

FIRED AT RANDOM.

COME



CHILDREN, gather at my knee, and while the lamplight glows
And while your mamma buttons you into your slumber clothes
I'll tell you of a little boy named Archibald Montrose.

He lived—I shall not tell you where, for that has naught to do
With this veracious narrative—of course the story's true!
And what occurred to him might happen just as well to you.

This little Archibald Montrose, as I have since been told,
Was very wise beyond his years, and likewise very bold—

I think that I have been informed that he was eight years old.

He knew a dozen "pieces," he could sing and also dance;
He had contempt for any one who was not garbed in "pants,"

And he showed off his cleverness whenever he got a chance.

In short this little paragon—if you don't understand

The meaning of a word I use, why, just hold up your hand—

This boy was quite the brightest boy residing in the land.

One day—and here the tale begins—one snowy day last week

His little sister Isabel, a gentle child and meek,
Said: "I wish Santa Claus would bring a doll that can speak."

"Ho! Ho!" cried Archibald Montrose, without a moment's pause;

"He won't do any such a thing; I know he won't because

No matter what they say to you, there ain't no Santa Claus.

"A fat old whitey whiskered man comes Christmas eve, I know,

And plays that he is Santa Claus, but that is just for show;

If you look close you'll see that he is pa or Uncle Joe."

His little sister Isabel she wept in sore distress;

Still, she was very loyal and her faith was none the less,

But though she echoed "No, no!" Archibald insisted "Yes!"

Now suddenly a dreadful thing occurred upon the spot:

A fat old short old gray old man, with figure very squat,

Drawn by a reindeer team drove right straight up through the side lot.

And beckoning with his finger at the little Archibald,

Who stood with eyes wide staring and exceedingly appalled;

"There ain't no Santa Claus? Well, you just come and see!" he called.

I do not know the magic of that finger, but I know

That though in terror Archibald made effort not to go,

Still, something, something drew him to the party in the snow.

And, frowning o'er his shaggy beard, the fat old man cried out:

"How dare you tell such wicked tales? How dare you cast a doubt

On something that you do not know a blessed thing about?"

"A proper, fitting punishment shall be your due to show

The fact that Santa Claus is not your pa or Uncle Joe.

Observe. I now transform you to a little boy of snow."

Straight down the spine of Archibald there ran a sudden chill;

He felt his blood and flesh and bones change into ice until

He stood entirely motionless, and freezing, freezing still.

His fingers were ten icicles, his feet were crystal lumps;

His arms were scarcely arms at all, but merely snowy humps;

His round, white head appeared to be a snowball struck with mumps.

Thus he was quite transmogrified from heel clear up to scalp

Into a little snowmade boy; indeed a very palpable example of what one might call a human Alp.

Of course he was too stiff to bend upon his icy knees

And beg the libeled Santa Claus, the saint of Christmas trees,

To turn him back into a boy—with oft-repeated "please."

And so the saint drove off again and left him on the lawn,

And no one of his elders knew where Archibald had gone,

Although they searched all afternoon and through the night till dawn.

They hunted stable, garret, woods; they looked down in the well;

They asked all round and even cross-examined Isabel,

But she they found to their distress was quite too small to tell.

A dozen times a day they passed that little boy of snow,

But did not dream that whitened form was Archibald's, although

He tried his very icy best to speak to Uncle Joe.

So all last week the image stood, and so it's standing, still;

The wind blows all about it with a more than frigid will,

And little, transformed Archibald is one continuous chill.

But dreadful as his present fate, decreed by Santa Claus,

He dreams with even greater dread of future days, because

He understands that woo will come with springtime, when it thaws.

Oh, that's the tale of Archibald—of Archibald Montrose;

It's true because I have it from a gentleman who knows.

Now kiss me, for I see that you are in your sleeping clothes.

And when you say your little prayer, just after "Amen" pause

And think of snowy Archibald and what occurred because

He told his sister Isabel there was no Santa Claus.

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