

Speaking of Presents

Know what?

I don't like to come right out and *say* what I want for Christmas—because there are quite a few things I want—and I think parents like to think they get ideas themselves. But I figure it doesn't hurt to drop a few hints, beginning about the first of December. After all, it's a long time since Dad and Mom were young. And how can they remember what they wanted for Christmas when they were my age?

Know what?

One Saturday morning a couple of weeks ago I was cracking nuts for Mom's fruit cake. It struck me as a pretty good time to drop a hint, and I thought of a good way to do it. "Mom," I said, "if I were rich, you know what I'd buy you for Christmas?"

"I haven't any idea," Mom said.

"A dog!" I shouted. "A black and white dog—or brown, if you'd prefer. Or spotted. Just so it was a dog."

"Hmm," Mom said. "Then I guess it's just as well you aren't rich, because we haven't room for a dog."

Know what?

During the next few weeks I managed to drop some more hints. I told Mom how we learned in school that fresh air and exercise were absolutely necessary for good health . . . and that anybody who had a *bike* or a *pony* was bound to get plenty of fresh air and exercise.

And what did Mom say? Said experience had taught her

that the best possible exercise was taking a walk on your own two feet. Otherwise the bike or pony got all the exercise.

Know what?

I can't seem to get Mom or Dad interested in wanting one of those new combination pocket knives for Christmas . . . you know, the kind with a wonderful can opener and leather punch and screw driver and corkscrew in addition to a big and little blade. Mom says she has a much better can opener already, and she wouldn't have any use for the leather punch. And Dad says he has at least four screw drivers and three corkscrews. So I'd better think of something else.

Know what?

For the past week Mom has been talking about wool mitts and sweater and muffler. What color would a person my age like best? As if I can't see through her hints! But I fooled her. Quick as a flash I told her the color of mitts and sweater and muffler would depend on the color of the new sled a fellow was going to get for Christmas.

Mom started to laugh. And I started to laugh. And what it all comes down to is that we're both in the same boat . . . we don't either of us know what we're going to get. Did I say *boat*? Say, maybe I can think of a good way to drop a hint about a boat!

Santa simply had to stay for (after his long trip from the North Pole). And then there were songs to sing. It was the best Christmas Herman Pinchpenny had ever spent in his life.

And so it is time to come to the end of this story. But, here is a funny thing: no one knows for sure how the story is going to end. You see, all *that* happened last Christmas, and *this* Christmas hasn't quite come. And no one can be sure how Herman is going to act. Is he going to play Santa Claus for the Jovials again? Or perhaps will he be Santa Claus down at the big Community Christmas Tree? Or is he planning to take over the entire pencil end of Santa's business? No one really knows. But one thing is certain. Herman is going to *spend* Christmas wholeheartedly, one way or another.

THE END

Not Taking Any Chances

Grownups don't know everything. Take Dad. When I asked him how Santa's reindeer could run through the sky without falling down, he cleared his throat and said he guessed that was something special for *Christmas*. And when I asked how reindeer could come down on roofs without people hearing them, he said people didn't have the right kind of ears. But when I said, "What kind of ears are right?" he couldn't answer that, either.

No, grownups don't know everything. Take Gram. When I asked how Santa Claus could come down the fireplace chimney without getting all sooty, she said perhaps he had a new-fangled nylon suit that didn't show dirt. "Well, why didn't he get dirty *before* he had that new-fangled suit?" I asked. Gram couldn't answer, and she didn't know what happened if there was a fire burning in the grate, either. She just said Dad would be sure to put the fire out before he went to bed, so I shouldn't worry.

No, grownups don't know everything. Take Mom. When I asked her how Santa had time to deliver all those presents on the night before Christmas, she said she was sure his clock wasn't like ours. But she couldn't tell me how it was different. And when I asked how Santa's bag could be big enough to carry all those toys, she said maybe he carried refills. But she didn't know what the refills looked like.

No, grownups don't know everything. But I don't care. I'm going to hang up my stocking where he'll be sure to see it, anyway!