



**"AUNTEE, I'LL THINK OF SOMETHING—I PROMISE
YOU I WILL."**

SECOND EDITION

GRANDFATHER'S
LOVE PIE

BY
MIRIAM GAINES



ILLUSTRATIONS BY
JOHN EDWARD WHITING



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MISS MIRIAM GAINES.**

TO THE MEMORY OF MY BELOVED FATHER,
JOHN THOMAS GAINES,
THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS DEDICATED.

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GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

I.

"O, AUNTEE, what is it?"

The awed young voice paused at the threshold.

It was a sight the little girl had never witnessed before—she had seen Auntee sad at occasional intervals, and a few times had looked upon tears in the usually merry eyes of her beloved chum, but never before had she beheld Auntee sobbing in such an abandonment of grief.

There was a very tender tie of love between these two—Alsie, the dear little twelve-year-old daughter of an older sister of the family, and Alice, the only remaining unmarried child of a household of many sons and daughters.

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

The family circle had never been broken, however, and it was a household where love prevailed, for although several members lived in far-away homes, the flame of affection burned as brightly and the cord of love bound them together as strongly as did ever the same ties bind their sturdy Scotch ancestors into clans.

Auntee (for that was Alsie's baby name for the aunt, with whom so many happy hours had been spent) rose half way up from the bed with a somewhat startled movement, but the sight of the stricken little face at her side seemed to bring back afresh the reminder of her pain, and she again buried her face in the pillow with a sob.

After a few moments, however, the young woman put her arm tenderly around the little namesake and tried to explain.

"I did not intend to burden you, Alsie dear, with my grief, but I feel so

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

sad and somehow I just couldn't keep it shut in any longer—it *had* to come out. But I thought you were playing with your little friend Margaret, and I knew mother had started for the drug store on an errand which would surely keep her an hour."

"Auntee, are you so sad because dear Uncle James has gone away? You know grandma said he had been called to his heavenly home, and there are lots of us left to make you bright and happy."

"So there are, Alsie, and I will try to take courage in that thought, for surely God wouldn't take another loved one away from us so soon—so soon." The last two words were spoken pensively and as though she was unconscious of the presence of the child. Little Alsie's face became white.

"O, Auntee, you don't mean that dear grandfather"—her voice faltered and she finished in a whisper—"is worse?"

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

Auntee regained her self-possession in a moment and said hastily, "No, dear child, no worse. But sit down with me and I will tell you all about it. You must promise not to mention it to grandmother, however, for we will have to be brave together." Then, sitting side by side in the pretty little blue bedroom where only a few months before so many joyous hours had been spent in fixing everything up daintily to meet the gaze of returned travelers, Aunt Alice related to young Alice the story of her trip to the doctor's that very day, and how he had told her that the chances were against the recovery of the beloved father and grandfather, lying so patiently on his bed of pain in the south bedchamber.

His health had begun to fail in the spring, but grandfather, with his broad shoulders, military bearing, and six feet of noble manhood, had never been sick within the memory of either of these two, and it was hard for them—

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

or, indeed, any other—to conceive that it was more than a passing ailment, and would soon disappear. The family became vaguely uneasy as the spring merged into the summer, and a plan was proposed for the plump little five-foot “wifey” to take her big husband, the Captain, on a long trip to the seashore and mountains.

The trip had been taken, but Captain Gordon's condition did not show the improvement that the anxious members of his family had so earnestly hoped to see, and after the return the busy little wife immediately set about securing a couch for his office, for the invalid insisted that he was able to resume his duties. She explained that “the Captain might rest a little now and then from his labors,” for the sturdy old soldier would not for a moment entertain the thought of giving up his work—the loved, chosen profession which he had followed so faithfully and successfully since he came

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

out—a gallant young officer of twenty-three—from the Civil War, the sole survivor of the four members of his household who had gone forth to fight for what was to be the Lost Cause.

Everything at the office was made especially comfortable, for how willingly would every one have spared the quiet, kind professor, who combined so wonderfully strength and manliness with gentleness and loveliness of disposition.

The experiment lasted one week—he came home at the close of the sixth day and said quietly, “I must get a substitute until I am well enough to attend to my work as it should be done.” So the substitute was secured and a consultation of doctors followed, with the result that a new line of treatment had been adopted. A few weeks failed to bring good results, so other treatments had been tried, until, a few weeks before, a skilled specialist had ordered him off to the infirmary for a period of several weeks.

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

The days spent here were days of great suffering, but grandfather was a man of monumental patience, and no word of complaint passed his lips. It was just at this time that a crushing blow had been dealt the hopeful, cheery little wifey, who had always been laughingly termed "boss of the ranch," "head of the house," and such-like terms, but whose right to these titles had never been disputed by the indulgent husband or devoted sons and daughters, for her ready hand always carried with it relief, and her merry laugh brought cheer and sunshine.

Her only brother had been stricken, and died within a few days, but the brave little wife and mother had hidden her deep sorrow in her bosom, and after a few days, only a smiling face was presented about the house.

When the allotted time at the infirmary had expired, the young doctor, who had studied the case with such zeal and attended his patient with the

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

tender care of a son, brought him back to his home.

After having put her father to bed, to rest from the weariness of the trip, Alice turned around to the waiting physician, a foreboding anxiety in her heart, and tried to make her question quite natural:

"Well, doctor, how soon can your friend, the specialist, have father well again?"

After a pause Dr. Emerson replied, "He will not continue on the case, Miss Gordon."

"O, doctor, what do you mean? He has not given it up? I can not relinquish hope—I won't."

"And I do not wish you to, Miss Gordon. Dr. Helm did not find your father's condition to be what he had expected, but we are going to begin at once a treatment that has been practiced with great success in Germany, in cases like his."

Nothing more was said at that time

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

between them, but the memory of that conversation was indelibly printed on Alice's mind, and a long night of the keenest anguish she had ever experienced, followed.

She thought, and thought, and thought, until the sounds from the sick-chamber near by, would bring a flood of tender memories and her pillow would be wet with tears.

It was thus that most of the night was spent. Toward morning she sank into a deep slumber, but, when she wakened, a terrible leaden weight seemed to oppress her, and it was several hours before the buoyant cheerfulness, with which she was by nature endowed, could again assert itself.

After several days and nights spent thus, Alice came to the wise conclusion that the situation *must* be faced, for obvious reasons.

