

## MISS SINGLETON.

A Christmas Story.

"This coffee smells good," said Miss Singleton, at Mr. Spinwell's breakfast-table. "but smells is on common delectable. Jest last night as ever was, says I to Sarah Jane, 'Sarah Jane,' says I, 'things don't taste as they smells,' says I, 'or as the good Lord intended 'em to taste. He made the sand for the ostriches,' says I, 'but we poor feeble critters gits it in sugar an' spice an' meal' an' land knows what all, an' we has to swallow it whether or no. Them's my very self-same words, Mr. Spinwell, an' I don't take none on 'em back."

She playfully shook her head at him as she spoke. "Ah, you grocers," she exclaimed, "you grocers with your dreadful tricks!"

Mr. Spinwell's face grew dark with sudden anger, and with an impatient movement and a hastily-muttered excuse, he rose and left the room.

"Some folks air so techy!" remarked Miss Singleton, placidly stirring her third cup of coffee. "What did I say to send him off huffy-like? I said 'this coffee smells good,' and it does."

"Coffee seems a simple thing to make," said Mrs. Spinwell, "but it isn't."

"No, indeed!" added Malvina. "Indeed it isn't. Why, if your egg isn't perfectly—"

A little scream from Miss Singleton interrupted her. "Oh, oh!" she gasped, "oh, my dear Miss Spinwell, I have made such a blunder, such a dreadful blunder! Then you really do use an egg for setting?"

"Why, I made so sure 'twas only a bit of fish-skin, that I told Miss Rufus Grey you never used eggs in your coffee! Well, I must drop in tonight and tell her how you does."

"Don't forget to add that pa hurried down to the store to send a lot of new sugar that came in yesterday. Oh, yes!" with a laugh, "that was what sent him off in such a hurry. He can't trust his clerk to do that, you know. He might tell, sometime. It would be dangerous, you know."

Ignoring Malvina's explanation, Miss Singleton continued, "Poor Miss Grey! poor woman! she does hanker after some real coffee. 'Something you can't get in this town,' I tells her. 'You must live on the color and the smell,' I says. I think there must be a little coffee—a very little—in a pound, don't you, Miss Spinwell? But dear knows what the rest is!"

"Odds and ends of stuff that pa can't sell, probably," remarked Malvina, with heightened color. "Roasted and ground and mixed in at midnight; cinders and mouldy beans and musty flour and all such stuff."

"How you talk, Malvina!" said Miss Singleton. "Jest as techy as her pa, aint she, Miss Spinwell? Now I didn't say Mr. Spinwell sanded his sugar. No, indeed! Why, only yesterday, when Miss Ballard insinuated as much, I stopped her short off. 'Don't tell me what you think,' says I, 'for I saw there, and I'd be sure to let it out first thing before I could remember to stop myself, and, anyway, in a little bit of a town like this, that can't support but one grocer, why, we must jest take what we can get, my dear Miss Ballard. So don't tell me, I beg, when your butter is rancid! It's bad enough to hear Sister Sarah Jane's complaints of the quality of her groceries. An' I'm sure the Spinwells live on the fat of the land. I don't get no such bread and butter nowhere as I got there.' And no more I don't, Miss Spinwell."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Spinwell, faintly. "Shall I pour you another cup of coffee, Miss Singleton? Will you pass her the doughnuts, Malvina dear?"

"It's strange," said Miss Singleton meditatively, as she accepted a third doughnut, "how Miss Rogers can fry her doughnuts without lard."

"Without lard!" exclaimed Malvina. Then she bit her lip in vexation. How could she have been betrayed into such folly, she asked herself, indignantly. Since Miss Singleton was in a manner her guest, since she would not again answer her malicious words, she would at least preserve unbending frigidity of demeanor, she had determined.

"They say—folks tell me," responded the seamstress, "that she never has no soap-grease! 'Tries out every drop o' drippin's—and you know what mutton drippin's is, Miss Spinwell—and saves it up for pie-crust shortening, and for trying popovers and doughnuts. Well off as the Rogers be, too!"

"She doubtless prefers to buy her soap," replied Mrs. Spinwell.

"Well, now—yes, I don't care if I do take another doughnut, Malvina—there's another thing there's lots of cheatin' about. Catch me washin' my face with any of your boughten soap? If I can't have good home-made hard soap—good clean grease an' clean hardwood lye—to wash it with, why, then, I'll never wash it! Store soap! Why, it's made of the worst stuff! An' it wrinkles the skin terrible, Malvina!"

Malvina vouchsafed no reply, but her eyes twinkled with amusement as she noted the deep furrows Time had imprinted upon the face of the seamstress.

