

By Ernest Hemingway

# A North of Italy Christmas

Milan, the sprawling, new-old, yellow-brown city of the north, tight frozen in the December cold.

Foxes, deer, pheasants, rabbits, hanging before the butcher shops. Cold troops wandering down the streets, from the Christmas leave trains. All the world drinking hot rum punches inside the cafes.

Officers of every nationality, rank and degree of sobriety crowded into the Cova cafe across from the Scala theatre, wishing they were home for Christmas.

A young lieutenant of Arditi, telling me what Christmas is like in the Abruzzi, "where they hunt bears and the men are men, and the women are women."

The entry of Chink with the great news.

The great news is that up the Via Manzoni there is a mistletoe shop being run by the youth and beauty of Milan for the benefit of some charity or other.

We sort out a battle patrol as rapidly as possible, eliminating Italians, inebriates and all ranks above that of major.

We bear down on the mistletoe shop. The youth and beauty can be plainly seen through the window. A large bush of mistletoe hangs outside. We all enter. Prodigious sales of mistletoe are made. We observe the position. We depart, bearing large quantities of mistletoe which we give to passing charwomen, beggars, policemen, politicians and cab-drivers.

We re-enter the shop. We buy more mistletoe. It is a great day for charity. We depart, bearing even larger quantities of mistletoe which we present to passing journalists, bar-tenders, street-sweepers and tram conductors.

We re-enter the shop. By this time the youth and beauty of Milan have become interested. We insist that we must purchase the large bush of mistletoe outside the shop, an empty bank building. We pay a large sum for the bush, and then, in plain sight of the shop window, we insist on presenting it to a very formal looking man who is passing along the Via Manzoni wearing a top hat and carrying a stick.

The very formal gentleman refuses the gift. We insist that he take it. He declines. It is too great an honor for him. We inform him that it is a point of honor with us that he accept. It is a little Canadian custom for Christmas. The gentleman wavers.

We call a cab for the gentleman, all this within plain sight of the shop window, and assist him to enter and place the large mistletoe tree beside him on the seat.

He drives off with many thanks and in some embarrassment. Many people stop to stare at him.

By this time the youth and beauty of Milan inside the shop are intrigued.

We re-enter the shop and in lowered voices explain that in Canada there is a certain custom connected with mistletoe.

The youth and beauty take us into the back room and introduce us to the chaperones. They are very estimable ladies, the Contessa di This, very large and cheerful, the Principessa di That, very thin and angular and aristocratic. We are led away from the back room and informed in whispers that the chaperones will be going out for tea in one-half an hour.

We depart bearing vast quantities of mistletoe, which we present, formally, to the head waiter of the Grand d'Italia restaurant. The waiter is touched by this Canadian custom and makes a fitting response.

We leave, chewing cloves, for the mistletoe shop. Under the small remaining quantity of mistletoe we demonstrate the sacred Canadian custom. Eventually the chaperones return. We are warned by a whistle up the street.

Thus the true use of mistletoe was brought to Northern Italy.

# Christmas In Paris

Paris with the snow falling. Paris with the big charcoal braziers outside the cafes, glowing red. At the cafe tables, men huddled, their coat collars turned up, while they finger glasses of *grog Americain* and the newsboys shout the evening paper.

The buses rumble like green juggernauts through the snow that sifts down in the dusk. White house walls rise through the dusky snow. Snow is never more beautiful than in the city. It is wonderful in Paris to stand on a bridge across the Seine looking up through the softly curtaining snow past the grey bulk of the Louvre, up the river spanned by many bridges and bordered by the grey houses of old Paris to where Notre Dame squats in the dusk.

It is very beautiful in Paris and very lonely at Christmas time.

The young man and his girl walk up the Rue Bonaparte from the Quai in the shadow of the tall houses to the brightly lighted little Rue Jacob. In a little second floor restaurant, The Veritable Restaurant of the Third Republic, which has two rooms, four tiny tables and a cat, there is a special Christmas dinner being served.

"It isn't much like Christmas," said the girl.

"I miss the cranberries," said the young man.

They attack the special Christmas dinner. The turkey is cut into a peculiar sort of geometrical formation that seems to include a small taste of meat, a great deal of gristle, and a large piece of bone.

"Do you remember turkey at home?" asks the young girl.

"Don't talk about it," says the boy.

They attack the potatoes which are fried with too much grease.

"What do you suppose they're doing at home?" says the girl.

"I don't know," said the boy. "Do you suppose we'll ever get home?"

"I don't know," the girl answered. "Do you suppose we'll ever be successful artists?"

The proprietor entered with the dessert and a small bottle of red wine.

"I had forgotten the wine," he said in French.

The girl began to cry.

"I didn't know Paris was like this," she said. "I thought it was gay and full of light and beautiful."

The boy put his arm around her. At least that was one thing you could do in a Parisian restaurant.

"Never mind, honey," he said. "We've been here only three days. Paris will be different. Just you wait."

They ate the dessert, and neither one mentioned the fact that it was slightly burned. Then they paid the bill and walked downstairs and out into the street. The snow was still falling. And they walked out into the streets of old Paris that had known the prowling of wolves and the hunting of men and the tall old houses that had looked down on it all and were stark and unmoved by Christmas.

The boy and the girl were homesick. It was their first Christmas away from their own land. You do not know what Christmas is until you lose it in some foreign land.

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