After this decision was reached, she became more calm, and the next day, without consulting any member of the

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

family, slipped away to the doctor's downtown office, and waited patiently until he was at leisure to see her.

Dr. Emerson seemed a little surprised at her appearance, but said, "What is it, Miss Gordon—what can I do for you?"

"I only came, Dr. Emerson, to say to you that I am now ready to hear what you have to tell about my father. I want to know just how much we may hope for—or how little." Her voice faltered, but she continued, "I could not listen a few days ago when you suggested that Dr. Helm was not able to relieve him, but tell me all now."

Perhaps it was because the kind physician felt sorry for the sorrowing daughter, or perhaps it was because, personally, he cherished a deep affection for the scholarly old gentleman on whom he was expending his most earnest efforts, but whatever the reason, he told her in the gentlest, kindest manner, enough to make her under-

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

stand that the chances were against her father's recovery. His concluding remarks, however, were reassuring. "Please do not understand for a moment, Miss Gordon, that I have given up hope. I do not agree altogether with Dr. Helm, and I feel that we have good ground for expecting favorable results from the treatment that we have recently begun."

After hearing the news, Alice returned home, to find a letter in which was a small check from one of the loving family circle, to be spent in a Christmas present for the dear sick one.

It had come to be a sort of habit in the family for a few of the far-away members to send little sums to Alice at Christmas time, in order that the presents should be such as would give service as well as pleasure.

The carrying out of these commissions had always been a source of delight to both big and little Alice, for did *they* not know best of all the individual needs

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

and hopes of each member of the household? Who, then, could so well plan and shop for the merry Christmas, which was *always* a success in the Gordon household?

Yes, a merry, happy season it had always been for, while all the comforts of a refined home had ever been theirs, the provision of these comforts had required constant economy and management on the part of the busy little "wifey" of the house. As the former children had grown up and flitted away from the home nest to establish families for themselves, they had gradually come to realize that it was because of *not having* so many things that they were enabled to get such a degree of pleasure from those gifts which just fitted the need, or perhaps those gifts, for which the ordinary craving might be counted an extravagance.

It had always been the custom for each one of the family to hang up his

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

or her stocking, and when the grandchildren began to appear upon the scene, grandfather's big sock always held a conspicuous place among the stockings of all sizes.

It was the remembrance of all these established customs that had caused the entire breakdown of Alice's walls of self-control (which she thought had been so well built), and when little Alsie found her there, alone in her chamber, in such deep distress, it was not surprising that the little maid was frightened.

This was the first time that Alice had ever confided to the child anything that was, even, in a remote degree, depressing, but her heart was so overwrought that she had poured out the whole sad story to the little girl before time could be taken for consideration of the wisdom of such a course. A flicker of doubt, however, came to her as she saw the troubled look of the child deepen into an expression of pain and

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

perplexity, and she continued, half apologetically,

“I ought not to feel so discouraged, dearie, I know. I ought to be brave, but when I tried to think what I *could* get for dear father with the checks that will surely be coming in to me, within the next two or three weeks, I felt so utterly broken-hearted that I could do nothing but cry.” The child put her arms tenderly around the neck of her beloved aunt, and gave her message of sympathy in mute kisses.

“I am completely at a loss to know what to do,” said Alice, with emphasis. “Here is Christmas, only a month distant—I have made no preparation, for I have had no heart for it; we can not hang up the stockings after the usual merry fashion, for it would be only a farce; we should cry instead of laugh when we see them, so I feel almost desperate to know *what* to do. O, Alsie, can't we think of some plan by which we may give dear grandfather a merry

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

Christmas, especially if it is to be his last with us?"

"Auntee, I'll *think* of something—I promise you I will—and it will be soon, too—perhaps by to-morrow—but anyhow by the day after, so trust to me and let us both hope that grandfather will get better."

"I will, dear—I will. There! I feel more hopeful already. Don't you remember, when you were a wee tot, and would come in and ask me for a piece of cake? When I would say, 'Well, now, I wonder where grandma has put that cake?' you would reply, so eagerly, 'Fink hard, Auntee—fink hard.' You knew well that a real hard *think* would bring results. Now we must both 'think hard' and see if we can't produce a little genuine Christmas cheer."

They parted with this compact, and when Alice, half an hour later, walked into Captain Gordon's sick-chamber, a pleasant smile was on her lips and her voice had regained its usual composure.

II.

A DAY or two passed with little change in the condition of affairs, in the Gordon household, but on the third afternoon, following the conversation between the two Alices, the younger one came in rather suddenly, and announced, in a whisper, that she had an idea.

In a little while Aunt Alice had suggested a walk "for a breath of fresh air," with the result that they were soon out together, alone, walking in the lovely park which was close by.

"You see, Auntee," began Alsie, "it was this way—I tried and tried to think of some celebration, which would make us all cheerful and happy at Christmas, but the more I thought, the harder the problem seemed to get. We couldn't have plays, for that would tire grandfather; a Christmas tree would remind us all of last Christmas,

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

when dear Uncle James had such a beautiful one at his country place. It would make grandma cry—and perhaps the rest of us, too—to remember that *that* home had been broken up by the loss of the father and husband. Altogether, I was beginning to feel real discouraged. Mamma took me down town to lunch with her to-day, and the waiter brought in such a big, luscious piece of pie. You know, Auntee, I have always loved pie 'most as much as grandfather. I began to think how long it had been since he had had a single taste of pie, and yet he has never complained. I began to wish—O, so much—that grandfather could enjoy that delicious bit of pie. The tears came into my eyes, Auntee, and I said to mamma, 'If grandfather could just eat this one piece of pie, mamma, I would be willing to do without pie for the rest of my life.'

“It was then, Auntee, that the idea came to me. Couldn't we have a

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

Christmas pie for grandfather which, instead of having a filling of rich custards or fruits, would contain all the cunning little presents that we grandchildren could make for him?"

"Why, Alsie, what an idea! I've heard of the Jack Horner pie and other varieties, perhaps, but who would have thought of the idea of a Christmas pie of that kind! We'll certainly carry it out, for your pretty idea was the offspring of an unselfish impulse, and a sympathetic tear, and it surely will thrive and bear fruit."

"Let's see, Auntee—a pie must always be round, mus'n't it?"

