

A Christmas Fairy

by John Strange Winter *from The Children's Book of Christmas Stories*

In the story, Tom Egerton and Bertie Fellows are students at an English boarding school. Both have to stay at school over the Christmas holiday. Tom's parents are in India, which is too far for him to go for the holiday. Bertie's sister is sick, so he cannot go home until she is well. They are sad they must stay at school. The boys have briefly argued about fairies: whether they exist to grant wishes.

This was the day before Christmas. Quite early in the morning came the great box of which Bertie's mother had spoken in her letter. Then, just as dinner had come to an end, there was a peal at the bell, and a voice was heard asking for Tom Egerton.

Tom sprang to his feet, and flew to greet a tall, handsome lady, crying, "Aunt Laura! Aunt Laura!"

Aunt Laura explained that she and her husband had arrived in London only the day before. "I was so afraid, Tom," she said, "that we should not get here until Christmas Day was over and that you would be disappointed. So I would not let your mother write you that we were on our way home. You must get your things packed up at once, and go back with me to London. Then uncle and I will give you a splendid time."

For a minute or two Tom's face shone with delight. Then he caught sight of Bertie and turned to his aunt.

"Dear Aunt Laura," he said, "I am very sorry, but I can't go."

"Can't go? and why not?"

"Because I can't go and leave Bertie here all alone," he said stoutly. "When I was going to be alone he wrote and asked his mother to let me go home with him. She could not have either of us because Bertie's sister has scarlet fever. He has to stay here, and he has never been away from home at Christmas time before, and I can't go away and leave him by himself, Aunt Laura." For a minute Aunt Laura looked at the boy as if she could not believe him. Then she caught him in her arms and kissed him.

"You dear little boy, you shall not leave him. You shall bring him along, and we shall all enjoy ourselves together. Bertie, my boy, you are not very old yet, but I am going to teach you a lesson as well as I can. It is that kindness is never wasted in this world."

And so Bertie and Tom found that there was such a thing as a fairy after all.

Questions

1. What was Aunt Laura's lesson?
2. What kindness did Bertie show Tom?
3. What kindness did Tom show Bertie?
4. What does "peal" mean in this sentence: "Then, just as dinner had come to an end, there was a peal at the bell, and a voice was heard asking for Tom Egerton."