

SANTA and the PIGWIDGEN

By LUCRECE BEALE

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Chapter 1

Many years ago there lived a man who had an extraordinary love for children.

He was always giving them little gifts—especially at Christmastime. He was so good and kind he was made the patron saint of children. He is called Saint Nicholas or Santa Claus for short and he is the spirit of all our Christmases.

Santa Claus lives at the North Pole and has flying reindeer and is able to bring toys to children all over the world. No one knows how this came about but many stories are told, and here is one of the most interesting.

Claus, as he was then called, lived in a mountainside village in a far-away land. He and his wife had no little ones of their own but their house was always filled with boys and girls.

Claus liked it that way. He told stories. He made up songs. He kept the cookie jar filled. He carved tiny wooden toys and gave them to the children. He scarcely had time to do his real work which was to make shelves and chairs and beds to sell to the villagers, but he never seemed to worry about making a living.

Then one day some boys playing in Claus' attic found a fat black purse. The purse clinked when the boys shook it. They went home and told their parents that Claus had a treasure of gold.

Now gold had never been seen in that far-away place and everyone was amazed. All the villagers, men, women and children, went to Claus' house and asked if they could see the treasure and merely feel the gold with their fingers.

"I have no gold!" exclaimed Claus.

"But the purse?" urged a villager. "Can't we even see the purse?"

Claus went to the attic and came back with the black leather purse. The sides bulged and the contents truly jingled like gold.

"If it's not gold, what is it?" asked an old man eagerly.

"I do not know," said Claus, "Many years ago a traveler stayed the night in my father's house. He left the purse and said he would return for it. He made my father promise never to open it. My father kept his promise. When he died he made me promise the same thing and the purse has been forgotten all these years."

"Open it!" cried the villagers. "Surely such a promise was not meant to stand forever!"



Mr. and Mrs. Claus loved children.

"For me it was," said Claus stubbornly.

The village elder spoke up slyly, "But Claus, we didn't make any such promise. Surely I can open the purse just for one little peek."

"Yes, why not?" cried everyone, moving closer. "Yes, yes!" chorused the children. "Just a peek!" And suddenly the elder leaned over the purse and opened the clasp.

There was a hiss and a screech. The lamps sputtered. A strange warm breeze blew through the house. The villagers stumbled back against the walls and Claus cried out, "Mercy me! What have you done?"

Chapter 2
THE CURSE

The mysterious warm breeze swept through Claus' house, out the door, up the chimney and through the window cracks.

Now it was gone.

The villagers stared at the purse. It was now flat and empty.

"You shouldn't have opened it!" Claus groaned. "I promised I'd never open it. Now who knows what will happen!"

"Nothing will happen," said, an elder nervously. "It was all a joke!"

"There never was anything in it!" scoffed an old man.

They laughed.

A little boy standing at Claus' side opened his mouth wide, wider, wider and gave a huge yawn. A little girl next to him did the same. She said, "I'm sleepy!" A second boy aid, "I've never been so sleepy!"

"I can't keep my eyes open," complained another child.

A moment later, all the children were yawning and rubbing their eyes. Before anyone knew what was happening, the children were sound asleep on their feet.

Mothers spoke sharply. They shook the children.

But it did no good. Fathers lifted the sleeping children and carried them home to their beds.

All day the children slept. And all night and all the next day. Men blew horns and pounded drums and paraded in the village square making enough noise to shake the houses. Mothers banged pots and pans in the kitchens and called, "Come to dinner—we're having all your favorite things!" Fathers leaned over the sleeping children and promised to play ball or climb trees with them if only they would wake.

But the children slept on.

Meanwhile Claus worked his wood carving shop. He made a special toy for each child. A clown. A doll with moving arms and legs. A music box. A sled. A checker game. Something for everyone.

While he worked, Mrs. Claus was in the kitchen mixing and baking and loading the pantry shelves with gingerbread men and raisin cakes and pecan pies.

"When the children wake," they told each other, "we'll feast and give gifts and make merry. What a time we will have!"

But the children would not wake and, finally, everyone knew a charm had been laid on them and they were going to, sleep, perhaps forever.

"It all began when the purse was opened," moaned Claus. "It is my fault. I promised never to open it,"



"I can't keep my eyes open!" "I'm so sleepy!"

"You must not blame yourself," said Mrs. Claus gently. "It was not you who opened it."

"It comes to the same thing," said Claus, "The purse was in my keeping." He picked up the old black bag and shook it angrily.

"I must find a way to break the curse!" he swore. "I will not rest until I do!"

He flung the bag against the wall. The clasp broke open. A small brass key fell out and skittered across the floor.

Chapter 3

CLAUS BEGINS A TRIP

Claus stared at the small brass key that clattered from the old black purse.

“Don’t touch it!” begged Mrs. Claus. “You may be cursed!”

“Perhaps,” said Claus. “On the other hand, it may be the key to the curse that was laid on the children.”

He examined the key. On its side was printed the single word: “Pigwidgen.”

“Pigwidgen?” exclaimed Mrs. Claus. “What could it mean?”

“I don’t know,” said Claus softly, “but I’m going to find out if I have to travel to the end of the earth!”

He went to his workshop and packed up all the toys he had made. He loaded another bag with the cookies and cakes and sweetmeats Mrs. Claus had made. He said goodbye to Mrs. Claus and set out.

He stopped at the nearest house where a sleeping child lay. He told the parents he was going away and he wanted to leave gifts for all the children.

“They’ll never see them. They’ll never wake,” sobbed the mother.

“They were cursed by the wind from the black purse!” groaned the father.

“I will find a way to break the curse,” swore Claus. “When the children wake they will find a gift and a cake. If I don’t come back, perhaps they will remember Claus.”

He went to the child’s bed and not finding anything else to put the gifts in, stuffed them in the child’s stocking and hung it on the bed.

He went to every house in the village. No child was forgotten. Then he took the narrow winding road that led across the mountain range to a distant town. The people there were known to be smart and traveled. He was sure they would know the meaning of the Pigwidgen key.

When he came to the town there were few people in the streets. All were sorrowful. Claus went up to a man and said, “Why is the town so quiet and the people so sad?”

