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The Christmas Owl

By
Mary
Graham
Bonner

CH R I S T M A S had come to the city. There was no snow on the ground, nor did any icicles hang from the eaves, nor were any ponds covered with ice. But there was Christmas in the city just the same.

The very air was like Christmas. It was cold and clear, crisp and vigorous. Even the scent of Christmas was in the air. Outside the grocery shops were piles of Christmas trees ready to be sold, and there were great bundles of Christmas trimming.

Every shop wore a Christmas look. The windows were decorated with red ribbons, wreaths, toys, calendars, cards, brightly decorated boxes filled with candles, tempting gifts.

People were hurrying, crowding into the shops, jostling each other, but in a good-natured Christmas shopping fashion.

Children were about. The Christmas holidays had commenced. Ann had finished her Christmas shopping. Yet she could not stay away from the shops.

It would be pleasant, she thought, to walk through them, watching the



She Was Walking Through the Aisles, Seeing Everything.

crowds, seeing the novelties that kept coming in for sale, joining the gay hurry of the near-Christmas period.

She walked along quickly. Not because she was in a hurry, but because she could not help hurrying. Christmas hurry was in the air.

It was a splendid experience to have all her Christmas shopping finished and to enjoy the shops in this fashion. Perhaps, since they were so crowded anyway, she should have stayed at home.

But she did not think that was necessary. She did not take up the time of any of the sales girls, nor did she push her way in to stand by the counters. She simply walked along the streets, going from time to time into the shops, walking through the aisles, seeing everything, and thoroughly enjoying herself.

All those presents that she was sending by post had gone off. All those presents she was going to deliver were wrapped up and written on and all ready for Christmas Eve, when she went to call on her friends in the city.

They lived, many of them, far apart, but she began her rounds early Christmas Eve, and stayed out until late. Friends she hardly saw during the year because the city kept her so busy and kept them so busy, and because the distances were so great, all had a hurried Christmas call from her on Christmas Eve.

They expected her on Christmas Eve—some time or other. No one went to bed early. It did not matter how late she called.

The next day would come quickly. No day came more quickly in the year than the day of Christmas came after Christmas Eve.

She would see Billy and she would see Norton on Christmas Day. She wondered what they would give her. Norton always gave her beautiful presents. Of course he had more money than Billy, but his presents always had more reason for being than Billy's.

But she almost liked Billy's presents best—impulsive, perishable kinds of presents were the ones Billy chose.

Yet Billy's impulsiveness was not of a perishable variety. There was great stability about Billy and loyalty and steadfastness, too.

But, then again, Norton was so devoted, so constant, so brilliant. She admired Norton immensely and thought a great deal of him. She admired Billy, too. Billy was just a dear.

They had both asked her to marry. She had promised she would have her mind quite made up by Christmas. That was why she had asked them both to see her that day—though usually she never saw people from the outside world on Christmas Day. Usually it was a day exclusively for the family.

It was strange, she thought, as she walked through the shops, that she had so much to decide and yet she was spending her time like this.

She should be home, or off where it was quiet somewhere, deciding.

She had always imagined when she had been young that marrying would be so simple a matter, with scarcely any thought attached to it.

At the age of thirteen she had pictured to herself a wonderful man who combined all attractions, asking her to marry him. And she would murmur a very sweet, a very shy, a very loving "Yes."

And now at the age of nineteen it was quite different. There were Billy and Norton—both of them. Her family liked them both. She liked them both. How strange it was that one could like two men—could not know at once which one of them was the one with whom she wanted to spend the rest of her life.

Yet this was the case. But she had recently made up her mind to make up her mind.

Norton was coming to see her at four. Billy at seven.

And then her thoughts wandered from both of them once more and she was completely fascinated and interested by the shops.

She loved every Christmas touch. She loved every single decoration. Oh, there was a little table right at the entrance of one of the shops into which she had just come. It was filled with novelties, ornaments, odds and ends of possible gifts.

Something on the table took her eye. It was a little candlestick made of green and made in the shape of an owl.

There was something particularly appealing to her in the expression of the owl. He looked so amused at all this. He almost seemed to be amused that he was here, as a Christmas novelty. He looked as though he would always cheer a person—there was something so droll about his expression as though he wanted to say that he found life, even in his candlestick form, very amusing, very simple, and certainly not worth any worries.

She had no need for the candlestick. She seldom, hardly ever, used a candle. And they had several old candlesticks at home anyway. Still she could not help wanting the owl—wanting it absurdly. She was never like this—wanting useless, pointless ornaments. But she did want this owl. She asked his price. It was not high.

And then, a funny idea came to her. She went to a telephone and called up Norton. "I'm down town shopping," she said. "Yes, you know the hour was for four tomorrow. I'll be home. And oh, Norton, I just saw the most adorable little candlestick. It's an owl—with such a funny expression. No, it hasn't any real value. Oh no, not an antique. No, no need of it at all. Yes, I'll see you tomorrow."

She called up Billy. The conversation, on her part was much the same. But Billy's had been different. Norton had not been much interested in that absurd owl about which she had spoken. He had not detected the note in her voice of eagerness for the funny little owl, and all the funny little things he stood for. Had he been of value, of actual beauty, Norton would have thought she had wanted it. He did not understand. But Billy's answers were different.

"Why don't you get him? Never mind if he is absurd and if there isn't any value to the thing. You want it, don't you? Get it as a little extra thing from me. Promise me you will!"



"The Owl Decided Me," She Told Billy That Evening.

As cheap as that! Good. You're letting me off easily."

She had known that little owl was wise the minute she had seen him. He could solve a problem in so simple a manner.

"I'm going to marry you, Billy," she said that next evening. "The owl decided me."

He laughed at that. He thought she was joking. But he did not laugh at her decision. He took her in his arms and was at a loss for an adequate speech—dear, talkative, noisy Billy could think of nothing to say.

But Ann had been right about the owl. That absurd little candlestick had enabled her to make a swift, sure decision. Billy appreciated the little, inconsequential moods that were of such great consequence. Just once in awhile it would be so wonderful to know that one's husband could be so sympathetically absurd!

(© 1925, Western Newspaper Union.)

Christmas

Oh, what in a wreath of holly,
Or a spray of mistletoe,
If I have no sweetheart jolly
To kiss when the lights are low!

Oh, some folks may think it shocking,
But Christmas can't Christmas be,
If I hang nobody's stocking
And nobody loves just me.
—L. M. Thornton.

Three Kinds of Christmas

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