

Gift of the Magi

WHAT do you think happened to me in there tonight?" asked the New Brother of the Old Tiler.

"Someone give you a dollar?" asked the Old Tiler.

"No, of course not!"

"You give someone a dollar?"

"Certainly not!"

"Well, I can't imagine what happened. Men don't usually get as excited as you are except about getting or giving dollars. What did happen?"

"Brother Smith asked me if I would stand for election as Junior Steward in December!"

"Most natural and reprehensible of Brother Smith!" chuckled the Old Tiler. "Of course you told him you would be pleased to do so."

"Why was it natural and why was it reprehensible, and of course I did nothing of the sort!" answered the New Brother.

"It is natural for men to ask their friends if they want office. It is reprehensible, because Masonry in lodge practice is not supposed to have any politics. An election is supposed to be like a wen, something that just grows without any previous warning or conversation! But why didn't you accept with pleasure?"

"I didn't accept at all! What would I want to be an officer for?"

"Why not?"

"Why, Old Tiler, you know well enough why not! I have heard you talk before about the responsibilities of office. An officer has to serve at least seven years before he gets to the East in this lodge. He has to learn degrees and attend meetings and go to all funerals and visit the sick and labor instructing candidates and I don't know what all besides. Why should I run my head into any such noose as that? What does the officer get out of it, anyway? Nothing but fifty dollars' worth of squares and compasses to hang on a blue ribbon on his coat and for the rest of his life have some Master say, 'You are cordially invited to a seat in the East!' Not for me, thank you!"

"No, very evidently not for you," agreed the Old Tiler. "Did you tell Brother Smith all this?"

"I sure did!"

"What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything. He just looked shocked!"

"I can understand that," mused the Old Tiler, placidly. "Most men are shocked when they go to a friend to do him honor and make him the priceless gift, and he laughs in their faces and calls their gift trash."

"Say, hold on a minute! What are you talking about? He didn't try to give me anything. He tried to wish something on me. He tried . . .

"Oh, no, he didn't!" contradicted the Old Tiler. "You are laboring under a misapprehension. You evidently think a lodge has to beg members to be her servants. Such is not the case. The lodge looks around to see which of her sons she will honor. Through a few men she picked on you. Brother Smith came to you with the Gift of the Magi in his hands. Of course, the gift is not his to make, it is the lodge's to make. But just because there is, now and then, the unappreciative, non-understanding member, who would tread on pearls if they were thrown before him, to get at the swill of ease and luxury instead of the jewels of labor and their reward, the lodge allows certain of its brethren to sound out the others before it offers them the position by in election.

"The lodge looks upon the election to the junior end of the line as a signal honor. In all probability, the man elected Junior Steward this year will be the Master seven years hence. At least he can be, if he has ability and love for Masonry and sticks to his job. So the lodge feels that in saying to a brother 'you may be a Master in seven years; at least, we will trust you to try, as we will try you in trust,' it is paying him the greatest compliment outside of an actual election to the East which it can pay. As betrothal is to marriage, so is election to the foot of the line to the Mastership.

"To be Master of a lodge is a position of responsibility. It means work. It means effort. It means trials. It means difficulty. But it also means much in education, in assurance on one's feet, in knowledge of character and strength of will and wit. Being Master brings great rewards, of which your 'fifty dollars' worth of gold' is but the symbol, not the substance.

"But we all make mistakes, and Brother Smith and I both made one. When he asked me about you, I said you had good stuff in you. So he spoke to you, but you don't want to bring it out for the lodge. That's your business. It was our error. So we will take the better man."

"Why . . . Why didn't you take the better man in the first place?" asked the New Brother.

"Oh, we didn't know he was the better man until you told us so. You had concealed it from us. We thought you had Master's quality in you. Willingness to serve, love of your fellows, desire to be something in Masonry for what it will do for you and what you can do for others; these make a Master's quality. But we were mistaken."

"No, I was mistaken," cried the New Brother remorsefully. "Do you suppose I could unconvince Brother Smith?"

"Not this year," answered the Old Tiler. "You have a year to try