom, crazed, as the sexton had said, by the torture of the bells.

It were useless to describe Mrs. Haughton's stupefaction when this wreck of humanity was brought to her door. The explanation of his plight was so simple and so natural that she could not find a word of blame for anybody, but just busied herself in doing the best she could for the unfortunate man. He was almost gone with hunger, exhaustion and the pealing of the bells. They had to be silenced while he lay between life and death, so terrible was their effect upon him.

"Maniac bells! be still! be still!" he would scream, striking fiercely upward, and then, when strength failed him, cowering into his pillows as though from raining blows.

As rest and nourishment restored the wasted body, the frenzied mind gradually regained its balance, until Leslie learned to recognize his plain little bride-elect, and grew visibly stronger under her influence.

It was a fortnight after his rescue that he told his story to Carmine and her mother. It ran thus:

"You remember I left this house at ten o'clock that night, and went to my hotel to complete my preparations. I worked for an hour, and then the beauty of the night tempted me out for a stroll about the old place. I often used to climb up the stairs of St. David's tower when a boy, and the fancy took me to do it again; so, without a word to any one, I ascended the parapet, and stood there, not looking at the old familiar scene, after all, but at my Carmine's lighted windows."

He took her hand, and in defiance of mamma, kissed it.

"You had told me to expect a little gorgon, and I had found, instead, so sweet, so spirit-pure a face."

"But ugly," interposed Carmine, with an unsteady laugh.

"Beautiful with the beauty that is eternal!" said Leslie, stoutly; and a tiny thorn was plucked forever out of her humble heart.

"CAN'T BE FOUND—DISAPPEARED!"

"Well," proceeded he, "I forgot where I was, so that when a great clang of bells rose just behind me, I started and meant to hasten down the stairs out of the din. Instead, I stumbled headlong into the open bell-tower, and lay, helpless, on my back, under the swinging bells, just in the center where they all met to deliver their infernal strokes."

"They had begun to ring in the New Year," he continued, "and I knew I had ten minutes of it to endure before I dared move hand or foot; for as each bell delivered its stroke the brazen lip would almost touch my face, and the wind of it nearly took my breath away. I lay there staring up at my enemies with starting eyeballs, as they swooped at me like hungry eagles, and snatched at my tossing hair. How they roared at me! How they hurled themselves like barking dogs at me!

"When they began to ring in the New Year I was in the prime of youth and vigor; when they stopped, my warm blood had become thin and cold, my hair was gray. I was an octogenarian in his senile childhood. I laughed and cried for joy when they were silent, and then crept off the fearful net-work and found the door. When I discovered it was locked, I suppose I fainted; at all events I remembered no more until towards the evening. From that time on—morning, noon, night, morning, noon, night—it all seemed to me a troubled dream, cut into by lance points of torture whenever the demon bells gave tongue. Sometimes the fifteen minutes seemed to me days and weeks apart; at other times they hurried on each other so that I yelled at them to wait and give me time to brace myself for their crashing blows. All hunger or thirst was forgotten in the torture of the bells: sleep I had none—only insensibility.

"On that fourth night of my imprisonment, the furious storm which rocked the tower brought me a strange relief, although the frozen snow blew in upon me, almost freezing me to death. Those other sounds were healing to my deafened ears; they diverted my mind from the recurrent horror of the bells. As the night wore on, I had a mysterious feeling that you, Carmine, were near me; that your spirit was calling upon mine. I dragged myself to the loop-hole and waited for daylight, praying all the time, with a new-born hope in my heart, for Heaven's mercy. I knew you were there at the window—I *knew*, though my eyes were too dim to see; and when I signaled with my hand, I heard your voice answer: 'Leslie! Leslie! I am coming!' and I knew I was saved.

"My Carmine," he took her hand reverently in his, "had your love for me been less faithful, you would never have bridged space with that yearning prayer which brought our spirits into communion, and I would have died—there, beside those demon-bells!"

Leslie Kenilworth lived to bless the bells that had so nearly destroyed him. The great ocean steamer that sailed away without one newly-wedded pair sank in the storm of that fourth of January, and all on board were lost. Had the bells not startled the young man so that he missed his footing and fell into his horrible dungeon, he and his gentle bride would have gone down with the ill-fated passengers of the Assyrian.—Annie Ashmore, in Demorest's Magazine.

A LIVELY OLD PAIR.

The Merry Christmas Caused by Uncle Tom's Old Boots.

HARDERS A. FLINT, Esq., lawyer, sat alone in his bachelor's den in a big easy chair, his feet encased in a pair of dilapidated old slippers, resting on the fender, his hand thrust half way into his trousers' pockets, and his head bent forward until his chin rested on his breast. On the table beside him lay a couple of newspapers and a yellow-covered law book, open at the page he had been consulting.

