A group of people in a dark room

Description automatically generatedTHE CONVERSION OF HETHERINGTON

I

Hetherington wasn't half a bad sort of a fellow, but he had his

peculiarities, most of which were the natural defects of a lack of

imagination. He didn't believe in ghosts, or Santa Claus, or any of the

thousands of other things that he hadn't seen with his own eyes, and as

he walked home that rather chilly afternoon just before Christmas and

found nearly every corner of the highway decorated with bogus Saints,

wearing the shoddy regalia of Kris-Kringle, the sight made him a trifle

irritable. He had had a fairly good luncheon that day, one indeed that

ought to have mellowed his disposition materially, but which somehow or

other had not so resulted. In fact, Hetherington was in a state of raspy

petulance that boded ill for his digestion, and when he had reached the

corner of Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue, the constant iteration

and reiteration of these shivering figures of the god of the Yule had

got on his nerves to such an extent as to make him aggressively

quarrelsome. He had controlled the asperities of his soul tolerably well

on the way uptown, but the remark of a small child on the highway, made

to a hurrying mother, as they passed a stalwart-looking replica of the

idol of his Christmas dreams, banging away on a tambourine to attract

attention to the iron pot before him, placed there to catch the pennies

of the charitably inclined wayfarer--"Oh, mar, there's Sandy Claus

now!"--was too much for him.

"Tush! Nonsense!" ejaculated Hetherington, glowering at the shivering

figure in the turkey-red robe. "The idea of filling children's minds up

with such balderdash! Santa Claus, indeed! There isn't a genuine Santa

Claus in the whole bogus bunch."

The Saint on the corner banged his tambourine just under Hetherington's

ear with just enough force to jar loose the accumulated irascibility of

the well-fed gentleman.

"This is a fine job for an able-bodied man like you!" said Hetherington

with a sneer. "Why don't you go to work instead of helping to perpetuate

this annual fake?"

The Saint looked at him for a moment before replying.

"Speakin' to me?" he said.

"Yes. I'm speaking to you," said Hetherington. "Here's the whole country

perishing for the lack of labor, and in spite of that fact this town has

broken out into a veritable rash of fake Santa Clauses--"

"That'll do for you!" retorted Santa Claus. "It's easy enough for a

feller with a stomach full o' victuals and plenty of warm clothes on

his back to jump on a hard-workin' feller like me--"

"Hard-working?" echoed Hetherington. "I like that! You don't call

loafing on a street corner this way all day long hard work, do you?"

He rather liked the man's spirit, despite his objection to his

occupation.

"Suppose you try it once and find out," retorted Santa Claus, blowing on

his bluish fingers in an effort to restore their clogged-up circulation.

"I guess if you tried a job like this just once, standin' out in the

cold from eight in the mornin' to ten at night, with nothin' but a cup

o' coffee and a ham-sandwich inside o' you--"

"What's that?" cried Hetherington, aghast. "Is that all you've had to

eat to-day?"

"That's all," said the Saint, as he turned to his work with the

tambourine. "Try it once, mister, and maybe you won't feel so cock-sure

about its not bein' work. If you're half the sport you think you are

just take my place for a couple of hours."

An appeal to his sporting instinct was never lost on Hetherington.

"By George!" he cried. "I'll go you. I'll swap coats with you, and while

you're filling your stomach up I'll take your place, all right."

"What'll I fill me stomach up with?" demanded the man. "I don't look

like a feller with a meal-ticket in his pocket, do I?"

"I'll take care of that," said Hetherington, taking out a roll of bills

and peeling off a two-dollar note from the outside. "There--you take

that and blow yourself, and I'll take care of the kitty here till you

come back."

