

Audition piece for "Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus" by Pat Cook.

## Chief

*Director's note: This character is similar to the Stage Manager in Our Town. He speaks to the audience but also plays a role in the plot as it unfolds.*

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. Or you can go the Keith Union Square and see him in person. Weber and Fields are starring their wonderful show, *Hurly Burly*, and May Irwin is playing *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 story when it all began. No story at all, when you come to it.

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?

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## Chief and Frank

FRANK: How many times are we going to go through this? I write something and then you come in here and tell me I can't write something!

CHIEF: (waving some pages.) I didn't say you can't write this; I said you need to check it with me first.

FRANK: I did check it with you!

CHIEF: And you hand me this?

FRANK: That's right.

(CHIEF looks at the pages and then back at FRANK.)

CHIEF: You can't write this!

FRANK: Oh, for the love of Mike!

*(FRANK falls into his chair.)*

CHIEF: *(Looks out at the audience.)* Be with you in a minute. *(Back to FRANK.)* You can't call the mayor a hyena!

FRANK: I didn't call the mayor a ... Did you read that at all?

CHIEF: Yes. Why do you think I came in here?

FRANK: Aggravation?

CHIEF: I guess so, since that's what you always deliver me whenever I do.

FRANK: All I said was ... (He reads) "... and let those who hold the purse strings of our great city beware – the preamble of the Constitution begins with 'We the people'. And we, the people, consider this new administration run by a bunch of jackals. (He shoves it back at CHIEF.) See? I called him a jackal, not a hyena!

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## **Papa O'Hanlon and Mama O'Hanlon**

MAMA: ... How was your day?

PAPA: Same as always. I keep trying to help people and they keep shoving all these homemade remedies at me. The Helfran kid is down with influenza.

MAMA: Bobby?

PAPA: Willie. And I get over there, you wouldn't believe what they had done to that poor boy. If you guessed a thousand years, you'd never get it!

MAMA: They have a sock with an onion in it tied around his throat.

PAPA: They have a sock with an onion in it tied around his throat. *(He stops and turns back to her.)*

MAMA: We have the same milkman, hon.

PAPA: Poor child is laying there, coughing to beat the band, and all the time having to wear that thing.

MAMA: Sometimes those old home cures. Work.

PAPA: Now, don't you start. *(He rises.)* Faith healers! Witch doctors! I wish I had a nickel for every time I've come up against one of them. Here we are, about to go into the twentieth century, medical science coming up with new discoveries every day, and these people keep hanging on the cures out of the Dark Ages. *(Mama begins looking around and under the table.)* A sock with an onion in it or a bag of cloves under your pillow. One last week had a concoction made out of birch bark and molasses and ... What are you looking for?

Mama: Your soapbox.

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## Mama O'Hanlon and Virginia

*(Mama is sitting and sewing at the table. ... 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 Virginia'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?

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### **Mrs. Marbury, Frank, Chief**

MARBURY: You wanted to dictate your new column, Mr. Church?

FRANK: Just a second, Mrs. Marbury. (*He crosses to CHIEF.*) Look, you know how I write. You don't have to print it, you know.

CHIEF: And what do we tell your readers?

FRANK: That the new administration is a bunch of jackals!

CHIEF: Oh! (*He looks at MARBURY.*) Can you do anything with him?

MARBURY: I was the one that got him to change it to jackals. He was going to put "jackasses"!

... (*Chief and Frank argue.*)

CHIEF: What about me? Don't I need hope? Hope that we won't have the building burned down!

MARBURY: (*trying to break the tension*) Why don't you do a good Christmas story?

FRANK: What?

MARBURY: 'Tis the season. Do one of the parables; they're always good for publication.

FRANK: See? That's what I get. Fall back on some old cloth-worn saw to get my message across. We're about to enter the twentieth century! And you think anybody is going to bring up Charles Dickens then? That's nineteenth century thinking!

MARBURY: Aw, I love that story!

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## **Missy, Charly, Virginia**

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: Nah-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.

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## Lige, Mama, Virginia

Lige: Mrs. O'Hanlon, I hope I ain't disturbin' you or nothin', it being suppertime and all.

Mama: Evening, Lige.

Lige: I told Mr. O'Hanlon, I was just coming by to give you this. Teresa sent back this cup a' sugar she borrowed this morning. Don't know why's she couldn't bring it over herself.

Mama: (*Takes the cup*) Thank you, Lige. Would you like something warm to drink, a cup of coffee?

Lige: No, ma'am, thank you just the same; I'd best not linger.

Mama: Well, you tell Teresa she didn't have to rush it right back over so quickly.

