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Santa's Understudy---The Prize Story

By Edyth Ellerbeck Read.

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66 DETTER run for it, sir." eried Sheriff Riley. "They're get-ing uglier every minute." \mathbf{D} "Why don't you make them stop, then-clean them out?" stor

Geadings, scowling wrathfully at the rabble that surged just below them like dirty surf, roaring sullenly, creeping ever nearer.

Riley gave an expressive gesture indicating his handful of men opposed to the hundreds of half-mad rioters. 'A broom against the ocean, Mr. Ged. dings. A dozen to 500."

You are armed, aren't you?" Geddings retorted with rising anger.

Riley nodded unwillingly. "Our or-ders ain't to shoot. We're here to protect property and life if need be-but"--"How are you going to do it withou:

shooting if those idlots take it into the.-heads to rush you? They've crow-bars against your clubs and could wreck the whole plant before you would come to, But they're always cowards and one volley over their heads would send them scurrying. Get back-darn you!" -this to the front rank of strikers who with savage yells had begun to press forward.

The shake of his fist and the curse were plain language even to Greek and Slav, and added fuel to the smoldering A chorus of the worst "swears" fire. known to the foreigners answered Geddings, and suddenly from somewhere in the crowd a jagged piece of slag from the dump was hurled and caught the millionaire just above the ear. staggered under the impact and when he recovered a streak of red showed below his hat brim. "Fire, I tell you!" he yelled at the

knot of deputies about him, "Fire, or I will?'

a moment he waited while the sheriff hesitated. And while he wavered the smeltermen with a mighty roar pressed forward and up the rising ground topped by the plant. Then, as only clubs were forthcoming at his cry. Geddings pulled his own weapon from his pocket and began firing rapidly. High he almed, and wildly, only caring to frighten these foreign devils away from his own person. Five quick shots over dodging heads rang out, then his sagging arm sent a sixth bullet crash-ing into the thick of the crowd. A sudden outcry and some one went down The rush was quelled, the mob half doubled on itself, and then seemed to pack in a solid mass about the wounded man. A few quick foreign commands and the ranks thinned to allow room for the lifting of the inert body. But at sight of blood another angry roar went up and this time the rush up the bank was concerted, determined.

An empty revolver and a half dozen frightened deputies offered slight protection to Geddings, who alone seemed the object of his men's hate-he must run for it now. He ducked anothe: missile, sprang through the little office gate, across the yard, along the narrow gage track and reached the dump. It descended steep as a moun-tain cliff, black, jagged, in places still hot and smoking from the molten slag, but he dared not tarry. He ran, leap-ed and slid down the side, his great bulk making the impact of the sharp slag torture to his tender flesh-and at last, breathless and hatless, reached his automobile.

The precious seconds demanded by cranking he grudged, cursing the chutter of the engine that announced his whereabouts to the angry mob. He cranked wildly, once, twice, the engine "died on him" but the third time the machine answered the wheel and leap-



abruptness not calculated to increase the comfort of the harrassed fugitive. He puffed from the aunusual exertion, his increasing desire for rest met by yhe increasing necessity for haste, as shown by the angry sounds that rose meacingly from the flat below him. Soon the storm began to take on the ohitratter of a blizzard, half blotting out the landscape, and completely ob-literating the trail. He was stumbling blindly along, neither knowing nor car-ing whither, when suddenly a bright (ausing him to leap like a cornered rab-bit behind an opportune boulder. From this coign of vantage he looked cau-tions of vantage he looked cau-tions of vantage he looked cau-tions in the yeallow light the black figures moving about the blazing car switch site.

scened to dente the goons droud a witch's fre. Geddings was half congealed with cold by the time the light died down and he was safe to venture from his hiding place. The vague idea of scaling the mountain and reaching town by that route was soon abandoned as the snow grew thicker, more blinding. Then a faint point of light just ahead plerced the gloom and showed him a tiny cottage hugging the hill—evidently one of the "shacks" of the married workmen who preferred the open gulches to the crowded quarters on the flat. Feeling his way towards it, Gleddings managed to reach a lean-to in the rear. Like a thief he tried the door, as silently as his numbed fingers could manage the task. Then, not suspecting the few steps just within, he plunged down them with sickening rapidity.

