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Santa Claus Behind the Times

A FANTASTIC COMEDY IN
TWO ACTS

BY

Z. HARTMAN

Author of "Santa Claus' Busy Day"

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Santa Claus Behind the Times

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

- SANTA CLAUS
- MRS. SANTA CLAUS.....*His wife*
- GABRIELLA.....*His elder daughter*
(very much of a young lady and very conscious of it)
- GRETA.....*His younger daughter*
(a giddy young hoyden, always being squelched by her mother)
- GRINGOREX.....*His groom and master of the reindeer*
(a stout elderly elf, very active for his years)
- MR. CONDOR..*Salesman for the Magic Airplane Mfg. Co.*
(small, dapper and unquenchably enthusiastic)
- MR. DOLPHIN.....*Salesman for the Enchanted*
Submarine Co.
- MISS TITTLE...*Reporter for the North Pole Daily Breeze*
- Eight Reindeer* SPRITES.....*Guardians of the Reindeer*
(impersonated by boys or girls)

TIME OF PLAYING.—Forty minutes.

SCENE

One simple interior scene for both acts.

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no 1

SYNOPSIS

Mrs. Santa rebukes the eight reindeer sprites, who are in the wildest spirits, and sends them out to tend the reindeer. Santa is beset by two salesmen, one trying to sell him a magic airplane and the other an enchanted submarine in which to make the Christmas trip. Mrs. Santa and her daughters are strong for the new-fangled means of locomotion, but Santa declares he prefers his faithful reindeer and doesn't mind being an old fogey. However, he promises that if the reindeer should fail him he would consider the airplane or submarine. Shortly after the reindeer run away. He is reminded of his promise; so after rebuking the reindeer sprites for their neglect, he arranges to make the trip in the airplane. In the midst of the trip the airplane breaks down and he is stranded on top of the Rocky Mountains. Meanwhile the Sprites have been searching for the runaways; they find them and go to Santa's rescue. So he finishes the trip in his sleigh and is more prejudiced than ever against the new-fangled means of locomotion, especially as the salesmen were largely responsible for the runaway.

COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS

SANTA CLAUS wears the conventional cherry-colored, fur-trimmed Santa Claus suit with high boots. Fur coat, cap and huge fur gauntlets for his trip.

MRS. SANTA CLAUS wears Russian jacket suit following the same lines and color as **SANTA CLAUS**.

GABRIELLA and **GRETA** may wear full, short skirts piled up, tier on tier, like the petals of a double aster, with plain smooth bodices above. Effective colors are purple for **GABRIELLA** and primrose-yellow for **GRETA**. Each should wear a pair of small tarlatan wings of the color of her costume, fastened to her shoulders behind; but neither should have the antennæ.

GRINGOREX, a stout elderly elf, very active for his years; will be effective in an old-fashioned English artisan's suit of brown or gray with short jacket and vest, knee breeches and a pointed elf cap. Fur coat for his trip with SANTA.

MISS TITTLE, a very businesslike appearing elf lady, dressed all in fur with a peaked fur stocking cap and smart eye-glasses. Carries a note-book and pencil.

REINDEER SPRITES, guardians of the reindeer, each being a kind of moral disciplinarian of one particular reindeer. The SPRITES must be small, slender and alert, and above all, must be very skillful dancers. Best results will be obtained by having the rôles impersonated by young girls, unless adolescent boys who can move about with elf-like grace are available. The SPRITES should wear blue and silver elf suits and silver elf shoes with long pointed toes; silver gauze wings on their shoulders and two long, graceful antennæ on each of their heads, pointing slightly forward.

All the other characters should have a touch of the elf about their costumes, finished off with the pointed elf-shoes and the narrow brimmed hats with pointed crowns.

INCIDENTAL PROPERTIES

Note-book for MR. CONDOR.

Note-book and pencil for MISS TITTLE.

Yellow envelope for GABRIELLA.

Tinfoil-wrapped package containing a wad of chewing gum the size of a crab-apple and a cigarette for SANTA.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

As seen by a performer on the stage facing the audience, R. means right hand; L., left hand; C., center of stage; C. D., door in center of rear wall; D. R., door at right; D. L., door at left of stage. UP means toward back of stage; DOWN, toward footlights.

