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I would like to thank my wife, Laura, for being the best wife in the whole world. I would also like to thank my whole family for being so loving and supportive, as well as letting me be a kid for as long as possible...

I would like to dedicate this play to two people: my grandmother for helping me become a life-long believer and to the baby on the way. May you, my child, believe for years and years to come...

Cast of Characters

VIRGINIA O'HANLON, 8 years old, inquisitive

MOTHER O'HANLON, about 35

FATHER O'HANLON, about 36

SAMANTHA O'HANLON, about 10

FRANCIS CHURCH, young editor, eccentric, klutzy

WALTER GIBSON, editor and chief of "*The Sun*"

MARY LOU PARKER, 8 years old, small looking

WENDY PARKER, younger sister, sickly, about 7

HANNAH PARKER (MOTHER), about 35

A POST-PERSON, young boy or girl, about 14

MARTHA, a friendly soup server

OLD CHRISTMAS PROLOGUE 1, timeless character

OLD CHRISTMAS PROLOGUE 2, timeless character

OLD CHRISTMAS PROLOGUE 3, timeless character

HOMELESS PEOPLE, 2-3 (can be the Christmas Prologues)

Time

1897.

This story can be played in time period, or can be set in a more ambiguous time.

Sets & Set Pieces

All can be minimalistic or suggestive.

The O'Hanlon living room—table, chairs, recliner, Christmas tree, presents, window

The New York Sun office of Francis—desk, typewriter, waste basket, lots of crumpled paper

Outside area—a park bench

Mary Lou's living room—table, three chairs

A soup line on a street corner outside a church—table

Acknowledgments

Yes Virginia, There is a Santa Claus was originally performed at C.W. Stanford Middle School, Hillsborough, North Carolina, December 17 & 18, 2008 with the following crew:

Director Jamie Gorski
Assistant Director Jacob A. Sanford
Production Director Jessica Sattler
Technical Director E. Lee Roane

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

by Jamie Gorski

INSPIRED BY THE ORIGINAL EDITORIAL
BY FRANCIS P. CHURCH, *THE NEW YORK SUN*, 1897

The Prologue

(The three PROLOGUES enter the stage and begin to get the stage ready. They place Christmas decorations throughout the stage. The amount and style of Christmas decorations are the director and designer's discretion. The three PROLOGUES come center stage and begin.)

PROLOGUE 1.

A snowy night by a creek in December,
The city was fast asleep.
The cold of the wind seemed to howl and linger,
Our reflections on ice gave us reason to weep.

We saw lines on our faces, the gray in our hair,
The stiffening of joints, and our eyes beyond repair.
It seemed as if nature did not notice or care,
That the core of our youth was in deep, deep despair.

PROLOGUE 2.

We walked along a familiar street,
Seeing holiday lights on homes and on trees.
Then a small child with a letter red and green,
Laid it in the mailbox, turned, and said, "it's for him."

The Christmas season has a magical way,
Putting youth in our hearts without pause or dismay.
We smiled and laughed, running home straight away,
We have letters to write on this glorious holiday.

PROLOGUE 1. Let's pull out the paper and pick up the pen,

PROLOGUE 2. Let's choose the cards to start and begin.

PROLOGUE 3. Let the holiday lights give us reason to live,

ALL PROLOGUES. Let the spirit within us write these letters again.

PROLOGUE 3.

We are scared to think that our childhood ends,
That we cannot imagine or we cannot pretend.
That we cannot write letters to Santa, our friend;
Only children are allowed to believe and attend.

But a Christmas letter brings youth to our eyes,
And our childhood does not end but survives!
A letter to family or friends can revive,
The power of Christmas that brings us alive!

PROLOGUE 1. Let's pull out the paper and pick up the pen,

PROLOGUE 2. Let's choose the cards to start and begin.

PROLOGUE 3. Let the holiday lights give us reason to live,

ALL PROLOGUES. Let the spirit within us write these letters again

Let the spirit within us write these letters again!

Scene 1

Francis' Office at *The New York Sun*

(It is the morning of December 24th. At rise, we see FRANCIS typing on his typewriter. There are busy office sounds heard in the background. WALTER is standing over FRANCIS with a stern and upset look.)

WALTER. Don't use a comma there, use a period! And watch those quotation marks! And that should be a semi—what is wrong with you today Francis?!

FRANCIS. I'm sorry sir! It's just that...well...you know...the last article I wrote wasn't very good, although I thought it went rather well because it really expressed my ideas that chickens should have rights too, especially on days like Thanksgiving and Christmas, and that people should really listen to the emotions of a clucky—

WALTER. *(Interrupts:)* Francis!

FRANCIS. (*Surprised:*) Waa! Yes, sir!

WALTER. You're rambling again!

FRANCIS. Yes, sir! I'm sorry, sir! (*Stands up and begins to crumple up story.*) I'll just take this story and start over, wa!... (*Trips and falls while attempting to throw away the bad story.*)

WALTER. Francis, Francis. (*Disappointed:*) You have been with us for over six months and you have hardly put together any story worth publishing!

FRANCIS. I know, sir. It's just that, well, ever since my parents moved away, I've been having trouble finding my voice again. I miss them a lot.

WALTER. Well, Francis, you better find that writer's voice! Your job is on the line. *The New York Sun* doesn't have time to let its journalists find their voices. We have deadlines to keep.

FRANCIS. Maybe if I were to write about that kitten thing I told you about.

