EDWARD EVERETT HALE

CHRISTMAS WAITS IN BOSTON & OTHER CHRISTMAS STORIES

Edward Everett Hale

Christmas Waits in Boston & Other Christmas Stories

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They Saw a Great Light

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Another Generation

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Here he comes! here he comes!"

"He" was the "post-rider," an institution now almost of the past. He rode by the house and threw off a copy of the "Boston Gazette." Now the "Boston Gazette," of this particular issue, gave the results of the drawing of the great Massachusetts State Lottery of the Eastern Lands in the Waldo Patent.

Mr. Cutts, the elder, took the "Gazette," and opened it with a smile that pretended to be careless; but even he showed the eager anxiety which they all felt, as he tore off the wrapper and unfolded the fatal sheet. "Letter from London," "Letter from Philadelphia," "Child with two heads,"—thus he ran down the columns of the little page,—uneasily. "Here it is! here it is!—Drawing of the great State Lottery. 'In the presence of the Honourable Treasurer of the Commonwealth, and of their Honours the Commissioners of the Honourable Council,—was drawn yesterday, at the State House, the first distribution of numbers'——here are the numbers,—'First combination, 375–1. Second, 421–7. Third, 591–6. Fourth, 594–1. Fifth,'"—and here Mr. Cutts started off his feet,—"'Fifth, 219–7.' Sybil, my darling! it is so! 219–7! See, dear child! 219–7! 219–7! O my God! to think it should come so!"

And he fairly sat down, and buried his head in his hands, and cried.

The others, for a full minute, did not dare break in on excitement so intense, and were silent; but, in a minute more, of course, little Simeon, the youngest of the tribes who were represented there, gained courage to pick up the paper, and to spell out again the same words which his father had read with so much emotion; and, with his sister Sally, who came to help him, to add to the store of information, as to what prize number 5—219–7—might bring.

For this was a lottery in which there were no blanks. The old Commonwealth of Massachusetts, having terrible war debts to pay after the Revolution, had nothing but lands in Maine to pay them with. Now lands in Maine were not very salable, and, if the simple and ordinary process of sale had been followed, the lands might not have been sold till this day. So they were distributed by these Lotteries, which in that time seemed gigantic. Every ticket-holder had some piece of land awarded to him, I think,—but to the most, I fear, the lands were hardly worth the hunting up, to settle upon. But, to induce as many to buy as might, there were prizes. No. 1, I think, even had a "stately mansion" on the land,—according to the advertisement. No. 2 had some special water-power facilities. No. 5, which Mr. Cutts's ticket had drawn, was two thousand acres on Tripp's Cove,—described in the programme as that "well-known Harbor of Refuge, where Fifty Line of Battle Ship could lie in safety." To this cove the two thousand acres so adjoined that the programme represented them as the site of the great "Mercantile Metropolis of the Future."

Samuel Cutts was too old a man, and had already tested too critically his own powers in what the world calls "business," by a sad satire, to give a great deal of faith to the promises of the prospectus, as to the commercial prosperity of Tripp's Cove. He had come out of the Revolution a Brigadier-General, with an honorable record of service,—with rheumatism which would never be cured,—with a good deal of paper money which would never be redeemed, which the Continent and the Commonwealth had paid him for his seven years,—and without that place in the world of peace which he had had when these years began. The very severest trial of the Revolution was to be found in the condition in which the officers of the army were left after it was over. They were men who had distinguished themselves in their profession, and who had done their very best to make that profession unnecessary in the future. To go back to their old callings was hard. Other men were in their places, and there did not seem to be room for two. Under the wretched political system of the old Confederation there was no such rapid spring of the material prosperity of the country as should find for them new fields in new enterprise. Peace did any thing but lead in Plenty. Often indeed, in history, has Plenty been a little coy before she could be tempted, with her pretty tender feet, to press the stubble and the ashes left by the havoc of War. And thus it was that General Cutts had returned to his old love whom he had married in a leave of absence just before Bunker Hill, and had begun his new life with her in Old Newbury in Massachusetts, at a time when there was little opening for him,—or for any man who had spent seven

years in learning how to do well what was never to be done again.