them with sickening rapidity. "Whisht, man! Hold yer noise!" a woman's voice admonished him in a sepulchral whisper. "The lads is all in there, and Oi've been waitin' this long toime with yer duds. What's kep ye?" Too bruised and dazed to speak, Ged-dings lay where he had fallen, remain-ing so still that alarm finally seized the woman; she grasped the candle and approached him.

the woman: she grasped the candie and approached him. "Hurt, Mickey? Drinkin' agin?" She held up the sputtering light and peered down at him, anxiety and reproach equally mingled in her voice. Then as the grimy, frightened face of Ged-dings met her eyes, she gave a smoth-ered erv and backed away.

sind the childher up here to play. They're warmer runnin' about as rob-bers, than sittin' about a could room." "Great Scott!" ejacuated Geddings, "Why don't you use coal and keep warm?"

"Why don't you use coal and keep warm?" "There's siven av us altogither, me an' Mickey an' the childher, not count-in' the cat,—and coal sivin dollar the ton this day, and but a dollar-ninety to be got at the smelter," conclesly summed up his protector, "Of've hearn tell as how the boss burns sivin ton the month to kape niver a wan but his own fat body warm. And there's my Jamie wid his precious nose frosted ivery winter reg'lar." "Boubtless he'll have that much more to burn in whin he dies," ruminated Mary O'Toole comfortingly, as she lent her large gasp to assist the unknown fugative. Gedding followed, cogitating the mat-

fugative. Gedding followed, cogitating the mat-ter of the Smelter wage. Thus quietly presented, its appeal was infinitely more forceful that if it had been ex-pounded by a smug walking-delegate, or howled at him by an unruly mob. "Perhaps the boss is not exactly-bad, at heart,' he suddenly suggested. "Perhaps he's merely-obstinate, and-thoughtless-"

thoughtless—" "An' does that change the price o' coal?—on' the long shifts, an' the wage?" she quizzed. "No!—no bettern the divil's own heart! Look there!" Turning in front of the spectral looking hole that opened into the hill-side, she spread her arm almost grandly to in-dicate the hideous smelter darkening the horizon to the south west. "Ye see that great black ugly thing—full o' cinder an' smoke an' fire an' accident? It's that is like his heart, begorra!— Harrd as the very iron in his slag-pots!"

Harrd as the very iron in his slag-pots?" Geddings breathed hard. So this was the thing he represented to his ment Never, from his college days when his fellows fawned on him to keep within the circle of his patronage and treats, on through the days when he reigned in a mansion of selfish bachelorhood, acquiring ever greater stores of un-utilized wealth, with a dozen servants answering his call and a few unsatis-fying social rfiends to pay him further homage, had he heard a bit of un-mitigated truth about himself until now. And he had never dreamed that the truth could have so keen an edge. It was with humbled spirit that he ordwide into the low forbidding mouth of the cave, self mistrust mingling oddy with self-pity in his startled con-sciousness. To be sure the prospect was most uninviting—this damp, cold isolation on Christmas Eve, while the fire burned brightly, unenjoyed, in his cone of his pampered style of living. Moreover, the revelation of his own inquity to which he had just listened, adad mental distress to his physical uscomfort.

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But Mrs. O'Toole soon interrupted his noment of introspection.