WALTER. Francis, Francis. We need some exciting news! It's the holidays. People want inspiration. They want heart-felt stories. They don't want to read about kittens living in apple boxes suffering from the cold—

FRANCIS. (*Interrupts:*) But sir! If they're given a home, then they could make little children happy. And then, that would be—

WALTER. (*Interrupts:*) Enough about the kittens! Look Mr. Church, here's the deal. You have until Christmas day to write something short of the Pulitzer, or you can find another line of work. Also, I'm taking away your Christmas bonus.

FRANCIS. But sir, I was going to use my bonus to visit my parents!

WALTER. Well, too bad. You have work to do.

(WALTER *exits.*)

FRANCIS. (*Pause.*) Now how am I going to see my family? Oh well, I guess I better go get some foood! (*Falls over waste basket again.*) Oh boy. (*Gets up, reaches into pockets.*) Wait. I thought I had some money with me... (*Realizes that he doesn't have any money.*) Oh no. (*He exits with a gloomy look.*)

Scene 2
The O'Hanlon House Family Room

(It is still the morning of December 24th. MR. O'HANLON is sitting at the table with a cup of coffee reading The New York Sun. MRS. O'HANLON is sitting at the table making a grocery list for Christmas dinner. VIRGINIA and her older sister are in the midst of arguing.)

VIRGINIA. Is too!

SAMANTHA. Is not!

VIRGINIA. Is too!

SAMANTHA. Is not!

MOTHER. Girls, please! It's not even eight o'clock in the morning! I am trying to get a grocery list together for Christmas dinner.

VIRGINIA. But mama! Samantha says it's not true!

MOTHER. Virginia O'Hanlon! I said enough. Your father is trying to read the paper.

SAMANTHA. *(Whispers to VIRGINIA:)* Is not!

FATHER. Samantha. I heard that. Now your mother asked you to be quiet. Now both of you, come to the table and have your breakfast. You have school soon.

SAMANTHA. Thank goodness it's the last day. I have been waiting for a break from Mrs. Fish Breath!

MOTHER. Samantha that is no way to talk. Now act your age.

SAMANTHA. I'm sorry, mama. You're right. I should act my age... In fact, I think Virginia needs to act her age too.

VIRGINIA. Bbbbbbbppppplllll!!! *(Buzzes lips at her sister.)*

MOTHER. Now what is that supposed to mean?

VIRGINIA. It means, ah Bbbbbbbppppplllll!!! *(Buzzes lips again to her sister.)*

SAMANTHA. You know, you look like a sick donkey when you do that.

MOTHER. That's enough, both of you. Now Virginia, what seems to be the problem?

VIRGINIA. Samantha says there's no Santa Claus.

MOTHER. Samantha, why would you say a thing like that? It is not your place to talk to Virginia about these things.

SAMANTHA. But mama, she's eight years old.

VIRGINIA. Mama, tell me the truth. Is Santa Claus real?

MOTHER. Virginia it's Christmas Eve. Santa will come.

VIRGINIA. But mama, you didn't answer my question. Is Santa Claus re—

FATHER. (*Slightly interrupting, reacting to an article in the paper:*) Unbelievable!

MOTHER. What is it, dear?

FATHER. Oh, it's just that this article says that...well...never mind. I guess if it's in *The Sun*, it must be true. (*He gets up from table.*) Well, I'm off to work.

MOTHER. Don't forget to get the ham from the butcher, dear.

FATHER. I know, I know. You've reminded me a thousand times.

MOTHER. (*Continuing to write down her grocery list:*) Well, you forgot it last year. And I told you a thousand times then, too.

FATHER. But you don't need to keep reminding me.

MOTHER. Yes I do, because if I don't, we will have another hamless Christmas.

VIRGINIA. No ham on Christmas is like eating mashed potatoes without a fork!

SAMANTHA. I got sick last year eating too many potatoes.

MOTHER. See?! Now do you want your eldest daughter to get sick again?!

SAMANTHA. (*Acts like she's puking:*) Bleh!

MOTHER. No need for the graphic expressions, Samantha.

FATHER. Okay, okay. Point taken. I don't want to be late for the office, so I will see you all this evening.

VIRGINIA. Hey papa.

FATHER. (*Almost annoyed:*) What is it, sweet heart?

VIRGINIA. What do you think about Santa Claus? Is he—

FATHER. (*Interrupts:*) We'll talk about this later, Virginia. (*He exits.*)

VIRGINIA. —real?

MOTHER. All right, now off to school. Both of you. (*She exits.*)

(*SAMANTHA walks over to VIRGINIA.*)

SAMANTHA. Bbbbbbbppppppllllll!!! (*Blows lips at VIRGINIA.*)

(*SAMANTHA exits the stage. VIRGINIA is left alone, feeling slightly neglected.*)

Scene 3

Back at Francis Church's Office

(*It is afternoon. There are wadded up papers all over the floor. Clearly, FRANCIS has been very busy at work. Lights up. We see FRANCIS pacing back and forth holding another potential story.*)

FRANCIS. (*Finishing reading his story:*) "...And furthermore, this crazy idea that mice are horrible, disgusting rodents that infest homes and eat little baby toes is ridiculous and preposterous!" There. That sounds like a delightful ending. Absolutely brilliant. (*All of a sudden, FRANCIS sees a mouse on the floor and screams like a little girl:*) AAAAAAHHHHHH!!! (*He jumps on top of his desk and begins to*

have a slight panic attack.) What a horrible, disgusting rodent! Stay away from my toes!

(WALTER storms into Francis' office.)

