

Such Lovely FLAMES

By John Scott Douglas

Fred Dobson plugged in the string of lights and then stood back to admire the blue and red and green candle globes on the Christmas tree. Ellen left the table she was setting to study the guests.

"Nice little tree, Fred. Seems a shame though, not to be sharing it with someone. This was our year."

And then she stopped, and her face, still pretty in middle age, grew pink. Fred knew she'd been about to say that it was their year to have the Robbins to Christmas dinner. Every year since their children had married and left they had either entertained their neighbors or had been their guests.

But now, by mutual consent, the quarrel with the Robbins was not mentioned. It was characteristic of Ellen not to blame Fred, and that took forbearance because Martha Robbins had been her dearest friend.

Ellen sighed. "Goodness! the turkey must be almost ready."

Fred thought of the quarrel, which had started because of a cocker puppy which wouldn't stay home. Tom, with his usual consideration for his neighbors, had started to build a fence to keep the dog out of the Dobson's garden. Fred thought the fence was a foot within his own property line, and jokingly said so.

Tom had laughed. "Who's paying for it?"

"I'll pay half," Fred had said, "if you'll buy the strip you're using."

The joke, within a matter of days, had taken on an edge, and then they gave up speaking. No longer did they fish and hunt together, or play in their usual Saturday four-somes.

By then, beginning to fume at Tom's high-handedness, Fred had his property surveyed, only to discover that his garden had in reality extended onto his neighbor's property. The fence was where it belonged.

Fred wanted to apologize, but every time he stepped outside, Tom walked into the house.

Within a matter of seconds, Fred was too busy to think of the quarrel. The little Christmas tree was on fire and crackling fiercely. He flung open the door and screamed, "Fire! help! help!" And then, snatching up the hall runner he'd been planning to replace.



He was back in a moment with a rake. Lifting the smouldering tree with the lines, he hurried it out onto the snowy lawn.

he knocked over the tree and began beating out the flames.

Behind him Tom called, "Stay with it, pal—I'll get something."

He was back in a moment with a rake. Lifting the smouldering tree with the lines, he hurried it out onto the snowy lawn.

Martha Robbins had appeared by then. Seeing Ellen staring dazedly at the cloud of smoke and the blackened wall where the tree had stood, she opened the windows and then slipped her arm around Ellen's shoulders.

"Poor dear! And just when you were sitting down to your Christmas dinner. After the smoke has thinned out this room will be freezing. You and Fred are having dinner with us."

Ellen looked happy but flustered. "But this was our year..." "Nonsense!" Tom said heartily. "We'll eat with you next year." "That will be swell," Fred said beaming.

When they started Martha Robbins' bountiful dinner, there was at first a little stiffness. But Tom was soon joking about Fred's high forehead, and Fred was asking Tom if he'd considered selling his hair to a wire-brush factory.

As they said hearty farewells later, Tom remarked, "Can't say I'm sorry about that fire. We've sure missed you folks."

"And it was all my fault," Fred said. "I was wrong about..." "Aw, forget it," Tom interrupted. "How about some golf Saturday?"

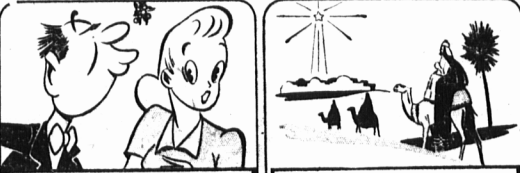
When they reached home, Fred looked at the blackened wall speculatively. "No real damage done, Ellen. A coat of paint will fix it up."

"How do you suppose the tree ever caught fire?" Ellen asked. Fred grinned sheepishly. "A match and a bunch of tissue paper may have helped."

THE PAGE-EGG PLAY

Very year in scattered villages in the North of England, shepherds, farm hands and others perform the ancient Page-egg Mummings Play at Christmas. With blackened faces and fancy clothes they repeat the words handed down for centuries. Chief actors are King (or Saint) George, a quack doctor and Father Christmas. In the play, the King slays his enemies one by one, but each in turn is resurrected by the doctor. One of the oldest of the "mumming" troupes is that at Alderley Edge, bordering on Cheshire and Derbyshire.

QUESTIONS ON CHRISTMAS



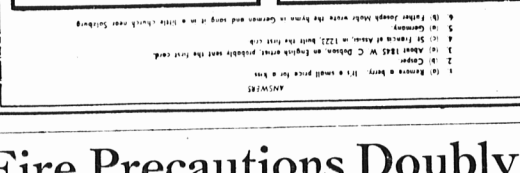
1. The Swedes know kissing is fun. That's why they thought of the Christmas misletoe. What should be done to the misletoe for each visitor? (a) remove a berry (b) do nothing (c) take off a leaf.