“Our children have been stricken with a strange malady,” replied the man. “They sleep and will not wake.”

Then Claus knew the vapor that had escaped from the black purse had spread across the mountain range and would go on and on until all children everywhere fell asleep.

Claus drew the key from his pocket and asked the man if he had ever heard of Pigwidgen. The man shook his head.

He asked everyone he saw. He knocked on doors. He went to the schoolteachers and the librarians and the doctors and the police.

No one had ever heard of Pigwidgen or had any idea what it meant.

Claus was in despair. Wearily he sank down on a curbstone. An old, old woman sat down beside him.

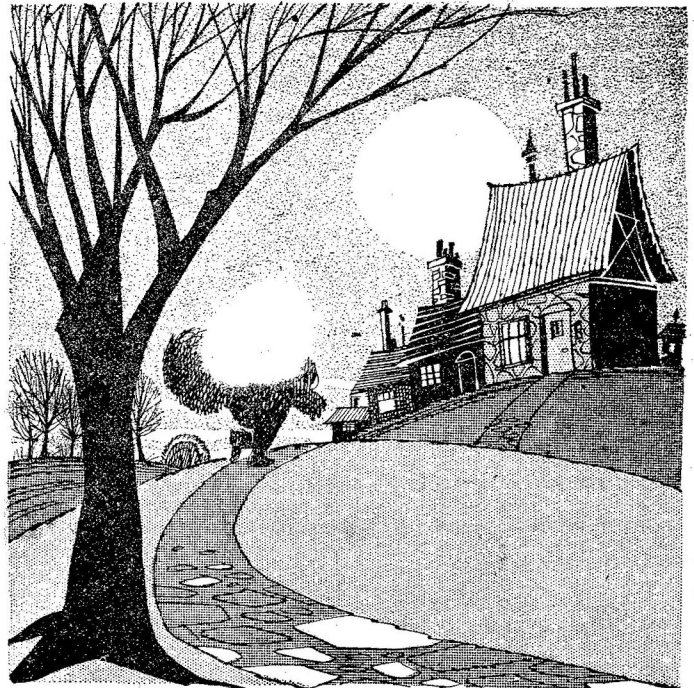
“I have heard of the Pigwidgen,” she crooned.

“Tell me!” cried Claus eagerly, “What do you know?”

“I know what a crooked-legged elf told me a hundred years ago,” wheezed the ancient Crone.

“What was that?” begged Claus.

“Only this I’ll say,” hissed the old woman. “Forget the Pigwidgen and return to your home,”



Claus went to every house in the village.

Chapter 4

PATRICK TWEEDLEKNEES

Claus leaned over the old woman and gently shook her shoulders,

“You’ve got to tell me what know!” he cried. “All the children are sleeping because of this Pigwidgen curse.”

“A Pigwidgen curse is a fearful thing,” wheezed the crone. “That is why you had best go home.”

“Who is the Pigwidgen?” asked Claus. “Where does he live? What does he do?”

The old woman closed her eyes. “I don’t remember,” she whined. “I am very old.”

She pressed her lips together and would not say another word.

Claus begged, teased and threatened but the old granny would not speak or even open her eyes or even breathe. “She is dead,” thought Claus in despair. At that instant the crone’s eyes popped open and she cackled, “Ice cream always helps a person remember.”

Claus rushed to an ice cream store and brought back all the ice cream he could carry. The ancient one ate seven quarts in seven different flavors. When the last box was licked clean she said:

“When I was a girl a hundred years ago a crooked-legged elf told me about the Pigwidgen. Go to him and he will tell you, too.”

“A hundred years ago!” gasped Claus. “Where could I find such a creature now?”

“On the Sopheppy River Ferry.”

“Where is that?”

“When night comes, take the crooked road out of town. When you come to the fork take the middle road to the weeping willow tree. Circle the willow 14 times.”

“And then?” cried Claus.

But the old crone’s eyes had closed again. Her mouth folded together. No more would she you say.

Claus went through town asking directions to the crooked road. No one had heard of such a road. Nor had anyone heard of the Sopheppy River Ferry.

Claus waited until dark. Then he walked to the four edges of the town. Three times he did this. On the fourth time when he came to the fourth side the moon had come out and he saw a crooked road where before a straight road had been.

Claus was very tired but he raced down the loony, ziggity-zaggity, catawampus road. At last he came to a fork. One road branched left and one road branched right. The middle road was not a road at all but only a path laid down by the moon.

Claus followed the path until the way was blocked by a giant willow tree. Although it was winter the tree was in full leaf.

Claus circled the tree, 14 times. The circle grew wider and larger until he was miles from the tree. When he had counted 14 times he fell on the ground in exhausted sleep.

A glittering light and a blow in the face awakened him. He opened his eyes to find a tiny elf yanking on his hair. The elf waved a flashlight made of fire-flies and shouted: “Wake up! Wake up!”



Claus bought all the ice cream he could carry.

“W-who are you?” stammered Claus.

“Patrick Tweedleknees,” snapped the elf as he gave the astonished Claus a fierce poke in the nose.



"I am the captain of the ferry," said Tweedleknees.

Chapter 5

THE SOPEHOppy FERRY

Claus sat up and rubbed his nose. Patrick Tweedleknees stood before him - two feet tall.

The little elf's legs were bowed. His nose was pointed. Woolley, eyebrows drooped over fierce blue eyes. Bristles of red hair sprang straight up from his head.

Claus laughed. He had never seen so comical a figure. Tweedleknees brandished his firefly flashlight and hollered, "You're trespassing on private property. I'd like to know what's so funny about that!"

Claus said hastily, "I am sorry. I was looking for the Sopchoppy River and the elf who runs the ferry there."

"I am the elf," said Tweedleknees. "I am the captain of the ferry."

"But," said Claus, "where is river?"

"You are sitting on it," said Tweedleknees grumpily.

Claus jumped to his feet in alarm. He peered at the ground but he could see no river, not a puddle.

"It's an underground river," said Tweedleknees huffily. "You were sitting on the entrance."

He kicked aside a layer of sod. There was a trap door. He lifted the door and flashed his light into a great hole. At the bottom was a river. Anchored there was a flimsy raft made of thousands and thousands of matchsticks.