WALTER. Francis!

FRANCIS. Waaa! Oh sir, it is you! Please save me from that awful rodent!

WALTER. Francis, it's just a little mouse. *(He picks up the mouse and goes to throw it out the window. FRANCIS screams again when he sees the mouse.)* Now get down from there and pick up your office. This place looks like it was hit by a tornado. Do you have my story, Frances?

FRANCIS. *(He looks at the story in his hand, then crumbles it up and throws it on the floor.)* No, sir. I'm afraid not.

WALTER. You have until tonight, Mr. Church. I need that story!

(He storms out.)

FRANCIS. *(He carefully gets down and sits at his desk.)* Why can't I find my voice? What can't I think of a good story? *(Beat. Then says, defeated:)* I know what to write. *(He pulls out a piece of paper and takes a pen, and begins to write.)* "Dear Mama and Papa, I do not think I will be able to make it home this Christmas..."

(Blackout.)

Scene 4 Outside, in a Play Area

(VIRGINIA and MARY LOU enter. They are in the midst of finishing a race. They are all bundled up in coats and scarves, except for MARY LOU; she only has a light jacket on. They continue to play throughout the scene. MARY LOU is very cold throughout the scene.)

MARY LOU. Yes! I win!

VIRGINIA. Yeah, yeah. Thank goodness school's over.

MARY LOU. I know. If I had to write down one more sentence, I think my hand would have fallen off. Wow, it's freezing out!

VIRGINIA. Where's your heavy coat?

MARY LOU. I let Wendy borrow it. Come on Wendy!

WENDY. (*Enters, coughing:*) I'm sorry Mary. I was just talking to Mrs. Williams. She gave me an "A" on my paper— (*Coughs again.*)

MARY LOU. Take it easy Wendy. You need to slow down. Remember about what Mama said about you running around and doing too much.

WENDY. I know I know.

VIRGINIA. Mrs. Fish-breath sure was stinky today!

MARY LOU. I know, at one point I thought her dragon breath was going to make me sick! Did you see Tommy Simpleton? He was turning green when she yelled in his face!

VIRGINIA. Ooo yeah! You're right! Like this: (*In a raspy, angry, dragon voice:*) Why did you not turn in your homework!!!! Why are you so pathetic!! Blaaahhhhh!!!!

WENDY. Ooo, gross!

(All the girls laugh. WENDY coughs. Then, they hear the town bell toll three o'clock in the afternoon.)

MARY LOU. Oh no, we only have a few more minutes. We have to meet our mother down the street. Wendy, run along ahead so Mother won't be worried.

WENDY. But how come I have to go?

MARY LOU. Wendy. (*Brings her closer in so VIRGINIA doesn't hear.*) You need to eat something—you're getting sick again.

WENDY. I know, I'm sorry. Bye (*Coughs.*) Virginia!

VIRGINIA. Merry Christmas Wendy. (*WENDY exits.*) What were you two whispering about?

MARY LOU. Oh, nothing—just sister stuff. Anyway, I should probably get going too. My mother needs me.

VIRGINIA. Why?

MARY LOU. *(A bit embarrassed:)* Oh, it's nothing. *(Trying to make up a story:)* I just have to meet her...for some...um...last minute Christmas shopping.

VIRGINIA. Mary. I can tell when you're lying.

MARY LOU. *(Sighs.)* I have to meet her at the soup line.

VIRGINIA. The one down on the corner? Why?

MARY LOU. Well, my mother lost her job last week.

VIRGINIA. Oh no! What happened?

MARY LOU. Something about cutbacks. My mother has been working there since I could remember.

VIRGINIA. What are you going to do now?

MARY LOU. Don't know. But she says it's only temporary, which is good, because the soup is so gross! It's like eating chicken with burnt asparagus!

VIRGINIA. Ooo, gross!

MARY LOU. Yeah! *(Pause. Change of tone:)* Of course, if papa was still alive, we would be so much better off right now. *(She begins to mentally drift into her own world.)*

VIRGINIA. I'm sorry, Mary.

(The girls hear sleigh bells in the distance and the voice of Santa Claus saying: "Ho! Ho! Ho! Merry Christmas!")

Hey, I know what will cheer you up! Santa is over at Sammie's Toy Store. I'll race you over to see him!

MARY LOU. That's okay. I'll stay here.

VIRGINIA. Why not? Don't you want to tell him what you want for Christmas?

MARY LOU. Why? He doesn't bring me anything.

VIRGINIA. Why not?

MARY LOU. I don't know. I can't remember the last time I received a present from anyone, let alone Santa Claus.

VIRGINIA. But what about at Sammie's Toy Store? Isn't that Santa?

MARY LOU. No. I have visited that Santa many times. Every year I've told him what I want, and every year he says he will get it for me. So far, I've gotten nothing.

VIRGINIA. Oh.

MARY LOU. I've been good every year. I get good grades in school. I help my mom around the house. I follow the rules. What am I doing wrong?

VIRGINIA. I don't know, Mary. (*Awkward pause.*) Do you believe in Santa Claus?

MARY LOU. I guess not. I have to get going anyway (*She shivers in the cold.*)

VIRGINIA. Hey Mary. (*Pause.*) Where's your scarf?

MARY LOU. Mama had to trade it for some cash last week. She said that would be only temporary too.

VIRGINIA. (*Slight pause.*) Here. Take my scarf and gloves.

MARY LOU. No Virginia, I can't.

VIRGINIA. Really. It's okay. I have an extra pair at home.

