



**HOMESICKNESS**, perhaps, had brought him back. Old Peter Johansen buttoned his threadbare overcoat, blew warm breath on his rough hands and jumped to the ground. There was no railroad detective to grab him for riding that freight train, because this was the day before Christmas. All but the homeless, like himself, seemed busy preparing for the Day of Days.

Forty years, Peter reflected, since he last set foot in Clark City. It had been a year after the big earthquake; a year after all hell broke loose, killing his parents and sister as they sat at dinner in the little house on Vine street.

Peter remembered: How he had come home late that evening; how the earth began quivering like a beast possessed; how he had



Peter stood alone for a long time watching the star appear.

searched like a madman through the ruins of that shock-wracked, fire-swept bungalow. Then, as Clark City began rebuilding, he had drifted off in a daze to roam up and down the earth—a ne'er-do-well, a hobo!

But always he remembered Linda, dear little sister Linda. In 40 years her memory always came back stronger than ever on Christmas Eve, for it was then that they used to climb Lookout Hill hand-in-hand at dusk, watching the evening star rise in the heavens.

That, perhaps, was why he was back this Christmas Eve. "Almost dusk now," he reflected, trudging along Clark City's busy thoroughfare. Christmas crowds jostled him, for he was a hapless wanderer with no place to go.

No place to go? Not Peter! Soon he found his way to the old residential district where Lookout Hill rose like a sentinel.

"The same old hill," he told himself. "Little Linda! If you were only here now to see your big brother! No—thank God you're not here, for your big brother is ashamed of himself!"

At the crest Peter stood alone for a long time, watching the star appear as it had since that first night over Bethlehem. He didn't notice the old lady until she spoke.

"Beautiful, that star, isn't it?" Peter fumbled with his greasy-stained cap.

"Yes'm, it is. Especially from Lookout Hill."

"Many years ago," she continued, almost in a trance, "my little brother and I used to watch that star rise in the heavens each Christmas Eve, until—(she wiped a tear away)—we were separated somehow during the big earthquake. He was killed, they found out later.

"Each Christmas Eve ever since I've come back here, just to remember him. I hope he's happy up there in Heaven."

Peter was staring at her, fairly ready to shriek, for it was Linda! No doubt about it, now!

He recognized the tilt of her nose, unchanged by the years; the familiar ring of a voice that somehow had failed to grow old. But he held himself back, for Peter was ashamed of himself.

She didn't notice him shuffle off after awhile, for Linda was still watching the star.

"In the freight yards he found an empty boxcar and bedded down under some straw in a corner. After a while he felt the car move, and somehow he was glad.

"Yes, it was Linda," he sobbed to himself, "but I just couldn't tell her. Thank God she's alive and happy. And thank God she remembers me on Christmas eve as I was, not as I am."

After awhile he fell asleep.

**Cakes Printed in Germany**  
A famous Christmas cake in Germany is Aachen Printen, from which the English word "prince" is derived. In the days before book-printing the idea of imprint belonged to the baking business to express the making of patterns in cakes. Many of these cakes have figures representing the old gods Wotan and Thor.

**Santa May Not Smoke Cigars**  
Santa Claus, perhaps, doesn't smoke—or he would be better informed on the quality of cigars.

## A Burglar for Christmas

by Rolana Flagel

IT WAS midnight on Christmas Eve. Seven-year-old Jack, having baffled the sandman since eight o'clock, tossed back the covers and crept downstairs.

Now, at long last, he would learn the truth about Santa Claus. Man or myth? Chimney sweeper or a lovable old red-nosed gentleman?

When the clock struck one Jack was still sitting patiently in the chair by the fireplace, watching the embers glow and wane. Tinsel on the nearby Christmas tree glistened. It was all very exciting, but where was Kris Kringle?

"The noise Jack heard a moment later might have been Santa but it didn't come from the chimney.

Quickly the boy jumped back in the shadows while he heard the dining room window raise slowly. A gust of cold air, heavy footsteps, and then Jack heard the window close.

