



Sidney Martin's Christmas

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SIDNEY MARTIN'S CHRISTMAS



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SIDNEY MARTIN'S CHRISTMAS



Chapter 1

“It Makes No Difference What I Do.”

“Ho, Hum!” he said as he looked drearily out of the window. “If a fellow could only be at home today. What is the use of having Christmas come, if a body has nowhere to go, and nothing to do, and nobody cares what he does? It makes no difference where I go, or what I do. I’d just as lief be at the store as anywhere.”

It was dreary for a boy of fourteen, only twenty miles from a nice country home. But it was a poor home, no money to spare for holiday visits, so the boy who was received as clerk into the large store on the corner, the largest in the town, because the merchant and his father had been friends in their long-ago boyhood, was trying to be a brave boy and spend his holiday alone; but it was dull work. It was so new and sad a thing to feel that it made no difference to anyone what he did. The town clock struck nine.

“Only nine o’clock!” Sidney said, and he thought that he did not know what to do with the day.

He went out, however, and began to take an aimless walk up the street. Nearly opposite Judge Porter’s handsome home, that large house built in foreign style, and the pride of the town for that and other reasons, he stopped suddenly and listened.

Music. Clear and sweet it rose on the air. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.”

Sidney went on around the corner with a curious face. Who could be outdoors singing on Christmas morning? The minute he got a view of the side gateway the riddle was plain.

“Ho!” he said, and then he laughed. “I do say, if those Shem ways haven’t come out in full force, exactly as they used to do in Germany; and there they are singing the Christmas carol. I wonder if they think they will get ‘Christmas greeting’ as they said the children did in the old country? What a droll looking set they are. The carol is real pretty, though.” This he added as the sweet words began again, “Glory to God in —”

Just at that very point they stopped every voice, and little Gretchen, the youngest of the group, gave a little squeal that did not belong to the carol. It was plain that something had frightened them. Sidney crossed over to them. Just inside of the gate had appeared old Bose, the great house dog, and he was not a lover of their music, to judge by the low growls with which he greeted it.

“Don’t be afraid,” said Sidney, coming promptly into view. “I know old Bose and he knows me. He is an ill-mannered scamp, but he won’t hurt you so long as I am around. You sing away and I will stand guard.”

And sing they did, like larks, and earned a penny all around, and plenty of little cakes. The Porters had spent a winter in Germany; they knew how to treat the little singers. Sidney, not being so well wrapped as the singers, shivered a little as he walked away. His promise fulfilled, he had to be content with a hearty “Thank you,” given in broken English, and a grateful smile in little Gretchen’s eyes.

Chapter 2

“I Was Walking Down by the Pond”

The Christmas carol had taken up quite a little of the morning. Sidney felt glad of that; the faster the morning went the better. He put his hands in his pockets and whistled to keep himself company, and tramped cheerily on.

Just where he was going he did not know, and it made no difference where he went, you will remember. He met a great many people whom he knew, and a great many that he didn't know. But none of them had anything to do with him.

Just across the town bridge there was a boy, and though Sidney knew no more about him than that he was Dr. Eldred's son and went to the academy, and sat across the room from him at Sunday-school, he seemed like a friend to the lonely fellow, and he stopped to look at him, and wonder how it would seem if they were good friends.

Young Eldred was in some perplexity. He had his sled, and stood holding the rope, while Miss Etta Eldred, curled nicely on the seat, wrapped in furs, appeared to be waiting for some decision.

“I suppose I have just got to go home first,” the boy was saying in disappointed tones, as Sidney crossed over for a nearer look at one who had a sister nearby to enjoy. “How are you?”

Eldred said cordially to Sidney; he was not a proud boy, though he had a good deal to be proud of. "Are you going down to see the skating? There's to be a great time. Two fellows are going to have a trial of speed, and the one who gets beaten is to give an oyster supper to us fellows in the evening."

"I hadn't heard of it," said Sidney, with interest. "When is it to be?"

"Why, it was to be at twelve o'clock, but I hear since I came out that the time is changed to eleven. It will be long after that before I can get there, for it is ten now, and I've got to go all the way home with Etta; she sprained her foot, you see, and mother is not willing to have her walk."

"I'll draw her home if she will let me." Sidney said this as heartily as though it would be a great favor.

Young Eldred caught the words joyfully. "Why, will you? That is real kind of you. Etta, you wouldn't mind for this once, would you?" And Etta shook the feather in her cap and said, decidedly:

"Oh no, not at all, if he would just as soon."

"But you will miss the race yourself. You know it is a long walk down home." This was Eldred's afterthought.

"Oh, I shouldn't mind that," Sidney said. He had not known a thing about it, so he wouldn't really be missing it.

And so it came to pass that he shouldered the satchel of books that were being taken from the academy for the vacation, and had just been gone after, and taking the reins in his own hands, waited only to see the doctor's son join a party of boys who were waiting for him, and then he and Etta started. A full mile over the crispy snow, with a merry young girl who occasionally came to the store to buy bright ribbons, and was always kind and pleasant.

This was a nicer Christmas than he had imagined, and so he told himself with a pleased face as he walked back the long mile alone, having taken his charge to the very door, delivered the books to her care, and himself put away the sled in the carriage house.