And in doing what there was to do he had not succeeded. He had just squeezed pork and potatoes and Indian meal enough out of a worn-out farm to keep Sybil, his wife, and their growing family of children alive. He had, once or twice, gone up to Boston to find what chances might be open for him there. But, alas, Boston was in a bad way too, as well as Samuel Cutts. Once he had joined some old companions, who had gone out to the Western Reserve in Northern Ohio, to see what opening might be there. But the outlook seemed unfavorable for carrying so far, overland, a delicate woman and six little children into a wilderness. If he could have scraped together a little money, he said, he would buy a share in one of the ships he saw rotting in Boston or Salem, and try some foreign adventure. But, alas! the ships would not have been rotting had it been easy for any man to scrape together a little money to buy them. And so, year in and year out, Samuel Cutts and his wife dressed the children more and more plainly, bought less sugar and more molasses, brought down the family diet more strictly to pork and beans, pea-soup, hasty-pudding, and rye-and-indian,—and Samuel Cutts looked more and more sadly on the prospect before these boys and girls, and the life for which he was training them.

Do not think that he was a profligate, my dear cousin Eunice, because he had bought a lottery ticket. Please to observe that to buy lottery tickets was represented to be as much the duty of all good citizens, as it was proved to be, eleven years ago, your duty to make Havelocks and to knit

stockings. Samuel Cutts, in the outset, had bought his lottery ticket only "to encourage the others," and to do his honorable share in paying the war debt. Then, I must confess, he had thought more of the ticket than he had supposed he would. The children had made a romance about it,—what they would do, and what they would not do, if they drew the first prize. Samuel Cutts and Sybil Cutts themselves had got drawn into the interest of the children, and many was the night when they had sat up, without any light but that of a pine-torch, planning out the details of the little colony they would form at the East-ward,—if—if only one of the ten great prizes should, by any marvel, fall to him. And now Tripp's Cove—which, perhaps, he had thought of as much as he had thought of any of the ten—had fallen to him. This was the reason why he showed so much emotion, and why he could hardly speak, when he read the numbers. It was because that had come to him which represented so completely what he wanted, and yet which he had not even dared to pray for. It was so much more than he expected,—it was the dream of years, indeed, made true.

For Samuel Cutts had proved to himself that he was a good leader of men. He knew he was, and many men knew it who had followed him under Carolina suns, and in the snows of Valley Forge. Samuel Cutts knew, equally well, that he was not a good maker of money, nor creator of pork and potatoes. Six years of farming in the valley of the Merrimac had proved that to him, if he had never learned it before. Samuel Cutts's dream had been, when he went away to explore the Western Reserve, that he would like to bring together some of the best line officers and some of the best

privates of the old "Fighting Twenty-seventh," and take them, with his old provident skill, which had served them so well upon so many camping-grounds, to some region where they could stand by each other again, as they had stood by each other before, and where sky and earth would yield them more than sky and earth have yet yielded any man in Eastern Massachusetts. Well! as I said, the Western Reserve did not seem to be the place. After all, "the Fighting Twenty-seventh" were not skilled in the tilling of the land. They furnished their quota when the boats were to be drawn through the ice of the Delaware, to assist in Rahl's Christmas party at Trenton. Many was the embarkation at the "head of Elk," in which the "Fighting Twenty-seventh" had provided half the seamen for the transport. It was "the Fighting Twenty-seventh" who cut out the "Princess Charlotte" cutter in Edisto Bay. But the "Fighting Twenty-seventh" had never, so far as any one knew, beaten one sword into one plough-share, nor one spear into one pruning-hook. But Tripp's Cove seemed to offer a different prospect. Why not, with a dozen or two of the old set, establish there, not the New Jerusalem, indeed, but something a little more elastic, a little more helpful, a little more alive, than these kiln-dried, sun-dried, and time-dried old towns of the seaboard of Massachusetts? At any rate, they could live together in Tripp's Cove, as they wintered together at Valley Forge, at Bennett's Hollow, by the Green Licks, and in the Lykens Intervale. This was the question which Samuel Cutts wanted to solve, and which the fatal figures 219-7 put him in the way of solving.

"Tripp's Cove is our Christmas present," said Sybil Cutts to her husband, as they went to bed. But so far removed were the habits of New England then from the observance of ecclesiastical anniversaries, that no one else had remembered that day that it was Christmas which was passing.