MARY LOU. Really? Thanks Virginia. Well, I'll see ya.

VIRGINIA. Merry Christmas, Mary Lou.

MARY LOU. Thanks.

(They begin to exit to opposite sides of the stage. VIRGINIA turns and looks back at MARY LOU.)

VIRGINIA. Hey Mary!

MARY LOU. Yes.

VIRGINIA. I'm sure Santa will bring you something.

MARY LOU. I hope so.

(They exit.)

Scene 5

A Very Icy Public Area Near the Soup Line

(This scene should be played as if the entire ground was covered with ice. We are closer to the soup line. VIRGINIA gets up and starts to walk on the icy sidewalk. She almost slips.)

VIRGINIA. Woh, it's slick out today. *(She goes to sit on a bench. She struggles on the ice.)* Why doesn't Santa visit Mary Lou? Mama says that there's a Santa. Mama wouldn't lie to me. Why was so mean to me this morning? I thought she believed in Santa Claus too. This just doesn't make sense. I wish someone could give me a straight answer.

(FRANCIS enters. He doesn't see the ice and slips and falls.)

FRANCIS. Wooh!!!

VIRGINIA. Sir! Sir! Are you okay?

FRANCIS. *(Still on the ground:)* I think I broke every bone in my body. What a day I'm having!

VIRGINIA. Can you lift your legs?

(He tries, but fails. He moans in comical pain.)

What about your arms?

(He tries, but same reaction.)

Your head?

(Nothing.)

What about a finger?

(Slowly, but steadily, FRANCIS lifts one finger from the ground.)

FRANCIS. Yes! YES! YEEESSS!!

VIRGINIA. Good, you're not dead. Here, let me help you up.

(She helps him up with some struggle.)

FRANCIS. Oh thank you. Thank you so much!

VIRGINIA. It's no problem. Merry Christmas.

FRANCIS. Oh wait! *(A little embarrassed:)* Um...Do you know where the soup line is?

VIRGINIA. Yeah, it's just up this street and around the corner.

FRANCIS. Thank you. I haven't eaten all day.

VIRGINIA. I'm sorry. Are you out of work, too, like my friend's mother?

FRANCIS. Well, no, not exactly. Well...I guess if I don't turn things around soon, I will be out of a job. Christmas can be such a stressful time!

VIRGINIA. Tell me about it. I have been thinking about a Christmas problem all day. I have asked so many people for help, and no one can give me an answer.

FRANCIS. Yeah. I've had those problems myself sometimes. But ya know what? Sometimes the answers to our problems are right in front of us. We just don't see them.

VIRGINIA. But I always thought, "seeing is believing."

FRANCIS. Not necessarily. *(He sits on the bench with VIRGINIA.)* When I was a kid I used to be afraid of monsters in my room. I would go to sleep with the lights on all the time. And then, one day, my mother bought me a stuffed animal. It was a cat, purple with white spots. I thought that was kind of weird. But anyway, my mother said that this cat was called Pippy, and that he was here to protect me from the monsters in my room.

VIRGINIA. A stuffed animal?

FRANCIS. That's right. A stuffed animal. After that night, I didn't have any more nightmares or any more scary images about monsters in my room. I slept with Pippy 'til I was twenty years-old.

VIRGINIA. How old are you now?

FRANCIS. Twenty.

VIRGINIA. You still sleep with a stuffed animal?

FRANCIS. No, I don't sleep with Pippy anymore. I gave Pippy to my little sister about six months ago.

VIRGINIA. But what can a stuffed cat do? Pippy isn't real.

FRANCIS. I don't know. Yes, on one hand, I know that Pippy is a stuffed animal. But on the other hand, Pippy is very real to me. When I go to sleep at night, it's nice to know that he's there—in my mind. Just the presence of Pippy gives me great comfort; I know he's there to protect me. Our minds are a wonderful thing. For me, my mind gives Pippy life, and for me, Pippy will always be there to protect me from the monsters in my room. Do you get what I'm sayin', kid?

VIRGINIA. I guess. Well, I think so. *(The city bell tolls four o'clock.)* Oh no, I have to get home. Merry Christmas! *(Starts to leave.)* And put some ice on your head. It'll heal faster.

FRANCIS. I will. And a Merry Christmas to you, too! *(FRANCIS quickly begins to head in Virginia's direction.)* Hey I never got your naaaame! *(He slips and falls again.)* Hey! Fast little girl. *(Pause.)* I wish Pippy could be here to help me up. Stupid cat!

Scene 6

The O'Hanlon House. Late Afternoon

(MRS. O'HANLON is at the table wrapping presents. VIRGINIA comes rushing in. She takes off her coat and proceeds to walk past her mother towards her bedroom.)

MOTHER. Virginia.

VIRGINIA. Yes, mama?

MOTHER. Where are your scarf and gloves?

VIRGINIA. Oh. I hope you didn't mind. Since I had an extra pair, I gave them to Mary Lou.

MOTHER. I see. *(Pause.)* I heard that Mary Lou's mother was just recently let go from her job.

VIRGINIA. Yeah. Mary said it had something to do with slow business and cut backs.

MOTHER. Well, it was very nice of you to give her your extra scarf and gloves. Do you want to help me wrap these presents for your cousins?

VIRGINIA. No thanks. I'm going to my room to read. *(She turns to leave.)*

MOTHER. Virginia.

VIRGINIA. Yes?

MOTHER. I know something is wrong. You were upset this morning and you look upset now. What is it?

