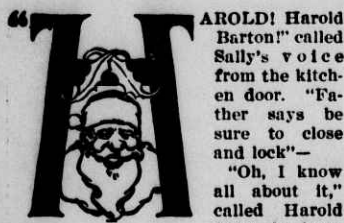


A SURPRISE SANTA CLAUS



"HAROLD! Harold Barton!" called Sally's voice from the kitchen door. "Father says be sure to close and lock!"

"Oh, I know all about it," called Harold from the barn door. "Don't bother your head about me." He turned his back and stalked into the barn, carrying a big basket filled with holly, fir boughs and mistletoe. Harold was to dress the Christmas tree and decorate the barn, for the tree was too large for the house, and the barn, which was well built, had been fitted up with stoves.

Harold and Bert Fenn put the last touches to the decorations and the tree just as the supper bell rang the day before Christmas. Dinner was early, as some cousins were to come in the evening and they had to be met at the station four miles away.

The Bentons lived on the edge of a town at the foot of a thickly wooded mountain that sheltered many a wild animal and often human beings almost as wild.

The cousins came and soon were safely tucked away in the beds and on the sofas that were not used by the uncles and aunts, and all was quiet.

Two persons were not asleep, though. Sally was thinking: "I wonder if Harold did lock the barn up well—with all our beautiful presents there. Suppose some of the woods tramps should break in. Oh, dear, I wish morning were here!"

Harold also, rolled up on a mattress on the garret floor, remembered that, although he had locked the large doors, he had not thought about the little door, and he could not remember whether it was fastened.

Morning dawned bright and crisp. Harold helped the gardener build the fire in the stoves in the barn and then waited impatiently for Uncle John, who had promised to act as Santa Claus and who could not get there until the last moment. The train arrived without Uncle John, and the smaller children were beginning to fret at the delay. So it was finally decided that they would have to do without a Santa Claus, for Uncle John had always taken that part, and no one could be persuaded to take his place.

The candles were lighted, and the family and guests trooped over to the barn. Such cries of surprise and delight there were when the big tree stood before them in a blaze of glory! When the "ohs" and "ahs" had died away a little, Harold started to make an apology for the absence of Santa.

"Santa Claus was detained," he began, when a whistling sound and then a tinkling noise like sleighbells came from the tree. He stopped in astonishment. Every one else heard the noise, too, and thirty-two pairs of eyes were turned toward the tree. Certainly something was moving in the tree. The branches toward the center shook, though no one touched the tree, and as every one watched breathlessly the branches parted, and the queerest little figure you ever saw pushed its way out and stood on a limb, bowing politely right and left. It was about two feet high, with long flowing white beard and hair and dressed just as you always expect to see Santa Claus.

QUEER FIGURE PUSH-
ED OUT.

The children looked up in open mouthed astonishment, Harold among them, and the grownups, with puzzled expressions, were trying to solve the mystery when another sharp little whistle was heard, and the tiny Santa Claus, using his hands and feet with much skill, climbed down a branch or two. In so doing he turned his back and showed a long brown tail beneath his coat.

Then there was a shout of laughter, with clapping of hands, and the children fairly danced with joy as the small Santa Claus, sitting demurely on a branch, took hold of a very pretty pink and white dolly and, after examining her wax face closely, kissed her lovingly. At this there was a louder rear of laughter, in the midst of which a gruff voice called out:

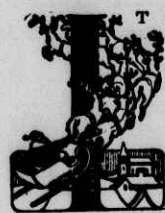
"Here, you beggar! Let it alone!" This voice came from the hayloft, and when the thirty-two pairs of eyes turned immediately to see who spoke they saw two pairs of legs hanging over the edge of the loft and two bearded faces peering down.

The two bearded men came down, one swinging from the beam and the other climbing down the ladder. Harold, with an exclamation of delight, sang both arms about the most hay-seedy looking one.

