

# I

By Christmas, 1980, the earth had had enough and was beginning to send out hints. Volcanoes roared. Fish drank nitrates and sulphur. A pandemic of sleepiness and drowsiness was sweeping the earth and scientists didn't know what to make of it. Some said that it was the coldest Christmas in memory as -40-degree temperatures blew down from the Arctic. Greece was struck with the worst snow blizzard in thirty years, the *Times* reported. "Wolves entered towns and villages to attack livestock." Declared Prime Minister Constantine, "Greece is not equipped to meet this sort of weather." In Italy, people were fleeing Naples. The Northern Hemisphere wasn't as much fun as it used to be.

The fortieth President wears \$3,000 worth of clothes including an \$800 overcoat from I. Magnin. He is warm and well-fed. His friends come from Bel Air, California, where the average house sells for \$800,000 and people pay \$600 for a shirt and \$350 for a tie and an alligator handbag goes for \$1,500. His friends are warm and surfeited. During his inaugural, 50,000 hot-air balloons are set afloat. Stomach-warming Kentucky bourbon and tails are back in the White House, a *Time* magazine columnist rejoices.

Eastern circles, however, are cautious. Beer money, car dealership money, supermarket money, and drugstore money surround the President. Eastern money has never heard of this

money. This money from Sacramento and Orange County where the real men wear \$450 Lucchese boots. Money is as tight as Scrooge. Retailers talk of a credit squeeze, and during this season of blizzards, this cold, nasty season, the newspapers devote much advertising to quartz heaters. Millions in the United States are without heat and fires that devastate entire families occur in the wintry cities of the northeast. The President is satiated and sanguine. He dines with Brooke Astor. He is warm, eating, well-fed, smiling-smiling, well-scarfed, bundled-up and waving.

Ebenezer Scrooge towers above the Washington skyline, rubbing his hands and greedily peering over his spectacles. He shows up at the inaugural in charcoal-gray stroller, dove-gray vest, gray-striped trousers, pleated-front shirt, and four-in-hand tie. Hail First Actor, and Ms. Actorperson on your thronelike blue winged chairs, and your opulent Republican dinners, and your tailors, and your fashion designers flown in from Paris and Beverly Hills and New York, and your full-page color coverage in *Women's Wear Daily*.

How did the *Buffalo Evening News* put it? "The Wild West is Back in the Saddle Again." In the west, he campaigned as a cowboy; in the south, the crowd wept and rebel-yelled at the sight of First Actor in a Confederate uniform. Miss Nancy's beautiful white people, in the Red Room, darkies in tails passing out sour mash left and right. Thank you, Miss Nancy, said Charlie Pride.

But Wall Street is skeptical, even when the President shows up in pinstripes. The *Wall Street Journal* mischievously prints the President-elect's nightclub bills incurred between his marriages; \$750 per month at the Mocambo Club and Ciro's. They remind the new President that regardless of his endorsement by the electronic evangelists, he is "a man who has seen something of life."

The President-elect says he wants Santa to leave him a tractor but isn't sure Santa can get it down the chimney. He

leaves out milk and cookies for Santa anyway. His cabinet officers wear expensive watches and suits. They are comfortable, well-off even. Regardless of how high inflation remains, the wealthy will have any kind of Christmas they desire, a spokesman for Neiman-Marcus announces. Their gifts range from \$100 gold toothpicks to \$30,000 Rolls Royces.

Ms. Charlotte Ford is cozy. She is eating well. The family can't make it to ski country this year and so they will settle for a Christmas dinner in their New York townhouse. Lunch will be served at 2:00 P.M. There will be twelve guests, six at two tables. They will eat off of china plates. They will dine on chestnut soup and turkey. For dessert, they will enjoy chocolate souffle and mince pie. The atmosphere will be "warm and congenial." There will be two kinds of wine, red and white.

By New Year's Day, seven point eight million people will be unemployed and will do without poinsettias tied with 1940 pink lace or chestnut soup. They will be unable to attend the ski lessons this year, but they will be fighting the snow, nevertheless. On Thanksgiving Day, five thousand people line up for turkey and blackeye peas in San Francisco. In D.C., four men freeze to death during inaugural week, one on the steps of a church. The church's door is locked. It is the coldest Christmas in memory and doesn't end until Inaugural Day.