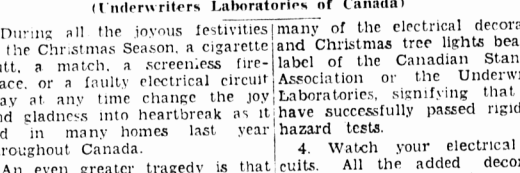
2. We ought to know the names of the Three Wise Men who were the first guests of Christmas gifts. They were Melchior, Balthasar and (a) Samuel (b) Casper (c) Shadrach?



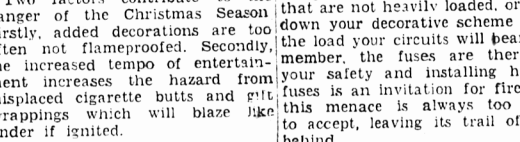
3. Everyone likes to get lots of Christmas cards. When did the custom of sending them start? (a) about 1845 (b) about 1781 (c) about 1903.



4. Who first had the idea of building a small replica of a manger for the Christmas scene? (a) Pope Gregory (b) Piers Plowman (c) St. Francis of Assisi.



5. The Christmas tree is the heart of our Christmas decorations. Which country first used the tree as a part of holiday observance? (a) Germany (b) Norway (c) France.



6. "Silent Night, Holy Night," one of the most beloved of Christmas hymns, was written by (a) Beethoven (b) Father Joseph Mohr (c) Martin Luther?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT



Saurey Sargent

The small kitten called Tupid watched preparations for Christmas dully. Only the middle boy, one Archie Raymond, noticed his apathy. The tree, in all its green splendor stood tall in the living room bedecked with increasing number of ornaments.

"Careful," Marcia Raymond admonished her son sharply. "Don't hang those big balls down so low. The kitten will break them."

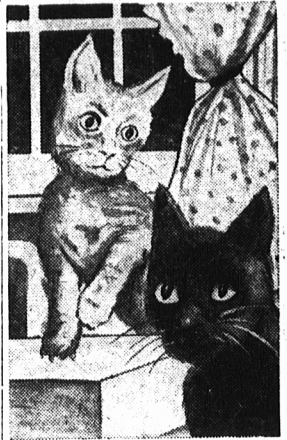
Gently Archie lifted them to a higher bough, drawing in the pungent scent of the pine. Only he saw that the kitten walked slowly under the tree unaware of the boughs tickling her furry back. His youngest brother had named the roly poly butterscotch kitten Tupid. Young Billy was easily aroused to fits of anger. His favorite expression under stress was a hissed, "you tupid, you big tupid!" Archie, his ten-year-old brother, Joe, and the parents laughed at the little boy's wrath and because the kitten was slower than the others in the litter they named him, most affectionately, Tupid.

"Archie," Mrs. Raymond was flurried from all the excitement. "That blue globe is much too low. Tupid will get it. I don't doubt," she added pessimistically, "that we will lose half of our globes."

Archie could see that Tupid had no interest either in the swaying boughs or the brilliant-colored fragile balls. For two days Tupid had wandered carelessly about the house and yard. He wasn't playful or friendly and he had stopped purring. Only Archie sensed that ada, Dominion Board of Insurance Underwriters, Dominion Fire Prevention Association and Canadian Standards Association, hoping that you and yours will have the merriest (and safest) Christmas ever.

the kitten was lonesome for his sisters and brothers and his mother. At first there had been four balls of fur and a proud old alley cat mother. As they grew they had become playful, pattering swiftly through the house. But now they were all gone, including the mother. Just Tupid was left to keep. Even the black imp with shut-button eyes had been given away. Tar Baby who had been the boss of the litter had been gone barely two days and Tupid missed him.

"Well," his father's voice boomed again, as he climbed down the ladder. "All done in time for



Tupid circled and smelled at the black kitten, until he was satisfied. Then his tongue flicked out to lick the kitten.

Christmas Eve. Come here Joe, Archie, you too Billy. I want you to see this fine tree."

Mrs. Raymond switched the lights off and Archie shivered in delighted excitement as the tree blazed illumined by the strings of lights and balls. The magic moment was shattered by the sharp ring of the doorbell.

A rush of cold air came in as Mr. Raymond flung open the door wide to admit a bundled figure.

