



—by— Violet M. Williams

The Wise Woman made her way through the snow to the cottage where her two little elf friends, Pennytop and Pip lived. It was Christmas Eve and she carried a large hamper which contained Christmas gifts for the two elves.

"There!" the old lady said, dumping her hamper on the floor. "Happy Christmas to you both, my dears! I am giving you useful gifts this year; see you make the most of them!"

Pennytop and Pip thanked the Wise Woman very much indeed and, when she had gone, they pushed the hamper underneath the Christmas Tree with the rest of their presents.

"Ooh, I can hardly wait until morning," sighed Pennytop. "Neither can I," agreed Pip. "And if we sit here staring at our parcels we are sure to open them before Christmas Day—and that would never do. Let's go to bed."

"We have a lot to do in the kitchen getting ready for tomorrow's Christmas dinner, haven't we?" yawned Pennytop.

"I have done it all," said Pip. "The turkey is ready to go in the oven, I made the pudding weeks ago, the mince pies are baked and the vegetables are peeled."

"You are clever, Pip," said Pennytop, admiringly. "It's not a case of being clever," said Pip, somewhat severely. "It is just hard work on my part! You, Pennytop, can dust the rooms and lay the table as your share first thing in the morning, mind! It should have been done today, really."

"Well, I've been so busy, you know," said Pennytop, hastily. "What with—er—and—umm— and—"

"You've simply been visiting your friends," retorted Pip. "Never mind, Pip," said Pennytop. "I'm making Christmas resolutions, instead of a New Year one! I am going to do all the housework in future."

"Hm!" sniffed Pip. "That was what you said last year. Never mind, you must dust the house in the morning whilst I cook the dinner."

And, agreeing eagerly, Pennytop followed Pip into their little bedroom, where soon they both lay fast asleep.

It was a lovely Christmas day the next morning. Pip hurried downstairs and cooked the breakfast—Pennytop seemed extra tired! When they had finished, Pip hurried into the kitchen to wash the dishes.

"You do your dusting whilst I wash up, Pennytop," danted Pip, rushing about as fast as he could. "Then we can open our presents."

"Just like him!" grumbled Pennytop. "Fancy thinking about dusting on Christmas morning! I'm dying to see my presents. I wonder what the Wise Woman has brought us. I've a jolly good mind to peep."

Now this was a dreadful thing to do and Pennytop was very naughty even to think of it, but he raised the lid and looked inside the hamper.

Pip was clattering the dishes in and out of the sink at such a speed, it was a wonder they didn't break. He, too, was anxious to see the presents.

He hurried back into the room and there was Pennytop standing by the open hamper which the Wise Woman has brought them. "Oh! you rotter!" cried Pip. "You've opened the hamper without me!"

Then he saw Pennytop's face. "Why, what's the matter?" Pip asked. "What is our present?"

"Look!" cried Pennytop. "The card says 'To Pennytop and Pip, and it's a SCRUBBING BRUSH!'"

"Don't be silly, Pennytop," said

Pip, coming to him and taking the present in his hand. "It's a wonderful toy bus. I've always wanted one of these."

Pip squatted on the floor and ran the present up and down. "You look jolly silly running a scrubbing brush up and down like that," said Pennytop crossly. "It's not a scrubbing brush!" exclaimed Pip.

But Pennytop was lifting out the next of the old woman's gifts. "This one is for Pennytop and Pip, too," he said. "I hope it's better than the last."

"You couldn't have anything better," said Pip. "Really, Pennytop—?" Then he gave a gasp as Pennytop untied the parcel.

"What a wonderful scarf!" he cried. "We shall have to take turns wearing that, Pennytop. What lovely colours in it!"

"Pip! What do you mean?" cried Pennytop, indignantly. "It's a horrid yellow DUSTER!"

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### CHRISTMAS CHEER

(Dorothy Boys Killan)

Nan Raymond, seated in white starched loneliness at the hall desk of Ridgedale's ten-bed community hospital, stared disconsolately at the tiny table tree which she had just finished trimming.

"Would it be just too much to ask you to take Christmas Eve duty for me, Nan?" Grace, the other night nurse, had asked her some days ago. "I know you aren't going to be able to get home for the holidays anyway, and my family is right here in town."