"That," announced the elf, "is the Sopchoppy River Ferry. Now may I inquire who you are and what you're doing poking into business that is no concern of yours?"

"But it is my business!" declared Claus.

He told Tweedleknees how a curse had escaped from a mysterious black purse left in his keeping. And how all the children of the land had fallen into a sleep from which they could not be wakened. And how he had found a key marked "Pigwidgen" in the purse.

I have set out to destroy the Pigwidgen, whoever or whatever he is," finished Claus. "And I have heard you are the one who can tell me what I need to know."

"The Pigwidgen is the strongest power on earth," said the elf. "You can never destroy him."

"Centuries ago the Pigwidgen laid a curse on the elves," said Tweedleknees. "Since then if the light of sun or moon fall on an elf he will turn to ashes. All except me. I was swimming under the Sopchoppy River at the time. I am very good at underwater swimming and I escaped the curse. All other elves must live underground and can be reached only by my ferry."

"Where will I find the Pigwidgen?" asked Claus.

"No elf has ever seen him. He lives behind walls in a land of frost and never-ending snow."

"I will go there," said Claus.

"You are braver than you look," said Tweedleknees grudgingly. His nose seemed to grow sharper. His red hair turned more fiery. "No one is braver than I," he declared belligerently. "I will go with you."

"Then let us be off" said Claus."

"We will need weapons," said Tweedleknees. "Special ones. The elves will make them. Come, don't dally so."

He gave the unsuspecting Claus a shove and they both tumbled down the hole to the Sopchoppy River Ferry.

Chapter 6
FOUR GIFTS

The Sopchoppy River cascaded through dark and fearful channels far beneath the earth. Claus lay flat on his stomach and clutched the sides of the matchstick raft.

The gushing waters surged around him. He thought every minute would surely be his last. But Patrick Tweedleknees calmly poked the raft through the flood with a long-handled broom.

At last the waters calmed and Claus dared to open his eyes. He saw a blue-lighted cavern ahead. The river flowed gently into the cave and Tweedleknees, leaping ashore, said, "This is Elfland."

Claus staggered off the raft. He was greeted by hundreds of elves, who shouted, "It's a giant!"

Tweedleknees explained crossly that Claus was not a giant but a perfectly ordinary man, who meant to destroy the Pigwidgen who had cursed all the children and elves of the land.

The elves gazed at Claus in awe.

"How brave he is!" they murmured. "How strong!"



"Use the magic with great care," urged the old elf.

"And I," said Tweedleknees jealously, "I am going to help him."

"We'll all help!" shouted the elves. "We'll give you the weapons to slay the Pigwidgen!"

They rushed off to the workbenches that filled the cavern. They set to work hammering and sawing, and whittling, all the time, singing at the top of their squeaky lungs:

"What are they making?" shouted Claus above the din.

"Elves can make anything," replied Tweedleknees.

"I like to make toys," said Claus modestly.

"Elves make toys, too. In fact, it's their favorite thing."

Tweedleknees showed Claus to a huge storeroom filled with tricycles and hobby horses and fire engines and a hundred other toys

"What do you do with them?" asked Claus admiringly.

Tweedleknees shrugged. "Store them here. It keeps us busy."

"But think how children would enjoy them!" said Claus.

"Children are everywhere," reminded Tweedleknees. "Elves are here and cannot leave."

A gray-haired spectacled elf tugged at Claus' sleeve. "We're finished now," he said.

The elves gathered around and the old elf gave Claus four wondrous gifts:

First, a bow and an arrow which would always find its mark.

Second, a ring. Twist it three times and it would cause a creature to change its shape.

Third, a mouthharp, the sound of which could charm the fiercest foe.

And finally, a dagger whose point had been dipped in a deadly poison.

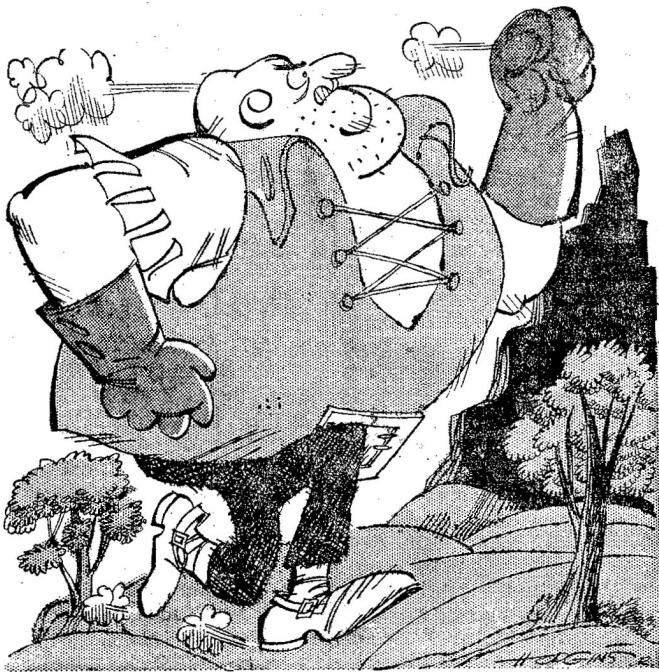
But the old elf warned, "There's one thing you must remember. The magic of each gift will work but once. Therefore use each with care"

Chapter 7
THE GIANT

What did it matter, thought Claus, if the magic of the elves' marvelous gifts would work but once? Each weapon was so powerful that it alone could destroy the Pigwidgen!

Claus and Tweedleknees started their northward journey to the land of frost and never-ending snow where the Pigwidgen was said to dwell.

Day and night they traveled north, stopping only for a few hours sleep or to hunt for a bit of food in the forests. One night they came upon a mansion standing dark and empty against the moonlit sky.



With a great bellow, the giant raced after them.

It was cold and they crept through the doorless entrance of the mansion to find warmth. Using Tweedleknees' firefly flashlight they found themselves in an empty hall from which four long and one short corridors led. They tiptoed into the short corridor, lay down on the floor and fell asleep.

