

A Sure Enough Santy.

Ain't there no Santy Claus—nowhere? blubbered little Butch Panner disconsolately. He was at his Grandmother Flickinger's, and his Aunt Jule had just been maligning the good old patron saint of children for the small boy's benefit.

"No, there ain't," answered Jule decidedly; "your ma and pa's the only Santy there is."

"Who told you?" inquired Butch suspiciously between sobs.

"Nobody—always knew it."

"It jest as nice to have your ma and pa git the presents when you're used to it," assured his small Aunt Opal, who was helping her mother to peel the potatoes for supper.

"Ain't there no reindeers?" Butch inquired dolefully.

"No nothin'," returned Jule.

"Don't be come down the chimney?"

"Naw—fat man like him—what's got into you, Butch, to believe such foolishness?" she jeered.

"Then there is a Santy," cried Butch, unexpectedly brightening.

"New there ain't," again denied Jule.

"But you said a fat man like him," repeated her small nephew.

"Can't a feller open his head without you ketch 'im up? Everybody plays there's a Santy and that he's fat—that's all there is to it. Ast your gramma," concluded Jule triumphantly.

"Ain't there a Santy, Gramma?" questioned Butch.

"No-o, I guess there ain't none," answered Ma Flickinger reluctantly, disliking to put her daughter Jule in a lie.

"But Jimmie Bistle seen him twict," urged Butch.

"I dunno much about it; ast your grandpa," evaded ma, as Pa Flickinger, a tall, shambling man, lounged into the room; for it was Saturday afternoon, a half-holiday at the factory.

"Ain't there a sure enough Santy, Grandpa?" asked Butch.

"A sure enough Santy? Bless your little heart, Butch, of course there is," answered pa.

"But gramma says there ain't—and Aunt Jule, too—and if there ain't I won't git no s'penders for Christmas, 'cause pa and ma says I ain't big enough for 'em."

"I'll write a letter to Santy myself and tell him jest what you want," consoled Opal.

"But gramma says there ain't none," wailed Butch, bursting into fresh grief.

"Your gramma means all right, but she don't know nothin' about it. Hey, old woman?" inquired pa jocularly.

"Mebbe I be mistaken," said Ma Flickinger, relieved.

"What's the use in keepin' up the lie any longer? Butch ain't a baby," put in Jule boldly.

"And what's the use of your comin' over here and blabbin' of things you'd better keep shut off?" growled her father.

"Jimmie Bistle he seen Santy—" began Butch plaintively.

"Then Jimmie knows," asserted pa genially.

"Does he come down the chimney?" questioned Butch, only too ready to have his faith restored.

"Sure," affirmed pa.

"And have reindeers?"

"Eight," informed pa with conviction. "And he'll bring me red s'penders, won't he, Grandpa?"

"If you're good," promised pa.

And Butch went noisily out to hunt up Jimmie Bistle and to have his faith further confirmed.

"I'd rather you wouldn't 'a' told Butch yet a while, Jule; he ain't much more'n a baby." And pa shook his head at the sacrilege.

"I don't think it's right to string out a lie like that till doomsday," snapped Jule.

"I dunno as 'tis a lie," grumbled pa; "but if 'tis, it's the whitest lie I ever heard—and it's good enough for me."

"Butch'll find out sooner or later," stated ma practically, without looking up from her work.

"Find out nothin'," disagreed pa. "I never found out nothin' ag'in Santy Claus yet—and I ain't no greeny, neither. But here's our other grandchildren, Jule's twins, Janice and Jasper, and Elvie's baby, Beulah, ain't they goin' to be fetched up on Santy Claus?"

"Every one of 'em, if I have my way," answered ma emphatically.

"Of course my twins believe in Santy; but I'm goin' to tell 'em the truth long afore they're as old as Butch," put in Jule.

"Well, I wish there was some way we could brace Butchie up now," said pa; "somebody else'll be tellin' him it ain't so ag'in, and then he'll feel worse'n ever."

"Why couldn't we have a Christmas tree and a Santy Claus here at home, all of us Flickingers?" inquired Opal eagerly.

"Hurrah! jest the figger," shouted pa. "Let's do it to celebrate me gettin' a better job at the factory."

"If that ain't jest like a man—no forethought. We don't have much more money now than we did afore you got that job," said ma sharply. "now we're savin' money for Jed to go to College—you know it's goin' to cost a lot more'n we reckoned at first. Anybody'd think you was a Rockefeller."

But just then Sophie, the pretty young Polish wife of their son Bill, who lived next door, came in, and pa told her about Butch.

"Let's all put in together and have a real Christmas," planned Sophie, "all of us married children, Jule and Mandy and Elvie and Billie and me—it wouldn't cost so awful much—what you think, Mamma Flickinger?"

"What I think is that you and Billie're payin' the instalments on your home," ma dryly reminded her, "and it does seem to me, Sophie, that you'd better keep right at it."