Chapter II.
Tripp's Cove

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Call this a long preface, if you please, but it seems to me best to tell this story so that I may explain what manner of people those were and are who lived, live, and will live, at Tripp's Cove,—and why they have been, are, and will be linked together, with a sort of family tie and relationship which one does not often see in the villages self-formed or formed at hap-hazard on the seaside, on the hillside, or in the prairies of America. Tripp's Cove never became "the Great Mercantile City of the Future," nor do I believe it ever will. But there Samuel Cutts lived in a happy life for fifty years,—and there he died, honored, blessed, and loved. By and by there came the second war with England,—the "Endymion" came cruising along upon the coast, and picking up the fishing-boats and the coasters, burning the ships on the stocks, or compelling the owners to ransom them. Old General Cutts was seventy years old then; but he was, as he had always been, the head of the settlement at Tripp's,—and there was no lack of men younger than he, the sergeants or the high-privates of the "Fighting Twenty-seventh," who drilled the boys of the village for whatever service might impend. When the boys went down to Runkin's and sent the "Endymion's" boats back to her with half their crews dead or dying, faster than they came, old General Cutts was with them, and took sight on his rifle as quickly and as bravely as the best of them. And so twenty

years more passed on,—and, when he was well nigh ninety, the dear old man died full of years and full of blessings, all because he had launched out for himself, left the life he was not fit for, and undertaken life in which he was at home.

Yes! and because of this also, when 1861 came with its terrible alarm to the whole country, and its call to duty, all Tripp's Cove was all right. The girls were eager for service, and the boys were eager for service. The girls stood by the boys, and the boys stood by the girls. The husbands stood by the wives, and the wives stood by the husbands. I do not mean that there was not many another community in which everybody was steadfast and true. But I do mean that here was one great family, although the census rated it as five-and-twenty families, —which had one heart and one soul in the contest, and which went into it with one heart and one soul,—every man and every woman of them all bearing each other's burdens.

Little Sim Cutts, who broke the silence that night when the post-man threw down the "Boston Gazette," was an old man of eighty-five when they all got the news of the shots at Fort Sumter. The old man was as hale and hearty as are half the men of sixty in this land to-day. With all his heart he encouraged the boys who volunteered in answer to the first call for regiments from Maine. Then with full reliance on the traditions of the "Fighting Twenty-seventh," he explained to the fishermen and the coasters that Uncle Abraham would need them for his web-footed service, as well as for his legions on the land. And they found out their ways to Portsmouth and to Charlestown, so that they might enter the navy as their brothers entered the army. And so it was,

that, when Christmas came in 1861, there was at Tripp's Cove only one of that noble set of young fellows, who but a year before was hauling hemlock and spruce and fir and pine at Christmas at the girls' order, and worked in the meeting-house for two days as the girls bade them work, so that when Parson Spaulding came in to preach his Christmas sermon, he thought the house was a bit of the woods themselves. Only one!

And who was he?

How did he dare stay among all those girls who were crying out their eyes, and sewing their fingers to the bones, —meeting every afternoon in one sitting-room or another, and devouring every word that came from the army? They read the worst-spelled letter that came home from Mike Sawin, and prized it and blessed it and cried over it, as heartily as the noblest description of battle that came from the pen of Carleton or of Swinton.

Who was he?

Ah! I have caught you, have I? That was Tom Cutts,—the old General's great-grandson,—Sim Cutts's grandson,—the very noblest and bravest of them all. He got off first of all. He had the luck to be at Bull Run,—and to be cut off from his regiment. He had the luck to hide under a corn crib, and to come into Washington whole, a week after the regiment. He was the first man in Maine, they said, to enlist for the three-years' service. Perhaps the same thing is said of many others. He had come home and raised a new company,—and he was making them fast into good soldiers, out beyond Fairfax Court-House. So that the Brigadier would do any thing Tom Cutts wanted. And when, on the first of

December, there came up to the Major-General in command a request for leave of absence from Tom Cutts, respectfully referred to Colonel This, who had respectfully referred it to General That, who had respectfully referred it to Adjutant-General T'other,—all these dignitaries had respectfully recommended that the request be granted. For even in the sacred purlieux of the top Major-General's Head-quarters, it was understood that Cutts was going home for no less a purpose than the being married to the prettiest and sweetest and best girl in Eastern Maine.

