



Christmas Chef

By DAVIS TRACY.

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"DID you get one, John?" Mrs. Botsford spoke eagerly, almost hysterically.

"Yes, I sent her round to the kitchen entrance."

"Can she cook?"

"She is neat and very nice looking."

Mr. Botsford temporized defensively.

"She says she can do every kind of housework from up garret to down cellar."

"But can she cook—fancy dishes, I mean?"

"She says that she had quite a reputation at home for plain, wholesome cooking, and she is willing to learn. I told her what you wanted."

Mrs. Botsford dropped upon a stool, her eyes filling.

"Oh, John," she ejaculated, "it's 11 o'clock now, and Cousin Edward's fiancée is coming at 3 o'clock to stay until Saturday, and she and Edward and some of her people will be here for Christmas dinner tomorrow, and you know I have never seen the girl or any of them. We must have things nice. The girl's worth a clear million in her own right. Oh, John, why need our cook get sick at such a time and—"

Mrs. Botsford was becoming incoherent, but John nodded comprehendingly.

"But what else could I do? There's a corner on servants, especially cooks, at this season. The only suggestion of one besides Sarah was a ten dollar a day chef who commences on a regular job Monday. Of course you don't want a chef for two days."

Mrs. Botsford sprang to her feet, her face suddenly radiant.

"The very thing!" she cried. "He can do the art work and your cook the

She waited until her husband returned from the telephone, nodding. "Says the chef will be up at 1 o'clock sharp, Julia. Now I'll go downtown and order the Christmas trimmings and things."

At 1 o'clock sharp a cab rolled up to the door, and a girl alighted. Mrs. Botsford's countenance fell a little, but rose as the girl opened the gate and went toward the side entrance. It was the chef, though but a girl, and



"NOW YOU MAY LEAVE ME IN CHARGE." the fact of her coming in a cab and being well dressed was significant of \$10 a day.

Mrs. Botsford did not wait for the second girl to answer the bell, but hurried to the side entrance. The occasion was too momentous for ceremony. As she threw open the door the girl was bending over a fine clump of late chrysanthemums that were smiling daintily into the very teeth of winter. Mrs. Botsford's heart warmed toward her instantly. A girl who could bend over flowers with that look was not an ordinary workman, but an artist. As the girl smiled, nodded and came forward Mrs. Botsford almost caught her in her arms.

"Oh, my dear," she cried, without giving the chef an opportunity to speak, "you don't know how glad I am to see you! I will take you right into the kitchen, and Sarah will show you where everything is. I shall not make a suggestion, for I see you are perfectly capable. Only do make it just as—"

As she was about to say "as you can," Miss Lenox was accustomed to everything, and—she wanted to make her like me so much and to please Edward."

She had been hurrying the chef through the hall to the kitchen. At the door, to her surprise, the chef pressed a light kiss upon her forehead.

"If you are as nice to Miss Lenox as you are to me," she smiled, "I think she will like you. Now you may leave me in charge. I will do the best I can."

Mrs. Botsford returned to the drawing room, rubbing her forehead thoughtfully.

"What's the matter, Julia," her husband asked—"another headache?"

"No," doubtfully, "that's where the chef kissed me. I never had a girl kiss me as soon before. But I don't care if only she diffuses her artist soul through the cooking. She has an artist soul, John. I saw it in her eyes."

At 3 o'clock she was again at the window, but there was no carriage in sight. Two minutes later the tele-

phone rang. She went to the telephone herself.

"What's that you say? Can't come? Why, that's too bad. But you will be here tomorrow, of course? What? Will send note? Yes. Well, come as early as you can."

An hour later the note came. Mrs. Botsford read it with a perplexed face, then passed it to her husband.

"I didn't know she spelled her name that way, John," she said, "though of course we never saw it spelled out. I'm afraid she's not so well educated as we thought. And of course a lover's opinion isn't always reliable. Poor Edward!"

Mr. Botsford nodded vaguely and opened the note, which read:

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Botsford—Sorry I cannot come according to agreement. Imperative summons elsewhere. Will see you tomorrow. Faithfully, etc.

M. LEHNKOCKS.

"Rather abrupt for good form, isn't it?" queried Mr. Botsford. "The name might masquerade almost any nationality that's foreign, but never mind, Julia. We must be as nice to her as we can for Edward's sake."

At 9 o'clock that night after the palms and mistletoe and holly had been arranged Sarah suddenly burst upon them with face full of consternation.

"The chef!" she gasped. "She's gone—left entirely! I was at the range, watchin' the turkey, an' she come in with her hat on an' said that everything was ready, so I could attend to it now, an' she left this note for ye."

"But why did she go?" gasped Mrs. Botsford. "I thought—"

"She said everything was all ready," Sarah repeated stolidly, "an' that I could attend to it now. There" as a clear car tinkle sounded outside, "that's her car startin' now. She said she wanted to catch the 9 o'clock."

Mrs. Botsford opened the note with trembling fingers. As she read she frowned, looked mortified, laughed and finally passed the note to her husband, with shining eyes. "She's all right," was her only comment. The note read:

Dear Mrs. Botsford—You really must forgive me. I had an errand downtown and so called at your house an hour earlier than I intended, thinking that I would stop there awhile, and then perhaps you and I would do the errand together. A sight of your lovely chrysanthemums drew me straight through the gate to the side entrance. Then you opened the door, and some way we drifted into the kitchen before I quite realized what I was doing. Then your straits and a remembrance of former triumphs conspired to do the rest. I really do love cooking and have taken a lot of courses in special things. I think I have excelled myself this time and believe you will be satisfied with the result. Sarah and the second girl can manage the rest very nicely. I shall do my errand now and will stay with my aunt at the Marlborough tonight. It will be more convenient. You may expect me quite early tomorrow morning. Faithfully,

M. LEHNKOCKS.

"The girl's worth a clear million,"

plain dishes. A chef will be so—

chic, and you know Miss Lenox has been used to everything. He—a chef—is he, isn't he, John?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. That has always been my impression, though I don't suppose there is any law about a girl filling the position. The manager in this case only stated that a chef could be had for two days."

"Well, it's a man, of course. Now hurry to the telephone, please, before some one else gets him."

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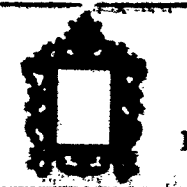
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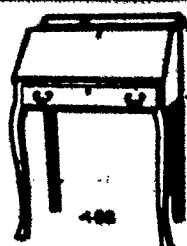
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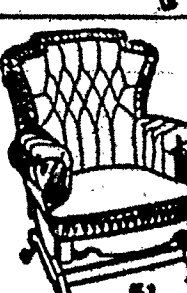
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