LOST, STRAYED OR STOLEN

By MARY WINTHROP

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"THE man who said that a big apartment house was a village in itself didn't know a thing about it, or else he had never been in a village. Lord! I would say it was a collection of hostile camps, with a janitor as the only means of communication."

By way of emphasis for his words Frank Lane threw across the room the gayly illustrated magazine he had been pretending to read. It landed with a crash, bringing with it to the floor a small vase which stood on the corner of the mantel. Broken bits of porcelain rolled in all directions.

The young man started to his feet. The vase was one of his childish relics. Every bit was precious. But he sank back with a groan. He had forgotten his sprained ankle.

The pain in it made him remember. It was almost intolerable for a few moments. But that was not what brought the tears to his eyes—tears of weakness and loneliness. He was remembering that it was the day before Christmas and that he was shut up in his bachelor apartments with a sprained ankle. A solitary dinner at the club

"I WISH YOU WOULD LET ME KEEP IT."

was never wildly festive for Christmas, but even that was to be denied him this year.

There was a rattling at the hall door. Lane hastily brushed aside the tears as the wife of the janitor came in. Womanlike, she was compassionate. Her face beamed as she cried: "A package for ye, Mester Lane. Th' postman jest left it, an' I hurried it up, thinkin' it might cheer ye a bit. It's sure some prisint a lady fren's been a-sendin' ye."

The invalid laughed shortly. From a lady friend! He had been raised in an orphan asylum and as far as his knowledge went had not a living relation. His position in the business world was entirely due to his own pluck and energy. He had not had time to make lady friends.

When the woman had gone, he still looked curiously at the package in his lap. It was in bad order. The string was loosened and the enveloping paper torn. The address was blurred, but he could still make out faintly the inscription "F. E. Lane" and the name of the apartment house. It was really for him.

His fingers trembled with eagerness as he slipped off the outside wrapper and disclosed dainty tissue paper and ribbons. It must surely be from a girl, he thought.

Inside was a creation of violet silk. He eyed it dubiously, but then his face cleared. He had seen similar curios in shop windows. It must be a handkerchief case.

But the name of the sender? He took hold of the case gingerly and shook it. He carefully turned it inside out. No card appeared. It must have slipped out on the way. He sniffed appreciatively. The case was strongly scented with violets. It almost seemed as if the fair donor herself was glorifying his room with her presence.

Yet the question of who had sent it still remained unsolved. He knew whom he wished had sent it—the girl in the flat above. She was the girl who, when she came in from the office of an evening, sat down at the piano and rattled off a jolly twostep—that was when things had gone well—or crept in quietly and sang soothing lullabies—that was when the day's work had left her wornout and blue. Lane sympathized, for he had felt just that way himself.

"B-r-r-r" rang the electric bell. Lane frowned as he reached his hand back for the button. Why need commonplace realities in the shape of the janitor break in upon his day dream? Then he straightened up suddenly. The figure standing in the doorway was not to be confused with the janitor. It was a girl with rebellious brown curls wandering down to obstruct a pair of serious dark eyes. It was the girl of the flat above.

The girl stood uncertainly a moment in the gathering dusk, then stepped forward with sudden decision. "I beg your pardon for intruding on you," she said apologetically. "I don't believe you can even see who I am in this semidarkness. Won't you let me light up? I am the girl from the flat above." As she spoke she turned to the switch. In a moment the room flashed into a blaze of light.

Lane still stared at her as if at a vision, but the years of business training came to his aid. "Won't you sit down, Miss Fane?" he said courteously. "I can't rise—a little trifle of a sprained ankle."

"Yes, I know," the girl interrupted sympathetically. "The janitor told me. I am so sorry." The man found her pity very sweet.

"I don't want to trouble you," she went on, "but I am looking for one of my Christmas presents which is lost, strayed or stolen. It must have come, for my cousin writes that it was mailed some days ago."

Instinctively Lane spread his hands over the dainty trifle lying in his lap. Yes, the pillow hid it from view.

"It is a handkerchief case made of purple silk. As our names look something alike, I thought it might have come to you by mistake." She looked at him expectantly.

