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Billy's Santa Claus Experience

Cornelia Redmond

Of course I don't believe in any such person as Santa Claus, but Tommy does. Tommy is my little brother, aged six. Last Christmas I thought I'd make some fun for the young one by playing Santa Claus — but as always happens when I try to amuse anybody, I just got myself into trouble.

I went to bed pretty early on Christmas Eve so as to give my parents a chance to get the presents out of the closet in mamma's room, where they'd been locked up since they were bought. I kept my clothes on except my shoes and put my nightgown over them so I'd look white if anyone came near me. Then I waited, pinching myself to stay awake. After a while papa came in with a lot of things and dumped them on Tommy's bed. Then mamma came in and put some things on mine and in our two stockings that were hung up by the chimney. Then they both went out very quietly, and soon all the lights went out too.

I kept on pinching myself and waiting, and then, when I was sure everybody was asleep, I got up. The first thing I did was slip into my sister's room and borrow her white fur rug — the one mamma gave her for her birthday — and her sealskin cape that was hanging on the closet door. I tied the cape on my head with shoestrings and it made a fine big cap. Then I wrapped the fur rug around me and pinned it with some large safety pins I found on Tommy's garters. Next I took mamma's new scrap-basket, the one trimmed with roses that Mrs. Simmons had embroidered for the church fair, and piled all of Tommy's toys into it. I fastened it to my back with papa's suspenders, and then I started for the roof.

I hurt my fingers opening the scuttle, but kept right on. It was snowing hard, and I stood on the roof and let myself get pretty well covered with flakes. Then I crawled over to the chimney that led down into our room and climbed up on top of it. I had brought my bicycle lantern with me and lit it so Tommy could see me when I came down.



There didn't seem to be any places inside the chimney where I could hold on by my feet, but the ceiling in our room wasn't very high and I'd often jumped nearly as far — so I just let her go, and I suppose I went down. Anyway, I didn't know anything for a long time after that.

Then I woke up, all in the dark, with my head feeling queer. When I tried to turn over I found I wasn't in bed at all, and then my arms and legs began to hurt terribly — mostly one arm that was bent under me. I tried to get up but couldn't because of the pain, and I was terribly cold, and there was nothing to stand on. I was just stuck. So I began to cry.

Pretty soon I heard mamma's voice saying to papa: "Those must be sparrows making that noise in the chimney. Just touch a match to the wood in the boys' fireplace."

I heard papa strike a light and then the wood began to crackle. By jinks! It began to get hot and smoky and I screamed:

"Help! Murder! Put out that fire if you don't want to burn me up!"

Then I heard papa stamping on the wood and mamma calling out, "Where's Billy? Where is my child?"

Next Tommy woke up and began to cry and everything was terrible — specially the pain all over me. Then papa called out, very stern: "William, if you are in that chimney, come down at once!" And I answered, crying, that I would if I could, but I was stuck and couldn't.

Then I heard papa getting dressed, and pretty soon he and John from the stable went up on the roof and let down ropes that I got around me and they hauled me up.

It was just daylight and I was all black and sooty and scratched, and my arm was broken.

Everybody scolded me except mamma. I had spoiled my sister's white rug and broken all of Tommy's toys, and the snow that got in through the scuttle melted and stained the parlor ceiling — besides, I guess it cost papa a good deal to get my arm mended. Nobody would believe that I had just meant to make some fun for Tommy, and my arm and all my bruised places hurt something awful for a long time.

If I live to be a million, I am never going to play Santa Claus again.

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