Santa Claus Behind the Times

ACT I

SCENE.—*Reception-room in SANTA CLAUS' home. Time, afternoon of December 24, just as SANTA is preparing for his Christmas Eve trip. The most conspicuous furnishings are a few quaint, Colonial chairs, and a huge, old-fashioned fireplace and mantelpiece in upper R. corner. 'Phone on 'phone-table wherever convenient. Door in rear C. leading into hall and outdoors; door at L. leading into SANTA'S office; door at R. opening into a living-room. All doors are closed. Window at L. of C. D. DISCOVERED eight reindeer SPRITES dancing to the music of Schubert's "Musical Moments" played very softly, very lightly and very swiftly behind the scenes. They caper about noiselessly, each following out his own caprice in the dance; one glides about smoothly, doing an intricate dance step; another whirls wildly round and round to the music; two others execute a few steps together, now and then whirling each other around by the waist. LOB, the leader, does a lively jig, leaping high from time to time, snapping his fingers and kicking to R. and L. They never make a clumsy movement, all their dancing is graceful. From time to time, as they dance, they chant in singsong one after another, "We're going to-night! We're going to-night! We're going with Santa Claus to-night!"*

ENTER MRS. SANTA CLAUS, D. R., *closely followed by GABRIELLA and GRETA. She discovers the joyously dancing SPRITES, folds her hands across her ample waist-line, and gazes severely at them. Under her grim look the dancing abruptly ceases.*

MRS. SANTA. Reindeer sprites, what does this mean? Why are you prancing about in this disgraceful fashion?

LOB, THE LEADER (*abashed*). Wh-why, Grandmother Santa, w-we were only celebrating a little because we're going with Grandpa Santa to-night!

MRS. SANTA (*still more sternly*). Celebrating! One would think you had never made the Christmas Eve trip before! Do you know what you should be doing? Every sprite should be out in front looking after his own reindeer, while Gringorex loads the sleigh. The reindeer have been tugging at their bits all afternoon. I've never seen them so restless before. Doesn't Santa depend on you to keep them quiet? (*The SPRITES hang their heads*)

LOB (*very meekly*). Yes, ma'am. We'll go out and see to 'em right away. (*The SPRITES sneak out, looking behind them apprehensively, yet giving irrepressible little skips as they EXIT C. D.*)

GRETA (*peering out of window*). My goodness, what a lot of romping around those reindeer are doing! I tell you what, mother, some day those silly beasts are going to break loose and tear things to pieces!

GABRIELLA. Well, what else can you expect but a runaway? Father insists on keeping the stupid creatures. It would serve him right for refusing to get an automobile!

MRS. SANTA (*sitting in a chair and folding her hands in her lap with resignation*). I have talked to your father until I am hoarse, trying to convince him that he owes it to himself and to us to make the Christmas Eve trip in a really decent, up-to-date turnout. I might as well have saved my breath, for he insists that he will never give up the reindeer. Such a mulish man!

GABRIELLA (*with ladylike disgust*). It's a disgrace! All my friends are so surprised that a great and important person like father should travel about in that shabby, old-fashioned sleigh and drive those absurd reindeer! It makes me so ashamed every time they speak about it!

GRETA (*tossing her head*). And those impish reindeer sprites, with their crazy pranks—to think that we have to stand for them! They are the worst fairies in Kris Kringle country.

GABRIELLA. They're another humiliation! Father should get rid of them.

GRETA. Is that airplane agent still in the office with dad, mother?

MRS. SANTA. Yes; I saw him arguing away as I passed the window.

GRETA (*giggling irrepressibly and executing a pirouette*). It won't do him the least bit of good! It'll only make dad perfectly furious to be caught this way right in the middle of getting ready for the Christmas Eve trip, and he won't buy a thing. Just the same, mother, I'm glad you set that agent on him!

MRS. SANTA (*drawing herself up majestically*). I set the agent on him! Greta, what an expression! I merely told Mr. Condor that it would do no harm for him to call and explain his airplanes to your father. I don't know why the leading salesman of the Magic Airplane Manufacturing Company shouldn't be at home in this house. He's perfectly respectable and his manners are most agreeable!

GRETA (*opening D. L. a trifle and peeping into the office*). My goodness me! There are two of 'em in there. Poor old dad! Where did the other one come from, mother?

MRS. SANTA (*peeping over GRETA'S shoulder*). Oh, that's Mr. Dolphin, head salesman for the Enchanted Submarine Company, Inc. He must have caught your father when Mr. Condor was out in front demonstrating

the airplane. He's very much in hopes he can sell your father an enchanted submarine.