Well! for my part I do not think that the aids and their informants were in the wrong about this. Surely that Christmas Eve, as Laura Marvel stood up with Tom Cutts in front of Parson Spaulding, in presence of what there was left of the Tripp's Cove community, I would have said that Laura was the loveliest bride I ever saw. She is tall; she is graceful; she has rather a startled look when you speak to her, suddenly or gently, but the startled look just bewitches you. Black hair,—she got that from the Italian blood in her grandmother's family,—exquisite blue eyes,—that is a charming combination with black hair,—perfect teeth,—and matchless color,—and she had it all, when she was married, —she was a blushing bride and not a fainting one. But then what stuff this is,—nobody knew he cared a straw for Laura's hair or her cheek,—it was that she looked "just lovely," and that she was "just lovely,"—so self-forgetful in all her ways, after that first start,—so eager to know just where she could help, and so determined to help just there. Why! she led all the girls in the village, when she was only fourteen, because they loved her so. She was the one who

made the rafts when there was a freshet,—and took them all out together on the mill-pond. And, when the war came, she was of course captain of the girl's sewing,—she packed the cans of pickles and fruit for the Sanitary,—she corresponded with the State Adjutant:—heavens! from morning to night, everybody in the village ran to Laura,—not because she was the prettiest creature you ever looked upon,—but because she was the kindest, truest, most loyal, and most helpful creature that ever lived,—be the same man or woman.

Now had you rather be named Laura Cutts or Laura Marvel? Marvel is a good name,—a weird, miraculous sort of name. Cutts is not much of a name. But Laura had made up her mind to be Laura Cutts after Tom had asked her about it,—and here they are standing before dear old Parson Spaulding, to receive his exhortation,—and to be made one before God and man.

Dear Laura! How she had laughed with the other girls, all in a good-natured way, at the good Parson's exhortation to the young couples. Laura had heard it twenty times,—for she had "stood up" with twenty of the girls, who had dared The Enterprise of Life before her! Nay, Laura could repeat, with all the emphasis, the most pathetic passage of the whole,—"And above all,—my beloved young friends,—first of all and last of all,—let me beseech you as you climb the hill of life together, hand with hand, and step with step,—that you will look beyond the crests upon its summit to the eternal lights which blaze in the infinite heaven of the Better Land beyond." Twenty times had Laura heard this passage,—nay, ten times, I am afraid, had she, in an honest and friendly way, repeated it, under strict vows of secrecy, to

the edification of circles of screaming girls. But now the dear child looked truly and loyally into the old man's face, as he went on from word to word, and only thought of him, and of how noble and true he was,—and of the Great Master whom he represented there,—and it was just as real to her and to Tom Cutts that they must look into the Heaven of heavens for life and strength, as Parson Spaulding wanted it to be. When he prayed with all his heart, she prayed; what he hoped, she hoped; what he promised for her, she promised to her Father in heaven; and what he asked her to promise by word aloud, she promised loyally and eternally.

And Tom Cutts? He looked so handsome in his uniform,—and he looked like the man he was. And in those days, the uniform, if it were only a flannel fatigue-jacket on a private's back, was as beautiful as the flag; nothing more beautiful than either for eyes to look upon. And when Parson Spaulding had said the benediction, and the Amen,—and when he had kissed Laura, with her eyes full of tears,—and when he had given Tom Cutts joy,—then all the people came up in a double line,—and they all kissed Laura,—and they shook hands with Tom as if they would shake his hands off,—and in the half-reticent methods of Tripp's Cove, every lord and lady bright that was in Moses Marvel's parlor there, said, "honored be the bravest knight, beloved the fairest fair."

