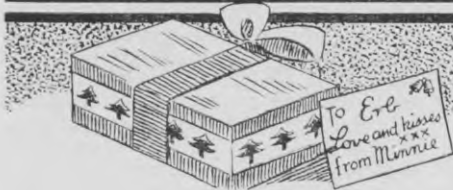


A CHRISTMAS BOX for SIMKINS



"GRAZIE", said Herbert Simkins, taking the 30/- from his wife. "Prego", she replied, with gentle irony. When would he learn to stop talking those awful foreign languages.

"I'll get them, all right," Herbert said, pulling on his boots.

Yes, he'd get them, all right. Fancy paying 400 lire for a turkey! He chortled. He had seen Mrs Jones with a small flock of *tacinas*, and if he couldn't scrounge one his name wasn't Herbert Simkins. Not that he was too sure of that since he had got spliced. He felt it might be Joe Hunt at times. But even if he missed there were always old Postlewaite's ducks or McPherson's *galenas*, not that the latter would be much good with the *munga* they got, or didn't get. He supposed his own spuds would do, but his peas were over. Too rich a soil—the worst of having a job like his. But he thought he knew where he could get the peas, all right—and a few strawberries, too, with a little bit of luck. He'd been pretty good in his deliveries to old Hang-Lo.

He just couldn't waste 400 lire. Besides, he had scarcely any plonk in the house at all, even though he had hocked a couple of spare water jugs they'd got as wedding presents. But a chap had to have plenty of plonk at Christmas what with all his *amicos* coming in for a few *salutes* and *vivas*. He wasn't going to have them thinking he was a tightwad. It wouldn't do him any good, especially after the way he'd been

able to bludge on them all through the year. And there was another year coming, too.

* * *

Herbert was busier than usual on the twenty-fourth—too many farmers in town and too much litter thrown around by the civvies. He'd like to put them on a few emu parades and see how they liked it. Think they were lites the way they threw things about—everything except lire, that was.

But he was not too tired to go on to the Crown when he had put away his little red handcart, his shovel and broom. The turkey, the peas and the strawberries could come later—when their owners were walking the town enjoying their Christmas Eve. It'd be just like an *Ite festa*, thought Herbert a little contemptuously. Not like the Christmases he had spent in Cairo and Italy. He sighed deeply. He was thinking of his Christmas near Orsogna—not *too* near, of course—and his other at Gioia. If he could only have another like them—without the snow and the rain, of course, and without the adjectival natives and their oxen, pigs, rabbits and *galenas*. Well, without their oxen and rabbits, anyway.

Herbert again sighed deeply, but for a different reason. It was six o' clock and "Time, gentlemen, please!". Very reluctantly he placed his handle on the bar and wiped his stubbly chin with the back of his hand. Almost as good