"Will you have another doughnut?" she presently asked.

"I guess not. I've dined my coffee clean dry. But I dunno as I care if I slip two or three in my pocket. I like something handy when I feel all gone. My poor stummin' dreadful weak lately. Sarah Jane says it's the poisons mixed in with the Lord's good providin's, and" with a long, deep-drawn sigh, "I reckon likely this."

At this insinuation, Malvina found it hard to suppress a stinging retort.

Miss Singleton now expressed a desire to begin her work, and in silence Malvina led the way to an upper chamber.

"Well," exclaimed the seamstress, "I ain't been in this room for eight year, an' I do declare your na's the very same lace on the pillow-slips, and the very same rag-carpet! Well, I'm beat! I s'posed they was wore out and sold to rag peddlers long ago. Eight year, why, let me see—eight—ten—twelve—yes! You're twenty-four year old, Malvina! And," tittering, "not married, and no sign of it, 'less it's the new minister, and he's that pleasant with everyone you can't tell nothing by him. I wouldn't think he meant anything by the pointedest attentions."

"Perhaps not," replied Malvina, icily, "but it is quite time to begin our work, Miss Singleton."

A trifle subdued, Miss Singleton took her place beside the quilting-frame.

"Sort o' hit-an'-miss," she began in a brisk voice, after a very brief silence, "yet not exactly hit-an'-miss, neither. Land sakes, it here aint your blue silk, Malvina Spinwell! Well, now, I'm powerful pleased to see it stripped up an' in the grab-bag quilt."

"You have wore it so long," she continued, as Malvina quitted in silence, "an' you're so sensible you won't mind my telling you that last time you wore it to church sociable, I heard someone say, 'You may know Miss Spinwell by the blue silk dress!' 'Poor soul!' thinks I, 'so other folks has noticed how awful long that dress has lasted!'"

Still Malvina quitted in silence. She would speak only when courtesy absolutely demanded it, she resolved.

"I could ha' sunk through the floor, I felt that mortified," continued Miss Singleton, "for," shooting a keen glance at her silent companion, "twere the parson himself who said it!"

"I don't believe it!" was the reply that rose from Malvina's heart, but she would not utter it.

"An' blue is sech a trying color for a girl unless she be clean pink and white. I can't think, I'm always saying to Sarah Jane, 'why 'tis that girls nowadays looks old so quick!'"

She glanced again at Malvina as she threaded her needle. "I guess the parson won't get many smiles the next time she sees him," she chuckled. But Malvina sewed on in silence. Soon, with a beaming, affable smile, Miss Singleton asked, "What dress'll you wear to Larson Livingstone's Christmas tree, Malvina?"

"My blue silk."

"Land o' the livin'! Why, Malvina Spinwell, you haint stripped up the old thing, then?"

"No."

"No," said her mother, entering the room, "she had two long breadths left the last time she altered the dress, so she gave them for the quilt. They look very nice, I think. Well, how are you getting on?"

"First rate; but I'm upst about that dress, I'm free to say."

"I promised to send the quilt to the vestry tomorrow afternoon," continued Mrs. Spinwell.

"It shall be finished," said Malvina.

"Don't worry, mother."

It was the afternoon before Christmas.

"I thought your presents had all been sent to the tree," said Mrs. Spinwell, as, dressed for the festival, she entered the sitting room and found her daughter sewing rapidly.

"This is another," replied Malvina.

"This also," touching a dainty handkerchief, "and both are for—guess?"

"I cannot. I thought you had remembered all your friends."

"For Miss Singleton!" and Malvina laughed at the surprise depicted on her mother's face.

"But—only last night—you—"

"Let me finish your sentence. Only last night I said Miss Singleton was a meddlesome, mischief-making, cantankerous old maid! Only last night I said she should never fit another dress for me. Yet I am at this moment nimbly making this violet plush handkerchief-case for her."

"I am glad, dear, that you feel differently now. She will be very much pleased with your gift."

"It is a peace-offering," said Malvina, gravely. "I—but never mind now, there is John at the door with the sleigh. Don't let him upset you in a snow-drift! I'll be there in an hour. Good-by—and don't tell Nettie Miles what I'm doing, for she'd be sure to come over and hinder me, and I must be there an hour from now. I must."

Toward the end of the evening Mrs. Spinwell sought momentary rest in a small parlor beyond the large room where the Christmas festivities were in progress.

She had not been long there when Miss Singleton bounced into the room and flung an armful of packages upon the sofa; then hurling herself upon the floor, she broke into a passion of sobs and moans, and excited and incoherent exclamations.

