



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Errors of Santa Claus

Stephen Leacock

It was Christmas Eve.

The Browns, who lived in the adjoining house, had been dining with the Joneses. Brown and Jones were sitting over wine and walnuts at the table. The others had gone upstairs.

"What are you giving to your boy for Christmas?" asked Brown.

"A train," said Jones, "new kind of thing—automatic."

"Let's have a look at it," said Brown.

Jones fetched a parcel from the sideboard and began unwrapping it.

"Ingenious thing, isn't it?" he said. "Goes on its own rails. Queer how kids love to play with trains, isn't it?"

"Yes," assented Brown. "How are the rails fixed?"

"Wait, I'll show you," said Jones. "Just help me to shove these dinner things aside and roll back the cloth. There! See! You lay the rails like that and fasten them at the ends, so—"

"Oh, yes, I catch on, makes a grade, doesn't it? Just the thing to amuse a child, isn't it? I got Willy a toy aeroplane."

"I know, they're great. I got Edwin one on his birthday. But I thought I'd get him a train this time. I told him Santa Claus was going to bring him something altogether new this time. Edwin, of course, believes in Santa Claus absolutely. Say, look at this locomotive, would you? It has a spring coiled up inside the fire box."

"Wind her up," said Brown with great interest. "Let's see her go."

"All right," said Jones. "Just pile up two or three plates or something to lean the end of the rails on. There, notice the way it buzzes before it starts. Isn't that a great thing for a kid, eh?"

"Yes," said Brown. "And say, see this little string to pull the whistle! By Gad, it toots, eh? Just like real?"

"Now then, Brown," Jones went on, "you hitch on those cars and I'll start her. I'll

be engineer, eh!"

Half an hour later Brown and Jones were still playing trains on the dining-room table. But their wives upstairs in the drawing-room hardly noticed their absence. They were too much interested.

"Oh, I think it's perfectly sweet," said Mrs. Brown. "Just the loveliest doll I've seen in years. I must get one like it for Ulvina. Won't Clarisse be perfectly enchanted?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Jones, "and then she'll have all the fun of arranging the dresses. Children love that so much. Look, there are three little dresses with the doll, aren't they cute? All cut out and ready to stitch together."

"Oh, how perfectly lovely!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown. "I think the mauve one would suit the doll best, don't you, with such golden hair? Only don't you think it would make it much nicer to turn back the collar, so, and to put a little band—so?"

"What a good idea!" said Mrs. Jones. "Do let's try it. Just wait, I'll get a needle in a minute. I'll tell Clarisse that Santa Claus sewed it himself. The child believes in Santa Claus absolutely."

And half an hour later Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Brown were so busy stitching dolls' clothes that they could not hear the roaring of the little train up and down the dining table, and had no idea what the four children were doing. Nor did the children miss their mothers.

"Dandy, aren't they?" Edwin Jones was saying to little Willie Brown, as they sat in Edwin's bedroom. "A hundred in a box, with cork tips, and see, an amber mouthpiece that fits into a little case at the side. Good present for Dad, eh?"

"Fine!" said Willie appreciatively. "I'm giving Father cigars."

"I know, I thought of cigars too. Men always like cigars and cigarettes. You can't go wrong on them. Say, would you like to try one or two of these cigarettes? We can take them from the bottom. You'll like them, they're Russian—away ahead of Egyptian."

"Thanks," answered Willie. "I'd like one immensely. I only started smoking last spring—on my twelfth birthday. I think a feller's a fool to begin smoking cigarettes too soon, don't you? It stunts him. I waited till I was twelve."

"Me too," said Edwin, as they lighted their cigarettes. "In fact, I wouldn't buy them now if it weren't for Dad. I simply had to give him something from Santa Claus. He believes in Santa Claus absolutely, you know."

And, while this was going on, Clarisse was showing little Ulvina the absolutely lovely little bridge set that she got for her mother.

"Aren't these markers perfectly charming?" said Ulvina. "And don't you love this little Dutch design—or is it Flemish, darling?"

"Dutch," said Clarisse. "Isn't it quaint? And aren't these the dearest little things, for putting the money in when you play. I needn't have got them with it—they'd have sold the rest separately—but I think it's too utterly slow playing without money, don't you?"

"Oh, abominable," shuddered Ulvina. "But your mamma never plays for money, does she?"

"Mamma! Oh, gracious, no. Mamma's far too slow for that. But I shall tell her that Santa Claus insisted on putting in the little money boxes."

"I suppose she believes in Santa Claus, just as my mamma does."

"Oh, absolutely," said Clarisse, and added, "What if we play a little game! With a double dummy, the French way, or Norwegian Skat, if you like. That only needs two."

"All right," agreed Ulvina, and in a few minutes they were deep in a game of cards with a little pile of pocket money beside them.

About half an hour later, all the members of the two families were again in the drawing-room. But of course nobody said anything about the presents. In any case they were all too busy looking at a beautiful big book, with maps in it, that the Joneses had brought to give to Grandfather.

But upstairs, away upstairs in a sitting-room of his own Grandfather Jones was looking with an affectionate eye at the presents that stood beside him. There was a beautiful whisky decanter, with silver filigree outside (and whiskey inside) for Jones, and for the little boy a big nickel-plated whistle.

Later on, far in the night, the person, or the influence, or whatever it is called Santa Claus, took all the presents and placed them in the people's stockings.

And, being blind as he always has been, he gave the wrong things to the wrong people—in fact, he gave them just as indicated above.

But the next day, in the course of Christmas morning, the situation straightened itself out, just as it always does.

Indeed, by ten o'clock, Brown and Jones were playing with the train, and Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Jones were making dolls' clothes, and the boys were smoking cigarettes, and Clarisse and Ulvina were playing cards for their pocket-money.

And upstairs—away up—Grandfather was drinking whisky and playing the whistle.

And so Christmas, just as it always does, turned out all right after all.



Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why riri.ro.com offers 3,000+ free stories — fairy tales, fables, bedtime stories, myths and more — for every age, in 13 languages, with free printable PDFs and often audio. Reading should be a right, not a privilege. Share riri.ro.com and spread the joy of reading.

Instagram: @riri.ro_reading · Pinterest: pinterest.com/riri.ro.com