They every one exclaimed, "Why, Uncle John!" And Uncle John laughingly explained that he and a friend, whom he introduced as Mr. Whitman, had arrived on the midnight train and, as they did not wish to disturb the family, had tried the barn doors. Then they had decided upon this surprise.

"And the Santa Claus monkey is himself a present for you, Harold, to remind you to lock doors," said Uncle John, with a twinkle in his eye.

SANTA MAKES A TRIAL TRIP



IT was a week until Christmas. Santa Claus went all over his work rooms. All the toys were done and everything in place.

"The reindeer are in such fine shape and anxious for exercise I think I'll take them out for a trial run today," said he.

So saying, Santa hurried to his stables. There the reindeer were showing their impatience to be out in the open, and Santa gave orders to his stable elves to hitch up the steeds to the sleigh, as he meant to give the good animals a little exercise.

"They need a race now and then," he said. "Otherwise they'd get stiff knees and would feel clumsy when trying to gallop over shifting clouds and ragged treetops and uneven roofs."

After the ride of several hours Santa cried out to his reindeer:

"Now to earth, my good fellows. And don't lag. We must be there just as the dark is falling over the land. If we wait till the moon comes out we'll be seen, and that would never do."

As the darkness settled over the land old Santa dropped from a fleecy cloud to the top of a tall church steeple. There he got out of his sleigh, told his reindeer not to move from that steeple and made his descent to the roof of a convenient house. And past the windows of hundreds of homes he darted, peeping into them and counting the new faces he saw for the first time.

"Lots of new little ones," he said to himself, smiling. "God bless them all. Well, they keep me busy throughout the year. And they are increasing so rapidly that I'll have to take several hundred assistants next year."

Then Santa returned to the high church steeple, and as he was getting into his sleigh the aged bell ringer, accompanied by his grandson of ten, came out of the church with a lantern in his hand. The little grandson looked up and cried out to his grandfather:

"Oh, look, grandpa, there in the sky! It's Santa Claus and his reindeer. See them flying! Oh, now they are gone—clean through that white cloud over the church. Oh, grandpa, did you see them?"

"No, my son, and neither did you. Your mind is so full of Christmas just



SANTA PEEPED INTO HOUSE.

now that you see things mentally. You just imagined that Santa and his reindeer were over the church. Why, it wants a whole week before Christmas, sonny, and Santa never comes till Christmas eve. Come along and don't imagine things like that any more." And the aged bell ringer swung his lantern and led the way along the snow covered path to his home, his little grandson, Sammy, following. But in Sammy's heart was a feeling that he had not imagined seeing Santa. He felt the thing had been real. "He was just peeping round to see where the good children live and getting acquainted with the chimneys," said Sammy to himself. "But grandpa is too old to understand. He hasn't cared about Santa for many, many years. But I do, oh, I do! And how I should love to slip away up into the church tonight and visit Santa's realm! But that would be impossible. It is not intended for boys to get off the earth, so Santa comes to them."

Just then Sammy's grandmother opened the kitchen door for them, and as Sammy entered the good old lady stooped and kissed him, saying:

"I just had a letter from your cousins, Mabel and Ted, saying they were coming to spend Christmas with us and that they had written Santa Claus of the change of their address so that he could fetch their gifts here—along with yours. Bless the dears!"

And Sammy knew that Santa would do as his cousins asked him to, although grandpa laughed at the idea and said: "That is nonsense, good wife. Children should not believe such silly things." But Sammy knew a thing or two that grandpa did not know

NO ACCOUNTING FOR SANTA CLAUS



HE twins were deep in the mysteries of mince meat making under the direction of the faithful Dinah. Maud stood on a chair chopping beef and apples in a huge wooden bowl; Marian sorted raisins and

citron at a side table; Dinah stirred some savory mess that cooked. So busy were they that the stealthy entrance of Wilbur was not noticed until his excited face peered over Maud's shoulder. With a startled scream she dropped her chopper: "Go away, you horrid boy! We're too busy to bother with your pranks."