Frightened, he crept forward until he could see where blue moonlight filtered into the dining room. There Jack saw—not Santa Claus but a masked burglar, systematically looting the silverware!

Seconds later his softly slipped feet carried the lad upstairs into his parents' bedroom. The boy shook his father.

"Dad!" he whispered loudly, eyes blazing. "Dad! Wake up!" "Grummp," came the sleepy answer.

"A burglar, Dad! Wake up! Call the police!"

Not waiting, Jack reached for the bedside telephone himself. His mother still slumbered.

"Operator?" he asked. "Send the police over to our house right away! There's a burglar downstairs!"

By that time it was out of Jack's hands. His parents were wide awake now, clinging to their hero



Jack reached for the telephone himself.

son and listening. During the next two minutes they heard a stark drama—downstairs the dining room window opened and closed. In the distance, growing ever nearer, was the hum of a motor which they knew would be the police car.

They heard it stop outside. Then came a shout, "Stop thief!" A brief scuffle, and they knew the burglar was captured.

Next morning Jack was awakened by his father.

"Son," he began, eyes twinkling. "I forgot to ask last night how you happened to hear that burglar."

Jack blushed.

"I was downstairs, Dad, waiting for Santa Claus. Wanted to see if he really does come on Christmas eve."

His father laughed heartily. "But Jack!" he protested. "Don't you know that Santa Claus never comes when little boys and girls are watching? I'll bet he's been here by this time, though. Let's see!"

Downstairs Jack's surprise was divided between two equally fascinating subjects. Around the Christmas tree were more presents than he'd ever seen before, including a brand new bicycle!

But off to one side was a jolly looking, blue-uniformed policeman.

"Sunny," the copper began. "That burglar you captured last night was 'Lightning Pete,' a most notorious house breaker."

Jack's jaw dropped.

"Best of all," the policeman continued, "there's a \$500 reward for his capture, and it all belongs to you. Here's the check."

Jack could barely say "Thank you," so amazed was he.

"I guess," he finally mumbled, "that Santa Claus is wearing a blue uniform this year."

**Shepherd Village Plays Bethlehem**  
Les Baux in France, a village of shepherds, puts on one of the most dramatic Christmas celebrations in the world, and has done it yearly for over a thousand years. The peasants act out the whole Bethlehem story with real oxen. Thousands of visitors come every Christmas eve to see the event.

**Christmas in Sweden**  
Sweden celebrates her Christmas December 24 with fish and rice porridge.

## SNOWBOUND CHRISTMAS

BY CLYDE WILSON

BILL YARDLEY poked a tentative eye outside his blanket. It was daylight, at last. Across the tiny cabin Jim was snoozing quietly, his measured breath almost drowned by the roaring wind outside.

Bill's eyes surveyed the cabin with its old stove and rickety furniture. Cozy enough, perhaps, but this was no way to spend an entire winter, even for the sake of geographical accuracy. Several hundred miles to the south, in Winnipeg, the government office was waiting for early spring when Bill and Jim could finish their surveying assignment and bring back a report.

As he walked up to old Peter's gridded ticket window, Dick recalled the last time he stood in this station. Two and a half years ago, it was, the day after Jean had left for New York in search of a career.

"Just can't stand Marysville," she had told him. "You'll understand, Dick, won't you?"

He had forgotten as best he could. Nothing in Marysville for him then, either. There had been a quick decision, a closing of half-open doors, a tearful good-bye to his parents and then—off to the city. It was odd how a blow like that could give a fellow determination. Today, just 30 months later, he was coming back home with a career already carved out.

Old Peter looked up from his sheaf of train orders.

"Well, Richard!" he cried. "Glad to see you, boy, and a Merry Christmas! Your folks know you're coming?"

"Merry Christmas to you, Pete!" Dick answered. It was nice, at that, to see a familiar face. "Mind if I use your phone? I caught an early train and Dad wasn't expecting me until tonight."

A few minutes later the old family car was carrying him home. His Dad looked older, and a mite worse.

Ahead, meanwhile, were two months of this maddening snowbound silence.

Bill's glance drifted to the calendar. Suddenly he caught his breath—"Jim!" he shrieked. "Wake up! Wake up! Do you know what day this is?"