Etta had thanked him heartily, and given him a pocketful of splendid apples besides. And better than all the rest, the morning was quite gone. Actually nearly twelve o'clock! This he said aloud, in glee, as he came to the main street once more, and caught sight of the moon-faced clock, keeping guard in the church steeple.

Chapter 3

“I was at Mr. Seymour’s.”

He had just one thing to do that day that had a little touch of business about it, and all the dignity of an appointment. That was to take a smooth and beautifully polished wooden top that he had made, down to Mr. Chester Seymour’s, on Seymour Avenue, and be there at one o’clock precisely. There was to be a simple little Christmas tree shown off at that house at that hour. The tree was for the benefit of Mr. Seymour’s half dozen little nephews and nieces, who were clustered around him, and the little lame boy who lived with them was to be counted in. This lame boy was a pet of Sidney’s. He looked like a certain little boy at home who slept with Sidney when he was there, and whose company was sorely missed.

The top had been made for him in spare moments; and since the thought came to Sidney the moments had been so spare that he had walked around to Mr. Seymour’s the night before to ask if the top came at nine o’clock the next morning would it be in time for the tree? Then and there Mr. Seymour had rejoiced his heart, by a promise that if he would bring it at precisely one o’clock it should be hung at once, and he should have a peep at the tree.



This programme was carried out, and the tree was heartily admired by Sidney. There was nothing on it for him. Nobody had thought of that, but he had expected nothing, so, as he would have said, he hadn't missed anything.

"Could you go home by way of Mr. Stuart's, my boy?" Mr. Seymour had said, as he, having enjoyed lame Neddie's delight over his top, was about to go. "Could you as well go home by way of Mr. Stuart's and leave a note there for me, or will it take you too far out of your way? It is quite a distance round."

"Yes, sir," said Sidney, promptly. "No, sir, it is not too far. I like the walk, and I haven't a single thing to do. This is a holiday, you know."

Mr. Seymour had smiled and thanked him, and given him the note, and hoped he would have a merry Christmas, and went back to his dining-room and his turkey.

There was not to be any turkey at Sidney's boarding-house. But though they were poor in the farm-house, twenty miles away, they raised turkeys, and always had one for Christmas. Sidney knew the smell, and whiffed it up like a breath of home, as he turned from Mr. Seymour's hall.

Chapter 4

“I Might As Well Go That Way.”

Mr. Stuart lived exactly in the opposite direction from Sidney's boarding-house, so how Mr. Seymour could have said “go round that way home,” I am sure I don't know. Our boy Sidney was getting just a trifle tired of long walks, but they seemed to be exactly in his line on this Christmas holiday, so he trudged briskly on, trying not to think of home any more than he could help. His note delivered, he stood a moment in thought. Should he go home around Pike's Hill, or take a short cut across it?

“I might as well go one way as another,” he said, aloud. “What is the difference? I guess I'll take the hill—that will bring me home in time for my dinner.”

So up the steep hill he climbed, getting out of the way of half a dozen coasters as they rushed gaily down. One, though, didn't rush down. Instead, he pitched over on his back. Sidney was the only boy who was not half way down the hill, or just starting on that journey, and Sidney went at once to him. He was groaning a little, and in trying to get up, groaned some more and fell back.

“That nasty sled of mine,” he exclaimed, as Sidney bent over him. “It has got a loose runner. I told Jimmy it would be the death of me. Help me up, can't you? I've hurt my foot, or broke it, or something. It twisted right under me.”



“Where do you live?” Sidney said, tugging with all his might, and succeeded in seating him on his sled just as some of the riders came puffing up to see if it was anything more serious than a tumble.

“I live on Pine Street, and how I am ever to get there is more than I know.” And he groaned as he hit one foot against the other.

“Can’t some of your friends draw you there?” Sidney said, looking at the boys standing around.

He shook his head. “They aren’t my friends,” he said. “I never saw them before. They are from the upper village, and they have got to meet the sleigh they came with at two o’clock. They’ll be likely to do it, won’t they?” This with a smile, as the clock in the town chimed two, and every boy suddenly took to his heels.

Sidney drew in his breath. He was just tired of walks, and this was not so interesting a sprain as he had helped home earlier in the day, but of course the boy couldn’t be left sitting there; so he spoke quickly:

“I’ll draw you home. Sit as steady as you can, and I won’t jolt more than I can help.” And away they went down Pike’s Hill, and off toward Prime Street, a quarter of a mile away.

“You’re a real good boy,” said the sprained boy’s mother, as he delivered her son safely into her hands. “Tommy won’t forget you in a hurry, I guess.” And Sidney walked away rubbing his hands, and feeling that he would not be likely to forget Tommy, he was such a heavy fellow.

Chapter 5

The Sum of It All

Just as Sidney was eating a cold dinner, an hour after the proper time, the senior and junior partners at the corner store shook their heads as they looked at each other, both being very grave.

“It looks dark,” said the younger man.

“It does, that’s a fact!” said the elder. “But then I can’t seem to believe that he took it. I have always thought him the very soul of honesty.”