"Why, what has happened?" exclaimed Mrs. Spinwell.

"Oh, oh, oh! O that I should live to see my gray hair thus insulted! Oh, oh!"

"Come and take this chair," urged Mrs. Spinwell. "Come, and then tell me your trouble. Come, your hands are cold; come and sit here and warm them."

With a sudden jump Miss Singleton rose and clutched her parcels and seated herself by Mrs. Spinwell.

"Oh, oh! the wretch! the brute!" she began. And then, with a desperate attempt at calmness, she said, "Look! look at that box! Look at them bundles!"

Mrs. Spinwell glanced at them. "Well?" interregatively, "they are the wrappings of Christmas presents, I suppose?"

"Pretty Christmas presents! Christmas presents, indeed! Oh, when I find the wretch who sent 'em, he'll look pretty!"

"I am sorry," said Mrs. Spinwell. "Some one has sent you something you do not like, I suppose."

"Do not like!" and the irate seamstress' voice rose to a shrill shriek. "Do not like, indeed!"

It was doubtless, meant for a joke. I do not like jokes of that nature, but my dear Miss Singleton, we must make allowances for the exuberant spirits of young people, and endeavor to pardon—"

"I'll not pardon the one who played this joke!"

"You have not yet told me what it is."

"Look!" said Miss Singleton, holding up a brown paper parcel, "do you see that? Well, that box held five of them parcels, and what do you think is in them? Oh, I'll fix him! He'll rue this!"

"Have you opened all?"

"Every one! Just as quick as the box was handed me, an' I see the outside mark."

"Not to be opened here,—jest so quick I darted into the pantry an' opened every single parcel!"

"And they held—nothing?"

"Nothing!" I wish they'd held that idly's brains! I'd ha' dashed 'em into a red-hot stove quicker'n a wink! Nothing!" she repeated, scornfully. "Well, (for I'm in a hurry to go out an' hold that wretch up to public scorn) this one was marked, 'Sugar.' 'Sugar!' thinks I, 'Some one knows I'd like a mouthful of sugar that wasn't all sand!'"

Mrs. Spinwell's cheeks grew hot as she listened, but she forced herself to say calmly and pleasantly, "I hope it was nice sugar, Miss Singleton."

"'Twa'n't! 'twa'n't! sugar at all! 'Twas jest coarse yellow sand!"

"Sand?" faintly.

"Yes! An' the one marked 'Coffee'—what was that? A mess o' dried-up moss an' peas an' beans an' land knows what!"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Spinwell.

"An'," waxing more and more vehement in voice and gesture, "the one marked 'Butter' was jest a big hunk o' taller, an' rancid taller at that! Well, the fourth one was marked 'Soap'; an' 'twixt you an' me, Miss Spinwell, I calculated give it to Miss Rogers, seeing as she gave me that handsome gray alpaca last Christmas, though I always suspected as she picked it up at one o' them big bargain sales down to the city. But I thought 'twould be a delicate hint as well as a nice present, seeing as folks says she uses up all her soap-grease for pie-shortenin' 'stead o' lard, an' I never mistrusted there'd be cheating about soap. Such a nice present as 'twould ha' made," mournfully.

"It wasn't soap, then?"

"Soap!" in a high key. "Broken bits o' taller candles an' rosin an' beeswax done up in six different wrappings—that's what it was! The wretch, the insultin', on-feelin' wretch!"

"What was the last one?"

"Well," lowering her voice to a tragic whisper, "it wasn't marked, an' quicker'n a wink it flashed on me 'twas dynamite! 'He don't like the parson's threats at rum-drinking an' blow-selling,' thinks I, 'an' so he's going to rum-me an' the parson sky-high!'"

"What made you open it, if you thought that? It was very careless, Miss Singleton."

"Open it! Didn't I want to know what was in it, even if it did go off next minute? Well, it wa'n't dynamite! 'Twas jest a mess o' broken egg-shells an' mouldy cod-fish-skin, long strips! Where be they? I'll twist some 'o 'em round his neck 'fore I'm done with him—the onfeelin', cantankerous savage!" With these words Miss Singleton grasped her bundles and darted toward the door.

"Stop! Don't go! Let me call Malvina."

"Melvina! 'Spose I'd shock Malvina after the beautiful presents she give me? I won't say nothing to shock her, Miss Spinwell, but I've a deal to say to him! The wretch! the villain! He'll cringe 'fore I'm done with him!"

But as she precipitated herself into the audience room, she encountered a thick smoke, and heard a tumult of excited voices.

"Fire! Fire!" she shrilly shouted as she perceived the Christmas tree blazing.