GABRIELLA (*critically*). I should prefer the airplane for father. It is smarter and more professional—more up-to-date. There's not so much style to a submarine.

GRETA (*with her eye to the aperture of the door*). Well, it won't cost you anything to keep on preferring, Gaby dear. But that's all you'll get out of it, for neither one of those salesmen is going to sell dad a single thing! Whee! he looks as if he could eat 'em alive! And he's trying his best to get away from them.

GABRIELLA (*peering over GRETA'S head through the opening*). Look out! He's coming this way! (*Retires hastily down R. GRETA skips away from door just in time*)

ENTER SANTA CLAUS D. L., *looking as black as a thunder cloud, followed by MR. CONDOR, and MR. DOLPHIN.*

SANTA (*irritated and harassed*). No, no, no! I will not even consider it to-day, nor any other time! The idea of your tackling me just when I'm rushed to death with preparations for my Christmas Eve trip! By thunder, you'll make me late, you fellows!

CONDOR (*enthusiastically renewing the attack, unabashed*). But my dear Mr. Claus, don't you see that if you will use one of our excellent airships, you will not be late? You will never again be late on any Christmas trip. You couldn't be late if you tried! Our ball-bearing, copper-riveted, 500,000 horse-power super-airship is positively guaranteed to go three times as fast as the North Wind —

SANTA (*exasperated*). Oh, for the love of Mike, don't begin that all over again!

DOLPHIN (*edging CONDOR out of the way and taking possession of SANTA*). You haven't heard *my* proposition at all, Mr. Claus. There isn't an airplane made that can beat the boats of the Enchanted Submarine Company, Inc. Yes, sir, we stand behind our product!

If you have to cross oceans, the best way is to make the journey under the water ——

SANTA (*clutching his head with both hands in despair*). This one is as bad as the other!

DOLPHIN (*warming to his task*). Why, my dear sir, ours is decidedly the scenic route! Think of all the wonderful under-sea forests along the way; and the coral reefs; and the mermaids, luring you with their vamp songs; and the octopuses and the whales and—— and all the rest of the fine scenery! Besides, you would find the water route much cooler when passing through the hot continents. An elf of your constitution would find air travel over the tropics very trying!

CONDOR (*acidly*). The ignorance of some fellows is enough to make the angels weep! Our planes are geared to sail a thousand miles above the hot belt. No inconvenience whatever to Arctic travelers!

DOLPHIN (*jeeringly*). None at all, unless the North Wind lets loose his hurricane imps and they start the airplane to turning somersaults!

CONDOR (*with heat*). We claim that our planes can't be touched by the hurricane imps!

DOLPHIN. Yes, you fellows claim the sun, moon, and stars for everything you make!

CONDOR. And you fellows haven't anything to claim for your leaky old tubs!

DOLPHIN. What do you mean, sir?

CONDOR. What do you mean, sir? (*They glare at each other as fiercely as two turkey cocks*)

SANTA (*wearily*). Aw, give us a rest!

MRS. SANTA (*sweetly, hoping to avert a fight*). I'm sure both modes of travel have their advantages, gentlemen.

GRETA (*bursting out enthusiastically*). I think the submarine would be just too cunning! When dad is away, you and I could take little jaunts in it, Gaby. We could run up to the Pole and visit the Iceberg Mermaids, couldn't we?

GABRIELLA (*decisively*). The airplane would be much

better for father. It has ten times the style of the submarine. Besides, father gets seasick when he goes boating. The submarine would never do for him!

GRETA (*pouting*). Well, he might get the submarine for me, then! He ought to, seeing that it was his pesky old reindeer that ate all the moss off my new winter hat——

MRS. SANTA. Greta, hold your tongue! (GRETA *subsides*)

SANTA (*to the two salesmen, who are looking haughty and trying to ignore each other*). Well, boys, all this eloquence is wasted on me. I'm just a plain, old-fashioned codger that doesn't care a hang if he lags behind the times. I'm used to my reindeer and they're used to me. They'd never forgive me if I scrapped 'em and I'm sure I should be mortally lonesome without 'em. Besides, what would my earth children think of me if I brought 'em their presents in anything except my good old sleigh?

DOLPHIN. Why, bless you, Mr. Claus, they'd be proud to think that Santa Claus visited them in the most modern style!

SANTA. Rats! Children don't bother their heads about such fool notions! Why, they'd be heart-broken never again to hear the tinkle of Santa's sleigh-bells or have the fun of looking for the print of reindeer's hoofs in the snow! How would they know that Santa had visited them if they didn't find the traces of those little hoofs?