The exchange of externals was not long in accomplishment. The gathering

of the shadows of night made it a comparatively easy matter to arrange

behind a conveniently stalled and heavily laden express wagon hard by,

and in a few moments the irascible but still "sporty" Hetherington, who

from childhood up to the present had never been able to take a dare,

found himself banging away on a tambourine and incidentally shivering in

the poor red habiliments of a fraudulent Saint. For a half-hour the

novelty of his position gave him a certain thrill, and no Santa Claus in

town that night fulfilled his duties more vociferously than did

Hetherington; but as time passed on, and the chill of a windy corner

began to penetrate his bones, to say nothing of the frosty condition of

his ears, which his false cotton whiskers but indifferently protected,

he began to tire of his bargain.

"Gosh!" he muttered to himself, as it began to snow, and certain passing

truckmen hurled the same kind of guying comments at him as had been more

or less in his mind whenever he had passed a fellow-Santa-Claus on his

way up-town, "if General Sherman were here he'd find a twin-brother to

War! I wish that cuss would come back."

He gazed eagerly up and down the street in the hope that the departed

original would heave in sight, but in vain. A two-dollar meal evidently

possessed attractions that he wished to linger over.

"Can't stand this much longer!" he muttered to himself, and then his eye

caught sight of a group that filled his soul with dismay: two policemen

and the struggling figure of one who appeared to have looked not wisely

but too well upon the cup that cheers, the latter wearing Hetherington's

overcoat and Hetherington's hat, but whose knees worked upon hinges of

their own, double-back-action hinges that made his legs of no use

whatsoever, either to himself or to anybody else.

"Hi there!" Hetherington cried out, as the group passed up the street on

the way to the station-house. "That fellow's got my overcoat--"

But the only reply Hetherington got was a sturdy poke in the ribs from

the night-stick of the passing officer.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" growled Hetherington.

II

Ten minutes later a passing taxi was hailed by a shivering gentleman

carrying an iron pot full of pennies and nickels and an occasional

quarter in one hand, and a turkey-red coat, trimmed with white cotton

cloth, thrown over his arm. Strange to say, considering the inclemency

of the night, he wore neither a hat nor an overcoat.

"Where to, sir?" queried the chauffeur.

"The police-station," said Hetherington. "I don't know where it is, but

the one in this precinct is the one I want."

"Ye'll have to pay by the hour to-night, sir," said the chauffeur. "The

station ain't a half-mile away, sir, but Heaven knows how long it'll

take us to get there."

"Charge what you please," retorted Hetherington. "I'll buy your darned

old machine if it's necessary, only get a move on."

The chauffeur, with some misgivings as to the mental integrity of his

fare, started on their perilous journey, and three-quarters of an hour

later drew up in front of the police-station, where Hetherington, having

been compelled in self-defense to resume the habiliments of Santa Claus

under penalty of freezing, alighted.

"Just wait, will you?" he said, as he alighted from the cab.

"I'll go in with you," said the chauffeur, acting with due caution. He

had begun to fear that there was a fair chance of his having trouble

getting his fare out of a very evident lunatic.

Utterly forgetful of his appearance in his festal array, Hetherington

bustled into the station, and shortly found himself standing before the

sergeant behind the desk.

"Well, Santa Claus," said the official, with an amused glance at the

intruder, "what can I do for you to-night? There ain't many rooms with a

bath left."

Hetherington flushed. He had intended to greet the sergeant with his

most imposing manner, but this turkey-red abomination on his back had

thrust dignity out in the cold.

"I have come, officer," he said, as impressively as he could under the

circumstances, "to make some inquiries concerning a man who was brought

here about an hour ago--I fear in a state of intoxication."

"We have known such things to happen here, Santa," said the officer,

suavely. "In fact, this blotter here seems to indicate that one George

W. Hetherington, of 561 Fifth Avenue--"

"Who?" roared Hetherington.

"George W. Hetherington is the name on the blotter," said the sergeant;

"entered first as a D. D., but on investigation found to be suffering

from--"

"But that's my name!" cried Hetherington. "You don't mean to tell me he

claimed to be George W. Hetherington?"

"No," said the sergeant. "The poor devil didn't make any claims for

himself at all. We found that name on a card in his hat, and a letter

addressed to the same name in his overcoat pocket. Puttin' the two

together we thought it was a good enough identification."

