

SANTA and the FLYING SHOE

by Lucrece Beale

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Chapter 1

THE FALLING SKY

Once upon a time, in the faraway Kingdom of Polydora, there ruled a king named Ferdinand.

He was a good king, kind and gentle and trusting. If anything, he was perhaps a little too good-hearted and some people said he was not so much simple-hearted as simple-minded. Behind his back, these people called him "Ferdinand the Foolish."

Foolish or not, Ferdinand was the happiest of kings. He loved everything about his job and would not have traded with anyone. He loved his great velvet-draped throne and his jeweled crown and his marvelous purple and crimson robes.

He loved to grant favors to subjects who needed help and to order whatever he wished for lunch. He loved to give circuses for children and to stay up late reading mystery stories whenever he wanted.

In fact, reading mystery stories was one of the King's chief pleasures and if he had any complaint at all it was that he could not get enough detective stories. The little library off his

bedroom and the big library next to the throne room were stacked with such books. Still the King was always looking for more because, of course, it is no good reading a mystery story a second time when you already know who killed the cook and who stole the duchess' tiara and who blew up the midnight express from Chungking.

"Really I must have something new," said the King one morning after two sleepless nights when he had no new mysteries with which to read himself to sleep.

"But, your Majesty," said the Minister of Science "you have already read every mystery in the realm." The Minister sniffed a little as he said this because he felt the King should read scientific tracts or even science fiction that would improve his mind.

"Isn't there anything new being written?" asked the King plaintively.

"By your order," said the Minister distastefully, "every author in the land is at work on a new mystery. Nevertheless it will be after Christmas before the first one is finished."

"Christmas!" exclaimed the King, turning to his secretary.

"That reminds me, what preparations have we made for Christmas this year?"

The secretary took a small notebook from his pocket and began to read:

"One hundred and fifty foot Christmas tree to be installed in the Public Square.

"Eight hundred and twenty-two children invited to the Christmas party.

"One thousand pound cake and one-half ton of chocolate and peppermint ice cream and five miles of ribbon candy to be provided.

"Eight hundred and twenty-two red stockings to be hung on the fireplace for the eight hundred and twenty-two children plus." said the secretary, glancing sideways at the Minister of Science, "one large size stocking for your Majesty."

"Very good!" said the King, pleased. Then he leaped up. "My goodness! We haven't sent my letter!"

"What letter is that?" asked the Minister of Science who made it his business to keep up with the royal correspondence on affairs of state.

"My letter to Santa Claus." explained the King. "Sit down," he ordered his secretary. "We'll do it right away."



The Minister of Science, who clearly was one of those people who thought Ferdinand simple-minded, left in a huff while the secretary drew out pen and paper to take the King's dictation.

"Dear Santa," began the King. "I am very much in need of some good detective stories and, if it would not be too much trouble, this is what I would like for -"

At this point there was an enormous crash. The whole palace shuddered. The King was flung from his chair and all the detective stories on the shelves were hurled to the floor.

A moment later, the palace watchman burst into the room crying, "Your Majesty! The sky has fallen in!"

Chapter 2 THE BIG HOLE

The king and his secretary peered out from under the mountain of detective stories that had buried them when the mysterious crash shook the palace.

“W-what on earth happened?” stammered the secretary.

“It - it’s the sky!” cried the wide-eyed watchman. “It has fallen in the Public Square!”

“Nonsense!” murmured the king as he crawled around the floor on his hands and knees looking for his spectacles. “Did you SEE the sky fall?”

“Not exactly,” faltered the watchman.

“What did you see?”

“Well, nothing, to be truthful,” said the watchman. “When the crash came it shook me awake - I mean, awry - and then I picked myself up and ran as fast as I could to report to your Majesty.”

The King found his spectacles between the pages of “The Case of the Missing Suspenders” - one of his favorite mysteries. The spectacles were cracked at the bridge but still usable. He put them on and rose to his feet.

“If the sky fell,” he said reasonably, “It wouldn’t fall in just one little piece. It would be on top of the whole palace. We’d be buried in sky!”

The watchman nodded dutifully. Then he blurted, “Never-the-less, only the sky falling could have made the earth quake so!”

“Well, I shall see for myself what the trouble is,” said the King. He spoke bravely but he was far from feeling brave. He forced himself to march regally - with head up and shoulders back - down the corridors to the winding palace stairs while the watchman trailed meekly in his shadow.

As he marched he could hear his palace guards running down other corridors and from the streets he heard the sound of many people gathered there facing he dared not imagine what awful danger.

As he went out the door, the King drew his sword.

He expected to find a giant, a monster, a leviathan in the Public Square. What he found was a hole in the ground. The hole was about half a block long and two feet deep. It was surrounded by excited townspeople who walked ‘round and ‘round it searching for its cause.

Most of the hole covered the Public Gardens but at the very tip there was the crushed remains of the home of the Minister of Finance. As the Minister was away collecting taxes at the time and as he wasn’t very popular anyway, no one was too upset by this but all were grateful that they themselves hadn’t been in the way of whatever made the hole.

Then someone said that since they didn’t know what had happened, who could say it might not happen again only this time the mountain or the sky or whatever it was might land on their very selves? This set off a panic and all the people rushed to their homes and hid under the beds thinking foolishly that if

something did land on them at least it would take a little longer to get to them.

Meantime, the King’s Ministers met in the Great Throne Room to decide on a course of action.

“We must call out the militia,” said the Minister of War. “We have been attacked by some foreign power with a strange new weapon.”

The Court Astronomer rose to say “It is my belief that we have been struck from outer space by a meteor which dissolved on contact with the earth and -”

The Minister of Agriculture interrupted, “We must move at once to protect the crops and livestock and -”

And so on and on, the Ministers grappled with the problem and so intent were they that not one of them noticed that the King himself was not present nor, indeed, had he been seen since he had first left the palace.



Chapter 3

THE KING LOOKS FOR CLUES

While the ministers were busy squabbling about what had happened and what was to be done about it, King Ferdinand was taking a walk.

All alone in the Public Square he walked 'round and 'round the big hole. He took a small magnifying glass from his key chain and from time to time he got down on his hands and knees to study the ground. Several times he jumped into the hole and measured parts of it with a tape measure he secretly wore as a belt for his trousers.

When he had seen all there was to be seen the King stood for a long while clucking his tongue and shaking his head. He was trying to imagine how the detectives in his favorite detective stories would handle such a situation. Presently he remembered that one such detective always advised his assistants to get away and take a long view of a problem.

"That's what I must do!" exclaimed the King. "I will get as far away as I possibly can; then I will take a really good look at this extraordinary problem."

