

A Defective Santa Claus

(by) James Whitcomb Riley

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ALLUS when our Pa he's away
Nen Uncle Sidney comes to stay
In our house here—so Ma an' me
An' Etty an' Lee-Bob won't be
Afeard of anything at night
Might happen—like Ma says it might.
(Ef Trip wuz big, I bet you he
'Uz best watch-dog you ever see!)
An' so last winter—ist before
It's go' be Chris'mus Day,—w'y, shore
Enough, Pa had to haf to go
To 'tend a lawsuit—"An' the snow
Ist right fer Santa Claus!" Pa said,
As he clum in old Ayersuz' sled,
An' said he's sorry he can't be
With us that night—"Cause," he says-ee,
'Old Santy might be comin' here—
This very night of all the year.
I got to be away!—so all
You kids must tell him—ef he call—
He's mighty welcome, an' yer Pa
He left his love with you an' Ma,
An' Uncle Sid!" An' clucked, an' leant
Back, laughin'—an' away they wend



An' he roll them old big
taters in the place

Nen Uncle, when she's gone back to
The kitchen, says, "We ust to do
Some cookin' in the ashes—Say,
S'posin'—we try some, thataway!"
An' nen he send us to tell Ma
Send two big 'taters in he saw
Pa's ben a-keepin' 'cause they got
The premium at the Fair. An' what
You think?—He rake a gre'n-big hole
In the hot ashes, an' he roll
Them old big 'taters in the place.
An' rake the coals back—an' his face
Ist swettin' so's he purt-nigh swear
'Cause it's so hot! An' when they're there
'Bout-time 'at we fergit 'em, he
Ist rake 'em out again—an' geel—
He bu'st 'em with his fist wite on
A' old stove-led, while Etty's gone
To get the salt, an' butter, too—
Ist like he said she haf to do,
No matter what Ma say! An' so



An' Uncle wave his
hands an' yell

An' Uncle wave his hands an' yell
'Yer old horse ort to have on bells!
But Pa yell back an' laugh an' say
'I 'spect when Santy come this way
It's time enough fer sleighbells nen!
An' holler back "Good-by!" again,
An' reach out with the driver's whip
An' cut behind an' drive back Trip.

An' so all day it snowed an' snowed!
An' Lee-Bob he ust watched the road,
In his high-chair an' Etty she



An' Lee-Bob, he ist
watched the road

U'd play with Uncle Sid an' me
Like she wuz he'ppin' feitch in wood
An' keepin' old fire goin' good,
Where Ma she wuz a-cookin' there
An' kitchen, too, an' ever where,
An' Uncle say, "At's ist the way
Yer Ma's ben workin', night an' day,
Sence she hain't big as Etty is
Ef Lee-Bob in that chair of his!
Nen Ma she'd laugh 't what Uncle
An' smack an' smooze his old bald head
An' say "Clear out the way till I
Can keep that pot from b'lin' dry!"



Where Ma she wuz
a-cookin' there

Had the best Lighter
ever wuz!"

He salt 'em butter 'em, an' blow
'Em cool enough to eat—
An' me—my! they're hard to beat!
An' Trip 'ud ist lay there an' pant
Like he'd laugh out loud, but he can't
Nen Uncle fill his pipe—an' we
'Ud he'p him light it—Sis an' me,
But mostly little Lee-Bob, 'cause
'He's the best lighter ever wuz!"
Like Uncle telled him wunst when Lee-
Bob cried an' jerked the light from me,
He wuz so mad! So Uncle pat
An' pet him. (Lee-Bob's ust to that—
'Cause he's the little-est, you know,
An' allus has ben honored so!)



An' old three-legged
stool!

Nen Uncle gets the flat-arn out,
An' while he's tellin' us all 'bout
Old Chris'mus-times when he's a kid,
He ist cracked hickernuts, he did,
Till they's a-crookful, mighty night!
An' when they're all done by an' by,
He raked the red coals out again
An' telled me, "Feitch that popcorn in
An' old three-legged stool—an'
The led an' all 'bout, little man—
An' yer old Uncle here, all show
You how corn's popped, long years ago
When me an' Santy Claus wuz boys
On Pap's old place in Illinois!
An' your Pa, too, wuz chums, all through,

With Santy!—Wish! Pa'd be here, too!
Nen Uncle sigh at Ma, an' she
Pat him again, an' say to me
An' Etty,—You take warning fair!
Don't talk too much, like Uncle there,
Ner don't fergit, like him, my dears,
That 'little pitchers has big ears!"
But Uncle say to her, "Clear out—
Yer brother knows what he's about—
You git your Chris'mus-cookin' done
Ef these pore children won't have none!"
Nen Trip wake up an' raise, an' nen
Turn roun' an' nen lay down again,
An' one time Uncle Sidney say,—
"When dogs is sleepin', thataway,
Like Trip, an' whimpers, it's a sign
He'll ketch eight rabbits—mayby nine—
Afore his fleas'll wake him—nen—
He'll bite hiss'e't to sleep again
An' try to dream he's ketch ten."