When dawn came they exited via the flapping, doorless entrance. Tweedleknees yawned noisily. Claus clapped his hand over the elf's mouth. He pointed at a nearby hill.

"What is it?" sputtered Tweedleknees behind Claus' hand.

"It's not a hill!" gasped Claus. "It's a sleeping giant!"

He pointed at the mansion where they had spent the night.

"And that isn't a mansion. It's the giant's glove!"

Suddenly the mighty hump stirred.

"1,-Let's get out of here!" stuttered Tweedleknees. He and Claus started off as fast as their trembling legs could carry them.

Unfortunately the only place to rim was straight up a mountain. They had hardly started when a grinding, crunching caterwaul split their ears. They fell to the ground and shivered and shook. When they peered down at the hump they saw the giant had merely turned on his back and was now peacefully snoring.

"What an oaf!" grumbled Tweedleknees. He was ashamed to have been so afraid.

"Come on," urged Claus. "He may wake soon."

They scrambled up the rocky mountain. They had only to disappear on the other side to be safe. The giant would never know they had been there.

But when they reached the top Tweedleknees turned and glared down at the hump far below, "I'm not afraid of giants" he bragged. "In fact, I think I'll just finish off that giant before we go."

Before Claus could stop him, Tweedleknees put all his weight behind a colossal boulder and shoved it off the mountain. The boulder rocketed down and bashed the head of sleeping giant.

But the boulder had done the giant no more harm than an acorn dropped from a tree. It had merely awakened him and he was very annoyed.

He lumbered to his feet. Seeing Claus and Tweedleknees at the top of the mountain he gave a bellow and started after them.

Chapter 8
THE DONKEY

“Run for your life!” shouted Claus as he tore down the far side of the mountain.

“I’m coming! I’m coming!” sputtered Tweedleknives. He lurched over a rock and went tumbling head over heels until he came to a dead stop standing on his head with both legs wrapped around a tree.

Opening his upside-down eyes he saw the head of the giant looming over the top of the mountain. The giant grinned.

“Help!” bellowed Tweedleknives.

Claus turned and saw the giant reach out to snatch the elf in his gargantuan fist. His heart pounding, Claus unshouldered the bow the elves had given him to kill the Pigwidgen and shot the magic arrow into the heart of the giant.

The earth quaked and the mountain tottered when the great giant fell.

“You’ve done it!” Tweedleknives cried admiringly. “You’ve killed a giant!”

“Yes,” said Claus gravely. “But I’ve used the magic arrow and it cannot be used again.”

“Pooh!” exclaimed Tweedleknives. “You’ve three more weapons. There’s no need to worry.”

Then he and Claus continued north.

One day they met a witch huddled by the side of the road.

“Good day,” said Claus, “Can you tell me please if this is the way to the place where the Pigwidgen dwells?”

“I’ll tell you nothing,” rasped the witch,

“Aren’t you cold sitting there?” demanded Tweedleknives.

“Fie on you!” snapped the witch and she covered her head with her cloak.

Angered, Tweedleknives said, “She can’t talk to me that way. I’m going to tell her a thing or two.”

He tapped the witch on her shoulder. The witch withdrew her head from the cloak and Tweedleknives said, “You were very rude just now. You should apologize.”

The witch’s eyes flashed green and purple lights. Her face was chinless and her nose was like a tea kettle spout turned upside down.

“It could be,” said Tweedleknives huffily, “that if you acted nicer you would look nicer.”

The witch rose in wrath. Reaching under her cloak, she drew out a handful of powder. “That’s for being a butinsky!” She blew the powder in Tweedleknives’ face.



In wrath, the witch blew powder in Tweedleknives’ face.

He felt his jaw dropping and his teeth jutting over his lips and his ears growing long and hairy. In a moment he was turned into a donkey and the witch had disappeared.

Claus had continued on his way. He was astonished when a donkey came up behind him and nudged his shoulder.

Claus looked around for Tweedleknives but there was no sign of the elf. “Tweedleknives!” he shouted. “Look what’s here!”

The donkey threw back his great long head and brayed mournfully.

“What can be the matter?” wondered Claus,

The donkey pawed the snow with his hoof. Claus looked down and saw he had stamped out two words: “It’s me.”

“Who?” cried Claus in confusion. And then he groaned, “Oh no,” as he finally understood.

Chapter 9

THE SNAKE HOUSE NEST



The snakes approached the terrified elf.

The donkey gazed at Claus from large brown eyes. He rolled his lips back from his big yellow teeth and swung his heavy head.

“So it’s you!” sighed Claus. “You made the witch angry and she has bewitched you. Now what are we to do?”

The donkey brayed piteously.

Claus remembered the magic ring the elves had given him. It could be used once to change a creature’s shape. Claus slipped the ring on the long tail of the donkey. He twisted the ring three times, saying “Change to your natural shape.”

The donkey vanished. Patrick Tweedleknees stood there rubbing his ears. “Am I glad to get rid of those donkey ears,” he cried.

“Perhaps I should have left you as you were,” said Claus. “It would have kept you out of trouble. Now we have used both the ring and the arrow and still have not met the Pigwidgen. You must be careful and control your temper.”

Tweedleknees promised to be very, very good and they continued on their way. Now it was truly cold. The snow was many feet deep. As they trudged on with their heads bent against the wind they saw a rabbit shivering in a snow drift.

“How cold he looks,” murmured Claus.

“I will warm him under my coat!” said Tweedleknees. He reached for the little creature. The rabbit took one look at the elf and scurried away.

“What gratitude!” exclaimed the elf.

“Never mind.” said Claus, “He doesn’t know what’s good for him.”

“I’ll show him,” growled Tweedleknees. He ran after the rabbit. The faster he ran the faster the rabbit ran. Claus ran after them both shouting, “Let him go! What does it matter?”

Suddenly, the earth gave way Tweedleknees plunged headlong into a deep pit while the rabbit went merrily on his way.

“I’ve fallen in some kind of a trap.” puffed Tweedleknees. “Here, help me out.”

Claus leaned down but he could not reach the elf. He dragged up a fallen log and dropped one end into the pit.

But Tweedleknees screeched, “It’s not a trap! It’s a snake nest!” Claus peered over the side and saw hundreds of snakes wiggling around the elf.