He hitched his ermine robes over his arm and ran into the palace and up the broad stairs. Even when he had reached the fifth floor he did not stop. He opened a secret door into a secret closet and climbed a circular staircase that led up, up, up into the highest tower of the palace.

When the stairs ended, the King stood in a small room at the very top of the Kingdom.

"This should be far enough away," he thought with satisfaction. He ran to a window and poked his head out and peered below. For a moment all he could see were spots before his eyes.

Then he realized they weren't really spots, they were buildings - so far below him they looked like little black specks. In the middle of the black specks was a blank space which was the Public Square and in the middle of this was the Public Garden and in the middle of this was the great mysterious hole.

The King leaned further and further out of the window staring at the black shape. He could not believe what he saw. He took off his spectacles and looked. Then he held his spectacles upside down and looked.

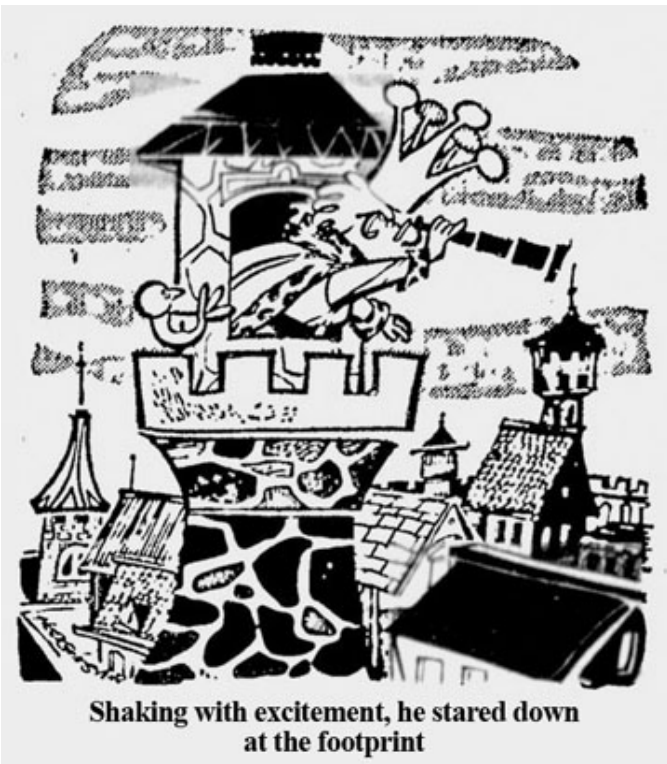
It was true! The black shape was a footprint! Clear as could be the King could see the outline of a shoe - a left shoe with a broad fiat heel - a shoe so large that only a giant as tall as the sky could have worn it!

Where the heel had dug into the earth there were strange lines and curlicues. The King dashed to a corner cupboard and drew out a telescope he kept there to gaze at the stars. He brought the telescope to the window and shaking with excitement, stared down at the footprint.

Now the crumpled lines took shape. "I" read the King. "P... S... W.." Slowly a word formed as the King traced out the letters with his finger on the window sill.

Suddenly he dropped the telescope and went spinning down the 34 steps on the spiral staircase and the five flights of stairs below and burst into the Great Throne Room.

"Gentlemen!" he cried to his ministers. "We have been invaded by an Ipswitch!"



Chapter 4

TRAILING THE IPSWITCH

The ministers stared at King Ferdinand in astonishment.

“An IPSWITCH?” exclaimed the Minister of War. “What is an Ipswitch?”

“It’s a city somewhere--I forget just where.” said the Minister of Education importantly.

“No, no,” protested a Doctor of Medicine. It’s a kind of nervous feeling - or jitter!”

“I thought it was a special kind of preserves.” said the Palace Dietician.

King Ferdinand coughed for attention. “The Ipswitch I am talking about.” he declared. “Is a giant with enormous feet and it stepped with its enormous left foot into the middle of the Public Square. That is what shook the town and made the hole in the Garden. Its name is printed on its heel and if you want to see for yourselves come in the tower and look.”

Trying not to show how pleased he was with himself for his detective work, King Ferdinand led the ministers to the top most tower of the palace where they saw that what he said was true and they really had been visited by a giant named Ipswitch.

The ministers were very impressed with the King’s discovery and they thought perhaps he was not so simple-minded after all. Then the palace shoe maker who, unknown to anyone, had trailed along behind them, tugged at the King’s sleeve and said:

“Your Majesty, if the giant is an Ipswitch, we are all the same.”

“What do you mean?” asked the King.

The shoe maker bent one leg and showed the bottom of his foot. “You see, sir, everyone has Ipswitch written on his shoe. It’s the name of the heel.”

The King looked at his own heel and all his ministers looked at their heels and sure enough “Ipswitch” was printed on every one.

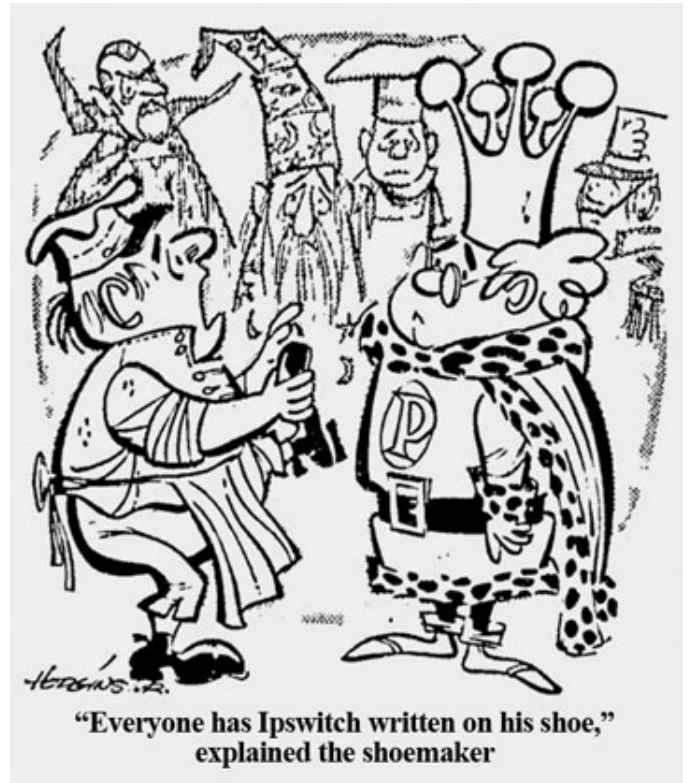
The King blushed at his mistake. But he quickly recovered and said, “Well, anyway, the heel in the Public Garden is certainly the largest heel in the world and, as such, deserves to be known as the one and only real Ipswitch even if everyone in the Kingdom is a little Ipswitch.

