



the
SECOND YARN

the elf
who SAVED
CHRISTMAS

At the end of a long Christmas day many years ago, as the North Pole glistened under a full moon, a tired and frustrated Santa Claus finally returned home from his gift-giving journey. As the elves helped him remove the harnesses from his weary reindeer, Santa said, "Little friends, we must do something! Each year my journey takes longer." He lovingly stroked his reindeer and softly said, "So many children were disappointed because we arrived so late at their homes. You did your best, I know. And you too, my great sleigh!"

And what a grand sleigh it was! It had been given to Santa Claus by its original owner, Czar Nicholas I of Russia. The imperial sleigh was painted in rich reds and yellows, with hand-carved decorations covered with real gold. On the sides of the sleigh were brightly colored images of Saint Nicholas, the Madonna and Child and several other saints. They all had real gold halos, and precious jewels sparkled from the designs on their clothing. So wondrous was this magnificent sleigh that those lucky enough to see it were held spellbound by its splendorous beauty.

Long, long ago, when Santa Claus first began to make his Christmas Eve visits, his splendid sleigh raced like lightning across the snow-covered hills and fields. Of course, in those olden days there were fewer people on earth, and so the sleigh was less weighted down with presents. As the world's population grew, however, the sleigh became heavier. As more and more parts of the earth were settled, it became impossible to visit every home on a single night. Each year Santa returned home

to the North Pole later and later. Each year more and more children had to wait for the arrival of their beloved but tardy Santa Claus.

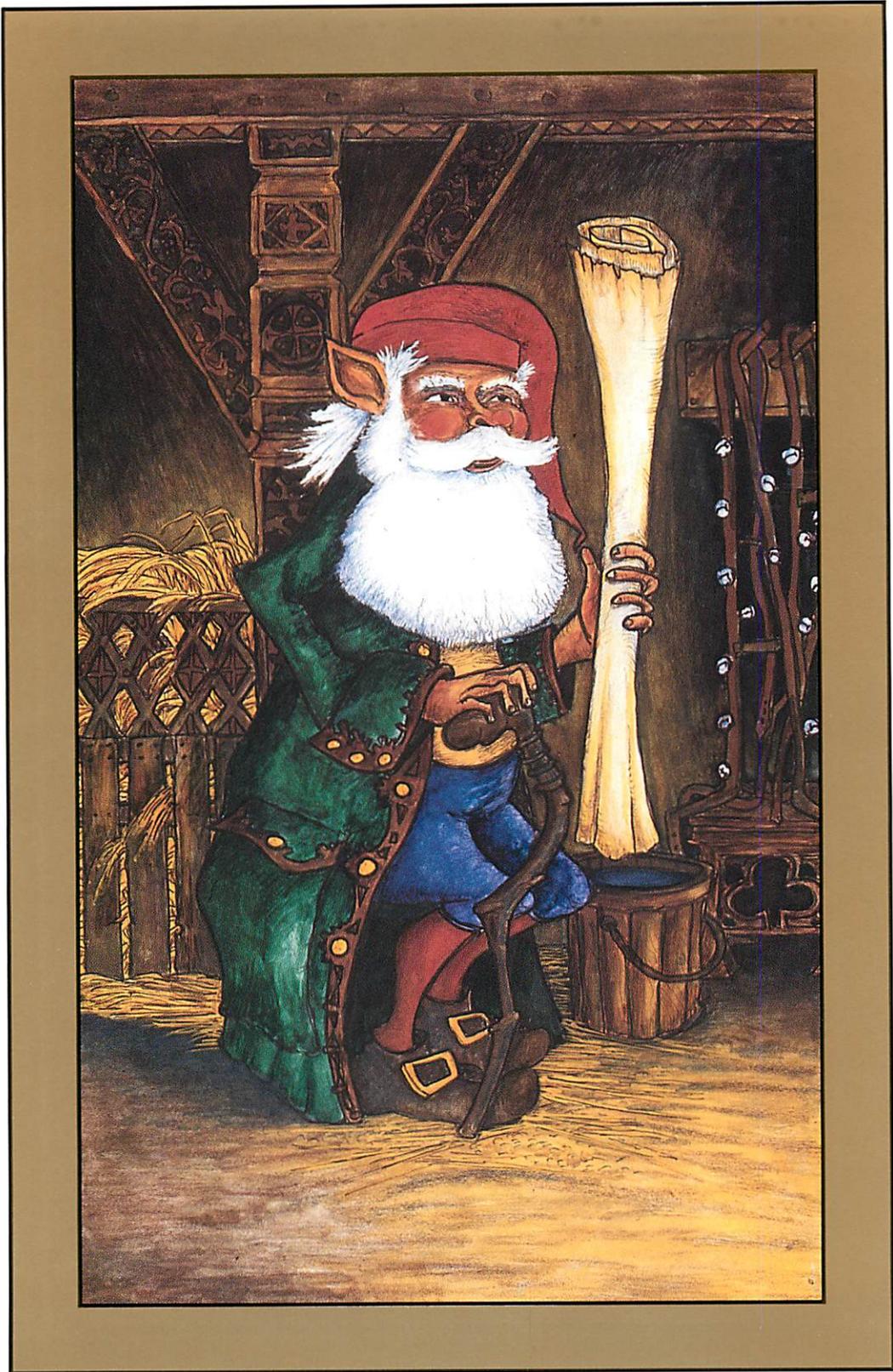
After Santa had rested from his long Christmas Eve ride across the earth, he called a community meeting of all those who worked at the North Pole. They met in the great barn next to his house. The oak beams which crisscrossed the ceiling like intertwined tree branches were covered with carvings of birds, beasts and flowers. Santa stood in his magnificent sleigh, with Mrs. Claus seated beside him, and addressed the crowd of elves: "My friends, we must find a new way to visit all the homes on earth in one night."

