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## The Story of a Heart.

BY MARJORIE L. C. PICKTHALL.

Patricia thought it very unkind of Dan to get ill just after they had quarrelled. Not that it was a quarrel really. Only she had told him it was a pity he couldn't let people understand that her interest in him was only friendly and sisterly, and he had said that was all very well, but how about his interest in her? His second name was George, and he couldn't tell a lie, and let them understand it was brotherly. And then the quarrel began. Only it wasn't really a quarrel. And then Dan had taken a mean advantage of her, and got himself ill.

The old doctor had pulled up on the top of the hill above the school house to tell her, with fatherly consideration, "A very sharp touch of gripe," he said, watching her under his big fur cap, "but we'll do our best for him, Miss Pat. Don't you worry, my dear. A slight of your rosy face would be his best medicine, but I doubt too stimulating just now. Don't be anxious."

"No doubt all his friends will be anxious," said Patricia coldly. She whistled Chucks with unnecessary violence, and swished with his leash at the snowy grasses. "He's another of the silly ones. Why do they all persist in tacking me on to Dan! I suppose he expects me to amuse him by burying all the dolls in his backyard, like I did when he had the mumps." She watched the old sleigh swaying down the hill. At the bottom it turned and went up the driveway to the shabby old grey house under the maples where Dan lived. Something colder than the temperature clutched at her heart. "Twice in one day!" she said to herself. "Twice in one day!"

The next day when she came in from her walk the two little aunts were waiting for her—Dan's aunts. Miss Hester held Pat's hands in both hers as she said there was no real cause for anxiety about the dear boy. "But Doctor Mackenzie wishes us to have a strained nurse. It is much wiser in the long run, and gives the patient every chance. Though what better chance he could have than in our love—day and night—always good when he was ill—more than twenty years—Daniel George after his great-grandfather—"

The little lady had herself in hand again in a moment. "I did not sleep much last night, and I feel a little tired. Forgive me, my dear, I should consider you and not myself. I do consider you. You will be a brave girl; my love, and help us all."

Pat watched the two little brave figures walking down the path; Miss Hester looked smaller than usual, and her dainty faded sweetness was gone; Miss Barry looked worn and aged. Pat crept slowly up to her room. From its window, before the trees grew so tall, she could see across to Dan's window. They used to signal each other with fifteen-cent lanterns. She had no chance of telling Miss Hester that her interest in Dan was cool and friendly. Why should people persist in making those silly mistakes? Pat decided that she was vexed and annoyed. And O, how horribly afraid! The third day her mother told her, very gently, that Dan had pneumonia.

After that, Pat lost count of the days, somehow. They were just grey, leaden spaces of time, to be dragged through with. She was sent out for walks and given a tonic. It was a little consolation to walk dully, steadily, through the cold grey woods, and tell herself that just this sickening anxiety was consuming every one of Dan's friends, and that she ought to be sorry for them too.

But somehow she could think of nothing but her own aching heart, that seemed to beat so heavily—"Dan, Dan, Dan."

The day they sent for the other doctor Pat did not go out. She dared not face the bill-road, because it led past the hushed grey house where Dan was. And besides, people were sure to stop her and say: "Have you heard how Dan—young Mr. Barry is to-day, Miss Patricia?" Just as if she, of all the town, should be the one who knew! And to-day what could she say? Not even the doctors and the nurses could say.

"Dan, Dan, Dan!" What would the world be like without Dan? She tried to imagine it, and her heart shuddered and failed and fell away.

Miss Hester sent over a little note to say that Buster was fretting so, would dear Patricia take him out for a run with Chucks? Patricia took Buster to her house, and her heart. It gave her something to do, keeping the two terriers from each other's throats, and something to think about. She saw herself, even as far as ten years hence, dressed in black, still caring for a masterless Buster; for Pat was very young. After she had cried about it till both the dogs were quiet wet, she felt a little better. In her heavy heart was a tiny star of hope. Perhaps—perhaps—

"But even if he does, he won't be my Dan. I told him he wasn't and never would be."

And then there was a day when Dan was better. Miss Hester climbed two fences and ran across a field to tell Pat so at once. "I thought you should be the first to know after ourselves, my love. Our hearts have ached for you all these weary days."

"Thank you, Aunt Hester," said Pat quietly. She went out to the kitchen and put her arms about Buster and told him his master was better. She felt quiet and very tired, and saw with a sort of weary content that it was a lovely day, and snow and sapphire and sun. She went up the hill that day, and when people asked her how Dan was, she said "Better," and they shook hands with her, saying, "That's good, Miss Pat, that's fine!" She saw how pleased they were. That was because they all loved Dan, just as she did.

Doctor Mackenzie met her again at the top, and waved his whip and shouted until the old mare bucked in the harness. "We've beaten it!" he cried. "We've kept him for you!"

The words seemed dragged from Patricia against her will. "Has he—asked—for me?"

The elation died out of the doctor's face. "Why—no," he confessed. "He hasn't. Asked about the pup, that's all."

Pat went straight home. "Oh, Dan, Dan, Dan."

At the door an avalanche of little nephews and nieces met her. They all loved Dan too. "He's better!" they shouted.

"Yes, I know."

"Then why do you look 's if you'd been cryin'?" Don's cry. We want you to help. Doctor Mac says Dan won't be fit to go the school Christmas tree."