"It's good-bye fer now," she said cheerily, "an' Ol'll be back fer ye when Mickey goes on the midnight shift." "But here's a strike on," Geddings objected, "there may be no midnight shift." shift

shift." "Oh well, 'tis all wan wid Mickey. He'll make a shift o' his own at wan or tother o' the saloons, then. Niver ye fear. It's niver a minut his bed will see him this night. But-"turning for a final inquiry, "phwat was it start-ed them hot-heads afther ye? Was it wan av the men ye hit wid yer auty-mobile, belike? It makes a fury in the hearrts o' the men-these autymo-bile runovers."

ble runovers." "No," replied Geddings cautiously, "It was a little mix-up at the smelter. One of the men threw a plece of stag which struck me on the head. And threw something back. That's all. Then they chased me."

Beddings's self-complacency was fast ebbing away. He saw himself unwill-ing to confess accurately the occur-rence at the yards, or to acknowledge his own identity. He found himself de-pendent upon a woman of the dependent class for safety for life normans and pendent upon a woman of the dependent class for safety, for life, perhaps, and hitherto it had been his proudest boast that the lives of more than a thousand men lay in his own keeping. His con-fidence in himself and his proud posi-tion was considerably shaken. But, crouching humbly in the mouth of the cave, he suddenly became aware of the humor of his predicament. Sidney Ged-dings, mining magnate and copper king, a fugitive Santa Claus in turkey-red! "By George, I'd make a peach of a cartoon!" he murmured, but his smile at the reflection was more rueful than amused.

"Is them his tracks back o' the house an' up the hill?" asked Mickey's friend.

She leaped to a decision. "No-no!" she leaped to a decision. "No-no!" she lied breathlessly, " 'tis across the gulch he went-by Terrence Murphy's house-to the north."

she hed breathlessly, " tis across the sulch he went-by Terrence Murphy's house-to the north." The pursuers turned away in the di-rection she had pointed, while Mary O'Toole stood fixedly watching them disappear from sight. "Mother o' Mary!" she cried aloud, "Mickey, me darin', me own he was, and him as did the shootin' has to reckon wid me!" Then, head and heart burning with elementai wrath, she walked resolutely to the corner of the room, selzed Mickey's gun from behind the stove, and closing the cabin door stalked militantly up the mountain to the cave that concealed the fugitive-the same man, this fugitive, but now an enemy, in that his affront was personal to her and hers. A little later Geddings, still patient-ly endeavoring to reconcile himself and his posture to several hours more of discomfort, was startled by an unex-pected shadow darkening the mouth of the cave But instantly recompiling the outlines of Mary O'Toole's tall fig-ure, he stretched his cramped limbs with a relieved sigh. "So you've come for me already!" "O'Ye come, she answered grimly, "- to kill ye." Geddings started back; the words had hardly the ring of a jest. "O'I'I give ye toime fer a prayer." she continued in the same grim tone, "-tho' saints know, all the masses ye cud pay fer wudden't save yer' black soul But if ye're goin' to pray, be quick about it. O'I'I waste no toime on ye"

on ye" "Look here!" cried Geddings, still more amazed than frightened. "What have you got against me?-I've a right to know before you turn that gun on "me"

ne." "Pretendin' again? Arr ye sham all krough? Gettin' behind my skirts nd playin' wid my babes afther kill-n' their father!" Her volce began to ise hysterically at the last words. "Killing their father?" Geddings ould only repeat dazedly. "My Mickey!" she walled. "He's not dead?" Forgetting danger n his anxiety, Geddings stepped out f the shadow and selzed the woman's rm.

"Av course he's dead—shot, they said —and by ye, ye skulkin', hypocrite!" She wrenched herself away from him and fingered her gun wildly. "Have you seen him?" Geddings per-sisted, trying to quiet her by his own calm.