To this everyone agreed because it made them feel ever so much better to have a name for their enemy. It made it all less mysterious and easier to cope with somehow.

Then one of the ministers said, “If the Ipswitch is so enormous why is it we could not see him as he passed by?”

This stumped them all but the King, who was used to all kinds of mysteries having read so many detective stories, said, “Perhaps he moved too fast or perhaps he was invisible or perhaps he was very, very thin.”

“But what are we to do?” finally, asked the Minister of Action.



The King had never felt so wise and important. “It seems to me,” he said simply, “That if the left foot landed here the right foot had to land somewhere else. Therefore we have only to track the footprints and well come to the Ipswitch.”

The ministers thought this a brilliant idea and they set out at once to find where the right foot of the Ipswitch had landed. They were not too long in finding it because just as they set out word came from a distant province that a forest of pine trees had been suddenly crushed to earth. And from a still further province word came that a large lake had inexplicably overflowed its sides the way a bathtub full of water would do if a fat man suddenly leaped into it.

The strangest thing was that all the tracks were made by a left foot!

The King and his ministers followed the left footed trail until they came finally to a great ocean and here the tracks ended.

“Ah,” said the King. “It has gone too far. It has stepped into the ocean and the ocean is so deep it would drown a creature as tall as the sky, especially a creature with only one foot!”

Then the ministers congratulated the King for his wisdom and they all returned to the palace.

Chapter 5

HAUNTS

When the King returned to the palace he announced that the danger was past and ordered all his subjects to come out from under their beds. Then, as it was quite late, he retired to his room to read in bed before going to sleep. He was reading an old mystery that he had already read several times but still it was better than no mystery at all.

He was just beginning to doze off when a remarkable thing happened. The bed sheet began to move!

The King tugged the sheet back under his chin. But no sooner was he settled comfortably than the sheet began to slip again. Slowly, slowly, it drifted toward the foot the bed.

The King watched in astonishment as the edge of the sheet traveled from his chin, across his chest and stomach and over his bent knees. Just as it was about to slide over his toes, the King threw himself forward and peered under the bed.



**The King rushed into the hall shouting,
“Help! Help!”**

There was nothing to be seen. The King fell back and yanked the sheet all the way over his head. He lay there, scarcely breathing, clinging to the edge of the sheet.

He waited and waited. Presently he felt a slight tug at the far end of his sheet. He clung to his end. The tug became stronger. The King tightened his grip. Then there was a mighty tug at the end. The King, not to be outdone, gave such a vigorous tug at his end that suddenly the whole sheet flew up from the bottom and right over the King's head!

The King started to cry out for help but he was so tangled in the sheet he couldn't open his mouth. When he was finally untangled he got up and walked round the bed twice and peered underneath it a dozen times. There was nothing there. The King decided that the whole thing had been a nightmare.

“I've really been reading too many detective stories,” he scolded himself. “And then there was all that commotion about the Ipswitch. My nerves are on edge. I'll feel better when I've had sleep.”

He remade the bed, tucking the sheet in on all sides and tucking in three blankets with hospital corners. Then he turned out the light and crawled under the cover.

He had scarcely shut his eyes when there was a long, low s-q-u-eeeeee-k from the far side of the room. The King's eyes flew open. He knew the squeak was caused by the hinge on his door. It needed oiling and the door always squeaked when it was opened.

The King lay there holding his breath. Someone had opened the door and was in the room with him.

“I'll not be murdered in my bed!” thought the King bravely and he leaped out of the covers and turned on the light.

The room was empty. The door was closed.

But the King's nerve was gone. He rushed into the hall and shouted, “Help! Help!”

Ministers from all over the palace came stumbling through the corridors. When they arrived in the King's room he told them what had happened. They turned the room upside down and even took the bed apart but there was nothing to be found.

The ministers looked at the King. They were wondering if perhaps he wasn't simple-minded after all when suddenly there was an awful crash, the whole palace trembled and King and Ministers were flung from their feet.

The Ipswitch had come again!

Chapter 6

THE PEOPLE PANIC

This time the Ipswitch landed on an acre of Christmas trees which stood in little red and green pots behind the palace. These trees had been gathered from all over the land and were to be given to the poor on Christmas Eve. King Ferdinand had decorated them with tinsel and blue and silver balls and toy horns and candy canes and a golden star on the tip top of every one.

Now the field lay in ruins, the trees and the pots and the pretty decorations crushed beneath the enormous left foot of the Ipswitch.

In the palace itself all was confusion. The Ministers, gathered in the King's bedroom, were flung violently about. A rare antique vase fell from a mantel piece and knocked the Minister of Science senseless, the Minister of War was wound into the bed springs and the King himself was tossed into the air and left hanging by his knees from the chandelier.

Gradually they righted themselves and, when dawn came, went out to survey the damage. Again, no one had seen the Ipswitch itself and the only thing that marked its passage was the foot print in the field of Christmas trees.

Now the people were really frightened and worse still, they had lost faith in King Ferdinand who had told them the Ipswitch had drowned. They began to mutter against the King and say that if he couldn't do something to defend the kingdom he should step down and let someone else rule the land.

But Ferdinand was undismayed. He set up a watch around the town and palace.

"If we keep our eyes open we are bound to see the Ipswitch when it comes again and when we do see it we will capture it, dead or alive!" He ordered his men to be alert and to attack at first sight of the enemy.

For three whole days and nights the guards, with King Ferdinand in command, watched over the palace grounds and the Public Square and for three days and nights nothing happened.

On the fourth day a guard suddenly shouted, "Here it comes!"

The King and all the guards looked up and saw a great black shoe coming down from above. While they waited to attack the foot landed with crash in an empty playground. The shock of the crash sent the guards sprawling and when they picked themselves up the Ipswitch was gone.

After this the King did not know what to do for how could he fight an enemy he could not see? To make matters worse, ever since the first appearances of the Ipswitch, the palace itself had been haunted.

Now only did doors open and close by themselves and sheets slide from the King's bed but the King often heard whispering sounds and creaking stairs and tapping on the walls when it was late at night and no one around at all.

Meanwhile, the people were sure that the next time the Ipswitch came it would step right on their very own homes.



They howled for something to be done and, since they couldn't have the Ipswitch's head, some even began to clamor for the King's head!

Poor Ferdinand! He sat in his room and thought, "Oh, dear, why did all this have to happen so close to Christmas!" He remembered the letter to Santa he had never finished writing. "It's just as well," he sighed. "For by Christmas I shall not even be here anymore."

