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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Unlucky Jim

Arthur S. Maxwell

Jim was sure he was the unluckiest boy who had ever been born. Everything went wrong for him. Today was the worst yet, because only a few minutes ago his one and only glass marble had rolled down a drain.

And that wasn't the only thing. He was shivering. He should have had warm stockings and a warm undershirt, but there wasn't money for them. Father was out of work.

He was hungry, too. It was hours since dinner, and the bread and butter he'd had then seemed to have gone all the way to the South Pole. As he trudged along with his hands in his pockets, he watched other boys and girls hurrying into bright, beautiful homes for supper. He knew he would be climbing the dark, narrow stairs of an East End tenement for his bit of bread and jam.

Then he passed a toy shop, blazing with lights and crammed with everything that could make a boy's heart glad. He stopped and watched children come out with brown-paper parcels tucked under their arms. Jim pushed his hand deeper into his pocket and touched his penny, all the wealth he had left. How he wished he could buy something for his little sister, lying sick at home!

"If I'm not the unluckiest fellow who ever lived!" he thought.

But the next day, his luck seemed to turn. He was walking near home when a well-dressed lady stopped him.

"Is your name Jimmie Mackay?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Jimmie, surprised and wondering what was coming.

"We have your name on a list at our church," said the lady, "and we'd like you to come to a special Christmas party next week. Here's your ticket."

"My word!" said Jimmie, not knowing what else to say. "But what about Jean? She's my sister. She might be better by then. She ought to come too."

"I'm afraid we can only take one child from each family this time," said the lady kindly. "We'll try to bring Jean next time."

"Well, that's lucky and unlucky," Jim said to himself as she walked away. "Lucky for me, and unlucky for poor Jean."

Then a bright idea struck him. Perhaps Jean could go in his place! He looked at the ticket. It read: *Admit bearer, Jimmie Mackay, only.*

“Unlucky again,” he murmured.

So Jimmie went to the party, and for most of the evening he forgot his troubles. Everything was so different, so wonderful. He had never had so much to eat in all his life.

After supper there were games, until at last it was time for the gifts on the Christmas tree. The excitement! Every child was allowed to choose whatever he wanted most.

Jim could hardly sit still as the other children went up ahead of him. He’d spotted a wonderful toy engine on the tree, something he’d wanted all his life, and he hoped and hoped and hoped nobody would pick it first.

At last, after what felt like hours, it was his turn.

“Jimmie Mackay!” called the lady by the tree.

He shot out of his seat like a cannonball. All he could see was the red engine. It was still there!

But as he came closer, he saw that she was the very lady who had stopped him in the street and given him his ticket. All at once, a new idea came to him.

“And what would you like, Jimmie?” she asked. “You may have any one thing on the tree.”

What an offer! Jimmie could hardly take it in. He gazed up at the sparkling, loaded tree. His eyes found the engine again.

“Most of all,” he said, looking up at her, “I’d like that red engine. But if you don’t mind, I’ll take that fairy doll over there.”

Tears filled his eyes as he said it, but he kept his face steady.

Somehow the lady seemed to understand. Without a word, she fetched the doll. As he turned to go, she squeezed his hand and bent down to whisper, “God bless you.”

The other children did not understand at all. They hooted and laughed and told the whole room that Jimmie had picked a doll. Some of the boys called out names. Others said, in very superior voices, “Imagine a boy taking a doll!” And some of the little girls said, “That was just the doll we wanted!”

Jimmie blushed. He couldn’t help it. Finally, he felt so uncomfortable that he put on his cap and walked out with the doll under his arm.

All the way home he thought about the bad luck that seemed to follow him everywhere. First he had given up the engine on purpose, and then he'd been laughed at by the whole crowd.

"If I'm not the unluckiest fellow—" he began. Then he felt the doll under his arm. At once his thoughts brightened and his steps quickened.

A few minutes later, he was in the little dark bedroom where Jean lay sick in bed.

"I'm so glad you're here!" said Jean. "It's so lonely all by myself. What have you got?" She sat up and peered at the doll with shining eyes. "Is that for me? Oh, Jimmie, Jimmie, you're a dear!"



And Jimmie forgot all about his bad luck. Joy rushed through him as he watched his sister's face. How glad he was that he'd chosen the doll and not the engine!

Just then, there was a knock at the door. It was the lady from the party.

"What—?" began Jimmie.

"I came to tell you how sorry I am that the children were unkind to you tonight," she said. "They're sorry now, too. I told them why you chose the doll, and they asked me to bring you something for yourself. Here it is. Now I must go, it's late. Good night!" And she was gone.

Jimmie gasped, then tore open the package.

It was the engine!

He danced a jig around Jean's bed, chuckling to himself and saying:

"If I'm not the luckiest fellow who ever lived!"

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