



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

A Christmas Fairy

John Strange Winter

It was getting very near to Christmas time, and all the boys at Miss Ware's school were talking about going home for the holidays.

"I shall go to the Christmas festival," said Bertie Fellows, "and my mother will have a party, and my Aunt will give another. Oh! I shall have a splendid time at home."

"My Uncle Bob is going to give me a pair of skates," remarked Harry Wadham.

"My father is going to give me a bicycle," put in George Alderson.

"Will you bring it back to school with you?" asked Harry.

"Oh! yes, if Miss Ware doesn't say no."

"Well, Tom," cried Bertie, "where are you going to spend your holidays?"

"I am going to stay here," answered Tom in a very forlorn voice.

"Here—at school—oh, dear! Why can't you go home?"

"I can't go home to India," answered Tom.

"Nobody said you could. But haven't you any relatives anywhere?"

Tom shook his head. "Only in India," he said sadly.

"Poor fellow! That's hard luck for you. I'll tell you what it is, boys, if I couldn't go home for the holidays, especially at Christmas—I think I would just sit down and die."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't," said Tom. "You would get ever so homesick, but you wouldn't die. You would just get through somehow, and hope something would happen before next year, or that some kind fairy would—"

"There are no fairies nowadays," said Bertie.

"See here, Tom, I'll write and ask my mother to invite you to go home with me for the holidays."

"Will you really?"

"Yes, I will. And if she says yes, we shall have such a splendid time. We live in

London, you know, and have lots of parties and fun."

"Perhaps she will say no?" suggested poor little Tom.

"My mother isn't the kind that says no," Bertie declared loudly.

In a few days' time a letter arrived from Bertie's mother. The boy opened it eagerly. It said:

My own dear Bertie:

I am very sorry to tell you that little Alice is ill with scarlet fever. And so you cannot come for your holidays. I would have been glad to have you bring your little friend with you if all had been well here.

Your father and I have decided that the best thing that you can do is to stay at Miss Ware's. We shall send your Christmas present to you as well as we can.

It will not be like coming home, but I am sure you will try to be happy, and make me feel that you are helping me in this sad time.

Dear little Alice is very ill, very ill indeed. Tell Tom that I am sending you a box for both of you, with two of everything. And tell him that it makes me so much happier to know that you will not be alone.

When Bertie Fellows received this letter, which ended all his Christmas hopes and joys, he hid his face upon his desk and sobbed aloud. The lonely boy from India, who sat next to him, tried to comfort his friend in every way he could think of. He patted his shoulder and whispered many kind words to him.

At last Bertie put the letter into Tom's hands.
"Read it," he sobbed.

So then Tom understood the cause of Bertie's grief. "Don't fret over it," he said at last. "It might be worse. Why, your father and mother might be thousands of miles away, like mine are. When Alice is better, you will be able to go home. And it will help your mother if she thinks you are almost as happy as if you could go now."

Soon Miss Ware came to tell Bertie how sorry she was for him.

"After all," said she, smiling down on the two boys, "it is an ill wind that blows nobody good. Poor Tom has been expecting to spend his holidays alone, and now he will have a friend with him—Try to look on the bright side, Bertie, and to remember how much worse it would have been if there had been no boy to stay with you."



"I can't help being disappointed, Miss Ware," said Bertie, his eyes filling with tears.

"No; you would be a strange boy if you were not. But I want you to try to think of your poor mother, and write her as cheerfully as you can."

"Yes," answered Bertie; but his heart was too full to say more.

The last day of the term came, and one by one, or two by two, the boys went away, until only Bertie and Tom were left in the great house. It had never seemed so large to either of them before.

"It's miserable," groaned poor Bertie, as they strolled into the schoolroom. "Just think if we were on our way home now—how different."

"Just think if I had been left here by myself," said Tom.

"Yes," said Bertie, "but you know when one wants to go home he never thinks of the boys that have no home to go to."

The evening passed, and the two boys went to bed. They told stories to each other for a long time before they could go to sleep. That night they dreamed of their homes, and felt very lonely. Yet each tried to be brave, and so another day began.

This was the day before Christmas. Quite early in the morning came the great box of which Bertie's mother had spoken in her letter. Then, just as dinner had come to an end, there was a peal of the bell, and a voice was heard asking for Tom Egerton.

Tom sprang to his feet, and flew to greet a tall, handsome lady, crying, "Aunt Laura! Aunt Laura!"

And Laura explained that she and her husband had arrived in London only the day before. "I was so afraid, Tom," she said, "that we should not get here until Christmas Day was over and that you would be disappointed. So I would not let your mother write you that we were on our way home. You must get your things packed up at once, and go back with me to London. Then uncle and I will give you a splendid time."

For a minute or two Tom's face shone with delight. Then he caught sight of Bertie and turned to his aunt.

"Dear Aunt Laura," he said, "I am very sorry, but I can't go."

"Can't go? and why not?"

"Because I can't go and leave Bertie here all alone," he said stoutly. "When I was going to be alone he wrote and asked his mother to let me go home with him."

She could not have either of us because Bertie's sister has scarlet fever. He has to stay here, and he has never been away from home at Christmas time before, and I can't go away and leave him by himself, Aunt Laura."

For a minute Aunt Laura looked at the boy as if she could not believe him. Then she caught him in her arms and kissed him.

"You dear little boy, you shall not leave him. You shall bring him along, and we shall all enjoy ourselves together. Bertie, my boy, you are not very old yet, but I am going to teach you a lesson as well as I can. It is that kindness is never wasted in this world."

And so Bertie and Tom found that there was such a thing as a fairy after all.

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