"And this one will have to be big, too," replied Alice, "for there are lots of us who want to have a finger in it. Those dear co-workers with father, who have kept his sick-room so fragrant and beautiful with flowers, must each be allowed a little space for a card of greeting. In fact, Alsie, I think it would be a good idea to invite all his

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

most beloved circle of friends to send a little message of love, for only the other day he said to me, 'There is nothing so acceptable to a man lying on a bed of sickness as an offering of love—be it a message, a flower, a visit, or a delicacy—it is delightful to be remembered.' ”

“Well, Auntee, I'll see all the cousins within reach and write to the others, and you do the same with the grown folks of the family, and the rule must be that each is to put into the pie something that will please grandfather or make him laugh.”

“Fine, Alsie, fine. It's a good rule to make, for it's a '*Merry Christmas*' we are striving for, and I don't believe our efforts will fail if we put into them all the love and energy which the family say you and I possess, in a like degree.”

“We haven't much time to lose, either, Auntee, for we have lots to do in the three weeks that remain to us. Now, as to business, what are we going

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

to make the pie-crust of—I mean what material will take the place of the pie-crust, which you know is what holds the goodies?”

“It must be considerably stronger than the crisp, brittle crust which Aunt Bettie brings to *our* table,” replied Aunt Alice with a laugh.

After a moment she continued, “I wonder if we couldn't get hold of one of those hat-boxes which are made to hold the enormous ‘creations’ we see every day in the milliners' shops, and on the heads of so many pretty girls. We can make the effort, anyhow, and if we don't succeed in finding just what we want, needles and cardboard are plentiful and we can make a box to suit ourselves, for it must be at least twenty-five or thirty inches in diameter and six inches high to hold the filling.”

They walked slowly homeward, discussing various little points which occurred to them along the way, until, when Alice walked back into the front

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

door of her home, what was her surprise and delight to feel that the weight of the sorrow, which had so oppressed her, was lightened. She felt almost buoyant in her eagerness for Christmas to come.

And now a busy season began. It was hard to think of anything suitable for the invalid, for had not the loving hands of his wife and children provided everything that might add to the comfort of the beloved head of the household?

There was one little feature that had been overlooked, however—grandfather possessed no foot-warmers. So Alsie's energies were at once set to work on these articles, which were destined to be "real comforts" in the weeks which followed Christmas.

The story of grandfather's pie was soon spread, not only through the family, but also to a large circle of friends. Everybody was cautioned, however, to keep the secret from Mrs.

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

Gordon, for it was decreed that the faithful little "wifey" (no one had ever heard the Captain address his wife by any other name than *that*, which he had bestowed upon her during their honeymoon) should share the surprise and pleasure with her husband.

"Mr. Doctor, what are you going to put in the Christmas pie?" exclaimed Alice merrily one morning, after telling the physician of the plan.

"I think I'll contribute the turkey," he answered with a smile. "A turkey, of course, which won't take up too much space, and the dressing I'll put in that turkey will be calculated to make any sick man well. Do you understand?"

Alice didn't quite understand, but was willing to leave the matter in his hands.

Little Jack was quite worried that he could think of nothing to make grandfather laugh, and one day when he was in the sick-chamber he blurted out, "Grandfather, what would you rather

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

have me give you for Christmas than anything else?"

The laugh came then—before time—for it explained to grandfather the uneasy, doubtful expression which had enveloped the little lad's face just previous to the asking of the question.

"Well, I'll tell you, Jack, what would please me more than anything else—a perfect report from your teacher. If you could bring me this, on Christmas Day, I would know that it meant hard work for a boy, who is as fond of play and mischief as you."

Nothing more was said on the subject, but little Jack passed out of the room with a stern resolution that that report should be forthcoming, and when Aunt Alice was told of it she exclaimed enthusiastically, "O, Jacky boy, you *must* get that perfect report, even if it does mean hard work, and we'll lay it in the very center of the pie, sealed up in the prettiest Christmas envelope that I can paint."

III.

“AUNT BETTIE, what are *you* going to put in the pie? For you know everybody must put in something to please grandfather or make him laugh,” asked Alsie, after detailing the plan to the dear old black mammy, who had been grandmother’s maid when she was a young lady in the long years ago.

Aunt Bettie was considerably beyond sixty, but not many young “niggers” could get around as lively as she, and no one, who had ever dined in that household, could doubt her ability to cook the best meal ever brought to a table.

“Nevah you min’, honey—Aunt Bettie’ll have somethin’ fur de occasion—it’s a shame dat doctah won’t let Captain Gordon hab no pie nor nuthin’, but makes him eat jest dem beat biscuits, when he likes de soft ones so

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

much de best. I'll be ready, chile, on de day 'fore Christmas, so don' you worry yourse'f 'bout me."

"But you mus'n't make him anything that is bad for him, Aunt Bettie. He can't eat the plum pudding, and other rich goodies like the rest of us, you know, because he is too ill and the doctor won't allow it," answered Alsie anxiously.

"I'll 'member *all* dat," laughed Aunt Bettie reassuringly, as the child departed from the kitchen, but a feeling of sadness came to the faithful old soul as she recalled the festivities of the year before, when Christmas dinner had been prepared for the whole family of children and grandchildren, and the thought of how the dear head of the family had enjoyed that occasion brought tears to her eyes.

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Such conversations were being held every day, and the days were passing,

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

too, with astonishing rapidity, just as they always do when one is deeply interested in some absorbing project.

Aunt Alice had been receiving, daily, numerous letters—several containing checks—and little Alsie's correspondence had suddenly grown to enormous proportions.

Uncle Dick came in one evening, and slipping a gold piece into his sister's hand remarked, "*I* can't think of a thing for that pie, Alice. I'm sorry to be so stupid, but I'll have to ask you to take this and see what your clever brain can do with it."

"O, Dick, it will make a grand 'plum' for the pie. I'll put it in, just in this form, for I want all the money entrusted to me, as agent, to go toward providing for father, comforts and luxuries, such as we might not be able to afford under ordinary circumstances. And yet, it's almost impossible to know exactly how to spend it just now," replied Alice. After a little pause she

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

added, "I believe I'll just put the gold pieces and checks into a little box and label it, 'Fruit for the Pie.' My biggest check may truly be termed a *peach*, and I can convert one or two others into plums and raisins."