VIRGINIA. Well, it's just that Mary Lou is one of the nicest people I know, but Santa never comes to visit her on Christmas. Yet, Harry Benson, a boy in our class and the world's meanest kid, gets new toys every year. I just can't help but wonder if there is a Santa Claus. I mean, I think I've seen him down at Sammy's Toy Store, but Mary Lou tells me that that's not really him. I just don't know anymore, Mama.

MOTHER. Oh Virginia. You have too much on your mind for a little girl your age. You need not worry about these things now. Ask yourself: Do you believe in Santa Claus?

VIRGINIA. I want to. But no one can seem to give me a straight answer.

MOTHER. Well, it is a complicated world, Virginia. I know that is not the answer you want, but that is the answer I have. But if Santa is real to you, then he is real. Santa will stop by tonight I'm sure.

VIRGINIA. I just wish he would stop at Mary Lou's house too. I wish there was more I could do for her.

MOTHER. I know, sweetheart. I know.

(SAMANTHA enters with extra wrapping paper looking a bit annoyed at seeing VIRGINIA.)

SAMANTHA. Mama, where do you want me to put this wrapping paper?

MOTHER. Right here on the table. I have to go back to the store. Your father forgot the sweet potatoes, of course. Why don't you two girls finish up with the wrapping. I won't be long. *(She exits.)*

(VIRGINIA and SAMANTHA begin wrapping presents. They are still a bit tense from earlier.)

SAMANTHA. Pass the bows.

VIRGINIA. What?

SAMANTHA. Pass the bows!

VIRGINIA. Oh, sorry. *(Awkward silence.)* Samantha, why were so mean to me earlier?

SAMANTHA. About what?

VIRGINIA. You know, about Santa Claus.

SAMANTHA. Well, it's just that...I think you should know the truth.

VIRGINIA. But the truth is, that he's real. Isn't he?

SAMANTHA. I don't know Virginia! I mean, I thought he was. But then, last year, I tried to stay up all night on Christmas Eve. I sat at the recliner, trying to stay awake. Then, I couldn't last, I fell asleep. The next thing I knew, it was Christmas morning, and I awoke in my bed. Not the recliner, but my bed. I was so upset.

VIRGINIA. But, how does that prove that there is no Santa Claus?

SAMANTHA. Do you think Santa would carry me up to my room and put me to sleep? No. Mama and Papa would.

VIRGINIA. But, that still doesn't prove that Santa isn't real.

SAMANTHA. Virginia. I just—I just don't want you to think that you will see a jolly, white-bearded man, come down our chimney tonight. I didn't.

VIRGINIA. But you fell asleep. I will try to stay up tonight Samantha. Then, I'll know for sure that he's real.

SAMANTHA. Well Virginia, if you can prove me otherwise. Please do. This has been a miserable Christmas for me. (*Sighs.*) I want to believe again too.

VIRGINIA. You will Samantha. You will. Tonight! Stay up with me! Please? Please? (*Adlibs more "pleases" to get SAMANTHA to say yes.*)

SAMANTHA. Well... Okay.

VIRGINIA. And don't fall asleep!

SAMANTHA. I won't.

Scene 7 The Soup Line

(People are standing in line to get soup. MARY LOU'S MOTHER and WENDY are in line, followed by MARY LOU.)

MARY LOU'S MOTHER. (*To MARY LOU:*) Well, that was very nice of her to give you those hat and gloves.

MARY LOU. I know, she's one of my best friends.

WENDY. (*Coughs.*) Mama, I'm cold.

(FRANCIS enters and falls in line with the others.)

MARY LOU'S MOTHER. I know sweetheart. We are going to get you some hot soup. Then, you will feel better. Let me feel your forehead (*Feels forehead:*) Oh no, you're getting a fever.

WENDY. I'm sorry Mama

MARY LOU'S MOTHER. Martha. Could we have a little more soup for Wendy?

MARTHA. Of course. Here you go Wendy. (*Pours extra soup into her bowl.*)

MARY LOU'S MOTHER. Wendy, why don't you head over to the grocer to get warm. I will be there in a minute.

WENDY. (*Coughs.*) Okay mama. Thanks Martha! (*Exits.*)

MARTHA. You're welcome! *(To MARY LOU'S MOTHER:)* She's not looking good Hannah. She's starting to look like how your Tom looked before he got real si—

MARY LOU'S MOTHER. *(Interrupts:)* I don't want to think about it Martha. It's Christmas. My girls already have a lot to deal with.

MARTHA. Well, make sure you get her to a doctor.

MARY LOU'S MOTHER. I would if we had the money. I just hope things begin to turn around for her. Well, for both my daughters really.

MARTHA. I'm sure it will, Hannah. Merry Christmas.

MARY LOU'S MOTHER. Merry Christmas. *(Looks over to MARY LOU:)* Mary Lou, there's Mrs. Simmons over by the grocer. I'm going to get your sister and then talk to her about a job. You stay right here, and I'll be back for you. Stay here and enjoy your soup.

MARY LOU. Okay, Mother.

(She exits. Poor people are sitting around the area drinking the hot soup slowly. MARY LOU sits down. FRANCIS gets his bowl and notices her. Looking a bit frightened in this new area, he feels safe confronting the child.)

FRANCIS. Hey kid, do you mind if I join you?

MARY LOU. Sure.

FRANCIS. Thanks. *(Pause.)* Merry Christmas.

MARY LOU. Okay.