“Climb the log!” shouted Claus.

But Tweedleknees was too scared to move. He stood staring as if hypnotized, too scared too even to shake. The snakes were annoyed at being awoken from their long winter sleep. They twisted and curled into a tight circle around the elf.

Claus pounded on the snakes with the log but they slid out of the way. He shouted and threw rocks into the pit. But the only one hurt was poor Tweedleknees who was too frightened to duck.

The snakes’ sleepy eyes glittered. Their pointed tongues darted in and out. It was clear they were getting very, very angry.

Chapter 10
THE DAGGER

When Claus saw the snakes preparing to strike Tweedleknées he dug the magic mouth harp from his pocket. The elves had told him the sound of the harp would charm the fiercest foe. Would it work for a thousand snakes?

He took a deep breath and blew with all his might on the harp.

The sweetest music he had ever heard filled the air. The snakes grew silent. Slowly they uncoiled. Their tongues were still. Their eyes grew dreamy.

Claus shouted, "Tweedleknées, come!" Then he blew desperately on the harp while the elf, freed of his hypnosis, scrambled up the log to safety.

Claus and the elf ran until they had no breath left either to run or blow. They fell into a snow bank and lay there gasping.

Presently Claus sat up: He threw away the harp. It was the third weapon and its magic would not work again.

"Ah, well," Claus said. "We still have one last weapon." He drew from his belt the dagger whose point had been dipped in a deadly poison. "When I meet the Pigwidgen I shall use this. Even if the dagger fails to kill, the poison will."

Tweedleknées took the dagger and examined it. "The point seems dull," he said critically. He pressed the point gently against the palm of his hand. "Ah," he said with satisfaction. "It is sharp enough."

"Let us go," said Claus rising, "for surely we have wasted time enough."

But Tweedleknées did not stir. His face turned pale. Sweat poured down his forehead. His whole body shook with fever.

"I can't move," he grunted.

The awful truth came to Claus. He opened Tweedleknées' hand. There lay a single drop of blood where the dagger had pressed against the palm.

"You are poisoned!" cried Claus. He cradled the trembling elf in his arms. "What shall we do? What shall we do?"

"Leave me," murmured Tweedleknées.

"Never!"

"I have been nothing but trouble."

"It doesn't matter. You never meant harm."

"I am done for," growled the elf. "You must go on, There is no more time to lose."

Claus would not leave. "There must be some way to save you. You are an elf. Tell me what you know!"

"There is a way," sighed Tweedleknées

"What is it? Tell me!"

"If," whispered Tweedleknées, faintly, "a stone should throw away the harp. It was the weep for me."



"I am done for," said the elf. "You must go on."

Chapter 11

THE DOOR IN THE WALL

Claus held the dying Tweedleknees in his arms. The elf had said he would live if a stone should weep.

Claus glared around at the rocky boulders jutting out of the snow. "Weep!" shouted Claus wildly. "Weep for Tweedleknees!"

But the great stones stood frozen and dry in the wind.

Claus carried the elf into a nearby cave. It was cold there too, but the stone walls cut off the wind. Claus built a fire. He melted snow in a tin cup he carried on his belt. When the water boiled he washed the small puncture in the palm of the elf's hand.

Then Claus sat there staring gloomily at nothing. Presently, his eyes widen and his mouth fell open. "They're weeping!" he shouted. "The walls are weeping!"

Now it could have been that the warmth of the fire and the steam from the boiling water caused moisture to form on the frozen rocks. Whatever the cause, tiny streams of water ran gently down the walls. The stones were weeping!

Tweedleknees opened his eyes. He sat up. He was well.

Claus was so happy to see the elf return to life that he did not scold him for his carelessness with the dagger. But Tweedleknees was gloomy. "All our weapons are gone. How can we fight the Pigwidgen now?"

"We'll have to use our wits," said Claus.

"Alas," said Tweedleknees, "that is one thing I have in short supply."

"We shall see when the time comes," said Claus. "Now let us get where we are going"

So they traveled northward. Snow swirled against them. Wind whistled around their ears. Tears froze on their eyelashes. Icicles hung from their chins.

"If the Pigwidgen lives in a land of frost and never-ending snow this surely must be it," said Tweedleknees at last.

Claus cried, "Look! Look!"

Tweedleknees squinted through his frozen lashes. All he could see was snow, snow, snow.

"It's like a solid wall," he grumbled.

"It is a wall!" exclaimed Claus. "A solid wall 30 feet high."

"Then we're there!" whooped Tweedleknees.

"But how do we get in?" wondered Claus.

"Simple," retorted the elf. "We'll climb it."

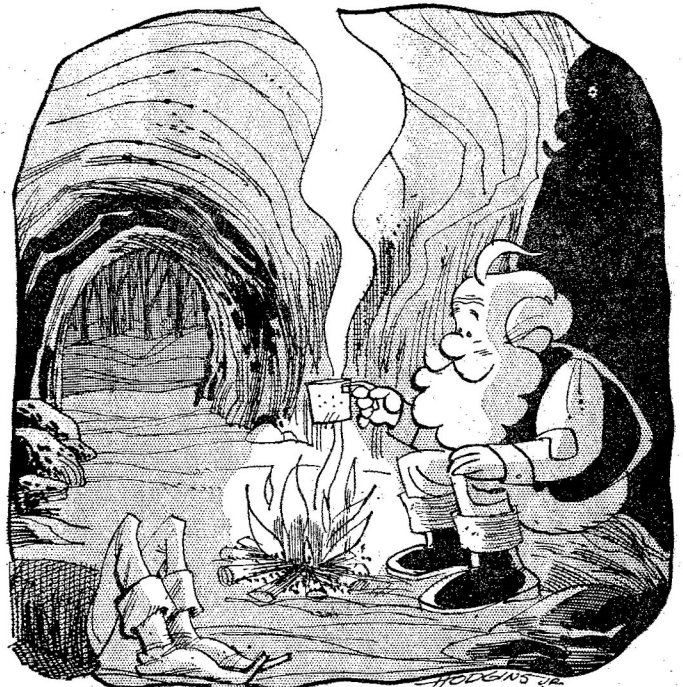
But the wall was straight and smooth. They could not get even a fingerhold. They heaped up mounds of snow but could not reach even half way.