Chapter 7
THE LETTER TO SANTA



The King thought of the letter to Santa Claus which he had never finished. He got it out and looked at it.

Besides asking for more detective stories for himself he had planned to ask for toy soldiers for his Minister of War and a balloon for the Minister of Science and a book on sandwich making for the cook and oh - it was such a wonderful Christmas he had planned!

He put the letter on his desk and began to walk up and down the room. It broke his heart to think of the Christmas that now would never be. Suddenly he clapped his hands and cried "But, why shouldn't it be, after all? I'll write to Santa anyway and who knows.-?"

He turned to the desk and took up his pen but when he reached for the letter it had disappeared! It wasn't under the blotter or in the drawer or on the floor. Frantically he went through all the papers in the room, emptied the waste basket, searched his pockets, even shook out the pages of all the detective stories on the shelves.

The letter had vanished.

Now the King was thoroughly frightened. He felt he HAD to reach Santa Claus, that, indeed, Santa was the one last hope of the whole kingdom. He snatched up a piece of fresh writing paper and, gripping one end of the paper tightly in his fist, he began to write.

He told Santa all the awful things that were happening, about the haunted palace and the Ipswitch and the panic of the people. He begged Santa for help, for advice or, at the very least, for some detective stories that might help him solve the mystery.

He wrote as fast as he could because he was afraid that any minute the pen would dissolve in his fingers or the paper evaporate in front of his eyes.

When he had finished he folded the letter into an envelope and stamped it with the royal seal and wrote on the front "To Santa Claus. Special Delivery." Then clutching the letter in both hands, he rushed to the office of the Minister of Science.

"Will you see that this letter is delivered at once!" cried the King. "It is of the utmost importance."

Since the appearance of the Ipswitch the Minister of Science and the other royal ministers had put all their energies into defending the kingdom. They met three times a day to wring their hands and discuss the problem. They wrote memorandums to one another suggesting steps some other minister should take. They made long lists of things they themselves had done.

Still they could not capture the Ipswitch or even find it and, in their hearts, they blamed the King for their failure and for all the bad times that had come to the land.

So when the Minister of Science heard the King's command and saw to whom the letter was addressed he flew into a rage. He snatched the letter from the King's hand. "What kind of a king are you? Santa Claus and detective stories! The people are right - you are Ferdinand the Foolish and not fit to be king at all!"

With that he tore up the letter and threw the pieces in the corner.

Astonished and bewildered, the King crept back to his room. "They are right," he thought unhappily. "Perhaps I should step down from the throne and let the people have a wiser king."

Chapter 8
SANTA LAND

While all was confusion and terror in Ferdinand's Kingdom of Polydora, things were quite different in far away Santa Land.

There, on a snowy afternoon, Santa Claus sat in his favorite rocking chair beside a glowing fire and dozed. He was dreaming he was at a party with the Queen of Fairies and she had just accepted his invitation to waltz. At this point, Mrs. Santa Claus burst into the room and shook him by the shoulder.

"A fine thing!" she exclaimed. "Here you sit dozing away when there is such a short time until Christmas and goodness knows how much work there is to be done!"

Santa shook his head vigorously "I wasn't sleeping my dear. I was thinking."

"Thinking what?" asked Mrs. Santa suspiciously.

"Thinking of a new toy," said Santa.

"Oh, bosh! You were sleeping and your snores were so loud I was afraid you would cause my cake to fall."

"Cake?" said Santa licking his lips. "What kind of cake, my dear?"

"Pineapple Upside Down Cake," said Mrs. Santa. "And you'll not have a bit unless you wake up and get to work."

"But I think best when I'm asleep," said Santa. "In fact, some of my best toys have come from dreams. The perpetually spinning top, for instance, came after I dreamed I was on a merry-go-round and couldn't get off. And once I dreamed I was falling through space and when I woke I made that umbrella parachute that was so popular two years ago."

"Well," said Mrs. Santa, "What toy were you dreaming of this time?"

Santa remembered the beautiful fairy queen he had been about to dance with. "Well - uh -" he faltered, puffing furiously at his pipe, "Well -"

There was a knock at the front door and Santa, rescued in the nick of time jumped to open it. Patrick Tweedleknives, the oldest dwarf in Santa Land, entered, dragging behind him a tiny reds headed fairy who carried a handkerchief sized bag on his back.

"This creature insists he has to see you," said Tweedleknives crossly. "I've told him he can have five minutes and no more because you are very, very busy."

"Come in," said Santa warmly. "What can I do for you?"

The tiny fairy crossed to the fire, staggering under the weight of the bag on his back.

"I've come from the Kingdom of Polydora where strange things have been going on," he said. "I happen to be the Crumb Man at the palace there and -"

"Crumb Man? What's that?" asked Santa.

"Speak up!" snapped Tweedleknives. "Hurry on with it!"

"I collect the crumbs dropped in the kitchen. That way I feed the fairies in the town," said the little fellow, trying to say all he had to say in one breath. "Well, lately someone else - I don't know who - has been getting the crumbs first and things have been very hard. So last night I decided to look for crumbs in some of the other rooms in the palace because I thought perhaps the King was making sandwiches somewhere else the way he sometimes does - and in one of the offices I didn't find any crumbs but I did find this."

Breathless with his long speech, the little fellow opened his bag and all the pieces of King Ferdinand's letter fell at Santa's feet. "A puzzle!" exclaimed Tweedleknives angrily. "You came all the way here to bother Santa with a puzzle?"

But Santa was on his hands and knees fitting the bits of paper together. When it was all in one piece he read it slowly and then he read it again and then he got to his feet and said:

"This is a predicament! I shall have to go at once!"



Chapter 9

SANTA AND THE SEEING EYE

“Oh, no!” cried Tweedleknives in alarm. “You can’t possibly go anywhere when there is such a short time before Christmas!”

“But I must,” insisted Santa. “Listen to this and you will agree.” Fitting the bits of paper together he read the letter from King Ferdinand telling about the visits of the frightening Ipswitch and the haunted palace and begging for help from Santa.

“These are strange goings on,” finished Santa. “The King of Polydora certainly needs help.”

Mrs. Santa clucked her tongue. “It’s only because you always like a mystery and you like to play detective,” she fretted.

“That reminds me,” said Santa with sudden inspiration. “I’ve just remembered the toy I was dreaming of a while ago. It was a Seeing Eye. Properly installed it would allow anyone to sit in his own room and see what is happening in another room - even one five floors below! Think how the children would love to have that for Christmas?”