FRANCIS. *(An awkward silence. FRANCIS tries to make conversation.)* So, your mother's looking for a new job? Not happy with her old one?

MARY LOU. No. She was happy. She lost her job. I felt terrible. They told her they had to make cut backs. I don't really know what that means, but my mom said it wasn't my fault or hers.

FRANCIS. Yeah you're right. It wasn't you or your mother's fault. Times are really hard right now. I'm sorry about your sister too. She doesn't look well.

MARY LOU. I know. I hope she gets better too.

FRANCIS. (*Awkward pause.*) So, I bet you're looking forward to Santa coming tomorrow!

MARY LOU. I don't believe in Santa.

FRANCIS. Don't believe in Santa?! How old are you?

MARY LOU. Eight.

FRANCIS. Eight. And you don't believe in Santa. Why not?

MARY LOU. Well, how can I believe in a person that I've never met?

FRANCIS. I feel like I've just had this conversation.

MARY LOU. What?

FRANCIS. Oh nothing. Go on.

MARY LOU. Well, I've been good all year. I was last year. And the year before that. And the year before that. Santa hasn't brought me anything.

FRANCIS. (*Reflective and somewhat sad:*) I see.

MARY LOU. I mean, every year, my mother, sister, and I go to our church and they serve a big Christmas meal. We look forward to that. We also get new coats from them every year too. (*Refers to the coat she has on:*) This is the only one they had last year that fit me. I wish it was a little warmer. But the thing is, Santa didn't give it to me, or my Christmas meal.

FRANCIS. Well, how do you know that he didn't make the meal? Or how do you know he didn't make you that coat?

MARY LOU. I don't know. Because it wasn't under a Christmas tree.

FRANCIS. Well, is there a rule anywhere that says, "Gifts from Santa Claus can only be found under Christmas trees?"

MARY LOU. I guess not. But that doesn't prove that he's real.

FRANCIS. But it also doesn't prove that he isn't real.

MARY LOU. I guess so.

FRANCIS. Well, I'm sorry for all that you're going through.

MARY LOU. It's okay. I'm thankful that I have my mother and my sister. And I'm thankful that I have my friends too. So, do you believe in Santa Claus?

FRANCIS. *(Thinks. Then says with confidence:)* Yes. I do.

MARY LOU. I wish he was real.

FRANCIS. I think he is.

(WALTER enters, walking past the poor as if he doesn't see them. He notices FRANCIS.)

WALTER. Francis!

FRANCIS. Oh! Yes sir?!

WALTER. What are you doing down here in this place?

FRANCIS. Just having some food before I get back to work, sir.

WALTER. Food? Well...make sure I get that story by tonight.

(He storms off.)

FRANCIS. Right sir. *(To MARY LOU:)* I've got to go. Merry Christmas, uh—

MARY LOU. Mary. Mary Lou Parker.

FRANCIS. Mary Lou Parker. Merry Christmas.

MARY LOU. Good bye.

Scene 8 The O'Hanlon House. Night

(VIRGINIA and SAMANTHA are in their pajamas and robes. They are sitting around the tree, looking tired and frustrated.)

SAMANTHA. I don't think he's coming.

VIRGINIA. It's not that late Samantha. We've got to try.

SAMANTHA. Virginia, maybe we should just go to sleep, and forget this whole thing.

VIRGINIA. No. I can't. I have to know the truth.

SAMANTHA. Virginia, I just can't stay awake. I'm going to bed. You should to. If you stay up, I think you'll be disappointed.

VIRGINIA. No I won't Samantha. I'll prove you wrong. You'll see.

SAMANTHA. Virginia! (*Re-thinks, then delivers calmly:*) I hope you do. Good night. (*She exits.*)

(*VIRGINIA sits quietly, getting more anxious.*)

VIRGINIA. (*Talking to the sky out the window:*) Please. Please show up. Please. Please. (*She begins to sob a little.*)

(*VIRGINIA'S FATHER enters.*)

FATHER. Virginia, are you crying?

VIRGINIA. (*Holding back the tears:*) No.

FATHER. Why are you crying?

VIRGINIA. It doesn't matter.

FATHER. It does matter. Talk to me.

VIRGINIA. I'm going to stay up all night.

FATHER. And why is that?

VIRGINIA. I'm going to stay up so that I can see Santa Claus.

FATHER. You don't have to do that, Virginia; he'll be by to bring you presents I'm sure.

VIRGINIA. *This is not about the presents!* I just need to know if he's real. I have to know.

FATHER. Why do you have to know?

VIRGINIA. Because. I want to believe in him. I have my whole life. And right now, I'm beginning to think he doesn't exist. Nobody can give me a straight answer. It's like people are avoiding me whenever I ask them about it. Why papa? Why are people not giving me a straight answer? Do they not believe? I have been believing.

FATHER. Well, isn't that enough?

VIRGINIA. No, because of my doubts. There are so many things that don't make sense. Why does Mary Lou not get a Christmas like me? If Santa is real, shouldn't she get a Christmas too? She's as good as I am.

FATHER. I don't know, Sweetheart.

VIRGINIA. Well, that's why I have to talk to Santa. So I'm going to wait.

FATHER. You can't wait for him all night, Virginia. He won't come.

VIRGINIA. Why not?

FATHER. Because...that's part of the rules. That's part of the magic of Christmas. If you stay up all night, then it's like saying, you don't believe in him. You have to believe. If you do, then he is real and he will come. But you have to accept the magic. You have to sleep.

VIRGINIA. Well, then how will I ever know if he's real?