Lige: Oh, I don't like to be beholden to anyone. Pay back as you go, that's what I always say. Oh, by the way, I'll be bringing by your load a' coal tomorrow afternoon 'stead a' in the mornin'. We is runnin' a little short-handed. (*He sees Virginia.*) Well, little lady, you getting' excited about Christmas comin'?

Virginia: I don't know.

Lige: (*Winks at Papa.*) You don't know? Don't sound like any little girl I know. You sure you're Miss Ginnie?

Virginia: Mr. Liege, is there a Santa Claus?

(*Lige looks at Mama.*)

Mama: We have something of a crisis here.

Lige: Well, I tell you; I don't know much, God knows. (*He kneels down to get eye level with Virginia.*) But I do know one thing. I work real hard to make sure me and mine has ever'thing we needs to get by on; you know that, don't you?

Virginia: Yes, sir.

Lige: I suppose ever'body does. Well, let me tell you. (*He looks deeply into her eyes.*) Last year old Santy brung me a new coat. If it weren't for old Santy Claus, I don't know what I'd do. He brings us all the stuff we can't buy ourselves. He makes sure a' that. That's what he does.

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### **Mrs. Madison, Mama, Virginia**

(Yelling offstage) MADISON: Anybody home?

Papa: (Yells back) In the dining room!

(Mrs. Madison enters)

MADISON: Here you all are. And all the best of the season to you.

MAMA: Same to you, Mina. By the way, you know what your Melissa has been telling Ginnie?

MADISON: Yes, I do, and that’s why I came right over. I made her tell me after I caught her and Charly giggling in the parlor.

...

MADISON: Listen, Ginnie, don’t pay any mind to that loud-mouthed daughter of mine.

VIRGINIA: But she told me there wasn’t any ...

MADISON: There is so a Santa Claus!

VIRGINIA: But she told me her daddy told her there wasn’t!

MADISON: Yeah, well, he’s stupid.

VIRGINIA: That’s what Charly said.

MADISON: Well, it’s all over town.

MAMA: Ginnie!

VIRGINIA: Well, that’s what she said.

MADISON: Kids these days. (To MAMA) Where do they get their ideas?

MAMA: I’m sure I don’t know.



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## Father Michael and Chief

*Director's Note: An Irish brogue would be helpful. At least a hint of one.*

CHIEF: You seem to be in a bit of dither, sir.

MICHAEL: Dither enough. You know, in my line, I get all sorts of questions. People come to me with all sorts of theological queries. How to live their lives, what the scriptures say in regards to these changin' times we live in, that sorta thing. And I thought I had heard them all. Well ...

CHIEF: Let me guess. You just met a young girl, about eight years old?

MICHAEL: I did, you know.

CHIEF: And she asked you if there was any such person as Santa Claus.

...

MICHAEL: And what manner of devil's work is this?

CHIEF: I ... I was watching from back there ... Heard the whole thing.

MICHAEL: Well, and didn't it happen just as you said. Little O'Hanlon girl, Virginia, I think; father's a fine doctor. I'm on my way to the Heffrans to see how young William is doing, they had a sock around his neck last time I was by, and didn't she up and ask me that very thing. "Father," she says, "I know for a fact you are a truthful man." Well, no argument there, so far's I know. "Is there such a person as Santa Claus? And ..." she goes on before I can regain me ballast, "if so, can you put that down on a piece of paper for me?"

CHIEF: A heady question.

MICHAEL: Isn't it now! We're still talking commandments with a wee one that age, and she ups and asks me about Santa Claus. And she wants it endorsed on some sort of document! I never heard the like.

CHIEF: So, you told her ... ?

MICHAEL: I told her to pray for guidance. God would show her the answer in his own good time. And if she needed any writing on the subject, the Good Book holds all the answers. Well, and I ask you, what was I to say?

CHIEF: Of course.

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### **Mrs. Birch**

Settle down, children; settle down. ... I know Christmas is coming, but it's not here yet. I wish it were, believe me; I wish it were! But it's not and let hear no more about it ...

Robert Tyler, you stop that this minute! Let go of Karen's hair! Don't make me come back there! ... We've no time for any foolishness today. Now, get out your pencils. We're going to have a spelling test and see if you have been paying attention. (*Children: AWWW*)

Quiet now. Just use your heads and remember our "I before E except after C" rule. That's all the hint I'm giving you. First, let's see who's brought in notes from home. ... (*opens and responds to a few notes*) Dear Mrs. Birch, Is there a Santa Claus?" (She looks up and then back to the note.) "If there is, please write that down here." Write, R-I-T-E. (*She looks up.*) Virginia! See me at recess.