"You could get an airplane; that would be faster," said one of the elves. But at this suggestion the reindeer snorted and pawed the ground in disapproval, and a groan rose up from the crowd of elves. Mrs. Claus spoke up, "True, an airplane would be faster, but it wouldn't have the same magical touch as our magnificent sleigh and beautiful reindeer."



SANTA nodded: "Yes, I agree. But I may have to travel by plane to reach every home on Christmas Eve. I hate to think of it, yet we may have to face reality and retire the reindeer and my sleigh. But are there any other ideas?" The meeting lasted till almost lunch time as many members of the North Pole community expressed their concerns and fears. Santa ended it, saying, "We have almost a year to find a good solution. I'm sure we can solve this problem together."

As Santa, Mrs. Claus and the crowd of elves left the barn, one old elf with a long white beard remained

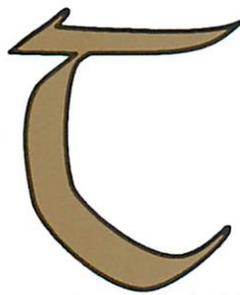


behind, leaning on his carved wooden staff. Because he had anticipated the reason for the community meeting, the elf brought along some plans to address Santa's dilemma. Although he had listened to all the ideas proposed, he could not muster up enough confidence to say anything at the meeting. The old elf's green coat which reached almost to the floor had large, deep pockets that once had been filled with presents. Long ago, just like Santa, he had been as well known as St. Nick in Germany. His name was the Birthday Elf, and he visited children on their birthdays, bearing beautiful gifts. But with the passage of time he was forgotten; now retired, he lived in the Old Elf Home behind Santa's house.

The aged elf spoke to the great sleigh, "I hope that what has been my fate doesn't also become yours."

The regal sleigh only laughed. Glowing with pride, the sleigh said, "That's impossible; part of the joy of Christmas is for people to see me. Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without Santa arriving in me!"

The old elf replied, "I wouldn't be so sure. I never thought I'd only be a faint memory of what I once was. But look at me: it can happen to you too!"