"Indeed, I'm not up to any pranks at all," he began in an aggrieved tone. "I've just seen something that makes me so excited!"

"Don't keep us in suspense!" came in curt accents from the side table.

"I've discovered all sorts of odd shaped bundles in the storeroom closet!" he exclaimed impressively. The twins gasped, and Dinah spoke crossly. "And



THE TRIO REVELED IN THE SHINING MASSES.

what was you doin' in dat closet? Children ain't got no call to meddle in what doan concern 'em, now!"

But neither of the three was to be put off thus. "How many were there?" asked Marian. "Did you peek in 'em?" queried Maud. Then Marian's sense of honor came to the rescue. "It really doesn't matter," she said. "They are evidently meant to be secrets. Perhaps Santa Claus is concerned in them."

"But," began the boy hesitatingly, "it makes me doubt if Santa Claus really exists to see all these things beforehand. Do you think there is such a person?"

"Well, Wilbur Pennington, of all silly questions! Doesn't he always fill our stockings and bring us a tree? Doesn't he always get the notes we put in the fireplace for him and give us everything we write for? Haven't we been told loads of times about his reindeer and sled and workshop at the north pole and his jolly face and all the rest of it?" These questions were fired at him in a volley by both twins.

"Well, I don't care," he answered doggedly. "The fellows in school laughed at me when I spoke of him the other day, and it does seem queer how he can do all the things he does."

"Go 'way, chile!" ejaculated Dinah. "Dere's lot ob t'ings dat's past our understandin'! Does we know how de blessed sun kin shine ober de whole country at once? Does we know how de wind blows an' de waves come rollin' widout ceasin'?" We needn't care how Santa Claus gets round de way he do. I disremember de time when he forgot me.

Ever since I was a little pickaninny befo' de war he's brung me gifts. Old missus used to 'low him to set up de tree in de big mansion an' leave de darkies' gits 'long wid de white folks' Go 'way, chile! Down yob try to make me believe dere ain't no Santa Claus, 'cause dere jest nacherally has to be one." And Dinah stirred violently to ease her injured feelings.

"Of course there is a Santa Claus," said Marian, coming to her rescue. "You see, Wilbur, it's just this way. There is no doubt of the love and care that give such joy to boys and girls at this happy time—the love that gratifies their dearest wishes and takes into account all their efforts to do what is right, even though the results often look like failure."

"It really doesn't matter by what name we call this love. If we're told it is Santa Claus, why, then, we ought to agree to accept the old fellow, with all his delightful traditions and novel ways of doing kindnesses. It's really the spirit of Santa Claus that makes Christmas the happiest day in the whole year. So I, for one, am not going to deny the dear fellow's existence. Come out and explore the snow-drifts till the sun goes down. Maybe we'll discover the north pole."

And the trio reveled in the shining masses until the shadows of darkness swallowed the sunlight, much as their doubts of Santa Claus had been swallowed in the depths of trusting love.

The Old Year And the New

I WATCHED the old year fade, And with its dying light The gloom, at first a shade, Turned into darkest night. And then I said: "Tis gone The old year is no more, And memories now alone Linger along the shore."

I watched the old year die, And with its fading day There came the thought that by Its death a brighter way Opens up, and, all things bright, We'll have surcease at last From specters dark as night. They'll live, but in the past.



I watched the old year's flight And then said, with a smile, "Ah, now the new year bright Will bide with us awhile! But ere my hopeful dreams Have realized one day Is dead and passed; it seems It starts but to decay."

Thus all along the way Gravestones must mark the miles, An epitaph each day, A tomb of tears and smiles. So we begin the new, ('Tis old ere we've begun) To find it's aging, too, With the first setting sun.

But 'twill not always be, There'll come a living day, And all things new, and we Shall live in endless May. No gravestones then will mark The tombs where dead hopes lie, No nights of sorrow dark, Creep o'er our changeless sky. —James Daniel Cleaton.

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