The Plum Pudding

By MARY GRAHAM BONNER

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MARIAN had never before cooked at all to speak of until she had married Bert that summer.

She had made a great success of it, but she was a little nervous afterward when she realized that she had invited all of Bert's family and near relatives for a Christmas dinner. And that they had all accepted.

"Now Marian dear," Bert had said, "just have a simple dinner. Don't bother about the frills. Our ordinary Sunday dinner will do beautifully. Anyone who gets our usual Sunday dinner is getting a fine meal."



"Well, I guess that is about all I can do—and for so many, too," Marian said.

"You're a wonder to attempt it," Bert said admiringly. "But don't think you have to overdo it."

For days and days Marian planned her Christmas dinner. She salted nuts, she made cranberry sauce. She ordered a fine young turkey. She wasn't nervous about the turkey—that was just about as easy as chicken.

Yes, she was planning to have the old-time Christmas dinner. She wouldn't tell Bert. She would surprise him. And then, if she did tell him, she might be more nervous about the things she had planned to do, feeling that he was going to be so proud of her that she couldn't fulfill his expectations of her success.

So she worked and planned and schemed.

And that Christmas eve when Bert kissed her good-night she smiled to herself as she heard him say:

"Well, it's quite true. People have always eaten too much at Christmas time in past years."

Bert's family all arrived in due season for Christmas dinner.

"Well, were you nervous over your first turkey?" asked Aunt Emilina. And how happy Marian was that she could say that she hadn't been nervous and that it was going to come out all right, she thought.

"I bet it was a job making your first plum pudding," said Uncle George, and Bert looked angry and grieved. He didn't want anyone to make his Marian feel uncomfortable. And now his own family were doing it.

"Uncle George," Bert said, "we meant to tell you. We're not going to have one of those old-time dinners. We think that people have always felt wretchedly at Christmas, and after Christmas—indigestion and all. So we're just going to have a nice simple dinner."

Marian had left the room now. But she could hear the defending note in Bert's voice, and at the same time a note of sadness that their dinner was going to be so simple.

She wanted to rush in now and tell them all that it wouldn't be so simple, and to put her arms around Bert's neck and kiss him. He was standing up for her. And they were all trying to be critical. And she had invited them all to her house. This was the way they were accepting her hospitality!

"But, following a number more similar remarks on how did she get along with her mince pie, and did she burn herself salting the nuts, she at last announced that dinner was quite ready.



Admiringly, increasingly admiringly, the guests ate and ate and ate. There was nothing that had ever been a part of a Christmas dinner that Marian did not have.

And Bert grew prouder and more boastful of her by the moment! How Bert loved to boast of what she could do!

At last came the dessert—mince pie and apple pie and plum pudding, too. How Bert's eyes opened wide with surprise when he saw the pudding.

"What did you mean when you said you were going to have a new kind of a dinner without any of the Christmas trimmings?" asked Uncle George.

"My wife likes surprises," Bert beamed. And after they had all gone, Bert said:

"They behaved atrociously, but oh! How proud I was of you. And Marian darling—"

"Yes, dear?"

"The plum pudding was the best that has ever been served at any Christmas dinner at any time I know."

"I think it was a success," Marian smiled.

Christmas Wedding Bells

By MARY GRAHAM BONNER

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ELIZABETH had always, it is true, admired Howard. He was so faithful and good and reliable. He had been good to his mother and his sister. Everyone knew he would be good to a wife, and they all knew, too, that he wanted Elizabeth for his wife.

"You're foolish not to take him," they said. "We all know you have the opportunity to do so every time he goes to see you. We would wager he'd proposed any number of times."

"I don't know about that," Elizabeth would laugh. They could get nothing out of her.

Once some of them spoke to Howard.

"We wish you two would get married. We're tired of seeing you courting all the time."

Howard smiled.

"It's up to Elizabeth," he said.

One woman spoke to Elizabeth one day in a very serious fashion.

"The trouble with you," the woman said, "is that you've always had so much attention. Not only Howard, but everyone has been charmed by you, and you think that will go on to the end of time. You'll find it won't. They'll stop, and then, where will you be?"

"I don't want to be married so as to escape being an old maid," Elizabeth laughed. "I've seen too many happy ones to be afraid. What's



more—I think a lot more of a person who is faithful to someone they've loved than to marry for the sake of marrying. Lots of the "old maids" are that. Some of the married ones have been so afraid they'd be thought unpopular and unwanted that they've married out of sheer cowardice."

This was very puzzling. Had Elizabeth loved someone in her earlier days—perhaps when she had gone away on a visit? No one knew. But everyone was puzzled. So much puzzled that they asked no more questions. They stopped telling her she should marry Howard. They stopped telling her what a wonderful husband he would make, and how much he loved her.

They were speculating on which visit it could have been when the tragedy occurred. And had the mysterious man married or had he been already married and so Elizabeth, as a nice, quiet girl had quickly taken herself home and out of the way?

It was snowing hard. Elizabeth was getting together her Christmas presents when the door bell rang. Outside stood Howard.

