



By Bertha R. Hudelson

The Carson's didn't run bills. That is, not many. They didn't dare. They were paying for their small ranch type home by the month, for Junior's appendectomy, and for Janie's teeth straightening. Besides house, life, and car and taxes they had little money left for ordinary living, let alone for running bills at department, clothing, and other stores that display enticing wares for the weak. Weak in the sense that when there is not enough money for even necessary things, spend anyway!

On this special day in December, Phil and Lucy sat on their back steps mulling over a problem. They had, long ago, bought toys for the children's Christmas. But they had forgotten someone. 'Dad Carson. What can we give him?'

'Socks, or Bermudas, I guess,' Phil suggested, relighting his pipe



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for the fourth time since beginning their conversation. Phil had foregone cigarettes in order to stop one big money leak and resorted to pipe smoking for consolation. The transition had been difficult, for he was forever forgetting to keep his pipe lighted.

Money Conscious

Lucy, watching, remarked, 'I'm even getting so money conscious that I'm glad when your pipe goes out. Uses less tobacco and luckily the matches are free. Yet the economical sock idea leaves me cold,' and she shrugged disdainfully. Too ordinary. I don't see why nice gifts for men are so expensive. If Dad were a woman, I could get a ritzy little pair of earrings, or a fancy handkerchief, for not more than a dollar. That's about all we can afford. As for Bermudas! You know Dad. He'd stick them in the fire rather than wear such 'cock-eyed stuff' as he calls them. 'Shaving lotion, then.'

Observance Was Once Against Law

At one time it was illegal to observe Christmas in this country. In 1596 the Massachusetts Bay Colony's general court passed the following resolution: "Whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas or the like, either by forbearing labor, feasting, or any other way, as a festival, shall be fined five shillings." It is believed that the first 'legal' observance in this country was in 1687 when Governor Andros conducted services in Boston's town hall. However, it was not until 1856 that the Massachusetts state Legislature passed laws making Christmas a legal holiday.

'He'd buy that himself. We must give him something unusual yet costing nearly nothing-if possible.'

An Idea

'He's fond of jelly. And why not half a dozen glasses?' Lucy suggested, happily, pleased that she had at last come up with an idea. 'You know Mom Carson doesn't make jelly any more, or can fruit, or bake. She says she's graduated from all that. From now on she's taking things easy. And she deserves to, although I do feel a little sorry for Dad with his farm bringing up. To hear him tell it, his mother even fried chicken for breakfast. Sometimes he had fried chicken three meals a day. Not that I would want it, but he likes to eat. A habit formed when young, and, 'they say,' habits grow stronger as one grows older. But the jelly wouldn't do. Not homemade.'

A Winner

Phil suddenly took a long puff on his again-unlit pipe. 'I know what! You're such a good cook, why not offer to bake him some pies? Any kind he likes. As many as he wants.'

'Wonderful! Why didn't I think of that?'

'Because my brain happens to work a little faster than yours, my dear,' Phil said, smiling fondly. 'We'll get a nice card and announce our gift. What could be better?'

'Nothing! But it's a good thing you smiled when you made that brainy remark,' Lucy told him, smiling as fondly at him as he had at her. 'Now for sweeping and dusting until 1982!' She leaped to her feet and started into the house.

Paul slowly stood up, groaning, 'And me to work.'

They went their different ways, unashamed of the gift they were to offer, and content, despite the problem of the high cost of living in the year of 1960. After all, there are satisfactory ways of beating it if you but use your brain.