Fire Precautions Doubly Necessary At Christmas

(Underwriters Laboratories of Canada)

During all the joyous festivities of the Christmas Season, a cigarette, a match, a faulty electrical fire-place, or a faulty electrical circuit may at any time change the joy and gladness into heartbreak as it did in many homes last year throughout Canada.

An even greater tragedy is that most of these fires could have been avoided by following a few simple rules. A little extra care may save a home — yours.

Two factors contribute to the danger of the Christmas Season. Firstly, added decorations are too often not flameproofed. Secondly, the increased tempo of entertainment increases the hazard from misplaced cigarette butts and gift wrappings which will blaze like tinder if ignited.

Let's look at a few safety suggestions:

1. Use flameproofed decorations. For greatest safety, many manufacturers produce flameproof materials that were tested and classified by Underwriters Laboratories, and these products bear the familiar Underwriters' label as your guide to safety.

2. In selecting the tree, pick one that is small. A small, well-formed tree can be decorated easier and more attractively than a large one and does not produce the same hazard. To preserve the tree, place it in water or moist earth, thereby keeping the needles from drying out. Dry Christmas tree needles are a dangerous fire hazard and a dry tree should not be given house room. To further help preserve your tree, keep it in a cool corner away from drafts.

3. Avoid decorations of paper and candles on the tree. Here again,

many of the electrical decorations and Christmas tree lights bear the label of the Canadian Standards Association or the Underwriters Laboratories, signifying that they have successfully passed rigid fire hazard tests.

4. Watch your electrical circuits. All the added decoration lights may threaten to overload the circuits in your house. If this happens, you can either have qualified electricians put in new circuits, bring extensions in from outside that are not heavily loaded, or scale down your decorative scheme to fit the load your circuits will bear. Remember, the fuses are there for your safety and installing heavier fuses is an invitation for fire. And this menace is always too ready to accept, leaving its trail of grief behind.

5. After your Christmas entertaining, check your furniture for lighted cigarettes. A butt will stay smouldering under the sofa cushions for hours and come to life in the dead of night.

6. Remember children and candles don't mix. If you must use candles, keep them out of the children's reach. P... still use the electric variety and be certain.

7. And on Christmas Day (mother's day, this will be your chore) pick up those gift wrappings as soon as possible. When they are safe in the garbage can, we know they can't add to a fire under the tree.

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The Legends of Christmas

"My father says I can't keep the kitten," Gerald Parax recited automatically close to tears. "I have to give it back because it gives my father hay fever." Gerald went out in another rush of frosty air but not before Mrs. Raymond had pressed a fat candy cane into his mittened hand.

"Tar Baby huddled in the middle of the floor. Watch it, boys," Mr. Raymond warned. "Let's just watch him. He feels strange here now but he'll be all right in a while."

Archie saw Tupid jump from the sofa with a purr of delight. Tupid circled and smelled at the black kitten until he was satisfied. Then his tongue flicked out to lick the kitten. Tupid's paws caressed him as his tongue washed him. The black kitten stood passive as Tupid showered his pent-up love on him.

"Thay, mommy," Billy lisped. Tupid's kissing him, isn't he?" "Um," Mrs. Raymond agreed. "Tar Baby's Tupid's Christmas present."

Mr. Raymond's eyes swept his sons' awe struck faces. "No," he said firmly. He's our Christmas present too."

There are almost as many Christmas legends and superstitions as there have been Christmas's. Countless customs from the Old World have been absorbed through the centuries into the celebrations that we participate in today. A few, however, have been passed down from one generation to another, remaining always the same.

The Indians of Canada, for example, believe that the deer kneel in prayer each Christmas Eve. An early missionary probably is responsible for the idea, but it still lingers and wily Indian have always attempted to catch the deer in the act.

In England, it is believed that the bees express veneration for the nativity by singing in their hives at midnight. The bee hives are always adorned with holly sprigs for the Yuletide season.

In Europe it was custom for a young girl to creep to the family woodpile on Christmas Eve and pull out the first stick that her hand touched. If the stick was a straight

one, with no knots, tradition said that she would have a good husband.

Farmers in Europe also gave torches to their children and sent them singing into the apple orchards and the fields. The mice, caterpillars and moths were said to flee before the approaching songsters.

In early Germany it was a belief that water turned into wind during the hour before midnight on Christmas Eve.

THE DEVIL'S KNELL

Seven hundred years ago in the English town of Dewsbury, in Yorkshire, a boy was murdered and his body thrown in a nearby stream. The crime was discovered and the murderer, a rich man named Thomas de Southill, presented as a penance a tenor bell to Dewsbury Church. The bell became known as the Devil's Knell, and every Christmas eve it is tolled once for each year of the Christian calendar.



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