And there was a bunch of laurel hanging in the middle of the room, as make-believe mistletoe. And the boys, who could not make believe even that they were eighteen, so that they had been left at home, would catch Phebe, and Sarah, and Mattie, and Helen, when by accident they

crossed underneath the laurel,—and would kiss them, for all their screaming. And soon Moses Marvel brought in a waiter with wedding-cake, and Nathan Philbrick brought in a waiter with bride-cake, and pretty Mattie Marvel brought in a waiter with currant wine. And Tom Cutts gave every girl a piece of wedding-cake himself, and made her promise to sleep on it. And before they were all gone, he and Laura had been made to write names for the girls to dream upon, that they might draw their fortunes the next morning. And before long Moses Cutts led Mrs. Spaulding out into the great family-room, and there was the real wedding supper. And after they had eaten the supper, Bengel's fiddle sounded in the parlor, and they danced, and they waltzed, and they polkaed to their hearts' content. And so they celebrated the Christmas of 1861.

Too bad! was not it? Tom's leave was only twenty days. It took five to come. It took five to go. After the wedding there were but seven little days. And then he kissed dear Laura good-by,—with tears running from his eyes and hers,—and she begged him to be sure she should be all right, and he begged her to be certain nothing would happen to him. And so, for near two years, they did not see each other's faces again.

Christmas Eve again!

Moses Marvel has driven out his own bays in his own double cutter to meet the stage at Fordyce's. On the back seat is Mattie Marvel, with a rosy little baby all wrapped up in furs, who has never seen his father. Where is Laura?

"Here she comes! here she comes!" Sure enough! Here is the stage at last. Job Stiles never swept round with a more

knowing sweep, or better satisfied with his precious freight at Fordyce's, than he did this afternoon. And the curtains were up already. And there is Laura, and there is Tom! He is pale, poor fellow. But how pleased he is! Laura is out first, of course. And then she gives him her hand so gently, and the others all help. And here is the hero at Marvel's side, and he is bending over his baby, whom he does not try to lift with his one arm,—and Mattie is crying, and I believe old Moses Marvel is crying,—but everybody is as happy as a king, and everybody is talking at one time,—and all the combination has turned out well.

Tom Cutts had had a hole made through his left thigh, so that they despaired of his life. And, as he lay on the ground, a bit of a shell had struck his left forearm and knocked that to pieces. Tom Cutts had been sent back to hospital at Washington, and reported by telegraph as mortally wounded. But almost as soon as Tom Cutts got to the Lincoln Hospital himself, Laura Cutts got there too, and then Tom did not mean to die if he could help it, and Laura did not mean to have him. And the honest fellow held to his purpose in that steadfast Cutts way. The blood tells, I believe. And love tells. And will tells. How much love has to do with will! "I believe you are a witch, Mrs. Cutts," the doctor used to say to her. "Nothing but good happens to this good-man of yours." Bits of bone came out just as they were wanted to. Inflammation kept away just as it was told to do. And the two wounds ran a race with each other in healing after their fashion. "It will be a beautiful stump after all," said the doctor, where poor Laura saw little beauty. But every thing was beautiful to her, when at last he told her

that she might wrap her husband up as well as she knew how, and take him home and nurse him there. So she had telegraphed that they were coming, and that was the way in which it happened that her father and her sister had brought out the baby to meet them both at Fordyce's. Mattie's surprise had worked perfectly.

And now it was time for Laura's surprise! After she had her baby in her own arms, and was on the back seat of the sleigh; after Tom was well wrapped up by her side, with his well arm just supporting the little fellow's head; after Mattie was all tucked in by her father, and Mr. Marvel himself had looked round to say, "All ready?" then was it that Jem Marvel first stepped out from the stage, and said, "Haven't you one word for me, Mattie?" Then how they screamed again! For everybody thought Jem was in the West Indies. He was cruising there, on board the "Greywing," looking after blockaders who took the Southern route. Nobody dreamed of Jem's being at Christmas. And here he had stumbled on Tom and Laura in the New Haven train as they came on! Jem had been sent into New York with a prize. He had got leave, and was on his way to see the rest of them. He had bidden Laura not say one word, and so he had watched one greeting from the stage, before he broke in to take his part for another.