'No-no-but he's at the 'Mergency

hospital-where niver a soul is cared fer dacently. An' ye-ye that'd rather shoot a man than raise a miserable ware-"

shoot a man than raise a miserable wage—" "Listen," he commanded. "You don't understand. It wasn't a regular strike—the men didn't organize or send a delegate to demand a raise. They just stopped work, got drunk, and then stood around yelling like demons. I would not have known what they want-ed if they had not marked up the fences with chalk—'two-twenty-five,' in big figures scrawled everywhere. When I got the sheriff and some deputies out there to keep order the men began to abuse me. The sheriff was a puny thing—couldn't have herded sheep—and I had to protect myself. I just shot off my gun to frighten the mob—I didn't intend to hit anybody." Ged-dings felt his anticlimax. "But ye hit my Mickey!" "But I can help him better alive than dead—and you and the children, too, if you'l just be sensible. Put away your gun and keep the men off me worse men in the world than Sidney Geddings, Mrs. O'Toole."

worse men in the world than Sidney Geddings, Mrs. O'Toole." "Prove ut!" she cried "Then come with me to the Emer-gency hospital-I'll have your husband taken to the best surgeon in the city. And the men shall have their raise. Come-we must hurry."

And the men shall have their faise. Come-we must hurry." "But the furreners arr jist ready to chew ye up," she objected, fearing now for the recent victim of her deadly rage. "They will never know me in these togs-and with you. They will take me for one of the numerous Santas larking about. We must risk it." Still carrying the gun Mary O'Toole trudged, like the king of France, down the hill again, with her gally costumed companion mute beside her. But though he had nothing to say, Sidney Geddings was doing some of the hard-est thinking he had ever done in his life. He felt as if he had just been fostled from a dream that had lasted from his cradle days. Rude as the awakening was, he felt that it was the first time he had ever touched Reality, and somehow he had no desire to sink back into slumber. and solutions its into desire to sink back into slumber. During the long walk down the gulch and across the flat his mind worked at fever heat, so that neither cold nor fear could chill him nor fatigue dismay his newly aroused spirit. They passed but few stragglers-cold and darkness had evidently cooled the wrath of the explosive foreigners-and only good-natured ralliery greeted the appearance of the odd pair. They found Mickey O'Toole in the hands of a badly frightened doctor, an M. D. so new that the ink on his diplo-ma had hardly had time to dry. How is your man?" Geddings asked shortly, entering unannounced, with Mary O'Toole following sturdily at his heels.

the letter. Into the big Limousine he and the physician carried Mickey, and through space to St. Luke's in the city. Once there the wounded man was put into the hands of a great surgeon, and again the waiting began for the pair whom chance had mated by a common fear.

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The tired clerks of the biggest toy-shop in Coppertown were just prepar-ing to swathe the counters in their night-wrappers, when they were halted by the entrance of the oddest pair of shoppers the place had held that day Santa Claus himself, red of nose, white of beard, fat and ruddy, took the lead, while his companion, tal, broad-beamed, and wealrng the marks of toll in form and fist, followed in happy bewilder-ment.

and nst, booked in happy declarate ment. The weary proprietor was galvanized into new life when Saint Nicholas be-gan to give orders, and dispatched a small army of cash boys to the base-ment to replenish the well-nigh ex-hausted stock of the establishment. Balls, marbles, tops, flying machines, sieds, stuffed rabbits and woolly dogs that squeaked-to say nothing of sil-vered cherubs, golden balls and tinsel angels for the tree-the portly saint demanded, until the whole force of clerks was forced to pltch in and help carry the bundles to the waiting auto-mobile.

clerks was forced to pitch in and help carry the bundles to the waiting auto-mobile. Geddings paused at last. He still clung to his turkey-red disguise, hav-ing no desire to furnish material for the ubiquitous newspaper reporter who would undoubtedly have found a rich "story" in this adventure of the "Cop-per King." To himself he owned that he was having the "time of his life." but he had come finally to the point where his memory of his boyhood's treasures was exhausted. He stopped a moment to ponder: what did boys play with nowadays, anyway? Turning to question the mother of five of them, he found her absorbed in watching the gyrations of a wonderful elective en-gine that whirled about a diminutive track in the show-windows. Mary O'Toole raised a pair of wist-ful yet apologetic eyes. "My Jamie Is that fond o' engynes! Mickey let him ride in the cab wan day-in the little engyne that haulis the slag-pots, yo mind-and the by did ask the most in-tilligent questions!" "What else, ma'am?" he asked, sur-veying the dishevelled counters in an effort to discover something still that might appeal to masculine tastes. "Seems to be nothing left but dolls." To his surprise the look Mary O'Toole turned upon the bisque bables with their round eyes and flaxen curls, was full of unutterable yearning. She was sfull of unutterable yearning. She yaes. "But you've no girls!" Geddings de-

cycs. "But you've no girls!" Geddings de-murred, though she had said nothing,



ed forward.