"Well, I'll have you to understand, sergeant--" bristled Hetherington,

cockily.

"None o' that, Santa Claus--none o' that!" growled the sergeant, leaning

over the desk and eying him coldly. "I don't know what game you're up

to, but just one more peep in that tone and there'll be two George W.

Hetheringtons in the cooler this night."

Hetherington almost tore the Santa Claus garb from his shoulders, and

revealed himself as a personage of fine raiment underneath, whatever he

might have appeared at a superficial glance. As he did so a crumpled

piece of paper fell to the floor from the pocket of the turkey-red coat.

"I don't mean to do anything but what is right, sergeant," he said,

controlling his wrath, "but what I do want is to impress it upon your

mind that \_I\_ am George W. Hetherington, and that having my name spread

on the blotter of a police court isn't going to do me any good. I

loaned that fellow my hat and coat to get a square meal, while I took

his place--"

The officer grinned broadly, but with no assurance in his smile that he

believed.

"Oh, you may not believe it," said Hetherington, "but it's true, and if

this thing gets into the papers to-morrow morning--"

"Say, Larry," said the sergeant, addressing an officer off duty, "did

the reporters copy that letter we found in Hetherington's pocket?"

"Reporters?" gasped Hetherington. "Good Lord, man--yuh-you don't

mum-mean to say yuh-you let the reporters--"

"No, chief," replied Larry. "They ain't been in yet--I t'ink ye shoved

it inter yer desk."

"So I did, so I did," grinned the sergeant. Here he opened the drawer in

front of him and extracted a pretty little blue envelope which

Hetherington immediately recognized as a particularly private and

confidential communication from--well, somebody. This is not a \_cherchez

la femme\_ story, so we will leave the lady's name out of it altogether.

It must be noted, however, that a sight of that dainty missive in the

great red fist of the sergeant gave Hetherington a heart action that

fifty packages of cigarettes a day could hardly inflict upon a less

healthy man.

"That's the proof--" cried Hetherington, excitedly. "If that don't

prove it's my overcoat nothing will."

"Right you are, Santa Claus," said the sergeant, opening the envelope

and taking out the delicately scented sheet of paper within. "I'll give

you two guesses at the name signed to this, and if you get it right once

I'll give you the coat, and Mr. Hetherington Number One in our evening's

consignment of Hetheringtons gets re-christened."

"'Anita'!" growled Hetherington.

"You win!" said the sergeant, handing over the letter.

Hetherington drew a long sigh of relief.

"I guess this is worth cigars for the house, sergeant," he said. "I'll

send 'em round to-morrow--meanwhile, how about--how about the other?"

"He's gone to the hospital," said the sergeant, grimly. "The doctor says

he wasn't drunk--just another case of freezing starvation."

"Starvation? And I guyed him! Great God!" muttered Hetherington to

himself.

III

"Narrow escape, Mr. Hetherington," said the sergeant. "Ought to be a

lesson to you sports. What was your game, anyhow?"

"Oh, it wasn't any game--" began Hetherington.

"Huh! Just a case of too much lunch, eh?" said the officer. "You'd had

as much too much as the other feller'd had too little--that it?"

"No," said Hetherington. "Just a general lack of confidence in my

fellow-men, plus a cussed habit of butting into matters that aren't any

of my business; but I'm glad I butted in, just the same, if I can be of

any earthly use to that poor devil of a Santa Claus. Do you suppose

there's any way to find out who he is?"

"Well, we've made a good start, anyhow," said the sergeant. "We've found

out who he isn't. When he comes to in the mornin', if he does, maybe

he'll be able to help us identify him."

"To-morrow!" murmured Hetherington. "And who knows but he's got a family

waiting for him somewhere right now, and as badly off as he is."

"Ye dropped this, sir," said Larry, the officer off duty. "It come out

of the red coat--mebbe it'll help--"

He handed Hetherington the crumpled piece of paper that had fallen to

the floor when he tore Santa Claus's cloak from his back. It was sadly

dirty, but on one side of it was a childish scrawl in pencil.

