



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

A Christmas Miracle

Lannie Haynes Martin

John Spencer had always known he wasn't good enough for Ann Preston. What he resented was being *told* so, again and again, by Ann's people. Their scorn only hardened his resolve — so John simply gathered up his bride and his law books and carried them off to the West.

The journey from Virginia, the opening of a law office, the setting up of a new home — however modest — made money melt away alarmingly fast. And though not a single client had yet found his way to John's door, he was always busy: reading up, straightening out, settling in. Ann, meanwhile, was desperately lonely and homesick. She cried a good part of the time when John wasn't there to see. He was making such a brave fight of it! But back home there were house-parties just now, and the peaches were ripe — and here the land lay flat and dry as a desert. The dust got into her throat, and, worse, into her eyes.

First came the disfiguring smoked glasses; then a green eye-shade; then a darkened room, and pain — constant pain. At last a specialist was sent for. He pronounced it a serious case, and warned that she might lose her sight altogether. Her eyes were kept bandaged. For three months she lived in a darkened room, while John Spencer read to her, dressed her, fed her, and cared for her as tenderly as if she were a baby. In those three months, his hair turned gray.

Never once did she speak to him of the family back home. But as Christmas drew nearer, she began to ask, every single day, in a small and pathetic quaver, "Any box, dear?"

It was like a sword-thrust to his heart each time. He knew she was watching for a Christmas box from home — and he knew none would ever come. He knew them all too well: her Uncle James, who had meant to make her his heiress until she "disgraced the family" by marrying poor; her two proud, cold, mercenary sisters. Her parents had died when she was very young.

One day, after Ann had asked her little quavering question, John Spencer set his teeth and said to himself, "She's got to have that box."

The next day he was later than usual getting home from town, and later still the day after. And then, though it was more than two weeks before Christmas, an expressman drove up and set a box on the porch. Ann had heard the wheels,

and was all excitement by the time John came in.

"There's an express package!" she cried.

He carried the box inside and began prying off the lid. "It's addressed to Ann Preston Spencer," he said, and then he began lifting out the treasures one by one, reading aloud the cards pinned to each. A rose-colored silk negligée trimmed with lace. A pink silk evening dress — "and the card says 'From Cousin Harriet.'"

"Oh, how perfectly lovely of her!" exclaimed Ann. "Do let me feel it."



There were dainty embroidered things marked from Cousin Lucy and Aunt Juliet, and some really beautiful table linen bearing the cards of her two sisters. Ann was like a different person from that hour. When the specialist came again, he said there really did seem to be some hope for her eyes now.

A neighbor, Mrs. Green, looked in on Ann whenever John was away in town. The morning after the box arrived, Ann had her take out all the gifts to admire, the cards still pinned in place. Somehow the handwriting looked oddly familiar to Mrs. Green — John Spencer had once drawn up a contract for her, when she'd sold some land. She turned one of the cards over. There, on the back, in bold black type, was printed: "*John Spencer, Attorney at Law.*"

It did not take the confidences Ann was happily pouring out to help Mrs. Green understand the whole of it.

Mrs. Green went home, had a good cry, and then sat down and wrote a special-delivery letter to Virginia — such a letter as had likely never before found its way into that proud state. She tried to paint John Spencer as his western neighbors had come to know him: his strength, his courage, his tenderness, day after day, as he cared for his helpless, stricken wife. She was tactful enough never to mention any family quarrel. He had simply done this thoughtful, delicate thing, she wrote, because his wife had sighed for something from home, and he tried to grant her every wish. Surely, once they knew, they would be only too glad to make that wish come true — and of course they must never let Mr. Spencer learn that she had written, for he would never forgive her.

There were still two weeks until Christmas. A letter would reach Virginia in five days, and if they acted quickly — as Virginians sometimes did — well, then, maybe...

Now, John Spencer had always been a very practical, materialistic sort of man; it

was one of the things the Virginia Prestons had held against him. But when a genuine box arrived from Virginia by special express on Christmas Day — and when that box held a pink silk evening dress, quite the loveliest thing he had ever seen, a real embroidered forget-me-not collar, and a little rosebud cap just such as he had once tried to describe to Ann — he quietly carried off the whole of the first lot of gifts to a secondhand shop, took up reading works on telepathy and mental suggestion, and believes to this day that Ann's longing, joined with his own projected thought, was what summoned that box across the country.

In a few weeks Ann's sight was fully restored, and she feasted her eyes on the beauty of her gifts. Letters began to travel back and forth, and now Christmas boxes cross the continent both ways each year. The one going east carries dozens upon dozens of luscious western oranges, grown on Spencer's own hundred-acre ranch. And the proud Prestons of Virginia are never prouder than when they speak of "our cousins — Judge and Mrs. Spencer."

Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why ririro.com offers 3,000+ free stories — fairy tales, fables, bedtime stories, myths and more — for every age, in 13 languages, with free printable PDFs and often audio. Reading should be a right, not a privilege. Share ririro.com and spread the joy of reading.

Instagram: @ririro_reading · Pinterest: pinterest.com/ririrocom