

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

By Pat Cook

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STORY OF THE PLAY

“Dear Editor, is there a Santa Claus?” - a question innocently asked by eight-year-old Virginia O’Hanlon. Christmas was coming and all was right with the world ... until her friends mischievously told her the “facts” about Old Saint Nick. To whom could she turn for the truth? Not her father, a doctor who is always fighting old world superstitions. Not her teacher, who is fed up with Christmas even before it has arrived. So Virginia writes a letter to the editor of the *New York Sun*. Her father always said, “If you see it in *The Sun*, it’s so.” Her letter falls into the hands of Francis P. Church, a veteran editorial writer who seeks to cut away at lies with his razor sharp wit. He knows there is no avoiding the question. He must answer, and answer truthfully. And so he begins his reply which was to become one of the most memorable and cherished editorials in newspaper history.

Full of all the joy, excitement and anxiety of a child’s Christmas, this Yuletide yarn shows all the warmth and humor of a bygone age. We aren’t so different now as then, we all are children at heart. All because one little eight-year-old girl took pencil in hand and asked an editor a world-shaking question, and he replied, “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.”

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 m, 7 w)

CHIEF: The editor of the *New York Sun*, a rather grandfatherly figure, the narrator.

PAPA O'HANLON: A man in his mid-thirties, amiable head of the family.

MAMA O'HANLON: A woman in her mid-thirties, loving and understanding.

VIRGINIA O'HANLON: An eight-year-old girl on a quest.

FRANK CHURCH: A crusading columnist in his forties.

MRS. MARBURY: Frank's secretary, the backbone of the office.

MISSY: Virginia's friend, something of a brat.

CHARLY: Virginia's other female friend and Missy's confederate.

MRS. MADISON: Missy's mother, a large, friendly woman in her thirties.

LIGE: A no-nonsense, hardworking man.

FATHER MICHAEL: The ultimate Irish priest.

MRS. BIRCH: Virginia's long suffering teacher.

TIME: Just before Christmas, 1897

PLACE: Church's office and O'Hanlon's dining room.

SET DESCRIPTION

The stage is basically divided into two proper sets for this Yuletide tale. SL is the dining room belonging to the O'Hanlon family. It consists of a very old-fashioned dining table and chairs. A large buffet is nearby. There is a door, SL, which leads to the kitchen and an archway on the UPS wall, leading to a hall with an exit to the front door on the right and an exit left to the rest of the house. The second set, SR, is the office belonging to Frank Church of the *New York Sun*. It is comprised of a large desk with padded chair and wastebasket. There is also a chair near the front of it, another more comfortable chair near it and a hat rack. There is one door on the SR wall, which leads to the rest of the newspaper offices.

PROPS

FRANK: Pencil, paper, pocketwatch.

MAMA: Sewing materials, dish towels, glue, newspaper, scissors.

CHIEF: Newspaper, papers, glasses, letters, pencils.

PAPA: Newspaper, shirt, button, satchel, pipe.

MARBURY: Notepad, letters.

BIRCH: Yardstick, papers, newspaper.

LIGE: Cup of sugar, newspaper.

MADISON: Wicker basket of laundry, newspaper.

FR. MICHAEL: Newspaper.

VIRIGINA: Paper and pencil, books.

SET PROPS: Newspapers, wastebasket.

SOUND EFFECTS

Sound of children, sound of children saying "awwwww," door ringer

ACT I

(AT RISE: The O'Hanlon dining room. MAMA is sitting and sewing at the table. The O'Hanlons do a lot of living at this table. Just then, VIRGINIA rushes in from SR, crying.)

MAMA: What is the matter, Virginia? *(VIRGINIA rushes into HER arms.)* Child, what has come over you?

VIRGINIA: Oh, Mama!

(SHE buries her face in her MOTHER'S dress.)

MAMA: There, there, are you hurt? *(SHE pulls the CHILD'S head back.)* Here! Are you hurt?

VIRGINIA: No, I'm not hurt.

MAMA: Then what is it? What happened?

VIRGINIA: Oh, Mama! Is it true?

MAMA: Wait just a minute there. Is what true?

