

A Christmas After-Dinner Dream
BY CHARLES MORRIS.

In came little Lotta, her cheeks pinched into twin roses by the winter wind. She was cosily dressed in thick coat and furs, though the summer of happiness in her face seemed in itself a plentiful guard against the fierce outset of the frost.

"Don't I wish you had gone to Aunt Clement's with me!" she cried, half out of breath, to her elder sister. "Such a good time as we had! And then the dinner. You should just have seen our Christmas dinner!"

"I suppose I will soon see evidence of it, in the shape of a sick little girl."

"I guess you won't then!" said Lotta, pursing up her pretty lips. "But such a dinner as that! No one could help eating more than enough. There, was a perfect Goliath of a turkey, with two monstrous chickens to uphold his dignity; and—

"And a wild goose."

"If you mean me," cried Lotta, "I was not a bit wild."

"Oh, I don't mean to be personal," said her sister, laughing.

"I suppose I am a little goose sometimes," said the child, very thoughtfully, "but then I was not born wise."

"Go on with your dinner," replied her sister.

"Then there were the oysters, and the vegetables, potatoes and onions, and celery, and—oh, everything. You know! And then came in the mince pies, and the pumpkin pies, and the tarts—Aunt's own make. Miracles of pies!"

"I hope you did not eat too much of them. They often make you sick."

"No, far I liked the plum pudding better. Such a monster as it was! All currants, and raisins, and spice, and everything good. It was just charming; and as sweet as..."

"As coffee with three sugars in it," said her teasing sister.

"Then there was jam, and preserves, and cake, and nuts, and ice cream. Oh, I could not tell you half. I never saw such a Christmas dinner, and I wished all the time that you and mamma were there."

"Thanks for the wish; though I am rather glad that I was not. We were feasting somewhat more soberly at home, Lotta."

"I knew you were having a good time or I would not have half enjoyed my dinner, you dear, kind sister," said affectionate Lotta, throwing her arms around her and eagerly kissing her.

The sister returned the embrace with loving interest.

"And see what I have here," cried the versatile Child. "I have the wishbone of the chicken; I am going to put it over the door to dry. If I go to sleep under it, I hope it will bring me pleasant dreams."

"Of plum pudding and the like!" laughed her sister, as she turned to leave the room.

"Oh, not" said Lotta, wearily, as she flung herself into the armchair, "have enough of plum pudding for to-day, thank you. Don't mind me, Mary dear. I will just sit here and think and rest a little."

There was a comical look on Mary's face as she left the room. She had seen instances of such resting and thinking before.

Lotta did intend to think; but how could she think, with a gentle hand pushing her back in her chair, and soft fingers pressing down her eyelids, and busy spiders weaving cobwebs in her brain? Thought was out of the question, with this misty genius of sleep hovering about and overshadowing her.

She nodded thrice, rubbed her eyes twice, sighed once, then nestled herself cosily in the arms of slumber, lost to the world without.

She had not slept long before the strangest things happened. One queer little elf peered at her through the keyhole of the door, and then wormed his way into the room. Down the chimney slid a brace more, gliding slyly out upon the floor. From the closet trooped out a dozen long-nosed gnomes, peeping comically at the sleeping beauty in the chair. Robin Goodfellow himself leaped out through a trap in the floor. Such a phantasmagoria, and she saw it all through her closed eyelids.

And now, emboldened by her quiet, they came in troops and battalions, from every crevice and crack in the room, big-headed, spindle-shanked, the oddest of creatures, dancing and capering on the floor, flying like acrobats through the air, perching upon the top of the door's and windows, and squatting cross-legged, tailor fashion, on the top of her hat.

She was half afraid and tried to get up; but the cobwebs of sleep were too strong for her, and bound her firmly to her chair.

And now mischievous Puck grasped the wishbone from over the door, and drew with it a magic circle round the room, and waved it three times through the air, above Lotta's head.

It proved an enchanted wand. The elves and gnomes flew out of doors and windows, and through ceiling and floor.

But just as Lotta hoped she was well rid of them, back they came in redoubled numbers, dragging in what seemed to Lotta the materials of her late feast.

Here was one bent double under the weight of a huge pear, which he bore aloft on the point of a great knife. Here came others rolling in oranges like balls, while one jolly sprite lay on his back balancing a golden lemon on his uplifted feet. Others came dragging in a gigantic apple with a rope, a round-eyed fellow sitting astride of it like a charioteer.

Still Puck waved his bone, and still they came. A dozen dragged in a great conserve jar, and plunged head first into it, for the sweets within. Here came three more with a bottle of wine, mouth downward, spilling its distilled sweetness. Here a pug-nosed elf had caught his twin brother in the jaws of a nutcracker. There a playful rascal had an unfortunate gnome on the prongs of a three-tined toasting fork.

Again Robin Goodfellow waved his wish-bone wand, and in came a delegation from the underworld with the most astonishing affair of all, no less than a round, solid copy of that giant plum pudding which Lotta had helped to demolish an hour before.

And now the fun grew fast and furious. The great pudding was a mere football in the hands of the nimble elves. They kicked and cuffed it about the room above her, till she shrunk and trembled with fear lest the heavy ball should tumble upon her head, and utterly destroy her appetite for plum pudding in the future.

But it was no use, the cobwebs held too tightly. She could only look in fear and trembling.

The elves seemed to suddenly discover that she was afraid of them. They gathered about her, with knife, and fork, and nutcracker, till she thought surely there was no help for her now, and wished that some good genius would only break those strong cobwebs.

Puck came last, armed with the wishbone, which he brandished like a warlike weapon. It grew and grew till he grasped in its grongs the mighty pudding, which he flung maliciously at her innocent head.

This was too much, and she shrunk hastily back. The cobwebs at last gave way. She sprang in affright from her chair.

In an instant elves and gnomes, pudding and pears, jars and jams, all vanished into the viewless air, and there stood Lotta wide awake, in the old familiar room, without a trace of the dance of enchantment to which she had been so unwillingly treated.

At her feet lay the wishbone, which seemed to her excited imagination the cause of all this turmoil.

The pudding had gone, but its weight lay yet upon her conscience, somewhat assisted by certain unpleasant internal sensations.

"Plum Pudding is delicious, but I don't think I will soon eat too much plum pudding again," said Lotta, decisively putting down her small foot as if she meant it. "Another time I will take sister Mary's advice, and stop eating when I have enough. I think I will be better for it when I am awake, and escape all such horrid Christmas nightmares when asleep."