“But how else can we explain it?” And here both seemed to grow sadder. The end of it was that a summons came to Sidney before he had touched his doughnut. He took it in his hand and made all haste to the store, wondering much as he was ordered to the private office.

“There has been sad work going on here today, Sidney,” began the senior partner, as soon as the door was closed. “I left a twenty-dollar bill in my desk last night, and my partner saw it here this morning at nine o’clock; this afternoon at three it was *not* here. Now, you know you are the only clerk in town today.”

Sidney looked from one to the other for a moment in startled wonder, as if to ask what all that, however sad it was, could have to do with him. Then he began to understand. He was a quick-witted boy, and a just one; he did not fall into a rage, as boys in

stories do, for it occurred to him that these men had only known him four months, and there couldn't seem to be anybody else who could have taken the money, so it seemed natural enough to suspect him. His voice, though very earnest, was not angry.

"It looks as bad as possible, Mr. Barnes; but I truly know nothing about it."

"That is easy to say," Mr. Barnes answered, coldly; and thinking in his sensible brain that it was very strange if the boy was innocent that he was not indignant.

"The question is, can you give an account of yourself between the hours of nine and three today? Where have you been and what have you been about?"

Sidney's face gloomed over, and he sighed heavily. "I have been wandering along and going nowhere in particular, and doing nothing at all. For all I can prove to you, I may have spent the twenty-dollar bill twenty times, only I *haven't* done it."

There was a listener to all this sitting quiet in his chair. This was the senior partner's son, a young lawyer. He was looking searchingly at the earnest-faced boy.

"Have you any idea where you were at nine o'clock?" he asked, suddenly.

"Yes, sir; I was standing at the window looking out and wondering what to do with myself; the town clock struck and I counted and thought what an awful long day there was."

"What then?"

"I went right straight out, and walked up street as far as Judge Porters."

"What stopped you there?"

"Why, the little Shemways that come to our Sunday school were out singing Christmas carols, just as they did in Germany;

and they got afraid of Bose, the Judge's dog, and I'm not afraid of him, so I stopped and took care of them till they were through."

"Go on. What did you do then, do you know?"

"Yes, sir; I went on across the town bridge, and from there I went to Dr. Eldred's, on Stone Street."

"What took you there?"

"Why, as I was walking down by the pond Fred Eldred stood there with his sled and his sister. She was on the sled; she can't walk; she has a sprained ankle; and Eldred wanted to go to the skating race, so I took his sister home."

"Just so! That took considerable time, didn't it?"

"Yes, sir; it was twenty minutes of twelve by the town clock when I came back."

"Then did you go to dinner?"

"No, sir. We don't have dinner on Christmas until two o'clock. That is the way we keep the holiday." Sidney said this with a gleam of mischief in his handsome eyes. Having a clear conscience, he could not help seeing the funny side of things.

"Very well, tell me what came next?"

"Next I had an errand at Mr. Seymour's."

"What Mr. Seymour's? On Seymour Avenue? What took you there?" and the keen eyes looked at him steadily.

"Why, I had a top that I made for lame Neddie, and I didn't get it done till today, and Mr. Seymour said I might come around at one o'clock exactly and have a peep at the tree."

"Did you have it?"

"Yes, sir; and it looked fine."

"So this was one o'clock. Then you went home, I suppose?"

"No, sir. Mr. Seymour asked me to take a note to Mr. Stuart's at the corner just below Pike's Hill, and I went straight there."

"After that I hope you had a chance to go home?"

“No, sir,” said Sidney, beginning to be amazed at his own story. “I went up Pike’s Hill to go across lots, and a boy had just tumbled over. They were riding downhill like mad, and he sprained his foot, so I helped him up and drew him home.”

“Who was he?”

“His name is Smith, Tommy Smith. He lives on Prime Street, below the old Market.”

“Were you the only boy there was to do for him?”

“Yes, sir. The other fellows were strangers to him, so was I for that matter. But they had come from the upper village for a sleigh-ride, and they were to be at some point downtown at two o’clock to go back. They were late, too, the clock struck while we were getting Tommy Smith on the sled, and the fellows all ran like tops.”

“And from Tommy Smith’s I earnestly hope you went home.”

“I did, sir;” said Sidney, and his face was in a broad smile.

The young lawyer turned to the two men, who had listened in breathless attention.

“I’ll take the case,” he said, “with pleasure. It is the most complete alibi I have heard this many a day; and the young man has been practicing all day on the Christmas carols that he began the morning with: ‘Peace on earth, good will to men.’ There has certainly been much ‘good will’ put into this day.”

“It is a complete chain,” the senior partner said, heartily. “My boy, I will go to every one of these parties whose names you have given, and if their statements agree with yours, it will settle the question of the bill. Whoever has it, it can’t have been you.”

“And they will agree, of course,” Sidney said, heartily. “Because it is so, and what else can they say?”

“There is no need of going to them,” said the junior partner. “It is all right.”

And Sidney, as he went back to his boarding-house, went thoughtfully over the day, and was much struck with the fact that something at every turn had marked the time for him. “It did make a difference which way I went, and what I did, after all,” he said, gratefully.

The End