VIRGINIA: That ... that there is no Santa Claus?

(SHE looks hard at her MOTHER, who looks away for a moment. The LIGHTS fade out on THEM and come up DSR on the CHIEF, who addresses the audience as if it were an old friend. He does this throughout the entire play. He is reading a newspaper as we discover him. He closes it and speaks.)

CHIEF: That's what we call a "grabber." We use it all the time in the newspaper business. Mostly with a big headline. You open with something to get the audience's attention, something that grabs you and then explain why you pulled such a stunt in the first place. Made you sit up, didn't it? You'll see that again later, but you'll know a lot more by then. Me? Oh, I'm ... well, everybody calls me Chief. I'm the managing editor of the *New York Sun*. *(HE indicates the newspaper.)* And what a time we live in. 1897! *(HE indicates the paper.)* Why, so much going on. Just take a look. You can go to the bicycle races and see Charles Miller, our best man.

CHIEF: *(Continued.)* Or you can go to the Keith Union Square and see him in person. Weber and Fields are starring in their wonderful show, *Hurly Burly* and May Irwin is playing in *Kate Kip*. And coming up ... *(Proudly.)* ... moving pictures! I'm not lying, they actually move. This one shows Pope Leo XIII. Yes, sir, there's a lot in this old newspaper of ours. *(HE folds it and thinks.)* Now, where was I? Oh, the little girl. Now, this story ... well, it wasn't much of a story when it all began. No story at all, when you come to it.

(LIGHTS come up on Church's office, where FRANK sits behind his desk, writing furiously with a pencil.)

CHIEF: *(Continued.)* That is, until I, brilliant man that I am, gave it to this man here, Francis Pharcellus Church. *(HE moves into the scene.)* We call him Frank, mainly because nobody can pronounce his middle name. *(HE looks at FRANK.)* Frank?

FRANK: *(Still writing.)* What?

CHIEF: I'm talking about you here.

FRANK: Just a second, Chief.

CHIEF: *(To the audience.)* Told you they all call me Chief.

FRANK: How can I finish this editorial by deadline if you keep interrupting me?

CHIEF: That's not the one I'm talking about.

FRANK: Then what're you bothering me for? You're always doing this. I'm fighting a deadline here! I've gone through three pencils getting this right and now you're already after me for something else.

CHIEF: Don't start complaining; you'll give the reading public the wrong idea about you.

FRANK: *(To CHIEF.)* People think what they will. I can only tell them that they're wrong. Larceny is spelled with an "S"?

CHIEF: "C."

FRANK: Right.

(HE goes back to writing. CHIEF moves back DS as the LIGHTS fade out on FRANK.)

CHIEF: I wish I had a hundred like him. Father was a Baptist preacher, and you know what they say about preacher's kids. He doesn't let much get by him. Now, back to Virginia O'Hanlon, that's the little girl in our story.

(LIGHTS come up DSL and VIRGINIA enters with CHARLY and MISSY. They are busily talking to each other.)

CHIEF: *(Continued.)* That's her with her little friends. And this is where it all begins. Well, you'll see ... *(HE turns to watch and listen.)*

MISSY: I ain't lying to you.

CHARLY: Ah, what do you know?

MISSY: In three years, my papa says, and the whole world will come to an end!

VIRGINIA: Na-ah!

CHARLY: Coming to an end? That's stupid!

MISSY: I am not!

CHARLY: And you're the only one who knows, right?

MISSY: Ever'body says so! Ever'thing is going too fast!

CHARLY: That's just stupid!

MISSY: That's what my papa says!

CHARLY: Stupid.

MISSY: Are you saying my papa is stupid?

CHARLY: Is this the same one that couldn't tell a horse from a mule?

MISSY: That's not funny!

VIRGINIA: But everything is getting so much better now, my papa says.

MISSY: That's what I'm saying! We can't just go on playing like nothing is different!

CHARLY: You believe ever'thing your papa says?

MISSY: He ain't gonna lie to me.

VIRGINIA: Well, my papa has never lied to me. And he's a doctor.

CHARLY: Don't he lie to his patients, when he has ta?

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