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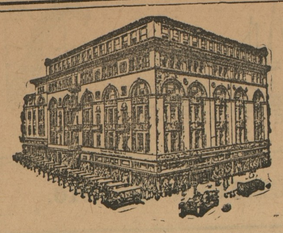
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Danny's Christmas Eve

By E. W. GERRITSON



IN THE narrow confines of the pass the blizzard screamed with redoubled fury and whipped the snow cuttingly into Danny Donovan's face as he trudged along behind his sled, shouting now and then to urge his dogs to greater effort. He breathed easier when, clear of the pass, he began the descent to the valley below. Three thousand miles is a long distance to travel for the purpose of killing a man, but Danny did not consider it a hardship, for the man he was tracking so mercilessly had killed Danny's brother, Jim, up in the Forty Mile Diggings. True, according to the testimony of eye-witnesses, Jim Donovan had been the aggressor, and in killing him, Lebonne, the big Canadian, had acted only in self-defense. But Danny cared not for that. In his blind rage at the news that his brother had been stricken down, his one thought was for a fitting retaliation, in which a sense of right and justice figured not at all.

Lebonne had been acquitted at once and had departed two months before the news of the affair had reached Danny's ears, consequently the tracking of him had been no easy matter.

At a little distance from the cabin Danny halted his team and fed a frozen fish to each of his dogs to insure quiet on their part. Then he left them and approached the cabin alone. He crept stealthily to the uncurtained window and peered within. A man sat beside a table. He was laughing and talking with someone at the other side of the room. Danny scrutinized him carefully to avoid making an error. But there was no mistaking him; he answered to the description perfectly.

Danny drew his revolver from its holster and cocked it, keeping well back that the light streaming from the window would not betray him. Then he took careful aim at the broad breast of the man within.

Impelled by curiosity, Danny stepped across the bar of light to the other side of the window. A sight met his gaze that drew forth a murmur of surprise. In a corner of the room stood a Christmas tree, glittering with crude, homemade ornaments of tinsel, and alight with tiny candles. Before it, in attitudes of awe-struck



Danny Stepped to the Other Side.

admiration, three children stood and marvelled. They evidently had just been admitted from another room. Beaming on them with maternal pride, stood a woman with rosy cheeks and coal black hair, telling them, no doubt, of the wonderful things that would grow on that tree over night. It was Christmas eve; Danny had no thought of that before. And tomorrow would be the day of "Peace on earth, good will toward men." And here was he, Danny Donovan, with black murder in his heart. A feeling of deep shame came over him and he lowered the hammer of his revolver, and returned it to its holster.

"By the saints!" he muttered into his beard; "an' I kem near to puttin' an end to a bit of fun like that!"

And now the children were sent away to bed, and the task of hanging the presents on the magic tree began. Unmindful of the biting wind and snow, Danny watched, and slowly a feeling of loneliness crept over him, and with it longing hope that perhaps, some day, he, too, in his own home—And why not? Over in the Fort McKenzie settlement was a fair Rose whose eyes had always been lowered before the look in his own.

With a last lingering look inside the cabin, Danny made his way to his team. There a new thought came to him and he paused to ponder it. Did he not owe these people something? He had come with a heart black as sin, and he was leaving with a heart light as air.

He fumbled beneath his pack, in the bottom of the sled, and drew out a deerskin bag. It was dirty and greasy, but it was filled with yellow nuggets and dust. Danny had several more like it in the sled, for luck had been with him in the North. He made a loop in the string that fastened the bag, and plodded back to the door of the cabin. He felt cautiously about until he found the latch, then hung his offering upon it and went back to his team. With subdued shouts he roused the dogs, then turned his sled around and made for the pass, the blizzard at his back and a joyous lightness in his step.

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