Now, Lane had been mentally planning how he might keep that handkerchief case. He was a thief in everything but the deed. But he could not answer those searching brown eyes with a lie. "Yes, I have it. I thought it was mine." And he held it out weakly. Then sudden inspiration came to him. "I wish you would let me keep it," he said pleadingly. "I will buy you anything else in its place that you like."

Miss Lane's color deepened. "Why?" she asked wonderingly.

"Because," he said vehemently, "it's the only Christmas present I shall have. I have been lying here in the dusk imagining who might have sent it to me, and I can't bear to give it up. I would not care so much if I was up and around. You don't know how blue a fellow gets shut up here all alone. Little things come to count a lot."

He looked so helpless lying there on the couch that the girl's heart went out to him, and she had a fashion of following her heart more readily than her head. "You poor fellow!" she said gently. "I know just how you feel. You shall keep the handkerchief case. Cousin Laura will never know, and I have several others. And you must count it as a real Christmas present from me. Only don't give me anything in its place except to wish me a merry Christmas when I come down to see you in the morning. I will bring some of the goodies from my home box. They will make you forget all about the ankle."

She hurried away. Lane did not know that it was because she wished to hide tears brought to her eyes by the dumb look of gratitude on his face. And he lay back and wished that the morrow might come.

Before another Christmas the two flats were empty. Mr. and Mrs. Lane were keeping house in a large flat on the ground floor. His wife always declares that he stole her heart and the handkerchief case at one and the same time on that memorable Christmas eve.

XMAS WITH THE GERMANS.

Scenes In the Shops and In the Retirement of Home.

As the handsome shops reveal the Christmas of the rich Germans, also we see the Christmas joys of the other, the peasant class. The toy stores—the dolls in all the national costumes of the world, and windows all bristling with combating soldiers. Candy shops! Candy is distinctively American. In Germany and France it is bonbons; in England sweets. The Germans do not eat candy as a habit, as we do, but on Christmas time, according to their idiom, "it goes loose." But it is the "pfefferkuchen" that is the great distinguishing delicacy of Christmastide. Not a house, family or person in Germany is without it. It is a sort of hard spice cake, made in all sorts of shapes.

The writer spent last Christmas in the home of Baron von Shierbrant. The day before Christmas the drawing rooms were closed. No one dare enter except the baron and baroness, who came in and out of those rooms very quietly and mysteriously. On Christmas eve the first event of interest is the Christmas eve dinner, which is characterized by the serving of "karpfen in bier" and the bringing forth from their secret hiding places of the famous Christmas cakes, marzipan, pfeffernuesse and pfefferkuchen. Dinner ends with the joining of hands and all saying, "Gesegnete mahlzeit."—Washington Post.

A Juvenile Impression.

"I'll be glad when I'm a grownup man," said the thoughtful youngster.

"Why?"

"Because then I can get my Christmas presents without having to be good beforehand."—Washington Star.

Has Been There Himself.

"Chris'mus kin be made so much pleasanter ef the stern parunt will on'y let his min' wander back tew the time when he made a dash fur the ole chimneypiece himself," says Ole Nutmeg.

Ballads of Yule.

Though some are dead and some are fled
To lands of summer over sea,
The holly berry keeps his red,
The merry children keep their glee.
They hoard with artless secrecy
This gift for Maude and that for Molly,
And Santa Claus he turns the key
On Christmas eve. Heigh-ho, the holly!

Amid the snow the birds are fled;
The snow lies deep on land and lea;
The skies are shining overhead;
The robin's tame that was so free.
Far north at home the "barley bree"
They brew; they give the hour to folly.
How "Rab and Allen cam' to pree,"
They sing; we sing, Heigh-ho, the holly!

ENVOI.

Friends, let us pay the wonted fee,
The yearly tithe of mirth, be jolly!
It is a duty so to be,
Though half we sigh, Heigh-ho, the holly!

—Andrew Lang.

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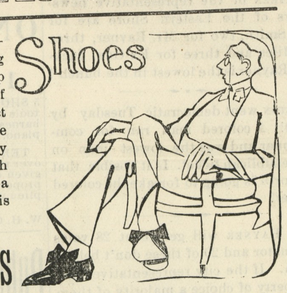

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"The Shoe Man." Under Stam's Hall.

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