

Santa Claus Comes to Town

by Shireen Anne Jeejeebhoy, 2003

The snow fluttered down in the grey outside my window. I scrambled out of bed, and shivering with cold, pressed my nose to the glass, the better to watch the soft flakes flirt with the wind. Suddenly, I remembered it was the Santa Claus parade today, and forgetting the flakes, I ripped off my PJs, pulled on my textured tights, and wool skirt, and undervest, and turtleneck and ran and slipped my way to the kitchen, my tights flopping off the ends of my toes.

“Hello, sleepyhead,” Mum greeted me. Pancakes! My favourite breakfast. We had time for it today because we didn’t ever go to church on Santa Claus Parade Sunday. My brother and sister were already at the table, sugary plates and pancake-crumb coated table mute testament to them having eaten. I pulled my chair out and hopped on. Mum poured batter into her sizzling pan; within minutes, pancakes were made, and she had poured on orange juice, sprinkled on sugar, rolled them up, and placed a plateful in front of me. I could never gobble my food, no matter how excited, but the snow and leaden skies promising Santa Claus spurred me on.

After breakfast, Uncle came in from parking his car, stamping the snow off his galoshes, the cold blushing his nose. It was our cue to muster our snow pants and jackets, scarves, hats, and mitts. Complaints, squeals, and giggles filled the air as we sat down on the floor legs outstretched to put our snow pants on. It was always a mystery as to whether the right feet would poke out the right pant legs. Then stirrup straps over our shoulders, ready to push arms into our jackets. Mum tied up our scarves behind our necks and pushed on our boots, and Uncle mushed our hats down over our eyes, while Dad did mitt duty, and our grandparents watched indulgently.

“Pee!” Pheroze called out. A collective groan while he was unwrapped. But soon we tumbled out the door and caught our breath at the crystalline blanket in front of us.

“Whoopee!” we screeched as we rushed down the concrete steps and landed in our white front garden. The fresh snow begged for angels. I threw myself on my back and swished my arms up and down, my legs side to side. It was my favourite Canadian snow game. I carefully peeled myself off and surveyed my creation.

“Me too!” Pheroze declared. The angel war was on.

“Come on, you three. Hurry up or we’ll miss the parade,” Uncle yelled. We scrambled up and after him, as Farida toddled through our forgotten angels.

Dad led us through the thick snow, with Uncle pulling up the rear to Dupont Street and us kicking the snow as we walked. Pheroze grabbed a fistful off a raised lawn, balled it up in his mitts, and missed me. “Dad!” I complained, as I balled up my own mittful of snow and threw it at Pheroze. It hit Farida. Her wail carved the air, and Uncle scooped her up, while Dad hustled us along. “Be good or I’ll take you back home,” he warned.

We joined the throngs of people streaming under the railway bridge and were soon part of the thicket of adults on the sidewalk. They blocked our view, and I was too old to sit on Dad's shoulders; anyway Farida now had that spot.

"Go on," Uncle coaxed me forward. Feeling shy, I slithered between long snow-suited covered legs. Pheroze followed. We sat on the edge of the sidewalk, strange fair-skinned children beside us. It seemed forever before we heard distant flutes and drums and, craning our heads to the right, saw Sparky, the yellow long-lashed police car.

The parade was a dream of upside-down clowns, story-book floats, bands, lucky kids waving at us, and finally Santa Claus way up high in his sleigh, dressed in his familiar red, ho, ho, hoing and waving at us. His team of reindeer pulled him past us too quickly and out of sight. We sighed, we wanted more, but our frozen feet were happy to stamp home.

We ran in the front door, flinging off boots, hats, scarves, snow-burred mittens, breathlessly telling Grandma and Grandpa all the wonderful things we saw, while Mum handed us mugs of hot chocolate, admonishing us not to spill any. The warmth through our hands shivered our chilled bodies. We sat down carefully on the blue couch in our living room near our grandparents, parents, and uncle, snug in the knowledge that Christmas together was coming. Santa had heralded it.