Touched, the magnificent sleigh answered, "Birthday Elf, once upon a time, like Santa, you also gave gifts that brought children delight. Only you gave them presents on their birthdays instead of Christmas. You may be retired now, but I'm sure you haven't lost your magical power. I know you can conjure up some way for me to travel faster and further than I do now, so that

I can continue to be the one who carries Santa Claus. Please show me the plans that you brought with you."

The Birthday Elf's heart pounded with excitement at the thought of once again being the agent of answered dreams. "All right," he said, "let me see if the old magic is still alive in me." Unrolling the scroll of paper he was carrying, he revealed a detailed drawing of Santa's sleigh, complete with wheels mounted on its runners. As the reindeer looked on, he explained that the sleigh could travel much faster on wheels, that they would be ideal for those places without snow.

The reindeer and great sleigh all shouted with glee, "Wonderful, Birthday Elf! That's the solution to our problem. Take your idea to Santa and see what he thinks."



So the old elf went to see Santa Claus and showed him the sketch. Santa carefully studied the design and said, "Good idea, Birthday Elf! It would help me cover more miles in less time. But I don't think we can save enough time to make all my many stops in one day. Thank you, but I believe we need a more radical solution."

Discouraged, the old elf returned to the barn and told the sleigh and the reindeer what Santa had said. They too were disappointed, but the Birthday Elf promised to try again.

Weeks passed and months slipped by, until it was mid-June. Everyone at the North Pole knew that it was only six months until the time for Santa to begin his Christmas Eve journey. For now their worry was covered over by the feasting and gladness of midsummer's eve. All the elves celebrated with great bonfires and dancing. The Birthday Elf, however, was not with them. He was in

the barn with the sleigh. Unrolling another large scroll of paper, he said, "On this most magical of nights, I come to you with my best idea yet. It's the grandest gift I can give you." The reindeer peered with puzzled eyes at a strange drawing of the sleigh, which looked like it had come from the pen of Leonardo da Vinci. In the center of the sleigh was a network of gears and pulleys that operated a shaft which engaged a revolving system of propellers. "My idea," said the aged elf, "is to convert you into a magnificent flying sleigh!"

"Marvelous," shouted the sleigh and reindeer, "that's surely the solution. With this design we should easily cover the whole world in a single night. Take it to Santa right away."

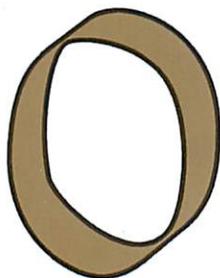
And so the Birthday Elf went to the midsummer's eve celebration and called Santa Claus aside to show him the plans. While Santa liked the idea, he was concerned that all the machinery necessary to engage the propellers wouldn't leave much room for all his gifts. But he nodded approval and told his elf engineers to begin work on it the very next morning.

By mid-September the flying sleigh was ready to be tested. The reindeer were harnessed up and Santa climbed aboard. All the elves gathered along the runway to watch the test flight. Mrs. Claus waved a red flag to give the signal, and when Santa threw the switch the propellers began to whirl, as the reindeer raced down the runway. To a chorus of cheering elves, the sleigh rose from the ground and began to gain altitude. Santa smiled and the sleigh swelled with pride as they started to soar upward. But then suddenly they began to lose altitude. A great groan descended on the crowd of elves, as Santa, the sleigh and the reindeer fell quickly back to earth after flying only a short distance.

Mrs. Claus and all the elves came running to the sleigh where a disappointed Santa sat shaking his head. "I had hoped it would work, but we were too heavy to fly.

Sorry, Birthday Elf, it was a good try, but not quite a radical enough solution! Still, we need to find an answer soon. There are only three months till Christmas!"

As the crowd slowly slipped away, the Birthday Elf was left standing next to the magnificent sleigh. He kept repeating, "I don't understand." Then, turning to the sleigh, he added, "According to my calculations the combined weight of sleigh, Santa, the gifts and the reindeer shouldn't have kept my invention from working. I need time to think." With that, the elf withdrew to the solitude of his room.