CONDOR (*triumphantly*). My dear sir, my company have foreseen this difficulty. We have had a plane especially made for you, which leaves the imprint of your name in large letters on the snow wherever you make a landing!

SANTA (*disgusted*). Look here, d'ye think I need self-advertisement? You'll have my earth children mistaking my name for a new brand of laundry soap! No, sir, I like my reindeer best. They've always done the right thing by me, and the reindeer sprites keep them in

good order. Can you say as much for your airplanes, young man? Come now, answer up! Do they never, never break down?

CONDOR (*without batting a lash*). No, Santa Claus, I can assure you they never break down. Their mechanism is perfect.

DOLPHIN. Yes, and I can say the same for my machines, Mr. Claus.

SANTA (*skeptically*). Maybe, maybe. But I've never tried 'em out, while, on the other hand, I've tested my reindeer again and again; and I find I can absolutely trust 'em in any emergency —

GRETA (*with a sniff*). Huh! Don't be too sure, dad! They've certainly been pawing the air this afternoon. 'Member the time they dumped you into a snowdrift and stood you on your head? (SANTA CLAUS *scowls at her*)

MRS. SANTA (*ominously*). Greta, that will do! (GRETA *tosses her head and retires to window to look out, pouting*)

CONDOR. But suppose your reindeer should some day leave you in the lurch, Mr. Claus. What then?

DOLPHIN (*edging closer*). Yes. Would you send for us and let us help you out?

SANTA (*hesitating, then taking the plunge*). Well, yes, I would. I'd send for you and give your speed-wagons a trial. But of course that wouldn't happen in a hundred years!

CONDOR (*pocketing his note-book*). Well, Mr. Claus, you never can tell. Stranger things than that have happened! I shall remember your promise.

DOLPHIN (*shaking hands*). So shall I. Well, sir, I'm off. Good luck to you and a pleasant trip with your reindeer.

CONDOR (*jocularly*). When one of 'em casts a shoe and you have to park the sleigh at the nearest blacksmith's, think of me and my up-to-date planes!

SANTA (*shaking hands and steering them toward c. d.*). You bet I will. Well, boys, so long. Drop in

again some day when I'm not up to my ears in work. Snappy Christmas weather we're having, eh? (*While still talking, he herds them out at c. d. and EXITS with them. While he is gone, MRS. SANTA and GABRIELLA exchange despairing glances*)

GRETA (*giggles and romps through a few dance steps*). Didn't I tell you they wouldn't get anywhere with dad? He's hard-boiled!

GABRIELLA (*vexed*). I believe he takes a positive delight in being behind the times! I suppose we shall never get rid of those reindeer pests!

MRS. SANTA (*sighing like a martyr*). Your father grows more and more set in his ways. It's very hard on me!

RE-ENTER SANTA at c. d., followed by MISS TITTLE.

SANTA (*irritated and preoccupied, muttering to himself, goes DOWN c.*). Confound those chaps! Always wasting a fellow's time! I wonder if Gringorex has finished packing the sleigh—— Thunderation! (*Observes for the first time that MISS TITTLE has followed him in and is now at his very elbow, smirking at him sociably*) What next?

MISS TITTLE (*bowing to the other ladies in turn and then to SANTA*). My dear Mr. Claus, how do you do? I am Miss Tittle, from the staff of the *North Pole Daily Breeze*. My editor sent me to find out all about this airplane you're buying——

SANTA (*barking out in his exasperation*). Who said I'm buying an airplane?

MISS TITTLE (*nothing daunted, shaking her forefinger at him archly*). Tut, tut! A little bird told me! Haven't we seen the salesman of the Magic Airplane Company camping on your trail for the last week? Of course it's a big piece of news for the *Daily Breeze* when the First Citizen of Kris Kringle Land abandons his time-honored sleigh and makes his Christmas trip in an airplane!

SANTA (*grimly, yet trying to be polite*). You bet it

will be a big piece of news—when it happens! But it hasn't happened, and it will be a hot summer day at the North Pole when Santa Claus trusts himself to one of those flibbertigibbet flying machines! Just tell your editor that, Miss Tittle!