Jim groaned, stirred a bit, and answered sleepily.

"Tuesday, ain't it? And so what?" "Jim! It's Christmas Eve!"

A few minutes later they found themselves staring blankly out the window, almost wishing they'd never discovered it was Christmas.

It was kind of childish to let on that you cared, Bill thought. So he put on his parka and headed for the door.

"Let's forget it, Jim," he advised. "I'm going to look at our traps and get some fresh air. Be back soon!"

It was no picnic, trudging through knee-deep drifts for two hours. To make it worse, the traps were all empty. Even the animal were staying inside in this weather.

"Wonder if they'll miss Christmas, too?" he mused as he neared the cabin.

Suddenly he heard a faint hum in the sky. It grew nearer. Unmistakably a motor—an airplane!

Bill raced for the cabin door. "A plane, Jim!" he cried. "Get some black smoke going up the chimney!" Then he raced out to the clearing.

The pilot saw him gesticulating wildly, or else he saw the fresh black smoke over the cabin. The big ship circled, flew off to the north, turned and came back, flying low. Over the clearing it almost stalled as the pilot dumped overboard a huge bundle that plummeted into the snow almost at Bill's feet. Then he waved and sped away.

They got it inside, somehow, though they wanted to open the bundle right where it landed. Once the rope was torn loose an oilskin pouch flew out. A note was inside. From the boss:

"In case you boys have forgotten," it read, "tomorrow's Christmas. Herewith the makings, including some presents your families asked us to send along."

Bill and Jim looked at each other, then they cheered.

"Merry Christmas!" asked Bill. "Why, it's the best ever! Wait'll you taste this turkey!"

**53 Sundays in Year**  
According to the Gregorian calendar, every year has 53 days of the one it begins on. Generally speaking, the year contains 53 Sundays every five or six years. This occurred in 1928, 1939, 1950, and again in 1964, 1975, 1986, 1997, etc. The United States naval observatory points out that in any continuous series of 28 years, five have 53 Sundays, unless the series includes a year whose number ends in two ciphers without its being a leap year, as in 1700, 1800, 1900. When leap year begins on Saturday, two of the six-year periods fall consecutively.—Philadelphia Inquirer.

**Old-Time New Year Serious**  
Old-time New England was serious on New Year's, as witness the title of a book published there in the year of 1702 by one Richard Standfast: "A New Year's Gift for Fainting Souls, or, a little handful of cordial comforts scattered through several answers to 16 questions and objections: As also doubting Christians invited to Christ."

**Chinese New Year's Greeting**  
The Chinese New Year's greeting is "Sui-hi," or "May joy be yours."

## Ham & Eggs

Christmas

FRESH snow crunched under Dick Wright's shoes as he stomped into the waiting room.

Old Peter was still there, still minding his telegraph key as he had when Dick was a boy. But now it was Christmas; now Dick was home from the city, a successful young architect.

As he walked up to old Peter's gridded ticket window, Dick recalled the last time he stood in this station. Two and a half years ago, it was, the day after Jean had left for New York in search of a career.

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"Heard from Jean, son?" he asked.

ried. Something was on his mind. "Heard from Jean, son?" he finally asked.

"No, Pop," he answered truthfully. The house loomed up ahead now. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, just wonderin', son, that's all. Forget it. There's Mother wavin' at us up yonder!"

But Dick couldn't forget it. Marysville and Jean were like ham and eggs. He thought about her when he stopped at the drugstore that night—they used to drink sodas there.

Maybe Dick was looking for more of those memories next morning when he started out alone on skis for Murray's hill. They used to play there in the winter, he and Jean.

"Forget it, you imbecile!" he snapped at himself. "That's a closed chapter in your life!"

It was a couple of hours later that he saw her. Skiing down Murray's hill for the last time he rounded Horseshoe Bend to find Jean directly in his path! There was a shriek, a taud, and then four feet sticking out of a snowdrift.

"Jean!" he cried, unstrapping his skis and running to help her. "Are you hurt?"

