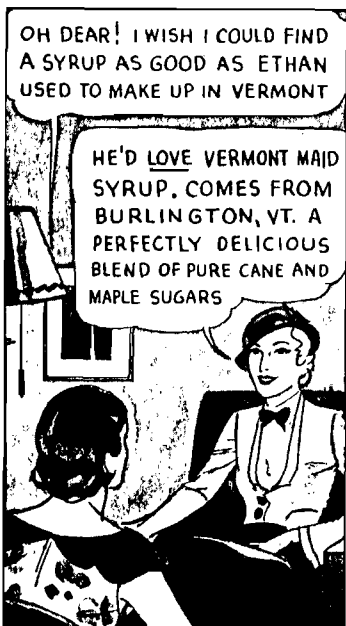


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## The Heart Remembers

(Continued from Page 9)

fellow Gray has an invitation to the party too."

Mr. John J. Gray received so little mail that he rarely went through the hollow formality of looking in his box. Today, therefore, the clerk had to call his attention to the note. Even then, Mr. Gray regarded it dubiously, as though it couldn't quite be for him.

An invitation an invitation to a Christmas party! Surely no one could be asking *him*. He read it again to make certain. "Mr. Richard Payne Pomeroy the pleasure of Mr. John J. Gray's company at five ——" That would be the rather expansive young fellow in well-cut tweeds he'd noticed last night walking around as if he owned the hotel. And now he was asking *him* to a Christmas party. He wouldn't, of course, if he knew. Christ had forgiven the thief, but Christians seldom did. But then, the young man didn't know. Nobody knew yet. He must go to the party. If he didn't, they might get onto the fact that there was something suspicious about him. He must go and act as though he really were John J. Gray, and not Nicholas Murdock at all.

"WHAT kind of party did you have in mind, Mr. Pomeroy?" asked Miss Appleby, seating herself on a tufted brocade sofa with something of the air of the committee which has met to discuss plans for the church picnic, when they met in the lobby.

"Oh," said Richard vaguely, a trifle disconcerted by her directness and clarity. "I want it to be a good party, you know. Everybody has to have a good time," he continued enthusiastically. "Probably cocktails to begin on or perhaps everyone in his circle drank cocktails, but he had a sudden astonished feeling that possibly everyone in Miss Appleby's didn't "or perhaps a dry sherry," he conceded, "to warm things up a bit. Break the ice, you know. And then I'll engage a private dining room and have a very nice dinner. Plum pudding, roast goose, all the trimmings. And lots of flowers for the ladies and cigars for the men, and afterward—oh, well," he stammered, noting her growing lack of enthusiasm—"oh, afterward, I might get some musicians to come up from Munich."

He broke off abruptly, for Miss Appleby's lively countenance was showing consternation and what was even more disconcerting, an odd, pitying amusement—yes, pity—as though she were feeling very sorry for him, somehow.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed, and then again, "Oh, dear!" And then, "But, Mr. Pomeroy, that's not Christmas!"

She let her shock soak in. "I don't see why not," he tried to bluster.

"Then you shouldn't give a Christmas party at all," she announced flatly.

"What's your idea?" he asked a bit sulkily, not looking at her directly. Richard wasn't used to having his ideas about parties questioned. They never were. He could give as smart a party as anyone.

"Well," she was saying as kindly as possible, "these people are all strangers. The only thing they have in common is that they're Americans, and probably all homesick. I know" her voice caught a little "I am."

"So," he could see her eyes lighting up as she began to think of the party she'd give—the thing that would bring them together, break the ice as you call it, would be just a simple American Christmas like the kind they probably all had when they were children. Make them all bring a gift, not to cost more than a mark, and suitable for any age or sex. Have a Christmas tree, and trim it the way you used to do at home, with crazy simple things, popcorn and cranberries—I'll help you and

perhaps some mulled wine and cakes. They'll have dinner about two-thirty in the hotel, so no one will want a banquet.

"And then," she hesitated, but went on defiantly, her eyes deep velvet brown with brave excitement, her lips scarlet, "well, you may think it's silly but I'd have them sing Christmas carols."

And suddenly Richard's mind raced a long way back and recaptured from his childhood a memory of that real Christmas which everyone carries in his heart. He remembered his mother, slender and stately in a dress of soft white wool with immense gathered sleeves, her delicate throat encased in a high net collar, her face grave and yet alight, sitting at the mahogany upright piano on Christmas Eve, playing Christmas music while the children sang. The smell of Christmas swept over him, the pungent, rich, spicy odors, the sharp tang of evergreen, all suspended in an atmosphere cold and crisp—and somehow very clean.

Richard traveled a long way back to a present which seemed incredible and unreal, after that so-clear reality of childhood. This pompously ornate and dingy little salon was remote, a dream; everything was irrelevant here, except, somehow, the slender, warm-eyed girl whose red lips were no longer set in a sedate, self-protecting austerity, but were now laughing and generous and kind.

"Yes," said Richard, drawing a long breath, "we always had music at home on Christmas. That would be the very thing. There's a piano in my sitting room. Could you play it?"

"I ought to be able to," she replied with an amused crinkle around her eyes. "That's what I do for a living, teach music."

"We've got a lot to do," said Richard, jumping up enthusiastically. "First I'll have to scribble them all notes telling them to bring presents. And then we ought to go out and buy popcorn and cranberries."

"I'll run up and get my hat and coat," cried Faith, as intent and serious as a child. "And I'll bring down a darning needle to string the cranberries with. I don't suppose you have one."

Then, for no particular reason, she laughed, and he, looking at her, began to laugh too, and thus they were swept on a gale of laughter into their flurry of preparations.

AS RICHARD hurried back up the stairs two at a time, he nearly stumbled over the little German girl he had noticed in the dining room. She was sitting on the top step, crooning softly to her doll.

"*Warum sitzen Sie da?*" he asked in irate, extremely imperious German, and then, more softly, "Where's your mother, *Kinderchen?*"

"She's gone for a ride."

"But it's Christmas, child. Aren't you lonesome?"

"Oh, no." She shoved her big doll out at him. "I have my dolly to keep me company."

"Look here," he announced suddenly. "I'm having a party. You know, cakes and candy and things. You come too."

The child looked pleased, but hesitated a moment.

"Shall I put on my pink dress?"

"Why, you look very nice in that dress." He smiled. He hadn't known little girls began so early to think of clothes.

"I think I will wear my pink dress," she announced firmly, "and I suppose," she looked at him with confident eyes "I suppose you could comb my hair for me?"

Richard saw Faith coming down the red-carpeted corridor in a long, black velvet dress, its close-neckline emphasizing the fairness of her skin, its enormous puff sleeves giving a stately quality to her slender throat, her small head, and realized, to his surprise, (Continued on Page 81)