They searched the length of the wall for a door but there was none.

"What a stupid place to live," sputtered the elf. "You can't get in or out!" He kicked irritably at the wall.

A small square of wall jiggled slightly at his kick. "It moved!" blurted the elf. "It's a door!"

Claus and Tweedleknees fell to their knees and scraped the snow from the wall. There was tiny door no higher than Tweedleknees' waist. In the center of the door was a tiny keyhole.



Claus built a fire to warm Tweedleknees.

Chapter 12

THE PYGMIES

Claus pushed on the tiny square door in the wall. The door wiggled but did not open.

"It's such a little door!" scoffed Tweedleknives. "We can knock it down!"

He beat on it and kicked on it and Claus pushed and they got a log and rammed on it but the door would not open.

Claus was discouraged. He put his hands in his pockets and hung his head.

Suddenly his hand closed around a small key in his pocket. He pulled it out. It was the brass key that had dropped from the black purse when the curse had fallen on the children. The single word "Pigwidgeon" was printed on the key.

Claus fitted the key into the little lock. Holding his breath, he turned the key. Slowly the door swung open.

The opening was so small Claus had to wiggle through on his stomach. Even the little elf had to crawl through on his hands and knees.

On the other side they huddled against the wall and gazed fearfully around. Here the wind did not blow so fiercely nor the cold bite so sharply. Snow-blanketed hills roiled down to a lake of ice. Near the lake stood a small castle.

Suddenly the drums and bugles sounded. Furious voices shouted, "Catch them! Don't let them get away!"

Tweedleknives dived into a snowdrift. Claus dived in beside him. When nothing happened, they timidly poked their heads out of the snow.

Bands of pygmies were fighting in front of the castle. They shouted and howled and cut off each others' heads laughing all the while.

At last it seemed not a pygmy was left alive. Claus and Tweedleknives stepped out of the snowdrift. Hardly were they out when all the fallen pygmies rose to their feet, put their heads back on their necks and began to fight all over again.

Claus and Tweedleknives jumped back in their snow hole. "It's a game!" blurted the old elf in amazement. "They're doing it all for fun!"

A band of reindeer appeared over the hill. The pygmies stopped fighting and chased the deer. Whenever they reached a reindeer a curious thing happened: the reindeer rose in the air and flew away!

They swooped gracefully over the castle top, round and round, high and low, like sea gulls at the beach.

The pygmies got ropes and lassoed the deer and brought them down from the sky. They drew their swords and shouted, "Hurray! There'll be deer meat for supper!"



From their snowdrift, an astonishing sight greeted them.

Before he knew what he was doing, Patrick Tweedleknives shot out of the snowdrift. He leaped in front of the rollicking pygmies and cried angrily, "Don't you dare!"

The astonished pygmies dropped the ropes and the reindeer raced away.

Chapter 13

THE CHALLENGE

The pygmies stared at Patrick Tweedleknees.

“Who are you? What are you doing here?” they demanded.

“You said you were going to have reindeer meat for supper,” growled Tweedleknees, though he was shaking inside.

“And why not!”

“You ought to be ashamed!” exploded the elf.

The pygmies burst into laughter, “Very well! We’ll have elf meat instead!”

They pounced on Tweedleknees. He twisted and bit and clawed and wormed out of their hands. He snatched up a sword and slashed off the head of the nearest pygmy.

The pygmy picked up his head and put it back on his neck. “You are a wild one,” he said admiringly. “We’ll take you to our king.”

“And who is your king?” asked someone. It was Claus. Unseen he had come into their midst.

“The Pigwidgen,” said the pygmy. “The most powerful creature on earth.”

Claus’ knees shook. He wondered how he could conquer creatures who could not even lose their heads.

He tried to speak but before he could find his voice, Patrick Tweedleknees said grandly, “Claus is more powerful than your old king!”

“Oh ho!” shouted the pygmies. “We shall see!”

They seized Claus and Tweedleknees and carried them off to the castle. “We will eat while we wait for the king,” they announced.

Tweedleknees wondered if they meant to have him for dinner but the pygmies bent over a tiny pot of stew. They filled their bowls and ate greedily. Claus could not understand how such a small pot could feed so many.

He leaned over the pot. It was as full as it had been at the start. The pygmies had seconds and thirds and fourths and all the time the pot stayed full.

“Does the pot never empty?” asked Claus.

“Never,” boasted a pygmy. “If you are so powerful surely you have such a pot, too.”

Claus shook his head and Tweedleknees exclaimed, “He could have but he does not care for stew.”

“What then does the great Claus like?” asked the pygmies with interest.

Claus turned on Tweedleknees. “Say no more!” he begged, for he knew not what awful boast the elf might make.

But Tweedleknees would not be quiet. “He likes roast pig!” he blurted. “And he can eat more than you or your old Pigwidgen any day!”

At that moment the castle door slammed and the Pigwidgen himself entered the hall.



No matter how much was eaten, the pot stayed full.

Chapter 14

THE EATING CONTEST

The Pigwidgeon was a mite, a dwarf, a peewee, a runt of a pygmy.

He marched up to Claus. "What are you doing here?" he demanded in a high squeaky voice.

"You have put a curse on all the children of the land," Claus said sharply. "I have come to ask you to lift it."

"You promised not to open the black purse that was left in your keeping," said the Pigwidgeon. "I myself left the purse there to test you. The promise was broken and now the children sleep." "It was no fault of the children," cried Claus. "You must wake them."

"Yes," blurted Patrick Tweedleknives. "And lift the curse you laid on the elves so that they live underground forevermore."

"And who is going to make me do these things?" inquired the Pigwidgeon icily.

There was a moment's silence. Then Tweedleknives said calmly, "Claus is."

The Pigwidgeon sputtered. He fell to the floor. He rolled over and over squealing and holding his sides. The other pygmies howled too.

At last the Pigwidgeon got to his feet. Wiping the tears from his eyes, he said, "You think yourself more powerful than I?"