“It would be wonderful!” exclaimed the little red-haired fairy who had come all the way from Polydora to bring Santa the letter from Ferdinand, “I might even be able to see who has been getting the kitchen crumbs ahead of me!”

“Very well - make the Seeing Eye!” snapped Tweedleknives. “But you don’t have to go to Polydora. Let the King solve his own mysteries.”

“But think,” said Santa. “If he doesn’t solve it - this - this Ipswitch - or whatever it is - may take it into its head to come tramping through the North Pole. Then what would happen to Santa Land?” He took Tweedleknives gently by the shoulder. “Come now, you can handle things while I am away. I’ll be

back before you know it.” He paused and scratched the side of his nose. “Incidentally, I think I will just make up that Seeing Eye before I leave. Might come in handy.”

He started out the door, then turned and stuck his head back in. “My dear,” he said softly to Mrs. Santa, “it would be a shame to miss your Pineapple Upside Down Cake. Do you suppose I could have a wee piece to take with me when I go?”

“Oh, you!” Mrs. Santa laughed spite of herself. “You always get your way!”

Santa grinned and hurried to his workshop. In a moment he was hard at work with blueprints, wires, mirrors, rubber tubes and magnifying glasses. The red-headed fairy sat on a tack box on top of Santa’s work bench and watched.

“I guess you can make anything!” he said at last.

“Well, most anything, I suppose,” agreed Santa.

“I wish you could make me a crumb sweeper.” said the fairy wistfully. Sometimes when I crawl around all night picking up crumbs in the palace kitchen I feel as if my back would break!”

Santa reached into his back pocket. “Try this,” he said handing the fairy a soft rubbery magnet. “It picks up cake crumbs the way an ordinary magnet picks up metal. I made it as a stocking gift for the mothers of small children.”

The little fairy climbed to the floor and dragged the magnet through the workshop. In an instant it was covered with crumbs that the Santa Land workers had dropped from their lunch. “Oh, boy! I’ve got it made!” cried the fairy happily

Santa snipped some wire and put away his blue prints. “I have it made, too,” he said. “Here is my seeing Eye.” And he folded up his new toy and put it in his pocket.

He rushed back to his house, packed a small bag and picked up the whole Pineapple Upside Down Cake Mrs. Santa had boxed for him. Then he set off for Polydora with the red headed fairy riding inside his big black boot.



The fairy sat on a tack box and watched Santa work

Chapter 10

VISIT FROM AN OLD WOMAN

King Ferdinand was no longer a happy king.

Twice more the Ipswitch had come to Polydora. The first time it had squashed into a peanut butter factory which was certainly a personal insult to the King because everyone knew peanut butter was his very favorite dish. The second time the Ipswitch trampled on a zoo, breaking down fences and overturning cages. Now the Kingdom was swarming with kinkajous and three-toed sloths and even a white elephant or two.

Each time the Ipswitch came it was followed by even stranger happenings at the palace. The King heard mysterious sounds in the dark of night and saw things vanish in the light of day. But by now he was so distraught he no longer knew whether he actually heard and saw things or whether it was all his imagination.

He took to sleeping with the light on and shoving his heavy bureau in front of the door. And each night before climbing into bed he would get down on his hands and knees and not only peer under the bed but crawl all the way under it and out the other side just to make sure nothing was there.

Even then, when at last he got into bed, he would not be able to sleep but would lie there shivering and staring and waiting for something, he knew not what, to happen.

So it was he was lying one night, cold with fright, when he heard a tap – tap – tapping at the door. The King lay very still. “If I don’t move,” he thought, “It will go away.” But the tap-tap came again. The King sat on the edge of the bed and stared at the door wondering what on earth to do.

Suddenly the door knob began to turn - slowly, slowly - and the door opened a tiny crack. The King could stand it no longer. He rushed at the bureau in front of the door, pushed it aside and flung open the door.

“Come in, whoever you are!” he shouted wildly.

Standing there was a plump little woman wrapped in a great black shawl that covered her face and hung to the floor.

“W-who are you?” whispered the King, falling back in bewilderment.

The woman took a step forward, tripped over the shawl and fell head long into the room. She threw the shawl back from her head and there was Santa Claus - eyes laughing and red cheeks, shining through white whiskers.

He picked himself up and chuckled. “That’s my disguise number one. A detective has to have a lot of disguises you know.”

Then he told the astonished King how he had gotten his letter and had come to help him. The King bubbled over with happiness and relief.

“This calls for a celebration!”

“And we shall have it,” said Santa. He pulled out the box containing the Pineapple Upside Down Cake and laid it on the desk. “I’ve saved this to share with you.”



“My very favorite!” cried the King. “Come and we’ll get some milk to go with it.”

They sneaked down to the kitchen for a bottle of milk but when they returned the Pineapple Upside Down Cake had disappeared. They searched everywhere but they could not find it.

“There, you see,” groaned the King in hungry despair, “The palace is haunted!”

THE PINEAPPLE UPSIDE DOWN CAKE



As Santa and the King pondered what to do next, the little red-headed fairy slipped from Santa's boot and danced across the room.

"What on earth is that?" asked the King, hardly able to believe his eyes.

"Ah," said Santa. "He's the fellow who brought me the torn up pieces of your letter. He lives in your palace and he has been having trouble lately finding crumbs in the kitchen."

"But not anymore," cried the little fellow. He drew out the soft rubbery magnet Santa had given him and pulled it across the floor. Instantly the magnet was covered with crumbs.

"Why it's crumbs from my Pineapple Upside Down Cake!" exclaimed Santa leaning down and licking the magnet.

"Then whoever took the cake must have left a trail of crumbs!" said the King.

"Clues!" agreed Santa. "We've only to follow the trail and -"

"We'll find the thief!"

The red-headed fairy, dragging the magnet, led the way as the three of them crept out of the room. In the corridor they turned to the right but no crumbs appeared. They turned back and went to the left. Immediately a sprinkling of crumbs gathered on the magnet. They turned into the East Wing. The magnet drew no crumbs. They turned into the West Wing and there the crumbs, flying to the magnet, led them past room after room until they came to the closed door of a private apartment.

"Here lives the Thief!" whispered Santa.

The King shook his head. "Impossible."

"Why? Whose room is this?" asked Santa.

"The Minister of Science. A most worthy man. Furthermore he has a poor stomach and never eats rich food. He certainly would never dream of touching Pineapple Upside Down Cake even if it were served to him at a royal banquet."

"Nevertheless" said Santa, "the Pineapple Upside Down Cake came to this room. That we know."

The King scratched his head thoughtfully. "If only we could set up a watch at the door."