Lawyer Flint was deep in perplexing thought, to judge by the expression of his face, for his brow was clouded and his lips compressed; and occasionally he turned his head toward the open volume as if inclined to seek further aid from it, but, with a slight shake of the head, relapsed again into his former attitude.

He had sat thus for a long time when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," said the lawyer, without looking up.

A servant girl entered, handed him a note and withdrew.

Lawyer Flint opened the note, read it, uttering an exclamation of impatience, arose and paced up and down the room.

"So Rolingold can't meet me to-morrow because it's Christmas," he muttered, as he stalked across the floor; "every day is important in this matter and yet he, the one most interested, delays proceedings twenty-four hours simply because it happens to be Christmas. Gad! I can't see how a business man like Rolingold can be so foolish. Well," he continued, "let him take his holiday and enjoy it if he can. I couldn't. It's many and many a long day since Christmas interfered with *my* business."

He returned to his chair, but the train of his thought had been interrupted and his face now wore a cynical, hard look as he gazed into the crackling fire. Once, long ago, his Christmas days had been bright, too, but their brightness was obscured by more vivid recollections of other Christmas times in later years, when ambition and disappointment and poverty and greed had steeled his heart and left no room for Christmas thoughts. Oh! the years that he had worked and starved and hoarded to reach his present condition of comfortable independence. As he looked back upon them now his lips closed tighter and the bitterness deepened in his face.

DEEP IN PERPLEXING THOUGHT.

From a distant part of the house came the sound of music and the laughter of children and the buzz of conversation. But the lawyer remained motionless with his head upon his breast.

Rat-tat, rat-tat, rattle-tattle, rattle-tattle-tattle, rat-tat, rattle-tattle, rat-tat-tat.

What was that? It seemed to come from the closet at the other side of the room. The lawyer went over and opened the closet door; there was nothing to be seen except a lot of old law books piled upon the shelves and a pair of heavy old boots on the floor.

"That noise must have come from below stairs after all," he said, "but it seemed to be right in the room; sounded just like some one dancing on a barn floor."

"I was just thinking of Uncle Tom," he continued, "and there are the boots the old man left here when he got his new ones at the close of his visit, a month ago. I must tell Joe to take them away."

He went over to the chair and sat down again. "Uncle Tom," he said to himself. "Bah! I hope he enjoyed his visit here. I didn't. I'd go crazy with that blundering old man around me. Nudging me and slapping me on the back, 'trying to get a little fun out of me,' as he said, with that everlasting, good-natured laugh of his. 'Christmas 'll soon be here,' he said, as he was leaving, 'n I hope you'll brace up, Harders, and enjoy yourself. *I'd* show you how to do it if I could stay with you.' Well, I wonder now what he'd do to show me how to enjoy Christmas," said the lawyer, as he settled down in his chair.

Again the sound of laughter and conversation came faintly from below. The violins struck up a lively air and—

Rattle-te-tat-te, rattle-te-tat-te, rat-te-tattle-te-rattle-te-tat!

The lawyer looked quickly toward the closet, the door of which he had left open. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. Yes, there could be no mistake about it, there were Uncle Tom's boots stepping about on the closet floor, rattling off the time with heel and toe, sidling across and back, right boot first, left boot first, *up* with the right, *up* with the left, and, as the music grew louder, up with both, crack! crack! the heels came together twice in the air, landing on the floor in exact time with the music, and finishing up with a lively rattle-tat-te rattle-tattle, rat-tat-tat. Then they came briskly over toward the astonished lawyer exactly as though they had feet and legs in them. Over to the fire they walked, turned heels toward it and stood there wide apart.

Involuntarily Lawyer Flint glanced up as if expecting to see the ruddy, jovial face and portly form of his Uncle Tom. There were the boots just as the old man would have placed them, but Uncle Tom was not there.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the lawyer, "but this is mighty curious."

The toe of the right boot began tapping the carpet gently, then they moved over to the window, stood still a moment and then walked out into the hallway.

"Gad!" said Lawyer Flint, excitedly, "I believe they are going out. I must see the end of this thing!"

He threw off his dressing-gown, hurried into his shoes, overcoat and hat, and followed the boots out of the street door, which had opened at their approach. Down the steps they tripped gayly and turned toward the brilliantly lighted avenue. The still, starlit night was bitterly cold, and Lawyer Flint shivered as he buttoned his heavy coat close up around his neck. Up the street he hastened, following the empty boots, which slipped sideways at every other step and jammed their heels into the trodden snow, but made their way rapidly, nevertheless.

Around the corner, into the avenue, in and out among the throngs of Christmas eve pedestrians, dodging here and there, stepping on toes, stopping in front of show windows, kicking themselves together and stamping on the ground—thus went the old boots, and after them followed the excited lawyer.

They turned into a big store. "Now," thought Lawyer Flint, as he entered the door, "some one will be sure to see them," but, strange to say, the boots were entirely unnoticed by the buzzing, laughing, happy people who thronged the store.