"More clever," answered Claus. "It comes to the same thing."

The Pigwidgeon threw back his head and blew a cloud of smoke from his mouth. He vanished in the cloud. An instant later he appeared again. "Can you do that?" he demanded.

"I—I do not wish to disappear," stammered Claus. "I am here to make you lift the curse."

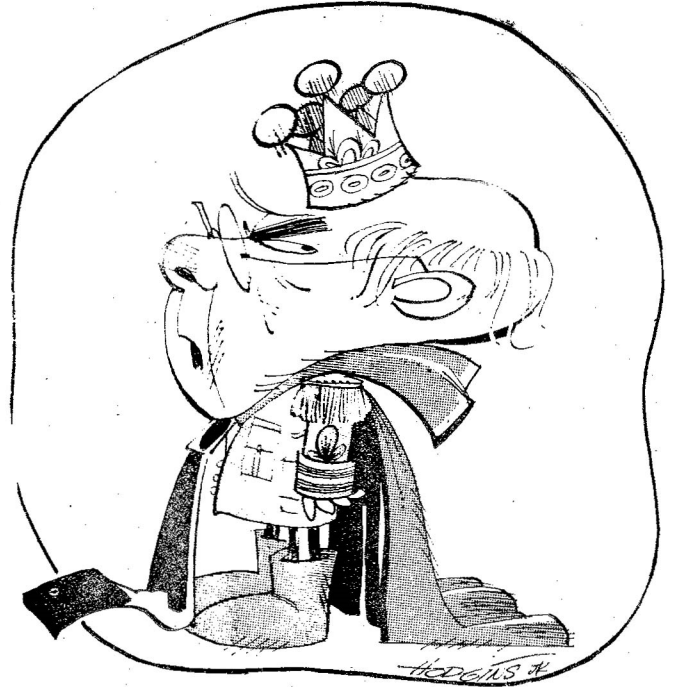
"Well," said the Pigwidgeon indulgently. "Let us have a contest. If you win perhaps I shall lift the curse. The elf said you like roast pig. Very well. Let us see who can eat the most."

He took Claus into the kitchen and shut the door. There was a table before a roaring fire. On the table were 10 succulent roast pigs.

The Pigwidgeon sat down and sank his teeth into a roast. In five minutes all that was left was bones and a tail. He ate a second roast and a third and a fourth and a fifth.

The pigs the Pigwidgeon ate had been secretly stripped of most of their meat and covered back over with skin. Nevertheless the meat that remained so stuffed the tiny Pigwidgeon that he now collapsed in a stupor.

Claus sat before the five remaining pigs. He nibbled on the choice bits of each roast and licked his fingers and stared dreamily at the fire. At last he knew what he must do.



"Do you think yourself more powerful than I?"

While the Pigwidgeon woke he raised his bloated head and demanded, "Well, what have you eaten?" "All," said Claus.

"But the bones? The tails? Where are they?"

"All eaten," replied Claus calmly.

And so they were for, while the Pigwidgeon slept, Claus had thrown the unfinished pigs into the fire which had eaten them, up skin, bones, tails and all.

Chapter 15

THE DRINKING CONTEST

The Pigwidgen could scarcely believe it. While he had eaten five roast pigs, leaving only the bones. Claus had managed his five roast bones and all.

“I have won the contest,” said Claus. “You must now lift the curse.”

“No, no,” cried the Pigwidgen. “There must be a drinking contest. If you can drink more than I, perhaps I will lift the curse.”

He rushed out to the great hall and ordered the pygmies to bring two urns of chocolate milk. The urns were so heavy it took 15 pygmies to carry each one. They set them on a cloth-covered table and went off get the milk.



The hot water bottles burst, spilling chocolate everywhere.

While they were gone Claus said “Before we begin I would like to step outside for a breath of air.”

“By all means,” agreed the Pigwidgen. “Take your time.”

Claus went out with Tweedleknives. He told the elf that it was the fire and not he that ate up all the roast pigs. “But how can I drink so large an urn of milk!” he groaned.

“Drink what you can and do not worry,” said the elf. “I shall use my wits as you advised and am sure I will think of something.”

The elf scurried back to the castle and left Claus walking gloomily by the lake. Meanwhile, the Pigwidgen had been busy secretly inserting seven hot water bottles beneath his shirt.

Claus sat at one end of the cloth-covered table and the Pigwidgen sat at the other end. Patrick Tweedleknives was nowhere to be seen.

The two great urns were filled with foaming chocolate.

They were too heavy and brimming to lift from the table. The only way to drink was through large rubber straws.

“Begin!” ordered the Pigwidgen.

Once more Claus looked around for Tweedleknives. The elf was gone. There was nothing to do but drink. He bent over his urn and sucked desperately on his straw. He drank and drank and drank. Slowly the milk went down until half the urn was empty.

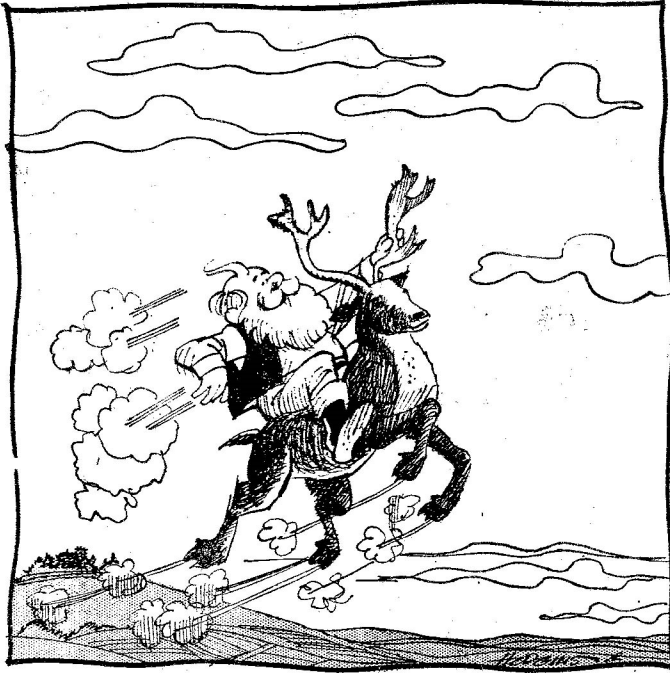
Try as he would Claus could not swallow another drop. He sank back in his chair and gasped, “I am done!”