"Ah," said Santa, "that reminds me!" He pulled his Seeing Eye from his pocket and captained it to the King, "We will set the Eye here in the wall facing the Minister's door and then watch from your own room." He set up the Eye and laid the wire under the carpet back to the Kings room.

Then the two of them settled back to watch through the glass at their end.

They had just gotten comfortable when they saw the door to the Minister's room slowly open. The next instant a small wet red blob waved at the far end of the glass.

"Good Heaven! It's a tongue!" cried Santa. "I believe someone is sticking his tongue out at us!" He shook the glass to see if something else wouldn't appear. But now the eye was a blank.

"Extraordinary!" mused Santa. "That's the littlest tongue I ever saw."

"The Minister of Science is a very big man," said the King thoughtfully.

"Perhaps he can shrink himself," said Santa. I once read a story about -"

But he got no further for suddenly the lights went out, there was a muffled cry in the dark and then a crash. Santa, stumbling around in the dark cried, "What's happening? Where are you?"

An instant later the light went on. But now Santa was alone. The King had disappeared.

Chapter 12

THE TRAP

Santa looked about in bewilderment. The King's room appeared perfectly normal but the King was missing. Standing there, Santa heard a strange rattling in the closet on the far side of the bed. He tiptoed to the closet and put his ear against the door. The rattling was subdued but violent as if a cook in a hurry was beating a dozen eggs into an omelet.

Santa took a deep breath and threw open the door. The King's clothes hamper was jumping up and down on the closet floor!

Reaching out gingerly, Santa opened the hamper and stepped quickly back. A pair of legs popped from the tangled clothes and waved frantically in the air.

"For goodness' sake!" exclaimed Santa. "It's the King!"

And so it was. Santa fished him, sputtering and quivering, out of the clothes hamper and set him on his feet.

"What happened?"

The King unwound a purple stocking from his neck. "When the lights went out I felt myself fly through the air and I landed upside down in the dirty clothes. That's all I know."

"We must get to the bottom of this," said Santa suddenly very businesslike. "Since all of your troubles started with the first visit of the Ipswitch I suggest we find the Ipswitch."

"But - I can't get out of the palace" protested the King. He told Santa how the people were very angry because he had not stopped the Ipswitch. "If they see me they will tear the crown from my head."

"Poo!" said Santa cheerfully. "We will wear disguises." He opened his bag and pulled out two woodchoppers costumes. This will suit me better than an old woman's dress anyway." he said, putting on his new disguise.

Delighted, the King drew on the tough leather pants and coarse coat and admired himself in the mirror.

"We'll need rope," said Santa as he hustled around the room.

"There's the fire rope," said the King. "It hangs out the window for escape in case of fire." He opened the window and pulled up the rope that dangled five stories down.

Santa wound the rope over his shoulder and the two woodchoppers stole out of the palace. Dawn was just breaking when they arrived at a narrow plain between two hills just beyond the town

"Wherever the Ipswitch steps it will have to pass this way," reasoned Santa. "We'll stretch this rope across the plain and no matter how fast it goes or how big it is it is bound to trip over the rope."

They tied one end of the rope to the top of a sycamore and the other end to an oak on the opposite of the plain. Then they hid themselves in some bushes and waited.

They waited all that day and all that night and by the next morning they were not only frozen they were starved. They were just going to get food when they heard a distant thud.



"It's coming!" cried the King.

In a moment there was another thud, still far away but shaking the ground around them. Then another thud, this one so close it upheaved the bushes around the woodcutters and buried them in dirt and shrubbery.

The thuds receded and Santa and the King unburied themselves and rushed to the plain. There was the footprint of the Ipswitch and right in front of it stretched the rope just as they had left it.

The Ipswitch had never even touched it.

Chapter 13

THE MAGICIANS

“It’s Impossible!” declared Santa. “How could it pass and not trip over the rope?”

The King shook his head. “The whole thing is impossible and I have never known anything to equal it in any mystery story I’ve ever read.”

“When we get to the bottom of this,” said Santa, “I shall have one of my writers do a story about it. It will be a good thing to have on the Book List next Christmas.”

“Perhaps we shall never get to the bottom of it,” said the King dolefully. “And by next Christmas I won’t even be King.”

“Nonsense,” said Santa. “I have a brand new plan. We will dig a ditch and the next time the Ipswitch comes around it will fall into it and that will be that.”

“It will have to be an awfully big ditch,” said the King. “We couldn’t dig it.”

“We will have your people dig it,” said Santa.

“But they no longer do anything I command!”

“But if a magician commands it?”

“Magician?”

Santa was busily pulling costumes from his inexhaustible bag. “We will disguise ourselves as magicians. Then we will promise the people to get rid of the Ipswitch if they will dig a hole.”

Before he knew it, the King found himself no longer a woodchopper but a magician dressed in black tails and tall silk hat and carrying a magic wand. Santa dressed in the same disguise and they headed back to the town. In no time at all they were surrounded by townsmen. These poor people had often heard of but never seen a magician and when they found themselves visited by two they were overcome with awe.

When Santa explained to them what he wanted they agreed willingly. There was nothing they would not do to rid themselves of the cursed Ipswitch.

They rushed to their homes for shovels and pickaxes and then marched, one thousand strong, to the narrow plain between the hills. There was already a deep impression made by the Ipswitch’s last trip and the two magicians stood at the edge of this hole and directed the laborers to enlarge and deepen it.

The eager workers dug and dug without stopping and the hole got deeper and deeper and wider and wider. Santa and the King stood at the side and from time to time waved their wands, pretending that magic was being invoked.

When at last the ditch was large enough they ordered the workers home and then the two magicians climbed into the hole.

“It’s huge!” cried Santa. “It’s bound to work.”

“Oh, my!” said the King, waving his wand excitedly, “I just wish the Ipswitch would come this very minute! I’d like to see it’s face when it falls in here.”

“Watch that wand!” cautioned Santa. “You never can tell - ”

But it was too late. Somehow magic had been invoked or maybe it was a coincidence but anyway the Ipswitch was on its way again. Hearing the distant thuds, the two magicians struggled wildly out of the ditch just in time to see an enormous left foot descending on them from above.

Panic stricken, Santa and the King tumbled again to the bottom of the ditch. They picked each other up and raced forward hand in hand. Then Santa stumbled and both of them crashed headlong. An instant later, the foot landed not two yards in front of them.

Open mouthed, they stared. It was a shoe. But there was no leg. No body. No head. Only a left-footed shoe that already was rising in front of them to land again miles away.