FATHER. You just know. You believe. You... I'm sorry. I wish I had a better answer for you, Virginia.

VIRGINIA. That's okay. (*Thinks for a moment.*) Hey papa? Was that true about what you said earlier?

FATHER. What do you mean?

VIRGINIA. About *The New York Sun*. You said, "If it's in *The Sun*, it must be true." Is that really true?

FATHER. Well, yes. I'd like to think so.

VIRGINIA. What if I wrote them a letter and asked them? Do you think they would respond?

FATHER. Well, maybe. But it's getting late, Virginia. The stories are probably already off to publication.

VIRGINIA. Can we try? Please papa? I have to know the truth. I have to know if he's real. *(In tears:)* Please Papa. If you don't know the answer, then they will tell me.

FATHER. Virginia, if you write to them, they probably won't answer. Even if they did, it probably wouldn't be the answer you want.

VIRGINIA. Do you believe in Santa Claus papa?

FATHER. Of course I do.

VIRGINIA. Then let me write the letter. I want to write the letter. If you say that *The New York Sun* writes the truth, then their answer will work for me. No matter what. Please papa? Please?

FATHER. *(Thinks for a moment.)* Okay, Virginia. Write your letter.

(She goes to the table and gets out a sheet of paper. She writes her letter. She puts her letter in an envelope.)

VIRGINIA. Who do I address it to?

FATHER. I don't know. I've never written a letter to the editor before. I suppose address it to "*The New York Sun.*"

(She writes down the address.)

VIRGINIA. Here you go papa.

FATHER. Thank you. Now you need to go to bed, Virginia. I will take this down to the postman.

VIRGINIA. I hope I get an answer Papa. Please hurry.

FATHER. I will Virginia. Now go back upstairs to bed. Good night sweetheart. Merry Christmas.

VIRGINIA. Merry Christmas.

Scene 9 **Francis' Office. Late at night**

(FRANCIS is back at his typewriter trying to find a story.)

FRANCIS. Think. Think. Think. *(Bangs head on table once.)* THINK!
Ow! *(He falls off his chair.)*

(*The POSTMAN enters.*)

POSTMAN. Hello? Hello? Is anyone here?

FRANCIS. (*Appears from behind the desk.*) Yes. I'm here. What can I do for you?

POSTMAN. Well, I have a last-minute letter to the editor of *The New York Sun*. Is that you, sir?

FRANCIS. Well, it is tonight. I'm surprised to see someone working so late!

POSTMAN. Well, we're the US Postal Service. We have a reputation to maintain! Especially on the holidays.

FRANCIS. I suppose you're right.

POSTMAN. Here you are then. (*Gives the letter to FRANCIS and hands him a clipboard, too.*) Please sign.

FRANCIS. It's still a bit late tonight for a mail delivery to the paper, don't you think?

POSTMAN. Well, it's the strangest thing. We were about to lock up at the post office, when a man came in and insisted this letter be delivered tonight. He said that it was important for his daughter, that it meant everything for her.

FRANCIS. His daughter, huh?

POSTMAN. Yes. He said, "My daughter is eight years old. I don't want her to grow up too soon. Please do this for my daughter, or for any child who may be in jeopardy." I have no idea what he was talking about, but he was so insistent, that I just couldn't refuse.

FRANCIS. Only eight years old? What could an eight-year-old possibly want with *The New York Sun* on Christmas Eve? (*He opens the letter and reads it to himself. He bangs his head on the table again in utter defeat.*) The impossible question! On this night of all nights!

POSTMAN. What is it?

FRANCIS. (*Reads out loud.*) It says: "Dear Editor: I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, 'If you see it in *The Sun* it's so.' Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus? Virginia O'Hanlon. 115 West Ninety-Fifth Street."

POSTMAN. (*Slightly giggles at his expense.*) Well good luck with that one! Well, I'm well past the clock. Merry Christmas.

FRANCIS. Merry Christmas.

(*The POSTMAN exits.*)

FRANCIS. (*He falls back into his chair.*) Virginia O'Hanlon. After to-day, I don't know if Santa exists, either.

(*WALTER enters.*)

WALTER. Francis.

FRANCIS. (*Slightly alarmed:*) Oh, hello, sir.

WALTER. Do you have my story?

FRANCIS. No, sir.

WALTER. Well, that's that then.

FRANCIS. I'll just pack up my desk tonight—

WALTER. (*Interrupts:*) What were you doing at that soup line to-day?

FRANCIS. I was getting some food.

WALTER. Why there?

FRANCIS. Because I couldn't afford to go anywhere else. (*Slightly annoyed:*) And neither could Mary Lou.

WALTER. Mary Lou?

FRANCIS. Yeah, Mary Lou Parker. A little girl, about eight years old. I sat there today, listening to her tell me that she did not believe in Santa Claus, because life wasn't fair.

WALTER. I didn't know things were going that bad for you Francis.

FRANCIS. (*Stands with conviction.*) Well, with all due respect sir, you didn't even think to ask. (*WALTER looks back at him. FRANCIS realizes he "stepped over the line" and sits back down, again defeated.*) Look, you're right, I don't have my voice anymore. I am bad for this busi-

ness. If you want to throw me out because my writing is terrible, I understand. I'll just start packing my things.

WALTER. *(Pause.)* You know, I was planning on firing you today. But then, I thought of one of the story samples you had sent me when you applied to work here six months ago. A story about a stuffed dog named Pippy.

FRANCIS. Stuffed cat sir.