D Thanksgiving night, the Birthday Elf entered the darkened barn, carrying a small lantern. The light from his lantern cast long yellow rays upward onto the arched oaken beams. The wondrous – but now worried – sleigh asked eagerly, "Have you brought me the gift I desire most?"

After a long pause the old elf answered, "Well, yes and no." The reindeer awoke and eagerly raised their ears.

"Yes and no?" repeated the sleigh. "What does that mean? And I see that you've come empty-handed this time. Have you no gift for me?"

"Whether what I have brought is a gift or not all depends upon you," answered the old elf. "I have spent many sleepless nights thinking about what went wrong with my last idea. I have also pondered on Santa's words – remember when he said that what was needed was a radical solution? I believe this time I have an answer, a radical one." With that he removed from his pocket a single page which had been torn from a book.

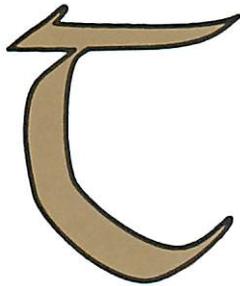
The page shined brightly even in the faint light of his small lantern as he handed it to the sleigh.

"Where is this page from?" asked the sleigh.

"I tore it out of Santa's Bible," answered the old elf. "It's a gift that holds the secret to your fondest dreams." And the elf held his lantern high so that the sleigh could read the words from the 8th chapter of St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians:

You are well acquainted with the favor
shown you by our Lord Jesus Christ;
how for your sake he made himself poor
though he was rich, so that you might
become rich by his poverty.

"I don't understand," said the sleigh, "what does this have to do with me or our problem?"



The old, white-bearded elf responded, "The answer is hidden in that single sentence. But you'll have to find it yourself or it won't be the answer. Great problems are resolved only by radical answers, and, my friend, no one likes to think radical ideas. Good night, and good luck!" The Birthday Elf slowly walked out into the night. The north wind, already heavy with snow, rattled through the rafters of the great barn as the magnificent sleigh pored over the puzzling sentence, repeating it again and again.

On December 6th, the feast of St. Nicholas, the sun transformed the snow and ice into a crystal world which sparkled with blinding beauty. Led by the Birthday Elf, all the elves processed to Santa's front door singing "Happy Birthday." Santa and Mrs. Claus came to the door to

greet them. Beaming with joy, the Birthday Elf said, "Santa, I bring you the best of all birthday gifts. Come with us to the great barn."

When they arrived at the doors of the barn, the Birthday Elf turned and said to the crowd, "A surprise awaits you. Be prepared." As he swung open the great doors, the sunlight flooded the barn in a yellow river of light. In the center of the wave of light was Santa's sleigh. Next to it was a paint can and a large brush. The great sleigh had been painted entirely in a drab green! It looked no different from a common farmer's sleigh. A gasp of horror rose from Santa and the elves who crowded around him.

"What's happened to my magnificent sleigh?" moaned Santa.

"I did it myself, Santa," answered the sleigh. "Now I'm ready to carry you and your gifts anywhere in the world, and we can do it all in a single night. I can fly now, without the need for any complicated machinery. I've painted myself plain green because I've discovered that what made us too heavy was my pride in being the most splendid sleigh in all the world. I had to become poor in order to be the bearer of you and your gifts."

On that birthday feast of St. Nicholas there was another test flight. Only this time Santa, his sleigh and reindeer easily took off and sailed into the sky. Again and again they circled the North Pole, as the elves and Mrs. Claus danced and cheered gleefully below. The heart of the now drab-green sleigh had never known such joy. Santa, with his great beard blowing behind him like a white silk scarf, merrily waved to his friends on the ground. His face beaming with joy, Santa repeated aloud the words of the Birthday Elf, "'Great problems are solved only by radical answers.' Ah, the whole mystery of Christmas is repeated again!"