It was rather unromantic, perhaps, pulling her out feet first. But she laughed at him and fell down again, pulling him after her.

"You're going to get your face washed for that, Mr. Wright," she cried.

He came up sputtering to find her suddenly serious.

"Dick dear," she said, "I was wrong. Mother wrote that you'd be home for Christmas and—well, I had to come too. It's you and Marysville that I want, not New York. This morning when I saw you going past our house, I somehow knew that I should go with you. Not just today, Dick, but always!"

It was like ham and eggs, Dick thought, only the next day was Christmas—and Christmas meant turkey!

**Edger Feast**  
One of the strangest surviving Christmas customs is the badger feast held at Ichester, Somerset. It was started by poachers in Norman times, says the Montreal Herald, and has continued without a break. The lads of the village catch a badger, kill and dress it some time before the feast. On Christmas eve it is strung on a spit over a huge fire at the inn and cooked slowly. When it is ready the party attack it with fingers and pen-knives; no cutlery other than this is allowed.

**Beginning of the New Year**  
Various dates were used in different countries, for the beginning of a year, but America followed the English custom of using the date of the most early Christian countries—about the beginning of the ecclesiastical year. The Gregorian calendar, establishing January 1 as the beginning of the year, was adopted by England and her colonies in 1752.

## SPECIAL DELIVERY

(A CHRISTMAS STORY)

By Roger Wheeler

EDITH'S drab room overlooked a snow-covered roof. Not the clean, cheery snow like they had back home on the farm but a murky gray covering on which rested the soot of a thousand city chimneys.

"So this is Christmas," she moaned, leaving her chair to pace the floor. "Oh! What I'd give to be back home tomorrow!"

But then, Edith had two Christmas presents to which she could look forward. Today, Christmas eve, the mailman MUST bring her annual package from home. And tomorrow there would be Christmas dinner with Ken—dear Ken who was working so hard these days that he could hardly take time off to think about Christmas.

Edith heard the bell ring downstairs and she skipped to her door, opening it softly and waiting tensely while the old landlady, answered.

"Yes, it was the mailman! And then came the shrill cry: 'Miss Harris! Mail for you!'

Edith practically leaped downstairs, for there would be her package from home. Then her heart sank, for the landlady handed her only two letters, a greeting card from her friend Margie and (of all things at Christmas!) a bill from the department store.

Edith climbed sorrowfully back to her room and wept. Something was wrong, for Mother and Dad never forgot her at Christmas. She cried spasmodically the rest of the day, while downstairs she heard the other roomers shouting Christmas greetings as they arrived and departed.

But finally Edith consoled herself, for she could still look forward to Christmas dinner with Ken tomorrow!

He was due at two o'clock that day, and after church Edith hurried home to get ready. At 1:30 she was seated restlessly awaiting the doorbell.

She was still waiting at 2:30, for Ken did not arrive. And Edith was getting hungry.

Three o'clock passed, and Edith frowned.

"What could have happened to him?" she asked herself.

At four o'clock she cried. It was too much! First her family had forgotten, and now Ken had chosen Christmas day to tell her in this painful fashion that he didn't care!

At 6 p. m. misery began mingling with the pangs of hunger. Edith put on her coat and started to the corner restaurant. But she never got past the door. There she ran into a breathless Ken.

"Edith, dear!" he cried. "Sorry to be so late, but I knew you'd understand when you got my note."

"But—" Edith was confused, "I didn't receive any note, Ken."

"What? But I sent a special delivery message when the boss asked me to finish that laboratory experiment this afternoon. What happened to it?"

The blundering old landlady answered him.

"Please come in or go out, and close the door," she barked from the hall. Then—

"Incidentally, Miss Harris, I forgot to give you these things. They arrived this afternoon."

She handed Edith the missing special delivery letter—and a huge package from home! Edith tore into the Christmas box and found a note from Mother. They'd had a blizzard, couldn't get to town; she hoped Edith would get the package Christmas day.

A few minutes later a happy Edith sat across the table from her Ken in the little restaurant around the corner.

"And now, dear," he began very carefully. "How about your Christmas present for me?"

