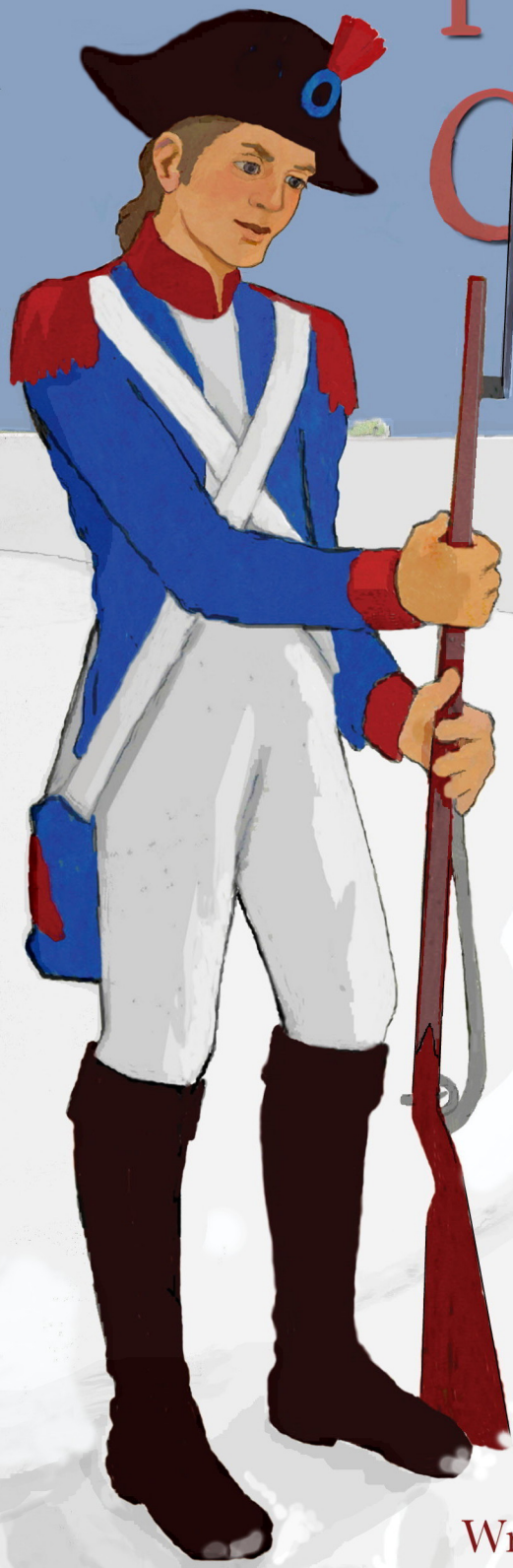


# JACQUES and the FORBIDDEN CHRISTMAS



Written and Illustrated by  
Martha Sears West

PREVIEW



Jacques' Secret  
SANTON CHRISTMAS



The background is a soft, painterly illustration of a winter scene. A wide, snow-covered path leads from the bottom center towards the horizon. In the distance, a castle with a prominent spire sits atop a hill. The sky is a pale blue, dotted with white, glowing stars or snowflakes. The overall mood is quiet and magical.

*Jacques' Secret*

# SANTON CHRISTMAS

*Written and Illustrated by*



*Martha Sears West*



For my sister, Betsy (Elizabeth Anne Christensen), with love and admiration. Her book, *In Manger Lowly*, and her many crèche exhibits have inspired me and thousands of others. Following her example, I hope this book will in some small way add joy to the celebration of our Savior's birth.

Santons are little clay figures such as Jacques makes. They appear in this book because of Betsy and the memory of our finding them together in Provence.