"I think I know of several plums that will be forthcoming if that's your idea, sis—it's a capital one, too," answered Dick. "I confess I'm getting quite interested in the contents myself, and two or three times I've come near asking about the progress of the pie, before mother, forgetting that she's to share in the great surprise."

"O, Dick, *do* be careful, for we have arranged it all so nicely, and in another week we'll be making up that pie, so don't spoil our plans now, for how much more father will enjoy it if his dear little 'wifey' shares the pleasure also. And, by the way, Dick, that reminds me of something that must go in for mother. A few days ago, when I was sitting with father, he directed me

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

to get a trifling gift for mother, but with his old-time humor he said, 'I believe the most acceptable gift that I could make Wifey would be all the receipts of the bills that have come in, for the little woman has worried considerably over the number and amounts. I got in a pretty good check several days ago, but I'll not give any gifts this year—the money must go to pay these extra expenses that have been inevitable. I wish you'd see to it that Wifey has as big a bunch as possible of receipted bills. It's the best I can do this year, and you all understand.'"

"Wasn't it dear of him, Dick, and who but father would have thought of making a joke of something, which might seem to some, only a trying duty?"

"It just shows us again the sort of manly man father has always been; but Alice, I had an idea that it would be a nice thing to take that little poem father wrote to mother last Christmas—

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

the one he presented with his gift—and have an illuminated copy made of it for mother's gift this Christmas. It pleased her so much at the time, and, in this form, it could be framed prettily and hung over her bed. You remember the lines—I have them in my pocket now.”

He unfolded the sheet of paper, and handed it to Alice, who read aloud:

MY BEST CHRISTMAS GIFT.

Some two score years, and more ago,
A father gave his child away:
It was a Christmas gift, you know,
Because 'twas done on Christmas
Day.

That little maid was given to me;
I took her then for weal or woe.
The years have passed so happily
It does not seem so long ago.

No other gift in any year
Has e'er excelled, or equaled this;
The others evanescent were
While this has shed perennial bliss.

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

For it has multiplied with time
And added blessings, year by year;
She came to me in youthful prime
And still remains, though in the sere.

Her children, and their children, too,
In number, just about a score,—
I count, as blessings, to her due:
May God repeat His gift once more.

My little wifey, always dear,
When Christmas comes, I think
back then
And greet you with increasing cheer,
My Christmas Gift, returned again.

“It’s a beautiful idea, Dick, but it won’t do now. There’s too much pathos in it for this occasion. When I read the lines myself, I am blinded with tears, for I realize all too keenly that we may not have him another Christmas. Some time, it may be a great comfort to mother to have it. Keep the idea in mind and work it out some day.”

So the little poem was folded up and laid away for another year.

IV.

SEVERAL days passed and grandfather seemed to improve. The spirit of Christmas pervaded everything, and even the invalid playfully asked Alsie if she could give him a hint as to what he might find in his sock on the eventful morning. Uncle Dick had been instructed to bring home all the Santa Claus posters that might be found in the newspaper office or bookshop, and there was already quite a stack of colored pictures on hand, showing Santa Claus in every stage of his wonderful yearly trip round the earth. Both Alices had spent some time selecting the little white Santa and sleigh for the top of the pie. The reindeer were hitched, tandem style, to the sleigh, harnessed and reined with the gayest red ribbon. The packages and letters began to

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

come, in considerable numbers, during the next few days, and several more "plums" were given into Alice's care, not to mention the *dates*, raisins, currants, and the like, for every check or coin was classified with the *fruit*, for the *filling* of the pie. It began to look as if that pie was to be a very rich one after all.

One morning, several days before Christmas, Mrs. Gordon came out of the sick-chamber, to the breakfast table, with a beaming face, saying:

"Captain Gordon spent the best night he has had in months, and he feels so bright and well that he wants to be brought into the library and rest awhile on the couch there."

What joy this announcement brought to them all! The rolling chair was drawn forth, and little Alsie led the way from one room to another with feet that fairly danced.

No ill effects followed the experiment, and it was repeated the next day with

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

even greater success. It really appeared that some of the most persistent features of Captain Gordon's illness were yielding, perhaps, to the treatment—at any rate, the beloved invalid was better, and the leaden weight of apprehension, which had so burdened the hearts of each one of them, was disappearing and a wonderful joy was taking its place.

A white-winged, invisible guest had arrived, before time, to spend the Christmastide with them. It was the Angel of Hope, sent by the pitying hand of the Father in Heaven, and with it came peace, joy, love, and merriment.

What a host of Christmas cards came in, on the morning mail, just preceding Christmas Day. Little Alsie was almost wild to begin work on the pie. After breakfast, Aunt Alice said calmly, "Alsie, come with me, for I have an important errand, and would like to have company."

"O, Auntee, how *can* you be so com-

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

posed when there's such a big pile of bundles in your bedroom closet, and have you seen the lovely palm sent to grandfather by the members of his literary club? It's a beauty, and so big that it looks almost like a small tree!"

They wended their way to Alice's room, and locked the door. Going to the closet, Alice brought forth the largest round hat-box that any of them had ever seen. It must have been two feet or more in diameter, but it was only seven or eight inches high.

The Christmas paper was next brought out, and what a wonderful variety there was—Santa Claus, in all phases of his yearly trip, was pictured on some rolls, while festoons of holly and ribbon were outlined against a background of white on others.

After considerable discussion and comparing of effects, it was finally decided that the outside crust of the pie should be of white paper, decorated in holly and ribbon, so the needles and

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

pastepot were both used in preparing the lower portion of the box. The top was treated in an entirely different fashion. It was covered over with the whitest of white cotton batting, and the glistening little sleigh was securely fastened to the center of the top. Fragments of the cotton fell over the edges, and when Alice sprinkled over this, the "diamond dust," it looked as if real icicles were dropping from a bank of glistening snow.

"Auntee, it's the prettiest thing I've ever seen!" exclaimed Alsie enthusiastically, after the lining had been neatly pasted in.

Then began the work of fixing up the packages to fill the pie. Aunt Bettie's contribution was unique—a beaten-biscuit gentleman, some twelve inches tall, who was certainly most "fearfully and wonderfully" made. The eyes, which had been so carefully put in with a fork, were a little too close together, and the dough nose, which had been

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

so anxiously applied, had risen unduly in the baking, to the great detriment of the biscuit gentleman's appearance. The mouth was all right, however—big and smiling. His legs looked very much like he had a bad case of locomotor ataxia, but the buttons on his coat were quite regular and his arms hung at his sides like ramrods.