"But I gave you the fountain pen, Ken," she protested.

"Yes, silly one, and I appreciated it. But if you want to make me still happier, listen to this. The boss came in tonight and said I'd done such a fine job on that research project that he was raising my salary. Know what that means?"

"For after all, you can't take the words out of a man's mouth when he's about to propose!"

Edith's eyes were fixed on Ken's face. "You mean you're going to marry me?"

"Yes, I do," he said, "and I'm glad to hear that. You're a wonderful girl, and I'm sure you'll be a wonderful wife. I've never loved anyone else, and I never will. You're the one for me, Edith. Will you marry me?"

"Yes, I will," she said, "and I'm glad to hear that. You're a wonderful man, and I'm sure you'll be a wonderful husband. I've never loved anyone else, and I never will. You're the one for me, Ken. Will you marry me?"

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## Santa Comes to Pierre

By Jules Devan

OLD MARIE didn't quite understand about Santa Claus, but her little Pierre did. Pierre went to school with the other boys while Old Marie sewed dresses in the sweat shop. It had been that way ever since Jacques died, two years after they left sunny France and came to New York.

"Mamma!" little Pierre would ask her at night, "Please, Mamma, will Santa Claus bring me the violin from Rubens' pawn shop this Christmas?"

Then he would stare expectantly while Marie tried to find an answer. She usually promised him Santa would, for little Pierre wanted the violin so badly. But as Christmas grew nearer the groceries and coal

and shoes used up all her savings—there was nothing left for Pierre's violin.

Marie was usually stolid, but she felt sad when she left the sweat shop Christmas eve. Little Pierre would be home waiting for Santa Claus and the violin. Pierre had seen it in the window at Sam Rubens' pawn shop only yesterday, a big five-dollar price tag tied around its neck. How sad he would be if this Santa Claus fellow forgot him!

Marie was swept along in the Christmas Eve traffic, downhearted. But despair gave way to triumph, for a plan suddenly came to her amid this confusion: She would beg for arms like her grandpère had done back in Paris! These Americans—they seemed happy enough to help her on Christmas eve!

"Pleez, m'sieur, a penny!" she cried to the passers-by on Broadway. "A penny for my little Pierre's violin!"

Marie had collected seventy-eight cents before the big Irish policeman saw her.

"Here now, old gurrul!" he protested. "Don't yez know ye can't panhandle here? Come along now to 't' station!"

A few minutes later old Marie was pouring out her story to the gruff desk sergeant. She was confused.

"Thees panhandling," she complained. "You say I cannot do it. But I only try to get money for the violin, so your Santa Claus wee come to my little Pierre. See?—she held out her money—"I only need four dollars and twenty-two cents more!"

"Well, now, that's different," the sergeant replied. "Come boys"—he addressed the policeman gathered around his desk—"let's kick in the five dollars to buy a violin for Marie's little Pierre! Sure now, and where's your Christmas spirit?"

A few minutes later a grateful old Marie was hurrying down the snow-covered side street to Sam Rubens' pawn shop. But alas! Sam was just handing the violin to a well-dressed old gentleman as Marie stormed in.

"Pleez, m'sieur!" she cried. "You mus' not buy it. The violin, it is for my petit Pierre. See? I have five dollars!"

The white-crested purchaser was dumfounded.

"But madame," he answered. "I have just bought it for my grandson's Christmas."

"N'importe!" Marie protested, adamant now. "You mus' sell it to me. The policeman, they have given me the money, see? My little Pierre, he will be so disappointed!"

The old man looked at Sam. "Have you another violin?"

"For seven dollar I got a better one." Sam's eyes lighted up. It looked like another sale.

"All right, madame," the gentleman spoke to Marie. "Here's your violin. Give me the five dollars."

"Merci, m'sieur!" Old Marie cried. "My Pierre, he will be so happy!" With that she dashed out into the night, happy at last.

Pierre was asleep when she arrived home, but he found the violin on the table next morning. It glistened like new inside the weather-beaten case.

"Mamma!" he cried with glee. "Mamma! The violin! But how—