

# A. Locked out. Santa Claus

By JOHN KENDRICK DANCOS.



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FROM my earliest infancy up to the present I have always had the good fortune to believe in Santa Claus. Lots of people, old and young—particularly some very wise young people that I know—have told me that no such person exists, but I know better. The dear old saint is to my knowledge a very beautiful spirit, and every time that Christmas comes along I see him almost everywhere I turn, among the rich, the powerful, the fashionable; equally among the poor and lowly. I've seen him beaming from the comfortable cushions of a fine electric motor car speeding along the parkways, and perched happily up alongside the driver of a heavily laden truck in the dusk of a bitterly cold winter's day prompting his companion to deal gently with his weary horses and under the spell of the hour to forget the dreadful condition of the highway, the clogging of the streets and his poor frostbitten nose and cheeks. So no one need tell me that Santa Claus does not exist or try to push the glorious old gentleman back into the realm of what the wise people call myth. I shall simply treat all such absurd statements as that with a broad grin and a wink that shows that I know better.

But I have other reasons than these for believing in Santa Claus, for once, some years ago—I shall not specify the exact date—I lay in ambush for him one Christmas morning and caught him just as he had completed his work upon my stocking, hanging from the chimney piece, and made him talk to me.

"Hullo, you!" I cried, as I popped out from behind the bureau, where I had been hiding. "You're Mr. Santa Claus, aren't you?"

"Yes," he said, with a funny little laugh that made him shake so that it also shook the house. "I may as well admit it. Nothing to be ashamed of, eh?"

"No, indeed," said I. "Something to be proud of, rather, I should say."

"Thank you," said the old gentleman. "It's very good of you to say so. What can I do for you?"

"I thought I'd ask you to take me back with you to Santa Clausville," I answered. "I'd like to take a peep at those wonderful workshops of yours."

"Hm! Well, that isn't a bad idea," said he, stroking his beard thoughtfully. "But—er—what would your family think about it? Wouldn't they worry over your disappearance? They might think I'd turned kidnapper, and that would never do."

"I shouldn't be gone long," I suggested. "Say only for a day. I could get a good peep at things in a day, couldn't I?"

"Yes, I think you could," said Santa Claus. "But the way things go in this world there is no communication between Santa Town, or Clausburg, as some people call it, except between midnight Christmas Eve and six o'clock Christmas morning. So if you want back with me to-night it would be a whole year before you could come home again. I'm afraid you'd be awfully homesick before long, even with me, and your friends would be dreadfully worried."

"Do you only have six hours in which to do all your work?" I asked.

"That is all I have here," said Santa Claus. "That is why of late years you find me using the mails and the express companies so much in the delivery of packages. There are so many more places to be visited now than there used to be that I have been forced to have assistance. If I didn't I'd be detained here so late that I couldn't get home at all for a whole year."

"What?" I cried. "Can't even you get in after six?"

"None!" replied Santa Claus. "If I were one minute late in driving up to the gates of my own country I should be unable to get in."



"Hullo, you!" I cried as I popped out from behind the bureau where I had been hiding.

And the dear old Saint began.

"It was two years ago," said Santa Claus. "There was an unusually large number of babies to be cared for that year, and they were just the goodest lot you ever saw, though between you and me I think all babies are good. When they don't seem to be as good as they might be it almost always means there's a pin sticking into them or their dinner doesn't agree with them or some other good reason which they always know. They didn't cry much at night and they spent most of their days smiling and cooing and clapping their hands gleefully. Somehow or other, while I am fond of all babies, I seemed to be particularly fond of them. Your little brother Dick, for instance, and Sammy Bronson's sister Polly—she was the sweetest little Polly that ever was."

"Yes," said I. "I know 'em both. Polly's pretty fine."

"Well, there were most a million babies like that that year, and I had something for every one of them," Santa Claus continued. "It was the busiest night I'd ever had, and in those days I was doing the work all by myself. So, when half-past five Christmas morning came, both my reindeer and I were dreadfully tired and sleepy. The reindeer were so tired they became nervous, and while I was fixing up the stockings in a big orphan asylum in Chicago they both took fright at a locomotive whistle half a mile away and ran away. They flew back to Clausburg and got in all right, but I had to trudge home on foot. I got there at half-past six and the gates were closed. It was a frightful situation. I knocked and knocked and knocked, but nobody came, and I realized that the case was hopeless. I couldn't blame anybody either, because I'd made the rules myself, and in refusing to answer my summons the gatekeeper was merely obeying my orders."

