

DADDY TEN.

By JESSIE CARGILL BEGG.

The little old man in the end bed of the ward with bandaged eyes, heard the cruel verdict in silence. Except for the tightening of his thin lips, and the faint flush that crept into his cheeks, there was nothing to make the house surgeon, believe that the loss of Daddy's sight was the calamity it might have been to some patients.

He reflected as he stood at the bedside that the old man was over seventy and getting his pension.

His wife was nearing the same age, but a capable daughter earned sufficient to keep them both in comparative comfort. It is true that Daddy had fully made up his mind that he would regain his sight after the operation. The doctors had warned him not to raise his hopes as he might be disappointed, but Daddy refused to be anything but optimistic. He told the nurses that the bandages would be taken off on Christmas Day, so that he could see his wife.

The house surgeon found Daddy's silence distinctly disconcerting. He fidgetted with his stethoscope and vainly endeavoured to think of something appropriate to say under the melancholy circumstances.

"I suppose you ought to be thankful that you have got to your age without this happening sooner," he remarked, brusquely.

"It'll cut up the old girl," quavered Daddy.

"She'll get over it," said the house surgeon soothingly.

"Bein' Christmas time, it'll be 'arder for 'er," persisted Daddy.

"Well, you try and be as cheerful as you can, and don't spoil Christmas for her," replied the doctor.

"It won't be no good when she gets to know as my sight's gone. I shouldn't wonder if she gets an 'eart attack right away."

"My advice to you is to keep the news from her till the next day, if you can; the bandages will be off."

He was gone before Daddy had framed a suitable reply.

But as the old man lay and pondered over the situation, he saw the wisdom of the advice.

He told Sister about it when she settled him up for the night.

"I just got to bluff 'er for once so as she can be 'appy on Christmas Day," he explained.

On the afternoon of Christmas Day, Daddy's wife came tottering up the ward to see him. Bent almost double with rheumatism and with a nervous jerk of the head that kept the little bead flowers in her bonnet in a constant state of tremor, Eliza looked a great deal older than she was. There was a great joy beaming out of her faded blue eyes.

She did not speak to Daddy Ten at first; she just sat and held his hand in hers in an ecstasy of happiness that needed no words.

It was Daddy who broke the silence. "You're lookin' ten years younger, mother."

"Oh, John! 'Ow much can you see of me, dearie?"

"All the best part of you, mother."

"I'll believe it when you tell me wot colour my blouse is, lovey."

"Why, green, of course," said Daddy, with a fear clutching at his heart.

She looked disappointed. "I'm too far away for you to see that it is blue, John." She stooped over him and Daddy touched her sleeve caressingly.

Then he gave a forced laugh. "'Ave you bin an' forgot as I'm colour blind, mother?" he asked, softly.

"FOR THESE AND ALL HIS MERCIES."

Bunchy sat in a corner of the ward, arrayed in her best cap and a bow of pink ribbon at her neck.

"Pink suits me complexion," she said. "I allus looked well in pink."

Bunchy was the nickname by which old Jane Bunch was known in the ward, and the ward was in one of our large mental hospitals. Bunchy was one of the "*Les Aliénés*," a term by which the French describe those that are afflicted in mind, and which is so far removed from our own harsh word *lunatic*. Indeed, one could not associate such a term with little old Bunchy, whose only apparent weakness was that she saw everything *coleur de rose*. The occasion that had called for Bunchy's best cap was no less a festival than Christmas Day.

She sat in her corner by the fire counting up her blessings, sometimes to herself, sometimes to a crosby or chance visitor.

"Very nice everything, I'm sure," she said, as her eyes wandered over the elaborate paper decorations; "them poppies is so natural, you could fancy they was growing! Very clever, our nurses is, I'm sure. Nurse Lily dressed up last night for a bit of fun. There are some as don't admire her; but I thought she looked beautiful with 'er 'air down and a shepherd's crook in 'er 'and. Oh, yes, we had a lovely dinner served up beautiful and 'ot, with a nice piece of fat. We didn't 'ave no light round the pudden; you couldn't expect it in these sort o' places. Besides, the poor gals might 'ave burnt their fingers. I wropped up a piece o' mine in me 'ankercher for my friend when she comes.

"Yes, the service in chapel was very nice. Textes all round the walls, and the choir sang 'andsome, I'm sure. The minister spoke beautiful from Lamentations, or some such book; but I forget.

"Yes; to-night we're going to 'ave a fancy dance. A young man on the other side is a bit partial to me, though I got my own young man in Roosia."

Three hours later, Bunchy put on her striped unbleached nightgown and dragged her skinny old figure into bed.

"Wonderful comfortable bed!" she murmured, "and plenty o' blankets; and I kep' a peppermint lozenge for the wind!"

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