

Disorder
at Klapat's

You come home then, so it's Christmas. What's happened? Merry Christmas or blessed; and to church, come what may.

Klapat, says the wife, you talk and talk. But you know we've always gone, Good Friday, Christmas, All Souls' Day.

Cut out that All Souls' Day stuff, says Klapat. Did my brother have to fall in 'sixteen so that that guy can crawl up into the pulpit and *kvetch*? The memorial tablet's got to go. Didn't we learn: *Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends*? And because that's written on the tablet it's got to go. Because it ain't so about your father and my brother, and if our kid — but he did write that he's alive, but if he too — then you don't have anything at all, just the crap from that guy.

Klapat, says the wife and unties her apron, first eat, you're always working yourself up. Karl-Heinz will be thinking we've decorated the tree and that we'll go to church afterwards.

Well we did it, the tree I mean, says Klapat. Like the old Teutons.

Eating's always good, says Klapat, so for all I care let's go to church, I'll put my uniform on and if he starts up again with that sort of thing, we'll leave.

A bit more, says the wife and hacks at the roast. A good invention this dead sow, you must say. Klapat says so too and holds out his plate. And now it occurs to him that the whole morning they were talking about Christmas in the office. Prellwitz always talks about the mystical ash and the like. So a guy's supposed to hang the tree on the ceiling and down underneath an apple, on a string, that's the earth.

Not so funny, says Klapat reprovingly, when Lina says baloney and gives him the sign to cut it out.

But who would hang a tree on the ceiling, better none at all. Klapat lays down his knife and fork criss-cross on the plate, and starts telling what Horstigall said.

So these people had a revolving base they always stuck the tree into. It played Christmas carols. While revolving.

That's funny, says the wife.

Not at all, says Klapat, not in the least. It's just a painted tin box. The key was hidden during the year so no one would wind it up. Only at Christmas. And don't keep butting in on me, and one Christmas, well, they probably overwound it or something, at any rate, first it rotates just right and they're sitting there and singing along and his father, he says, is already munching Christmas cookies, and then things started really hopping, the box rotates faster and faster, the balls are already flying, smack against the wall, smack, smack, the tomcat cuts out, the children bringing up the rear. Messy Christmas. Klapat laughs so much that his eyes water. Well, whaddaya think, Merry Christmas.

And now it occurs to him what Neumann said: Last Christmas was nice, the kids were home, he's got three in the service, one's a sergeant, boy they boozed it up, was real cosy.

Would you like to do that, Klapat, says Lina reproachfully. Well, Neumann's wife is dead, this year none of them get a vacation, the old man sits there alone. Let him go to church. But Neumann probably is a dissenter, as we used to call it, they don't believe in a Higher Being, just in those who can promote you, a civil service faith.

And so now the Klapats are sitting in church, Klapat in SA uniform, Lina in black silk, Lina is thinking, how's it going with my boy?

Mr. Eschenbach is playing the organ up there, first fast and then slowly, and it always rings a bit in between.

Must have slipped in the *Zimbelstern*, says Klapat, sounds good. And then Klapat cranes his neck because The Reverend is clambering up the pulpit steps.

And what's he saying up there, The Reverend? To begin with that the congregation should sing Silent Night at home, not in church.

He just wants to give everybody a pain in the ass. But not me. Not today. Here I sit, Klapat, in uniform, civil servant, front-line soldier, Iron Cross Second Class, and my son in the field. Just let him start in again with soldiers and war, just let him start in again, that guy, he'll soon see what's what.

What *is* what then, Klapat?

Then I'll get up and get the hell out. And Lina here along with me. But The Reverend doesn't talk about war, but about peace; the longer Klapat listens, the more suspicious it sounds. How come peace when we've got war now? But is he supposed to talk about war? So he should talk about peace? Should he or shouldn't he? In any case what he's say-

ing up there is very probably not what you can listen seriously to, now in war, and in uniform: That the peaceable people are the peacemakers and not the types who can and do make pieces of it.

And not Silent Night either. Can understand their not daring to demand the mystical ash. But at least Silent Night.

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, thus begins the New Testament, says The Reverend, and then it goes on: *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise. Was on this wise* my friends, that is, God does something with this birth to his world.

Now Klapat knows what's coming next. But this *on this wise* and that the whole New Testament from the very beginning talks about Christmas — well, I don't know, and very probably there'll come even more, the Three Magi, Good Friday, Easter, May Day, no not that one, Ascension, Pentecost. And Reformation Day and Repentance Day. The old Teutons had already invented all that anyway, says Prellwitz. Maybe it's really true, that after all the Infant Jesus had to be born first, but that's probably not what he means, in any case not so simple: born and the rest we know.

And Lina sits there, long hair, short brains, but for all that she can turn the tears on. Let

her. Better now than afterwards under the Xmas tree, after all you're human too.

The whole Testament. No, Klapat couldn't bring himself to it. But there wasn't really a direct reason for getting up except perhaps when he talked about peace, now in war, but after all you do go to church Christmas because it's Christmas and old habit, something old, something familiar, you only need to think of it and it's before your eyes the way it used to be at home and how we always used to go swiping the tree from the tree nursery, and one year the forester Kiuppel had marked all the trees and then came on a visit, the second day of Christmas, but didn't say a word, just pulled our ears afterwards, us kids. And today: That is the *book of the generation of Jesus Christ*. There something is done, peace, where there's now war. Doesn't fit, neither back nor front, thinks Klapat.

There he's lying in bed at night, and it's all over.

No, they didn't get up. Only afterwards, as is proper, when church was over. Then they sang at home, both the Klapats, and it struck them that they were old. And he brought out the violin, that much he can still manage. And they wrote a letter to their boy. And Klapat once more began to talk about Horstigall's revolving base, which played

songs, but he soon stopped, then a little radio, and at twelve the chimes.

Not another word about all that. But are such holidays there for a guy to get mixed up? To lie there and not sleep? That I don't know.