"Fire! Fire! We're all on fire! Folks and trees an' presents! Fire! Fire!"

Dearly d d Miss Singleton love a sensation, but, greatly to her dismay, she presently heard the minister request the people to return to their homes. A few buckets of water had quenched the sudden blaze, but a dense smoke still filled the room. Fuming at this unexpected turn of affairs, and at the enforced delay it caused her, Miss Singleton departed. She found some consolation, however, in recounting the events of the evening to her sister.

"Seems as if that tree caught a-fire jest to save him an' spite me," she concluded. "But I'll ferret him out! I haint done with him, Sarah Jane!"

"I'd take Miss Spinwell's advice, Lucinda Maria, it was you."

"Why?"

"Likely 'tis a joke," said Sarah Jane. "Mebbe some one's heard you rummin' on 'bout things bein' fermented an' sanded an' spiled, an' played a trick on you to pay ter it. Seems likely to me, Lucinda."

Vouchsafing no reply, Miss Singleton bounced noisily from the room, but at the breakfast table she resumed the conversation.

"You don't know nothing about it, Sarah Jane," she declared, "an' I wouldn't never sit up to insinuate things as I didn't know it, I was you. 'Spose I hev said things was contrary to the Lord's intentions, what o' that? Spinwell's the only grocer there be, an' 'twa'n't him nor she. An' as for Malvina, she give me two extry presents, an' her head's jest completely turned by the parson, though he don't mean nothing at all, so 'twa'n't him' an' so you see you don't know nothing 'bout it, Sarah Jane."

"There! I clean forgot!" said Sarah Jane.

"There's a letter on the shelf as Spinwell's boy letched 'fore you came down. Hime 'tis."

"From Malvina. Miss Spinwell wants me to come to dinner, likely. Well, I'll go."

"I thought you were going to Miss Ballard's."

"Miss Spinwell will have the best dinner, so I'll go there," calmly replied Miss Singleton, as she opened the note.

Then, with a shrill cry, "It were her! it were Malvina! Asks my pardon, humph! Says she'd 'a' taken 'em off the tree if she hadn't been belated. Belated! Who belated her, I wonder? Parson Livingstone, likely! Ha! ha!"

Of the truth of her random remark, Miss Singleton was speedily convinced. For the note ran:

Dear Miss Singleton:—I have a confession to make—an apology also, and a bit of news for you. It was I who sent you the box! I did it, because I was angry at the things you had said about pa's groceries; but afterwards I was sorry, very sorry, and so I sent the other presents, and I intended to take the box from the tree, but I was late in getting there, and had no opportunity. I hope you will pardon it; it was unkind, I know, but I tried to make amends, although I was too late to prevent your suffering. You must forget it, dear Miss Singleton, for—and this is my bit of news—I am, sometime, to be your minister's wife, and with your help I can never be married, you know. So come and dine with us today and tell me that you will forget it. With kindest Christmas wishes. MALVINA.

"A very pretty letter," said Sarah Jane, as Miss Singleton, in grim silence, folded and refolded it, "and a handsome apology, Lucinda Maria."

"A pretty minister's wife she'll make, with her tantrums and her tempers an' her sly, onfeelin' tricks!" screamed Miss Singleton. "And I don't believe a word of it! I haint never seen no love-making, Sarah Jane."

"Well, now, I kinder mistrusted it long time ago."

"Poor man! poor man!" shaking her head mournfully, "I don't believe it! Poor man! poor man! That minx—that sly, artful minx! Pass me a glass of water, Sarah Jane! Haint a word of it true! Jest hand me out my bonnet, Sarah Jane, and my best cloak."

"Pears to me if I didn't believe it I wouldn't be in sech a powerful hurry to gab about an' tell folks," commented Sarah Jane. Nevertheless, she assisted her sister

in her hurried toilet, and voluntarily produced her best lavender kid gloves for the momentous occasion. And as she watched Miss Singleton walk briskly down the street, she said to herself, "Malvina Spinwell couldn't ha' made Lucinda Maria no handsomer Christmas present than this, an' she knowed it, I expects. She knowed Lucinda Maria would rather be the first one to spread the news than to hev the stiffest black silk gown as money could buy."

And could Malvina in spirit have followed Miss Singleton in her triumphal progress from house to house, she, too, would have been assured of the pardon, which later, the lady graciously accorded her. "But I must make one condition," she added.

"And that?" questioned Malvina. "Your old, worn-out blue silk! You must promise that you won't make over that old thing."