The lawyer leaned against the toy counter and watched the boots as they shuffled around on the floor.

"Something for the little ones?"

The question was asked by a pretty salesgirl, and it was addressed to Harders A. Flint. He started, and for the first time realized that he was in a rather peculiar position. Why was he standing around there, the people would ask, if he did not wish to buy? How long would he be obliged to remain? He couldn't tell. Should he say that he was waiting for those old boots? No, no; he didn't wish on any account to call attention to the ridiculous performance they were going through.

"Yes," he said, coloring, "something for the little ones," and then he went about selecting tin horns, and silver bells, and woolly dogs, and wooden monkeys, and trumpets, and checkers, and dominoes, growing white and red by turns as he thought of the fearful extravagance, and, glancing furtively, with increasing impatience and anger, at the boots, which seemed livelier than ever as his purchases increased.

"Seven dollars and forty cents, please," said the salesgirl.

Into the silver ball went a good $10 bill; click, click, it shot upwards and slid across to the cashier's desk, while the lawyer groaned and waited for his change.

Rattle-te-tat-te, rattle-te-tat-te, rattle-te-tat-te, rat-ta-tat! went the old boots close by his side. Several people looked at him with smiles of amusement. "Happy time, isn't it?" said a jolly little fat man, glancing at the lawyer's big bundle. "I feel like dancing myself."

"Change, sir; thank you. Merry Christmas!"

The exasperated lawyer grasped his bundle and hurried after the boots, which now seemed anxious to get away from the store. When he struck the cold air and again drew his coat around him he seemed somehow to feel less annoyance. The excitement of the chase had warmed his blood. It was a curious feeling that began now to steal over him, the like of which he had never experienced before, or at least not for many years, he said to himself, as he stopped before a candy store and followed the boots inside.

"Candy for Christmas?" He smiled almost to think that he, Harders A. Flint, should hear such a question addressed to himself; and more astounding yet was the fact that he did want to buy some candy for Christmas, and that he really stood there pocketbook in hand waiting for it.

"I BELIEVE THEY ARE GOING OUT."

Rattle-te-rat, te-rat-te-rat!

A smile broke over the salesgirl's face as she handed him the package of candy, and away went the lawyer after the boots, which seemed determined to give him a lively chase before the evening was over. Again he was in the biting air, but the warm blood coursed through every vein in his body as he hurried along. Again and again they stopped, until the lawyer's purse was nearly empty and his arms more than full. The old boots seemed fairly wild with delight, and Lawyer Flint could not, to save his life, help laughing at them as they skipped and slipped and danced along the sidewalk. Away they led him, out of the avenue, down the dark side streets, until he heard the sound of children singing. In this direction the old boots hastened and stopped before the house from whence the singing came. Up the steps they went; the door opened, and somehow the lawyer, too much flustered and confused to know how it was exactly, found himself in a room filled with children, and a lovely lady was saying to him: "Ah, you're in time, sir. Thank you *so* much. We haven't distributed the presents yet. You will make a good many little hearts glad to-night, sir." And all around him was warmth and light and music and a clattering of happy tongues, and altogether such a joyous atmosphere as he would not have believed could exist anywhere.

"Good-night! Merry Christmas!" The sound rang in his ears as he followed the lively old boots out of the door and back through the dark streets into the avenue.

"I wonder where they'll take me now?" he said, chuckling and laughing softly. "Gad!" he continued, "I had more than forty dollars in that pocket-book, and there isn't enough left to—hello—there they go into a cigar store. H'm, cigars are too great a luxury for Harders Flint—not to-night, though," he laughed. "I'll smoke to-night," and he came out of the store a moment later with a box of choice cigars in his hand.

And then the old boots led him back at a moderate pace to his bachelor quarters. He whistled softly as he removed his coat and got into his dressing-gown and slippers; then he lit a cigar, threw himself into the big chair before the fire and sat contentedly puffing the fragrant smoke and watching it curl upward toward the ceiling, and he laughed when from the closet he heard the old boots dancing again.

Rattle-te, rattle-te, rattle-te-rat, rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat—

"They must be tired," thought the lawyer, as the lively rattle dwindled into a regular, monotonous tapping.

Then he started, sat up straight and opened his eyes. The tapping did not come from the closet, but from the hall door. It was Joe, come to replenish the fire. "I've been dreaming," said Lawyer Flint to himself. He turned his back to the fire, looked over toward the closet and smiled. Then he walked to the window and looked out into the street. He took out his watch and looked at it, while a light shone in his eyes and his mouth worked curiously.

"There's time enough yet," he said, and Joe was surprised to see him hurry on his coat and hat; but not half so surprised as he was when he stood alone in the room a moment later with a big silver dollar in his hand.—Morris Waite, in Detroit Free Press.

A LIKELY STORY.

Policeman—Say, boy, where did you get that dog?

Boy—Santy Claus put it in my stockin'!—Life.