Back of Geddings lay the town where were home, protection and an army of henchmen who could help fight this insensate mob. But back of him, too, lay the crowd of strikers. No help for it, lead where it may he must take the road ahead.

it, lead where it may he must take the road absead. Stragglers on the outskirts of the crowd caught sight of him first and passed the word. But the game of "follow-my-leader" had already so en-grossed the most of them that they continued to huri themselves forward, not knowing why nor whither, only that the man in front was doing the same. By the time they sensed the fact that their quarry had backed on them and was fleeing by another route, Ged-dings had time for a good start, and only a cloud of sooty dust told where he speck But after that cloud of dust the pack was soon in full cry. Farther and farther he left them nutil no sign of pursuer dotted tho yoad; then, and only then did Geddings slack up and take note of his sur-youndings.

roundings. Back of him the smelter lay snuggled

roundings.
Back of him the smelter lay snuggled scinst the mountain, its huge stacks beiching black smoke against the barren cliffs. Alongside it the concentrator, utilizing the natural terraces, sprawled down the steep hill-side. On the flat lay bunk-houses, the company store, saloons and poolrooms. Radiating from the flat like the spokes of a wheel were guilles, along whose tiny streams were strung the shacks of the married workmen. Ten miles to the east lay the big town with its handsome homes built from the proceeds of this and similar earns.
Geddings's one chance for safety was to be within the boundaries of this and similar earns.
Geddings's one chance for safety was to be within the boundaries of this same town. Instead he found himself hainous road, whose, grade, now he had one heft the flat, was impossible for any machine to negotiate. Besides, the early dusk of midwinter was swiftly falling, making progress more difficult, more dangerous at every turn, while which the key breath that swept down the guiles can be within the swept down whe guiles can be when be and the swept down when the size that swept down the guiles can be when the source and the swept down when the being the swept down be guiles can be and simple complex that swept down the guiles can be when the the sy breath that swept down the guiles can be that swept down the guiles can be the sy breath that swept down the guiles can be the sy breath that swept down the guiles can be the sy breath that swept down the guiles can be the sy breath that swept down the guiles can be any down be guiles can be any down be guiles can be that swept down the guiles can be the sy breath that swept down the guiles can be that swept down the guiles can be the sy breath that swept down the guiles can be the sy breath that swept down the guiles can be the sy breath that swept down the guiles can be the sy breath that swept down the guiles can be the sy breath that swept down the guiles can be the sy breath that swept down the guiles ca

Geddings climbed numbly from his Geddings climbed numbly from his car, turned his fur collar up about his lingling ears, and set out reluctant-ly on foot. Mingled with his fear of his pursuers and rage at their pursuit, was a fierce resentment that Providence could so cruelly desert a favorite of fortune and cast him adrift on Christ-mas eve, when by all that was decent and fitting he should have been safe within the sacred portals of his own mansion, warm, well fed, well served by attendants who never went "on strike."