### *Jacques' Secret Santon Christmas*

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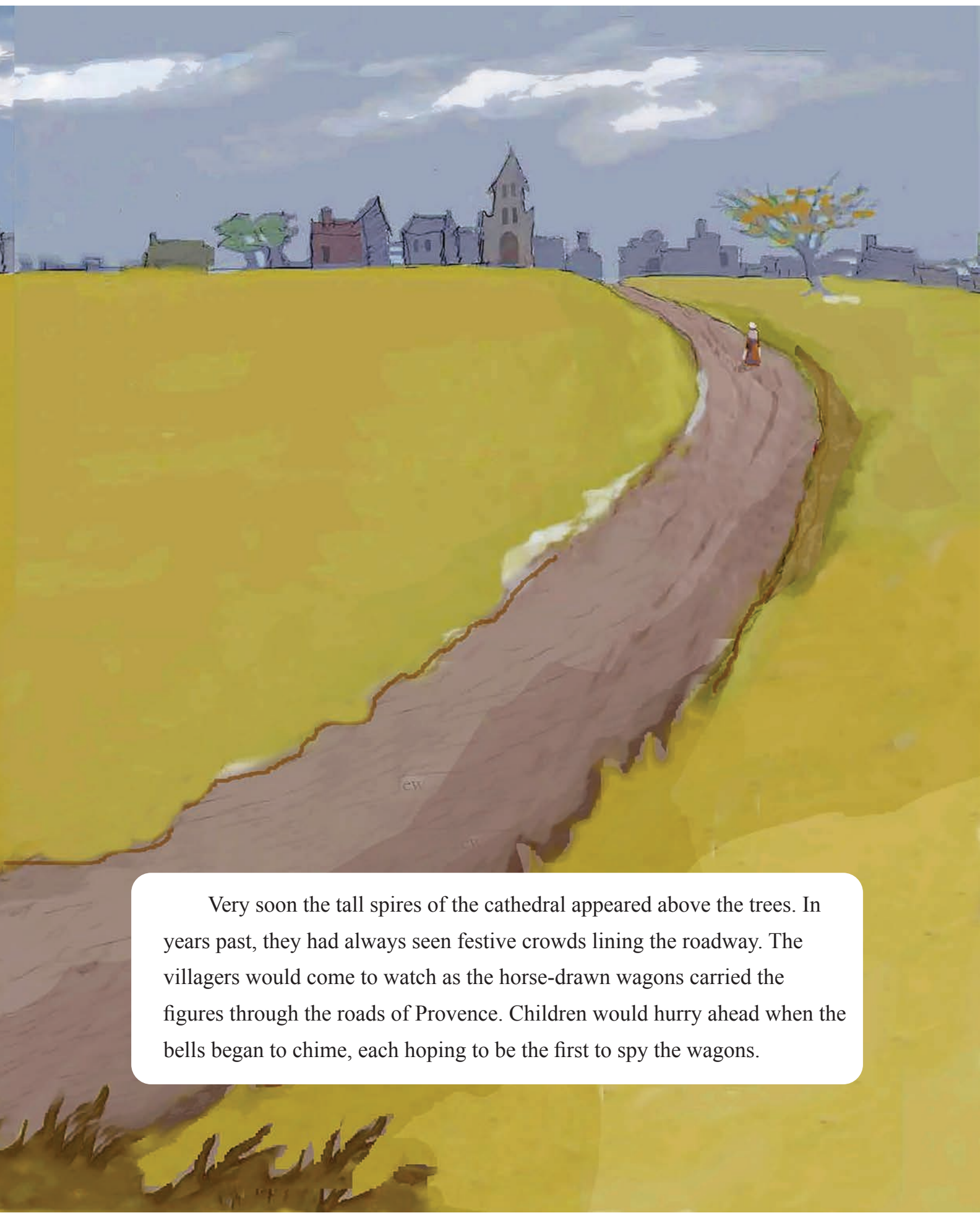


## I WHY, PAPA?

**T**en-year-old Jacques skipped along the country road beside his mother and father. Papa had made a few clay pots and wooden bowls to carry the day's provisions. Mother had packed rye bread and cheese, filled a jug with water, and put lard in the little earthenware bowl Jacques had made. These were arranged in a rough-hewn wagon, which they now pulled by turns.

The Christmas season was less than a fortnight away, and they were on their way to the cathedral, in town. Like many other families, each year they went there to watch the statues of the Holy Family being put in place.





Very soon the tall spires of the cathedral appeared above the trees. In years past, they had always seen festive crowds lining the roadway. The villagers would come to watch as the horse-drawn wagons carried the figures through the roads of Provence. Children would hurry ahead when the bells began to chime, each hoping to be the first to spy the wagons.





First a bearded Joseph, and then a pale and fragile Mary would be lowered from the wagons to the creaking of thick ropes. Friends and strangers alike would nod and wish one another joy as the pieces were taken inside the cathedral.

The manger was always last to be assembled near the altar. Jacques wished he could someday help carry the little pink Baby Jesus to the manger. He would lay Him down ever so gently beneath the gaze of Mary. He remembered the light that shone in people's eyes as they bowed down before the Christ Child.

Suddenly, Jacques noticed something odd: The villagers who had always crowded the roadside on this day were nowhere to be seen. The route was nearly empty, except for a young milkmaid. The bells were silent.

A tall soldier stood stiffly at attention, guarding the great gate to the cathedral. The musket at his side had a long, sharp bayonet.

At the sight of him, the milkmaid dropped one of her cans and stumbled by the roadside.

Was it the soldier's weapon or his angry stare that startled her? Jacques noticed his nose and cheeks were quite pink. Was he cold? Maybe that's why he was frowning.

When Jacques helped the milkmaid to her feet, she whispered, "Have you come to see the crèche?" Moving close to Jacques' ear, she said, "Napoleon made a new law. We may never again see the Holy Family in the cathedral."

The few villagers in sight seemed afraid of speaking aloud. An old man carrying sticks paused to speak quietly to Papa. "Government orders," he said. "The cathedral will be used for balls and banquets only . . . no nativity . . . no Christ Child."

"Why, Papa?" asked Jacques. Papa said nothing. Mother's eyes looked tired. As they returned home in silence, the wheels of the cart made a dismal creak. Jacques shivered and dragged his feet.