MISS TITTLE (*disappointed*). Then it isn't true? Oh, dear, I'm so sorry! We were going to run a handsome picture of you just stepping into your airplane in the rotogravure supplement to our Christmas issue! Our readers would have been crazy about it, and the papers would have sold like hot cakes! Well, I must go back and break the news to my editor. Good-day, Mr. Claus. Good-day, ladies. (*Turns to go, but approaching C. D., jumps aside just in time to avoid a collision with GRINGOREX*)

ENTER GRINGOREX C. D., *rushing in, breathless with excitement, his eyes bulging.*

GRINGOREX. Granddad Santa, Granddad Santa, what shall I do? The reindeer—— Oh, gee cricky, what shall I do?

SANTA (*seizing him by the arm*). Stand still, Gringorex. Don't jump around so! What about the reindeer?

GRINGOREX (*desperately*). Run away! Gone!

SANTA (*dumbfounded*). Run away! (MRS. SANTA, GABRIELLA, GRETA, and MISS TITTLE *all draw nearer and listen eagerly*. MISS TITTLE *whips out a note-book and begins to take notes*. MRS. SANTA *and the girls exchange significant glances*)

GRINGOREX. It wasn't my fault, Granddad Santa. I don't know what got into them pesky critters. They've been fidgettin' and standin' on their hind legs all afternoon. I told them cussed reindeer sprites to look after 'em; but what can you expect of a gang of imps like that? I only went into the factory for another load of toys for the sleigh, and when I came out the team was tearin' across the snow lickety-cut, with the sleigh bouncin' along behind. I ran after 'em but of course

I couldn't ketch 'em. They was out o' sight in no time!

SANTA (*with ominous calm*). And my entire load was in the sleigh, I suppose?

GRINGOREX (*fussily*). Oh dear, no! I had just unloaded the sleigh because it wasn't balanced right and I wanted some heavier toys to put on the bottom. So all the toys were saved, Granddad.

SANTA (*relieved*). Well, that's something to be thankful for! Where are those reindeer sprites of mine? Call 'em in!

GRINGOREX. I seen 'em sneakin' around out there, lookin' for knot-holes to crawl into, I reckon. (*Goes to C. D., opens it, and yells*) Hey, you sprites, Granddad Santa wants you!

MISS TITTLE (*smacking her lips appreciatively*). This is a better story than the one I came to get! (*Pause*)

ENTER reindeer SPRITES C. D. *They creep reluctantly in and go DOWN C. to SANTA. They hang their heads, ashamed and terrified; all their former high spirits are gone.*

SANTA (*sternly, to the leader*). Lob, you sprites have been asleep on the job, or this never would have happened!

LOB (*almost in tears*). Honest to goodness, Grandpa Santa, we left 'em only a few minutes, to look for the great white owl Gringorex says he saw last night. We ran all the way back and got here just in time to see the reindeer disappear over the west hills! (SPRITES *make faces at GRINGOREX behind SANTA'S back*)

GRINGOREX. Humph!

SANTA (*grimly*). Well, no matter whose fault it was, they're gone. And here I am marooned, with no way of making my Christmas trip! Think of it—thousands of children waiting for me and wondering why I don't come! A pretty kettle of fish!

GABRIELLA (*advancing on SANTA boldly from one*

side). Father, there's just one thing to do in this emergency.

MRS. SANTA (*tackling him from the other side*). Yes, Santa, and that is to call that nice young Mr. Condor back and take one of his planes!

GRETA (*dancing up and down*). And a submarine from that ducky Mr. Dolphin! Do get a submarine for me, dad, even if you don't want one for yourself. Don't be selfish!

MRS. SANTA (*sharply*). Be quiet, Greta! You're making us all nervous. (GRETA *holds her mouth with her hand, grinning at the others over her hand. To SANTA*) You remember what you promised those two men: that if your reindeer ever left you in the lurch, you'd call on them. Well, here you are!

SANTA (*dazed and sorrowful*). It's true. My reindeer have gone back on me. I never thought they'd serve me such a trick! (*Shakes his head and sighs heavily*) Well, I believe you're right, mother. There's only one thing to be done. Gringorex, run after that Condor chap and call him back.

[EXIT GRINGOREX C. D., *running*. GABRIELLA, GRETA and MRS. SANTA *smile triumphantly and whisper among themselves*. MISS TITTLE, *an attentive listener, beams*. The reindeer SPRITES *huddle wretchedly together UP L., near D. L.; they look at SANTA despairingly and at one another*.

LOB (*in a low tone, to the other SPRITES*). Our job is gone. This is the end of us!