Hetherington ran over it rapidly, and gulped.

"Read that, sergeant!" he said, huskily.

The sergeant read the following:

"DEAR SANDY CLORS:--my Popper says hell hand you this here leter

when he sees you to ast you not to fergit me and jimmy like you

did last yeer. you aint been to see me an jimmy since popper

lost his Jobb and he says its becoz you lost our adres so ime

ritin to tell you weve moved since you come the lass time and am

now livin now on the Topp flor of fore 69 varrick streete noo

york which youd ort not to find it hard to git down the chimbley

bein on the topp flor closte to the roofe so i thort ide rite

and tell you what me and jimmyd like to hav you bring us wenn

you come. I nede some noo shues and a hatt and my lasst dol

babys all wore out and sum candy if you can work it in sumhow,

not havin had much since popper lost his jobb, and jimmies only

gott one mitt left and his shues is wore throo like mine is only

a little worser, and a baseball batt and hed like sum candy to.

if there wass anything lefft ovvur for us from lass crissmis

wich you dident kno ware to find us to giv it to us we wuddent

mind havin that two but you needent mind about that if its

misslayde we can git along all rite all rite on whot ive sed

alreddy. ime leven and jimmies nine and we hope youl hav a mery

crismiss like wede hav if youd come to see us.

"yure efexinite frend mary muligan.

"p. s dont fergit the adres topp flor 469 varrick strete noo

york. take back chimbley middel floo."

"I'm sorry to say, Mr. Hetherington," said the sergeant, clearing his

throat with vociferous unction, "that the town's full of Mary and Jimmie

Mulligans--but, anyhow, I guess this is good enough evidence for me to

scratch out your name and enter the record under James Mulligan."

"Thank you, sergeant," said Hetherington, gratefully. "And it's good

enough evidence for me that this town needs a Santa Claus a blooming

sight more than I thought it did. What time is it?"

"Seven-thirty," replied the sergeant.

"Good!" said Hetherington. "Shops don't close till ten--I guess I've got

time. Good night--see you first thing in the morning. Come along,

chauffeur, I'll need you for some time yet."

"Good night, Mr. Hetherington," said the sergeant. "Where are you bound

in case I need you any time?"

"Me?" said Hetherington with a grin, "why, my address is 561 Fifth

Avenue, but just now I'm off to do my Christmas shopping early."

And resuming possession of his own hat and overcoat, and taking the

Santa Claus costume under his arm, Hetherington passed out, the

chauffeur following.

"These New York sports is a queer bunch!" said the sergeant as

Hetherington disappeared.

IV

At half-past nine down-town was pretty well deserted, which made it easy

for the chauffeur of a certain red taxi-cab to make fairly good time

down Broadway; and when at nine-forty-five the panting mechanism drew up

before the grim walls of a brick tenement, numbered 469 Varick Street,

the man on the box was commendably proud of his record.

"That was goin' some, sir," he said, with a broad grin on his face. "I

don't believe it's ever been done quicker outside o' the fire

department."

"I don't believe it has, old man," said Hetherington as he alighted.

"Now if you'll help me up-stairs with these packages and that basket

there, we'll bring this affair to a grand-stand finish."

The two men toiled slowly up the stairs, Hetherington puffing somewhat

with the long climb; and when finally they had reached the top floor he

arrayed himself in the once despised garb of Santa Claus again. Then he

knocked at the door. The answer was immediate. A white-faced woman

opened the door.

"Jim!" she cried. "Is it you?"

"No, madam," replied Hetherington. "It's a friend of Jim's. Fact is,

Mrs. Mulligan, Jim has--"

"There's nothin' happened to Jim, has there?" she interrupted.

"Nothing at all, madam, nothing at all," said Hetherington. "The work

was a little too much for him to-day--that's all--and he keeled over.

He's safe, and comfortable in the--well, they took him to the hospital,

but don't you worry--he'll be all right in a day or two, and meanwhile

I'm going to look after you and the kiddies."

