

know, but never having had any love affair of my own it is natural I should feel an extra interest in Clare's.

She took off her glasses and again wiped them with much care. He looked at her curiously.

'I begin to have a suspicion,' he said.

'Of what?'

'That you knew me all the time.'

The lady laughed softly.

'I wasn't particularly startled by your appearance.'

'And you didn't really take me for a book agent?'

'No.'

'Aunt Lucy,' said the young man, 'you certainly are a very clever woman.'

'Aunt Lucy! Hoity-toity! You are taking a good deal for granted, Richard Barclay. But, there, let's be frank and straightforward. I promise you nothing. You will stay and take dinner with us, and then we three will talk this all over. We are going to be perfectly independent on our side, you understand. We may be poor—or at least very far from rich—but we are proud. We come by it naturally. That's my father's picture up there, Jethro Holt. He was as proud as a lord.'

The young man looked up quickly.

'What did you call his name?'

'Jethro Holt.'

The young man's eyes sparkled.

'Jethro Holt, of Petunia, Me. Born there in 1815 died in 1863.'

'Why, yes. He was my father.'

The young man drew a narrow book from his pocket and rapidly leafed it over.

'Jethro Holt left three children, a boy and two girls, Arthur, Lucy, and Emily.'

'Yes. I am Lucy Mellen Holt—commonly called Aunt Lucy Mellen. At least that's what Clare has called me ever since she could talk. Emily was Clare's mother. She died when Clare was a baby, and Clare's father died the year after.'

The young man stared hard at her.

'Can you prove this relationship?'

'Why, yes, of course. I have the old family Bible and many letters and my father's picture and the deed of the old home.'

He drew a quick breath.

'This is wonderful,' he said. 'Tell me about your brother.'

'He was older than I—nine years older. He was a wayward boy, and greatly worried my father. When he was eighteen he ran away from home and shipped on a whaler. The ship was lost in the Pacific and all the crew were reported drowned.'

'Your brother escaped,' said the young man. 'He was picked up by a Russian sealer and landed at a Siberian port. He found his way to Australia, and roughed it as a sheep herder. There, through some mad fancy, he changed his name. He was no longer Arthur Holt; he was Henry Harlan. He became a trader and prospered; he prospered greatly. Finally he made his residence in New York. He lived there twenty years. He died there seven months ago.'

The lady, a strange look in her eyes, stirred suddenly.

'And that man was my brother?'

'Yes.'

She sighed. 'My poor brother.'

The young man leaned forward.

'Oh,' he said, 'we have searched for you in so many places! The head of our firm was your brother's attorney and one of the executors of the estate. The matter of finding the heirs was placed in my hands. I have travelled many miles on false clues. I have advertised in many sections—and now to stumble on you like this.'

'Then we are heirs to his property?' said the lady.

'He died without a will. You and Clare are his only living kin.'

'Does that mean we are rich?'

'Very, very rich.'

They were both silent for a moment or two. Then the lady sighed.

'That comes a little late for me,' she softly said, 'but it will be beautiful for Clare.'

A troubled look crossed the young man's face.

'Clare,' he murmured. 'This changes everything.'

'What do you mean?'

'Don't you see? Clare is now a great heiress. A new world opens before her. She can choose where she will.'

'True,' said the lady.

'It puts me in a painful, a false position. Why, even you might believe that I knew her relationship to Henry Harlan before I asked her to be my wife.'

'True,' said the lady again.

'Such a suspicion is shameful,' he went on. 'The one mainly thing for me to do is to release Clare from her promise.'

The lady arose and went to the window. It was plain that she was agitated by his startling news.

Presently she beckoned to him.

'Here,' she said. 'Do you see that young woman coming up the roadway? That is the great heiress. And she's something much better than that. She's a sweet and lovable girl, whose womanly heart can't be spoiled by any amount of money. I know her better than any other living person, Richard Barclay, and I tell you you have nothing to fear.' She turned and looked at him and laid a slender hand on his shoulder. 'Besides—' she began.

'Yes, dear lady.'

She softly laughed.

'It really looks as if we ought to have a lawyer in the family.—Exchange.'

Three Golden Balls and Santa Claus

It has been thought rather curious that the famous Medici family of Florence should have as their emblem three golden balls, which symbol has for hundreds of years been the pawnbroker's sign. The enemies of the Medicis were wont to laugh in their sleeves, and say that the pawnbroker's sign was very suitable, as the family had raised itself to prominence by usury and money-lending. The two emblems both came from the same legend, a very beautiful one of St. Nicholas of Bari.

A nobleman of the town of Patara had three beautiful daughters, whom, being bereft of all his fortune, he was unable to provide with a marriage portion. It seemed as if there was no honorable method to support them, and the poor father was in despair. St. Nicholas had heard of the family; and, as he had an enormous fortune, he resolved to dower the maidens, who were as good as they were beautiful.

Seeking their house one night, he found an open window, and threw into this a purse filled with gold. With this the oldest daughter was dowered; and a second purse coming in the same mysterious manner, gave the second daughter her marriage portion. The nobleman now determined to keep watch and see who was his benefactor, and discovered the saint in the act of throwing in the third purse. Falling upon his knees, the father exclaimed:

'O Nicholas, servant of God, why seek to hide thyself from gratitude?'

The good Bishop bade him tell no one while he lived, but after his demise the nobleman related his munificence. From this legend arose the custom of giving St. Nicholas three bits of gold or golden balls as his emblem. As he was the patron of the Medici, and also of the Lombard merchants who emigrated to England and there set up the first money-lending establishments and pawnbrokers' shops, so high and low use his emblem—the three golden balls.

From this same incident is said to be derived the custom of placing gifts in the stockings, or in some countries the shoes, of children on the eve of Christmas, and attributing the gifts to St. Nicholas under the corrupted form of his name, Santa Claus.—Ave Maria.

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