MISS TITTLE (*stepping forward and haranguing SANTA dramatically, waving her pencil perilously close to his nose*). My dear sir, this is the greatest moment of your life. How the little children of the world will bless you! How thankfully they will listen for the throbbing of your airplane engine, parked just over the chimney!

SANTA (*bitterly*). A fine substitute for the music of my sleigh-bells and the thud of reindeer's hoofs on the snow!

MISS TITTLE (*paying no attention to this, with growing enthusiasm*). They will no longer reproach you with being behind the times! You are now marching in the van of PROGRESS! Let me congratulate you! (*Pumps his hand up and down*) Just for this you will make the front page of the Christmas number of the *North Pole Daily Breeze*! I must hurry back to the office and get our photographer over here to take your picture. [*Nodding R. and L., EXITS hastily C. D.*]

SANTA (*glancing after her and shrugging his shoulders*). Progress! Humph!

[*With bowed head he EXITS slowly D. L. The reindeer SPRITES look at him imploringly as he passes them, but he pays no attention to them and shuts the door behind him.*]

GRETA (*whirling round and round the stage in wild-est joy*). Whoops! Hurray! Those old reindeer are side-tracked at last!

MRS. SANTA (*decorously pleased*). It is really fortunate that they ran away.—Greta, not so boisterous, please!

GABRIELLA. Now I can hold up my head among my friends!

GRETA. Listen! Isn't that the hum of an engine? (*Rushes to window*) It's Mr. Condor in his airplane with Gringorex.

GRINGOREX (*pokes his head and half his body in at C. D.*). Here's the airship ready to be loaded, Granddad—— Where is he?

MRS. SANTA (*opening D. L. and calling*). Santa, Gringorex and Mr. Condor have come in your new airplane.

SANTA (*impatiently, from within*). All right, all right! (*ENTERS hurriedly at D. L., wearing his fur coat*) Come, Gringorex, let's load in the toys.

[*EXITS C. D., bustling out.*]

GRETA (*following SANTA, dragging GABRIELLA with her*). Come, Gaby, let's go too! Oh, there comes Dolphin. Let's make dad buy his submarine.

[EXIT both girls C. D., followed by MRS. SANTA, who can be heard off-stage reproving GRETA. The SPRITES are left alone. For a few minutes they peep out of window and listen to the sound of voices and throbbing of the engine outside. Then they advance dejectedly to C.

LOB. Fellow sprites, there's only one thing left for us to do. We must find our reindeer and bring 'em back!

CHORUS OF SPRITES. But, Lob, how can we? They're a million miles away by now! How shall we know where to look?

LOB (*sternly*). Don't ask how and where! We've got to find 'em, that's all! We've got to get Grandpa Santa to give us another chance. If we don't find 'em, he'll send us away—— (*Groans and lamentations from the other SPRITES. LOB continuing mercilessly*) And he'll never, never let us come back or forgive us! You all know that. Now we must start out this very night and simply scour the Arctic Circle for the run-aways. Here's my plan: Two of us will go north, two south, two east, and two west. The Four Winds will give us free rides on their wings if we ask them politely. What do you say, fellow sprites?

CHORUS OF SPRITES. All right. Let's go!

FIRST SPRITE (*darkly*). If we catch 'em, just you keep your eyes open and you'll see what Dasher's going to get!

SECOND SPRITE. That's right! I'll fix Comet——

THIRD SPRITE. And Cupid will catch it from me!

LOB. Tut, tut! We've no time to waste blaming the reindeer. Besides, it was mostly our own fault. Come, we must sneak out back way, or that gang out in front might stop us. Are we ready, sprites?

CHORUS OF SPRITES. You bet. Lead on, Lob! (*They whirl round and round the stage in couples, then EXIT D. R. at full speed*)

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.—*Same as in ACT I. Late Christmas morning. DISCOVERED* MRS. SANTA seated at 'phone-table, telephoning. She looks worried, and glances restlessly around room from time to time.

MRS. SANTA (*speaking into receiver*). Why, no, Miss Tittle, I'm afraid I can't tell the *Daily Breeze* any more than it already knows. There was only that one brief wireless message from Santa about midnight, saying that the airplane had broken down while he was crossing the Rocky Mountains. Not a word about what he was going to do. (*Pause*) No, really, Miss Tittle, I'd rather not repeat it. (*Primly*) I regret to say that the language he used was not quite—er—dignified and lady-like. What say? Oh, the submarine. Yes, he promised Mr. Dolphin a tryout. They were to meet on the Pacific coast of South America and Mr. Dolphin was to take him across the ocean. But I suppose Santa couldn't keep the appointment. I'm really very anxious about him. He's never been so late from his Christmas trip before. Yes, Miss Tittle, I'll let you know if there's any more news of him. (*Hangs up receiver*) Heavens, what a nuisance that woman is!