The chauffeur placed the basket inside the door.

"You'll find a small turkey, and some--er--some fixings in it, Mrs.

Mulligan," said Hetherington. "Whatever ought to go with a turkey should

be there, and--er--have the kiddies gone to bed?"

"Poor little souls, they have," said the woman.

"Well, just you tell 'em for me," said Hetherington, "that Santa Claus

received little Mary's letter, will you, please? And--er--and if they

don't mind a very late call like this, why I'd like to see them."

The woman looked anxiously into Hetherington's eyes for a moment, and

then she tottered and sat down.

"You're sure there's nothin' the matter with Jim, sir?" she asked.

"Absolutely, Mrs. Mulligan," Hetherington answered. "It's exactly as I

have told you. The cold and hunger were too much for him, but he's all

right, and I'll guarantee to have him back here inside of forty-eight

hours."

"I'll call the childer," said Mrs. Mulligan.

Two wide-eyed youngsters shortly stood in awed wonder before their

strange visitor, never doubting for a moment that he was Santa Claus

himself.

"How do you do, Miss Mulligan?" said Hetherington, with a courtly bow to

the little tot of a girl. "I received your letter this afternoon, and

was mighty glad to hear from you again, but I've been too busy all day

to write you in return, so I thought I'd call and tell you that it's all

right about those shoes, and the hat, and the new doll-baby, and the

things for Jimmie. Fact is, I've brought 'em with me. Reginald," he

added, turning to the chauffeur, who stood grinning in the doorway,

"just unfasten that bundle of shoes, will you, while I get Jimmie's new

mitts and the base-ball bat?"

"Yes, sir," said the chauffeur, suiting his action to the orders, and

with a right good will that was pleasant to see.

"Reginald is my assistant," said Santa Claus. "Couldn't get along

without Reginald these days--very busy days they are--so many new

kiddies in the world, you know. There, Jimmie--there's your bat. May you

score many a home-run with it. Here's a ball, too--good thing to have a

ball to practise with. Some day you'll be a Giant, perhaps, and help win

the pennant. Incidentally, James, old boy, there's a box of tin

soldiers in this package, a bag of marbles, a select assortment of tops,

and a fur coat; just try that cap on, and see if you can tell yourself

from a Brownie."

The children's eyes gleamed with joy, and Jimmie let out a cheer that

would have aroused the envy of a college man.

"You didn't mention it in your note, Mary, dear," continued Santa Claus,

turning to the little girl, "but I thought you might like to cook a few

meals for this brand-new doll-baby of yours, so I brought along a little

stove, with a few pots and pans and kettles and things, with a small

china tea-set thrown in. This ought to enable you to set her up in

housekeeping; and then when you go to school I have an idea you'll find

this little red-riding-hood cloak rather nice--only it's navy blue

instead of red, and it looks warm."

[Illustration: She stood with her eyes popping out of her head.

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Hetherington placed the little cloak with its beautiful brass buttons

and its warm hood over the little girl's shoulders, while she stood with

her eyes popping out of her head, too delightedly entranced to be able

to say a word of thanks.

"Don't forget this, sir," said the chauffeur, handing Hetherington a

package tied up in blue ribbons.

"And finally," said Hetherington, after thanking Reginald for the

reminder, "here is a box of candy for everybody in the place. One for

Mary, one for Jimmie, one for mother, and one for popper when he comes

home."

"Oh thank you, thank you, thank you!" cried the little girl, throwing

herself into Hetherington's arms. "I knowed you'd come--I did, I did, I

did!"

"You believed in old Santa Claus, did you, babe?" said Hetherington,

huskily, as the little girl's warm cheek pressed against his own.

"Yes, I did--always," said the little girl, "though Jimmie didn't."

"I did so!" retorted Jimmie, squatting on the floor and shooting a glass

agate at a bunch of miggles across the room. "I swatted Petey Halloran

on the eye on'y yesterday for sayin' they wasn't no such person."