"I promise," said Malvina, with a happy laugh.—*Transcript Monthly.*

## THE ARIZONA KICKER.

A Fresh Batch of Interesting Items from the Land of Cactus, Sagebrush and Sand.

We extract the following interesting items from the last issue of the Arizona Kicker:—

ONE LESS.—We know of one Indian who won't gamble along the flowery war-path any more to speak of. We refer to Lay-Down-And-Roll-Over-On-The-Grass, otherwise known as Big Jim. He was helping himself to a mule from Thompson's corral the other night, when one of the herdsmen killed him so dead that he didn't have time to pull in his tongue. As usual, most of the funeral expenses had to come out of our pocket, although he was not our meat.

GETTING MONOTONOUS.—Some one in Omaha is selling off land in this neighborhood for gardens and pasturage, and every day or two a tenderfoot shows up to take possession. He finds the land to belong to the government, and to be composed as follows:

Cactus.....18  
Sage brush.....18  
Sand.....64

In five different cases our private graveyard has been included in sales, putting us to considerable trouble and expense to hold it. We are getting rather tired of this sort of thing, and the next pilgrim who comes along and takes that graveyard for a cattle range, of which he is the sole owner, has got to skip at the word, or made the tenth man sleeping under the sands.

WE APOLOGIZE.—The editor, owner, publisher and proprietor of the thing called "Our Contemporary" was driven frantic with jealousy because we were able to order and pay for three bundles of paper at once. We happened to meet him in Bonney's hardware store Tuesday afternoon, where he was dickering for a grind-stone to use as a balance-wheel on his "only steam press," and he boiled over and called us a liar. We hope he can be patched up, sewed together and saved from the grave, though the latest reports are discouraging. We didn't mean to. If he only will get well he may abuse us the rest of his natural life, and we won't say a word.

IT'S OUR WAY.—We understand that Judge Rich feels very bitterly towards us because we said in *The Kicker* last week that he got only his just deserts in the row with Maj. Baldwin. It's our way to state facts. The two gentlemen were disputing as to the color of a jack-rabbit's eye. The major was the soul of good nature until the judge pulled his nose. We stood close by and saw it all, and distinctly heard the "spat" of the bullet as it struck the judge in the shoulder. The fact Maj. Baldwin subscribes for five copies of *The Kicker*, while Judge Rich won't have it in the house, does not bias us in the least. We say that when a man pulls another man's nose in malice he should be prepared for the worst. If the judge was not prepared it was his own fault. He is bragging that he will serve our nasal organ in the same way before the year 1891. Judge, don't you try it—not unless you are tired of this vain world and want to go hence!—*Free Press.*

## One Way to Be Blessed.

"You dear old blessed!" exclaimed Mrs. Soltau, when her husband handed her a fine pair of diamond ear-rings for a Christmas gift.

"Why do you call me blessed?" asked Soltau.

"Because it is more blessed to give than to receive."—*Puck.*

## Its Whereabouts.

He—Hello! I wonder where my hat has gone? She (glancing at the clock)—It must have gone home.—*Ez.*

## Lookin' Back'ards.

I wisht I was at school again, A-rumpin' like I use to do 'Til Matt, an' George, an' Johnny, too, An' all the rest o' that young crew— 'At use to play an' 'la' haff day— I wisht I was at school again!

Instid o' climbin' on to ten An' two-score years, 'till hair es gray Es nor east clouds sun winter day ('At sort o' gives a chap away), It seems to me I'd rubber be A-trottin' off to school again!

The school-house, with its gaber end A-pittin' to the road, jes' seems To raise afore me now, when gleams O' them ole days cums back in dreams, An' 'twa'n't years to keep me in sleep An' trottin' off to school again!

Gether yer slate an' books, 'an then Mother 'ud take to work an' spread A slice or two of old-time bread 'Til cranb'ry jam—an' then a red Apple or two for me an' you— I wisht I was at school again!

'An then the times we use to spend, When school was closed, out in the wood A getherin' the nuts 'at strewed 'Til cranb'ry jam—an' then a red Apple or two for me an' you— I wisht I was at school again!

The years is big 'till change since when We walked togeth' down the road From school—ah! little then I knowed What 'twa'n't years to keep me in sleep An' trottin' off to school again!

I wisht I was at school again, It seems almost a hundred years, A cenchery o' sighs an' tears, Since that girl-sweetheart dropped her keers An' breathed a sigh an' said "Good-bye!" I wisht—I wisht—at school again.

—K. C. Topley, in Judge.

**ALL START ALIKE!**

All declare when Xmas is thought of, that we will not buy any presents this year. But you will, when you see

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PITH, 12th February, 1890.

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