

# LIMBURGER CHEESE

## A Christmas Gift

Mama was busy, and so she sent me to buy a Christmas gift for my little sister at the neighborhood grocery store last Saturday. The man behind the counter said I was cute and made me a present of something wrapped in a piece of silver paper. He told me that it was limburger cheese. Because we were poor, and I had never had a gift from anyone except family members before, I wanted to save it for Christmas day. I put it close to my nose to see what it smelled like; but I had a bad cold and I couldn't make out any odor at all. It was pretty, though, so I took it home and hid it in the warm coal shed back of the house, so my brothers and sisters wouldn't find it and eat it all up. In the morning I went to get it again. The limburger cheese was still there, nobody had bothered it. I still couldn't smell anything; but as I looked closely at the wrapper it made my eyes water a bit.

I wondered what to do with it. I didn't want to leave it home for fear a mouse might get it, and so I waited until my Mama and Poppa had come out of the house to go to Church and tucked half of it in Poppa's pocket, and most of the rest in Mama's fur muff next to a small Christmas gift she had for the Bishop. I knew it would be safe there. The family worked up a sweat as we walked to Church that cold winter day, and I walked a ways behind with my brothers. It was then I noticed that Papa was beginning to act suspicious of mama, and maybe a little offended. Mama too. I could tell by the looks they shot at each other from time to time, and the way they held their handkerchiefs to their noses when they looked at each other. Well, we made it to the Church alright; but after the first hymn, Mama whispered sharply: "Papa, I think it would be best if you just don't sing anymore. Just keep your mouth shut and breathe through your nose."

Well, after the prayer, Papa began to sweat something fierce, and whispered to Mama that we would all be a lot better off if she would go outside and get a little air. I guess the people behind us thought he meant them, because they got right up and walked out. After the first talk, the Bishop sent his counselor down to see if there was a dead cat under our pew. The counselor reported that there wasn't; but I'm not sure, because just then the people next to us put handkerchiefs to their noses and moved back ten rows and across the chapel. The Bishop was fit to be tied. He was all red faced and fussing as he asked the choir leader to cut the cantata short and closed the meeting early. He asked the leaders to meet outside with the members were who were assigned to clean the meetinghouse last Saturday. He thought a terrible smell like that, had to be caused by unsanitary conditions.

As Mama and Papa started to walk home I noticed that they were *not* happy with one another. They began to naturally drift apart, and finally Papa told Mama that he'd like to be alone on the way home, and crossed to the other side of the road. Mama said that was fine by her, and that she wished he'd go home quick, disinfect himself, and burn his clothes before she got there.

Once we all got home we found that the front room was stifling hot. It seems that Grandma had come on a surprise visit and had a fire blazing in the fireplace. As we sat there, nobody said anything; but it was only a few minutes before the air got real thick, and the older children were finding a thousand reasons to leave the room.

Mama spoke first and asked Papa to take the cat out of the house, quick, because he looked like he was going to be sick. But it was too late, because the cat got sick all over Papa's new wool suit. It was then that he noticed that the canary had keeled over too. Papa sat close to the fire; but Mama quickly told him to move because it only made matters worse. Papa got really upset and told Mama to go smother herself. She said he had spoken too late, because she felt like she was smothered already. Just then my grandma came in and asked if she could either open the window or call for the mortician.

When Papa went up and showered, Mama took his clothes at arm's length and offered them to a ragged tramp that was walking by outside; but the tramp told her that he didn't need clothes that bad. So Mama threw them over the fence into the creek. That turned out to be the wrong thing to do, because within two hours all the fish was a floating on the top of the water belly up.

I thought that Papa made a bad mistake the next thing he did, because before Papa would get in bed with Mama, he asked her if she had been fumigated yet. I can tell you that that didn't help anything at all!

Just then the phone rang. It was the bishop, he told Papa about finding some cheese with his gift, and some incriminating evidence that linked me with the smell that threatened to close the Church house permanently. A short time later my Papa came to wish me goodnight with a razor strap in his hand. Well, I tried to hide under the bed, but it wasn't any use. With all the whacking and a yelling I think Papa kept people awake for blocks around.

I can't sit down on my backside yet, but before I went to bed I put what I had left of the limburger cheese in my little sister's Christmas stocking right next to her chocolate Santa. I thought it'd be a real a pity to waste it.