"Why, yes," Nan had answered slowly. "I suppose I might as well be on the job as anywhere."

The urgent ringing of a bell broke in on her lonely dreams—the handbell of the patient in room two.

"Old Smithers! I wonder what long-winded complaint she'll have now," Nan groaned.

She opened the door. Mrs. Smith, every grey hair in place, was sitting bolt upright in bed. "I'm expecting a visitor tonight. Where is he?" the old lady snapped.

"If anyone asks for you, of course I'll bring him up," Nan forced herself to answer politely.

"It's almost nine o'clock, and Algeon wrote definitely that he'd make it for Christmas Eve," Mrs. Smith glared at Nan. "It's bad enough being here, let alone trying to celebrate alone."

"I'm not celebrating either, Mrs. Smith," Nan tried to sound sympathetic.

"Oh, you—you're young and strong, and well, this is your job!" The woman sighed. "How well I remember Christmas when I was your age! Sit down a minute and I'll tell you about the time we—"

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Smith, but I have some things I really must do."

"The old lady ignored her excuse. "The time we invited the church choir to supper and to help decorate our tree before choir practice," she went on. "Well, somebody began a carol as he tied a popcorn ball to a branch, and, do you know, before the last apple was hung on the tree, we had gone through our whole blessed program."

"Did you always put a star on the top of your tree?"

"Oh, my, yes," Mrs. Smith smiled. "I'll tell you just exactly what we did use for decorations. Let's see now. There were the popcorn balls, and cranberry chains..."

When the doorbell downstairs rang suddenly, Mrs. Smith brought herself up in the middle of a sentence and chuckled. "Thank you for listening to an old bore, my dear. Now you just go see if that isn't Algeon."

She did not seem to realize that her reputation for virtue kept at a distance those who would have been glad to know her well. She made the best of them, a little unworthy, a little uneasy in her conscience.

As a gesture of respect to her mother she spent the first Christmas alone in the vast old-fashioned house that had been left to her. She did the same for the second and third, though at last she was forced to admit she was lonely; she dreaded the thought of Christmas.

For the fourth Christmas she broke the routine and accepted an invitation to stay with the family of Mr. Welch, the secretary of the Rammbling Society, but even here she could not rid herself of a feeling that she was an intruder in what was really a family affair. It was then that she decided to make different plans for the fifth Christmas.

When she thought of benevolence and good-will she thought of children; and this led her to think of the only children she knew, those of her Sunday School class. She would give a children's party on Boxing Day.

One Sunday in November she mentioned the idea to the vicar, who disguised his surprise. Later in the afternoon, he said to his wife: "I had better have a word with the children, I suppose. It would be a terrible shame if nobody turned up. She'd be awfully hurt."

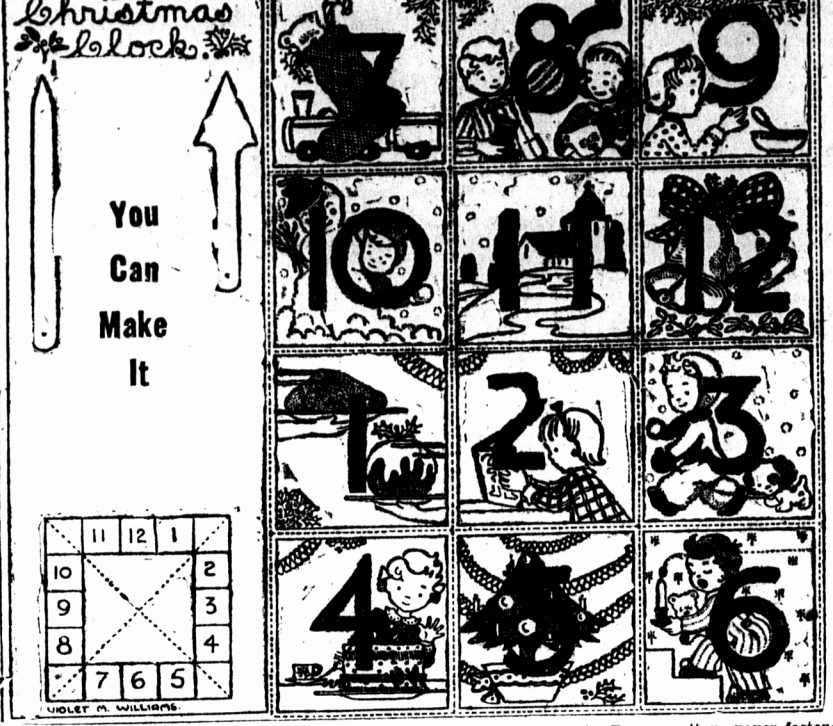
Miss Salt did not concentrate on her lesson that afternoon; when the moment came for her announcement of the party, she was uneasy and hesitant, more aware than ever of her lack of contact with the children who, sensing her uncertainty, stared and fidgeted. Perhaps her voice, very clear for when at last she reached the operative word, "party," one child let out an explosive "Oh boy!" and the atmosphere cleared like magic. Momentarily, she felt very happy.