"And you did well, my son," said Hetherington. "The man or boy that says

there isn't any Santa Claus is a--is a--well, never you mind, but he is

one just the same."

And bidding his little friends good night, Hetherington, with the

chauffeur close behind him, left them to the joys of the moment, with a

cheerier dawn than they had known for many weary days to follow.

V

"Good night, sir," said the chauffeur, as Hetherington paid him off and

added a good-sized tip into the bargain. "I didn't useter believe in

Santa Claus, sir, but I do now."

"So do I," said Hetherington, as he bade the other good night and

lightly mounted the steps to his house.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS PIE

Take a quart of pure Good Will,

Flavor well with Sympathy;

Boil it on the fire till

It is full of bubbling Glee.

Season with a dash of Cheer,

Mixed with Love and Tenderness;

Cool off in an atmosphere

That is mostly Kindliness.

Stick a dozen raisins in

Made of grapes from Laughter's vine,

And such fruits as you may win

In a purely Jocund line.

Make a batter from the cream

Of Good Spirits running high,

And you'll have a perfect dream

Of a Merry Christmas pie!

THE CHILD WHO HAD EVERYTHING BUT--

I

I knew it was coming long before it got there. Every symptom was in

sight. I had grown fidgety, and sat fearful of something overpoweringly

impending. Strange noises filled the house. Things generally, according

to their nature, severally creaked, soughed and moaned. There was a

ghost on the way. That was perfectly clear to an expert in uncanny

visitations of my wide experience, and I heartily wished it were not.

There was a time when I welcomed such visitors with open arms, because

there was a decided demand for them in the literary market, and I had

been able to turn a great variety of spooks into anywhere from three

thousand to five thousand words apiece at five cents a word, but now the

age had grown too sceptical to swallow ghostly reminiscence with any

degree of satisfaction. People had grown tired of hearing about Visions,

and desired that their tales should reek with the scent of gasoline,

quiver with the superfervid fever of tangential loves, and crash with

moral thunderbolts aimed against malefactors of great achievement and

high social and commercial standing. Wherefore it seemed an egregious

waste of time for me to dally with a spook, or with anything else, for

that matter, that had no strictly utilitarian value to one so

professionally pressed as I was, and especially at a moment like

that--it was Christmas morning and the hour was twenty-eight minutes

after two--when I was so busy preparing my Ode to June, and trying to

work out the details of a midsummer romance in time for the market for

such productions early in the coming January.

And right in the midst of all this pressure there rose up these beastly

symptoms of an impending visitation. At first I strove to fight them

off, but as the minutes passed they became so obsessively intrusive that

I could not concentrate upon the work in hand, and I resolved to have

it over with.

"Oh, well," said I, striking a few impatient chords upon my typewriting

machine, "if you insist upon coming, come, and let's have done with it."

I roared this out, addressing the dim depths of the adjoining apartment,

whence had risen the first dank apprehension of the uncanny something

that had come to pester me.

"This is my busy night," I went on, when nothing happened in response to

my summons, "and I give you fair warning that, however psychic I may be

now, I've got too much to do to stay so much longer. If you're going to

haunt, haunt!"

It was in response to this appeal that the thing first manifested

itself to the eye. It took the shape first of a very slight veil of

green fog, which shortly began to swirl slowly from the darkness of the

other room through the intervening portières into my den. Once within,

it increased the vigor of its swirl, until almost before I knew it there

was spinning immediately before my desk something in the nature of a

misty maelstrom, buzzing around like a pin-wheel in action.

"Very pretty--very pretty indeed," said I, a trifle sarcastically,

refusing to be impressed, "but I don't care for pyrotechnics. I

suppose," I added flippantly, "that you are what might be called a

mince-pyrotechnic, eh?"