Chapter 14

SHOE SHINE BOYS

“Did you see?” cried the king breathlessly. “It had no body! It was only a shoe!”

Santa nodded. “We’ve got to stop it! Why a shoe walking around all by itself like that could - well, it could just stamp out the whole world!”

“What will we do now?” asked the king.

“First, we’d better start running,” said Santa. “Because if I am not mistaken I hear our workers coming back to see the captured Ipswitch we promised them.”

It was true. This time, when the Ipswitch passed through the town, the people hardly minded for had not the two magicians promised to trap him in the ditch they themselves had dug?



Now they came running to see the captured monster. But when they came to the edge of the ditch they found only the two bedraggled magicians. Poor Santa and the king! They stood there with their beautiful tall silk hats bashed in and even their magic wands snapped in half.

The townsmen who had worked so hard to dig the ditch cried, “Where is it? Where is the Ipswitch?”

“We will capture it next time it comes,” declared Santa. “You must be patient.”

But the people had given out of patience. “You promised us!” They shouted. And they began hurling sticks and stones down on the magicians.

Santa and the king turned on their heels and ran as fast as they could to the far end of the ditch. Slipping and sliding they clawed their way up the sides and stumbled off into the mountain woods.

“Ah,” sighed the king throwing himself down to rest. “I am not only a failure as a king, I cannot even succeed as a woodchopper or a magician. I am finished. There is nothing left for me to be.”

“Diddlydum,” said Santa cheerfully. “I have plenty of disguises left. And ideas, too.” He rummaged through his little bag and came out with some short black pants and ragged coats.

“We will be shoeshine boys.”

“You are joking!” exclaimed the king.

“Not at all. We will be shoeshine boys and shine the shoe of the Ipswitch. Come on now - dress up!”

Obediently, the king did as he was told and the two of them headed back to the town. Santa, with his bushy white whiskers and big fat stomach made a rather odd looking shoeshine boy but no one noticed because the town was in a turmoil.

The people had crashed into the palace and demanded, once and for all, that the king (whom no one could find) should step down and the Minister of Science (who was much admired for his brilliance and his stiff bearing) should put on the crown and lead them out of their difficulties.

At this point, the Ipswitch (whom now appeared to be traveling around the world twice a day) sounded a distant thud. The Minister of Science, who had willingly put on the crown, ran into the streets and waved his hands calmly as if he could flag down the Ipswitch with some secret signal of his own.

And, indeed, the Ipswitch did seem to slow down and even to pause for a moment as it landed in the Public Square. The Minister of Science smiled smugly and started confidently towards the shoe. But even as he did so, the Ipswitch rose again only this time two fat little shoeshine boys were clinging with all their might to the tangled shoe laces that trailed from the big black shoe.

Chapter 15

AN OCEAN VOYAGE

“Hang on!” cried Santa as he struggled to wrap the shoe lace around his waist.

The King was too busy to reply. He had lost hold of his shoe string and was inching frantically forward on his stomach trying to find a safe spot. At last his hands found a lace hole and he climbed into it and clung to the edge.

Up, up the Ipswitch went and then down, faster than falling rain, to land in some poor farmer’s peach orchard, smashing the trees and shattering a nearby barn. Then up again and down, thud, thud, thud....

Santa swung around on the end of the lace like a ball on the end of a rubber band while the King bounced so hard in the lace hole he twice bounded right out of it and once went sliding all the way to the Ipswitch’s too before he caught himself on a scuffed piece of leather and dragged himself back to safety.

“Suppose it never stops!” he thought miserably. He had a sudden awful vision of Santa and himself jouncing around on the Ipswitch’s shoe for the rest of time. The more he thought about it the surer he was that this was just what was going to happen. He poked his head far out of the hole to explore the possibility of jumping off the next time they touched ground. What he saw caused his heart to miss a beat.

“Look! Look!”

Santa saw the King’s frightened face and turned and looked where he pointed. He, too, gasped and shivered with fright for just ahead and below them stretched an endless ocean and it was clear as could be that the next step the Ipswitch made would land them all plumb into the bottomless sea.

“Shall we jump off?” shouted the King.

Santa shook his head. “We must solve the mystery!” he shouted back,

The King hardly cared about the mystery any longer. He wished he were reading someone else’s mystery in his own comfortable bed back home - even if it wasn’t a king’s bed any more.

But it was all too late because now the foot was descending to the sea. The King shut his eyes and held his breath and waited for the cold water to cover him.

Smack! The shoe struck the sea and the waves splashed over the King but though he waited and waited he didn’t drown! He opened his eyes and let out his breath. The shoe, like an ocean-going ship, was riding the waves with the greatest of ease and, as the King stared in disbelief, a sail suddenly sprang from inside the shoe, caught the breeze and sent the Ipswitch zooming over the sea.

Santa pulled himself hand over hand up the shoe lace and climbed to the King’s side. “How about that! We get an ocean voyage as a reward for our troubles!”

But the King pointed ahead. “Not a long voyage, though. It appears we are headed there.”

Straight ahead a small Island grew inexplicably out of the sea. It was a lonely barren place of huge grey rocks and stony cliffs.

“Ah,” said Santa. “I have a feeling the master of that island holds the key to the whole mystery.”

“And when he sees us. . .?” asked the King.

“Let us not think of that until we get there,” said Santa cheerfully.



Chapter 16

THE SCARABOOS

The Ipswitch sailed neatly to the island, furling its sail and sliding between the overhanging cliffs. As it came to a stop Santa and the King leaped off and hid behind a rock where they could watch without being seen.

A moment later the Ipswitch's shoe tongue dropped forward and fell to the ground like a bamboo slide. Then a tiny man clambered out of the shoe, perched on the tongue and coasted to the bottom.

He was the smallest man ever seen - in fact you almost couldn't see him unless you were looking very hard. He walked with a funny little hop, now here, now there - like a sand flea.

"Good gracious!" gasped Santa "What a big shoe for such a little man! How could he have caused so much trouble?"

"There are more of him!" exclaimed the King.

Sure enough, hundreds and thousands of the little creatures were now sliding out of the shoe and hop, hop, hopping over the rocks.

"Let us follow them!" whispered Santa.

They slipped out from their hiding place and followed the horde of little men up a narrow road until they came to a great flat rock. Here stood a creature like themselves only wrinkled and bent with age.

And have you succeeded in your mission" he asked in a quivering voice.

"We have," said one of the little men. "The King of Polydora has fled!"

"Wonderful!" chortled the ancient creature. "My heart's desire is now fulfilled and we can leave this lonely island. This is what I have wanted for you all these years. Life will be full and rich for you from now on."