"Of course you know what children are," the vicar said to her afterwards, "you can never rely on them. They are much in demand at Christmas."

But no hint could shake her confidence in that ecstatic "Oh boy!" and she began to wonder if, despite her strict manner and her refusal to unbend, she was all the same a popular figure with the children. On the way out she paused on the steps to button her coat, and as she stood there she heard a child's voice, very clear from somewhere out of sight. "Hi!" it bawled, "what d'you think? Old Pepper's giving a party—bet that'll be grim!"

She did not move for several moments. What she had heard mitigated her earlier happiness because she was sure, sure beyond all doubt, that the voice which bet her party would be grim was the same voice that "Oh boy!" As she walked home she struggled against the temptation to abandon the

Royalty receive some strange Christmas presents. The King of Siam once visited Queen Victoria and was so impressed with the Royal kitchens, that his annual gift was always something for the kitchen. Unfortunately, it was always the same type of gift—a silver frying pan!



You Can Make It

—by— MICHAEL LANE

When the news went round that Miss Salt was giving a Christmas party for children, her friends were at first surprised and then vaguely apprehensive. It was kind of her, they admitted, but was Miss Salt the person to do it?

Most of those who knew her described her as a saint because she had, without question, without fuss or a word of complaint, devoted her best years of her life to the care of her invalid mother, who died on Boxing Day five years ago.

During her mother's life Miss Salt's only regular social activity was a Sunday School class, though she was not a good teacher and was unpopular with the children. After the merciful release Miss Salt took more time in preparing the lessons, and then food: cakes, plenty of cakes, and jellies with cream blobs on top and sandwiches with the crusts cut off and comic hats on the side plates and crackers. She underlined crackers. It was not long before she lost herself in a dream of the house as it would be when decorated throughout with fairy lights and echoing the shouts of happy children.

She would be the centre of everything, she would be the benevolent power. Everything would be organized to the last detail.

On arrival, the children would go into the lounge where there would be a lot of small tables, each with a different game laid out ready to be played. At the same time there would be carols on the gramophone records to keep up the Christmas atmosphere. Then at five-thirty they would move into the dining room and see the table and the fairy lights around the windows and the great Christmas tree dominating the far end of the room.

The presents would be given out after tea—Miss Salt was determined about that, because she knew that children must eat, and must if necessary be made to eat. Then, at six-thirty, back to the other room with the presents and then, finally, a sing-song. Miss Salt felt obliged to stress that Christmas stood for something rather than mere jollity, and it seemed to her that the best way of bringing this

whole idea, but the plans had already taken form in her mind and should make a party more exciting than any child could imagine; she would show them what Old Pepper could do if she wanted that night she drafted sheets of notes based on her experiences last Christmas when, for the first time since her childhood, she had taken part in a family gathering.

A Christmas tree was the first essential, a point of focus, something to hold the children together, something to symbolise... she could not think what. Then presents, graded according to age, presents of great variety yet not so varied as to cause jealousy. She wondered how to assess value through the eyes of a child, how to know what measure, what scale, applied? And then food: cakes, plenty of cakes, and jellies with cream blobs on top and sandwiches with the crusts cut off and comic hats on the side plates and crackers. She underlined crackers. It was not long before she lost herself in a dream of the house as it would be when decorated throughout with fairy lights and echoing the shouts of happy children.