Will ketch eight rabbits
—mayby nine

An' when Ma's gone again back in
The kitchen, Uncle scratch his chin
An' say, "When Santy Claus an' Pa
An' me wuz little boys—an' Ma,
When she's 'bout big as Etty there,—
W'y,—When we're growed—no matter
where,

Santy he cross his heart an' say,
'I'll come to see you, all some day,
When you got childrens—all but me
An' pore old Sid!" Nen Uncle he
Ist kindo' shade his eyes an' pour
'Bout forty-seven bushels more
O' popcorn out the chublet there
In Ma's new basket on the chair.



I'll come to see you
all, someday

An' nen he telled us—an' talk low,
'So Ma can't hear," he say,—You know
Yer Pa know," when he crived away,
Tomorry's go' be Chris'mus-Day;
Well, nen tonight," he whisper, "see?
It's go' be Chris'mus-Eve," says-ee.
"An', like yer Pa hint, when he went,
Old Santy Claus (now hush) he's sent
Yer Pa a postul card, an' write
He's shorely go' be here tonight.
That's why your Pa's so bored to be



He's shorely go' be
here tonight



But Uncle et, an' Ma

Away tonight, when Santy he
Is go' be here, sleighbells an' all,
To make you kids a Chris-mus-call!
An' we're so glad to know fer shore
He's comin', I roll on the floor—
An' here come Trip a-waller'n' roun'
An' purt-nigh knock the clo'eborse
A-down!

An' Etty grab Lee-Bob an' prance
All roun' the room like it's a dance—
Till Ma she come and march us nen
To dinner, where we're still again,
But tickled so we ist can't eat
But pie, an' ist the best mincemeat
With raisins in,—But Uncle et,
An' Ma, an' where they set and set



When we all waddle back
with it

Till purt-nigh supper-time; nen we
Tell him he's got to fix the Tree
'Fore Santy gets here, like he said.
We go nen to the old woodshed—
All bundled up, through the deep snow
'An' showin' yet, jee-rooshy-O!
Uncle he said, an' he p us wade
Back where the Chris-mus-tree he
made
Out of a little jackoak-top
He git down at the sawmill-shed
An' Trip 'ud run ahead, you know,
An' tend-like he 'uz eatin' snow—
When we all waddle back with it,
An' Uncle set it up—and git



Hain't that a sleigh
an' sleighbells jinglin'!

It's in front the fireplace—'cause
He says "Tain't so at Santy Claus
Comes down all chimblees,—least tonight
He's comin' in this house all right—
By the front-door, as ort to be!
We'll all be hid where we can see!
Ner he look up, an' he see Ma
An' say, "It's ist too bad, yer Pa
Can't be here, so's to see the fun
The children will have, ever one!
Well, well—We hardly couldn't wait
Till it wuz dusk, an' dark an' late
Enough to light the lamp!—An' Lee-
Bob light a candle on the tree
'Ist one—'cause I'm 'The Lighter!—Nen
He clumb on Uncle's knee again
An' hug us bofe,—an' Etty git
Her little chest an' set on it,
Wite clo'st while Uncle telled some more
'Bout Santy Claus, an' clo'st he wore
'All maked o' furs, an' trimmed w' white
As cotton is, er snow at night!
An' nen, all sudden-like, he say,—

"Hush! Listen there! Hain't that a sleigh
An' sleighbells jinglin'?" Trip go "Whoah!
Like he hear bells an' smell 'em, too.
Nen we all listen. An'-sir, shore
Enough, we hear bells—more and more
A-jinglin' clo'ster—clo'ster still
Down the old crook-road roun' the hill.
An' Uncle he jumps up, an' all
The chairs he jerks back by the wall
An' 'trows a' overcoat an' pair
O' winder-curtains over there
An' says, "Hide quick, er you're too late!
Them bells is stoppin' at the gate!
Git back o' them-air chairs an' hide,
Cause I hear Santy's voice outside!"
An' Bang! bang! we heerd the door—