After careful inspection which occasioned considerable laughter, the beaten-biscuit man was rolled up in tissue paper and placed in a Christmas box "just his size." On the card was this message: "The Bible says, 'Love your enemies'—here is an enemy for you to conquer," for it was a well-known fact that grandfather found it hard to overcome his dislike of the "hardtack," as he denominated the beaten biscuit prepared for him.

The doctor's turkey was next inspected—a nice little brown roasted fowl in appearance, but in reality one of the cunning little pasteboard devices that



AUNT BETTIE'S CONTRIBUTION WAS UNIQUE—A BEATEN-BISCUIT GENTLEMAN, SOME TWELVE INCHES TALL.

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GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

Alsie had so often seen in the confectioners' shops. There was plenty of stuffing too, for Dr. Emerson had filled it full of pills and capsules. There were pink pills and blue pills and green pills and lavender pills, and hidden among them was the prescription, with one end sticking out of the opening. It read: "For Captain Gordon—Pills of every color, size, and variety, warranted to cure every known pain or ache—to be taken with your Christmas pie." The little turkey was carefully wrapped in tissue paper and garnished with a spray of holly.

Next came the tiny basket of fresh eggs from the merry little next-door neighbor, whose big, fine chickens had been coaxed to lay a dozen eggs for the Christmas pie. The basket would not hold the dozen—O no! for its greatest capacity was four; but the remaining eight were set away in a safe corner of the pantry. The four eggs were laid in a perfect nest of red and

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

white tissue paper, and holly and ribbon were twined round the edges and handle of the basket. On the card was written the following bit of rhyme:

“Now, what can be nicer
Than for folks to remember
The friends that they love
With *fresh eggs* in December?”

“We shall have to get help, Alsie—just look at the books to be put in, and half the presents sent by the children must be wrapped and tied up, for you know every single thing must have a ribbon attached, by which it is to be pulled out of the pie.”

So Alsie was cautiously sent out to get her cousin Emily, the oldest granddaughter in the family, a quiet young girl of fourteen, who was exceedingly fond of reading.

“For goodness sake, let's get the books all in the pie before Emily gets here, Auntee, for she will want to read a little out of each one to see what it is

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

like, and we'll get no help from her," exclaimed Alsie.

Aunt Alice laughed, and replied, "Well, we must get through this work somehow, for Uncle Dick is coming out early this afternoon with the cedar, holly, and mistletoe, and will help us decorate the library. Speaking of cedar, let me show you what dear Aunt Cecile has sent in her Christmas box, besides the gifts."

Taking off the top, Alice lifted out a huge bunch of beautiful galax leaves and another of the daintiest sprays of evergreen.

"Just a suggestion of the bracing mountain air which you are to enjoy with me as soon as you are well enough to travel," was the message that came with it, for Aunt Cecile lived far away in a mountain climate, and was deeply disappointed at not being able to spend this holiday season at home, as she had intended. All sorts of curiously shaped packages were taken out

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

and laid aside for the various members of the household, but the largest share was to go in the pie. Tiny Bess had made a big shaving-ball at kindergarten, and this was sent to grandfather with a Christmas greeting. Bobby's contribution was a highly decorated three-layer blotter with grandfather's name and address in red ink on the top layer. It was not a thing of beauty, being the work of his own clumsy little hands, but he felt sure it would be appreciated, for he had heard grandfather wish so often that "somebody" wouldn't take away the blotters from his desk.

"I have such a cute little lemon that I want to put in the pie, Auntee, and yet I don't know exactly *how* to work it in. It would be too unkind to say that anybody would 'hand out a lemon' to dear, sick grandfather, but it's so tiny and cunning—hardly bigger than a lime. The groceryman found it in a box of lemons and gave it to me, asking if I needed anything that size for the

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

pie—you know I told him all about it. He said there was nothing in his Christmas stock too good for the Captain, and he'd like to send something, but it really seemed like all his goodies were forbidden fruit."

"We'll put the message in with the lemon, Alsie, and that will make it both funny and kind." So the tiny specimen was done up in a dainty box and on the large card was written: "The groceryman offered his choice stock of figs, dates, confections, and fruits for Captain Gordon's Christmas pie, but found nothing acceptable but a small-sized lemon, which he presents with the hope that it will furnish all the tartness necessary."

"Have you opened Aunt Margie's box yet?" was the question asked by Alsie as the work of filling the pie was drawing to a close.

"I opened that some days ago," replied Alice, with a smile. "There were a good many things in that box for

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

general distribution, and, by the way, Alsie, this goes into the pie, but I think it will interest you as much as father."

She had stepped to her dresser, and opened a drawer while speaking, and now held up to view what seemed to be simply an envelope. On turning it over, however, a pretty little border of holly was disclosed, painted around the edges. "A Reminiscence" was written in the center.

"What is it, Auntee?" exclaimed Alsie, reaching out her hand.

"We'll let you guess awhile, dearie. I am going to drop it in the pie now, and *that* will be one of the surprises that you will enjoy with grandpa."

Alsie was quite curious over the Reminiscence, and wondered what it could contain to be of such interest to her.

"Well, I won't have to wait long, anyhow," she finally exclaimed, with a laugh.

"One of the presents will have to stay on ice until to-morrow morning," ex-

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

plained Alsie to Emily, "but we'll show you the card. It's from Mr. McDonald, the druggist. He's been on a little hunting trip and this morning sent over the finest, fattest little quail you ever saw. On the card was written: 'Dear Captain: I filled this prescription for you myself, independent of the doctors, but I think they will approve. Take it to-morrow at one o'clock and see if you don't feel better.' Isn't it a cunning idea? It is to be the last thing put in before grandfather is brought into the library, Emily, so don't let us forget it."

"I won't," promised Emily; "but where are you going to put all those bottles of wine and brandy, Aunt Alice? Do you think the pie will hold them?"

"If that problem puzzles you, just *how* do you suppose we are going to get *this* in the pie?" replied Alice, lifting from its position behind the bed a box so huge that the pie itself seemed almost diminutive in comparison.

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

"O, Auntee," cried Alsie in astonishment, "do tell us what it is!"