ENTER GABRIELLA D. R., *uneasy and subdued, carrying a yellow envelope.*

GABRIELLA. The messenger elf of the Elfland Wireless Corporation was just here, mother, and left this.

MRS. SANTA (*tearing open the envelope and reading*). It's from your father. He says, "Home soon. Am on my way." But not one word about the breakdown!

GABRIELLA (*hopefully*). Maybe the mechanician they sent with him was able to fix it.

MRS. SANTA. Undoubtedly, my dear, or your father couldn't get home! But what bothers me is that this will prejudice him all the more against the airplane. Oh, I know him!

GABRIELLA. Well, he'll just have to make the best of it. The reindeer are gone; and I don't see him breaking in any more at his age!

ENTER GRETA C. D., *running in, bubbling over as usual.*
MR. DOLPHIN *following close behind her.*

GRETA. Oh, mother, here's Mr. Dolphin. He thinks it queer he didn't meet father.

DOLPHIN (*much perturbed*). Good-morning, Mrs. Santa. I've just this minute got in from South America. I waited and waited for your husband and I can't understand ——

MRS. SANTA. Santa has had an accident, Mr. Dolphin. The airplane broke down. Doubtless that is why he failed to meet you.

DOLPHIN (*whistling with surprise*). After all that fellow Condor's boasting!

GABRIELLA (*suddenly stepping forward in a listening attitude, holding up her forefinger*). Hush! That's strange! I thought I heard sleigh-bells! Did you hear them, mother?

MRS. SANTA (*startled*). No—yes! They sound like —— Well, if I didn't know that the reindeer were gone, I should say they sound like Santa's ——

GRETA (*flies to window and throws it open. Sound of sleigh-bells comes nearer and nearer. With a scream*). It's dad! He's coming in the sleigh—reindeer, bells, and all! Jee-rusalem cousins!

GABRIELLA (*rushing to window and looking over GRETA'S shoulder*). No, impossible!

MRS. SANTA } (*speaking* { For pity's sake ——!

DOLPHIN } (*together*) { Well, I'll be doggone!

(*Sound of sleigh-bells, now very close, fills the air. It grows spasmodic, then stops altogether*)

ENTER SANTA C. D., *grinning contentedly from ear to ear*. GRINGOREX, *also grinning broadly*, ENTERS *close behind him*. SANTA, *still bundled up in his great fur coat, removes his huge fur gauntlets as he speaks*.

SANTA (*genially*). Greetings, ladies! What, Dolphin, you here? I'm a little late, I know, but ——

MRS. SANTA (*fearfully*). Santa, where is your airplane?

SANTA (*jauntily, as GRINGOREX helps him off with his coat*). Stuck on top of the Rocky Mountains, for all I know. And it may stay there, for all I care! It isn't my airplane any longer. I told Condor flatly that if it broke down on this trip, I wouldn't have it. Luckily my good reindeer came along just in the nick of time, and as the sleigh wasn't knocked up much, I finished the trip with them. (*General consternation. None but SANTA and GRINGOREX look pleased*)

GABRIELLA. How on earth did you ever find them?

SANTA (*proudly*). Oh, the reindeer sprites found them and came in search of me. One of the scouts in the Weather Prophet's office at the North Pole Weather Bureau saw me go by and put them on my trail. I tell you, those little imps are all right! (*Sticking his head out at C. D. and calling*) Hi, you chaps, come in. (ENTER *at C. D. the reindeer SPRITES, a little shyly*) You did good work last night, sprites. I shall never forget how you and the reindeer came to my rescue when these precious modern inventions failed! You made my Christmas trip a success! (SPRITES *grin delightedly and exchange glances*)

DOLPHIN. But, Mr. Santa, is this fair to us to condemn our high-grade machines at the first small breakdown? Didn't your reindeer also fail you on just as little provocation?

SANTA (*whirling around on him with a stern look*). Little provocation? D'ye know what my sprites discovered, Mr. Dolphin, when they caught the reindeer?