But cursing only wasted his breath, he found, and soon he could spare none, for the road, narrowing into a trail, struck suddenly up the hillside with an

als the given by register a set of some dings met her eyes, she gave a smoth-ered cry and backed away. "Who arr ye? What ye doin' here?" she cried. "Hide me!" gasped Geddings with the little breath that remained to him, "They're after me-they've burned my automobile-they mean to kill me. I'll pay you anything you ask if you'll hide me away-anywhere-quick!" The words were a jumble of fear and pain, but Mary O'Toole, long-versed in the ways of her men-folk, nodded un-derstandingly. "Spreein agin-I know 'en! Up wid ye, then, and git into these. Mickey's self was tave warn 'em, but ye'l mak' a good Santy-port-ly-like and folly" She chuckled delightedly and held out what appeared to be a bunch of bright red rags. Struggling painfully to his feet, Geddings selzed upon the mass, eying with puzzled dismay the nonde-script garment, valnly seeking a mode of ingress into the thing. "Over yer head wid ut-and wigglet The kids is waitin' fer Santy Claus and I see where they come afther ye if ye don't hustle. Whishet most!"

I see where they come affly chast and i see where they come affler ye if ye don't hustle. Whishst now!" With her assistance Geddings wormed into the sack-like affair. It was of the

into the sack-like affair. It was of the material known as "turkey-red" with trimmings of some fluffy white stuff that clung in knobs over the surface. Made for a slenderer man, its meager proportions were a tight fit for Ged-dings's ponderous frame. But, gazing on him with satisfaction, Mary O'Toole ejaculated, "Jist the figger for Santy-praise het" be!

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waitin' fer?" she scoffed, her voice tinged with scorn for every foreign tongue among them.

steaming "praties," the Christmas spread. Only the stimulus of fear nerved Geddings finally to assume the char-acter of his disguise. He had faced the turbulent mob of foreigners with more courage than he felt in the pres-ence of these credulous eyes of childhood. But perform he must. With a superlative effort he shook off his diffidence together with his dignity, and began to play the role of kind and beneficient Santa. With unsuspected talent he developed

and beneficient Santa. With unsuspected talent he developed the part, buried his natural voice in the deep stentorian tones of the villains of melodrama, and playfully disported his generous allotment of avoirdupois according to the directions of the motherly stage-manager. All his efforts were applauded, noisily appreciated by the brood of lively O'Toole's and Ged-dings was progressing splendidly--when there suddenly came shouts from without, and several quick raps on the door.

door. "Down wid ye now! Give 'em a rear view, while OI go head thim off. Niver ye let on, an' kape up the fun," whis-pered Mother O'Toole to Geddings as she made her way stoutly to the door and opened to a half-dozen black fig-ures stamping the cold and snow from their feet

ures stamping the cold and snow from their feet. "An' phwat is ut now ye're after doin' here?--interruptin' a harmless mite o' fun this Christmas ave?" she demand-ed indigantly of the six mute foreign-ers arraigned before her. Mary O'Toole was far-famed among the smelter hands for strength of muscle as well as fire of tongue. Any woman who could keep Mickey O'Toole in hand must necessarily be of the Amazonian type.

"Well, an' is ut an invitation in ye're

One burly Greek, his dark eyes nar-rowed with a sly purpose, sidled in past the beligerent figure of Mickey's wife to scan the interior of the cabin. No suspicious traces were visible. All he saw was a fat, turkey-red St. Nicholas sprawled grotesquely on all fours, the turkey-red strained almost to the splitting point, and five rollicking little O'Tooles endeavoring to play leap-frog over his well-padded frame.

leap-frog over his well-padded frame. In response to a few unintelligible syllables from the interested spectator, the rest of the Greeks trudged apolo-getically in past Mrs. O'Foole and stood watching tho curious proceedings for what seemed an unconscionably long time to Geddings. Finally, after a few more ejaculations from their leader, they turned away, content to seek their victum of grambers. victim elsewhere

"An' 'tis about toime yez were gettin' "An' 'tis about toime yez were gettin' on, wid me holdin' the door riddy this tin minutes. Take yer muddy feet off," peremptorily commanded the disdainful housewife, "an' git out o' hearin' o' folks as common sinse enough to spake the English tonguel Ye good-fer-noth-in' immigrants!"