"Couldn't we squeeze the money out some way yet?" coaxed Sophie.

"Yes, but we don't want to," discouraged Jule; "it's mussy and fuss and young ones gettin' sick on candy, and breakin' the presents afore they're fairly off'n the tree. And us all a-strainin' to get each other presents—that ain't worth nothin' when they're bought."

"That's about right, Jule," commented ma.

"And we can git our young ones some little thing for Christmas, and they'll never know the difference," declared Jule.

"Still it'd be nice to have a big time right here at home," said pa, after Sophie had gone. "Ain't it Longfeller," he went on, in an expansive holiday mood, "who says it's better to give than to receive?"

"I dunno—I ain't up on them things any more," replied ma. "Mebbe 'tis better to give than to receive, but when you ain't got nothin' to give—and then strain up and give it—where's the justice in that?"

"If I was rich," grumbled pa, "you bet I'd do things Christmas time like white folks—"

"If you was rich," retorted ma, "folks'd do things for you all right, all right—your Christmas stockin'd be over-flowin'—but I dunno about your returnin' any of it—if you was rich."

"Still there's a kinder feel in the air about Christmas time that gits into a feller—rich or poor," maintained pa, and makes him want to live up to the peace on earth, goodwill to man business—"

"I never felt it," disagreed ma, "and I'll bet you wouldn't if you had to cook and scrub from mornin' to night like I have to. Opal, start the kitchen fire, and then set the table."

"Nobody ought to be too busy nor too poor to feel it," returned pa. "We ought to look about us Christmas time," he added largely, "and see if we can't find some one to be friendly with—"

"I wouldn't have to look far," broke in ma. "There's Mis' Bistle, Jimmie's ma, the best neighbor I ever had, she's mad at me. And if there's so much in the peace on earth, goodwill to man business, why don't she come ever and make up with me?"

"Jest as much your place to go over there, pa informed her.

"Watch me go first," sniffed ma.

"You never seemed to set such a store by Mis' Bistle till you fell out with her," observed Jule shrewdly.

"Well, I dunno's I did," admitted ma honestly. "though I always liked her. Mis' Bistle's awful good company."

"I've heard you say a hundred times that Mis' Bistle's too finicky to live," reminded Jule.

"Well, she is a little finicky," admitted ma, "or she'd never 'a' got mad at me about my keepin' that water-set we both bought for her sister's crystal weddin'."

the time we started up there and couldn't find the place."

"Mis' Bistle's jest every-day plain mean," spoke up Jule.

"No, I wouldn't call it that," corrected ma. "Mis' Bistle's different from us. She's always lived different. She's always been well-to-do, and hired her washin' done, and never lacked for decent clothes to wear! why, Mis' Bistle never knowed the time when she didn't have a black silk dress (and I never knowed the time when I did have one). She jest naturally hain't had hard times enough to make her think of other people."

"I'd call her jest plain selfish," asserted Jule.

"Mis' Bistle is a good woman," maintained ma loyally, "and if she is a little selfish it's because the littleness of it ain't never been brought home to her. And she's a good deal more generous than I be—"

"She's got more to be generous with; but she ain't neither, for you know, Ma, you'd take the clothes off'n your back for one of us young ones."

"Land knows!" cried ma, "I never begrudged anything to my own folks; but that ain't the height of unselfishness. I never could hand out things to neighbors as free as I'd like to—I'm always thinkin' of what it costs. Why, Mis' Bistle's sent me over a whole can of peaches, or a whole pie at once—and when Sophie was sick she furnished every blessed thing the girl et for a week."

"Oh, I don't suppose Mis' Bistle's a regular heathen," qualified Jule; "but I shouldn't think you'd want to be friends with her after the way she treated you."

"As you git older you don't care much about the little faults of your friends," stated ma, "knowin' you're chuckfull of 'em yourself. And it don't make no difference whether she likes me or not, I like her, and I miss her more at Christmas time when everybody's blabbin' about good-will—"

"It'd be a good miss to me," remarked Jule loftily.

"But it's the good times me and Mis' Bistle's had together—partly, I suppose—that makes me feel kind to her. She's terrible jolly."

"She pokes fun at folks," observed Jule bluntly.

"Well, who don't?" inquired ma tartly. "Ain't I heard you poke fun at Milo, your own husband, 'cause he's so wishy-washy?"

"That's in the family," defended Jule.

"All the worse then," retorted ma.

Though pa had strengthened Butch's faith in Santa Claus, the next time Jule saw her little nephew she took pains to undo all her father's good work; and Butch was once more disenchanted, and not even Pa Flickinger could then repair the fractured faith of the doubting small boy.