For answer Alice set the box on the bed, untied the string, and lifted off the top. A dainty and beautiful silken comfort was disclosed to the view of the admiring group. The background was of white, and scattered over it were clusters of the most exquisitely colored pink roses and green leaves. The edges were prettily bound with satin ribbon of an old-rose shade, and a huge bow adorned the center.

"It is made of the warmest and softest wool, and every stitch was put in by hand," murmured Alice softly, smoothing the comfort caressingly. "It is beautiful to look at, but by far the most beautiful part to father will be the thought that every one of his teachers wished to have a hand in the giving of his Christmas gift, and to this end they came together, with needles and thimbles, and the stitches were veritably put in with love."

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

"But the pie won't hold it, Aunt Alice—what are you going to do about it?" inquired practical little Emily.

"This big box goes behind the piano, and any other packages that can't be accommodated inside the pie, will be hidden around in various other little corners of the room. My plan is to have the *cards* in the pie, however, and as they are drawn out, the directions as to where the packages they represent are deposited, can be followed. Is that a good idea, Alsie, or do you think of something better?"

"It can't be improved upon, Auntie—you always think of the best plans. But let's hurry up now and finish, for the pie is about as full as it will hold."

A half hour more of work, and the pie was finished.

V.

THE workers were all quite ready to do justice to the lunch spread out for them by Aunt Bettie. Uncle Dick came in during the meal, exclaiming, "O, do save me a sandwich, Alsie, for I'm almost starved!"

"Where's the holly? Did you get any mistletoe? Are there any wreaths? Is there plenty of cedar?" were the questions poured out upon him before he had opportunity to sit down.

"Yes, to all the questions, and I'll begin work just as soon as I rest a bit and eat a bite," laughingly answered Uncle Dick. "Does that satisfy all parties?"

Uncle Dick was a great favorite with the children in the family—he loved them and seemed to find genuine pleasure in playing, talking, and romping with the "small fry," so it was not

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

surprising that they should take almost complete possession of him whenever he came.

"Your father's improvement continues," said Mrs. Gordon with a happy smile, in reply to her son's question as to how the invalid was feeling. "He seems so bright and well to-day and sat in the invalid chair this morning for more than an hour. I think he is surely gaining strength at last."

"He's looking forward toward tomorrow with lots of pleasure, too," said Alsie. "Yesterday, when I was in his room, he asked what I expected to find in my stocking, and playfully suggested that he and I would have to be careful not to get our stockings mixed. Do you know, Uncle Dick, I had hardly given a moment's thought to what I was going to get, for I have been so busy——"

Alsie caught herself just in time to keep from disclosing the secret to the

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

busy little grandmother, who, a few moments later, hurried out of the dining room to resume once more her position in the sick-chamber.

"Look out the window, Alsie!" exclaimed Emily at this point, "it looks like our hopes for a white Christmas are going to be realized."

Sure enough, the snow was falling fast and the ground already began to look white.

"If it just keeps up, Auntee, won't we have a beautiful Christmas?" exclaimed Alsie enthusiastically. Alice had been looking out, too, and the shadow of doubt pulled at her heart-strings.

Could it be the last Christmas—O, surely such a terrible sorrow was not in store for them all! What would the merry season be without him?

These were the thoughts that flashed through her mind, but at the sound of the dear little voice beside her, she dismissed them and answered cheerily, "I think we are going to have a beauti-

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

ful Christmas—in every way—but it's time to be about our work now. Ask Uncle Dick if he left the cedar out on the porch.”

The cedar was brought in—likewise the holly and mistletoe—and oh, how pretty the red berries looked, and how pretty the garlands of evergreen looked when tied up with the crimson ribbons!

“How do you like these?” called Uncle Dick as he smoothed out a great roll of posters. “I picked them up around the office, and thought they would help in the decorations.”

Alsie and Emily were filled with delight at sight of the great colored newspaper sheets, covered with all manner of pictures of the dear old saint. There he was just ready to climb down the chimney—another poster pictured him on his annual journey driving his reindeer over the snowy ground. And so on—it seemed as if every stage of the Christmas trip had been photographed in colors.

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

"I will pin this life-sized portrait of Santa Claus over the fireplace here," said Uncle Dick, "and you two girlies may get busy at once making garlands of evergreen to drape about him, and also over these others, for they must all have a touch of green; isn't that so, Alice?"

"By all means," answered his sister, with a laugh. "It's really a very clever idea, Dick, to bring all these posters out, for they give a festive touch to our decorations."

After two hours of hard work, in which hammer, nails, and stepladder played a considerable part, the library was almost transformed in appearance. Every window and picture was festooned with Christmas green, and the merry face of Santa Claus was visible from the bookcases, the desk, and many other nooks about the room.

"What about the pie, Auntie? Aren't we ready for it now?" questioned Alsie and Emily with impatience,

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

as a general survey of the room was taken.

"This is just the time where we will have to be very careful," was the reply. "Alsie, suppose you and Emily offer to walk out with grandmother when she goes to meet Aunt Martha and little James, on the five o'clock train, and as soon as you get her safely out of the house Uncle Dick can bring the pie and other things into the library, where we can all have a hand in fixing it up later. Of course I shall carry the key to the library the rest of the evening, for after keeping the secret this long, I am determined that mother shall have as much of the surprise and pleasure as father."

Seeing a look of disappointment on the two little faces at the idea of being banished just at the most interesting stage of the fun, Alice continued reassuringly, "It is almost train time now, chicks, and you know I can't go with grandmother to-day, so practice

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

the Golden Rule and run along. After your return from the station, you may come again to the library for, as you know, grandmother will want to have a good hour's conversation with Aunt Martha before tea-time."

No further urging was necessary. The two girls skipped away cheerfully, and a few minutes later were out in the snowstorm with the little grandmother between them, all three being well bundled up in coats and overshoes.

In less than an hour they had returned, the greetings were over, grandmother had taken Aunt Martha off to her room for the predicted chat, and the two little girls were taking their cousin James to the library. He had been told about the pie and was curious to know what it really looked like, for James was not gifted with a vivid imagination.