in' immigrants!" Silent before her unmistakable de-nunciation, the last Greek was slouch-ing dejectedly out, when she unex-pectedly assisted him over the thresh-hold with a vigorous spat of her hand, after which she closed the door with a bang. "There! Thim sooty furreners is went on' woire cafe But-" she warmed

a bang. "There! Thim sooty furreners is went an' ye're safe. But-" she warned, "there's Mickey yet to come, an' if ho strikes home wid a mile 'o rum an' a bit o' the divil in him an' gets on to ye-there won't be enough o' ye left to say a prayer when he gits through, Dhrap on to the vittles, children-'tis toime to ate. Fill up all the imply places yez ben kapin' fer a wake-an' don't forgit to feed the cat! Me an' Saint Nick has to go out and harness up thim reindeers, but oi'll be back in a bit. Sit up!" Needing no further urging the crowd of tow-heads crowded about the table, while Geddings, puffing after his vio-lent gymnastics, yet touched by the homely good spirit that reigned in the guich cottage, followed his benefactress out into the nigh. "Where-where are we going?" he

out into the night. "Where-where are we going?" he breathleesly inquired, doubting the ex-pediency of leaving his former refuge, as he saw her strike abruptly up the hill that rose just back of the house-a snowy hill whose white heights seemed to fade vaguely into the misty clouds of the clearing sky. "To a kind av cave lettin' into the mountain as the children discivered in their play," complacently answered his companion.

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companion. "Heavens! Won't I freeze?" gloomily, as he stumbled up the trail. "Ol don't expect so," was the re-assuring answer, "Tis not so could a night. Times, whin the home is not warm enough fer want o' firewood, Ol

amused. Mary O'Toole made quick work of the return journey to her cottage. She found her two younger children, having stuffed to their utmost capacity, asleep at the table, while the other boys played a noisy game of tag about the

played a noisy game of tag about the room. "To bed, to bed ivery wan av yez, this minit, or shur an' Santy'll niver be back to fill yer stockin's. Off wid yer shoes and hang yer stockin's on the line back o' the stove ready fer--whisht!" Mother O'Toolo held up a silencing finger. "There comes some wan now. Doubless 'is yer father, an' late he is fer supper. Now good night to ivery wan av yez-be off!" There was a scattering to bed. The smallest, toddling Clarence, Mrs, O'Toole was just tucking in on the an-cient sofa by the stove, when the ap-proaching steps reached the door, and knock followed knock in rapid succes-sion until she opened.

proaching steps reached the door, and knock followed knock in rapid succes-sion until she opened. It was not the expected husband, Instead there stood two of the Irish hands, engine-men at the smelter, who when confronted by Mrs. O'Toole seemed suddenly struck dumb. "Phwat is ut as yer a traipsin' up through the snow fer?-some fresh mischlef O'II be bound! Phwat is ut yer afther wantin?" she demanded, irate at their speechlessness. "Will yez come in, O'm askin' yez, or will yez come in, O'm askin' yez, or will yez be gettin' a bit farther out so's Ol kin shut the door?" Despite hor exasperation there was no answering movement or explanation from her countrymen. "Well, divil take yez, an if it's Mickey ye're afther wantin', 'tis at wan av the saloons he may be found-the 'Athens' or the 'Parthenon', like as not." At this one of the pair was embold-ened to speak. "It's at the hospital we wud be findin' Mickey this night-" "Phwat's that ye say, as took ye three hours to git sald-Mickey-at the hospital-sick? Phwat is ut, man, git the rest said quicker or-" "But Mickey-" "Yis-and some wan threw a bit o' slag at the boss-"

"Yis-and some wan threw a bit o'

'An' the boss pulled his gun and

"An' shot my Mickey! Oh the fiend to hurt me darlin'! An' then to come up here to me!" She choked with grief and rage.