WALTER. Stuffed cat. And I thought, there was something about your writing that kept me thinking. Wondering. It kept me engaged. I haven't seen writing that fresh in a long time. Even from my senior journalists. Oh, they can get the job done, but with all your talents as a writer, I guess I was expecting so much more from you. Perhaps that was a bit unfair.

FRANCIS. My folks leaving me here in the city hit me a lot harder than I thought.

WALTER. Right. Well, seeing you today at that soup line, I kept thinking, "A young man with such a talent for writing should not be focused on trying to find where his next meal will be. He should be working in his office, writing the next Pulitzer."

FRANCIS. That would be nice, sir.

WALTER. Well, I'm here now to tell you, Francis, that I am sorry for my behavior earlier today. That *The New York Times* is a difficult paper to keep up with, and I'm not sure how long *The New York Sun* is going to last. I took my frustrations out on you, and that wasn't fair.

FRANCIS. It's okay, sir.

WALTER. So, here's what I'm going to do. *(He pulls out an envelope.)* Here is your Christmas bonus. Go home and see your family.

FRANCIS. Oh, thank you, sir!

WALTER. And Francis...

FRANCIS. Yes, sir?

WALTER. When you come back after the holidays, I expect to see you back here on time.

FRANCIS. Thank you, sir. This is the best present I could have ever received.

WALTER. And Francis, find that voice again. This paper needs it.

(He exits. FRANCIS picks up his desk and puts on his coat, hat, and gloves. He starts to head out the door. Before he leaves, he stops, turns around, and looks at the open letter on the desk. He thinks for a moment. FRANCIS leaps around with joy and merriment. It's as if the light bulb in his head has turned back on.)

FRANCIS. Yess!!! YEESSS! Woo-Hoo! *(Calls off stage:)* Hey, Joey? Yeah, it's Francis. Hold publication. I've got one more story to add. *(Pause.)* Give me an hour. *(Pause.)* Thanks. *(Goes back to his desk.)* Okay, Virginia...is there a Santa Claus? Well, I'm about to tell you.

(He begins to type.)

Scene 10 The O'Hanlon House, Christmas Morning

(At sunrise. MR. O'HANLON is reading the paper. MRS. O'HANLON is reading a book. SAMANTHA and VIRGINIA are sitting by their Christmas tree looking at their opened presents. There is wrapping paper all over the floor.)

SAMANTHA. I think my new doll is prettier than yours, Virginia.

VIRGINIA. I don't think so. Your doll looks like it was ran over by a wagon.

SAMANTHA. BBBBPPPPPLLL!!!

VIRGINIA. BBBBPPPPPLLL!!!

MOTHER. Now, girls, that's enough. Well, I have to start to get the ham ready.

FATHER. *(Reading:)* No way!

MOTHER. Well, if that's the way you feel, then I suppose we will never have ham again for Christmas.

FATHER. No, no! It's not about the ham. Look! Virginia, come look!

(VIRGINIA and SAMANTHA run over and look over their Father's shoulders. MRS. O'HANLON comes around, too. They read.)

VIRGINIA. They answered!

FATHER. Yes, they did.

VIRGINIA. And if it's in "*The Sun*" then it must be true. Right?

FATHER. That's right.

VIRGINIA. Come here Samantha! Come read with me!

(They all read. SAMANTHA finishes first and walks over to the Christmas tree. She picks up two of the dolls she got under the tree.)

VIRGINIA. Wow! I knew it! I knew it!

SAMANTHA. Hey, Virginia...all these dolls—from Santa. Do you think your Mary Lou and Wendy would like them?

VIRGINIA. Oh yes. I think so.

SAMANTHA. We don't need all these dolls.

VIRGINIA. You're right. Hey, I have an idea! Mamma, Papa, can Mary Lou, Wendy, and their mother come over for Christmas dinner?

FATHER. Um...sure.

SAMANTHA. And can we give Mary Lou and Wendy two of our dolls.

MOTHER. Well now, Santa gave you those dolls.

VIRGINIA. We know. But one is enough for each of us.

MOTHER. If you would like to. That is very kind, girls.

SAMANTHA. Hey, Virginia, let's wrap up two of the dolls and get them ready for Mary Lou and Wendy.

VIRGINIA. Okay, but first I need to go over to Mary Lou's and invite them for dinner. (She puts on her coat and rushes out. She runs back

in and takes the newspaper from MR. O'HANLON.) I'll take that. (She exits.)

FATHER. Virginia, be careful out there! It's icy!

SAMANTHA. I'm going to go get more wrapping paper from the den.

(She leaves. MRS. and MR. O'HANLON look at each other and smile.)

FATHER. One of the finest articles I have ever read from this paper.

MOTHER. I agree. I don't know how you did it Richard. But thank you. Virginia is so happy. And Samantha...

FATHER. She believes again.

Scene 11 Mary Lou's House

(MARY LOU, WENDY, and MOTHER are sitting at a small table. They each have a mug in their hands. WENDY is bundled up in a blanket.)

MARY LOU. Thank you for the hot chocolate, Mama.

WENDY. Yes, thank you Mama.

MARY LOU'S MOTHER. You're welcome. I know it's not much, but Merry Christmas.

(A knock at the door.)

MARY LOU'S MOTHER. Well, I wonder who that could be?

(She opens the door. FRANCIS is standing there.)

FRANCIS. Mrs. Parker?

MARY LOU'S MOTHER. Yes.

FRANCIS. My name is Francis Church, I'm from *The New York Sun*. May I come in?

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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