He soon found out, however. Aunt Alice had covered over the entire top of the old mahogany library table with

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

soft cotton, and hanging from the edges was a deep border of the lovely Christmas paper which is used so much in these latter days for decorations. Around the edges were laid sprays of the rarer and more delicate evergreen sent from the South by the loving daughter. In the center rose the pie, and over all was sprinkled the glistening powder, which gave the whole an appearance of real snow. It was, in truth, a wonderful creation, and the children gazed at the lovely vision in speechless delight.

“The big box, containing the comfort, is behind the piano, James, and there are lots of other things, too big to go in the pie, stowed away in the various corners of the room, but the cards are all in the pie, and each tells just where to find a package. Some lovely flowers and plants have been sent in this afternoon, but we'll wait until morning to bring them into the library. There is the couch close beside the fireplace,

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

and if dear father is just able to be brought in to-morrow I think he will fully enjoy the Christmas we have had so much pleasure in preparing for him. Suppose we go out now, for it is tea-time, and, besides, almost everything has been done."

So saying, Alice turned to the door. The little party hastened out, and its members were soon engaged in a romp with Uncle Dick in the sitting room.

VI.

A MORE beautiful Christmas Day could scarcely have been imagined than dawned the next morning. The earth was covered with a carpet of snow, and the trees seemed to glisten with diamonds as the sun rose, although the air was crisp and frosty.

"Merry Christmas!" sounded in Alice's ears before she had fully wakened, and looking round with a somewhat sleepy expression she beheld the form of her beloved pet, arrayed in pink dressing-gown and slippers. A beaming smile adorned the face of the little girl, although the greeting had been so subdued as to be scarcely more than a whisper.

"I just couldn't wait to show you how well I look in them!" exclaimed

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

Alsie as she jumped into bed with Alice, and almost smothered her with hugs and kisses. "You can always think of the prettiest things for me, dear Auntee, and I do love pink so dearly," she continued with an affectionate glance at the pretty slippers, adorned with the daintiest of ribbon rosettes.

"Did grandfather have a good night? Do you think he will be able to come into the library?"

"One question at a time, dear. I rather think father had a good rest, for I heard the nurse only once during the night, and that is a good indication. If he is as well as he was yesterday, I feel sure Dick can bring him into the library, and the couch is there, so that he can lie down if he gets tired."

Almost an hour was spent in showing the contents of Alsie's stocking and discussing plans for the day.

"Perhaps we had better get dressed now, and be ready for breakfast when it comes, but of course we mustn't

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

disturb father, even though it *is* Christmas morning," said Alice with a smile, and she began to make haste with her toilet.

"Have you ever noticed what a long wait people have for breakfast on Christmas morning, Auntee?"

"That's because some people rise at such unearthly hours," answered Alice with a laugh, "but run along now, Alsie, and let's see which will be dressed first."

An hour later found the family grouped around the breakfast table. Each member had been in to the sick-room and given his greeting to the dear invalid, who had appeared so bright and cheerful that he seemed almost like his old merry self. When Alsie was recounting to him all the pretty things she had found in her stocking, he said, teasingly, "Now don't get into mine, too—I'm going to wait until Uncle Dick and his little tots come before I take my allotted hour in the library."

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

By ten o'clock Uncle Dick's family had arrived, and the big, stalwart son went into the sick-room to assist the pale, weak father into the library. A pang came to the heart of the former as he thought of what a contrast was this Christmas with the one of a year before, when the now wasted form had been so vigorous and handsome. A feeling of misgiving came as to what the next Christmas would bring to them.

When the chair was rolled into the library, what a sight was displayed to the wondering eyes of the astonished old gentleman!

The room was almost transformed in appearance with the elaborate decorations, and, added to this feast for the eyes, was the perfume of fresh flowers, for several boxes of roses and carnations had come in with Christmas greetings during the early hours of the morning.

Grandfather's breath was almost tak-

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

en away. He looked at the eager faces gathered all round him, and said helplessly, "What does it mean? I don't exactly understand."

"It's *your* Christmas pie, grandfather, for we couldn't let the day go by without your having a taste. When you find all the good things that are in that pie I don't think you'll feel slighted, even if Aunt Bettie's *mince* pie is denied," exclaimed Alsie enthusiastically.

"Yes, light in," added Uncle Dick, "and I'm here to help you, so we'll station ourselves around the fire and all assist *you* to enjoy it, slice by slice."

For a little while, however, it was only inspected, as Alice told the story of how the idea had come to little Alsie, and how all of them had assisted in working it out. Uncle Dick finally lifted off the top and a perfect network of narrow Christmas ribbons was disclosed.

"Each ribbon holds a dainty morsel,"

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

said Emily, as grandfather reached forth his hand to grasp one. The first "draw" was a fortunate one, for it proved to be a tender note of love and greeting from one of his most faithful and valued friends. The next brought forth Aunt Bettie's biscuit man, which looked so funny that every one burst into laughter. Then books and presents of many varieties followed. Every few minutes a card would be drawn out bearing a message from some dear relative or friend in a distant city or State. These tender reminders that so many of his friends were thinking of him with affection and sending him such cordial good wishes and hopes for recovery seemed to please Captain Gordon greatly.

As for the little "wifey"—she just sat at her husband's side and enjoyed the same measure of surprise and pleasure.

The package of receipted bills—gorgeously done up in Christmas style—was not forgotten, and brought forth

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

the predicted satisfaction, even if there was considerable laughing also.

"Handle this with care," laughed Uncle Dick, as he gayly lifted out the tiny basket of eggs. "This is one slice of the pie at least that you can eat."

The lemon was pulled out in the course of time and proved not to be too sour for enjoyment. Alsie waited patiently for the envelope containing the "Reminiscence," and at last, when it came forth, she drew very close to grandfather to watch him open it. A puzzled look was on his face as he unfolded several yellow sheets of paper and recognized his own handwriting. He began to read a few lines, however, and a kindly smile spread over his countenance.

"I rather think this will interest somebody else, too. Suppose you read it aloud, Dick," remarked grandfather.

It was dated ten years before, and proved to be one of the vivid, interesting letters that none could write so

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

well as Captain Gordon. It was written at the time of Alice's memorable year's trip abroad with some friends. Alsie was then a tiny girl of two years. The letter gave a detailed account of one of baby's escapades. It read as follows:

"The Old Kentucky Home.