They found all the trouble was caused by Vixen, the left leader. He was still raising Cain and shaking his head as if his mouth hurt him. So Lob pried open his jaws and found them stuck tightly together by—this! (*Takes a tinfoil-wrapped package from his pocket and, unwrapping it, displays a wad of chewing-gum as big as a crab-apple*) Chewing-gum! And look what was in the wad! A cigarette, which poor Vixen had bitten in two! Now, no one around here smokes cigarettes. My old pipe is good enough for me, and Gringorex won't have anything but his corncob. Mr. Dolphin, what brand of cigarettes do you smoke?

DOLPHIN (*stiffly*). I do not smoke, Mr. Claus.

SANTA (*his eyes twinkling*). Then the culprit must be Greta. Greta, how dare you smoke behind your old father's back?

GRETA (*cuddling up against his arm, with many giggles*). Oh, dad, what a perfectly thrilling detective sergeant you'd make! But instead of accusing your innocent little daughter, why don't you ask what brand of cigarettes Mr. Condor smokes? I saw his box last evening. It's Aurora Borealis!

SANTA (*solemnly quoting*). "Smoke Aurora Borealis fags. They satisfy!" Let's see, didn't Condor have a cigarette in his fingers when he was here yesterday?

GRETA. And that's what became of my gum! I stuck it there on the mantel and last night when I went to get it, it was gone. (*Runs over to fireplace and examines a spot on the corner of the mantel*)

DOLPHIN (*who has been wriggling uncomfortably, now draws himself up in offended dignity*). Sir, in view of the carelessness and neglect of the reindeer sprites, who are undoubtedly to blame for the runaway, I must say that your insinuations are absurd. I'm a very busy man, so I must wish you a very good-day! [EXITS rapidly c. d. *The reindeer SPRITES burst out laughing.* MRS. SANTA and GABRIELLA give them black looks, but for once they are not squelched.

GRINGOREX *joins them in loud guffaws.* SANTA *grins.*

SANTA (*mildly, looking after DOLPHIN*). Those fellows simply had to sell me something by hook or by crook. I think it was mostly by crook! Oh, well, just let 'em try it again! I'm cured. Nothing will ever persuade me to part with my good old reindeer. Come on, Gringorex, let's go out and give 'em the feed of their lives!

[EXIT SANTA *and* GRINGOREX C. D. GRETA *dances after them.*

MRS. SANTA (*resignedly*). There's simply no cure for being born behind the times! Come, Gabriella, let us see to dinner.

[EXITS D. R. *with* GABRIELLA. *The reindeer* SPRITES, *left alone, tiptoe to c., laughing silently and nudging one another.*

LOB (*confidentially, drawing the others around him*). Fellow sprites, I've something to tell you. Those two boob salesmen haven't anything on your Uncle Lob in the way of tricks! You know we eight started out yesterday afternoon to find the reindeer? Well, I came back.

FIRST SPRITE. Suffering snakes, Lob! What for?

LOB. To see if the reindeer might not have got tired running and found their way home. Well, I came upon that outlandish airship standing out in front almost ready to start. I was prowling around it, looking it over, when I spied a little head sticking out of the engine, with eyes like a beetle or grasshopper or something, taking in the scenery. "Hullo!" I says. "Who are you?" "I'm the elf of the airplane engine," pipes this head, puffing out its cheeks. "I'm more important than the engine itself, for I steer the ship! Get out of my way. I must have a clear view of the sky!" Well, it made me hopping mad to see him give himself such airs. So I says, "All right, if you're so important as all that, I'll give you a view of the sky and all the stars in it! Come out and let me have a look at you."

But he wouldn't come out, so I yanked him out; and whee! but I spoiled his face for him! (SPRITES *laugh uproariously*) Before I got through, I had blacked both his eyes for him! He could hardly crawl back into the engine! (SPRITES *double up with laughter*)

FIRST SPRITE (*stopping, and staring at LOB with dawning understanding*). Oh, Lob, do you suppose you knocked him out so badly that he couldn't steer, and so the thing broke down ——?

LOB (*winking at him*). Sh! That is one of the great unsolved mysteries in the annals of airplane travel! Ask the Great White Owl! (*The SPRITES crowd around LOB, laughing, and patting him on the back. Suddenly they begin to dance, swiftly, lightly, silently, as at the beginning of ACT I, while the music of "Moments Musical" is played softly behind the scenes at the same rapid tempo. Every movement, free, airy, and exquisitely graceful, betrays their joy and exultation. While they are still dancing, the CURTAIN slowly falls*)



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