Whether it was the quality of my jest, or some other inward pang due to

its gyratory behavior, that caused it I know not, but as I spoke a deep

groan issued from the centre of the whirling mist, and then out of its

indeterminateness there was resolved the hazy figure of an angel--only,

she was an intensely modern angel. She wore a hobble-skirt instead of

the usual flowing robes of ladies of the supernal order, and her halo,

instead of hovering over her head as used to be the correct manner of

wearing these hard-won adornments, had perforce become a mere golden

fillet binding together the great mass of finger-curls and other

distinctly yellow capillary attractions that stretched out from the

back of her cerebellum for two or three feet, like a monumental

psyche-knot. I could hardly restrain a shudder as I realized the

theatric quality of the lady's appearance, and I honestly dreaded the

possible consequences of her visit. We live in a tolerably censorious

age, and I did not care to be seen in the company of such a peroxidized

vision as she appeared to be.

"I am afraid, madam," said I, shrinking back against the wall as she

approached--"I am very much afraid that you have got into the wrong

house. Mr. Slatherberry, the theatrical manager, lives next door."

She paid no attention to this observation, but, holding out a compelling

hand, bade me come along with her, her voice having about it all the

musical charm of an oboe suffering from bronchitis.

"Not in a year of Sundays I won't!" I retorted. "I am a respectable man,

a steady church-goer, a trustee for several philanthropic institutions,

and a Sunday-School teacher. I don't wish to be impolite, but really,

madam, rich as I am in reputation, I am too poor to be seen in public

with you."

"I am a spirit," she began.

"I'll take your word for it," I interjected, and I could see that she

told the truth, for she was entirely diaphanous, so much so indeed that

one could perceive the piano in the other room with perfect clarity

through her intervening shadiness. "It is, however, the unfortunate

fact that I have sworn off spirits."

"None the less," she returned, her eye flashing and her hand held forth

peremptorily, "you must come. It is your predestined doom."

My next remark I am not wholly clear about, but, as I remember it, it

sounded something like "I'll be doomed if I do!" whereupon she

threatened me.

"It is useless to resist," she said. "If you decline to come

voluntarily, I shall hypnotize you and force you to follow me. We have

need of you."

"But, my dear lady," I pleaded, "please have some regard for my

position. I never did any of you spirits any harm. I've treated every

visitor from the spirit-land with the most distinguished consideration,

and I feel that you owe it to me to be regardful of my good name.

Suppose you take a look at yourself in yonder looking-glass, and then

say if you think it fair to compel a decent, law-abiding man, of

domestic inclinations like myself, to be seen in public with--well, with

such a looking head of hair as that of yours."

My visitor laughed heartily.

"Oh, if that's all," she said, most amiably, "we can arrange matters in

a jiffy. Your wife possesses a hooded mackintosh, does she not? I think

I saw something of the kind hanging on the hat-rack as I floated in. I

will wear that if it will make you feel any easier."

"It certainly would," said I; "but see here--can't you scare up some

other cavalier to escort you to the haven of your desires?"

She fixed a sternly steady eye upon me for a moment.

"Aren't you the man who wrote the lines,

The World's a green and gladsome ball,

And Love's the Ruler of it all,

And Life's the chance vouchsafed to me

For Deeds and Gifts of Sympathy?

Didn't you write that?" she demanded.

"I did, madam," said I, "and I meant every word of it, but what of it?

Is that any reason why I should be seen on a public highway with a

lady-ghost of your especial kind?"

"Enough of your objections," she retorted firmly. "You are the person

for whom I have been sent. We have a case needing your immediate

attention. The only question is, will you come pleasantly and of your

own free will, or must I resort to extreme measures?"

These words were spoken with such determination that I realized that

further resistance was useless, and I yielded.

"All right," said I. "On your way. I'll follow."

"Good!" she cried, her face wreathing with a pleasant little nile-green

smile. "Get the mackintosh, and we'll be off. There's no time to lose,"

she added, as the clock in the tower on the square boomed out the hour

of three.

"What is this anyhow?" I demanded, as I helped her on with the

mackintosh and saw that the hood covered every vestige of that awful

coiffure. "Another case of Scrooge?"

"Sort of," she replied as, hooking her arm in mine, she led me forth

into the night.