"My dear Alice:

"It pleases me greatly to know that my young daughter is having such a glorious time abroad with her friends, even though I do miss her sorely at home. The letter written by me a day or two ago, which will probably reach you along with this, informs you that we are all well at home, and it contains as much neighborhood gossip as Wifey was able to think of at the hour of my writing, along with considerable instruction about certain points in sight-seeing. Your letter this morning, telling the amusing little story of the Italian baby, made me wonder if you wouldn't like a 'baby letter' in return. So here is the answer:

"Last Sunday morning your little

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

namesake was dressed up in her prettiest white dress, with an abundance of blue ribbon adornment, and seated on the front porch, with careful instruction not to soil her clothes but to wait for mother to get ready to escort her to Sunday-school. It developed later that the first part of the injunction seemed to make an impression to the exclusion of the last order. At any rate, Alsie's mamma was somewhat delayed in her preparations, and when, twenty minutes or half an hour later, she appeared on the porch, no baby was in sight. A number of calls brought forth no response; a messenger was dispatched to the back lot, where the dandelions grow, another to the north side of the house, where the little maiden has been so occupied recently picking violets, while still other couriers were hastily despatched to all the neighbors. The report came back from all—no baby girl had been seen by anybody. The situation began to be a little alarming. The messengers were again started out, with instructions to go farther and report at once if any trace was found.

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

"Ten or fifteen minutes passed, and by this time Alsie's mamma was in a most excited state of mind, as you may well imagine, and felt perfectly sure that the little curly-headed damsel had been kidnaped. She was reproaching herself roundly for putting such a tempting morsel of humanity right into the hands of the cruel villians, when a sharp ring of the telephone brought the remnant of the family, who were not on searching duty, flying to the table in the hall, which as you know holds the receiver.

"Being the least agitated member of the group, I boldly called 'hello,' and was asked by a masculine voice if Mrs. Stratton's little daughter didn't have blue eyes and brown hair and if she wore a white dress with blue——

"It was not necessary to finish the description. My informant then stated that the little lady in question was at that moment occupying a high seat on top of the counter at the drug store, which you know is some five blocks away, and was surrounded by an admiring group of men and boys, to whom she was affably chatting. He said

CRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

that she refused to be led away, but was quite happy to eat the candy, chew the gum, and play with the various other offerings that were handed out by the amused group of auditors.

"Of course I started at once, and a few moments later I walked in on the baby, who was sitting, according to description, on the counter, explaining, 'Must keep dress kean—mamma take me Sunny Sool.' When I entered she held out her little hands to me with such an innocent, happy smile that I had not the heart to scold; but it was some time before I could persuade her to return to poor mamma, to whom the scant hour's parting seemed almost a year.

"You can imagine the rest of the story, but to relieve your misgivings I'll assure you that the cunning little tot escaped the well-merited punishment.

"This is quite a letter, so I'll wait a few days to write again. As you're probably in France by this time, I'll close my letter with an *au revoir*.

Yours, &c.,

R. A. Gordon."

Alsie's cheeks glowed with excitement

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

during the reading of this letter, and at its close she exclaimed, "O, Auntee, have you had it all these years and never showed it to me?"

"It was among my foreign letters, dear, and I had not thought of it for some time, but I well remember what a pleasure it was to read that letter and hear of the escapade of the dear little baby namesake at home. I have always meant to show it to you when you were old enough to enjoy it," answered Alice.

After a good deal of laughter and comments among the various members of the family, the card bearing the order to look behind the piano on the left side was pulled out of the pie, and Uncle Dick was dispatched for the package. It proved to be the huge box containing the silken coverlet. Grandmother's enthusiasm was awakened at the sight, and she commented many times on its softness, warmth, and beauty.

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

Books, cards, and gifts of all descriptions from the little tots, were taken out, inspected and complimented, to the immense satisfaction of the younger members of the family and the entertainment of the older ones of the group.

It really seemed impossible to empty that pie, but after an hour or more had been spent in the occupation the ribbons began to grow thin.

"This is to be the last one," said Alice, slipping her hand over a ribbon that Captain Gordon was just about to pick up.

"All right—just as you like. There have been so many goodies in this pie that I hardly see how it would be possible for anything better to be saved for the last," answered Captain Gordon with a loving smile.

The last ribbon was finally drawn, and tied to the end was the "box of fruit" that Alice had taken such pains to make attractive. Captain Gordon

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

slowly untied the ribbon and took the top off the box. He picked up a small sealed envelope bearing the inscription, "A plum from Dick," and in it was a shining gold piece. Each little envelope (and there were quite a number) contained a peach, a plum, a raisin, a currant, or a date. The "plums" were all gold pieces, but the checks were put in under other names—according to their value—and the silver pieces and bright pennies were all in the raisin and currant envelopes.

One envelope, bearing the name "Date," when opened disclosed a small card on which was written:

CHRISTMAS DAY.

When I "call to see" you, this "date" will be exchanged for a "plum."

HAROLD.

This occasioned a laugh, and Mrs. Gordon began at once to sum up the total.

"It's to buy you anything you want—

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

a comfort and luxury fund," explained Alice, "and all the members of the family join together in giving it."

"Grandfather, we hardly knew what to call your pie. It was not a chicken pie, even though it did contain a bird and a turkey. It was not a lemon pie, even if there was a lemon in it. It could not be called an apple, peach, cherry or mince pie, though there *was* plenty of fruit in that box, wasn't there?" said Alsie, with a laugh, when everything had been examined.

"I think I shall call it my 'Love Pie,' for never was a pie so highly seasoned or delightfully flavored with love as this has been," answered grandfather softly, "and I want the dear little girl who thought of it to know that I have enjoyed it more than any pie that I have ever eaten."

The invalid was a little wearied with the unusual excitement of the morning, and was soon ordered back to his bed for a little rest.

GRANDFATHER'S LOVE PIE

In the afternoon Alice went into the sick-room for a chat, while her mother went out for a little walk in the fresh, crisp air.

She told her father of how the silken comfort had been planned and made, and Captain Gordon, after a long pause, turned to her with what seemed to Alice the most beautiful expression she had ever seen on his face, and said, "Bring it to me, daughter."

She brought it forth and held it out to him that he might smooth its folds and look again at its rosy color.

"Spread it over me, dear, and let it cover me—as long as I need it."

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And it covered him for the six weeks that it was needed, when it was replaced with a coverlet of roses and lilies provided by the same loving hands.