Oh! what an uproarious Christmas that was when they all came home! No! Tom Cutts would not let one of them be sad! He was the cheeriest of them all. He monopolized the baby, and showed immense power in the way of baby talk and of tending. Laura had only to sit on the side of the room and be perfectly happy. It was very soon known what the

arrivals were. And Parson Spaulding came in, and his wife. Of course the Cuttses had been there already. Then everybody came. That is the simplest way of putting it. They all would have wanted to come, because in that community there was not one person who did not love Laura and Tom and Jem. But whether they would have come, on the very first night, I am not sure. But this was Christmas Eve, and the girls were finishing off the meeting-house just as the stage and the sleigh came in. And, in a minute, the news was everywhere. And, of course, everybody felt he might just go in to get news from the fleet or the army. Nor was there one household in Tripp's Cove which was not more or less closely represented in the fleet or the army. So there was really, as the evening passed, a town-meeting in Moses Marvel's sitting-room and parlor; and whether Moses Marvel were most pleased, or Mrs. Marvel, or Laura,—who sat and beamed,—or old General Simeon Cutts, I am sure I do not know.

That was indeed a merry Christmas!

But after that I must own it was hard sledding for Tom Cutts and for pretty Laura. A hero with one blue sleeve pinned neatly together, who, at the best, limps as he walks, quickens all your compassion and gratitude;—yes! But when you are selecting a director of your lumber works, or when you are sending to New York to buy goods, or when you are driving a line of railway through the wilderness, I am afraid you do not choose that hero to do your work for you. Or if you do, you were not standing by when Tom Cutts was looking right and looking left for something to do, so that he might keep the wolf from the door. It was sadly like the life

that his great-grandfather, Samuel Cutts, led at the old farm in old Newbury after the old war. Tom lost his place when he went to the front, and he could not find it again.

Laura, sweet girl, never complained. No, nor Moses Marvel. He never complained, nor would he complain if Tom and his wife and children had lived with him till doomsday. "Good luck for us," said Moses Marvel, and those were many words for him to say in one sentence. But Tom was proud, and it ground him to the dust to be eating Moses Marvel's bread when he had not earned it, and to have nothing but his major's pension to buy Laura and the babies their clothes with, and to keep the pot a-boiling.

Of course Jem joined the fleet again. Nor did Jem return again till the war was over. Then he came, and came with prize-money. He and Tom had many talks of going into business together, with Tom's brains and Jem's money. But nothing came of this. The land was no place for Jem. He was a regular Norse man, as are almost all of the Tripp's Cove boys who have come from the loins of the "Fighting Twenty-seventh." They sniff the tempest from afar off; and when they hear of Puget Sound, or of Alaska, or of Wilkes's Antarctic Continent, they fancy that they hear a voice from some long-lost home, from which they have strayed away. And so Laura knew, and Tom knew, that any plans which rested on Jem's staying ashore were plans which had one false element in them. The raven would be calling him, and it might be best, once for all, to let him follow the raven till the raven called no more.

So Jem put his prize-money into a new bark, which he found building at Bath; and they called the bark the "Laura,"

and Tom and Laura Cutts went to the launching, and Jem superintended the rigging of her himself; and then he took Tom and Laura and the babies with him to New York, and a high time they had together there. Tom saw many of the old army boys, and Laura hunted up one or two old school friends; and they saw Booth in Iago, and screamed themselves hoarse at Niblo's, and heard Rudolphsen and Johannsen in the German opera; they rode in the Park, and they walked in the Park; they browsed in the Astor and went shopping at Stewart's, and saw the people paint porcelain at Haighwout's; and, by Mr. Alden's kindness, went through the wonders of Harper's. In short, for three weeks, all of which time they lived on board ship, they saw the lions of New York as children of the public do, for whom that great city decks itself and prepares its wonders, albeit their existence is hardly known to its inhabitants.

Meanwhile Jem had chartered the "Laura" for a voyage to San Francisco. And so, before long, her cargo began to come on board; and she and Tom and the babies took a mournful farewell, and came back to Tripp's Cove again, to Moses Marvel's house. And poor Tom thought it looked smaller than ever, and that he should find it harder than ever to settle down to being of no use to anybody, and to eat Moses Marvel's bread,—without house or barn, or bin or oven, or board or bed, even the meanest, of his own. Poor Tom! and this was the reward of being the first man in Maine to enter for three years!

And then things went worse and worse. Moses Marvel was as good and as taciturn as ever. But Moses Marvel's affairs did not run as smoothly as he liked. Moses held on,