"I thought perhaps you'd not mind if I went with you when you took around the presents," he said. "I knew it was just about your time."

How lovely it was outside. The snow was falling, the air was so clear and cool, and here was Howard, so



straight and tall, his face glowing with health, his eyes so clear, so keen and so devoted. It made even the cold, crisp air seem warm and soft and affectionate.

They had delivered the presents and were now passing the small church. Inside someone was practicing on the organ. That was doubtless the organist practicing for the music for the service in the morning. There was much beautiful music always for Christmas! So many wonderful hymns, and such an atmosphere about it all.

"I wish," Howard said, "that he'd stop practicing the Christmas music and play us a wedding march."

"Perhaps he would," said Elizabeth.

"Do you mean it?" Howard shouted.

"Oh yes, my dear, of course I mean it. You've not said a word about marrying the last four times I've seen you and I've been about to do it myself. The people—they tried to keep me from seeing how wonderful you were by talking about you, making you what they saw in you—not giving me a chance to see for myself."

The organist played the wedding march. The clergyman came over hurriedly to marry them, bringing two witnesses with him.

"The Christmas bells and the wedding bells are joining together for us," Howard said a little later.

They took the basket which had had the presents in it back home. Then they announced to all the people what they had done.

"Merrie Christmas!" everyone wished them. But Elizabeth answered, "We don't need to be wished 'Merrie Christmas,' but we thank you all just the same!"

An Unasked-for Gift

By MARY GRAHAM BONNER

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MR. LOUIS ROTH had become a money-maker. Mrs. Louis missed doing her own work. She liked to do the darning. She was nervous in a motor-car, and a chauffeur depressed her. She had tried having one once, but she not only felt like a fool when she "dolled up," as she expressed it, but she was frightened when she saw the chauffeur's look of disgust when she told him she had no calls to make and no shopping to do except to the corner store.

She didn't care about going to a smart hotel for tea in the afternoon. Now and again she liked to have a "bite" in a pastry shop.

Louis was a musician. He was one of the most popular of dance conductors. He made money from royalties on his popular songs—a great deal of money. She had been often told that musicians were temperamental flirts. But the ones she had seen were not. They liked cigars and pinochle and fat checks. That wasn't so temperamental. Neither was there anything temperamental about the music publishers and the friends of Louis who came in of an evening for cheese and crackers.

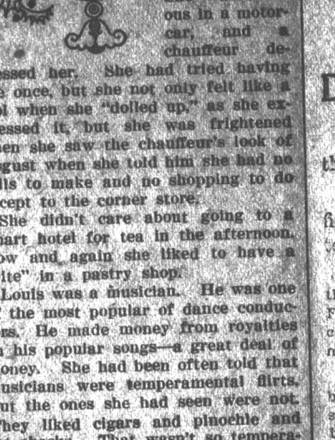
She was nervous when the maid broke dishes, though she knew there was lots of money to buy more. She was naturally a careful housekeeper, and the money had come a little too late or else she was one of the rare kind who couldn't spend it! Very rare, but not at all pleasant.

When she went to shows she fell asleep. She longed to dust behind corners and under the rungs of chairs. She loved to bake a good cake.

But prosperity was hers, and she didn't want to let Louis know how hard it was for her to be prosperous.

He came in this time when Mrs. Louis was sitting stringing corn for the little tree she had bought. It was Christmas eve.

Louis was very evidently excited. He asked his wife to come into the little bedroom so no one would hear. Louis hadn't become used to talking before a maid. His wife noticed that



"It's Going to Be Hard on You," He Said.

he looked rather worried and troubled.

"What's the matter?" A sharp thrill of pleasure went through her. Perhaps he had speculated, lost his money in Wall street, or on the curb. So many people did, she had been told.

Louis would be poor and she would darn his socks and get his meals, and they'd live in the old flat and keep the cozy red plush furniture. Louis had been talking lately of moving to better quarters.

He took her hands in his. "It's going to be hard on you," he said.

"Oh, no," she answered, trying to repress the exultant note in her voice, "I'll be glad—"

She was about to tell him how oppressive the riches had been, how they had almost suffocated her. How much happier she would be to have to save money, rather than try to spend it for Louis' sake, to make him feel she enjoyed it.

"Wifey," he said finally, "they want me to tour Europe. It's a great chance. There's big money in it, and the boys all want to go with me. Do you suppose, wifey, I know you're awful seasick, and a poor traveler." His face looked worried. "But do you suppose you could stand the seasickness and all, for I'd be so lonesome leaving you home? They want me so much—and they know I wouldn't want to go without you—that they're going to pay your expenses and make that a little Christmas present for you!"

She gave a look at the beloved red plush furniture. Would there never be any rest from prosperity? Her fate was sealed.

"I guess I could stand it, Louis," she said bravely. But in her heart there was hopelessness. Money, Europe, riches and more riches, a limousine future and a street car soul! And a Christmas present of such a trip! And she, alas, would have so much preferred a street car ride and a sewing basket from the boys such as they had given her that first Christmas after she had married Louis, when they hadn't been rich!



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