But Sophie could not bear to think of the Flickingers going without a holiday celebration, and invited the entire family over there to supper Christmas Eve. They met at Ma Flickinger's before going to Sophie's. Besides ma and pa and Opal had her big brother Jed, there were Jule and Milo with their twin babies, Janice and Jasper; Elvie and Mort with baby Beulah; and Mandy Panner, the eldest daughter, her husband, big Butch Panner, and, lastly, little Butch, their son.

"I'm terrible sorry that kid ain't goin' to have no Santy," sighed pa, as they started over to Sophie's.

"I never had no Santy when I was young," complained ma, "and I guess Butch can stand it. I'm so dead tired I'd rather take a lickin' than go over to Sophie's this evenin'." I like to git Christmas over; it's a disagreeable time to me—because we ain't got money to do it up like other folks. But Sophie's been fetched up different; she's always puttin' on airs and actin' like she was swell."

"Still she never wastes no money; and she always manages to git a good time out'n life—and to give a good time to others," declared pa.

"But when Sophie's as old as me she won't be quite so chipper—life'll take the spring out'n her," prophesied ma.

"And remember there's a Santy, Butch," whispered pa, as they filed into Sophie's house; "don't let the women folks cheat you out'n that—yet awhile."

But Butch only gave voice to an irresponsive, doubting "uh-huh," which made pa bluer than ever. "What a cussed thing it is," he mused "to crush

an innocent make-believe for a baby like Butch."

Sophie had her dining-room table pulled out to its fullest extent to accommodate the Flickingers; and she made everybody so welcome, and Bill, her husband, dished out such enormous plates of turkey and mashed potatoes, that all enjoyed themselves. And Butch for a time drowned his grief in a generous helping of gravy, and filled the void that Santa Claus had left with Christmas turkey.

But there was one guest at the table who was not a Flickinger, even by marriage, and that was ma's neighbor. Mrs. Bistle. On account of a severe cold, she had not been able to go with her family to spend the day in the country with her own relatives, so Sophie had invited her over there at the last minute.

Ma Flickinger and Mis' Bistle had exchanged painfully polite greetings, but later, when they were washing the dishes together, all coolness melted between them.

Soon after supper Bill Flickinger disappeared up-stairs, grinning and maddening an excuse that nobody understood. When all the company had gathered in the sitting room—for the parlor had been closed—Sophie threw open the double doors, crying:

"Welcome, everybdy, to the Christmas tree!"

And there, bright with gleaming candles, gay with festoons of snowy popcorn and red berries, sprinkled over with shining silver stars, and laden with mysterious packages, was a beautiful Christmas tree, a gorgeous, glittering, shimmering vision from its moss-covered base to its topmost green tassel. And before they had recovered from the surprise of the Christmas tree, Santa Claus himself burst with a jingle of bells from the stairway door, splendid in fur-trimmed coat and cap, with great white whiskers, and a string of sleigh-bells about his waist.

"Merry Christmas!" cried Santa Claus in a queer, high-keyed voice. "Fetch out that kid that don't believe in Santy Claus—and lemme give him a present."

Butch, scared and delighted at once, was dragged to the tree by his father.

"I do believe in Santy, I do believe in Santy," vociferated Butch; with noisy, whole-souled enthusiasm, his waning faith in the jolly old saint completely restored.

But when Santa Claus selected one of the mysterious packages from the tree and called out in a squeaky but jovial voice Butch's name, and Butch grabbed the alluring package and tore off the wrapper, then was the supreme moment of that enchanting happy Christmas Eve; for Butch held in his eager hands a pair of fire-red suspenders—just his size.

Like a delightful fairy dream passed the first of the evening to Butch. Opal was happy with hair ribbons, made from Sophie's old wedding finery, and the twins and Beulah were joyous over impossible woolen dogs. Everybody had a home-made present, even to Mrs. Bistle; and Sophie, with a little help from Bill, had done it all.

"Now do you believe in a sure enough Santy, Butch?" inquired pa, after Santa Claus had disappeared.

"Uh-huh," grunted Butch, in an inarticulate but happy affirmative.

"How does that happen?" asked pa.

"I seen him," answered Butch conclusively.

"And he seen you," returned pa, "and he give you as gay a pair of s'penders as he had by him—and it's up to you now, Butch, to live up to them s'penders—and to show Santy that he ain't made a mistake and give 'em to a cry-baby—hey, Butch?"

"Uh-huh," agreed Butch, contentedly munching home-made candy.

"And the presents never cost a cent," exulted ma at Sophie's thrift, when she and pa were talking over the tree that night after the children had gone to bed. "Butch's present was made out'n Billie's old weddin' s'penders. Looky, Pa, at my new flattron holders."

But pa only gave a hasty glance, for he was busily trying on half a dozen linen finger stalls that Sophie had made for him in case of an accident at the factory. "I'll be anxious to crush a finger now," declared pa; "looky, Ma, what could be thoughtfuller?"

"And it never cost nothin'," repeated ma. "Land! when I looked at that splendid tree t'at Billie dragged up from