Then all the Ipswitches cheered and jumped up and down and cried "Oh, Mighty One, how wisely you have led us!"

Santa could stand it no longer. He burst from his hiding place and shouted. "What did you have against the King of Polydora?"

The tiny creatures stopped whooping and stared at Santa and at the King who came to his side "Who are you?" they asked in astonishment.

"I am Santa Claus and this is Ferdinand, King of Polydora!"

The ancient leader gasped "SANTA CLAUS! For over a hundred years we've waited for you to come to our island. Now you've come but you are angry and will leave us nothing and never come again. Oh, if only you had come sooner! Every year we hope and hope but you travel the whole world round and pass us by."

"who are you anyway?" asked Santa.

"Scaraboos," said the leader unhappily.



Thousands of the little creatures were sliding out of the shoe

"SCARABOOS! What are Scaraboos?"

"Haunts. We haunt grave yards and spooky old houses and Halloween parties and such."

"We haunted the palace at Polydora." put in another creature. "And pulled the sheet off the King and threw him in the old clothes box and -"

"And stole my Pineapple Upside Down Cake," said Santa. "And stuck your tongue into the Seeing Eye."

"Yes, yes. But of course we didn't know you were Santa Claus or we'd never, never -"

"But you knew I was King," interrupted Ferdinand. "Why did you haunt me? What did I ever do to you?"

"Oh this is very sad," said the old leader. "You never did anything to us. But I made a bet you see. Someone told me that Scaraboos were fake and this made me very angry and said I bet we could panic a whole kingdom. So the man said he'd give us half the kingdom if would haunt Polydora and get rid of the King."

"And who," asked the King. "Who was this man?"

The Scaraboo looked unhappily at Santa and Santa said sternly "Tell him!" and the Scaraboo said. "It was the Minister of Science, your Majesty."

Chapter 17

A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL

“What!” cried King. “My own Minister of Science caused my downfall?”

“It is true,” said the Scaraboo. “The Minister wanted to be King. He plans to replace all the other ministers with machines and do away with farms and houses and such. He says this is the Age of Science and the Kingdom of Polydora is a thousand years behind the times. Instead of raising food the people will now make food pills in factories. And instead of houses they will live in underground caves and -”

“Oh, this is dreadful!” moaned the King. My poor people!”

The Scaraboos were overcome with remorse. “He promised us half the Kingdom,” said the leader. “And we did so want to get away from this island! But what fun would it be to haunt a kingdom of machines?”

Santa said, “And Christmas? Will they have Christmas in the new Polydora?”

The Scaraboos looked at him in dismay. “We never thought of that! But it’s true - the Minister doesn’t believe in Santa Claus.”

“Ah,” said Santa sadly. “Then I too shall vanish for to exist at all I must be believed in. And sooner or later he will get rid of you too, for haunts have no place in a Scientific Age.”

The Scaraboos fell worse and worse. They clustered around Santa sobbing, “What shall we do?”

Suddenly the King took a deep breath and threw back his shoulders. “I am still the rightful King of Polydora. I shall return and save my kingdom!”

Then all the Scaraboos and Santa and the King climbed into the big shoe and sailed away from the lonely island. When they came to shore all the Scaraboos took a big hop. The shoe leaped forward and landed with a thud miles away. Again and again they hopped until they came to Polydora.

The people shook with terror to see the shoe settle down in the Public Square. The Minister of Science, wearing Ferdinand’s crown, strode furiously from the palace.

He shook his fist at the shoe and cried, “Be off! I don’t want you anymore.” But the shoe just sat there. The Minister got madder and madder. He was about to set fire to the shoe when Santa and the King, still dressed as shoeshine boys, popped out and climbed to the ground.

The astonished minister drew his sword and threw himself at the King but Ferdinand snatched the sword away and turned it on the Minister. Then the Scaraboos, working faster than the eye could see, pinned the Minister’s arms to his sides and moved the crown from the Minister’s head to that of the King.

“What is this?” cried the people.

Ferdinand stripped off his disguise and stood forth in his rightful royal dress. “All your troubles are at an end,” he declared. “I am your King and the Ipswitch is no more.”

Then he told the people all that had happened. The people were furious and demanded that the Minister be put to death. But the King said, “I have a better idea. I shall exile him to the Island of the Scaraboos where he will be all alone and sleep in a cave and eat food pills and I even turn into a machine if he so desires.”

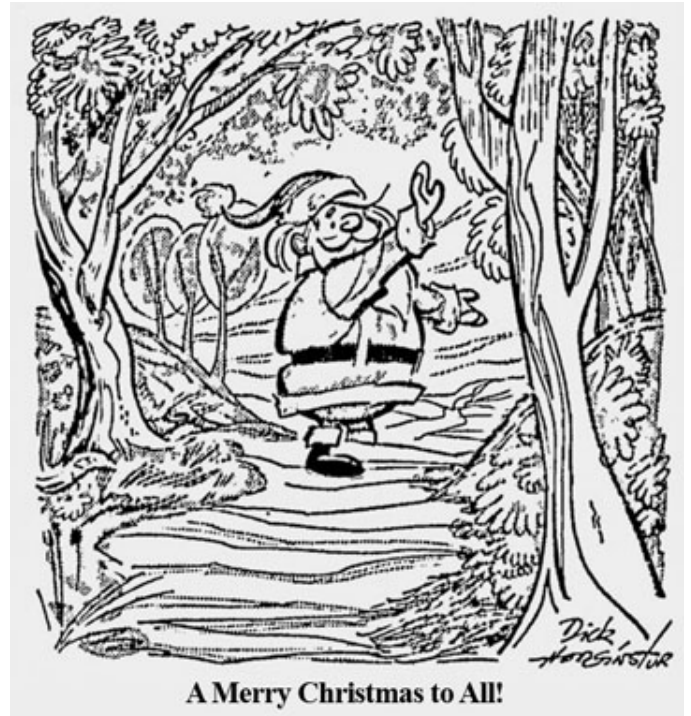
“And the Scaraboos?” asked the people.

“They will live in our land forevermore,” said the King.

A mighty cheer went up from the people and a teeny, tiny cheer from the teeny, tiny Scaraboos. Then the people said, “Your! Majesty, it is Christmas Eve. Will we have Christmas this year?”

Santa Claus threw up his hands. “CHRISTMAS EVE! Goodness gracious!” He stripped off his disguise. “Yes, indeed. You will have Christmas this year but I must hurry, hurry!”

And with a wave of his hand to the happy king he rushed away. When he reached the bend in the road he turned and shouted, “A Merry Christmas to All!”



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