



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Cake Lady

Mildred White

Tessie Louise had been making a great deal of trouble. From the moment her invalid mother brought the small golden-haired girl to the city hospital for treatment, Tessie had wound herself around the hearts of every nurse on the ward. And as her stay stretched on — partly because her mother was still too ill and too poor to manage her care at home — Tessie had become thoroughly, cheerfully at home.

Which was why it came as an affront to the autocratic young house doctor, Donald Bruce, when he heard the noise.

"What in the world does that child want?" he asked.

"Tessie wants a Nora Christmas doll," the nurse said eagerly.

Doctor Bruce wrinkled his brow. "What does she mean?"

"Miss Nora Dean," the girl explained, "is a young woman who visits the children's ward. She lives in a cottage out on the lake shore, and last summer she came in and took two of our little convalescents home with her for a whole month. Tessie Louise was one of them, and she fell so completely in love with Miss Dean that we could hardly coax her back. But it was necessary that she come." The nurse paused. "Yesterday, Miss Dean brought a basket of Christmas cakes — made like dolls, with currant eyes and colored frosted dresses. The children were so pleased. They call her the Cake Lady."

Doctor Bruce frowned. "That's bad practice — allowing outsiders to come in and feed our patients. I didn't suppose—"

The pleasant nurse hurried to defend her friend. "She has helped us in many ways. I would call Miss Dean a philanthropist, if she weren't—" A pause. "In humble circumstances herself."

"The young woman who lives on the lake shore?" the doctor asked.

The nurse nodded. "Her uncle was an old sea captain. Miss Nora made her home with him and her aunt when she was as small as Tessie. Now she lives on in the house at the water's edge to look after her aunt, who is elderly and ailing. And still—" The pleasant nurse choked up, unexpectedly. "Well. She's always trying to do things for others. That's how Nora Dean finds happiness."

"Great Scott!" interrupted the doctor. "There goes Tessie again. That noise must be stopped. She must not disturb the sick ones."

The prettiest nurse came hastily. "Tessie says she won't stop until she sees Miss Nora. I really wish we'd made arrangements yesterday to have her driven out to the lake for Christmas."

"How far out is it?" Doctor Bruce asked briskly. "I'll take her in my car. It's closed and comfortable."

He sighted the cottage as he pulled to a stop at the roadside, then gathered his small charge in his arms and made his way to the white door.

"Come in!" Nora greeted them cheerily. "The nurse phoned me you were coming. There's a new Christmas doll for Tessie Louise in the oven, and a whole lot more to take back with her."



It was a broad, warm kitchen, fragrant with sugar and spices. An old lady in a rocking chair near the window relieved Tessie of her wrappings and kissed her soundly on both cheeks.

"You must let Nora give the doctor a cup of coffee," the old lady said, "before his cold drive back to the city."

But Donald Bruce seemed in no hurry to return.

"This," he said, looking around slowly, "smells like my grandmother's kitchen. We used to spend Christmas with her when I was a boy."

The old lady smiled. "We're going to have a roasted chicken for dinner," she said, tentatively. "I wonder — it wouldn't seem too presumptuous, would it, if you stayed and ate with us? Just a little like being at grandmother's?"

It was remarkable how swiftly the afternoon hours flew in that lakeside cottage.

"I'm so glad," the old lady whispered at parting, "that you stayed to take Tessie back with you. It has been a happy Christmas for Nora. I can see it in her eyes — and usually, happiness only comes to Nora through the giving. She's the dearest girl in the world."

"She is just that," Donald Bruce answered solemnly.

His eyes were on Nora as he clasped the old lady's hand.

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