The Pigwidgen bent over his own urn and made mighty sucking noises. Actually the end of his straw led to the seven hot water bottles under his shirt and not to his mouth at all.

The milk flowed from the urn until all the hot water bottles were full but when the Pigwidgen looked up the urn was still full. The Pigwidgen blinked in surprise. He began to drink the milk himself. He sucked and he huffed and he puffed and he swallowed and he gasped and still the urn was full.

The Pigwidgen’s face turned blue and his stomach swelled. Suddenly there was an awful explosion. The seven hot water bottles burst and splattered chocolate milk all over the table.

Claus leaped to his feet crying, “I have won!”



Claus, on the reindeer's back, soared into the sky.

Chapter 16

THE RACE

After the drinking contest the Pigwidgen stomped away. All the pygmies withdrew to ponder the awful fact that their king had lost.

Claus waited in the great hail. Patrick Tweedleknees crawled out from under the table. "Where have you been?" cried Claus. Tweedleknees lifted the tablecloth. Claus leaned over and saw a half empty vat of chocolate milk. A hose led from the vat to the urn from which the Pigwidgen had drunk.

"So that was why the urn was always full!" exclaimed Claus admiringly.

"Precisely," replied the elf. "And now our wits together have twice defeated the Pigwidgen and he must lift the curse."

But when the Pigwidgen returned, he announced there would be still another contest. This time he would race Claus to the end of the rainbow and the winner would name his own reward.

Before Claus could protest, the Pigwidgen raced off. He had put on magic boots which could take 100-mile steps. When Claus had barely started, the Pigwidgen was halfway there.

"It is useless!" moaned Claus, gasping for breath.

At that moment one of the flying reindeer appeared in the woods. Quietly Claus approached him and gently rubbed his nose. He climbed on the reindeer's back and whispered softly, "Fly! Oh, please fly me to the end of the rainbow!"

The reindeer soared into the sky and in an instant came to the spot where the rainbow ended. Hours later, when the

Pigwidgen came panting up, there was Claus sitting on a rock, calmly smoking his pipe.

"What kept you?" asked Claus pleasantly.

The Pigwidgen now declared there would be one last contest.

"And how do I know it will be the last?" demanded Claus.

"Always you break your word and put me off."

The Pigwidgen led Claus outdoors to a small round box in the middle of the lake of ice in front of the castle.

"This box holds all my sorcery," said the Pigwidgen. "All my spells, charms, hoodoo, hexes, curses, incantations, enchantments and witchcraft.

"If you can lift the box, it will be yours and all my magic power will pass to you. If you can't lift it you will turn to stone. Agreed?"

Claus nodded solemnly. The box was very small. Even if it were filled with lead he was sure he could lift it an inch from the ice.

Then Patrick Tweedleknees rushed up to Claus and cried, "It's a trick! The box is really the tip of the North Pole. No one on earth could lift it!"

"What shall I do?" groaned Claus.

The elf screwed up his face and pulled at his hair and twisted his ears.

At last he growled, "Go back to the castle and delay things as long as you can." With that he dashed away.

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL

Claus rushed back to the castle to delay the contest. The Pigwidgen was impatient. He knew only he could lift the box of magic because it was screwed to the top of the North Pole.

“But give me a change of clothes!” begged Claus. “What I am wearing is not suitable for so serious a contest.”

“Oh, very well,” said the Pigwidgen crossly, and he ordered clothes brought to Claus.

Nothing large enough to fit could be found. Finally the pygmies discovered a bolt of red cloth. Quickly they cut out and stitched together a red suit. It was a fine and handsome outfit but, unfortunately, too large. Claus stuffed several pillows under his coat to make it fit. Then, looking like a rolypoly red rubber ball, he followed the Pigwidgen to the lake.

The tiny box sat on top of the ice. Claus bent over. He wrapped his hands around the box: He gave a mighty heave. The box did not move. Claus pried. He pushed. He pulled. The box still did not move.

The Pigwidgen cried, “You have lost! Now you will turn to stone!”

Claus shook his head and heaved once more. Suddenly, the ice split; there was a snap below the water and Claus raised the box high over his head.

The Pigwidgen turned pale. “You have lifted the North Pole itself!” he gasped incredulously.

Claus smiled. He knew the credit was due Patrick Tweedleknees. The elf had broken under the ice near shore and had swum underwater to the pole. All the time Claus was heaving. Tweedleknees was under the ice sawing on the pole.

The Pigwidgen said mournfully, “All my power is now yours.”

“And what of the curse that has put all the children in the land to sleep?” asked Claus. “And the curse that keeps all elves underground?”

“You may break them,” said the Pigwidgen, “The power is yours. My people are yours. This land is yours. But there is one thing you must know. No human being who has come to this land can leave. Though you will live forever you can never go home again.”

“Never?”

“Once each year and then only if you have a message to give.”

Claus was very and. What was the good of living forever and having so much magic power if he could not do what he had loved the most: to sit in his little workshop at home and make toys for the children of the village.

Tweedleknees appeared. He tugged a Claus’ big red trousers. “It is a good land,” he said gruffly. “The elves can move here



“Merry Christmas to all!”

from their underground caves. The pygmies can stay here. We can all make toys and once a year you can take them not only to your own village but to children everywhere. All the world will love you and call you Saint Nicholas or Santa Claus.”

Claus brightened. “I can fill a sled with toys and the reindeer can fly me,” he said happily “I will send for Mrs. Claus and she can make sugar plums to stuff in stockings.”

“And always wear red because that red suit has brought us luck,” said Tweedleknees.

“But,” said the Pigwidgen, “what of the message you must give in order to visit the world?”

“That’s easy,” said Claus. “I shall deliver our toys on Christmas Eve and my message will be Merry Christmas!”

And that is the tale of how the Santa Claus we know today came to be. It may or may not be true. It really doesn’t matter. The message is the same:

“Merry Christmas to all!”

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