Santa Claus is ubiquitous this year. Dolly Parton appears on the cover of *Rolling Stone* in a Santa Claus outfit; a little doll Santa Claus peeks from between her bosom lines. On the cover of *Fantasy* magazine, Santa Claus appears as a robot. United Press International reports on December 23, 1980, that the Sussex County Superior Court judge gave Leroy Scholtz permission to change his name to Santa C. Claus. "About fifty children and several adults, who had crammed the courtroom to lend support to 'Santa,' broke into applause as the decision was announced, and several ran up and hugged the tall, potbellied man." But all wasn't jolly for Santa Claus during 1980 Xmas. Associated Press reported on December 19, 1980,

that the 125 members of the Truth Tabernacle Church, in Burlington, North Carolina, had decided that Christmas is the work of the devil and Santa is an imposter. They said that Christmas is the birthdate of the pagan god, Tammuz, and that they would allow no Christmas trees or presents. "Santa was accused of child abuse by urging parents to buy liquor instead of clothing, of lying and saying he is Saint Nicholas, of causing churches to practice Baal religion unknowingly, and causing ministers to lie about Christ's birthday. After the charges were read and the sentence pronounced, an eight-foot dummy in a Santa suit was taken to the nearest tree and hanged as about a dozen children looked on, giggling."

On the corner of Union and Buchanan Streets in San Francisco, Santa is seen driving his reindeer and sleigh. The reindeer and sleigh are made of 6,000 pounds of ice and carved by Andrew Young.

Percy Ross, "the original Jewish" Santa Claus who gave away money to black schoolchildren on a New York Street, said, "I do it because I'm luckier than most and because every day is Christmas to me." Commented one child, "the dude's all right," Associated Press reports. United Press International says that three billion Christmas cards will be exchanged with gross sales higher than last year's 1.2 billion dollars. On the cards, Santa is depicted as a golfer, a tennis player, a long-distance runner, and a jogger. Nicholas changes with the times, running neck and neck with Jesus Christ; the Vatican would like to ruin this Saint. The writer says that Clement Clark Moore, author of "A Visit from St. Nicholas," wouldn't recognize him anymore.

In 1979 one "streetwise" Santa said, "These kids today, I'll tell you, they're seven going on forty. They're not kids for very long. When I first started as a Santa they'd believe in Santa Claus until they were about eight or nine."

The *Times* reported that Steven Jones, an assistant professor of comparative studies at Ohio State University, pro-

claimed Santa Claus a sexist fertility symbol. "There is an aura of expectancy surrounding Santa's arrival, and he is rotund in the same way as a pregnant woman." Jones said Santa gives things and comes down the chimney, a characteristic of the stork of another myth. "Santa is a male character who has usurped a female's role."

A Christmas poll is taken of American women, 75 percent of whom say they are sexually dissatisfied. Two ominous headlines appear: *Arctic Air Keeps Nation Frigid*, and *After Divorce, Who Gets Custody of Christmas?*

"An ultimate machine—a device that would mine the moon, a planet or an asteroid and use the raw materials to make anything anyone knows how to make including an exact replica of itself" was described by *Science Digest* as a "Santa Claus machine."

While combating squatters in Amsterdam, the police bring in Santa Claus to add some humor. In England, Father Christmas is arrested for taking photos of children and selling them for \$4.95. He is told that he can't return to his favorite spot until after Christmas, on January 5th.

Although Dick Powell starred in a 1940s movie called *Christmas in July*, the traditional beginning of the American Christmas falls on Thanksgiving Day. Of the first Thanksgiving, Professor James Deetz has written that for three days in 1621, the Anglo settlers got up in jackboots, felt hats, and plumes to dine on, not turkey, but *eel*, an Indian named Squanto taught them to hunt in the creeks and swamps near their settlements. Some local Indians contributed deer and helped the settlers put away pumpkin soup and gallons of booze. The first Anglo settlers had robust Elizabethan appetites, liked fancy clothes, and did a considerable amount of "wenching."

In the United States, millions of TV eyes are focused upon the Thanksgiving Day Parade which is sponsored annually by Macy's department store. Two bosses of important

retail chains watch the parade from a tinted-window, chauffeur-driven Cadillac. Brothers Herman and George Schneider both wear top hats, black-and-white striped pants, tails, shiny black shoes. Herman rests his hands on a cane.