"I should think you'd be glad to see people there—you're always so good natured," said I.

"That's all very true," said Santa Claus. "But you don't quite understand. We work so hard for six months of the year that we have to rest the other six. While we are sleeping we can't see people you know—we'd be awfully dull company if we did see them—and while we are working we are too busy to be interrupted. By the time I got back to Clausburg everybody'd gone to sleep for the annual rest, and I could have hammered six months at the gate before I could have wakened any one of them."

"I see," said I. "Somebody might have set up for you, though," I added.

"It's against the rules to sit up after six," said Santa Claus, and then he went on. "Well, I didn't know what to do," said he. "I wandered about outside for three or four hours, and then realized that there was only one thing to be done—make the best of it, and go back to earth again and earn my living as best I could until the gates were open again. So back to Chicago I trudged and then boarded a train for New York, making so close a connection that I hadn't time to buy a ticket. We'd got as far as Kalamazoo when up comes the conductor."

"Ticket, please," he said, stopping in front of me and getting his puncher ready. "I told him I hadn't one and asked how much the fare was to New York, intending to pay in cash."

"Thirty-six dollars," said the conductor. "I had about ten thousand in my pocket—so this did not worry me. Talking out my wallet I counted out the necessary thirty-six one dollar bills and added ten dollars more, which I told the conductor to keep for himself in honor of the season. And then—oh dear! It was awful!"

"Perfectly awful," I said.

"Why?" I asked. "Didn't you want to give the conductor ten dollars?"

"I'm Santa Claus," said I, when he handed me back my toy money.

"I haven't a doubt of it," he replied. "You ought to travel in a sleigh, not in a sleeping car."

"My reindeer ran away and I've been locked out," I explained.

"Oh, yes, I know," said he with a wink at the other passengers. "But really, you'll have to get off here. I haven't any orders to carry you through to New York—unless you ride in the stockstack. It's the only chimney on the train."

"He was horrid!" said I indignantly again.

"Oh, no," said Santa Claus. "He was only doing his duty. But it was very hard for me. I got off the train and made up my mind to work until I had earned enough to pay my way to New York in America money."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I shoveled snow," said Santa Claus with a deep drawn sigh. "It was the only dishonest thing I ever did."

"Shovelling snow is not dishonest," Santa Claus said I. "Lots of good people do it."

"That is true," said Santa Claus, "but the way I did it was not quite right. There was not much snow in Kalamazoo that year and I had to make a little go a great ways. I shoveled it off one side with me to another and then back again



"So I kept it up, seeing that that beautiful snow from one walk to another."

now from one walk to another, back ward and forward, until I had earned all the money I needed."

"It was kind of queer," said I.

"Yes," said Santa Claus. "And I've always been sorry for it. But what could I do? I had to earn my living, and really it was just as hard work as if I had simply shoveled the snow into the street. I've more than made up for it since by leaving extra presents at each of these houses at Christmas time, too—so in a way I have sinned for my mistake. Anyhow, I earned my fifty dollars and paid my fare to New York with it, reaching that city about St. Valentine's Day. And then I began a very difficult struggle for existence. I got a position first on the elevated railroad as a guard, but I couldn't keep it because I couldn't make people step lively. I guess I was too polite. Instead of calling out 'Step lively there!' in tones like thunder or a cannon going off suddenly and making people so nervous that they couldn't help jumping fast I'd say, 'Beg pardon, ladies and gentlemen, but if you don't mind accelerating your footsteps just a trifle it would materially aid the engineer of this train in his conscientious efforts to run through to the terminal on schedule time. You'd think being polite that way would bring about the desired result, but it wasn't so. Quite the contrary. Instead of hurrying, people would stop to listen to what I was saying, and the consequence was my train never did get through on time. It was always from one to two hours late."

"And they discharged you for being polite, did they?" said I.

"That was the real reason," said Santa Claus, "but the one they gave was that I was so fat I took up the room of three

ordinary passengers, so that they lost ten cents at the very least on each trip. At the end of six weeks I was discharged and compelled to look for a new position."