Nen it flew open

Nen it flew open, and the floor
Blowed full o' snow—that's first we saw,
Till little Lee-Bob shriek at Ma
'There's Santy Claus! I know him by
His big white mufftash!—an' ist cry
An' laugh an' squeal an' dance an' yell—
Till, when he quiet down a spell,
Old Santy bow an' 'trow a kiss
To him—an' one to me an' Sis
An' nen go clo'st to Ma an' stoop
An' kiss her—An' nen give a whoop
That fainted her!—Cause when he bent
An' kiss her, he ist backed an' went
Wite 'ginst the Chris-mus-Tree ist where
The candle's at Lee-Bob lit there!
An' set his white-fur belt afire—
An' blaze streaked roun' his waist an'
higher o'



Too hot got to put you out

Wite up his old white beard an' tho't
Nen Uncle grabs th' old overcoat
An' flops it over Santy's head,
An' swing the door wide back an' said
'Come out, old man!—an' quick about!
It—I've ist got to put you out!"
An' out he sprawled him in the snow—
'Now roll!" he says—"Hi-roll-ee-O!
An' Santy, sputter in "Ouch! Gee-whizz!
Ist roll an' roll fer all they ist!
Ma up, an' say, "Fer mercy sake!
'Cause I could hear him yappin' so—
An' I heerd Santy, wunst er twice,
Say, as he's rollin', "Drat the feller!
Nen Uncle come back in, an' shake
Ma up, an' say, "Fer mercy sake!
He hain't hurt none!" An' nen he said,—
'You youngsters h'ist up-stairs to bed!
Here! kiss yer Ma 'Good-night,' an' me,—
We'll he'p old Santy fix the Tree—
An' all yer whistles burns an' drums
I'll he'p you took when morning comes!"



Some wuz a-talkin'
out there by the fence

It's long while fore we go to sleep,—
Cause down-stairs, all-time somepin' keep
Santy bear up last night when that
Air fire broke out, an' quicker'n scar
He's all a-blazin', an' them-air
Gun-cottin whisksers that he wear
Ist flashin'—till I burn a hole
In the snow with him, and he roll
The front yard dry as Chris'mus jokes
Old parents plays on little folk!
But, long's a smell o' tow'er wool,
I kept 'im rollin' beautiful—
Till I wuz sure I shorely see
He's squenched! W'y, hadn't ben fer me,
That old man might a-burn clear down
Clean—plum—level with the groun'!"
Nen Ma say, "There, Sid, that'll dol—
Breakfast is ready—Chris'mus too—
Your voice 'ud sou'n' best, sayin' Grace—
Say it!" An' Uncle bow his face
An' say so long a Blessing nen,
Trip bark' two times 'ere it's "A-men!"



An' that's the last I know

A-kin'do' scufflin' roun' the floors—
An' openin' doors, an' shettin' doors—
An' could hear Trip a-whinin', too,
Like he didn't know ist what to do—
An' tongs a-clankin' down k'thump!
Nen some one squonkin' the old pump—
An' 'Whooh! how cold it sou'n' out there!
I could ist see the pump-spout whers
It's got ice chin-whiskers all wet
An' drippy—An' I see it yet!
An' nen, seem-like, I hear some men
A-talkin' out there by the fence!
An' one says, "Oh, 'bout twelve o'clock!"
'Nen," another says, "Here's to you,
Dad—



An' one hand's froze, too

God bless us ever one!" An' nen,
I heerd the old pump squonk again,
An' nen I say my prayer all through
Like Uncle Sidney learn' me to—
'O Father mine, e'en as Thine own,
This child lookin' up to Thee alone:
Asleep or waking, give him still,
His Elder brother's wish and will!
An' that's the last I know—Till Ma
She's callin' us—an' so is Pa,—
He holler "Chris'mus-gif!" an' say,
'I'm got back home fer Chris'mus-Day!
An' Uncle Sid's here, too—an' he
Is nibblin' roun' yer Chris'mus-Tree!"
Nen Uncle holler, "I suppose
Yer Pa's so proud he's froze his nose
He wants to turn it up at us,
'Cause Santy kick' up such a fuss—
Tetchin' hiss'e'f off same as ef
He wuz his own fireworks hiss'e'f!"



An' Uncle bow his face

An' when we're down-stairs,—shore
enough,
Pa's nose is froze an' salve an' stuff
All on it—an' one hand's froze, too.
An' got a old yam red-and-blue
Mitt on it—"An' w'e's froze some more
Acrost his chest, an' kindo' sore
All roun' his dy-fram." Uncle say—
'But Pa he'd ort a-seen the way
Santy bear up last night when that
Air fire broke out, an' quicker'n scar
He's all a-blazin', an' them-air
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