

# A Defective Santa Claus

(by James Whitcomb Riley)

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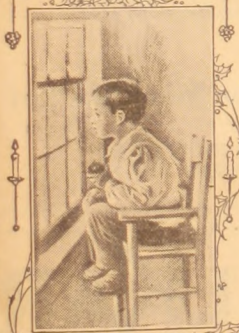
**A**LLUS when our Pa he's away  
Nen Uncle Sidney comes to stay  
In our house here—so Ma an' me  
An' Etty an' Lee-Bob won't be  
Afeard of anything at night  
Might happen—like Ma says it might.

(Ef Trip wuz big, I bet you he 'Uz best watch-dog you ever see!)  
An' so last winter—last 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  
Is 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 went!



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 ist 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's p'pin' feich in wood  
An' keepin' old fire goin' good,  
Where Ma she wuz a-cookin' there  
An' kitchen, too, an' ever'where.  
An' Uncle say, "'An' ist the way  
Yer Ma's ben workin', night an' day,  
Sence she hain't big as Etty is  
Er Lee-Bob in that chair of his!"  
Nen Ma she'd laugh 't what Uncle said  
An' smack an' smooove his old bald head  
An' say "Clear out the way till I  
Can keep that pot from bin' dry!"



Where Ma she wuz a-cookin' there.



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,  
Sposin' 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 great big hole  
In the hot ashes, an' he roll  
Them old big 'taters in the place.  
An' rake the coals back—an' his face  
Is sweeten' so's he purt-nigh swear  
'Cause it's so hot! An' when they're there  
'Bout-time 'at we fertig' em,  
He ist 'em out again—an' geel—  
He bust 'em with his fist wite on  
A' old stove-lead, 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



'Tis the best lighter ever wuz!"

He said an' butter 'em, an' blow  
'Em cool enough to eat—  
An' me an' 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 'supposed so!)



An' old three-legged stool—

Nen Uncle gits 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 cracklin', mighty night!  
An' when they're all done by an' by,  
He raked the red coals out again  
An' telled me, "Feich that popcorn in,  
An' old three-legged stool—an'  
The led an' all now, little man—  
An' yer old Uncle here, full 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!—Wisht 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 fertig, 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  
Er these pore children won't have none!"  
Nen Trip wake up an' raise, an' nen  
Turn round 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—maybe nine—  
Afore his fleas'll wake him—nen—  
He'll bite hissef to sleep again  
An' try to dream he's ketch ten."



'Till ketch eight rabbits—maybe 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 childerns—all but me  
An' pore old Sid!" Nen Uncle he  
Ist kindo' shade his eyes an' pour  
Bout forty-leven bushels more  
O' popcorn out the spout 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 drove 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 postal card, an' write  
He's shorely go' be here tonight.  
That's why your Pa's bored to be



'Tis 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' 'bout-nigh knock the clo'shorse  
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 can't eat  
But pie, an' ist the bit mince-meat  
With raisins in, 'Buz Uncle et,  
An' Ma. An' there 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  
Fure Santy gets here, like he said,  
We go nen to the old woodshed—  
All bundled up, through the deep snow—  
"An' snowin' yet, jee-roo-shy-ol!"  
Uncle he said, an' he'p us wade  
Back where the Chris-mus-tree  
made  
Out of a little jackoak-top  
He git 'down at the sawmill-shop—  
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 chimbles,—least tonight  
He's comin' in this house all right—  
By the front-door, as ort to be!  
We'll 'at-be hid where we can see!  
Nen he look up, an' he see Ma  
An' say, "It's ist too bad their Pa  
Can't be here, so's to see the fun  
The childern will have, ever' one!  
Well, we!—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 chist an' set on it  
Wite clos't while Uncle telled some more  
Bout Santy Claus, an' clo's he wore  
"All maked o' furs, an' trimmed 'as 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 "Whooh!"  
Like he hear bells an' smell 'em, too.  
Nen we all listen. An'—sir, shore  
Enough, we hear bells—more and more  
A-jinglin' clos'ter—clos'ter 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' th'ows 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! bang! we heard the door—



Nen it flew open.

Nen it flew open, and the first  
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 muftash!"—an' ist cry  
An' laugh an' squeal an' dance an' yell—  
Till, when he quiet down a spell,  
Old Santy bow-an' th'ow a kiss  
To him—an' one to me an' Sis  
An' nen go clos't 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 ist there—  
An' set his white-fur belt afire—  
An' blaze streaked roun' his wais an'  
higher o'



'Tis ist got to put you out.

Wite up his old white beard an' th'out  
Nen Uncle grabs th' old overcoat  
An' flops it over Santy's head,  
An' swig the door wide back an' say  
"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-ol!"  
An' Santy, sputter n' "Ouch! Gee-whizz!"  
Ist roll an' roll for all they ist!  
An' Trip he's out there, too,—I know,  
'Cause I could hear him yappin' so—  
An' I heard Santy, wunst er twice  
Say, as he's rollin', "Drat the feich!"  
Nen Uncle come back in, an' whakes  
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 'bout when morning comes!"



Some mense a talkin' out there by the fence.



An' that's the last I know.

A-kinde' scuffin' 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 soun' out there!  
I could ist see the pump-squout where  
It's got ice chin-whiskers all wet  
An' drippy—An' I see it yet!  
An' nen, seem-like, I hear some mense  
A-talkin' out there by the fence,  
An' one says, "Oh, 'bout twelve o'clock"  
"Nen," nother'n' says, "Here's to you,  
Doc!"



An' one hand's froze, too.

God bless us ever' one!" An' nen  
I heard the old pump squeak 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 looks up to Thee alone:  
Asleep or waking, give him still  
His Elder brother's wish and will,  
An' that 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 'uz froze his nose  
He wants to turn it up at us,  
'Cause Santy kick' up such a fuss—  
Tetchin' hisse' off same as ef  
He wuz his own fireworks hisse'!"



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 yarn red-and-blue  
Mitt on it—An' he's froze some more  
Across his chist, an' kindo' sore!  
All roun' his dy-gram," 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 scat  
He's all a-blazin', an' them-air  
Gun-cottin whiskers 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 him rollin' beautiful—  
Till I wuz sure I shorely see  
He's squench'd! W'y, hadn't ben'er me  
That old man might a-burnt clear down  
Clean—plum—level with the groun'!"  
Nen Ma say, "There, Sid; that'll do—  
Breakfast is ready—Chris-mus too—  
Your voice 'ud soun' best, sayin' Grace—  
Say it." An' Uncle bow his face  
An' say so long a Blessin' nen,  
Trip bark two times fore it's "A-men!"