"Poor old Santa Claus—it was outrageous!" said I.

"Oh, no," said the kind hearted old saint. "It was just business. I am pretty big around, you know. Well, the next thing I did was to try being a cab driver. I got a position as the driver of a hansom cab, but I soon lost that. My great size was against me there, too. You see, every time I'd get up into that little seat at the rear of the hansom I was so heavy I lifted the horse clear off his feet. Only his hind legs could reach the ground, and people were afraid to ride with me because they thought the horse was too risky. Anybody would think that to see a horse trotting down the avenue on his hind legs and his fore feet waving in the air, wouldn't they?"

"Yes, I think they would," said I.

"I tried a four wheeler, next, with very similar results," continued the old gentleman. "I weighed down the front of the cab so far that the people inside had all they could do to keep from sliding out the front windows, so my employer called me to him one morning and paid me my wages and sent me off. He gave me a letter of recommendation to a friend of his in the coal business, for which I thanked him, little dreaming why he did it and for what reason he thought the coal dealer would like to employ me. I presented my letter to the coal man the next morning. He was delighted with me, apparently, and told me to call around the following Monday and he would give me employment at once. This, of course, I did, but alas! only again to be bitterly disappointed."

"Did he go back on his word?" I asked.

"No, indeed; but the work he had for me to do—dear me, I never could think of such a thing," groaned Santa Claus. "What was it?" I asked.

"Nothing half so honest," said Santa Claus. "He wanted me to drive his



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I sat at Bunkerberry's, 1,015 Canal Street,

written on them. He thought it would be a good advertisement of his place, and I guess it was, for he kept me busy until December. It wasn't pleasant work, but it was honest, and I kept at it steadily until I began to get thin, what with the food they gave me and the exercise I had to take. My clothes hung loosely upon me like portieres, and finally he discharged me—said I wasn't what he wanted any more."

Santa Claus paused for a moment, drew a deep sigh and resumed.

"Then came the last," he said. "To keep my clothes from falling off I stuffed them full of old papers and straw and looked for another place, and a week before Christmas had the good luck to find one in a toy shop. The owner of it thought I looked so like Santa Claus that it would be a first rate thing to have me in his shop for the last week before Christmas. I never let on that I really was Santa Claus for fear he'd think I was crazy or an impostor. I simply went to work and stayed with him for five days, when I was discharged again. The next day never could get used to selling Christmas presents, so when people came in to buy things I'd just wrap them up and give them away, and one night when the head of the firm came to count up the profits we had a terrible time of it. I'd given away about eight hundred dollars' worth of dolls and mechanical toys and Noah's arks, and when he asked what had become of them and I told him—oh, dear me, he was terribly put out, and so was I. I was put out so quick that I scarcely knew what had happened until I gathered myself together and took an inventory of my legs, arms, teeth, eyes and other necessities of life. No bones were broken, however, and I was consoled by the fact that only two days remained before the gates of Clausburg would be open again and I could go home."

"It was this thought that carried me through, and when, shortly after midnight of Christmas Eve, I heard the jingling bells of my reindeer and sleigh in the cold, frosty air you can be sure it was a very happy old Santa Claus that waited until they were within halting distance. As soon as they heard my voice they

stopped still and then came prancing down to my side, overjoyed to find me still alive and not much the worse for my year of exile. I clambered into the sleigh, and when morning came and we reached the gates of Clausburg after a night of gift bearing I once again entered the streets of my beloved city, and an hour later was comfortably lying in my own little trundle bed."

"That," said Santa Claus, rising, "is the story of the only time I was ever locked out of Clausburg, and I received then and there that it would be the—"

The sentence was never finished, for even as the old Saint spoke the clock on my mantelpiece began striking six, and the old gentleman with an exclamation of dismay sprang from the bed. Here the lightning up through the chimney and, I presume, leaped into his sleigh and started at breakneck speed for home. For as I listened I heard him give the command in quick nervous tones—

"Clang there, Vixen! Glime! Bounce and Dancer and Prancer! We've got three seconds to make the great olddaddy!"

But he need not have hurried so fast, and I presume he reached home in safety, for to tell the truth my clock was fifty-five minutes fast.

So I kept it up, seeing that that beautiful snow from one walk to another.

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