"He came, did he-an' which way did

"He came, did he—an' which way did he go? We're afther him—we'll git him yet! Which way—do ye know?" "Yis—I know," repiled Mary O'Toole, dazediy, gazing with burning eyes through the open door. "Yis—I know!" The men waited expectantly. She hesitated, feeling desperately about for her decision, wondering, wavering, un-til—

The young physician lost his look of distress in one of amazement. This red-nosed, scarlet-frocked clown spoke in a tone of curt authority. Under his glance Geddings stiffened, forgetting his

glance Geddings stiffened, forgetting his disguise. "I'm Sidney Geddings, young man, and this is your patient's wife. We'vo both a perfect right to be here, and you will please answer every question with-out delay. Is he badly injured?" The young man partied. "I can't just say," he began professionally, when Geddings gave one of his old-time roars. "Then why haven't you a doctor here who can say?" The physician paled. "I've telephoned for one-and for an anbulance-it should have been here long ago." "Can he be moved?" Geddings asked shortly. "He must be; we've no conveniences here for so srious"--"So it is serious? Where's the tele-phone?"

here for so srious"--"So it is serious? Where's the tele-phone?" The doctor indicated it and Geddings seized the receiver. When he turned, after delivering himself of a dozen stoc-catto orflers, he found Mary O'Toole on her knees beside her husband's cot. "Is ut bad, Mickey?" she whispered. "Me finish, Mary." That was all; no moan, no outery from either. It was Geddings who made the only audible sound. If this man died, what would Sidney Geddings be? The next quarter of an hour lived in Geddings's memory as the hardest moments of his life. He paced the floor in a fever of impatience, until the honk of an automobile outside told him that his orders to defy all the speed regula-tions in the county had been obeyed to

Her lip trembled. "No-no. 'Tis only ne foolishness." me

me foolishness." "Take your plck," was Geddings's reply to this, and then as he saw a protest forming on her lips he bent and insinuated-"Don't you know some lit-tle girl to givp it to?"

insinuated-"Don't you know some lit-tie girl to givp it to?" "OI cud keep the purty creetur till next Christmas-belike the Virgin will answer me prayer!" she cried with a rapturous ring in her voice that no other occurance that evening had brought into it. She would not permit the doil to be wrapped, but gathered it into her arms and held it close all the way home. And the old bachelor, sitting beside her had time to ponder and marvel at the mother-love that could cherish five boys and still havo yearings for a sirl-child. It was almost midnight when Ged-dings finally rested after an hour's absorbing work in the O'Toole cabin. Notwithstanding that this had been the hardest day he had ever spent in his life, that he was scratched, bruitsed, hungry and tired, somehow he was ab-suredly contented. The springs of old emotions which he had thought long since dried up had suddenly begun bubbling, and arid spots long barreen began shyly to bloom. A foretaste of the delight the dawn would bring to the unsupecting little O'Tooles made him pause beside the bed long enough to smooth the towsled heads with a paternal tenderness never before awakened. In the light of cold reason his recent paternal awakened.

naternal tenderness never before awakened. In the light of cold reason his recent actions would have been deemed by himself as quixotic, a play to the gal-lery such as he detested. Just so, he knew, would his friends and business associates view the course of action ho had mapped out for the future. Already a messenger had been despatched to the smelter with his order to accede to the men's demands; they would know in time for the next shift. Lack of resolution, cowardice even, he ex-pected to be accused of, but if his inner self would just keep on support-ing him in the delightful maner it had recently adopted, he had confi-dence that his outer man could stand a few hard names. A familiar sound brought him to the door of the shack. He opened it and looked out, while over his shoulder, ex-pectant and gratified, peered Mary or Toole.

O'Toole. Christmas bells, according to legend and well-established precedent, should ring out their message of good cheer across the snow. But in a world of rampant commercialism, sweet bells play small part. There were no bells to chime forth the coming of the Yule-tide, out there in Smeltertown—only a whistle, shrill, clear and insistent, that issued from the engine room down on issued from the engine room down on the flat. The midnight shift and the

Christmas morn began together. "'Tis a sweet sound!" cried Mary OTo

OToole. And for once in his life Geddings thought so too.