"Of course he won't children. Why—why—that's the day after to-morrow." She had lost count of time.

"Yes, we know. Pore old Dan, he'll be drestle disappointed. So Billy's got a big branch, jus' like a whole Christmas tree, and we're going to tie our presents for Dan on to that, and stick it up outside his window so he'll see it. We want you to tie yours on too."

Patricia nodded, and went upstairs. She opened a drawer and looked at the gift she had for Dan, an expensive, intellectual book. It did not seem appropriate. She could not imagine Dan's tired eyes reading it, Dan's thin hands holding it. She pushed it back impatiently. At the back of the drawer, among other odds and ends, something else caught her attention. She stood looking at it a long, long time. Would Dan understand?

At last, with flaming cheeks and cold fingers, she drew it out, scribbled on it quickly.

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"Dan, from Pat," and went downstairs. The children watched her as she tied in on the beautiful cedar bough. "The book would have been too heavy," thought Pat to herself, "it would have broken the branch. This is light, light. Light as my own will be."

She did her task clumsily, aware of her hot cheeks and the critical scrutiny of the children. "Is that all?" asked Billy doubtfully, preparing to shoulder the branch. "Just that?"

"Just that." Pat almost laughed, she felt so happy.

"Just that red cardboard heart left over from our Valentine party?" The eldest niece's tone was penetrating in its disapproval.

"Just that."

"Pore old Dan." The youngest niece sighed. "And you have wrote on it, too. I'm giving him a pocket-comb."

"And this is a 'broidered handkercher. I did it mine self."

"And this parcel's a hyacinth bulb. He can put it in a pot and watch it grow."

"I'm giving him a piebald mouse. But we can't tie that on, or it would catch cold."

"And I'm giving him a pep'mint walking-cane."

"And I'm givin' him a book of dried wild-flowers, but some of 'em have fell out. He'll like that."

Pat laughed again. "He'll like mine, too."

"Well, I hope he will," said Billy with cold politeness, but I must confess I have my doubts."

But Pat had no doubts; at least, not for an hour or so. Then they descended on her in a storm, and she was miserable. How foolish she had been! How could she expect Dan to understand, after the dreadful things she had said? What could she do? Tell the children to give it back? No. She had done it now. She would face the consequences of folly, but she could not face the cold, disapproving stare of twelve juvenile eyes again. Little red cardboard hearts seemed to float in front of her eyes. That night she dreamed that Buster had it in his teeth, shaking it. She woke, crying out, "O Dan, Dan, will you understand?"

What would his aunts say? What would Dan think? Christmas morning brought the old doctor. "I've just come from my patient over yonder," he said gravely; but there was a twinkle in his eyes. "He's been asking for Miss Pat here. Do you think you could spare her for ten minutes before breakfast? I'd whisk her over there in the sleigh right away—Oh, just a shawl or something. Oh, yes, he's much better, but of course it doesn't do to deny 'em anything."

Pat drew the shawl over her head to hide her face, and sank down in the old furry robe. The merry Christmas faces at the door sank away into a sort of shiny mist. How silent the old doctor was! How quickly the old mare went! They were past the wild rose bushes already, over the little bridge, past the locust tree, past the bank where the wasps' nests were. The bells jingled so she couldn't think.

There were the aunts in the doorway, and kisses, and a few tears, all far away and un-

real. The doctor's voice saying, "Out of the valley of the shadow—a merry Christmas indeed for us all, dear ladies—we all love him—"

"O Dan, Dan, not as I do O, I wish I'd never come." A hushed stairway, that seemed to stretch into a vast length, though she had slid down the banisters dozens of times. A quiet woman at the door—

Through the mist Pat saw the familiar room grown strange and new. The cedar branch and the funny little parcels lay on a table, but the red cardboard heart was gone.

And Dan understood; Dan always did understand.

"O Dan, Dan, it was mine, it was mine!" But the question is, did the old doctor leave the sprig of mistletoe in reach among the medicine bottles?

## Deposed.

BY EDWIN L. SABIN.

I useter be "it" at Christmas;  
The whole darned thing was me.  
But it ain't that way no longer,  
For we've got a baby—see?  
An' happens that I ain't in it  
Around that Christmas tree!

Of course I do get some presents,  
The same's I useter get;  
If I didn't—well, if I didn't  
There'd be a kick, you bet.  
An' we have the tree an' fixin's  
The same's we useter; yet—

It's, "Baby! Oh, see, see, baby!"  
"Does baby like it? There!"  
"Did Santy bring lots of pitties?"  
"No, baby mustn't tear!"  
"Let babykins have it, brother!"  
Till a feller wants to swear.

They've give him a lot more stuff'n  
He'll ever, ever use.  
An' what do yuh think? It's my stuff  
He always has to choose!  
An' I have to hand it over  
For "baby" to abuse!

He's played with my truly engine  
An' put it on the bum;  
An' he's sat on my back of injuns,  
An' stuck a hole in my drum;  
An' it ain't such fun at Christmas  
Since that there baby come.

But they needn't think they can "Santy"  
Him like they've "Santied" me;  
For I'm agoin' to tell him  
There ain't no Santy—gee!  
An' maybe he'll think he'd rather  
Go back to heaven—see?

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