

The Family Circle

A LETTER TO SANTA CLAUS

DEAR SANTA CLAUS:

I never, never knew
That it would be so hard to write to you.
Last week I thought of lots and lots to say
About the toys I want, and games to play;
But now I've got the paper, pen, and ink;
It seems a little selfish, don't you think,
To write about myself? I'd rather start
By telling you what Tom has set his heart
Upon. He said, 'When Christmas day shall come,
I hope I'll get a trumpet and a drum.'
And Jimmy (he's my other brother) said
He'd rather have a train and ball instead,
While Alec wants a horse. But there, I fear
You'll think I'm asking for a lot *this* year,
So, Santa Claus, only one thing I'll beg:
Bring all the world a merry Christmas!

—Meg.

A DEPARTMENT STORE SANTA CLAUS

Christmas was coming. There was no doubt of it in Tim Blake's mind as he beheld the crowd of shoppers which filled the sidewalks, poured through the entrances, and clustered round the windows of the big uptown stores.

'Yes, Christmas is coming,' muttered Tim; 'but it is going to be a mighty poor Christmas for me unless something turns up.'

Poor Tim Blake had good reason for thinking as he did. He was verily a stranger in a strange land, without a home, without work, without even a cent in his pocket. Somewhere in the city were Tim's wife and child, and though he had sought them anxiously, they still remained unfound. Tim was a carpenter by trade, and back in the quiet Maine town, whence he had come, he had owned a humble shop, over which he lived with his wife and little Joey.

A few months before Joey had taken sick. 'He won't live through the winter,' said old Doctor Gordon, 'unless you can get him to a warmer climate.'

Tim did the only thing he could do under the circumstances; sold his shop and the cozy little home, and put mother and child aboard the train bound for Los Angeles while he remained to settle affairs. After the doctor's bills had been paid and a tourist ticket purchased for himself Tim found he had only a few dollars left. The business that required his attention delayed him longer than he had expected, and it was not until the early part of December that he arrived in Southern California. He immediately started out to seek his little family, but on inquiring at the address where they had been stopping he found they had gone no one knew whither. Tim had spent his last few dollars in trying to locate them, but without success.

'Guess I'm at the end of my rope,' Tim spoke dolefully, as he remembered that he had eaten nothing since the previous noon.

He walked aimlessly down the street through the jostling crowd, until he found himself before a newspaper office on Broadway. Spread out on the bulletin board was a copy of the morning edition, and Tim glanced over its columns to see if there could be any mention of those he sought. Page after page he perused, and was about to turn away with saddened heart when his eye lighted on this advertisement:

'Wanted—A short, stout man; must be good-natured and love children.—Apply at 10 o'clock this morning, Manager's office, Burgerham's Department Store.'

Tim walked on absorbed in thought. 'Queer sort of an ad,' he soliloquised. Then he beheld his own reflection in the window of a haberdasher's store, and he took off his hat and scratched his head.

'Well, I'm short and stout,' he said aloud to his reflection, 'but not very good-natured at present.' Pulling his old silver timepiece from his pocket, he found it lacked a few minutes of 10 o'clock. His empty stomach helped him to arrive at a quick decision, and he was soon at the big department store inquiring for the manager's office.

Tim was directed to take the elevator to the top floor, and there found he had been preceded by a dozen other men. Some of them were evidently short enough, but lacked the required avoirdupois, while others were stout, but inclined to tallness. One of the number seemed about the right weight and height, but his face was any-

thing but good-natured. The manager surveyed the waiting men and seemed pleased with Tim's appearance, for he picked him out of the crowd and dismissed the others.

'You'll do,' he said, briskly. 'Do you think you will make a good Santa Claus?' Tim's face expressed amazement. 'I don't believe I understand.'

'Oh, it's easy,' explained the manager, in a business-like tone. 'You see, every year during the Christmas season we have a Santa Claus for the sake of the youngsters. It amuses them, and proves quite an attraction. All you have to do is to dress the part, and have a pleasant word for the little ones.'

Tim's perplexity began to clear away, and when the manager asked if he was ready to accept the responsibility of being Santa Claus, he gladly agreed to the proposal. An hour later there was quite a stir in front of Burgerham's big store. A short, stout man with rosy cheeks, flowing white beard, and bright costume trimmed with fur appeared among the shoppers.

'Goody, goody!' cried the children, clapping their hands and crowding around him, while fond mothers looked on and smiled indulgently. Tim Blake as Santa Claus was a decided success from the very start.

The manager realised that he had not made a mistake in his selection of a Santa Claus. 'He's the best one we ever had,' he exclaimed again and again to the members of the firm. 'He's a regular genius. Just watch him hugging and kissing all those youngsters. When Christmas is over I intend to keep him on the pay-roll. He tells me he's a carpenter by trade, and we have plenty of that kind of work for him to do, and if he remains we will have him for other Christmases,' and the manager gleefully rubbed his hands.

The days passed in quick succession, and Christmas eve was at hand. The manager sat in his office poring over an accumulation of correspondence. They were the letters to Santa from the children, and it was the manager's custom each Christmas eve to read them over and enjoy many a quiet smile at the childish requests. His mood changed after he picked up one of the notes and made out its contents, for as he glanced it over he read:

'Dear Santy Claus,
im a littel sick boy up hear in the childerns horspital
an i cant eun to see you becaws i am in bed and cant
walk. their are lots of other kids hear just like me an
they want you to fetch em some toys fer krismuss but i
dont want enny toys if you only bring my daddy.

JOEY.

A tear fell on the grimy scrap of paper, and the manager was sniffing suspiciously. 'Poor little tike,' he cried, 'I can't find his daddy for him, but if I can make him and the other youngsters happy I am going to do it.'

Scribbling a short note, he pressed a button, and a boy in uniform appeared at the door. The manager wheeled in his chair. 'Give this note to the head of the Toy Department,' he said, 'and then send the Santa Claus man to me.'

When Tim arrived garbed in his quaint costume he found the manager pacing the floor. 'I want you to go to the Children's Hospital,' he ordered, 'and distribute a lot of toys to the youngsters. You will find my auto and chauffeur at the rear door, and you can start as soon as you get your load.'

In a few minutes they had left the business section, and after a brisk run drew up before the Children's Hospital. Tim entered heartily into the spirit of the occasion, and was at his best. As he passed from bed to bed accompanying each present with a kind word and a handshake the wards echoed with merriment. He had made the round of the institution, and had started down the stairs.

A white-capped nurse tapped him gently on the shoulder. 'You've missed one poor little fellow,' said she, and Tim turned and followed her upstairs to the top floor. Into one of the rear rooms they went, and there Tim beheld a little pale-faced lad lying in bed propped up with pillows. His eyes brightened as he looked up and saw the Santa Claus of his dreams. He stretched out his thin little hands to welcome him. Something seemed to come over Tim Blake. Throwing off his cap and tearing the snowy wig and beard from his face, he threw himself on his knees by the bedside and clasped the sick boy in his arms.

'It's my own Joey,' he cried, in a voice choking with emotion, 'my own Joey.'

The door of the room opened, and a sad-eyed woman entered softly. She stopped in bewilderment at the scene before her, but in a moment she was kneeling by Tim's side with her arms around his neck. The nurse tiptoed out of the room, gently closing the door behind her.

Somewhere out in the night a clock was chiming the hour of 12, and the joy bells were ringing all over the city.

Christmas had come indeed to the Department Store Santa Claus.—Benziger's Magazine.