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Paste the hands on card and cut

the middle of the board. (To find the centre, simply pencil two lines from corner to corner on the back of the card. The centre is where they cross.)

From the back, pierce a hole in

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## The Legends Of Christmas

consider inviting all the children. But when the matron indicated that it might be unfair to choose among strangers, Miss Salt took a deep breath and invited the lot. Very firmly, she refused the offer of staff; it was her party, and it would succeed or fail on her unassisted efforts.

Then she was busier than ever. She chartered a motor coach to bring the children at four and take them back at seven-thirty. She rearranged the kitchen to serve as an extra room; she bought more tables and more presents. On Christmas Day, she hurried back from church, changed into her working clothes, and lost herself in an angry array of preparing jellies and cream and cakes and all the things that children like at Christmas.

On the morning of Boxing Day she checked the carol recordings and revised the time-table, for now that she was to command an even larger group than anticipated a greater precision in organization would enhance the pleasure of all.

They came like a body of storm-troopers at four-fifteen and she expected and all of them at least in their attitude to her, were quite unlike the children in her class. They clustered in the hall and jabbered; they set her barometer, which she hadn't looked at for years, to "storm"; they explored the inside of her grandfather's clock. Let loose in the lounge, they took the time one minute to dispose of the same she had carefully laid out; instead, they examined her bookcase and the precious ornaments which, since she thought they would be of no interest to children, she had not bothered to remove. They talked to her, rolled about on the floor, became bored beneath her woolly rugs, completely ignored the carols until one four-year-old called: "Please Miss, haven't you got some jive?"

Flustered, helplessly clutching her time-table, she turned on the radio and they gathered around her. Some kind of music that she never listened to was just what they wanted, and they danced around like savages and she had to smile. The time was like magic with them and she had to join, with them and be a bear or a pirate or admit—with a certain reticence—that the house was haunted, or help in an ardent search for schnoodles (she never discovered what they were) in the cupboards.

Then, at roughly the right time, she announced tea in the other room and they swept her through on a tide of singing arms and legs and paper caps and streamers. But the routine went wrong when they saw the tree so laden that many of the presents lay scattered on the floor, and Miss Salt had to distribute the gifts before tea, eyeing each parcel for the little blue code mark indicating boy or girl and praying that all would be satisfied.

Then they set upon the table and she was thrilled to see them, eating and enjoying (though they didn't like her sandwiches and she had to get some hunks of bread and treacle) with no particular finesse but with life, with raw, genuine animal abandon. At the end, when all but a few cakes had gone, a nine-year voice piped above the others. "Wot?" it said, "no crackers?"

The assembly let out a concerted groan, and Miss Salt paled. "My goodness," she said, "I completely forgot them." They loved her for it.

They streamed back into the lounge and for a moment there was hesitation; they had seen the room before, its attractions were exhausted. This was the time for the carols, but Miss Salt did not feel like carols. Once again she had succumbed to her savoury comment; the time-table she crumpled in the hearth; but she didn't care.

"Wanna play murders," said someone and within a few seconds the cry was unanimous. "Wouldn't you prefer—?" Miss Salt began.

"Murders! Murders!" She gave way, and a lanky youth explained the intricacies of the game, for all of which Miss Salt only understood that at a given signal she had to plunge the entire house into darkness. She went into the back kitchen and switched off the mains. For some moments there was silence, and she crept back into the hall. Then it began. Moans and piercing shrieks, squeals of horror and pleasure, thumping feet high above her, doubtless in her bedroom; she accepted everything as part of the fun. Something flimsy brushed past her hand clutched at her wrist and then vanished, somebody on the ground touched her feet and whispered: "You're dead!" On the contrary, she thought, I have only now begun to live.

There was a call for lights and it appeared, so far as she could understand, that she had been murdered and there had to be an inquest to find the culprit. The inquest, however, was not popular and was soon abandoned in favour of another plunge into darkness. After the third or fourth game, the children collapsed on the floor of the lounge, and she brought them lemonade and the remains of the cakes. When they were eating they were quiet, and very suddenly Miss Salt asked: "Children, what is Christmas?"

"This is Christmas," someone shouted back.

"Yes, but what is it? Why are we having a party?"