Christmas Day

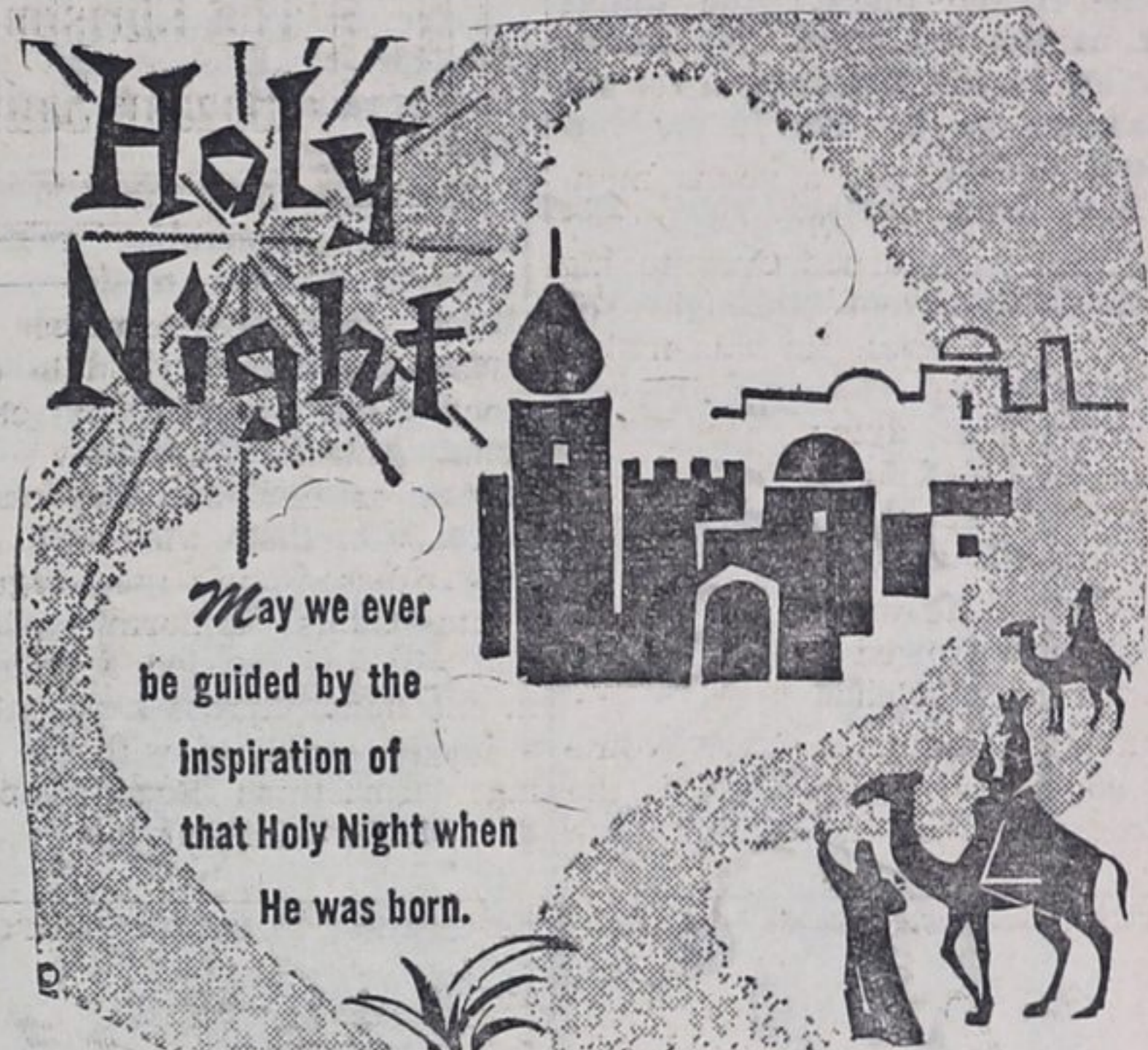
It is Christmas morn and the kids in their snuggies
 Are trying on skates and wheeling doll buggies
 As Mom and Dad stand knee-deep in papers
 Feigning surprise and watching the capers
 Of Babe and the pup who are too young, you see,
 To know just what gives, but join in the meleé.
 Sis finds the music box quite an attraction
 But Jack aims to know what's in the contraption.
 Mom, just in time, takes over the bat —
 Then stops to admire a French dolly's hat.
 Dad is absorbed in laying a track
 For a miniature train—it takes him back
 To the time when he was just about ten.
 But toys were not so intricate then.
 Babe now is chasing a huge red ballon
 It hits Dad's cigar and oh, what a boom!
 Mom, in surprise, slips on Susie's skate
 Causing a bump that will long mark this date.
 Soon it's announced that "Breakfast is ready"
 But nobody's hungry — too much candy already!
 It is mid-afternoon ere excitement subsides
 But it's only a breather till Grandpa arrives.
 Again there's a scramble to try out new toys
 Till someone shouts "Dinner"! over the noise.
 Then there's a race — who gets a leg?
 Junior wins — but the pup sure can beg!
 Soon there are yawns and "good nights" are said
 Mom breathes a sigh as she tucks 'em in bed.
 It's a wonderful day for the kiddies, I'd say —
 And one they will cherish to their dying day!

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