

**YES, VIRGINIA, THERE
IS A SANTA CLAUS**

By
Bob Cooner

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

© 2023 by Bob Cooner

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performances of **YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic, and digital reproduction, transmission, and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing. The

English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions, and Canada for **YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning production rights should be addressed to genekato@nextstagepress.com

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

Cast of Characters

7 Female (3 adults, 4 children); 2 Male (adults)

Virginia O'Hanlon:	Female; 7-10; energetic, strong-willed.
Frank O'Hanlon:	Male; 30s; busy, brusque; kind, loving.
Laura O'Hanlon:	Female; 20s-30s; loving but firm; internal sadness
Sam O'Hanlon	Male; 20s; animated, comic
Mary Ann O'Hanlon:	Female; 50s-70s; very proper; loving but needy
Margaret Murphy:	Female; 20s; Irish immigrant; practical; cheerful
Minnie Gallagher:	Female; 7-10; a shy follower
Clara Cunningham:	Female; 7-10; egotistical and bossy
Janie Cunningham:	Female; 6-9; a younger Clara, but less confident

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Though I have taken some dramatic liberties, the events and people depicted in the play are based on historical facts. Laura Virginia O'Hanlon (she preferred using her middle name) was born in New York City on July 20, 1889. Virginia, along with her mother, Laura Plumb O'Hanlon, and father, Dr. Philip Francis ("Frank") O'Hanlon, moved to the house at 115 West 95th Street in New York City in 1896. Virginia's father, a sixth-generation physician, had recently taken the job of deputy coroner for the city. Virginia fondly referred to her grandmother, Mary Ann O'Hanlon, as Móraí. Virginia's uncle, George Samuel ("Sam") O'Hanlon, was a vaudeville performer who, under the stage name "Sam Rice," later became known as the "King of Burlesque." Shortly after her eighth birthday in July of 1897, Virginia became upset by the claims of some of her friends that Santa Claus wasn't real. Her father encouraged her to write to the *New York Sun* for a definitive answer as to the existence of Santa Claus. On September 21, 1897, the *Sun* published veteran editorial writer Francis P. Church's famous reply. Since then, Virginia's letter and Church's response have appeared in thousands of newspapers and books. In fact, the *New York Sun* editor's response remains to this day the most reprinted editorial in the English language.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

ACT I

The front parlor of the O'Hanlon house at 115 W. 95th Street in New York City, 1897. Mid-December, mid-afternoon. Through the lace-curtained windows, we can see that it is a crisp, clear day. A doorway leads to the front entry hall and an unseen door to the street. A few steps lead down from the entry into the front parlor. The parlor is fashionably decorated in the Victorian style. There is a settee, two chairs, and a small writing desk and chair. Other doors lead to the kitchen and to the dining room. A full stairway on the landing near the back leads to the upper floors of the house. MARGARET Murphy, the O'Hanlon's young Irish housekeeper and cook, enters from the kitchen carrying a large stack of clean dishes. She is busily on her way to the dining room when she is stopped by a voice calling from upstairs.

LAURA. *(Calling from upstairs, off.)* Margaret? *(Margaret pauses momentarily, considers whether to answer, then decides to continue to the dining room quickly with her load of dishes. LAURA O'Hanlon, the lady of the house and a busy mother, enters hurriedly at the top of the stairs. She's dressed for an outing, wearing her hat and coat and pulling on her gloves. Still on a stair landing, she calls off to Margaret.)* Margaret?

MARGARET. *(Off.)* Comin', missus. *(Laura continues, still rushed and distracted, down the stairs and into the parlor. Margaret enters quickly, returning from the dining room.)* I was just about to set the table.

LAURA. *(Distracted.)* Oh—but it's early yet, isn't it?

MARGARET. *(Attempting to calm Laura.)* It is, missus. Only I had some time, so I thought I'd make use of it.

LAURA. Oh. Well, then, that's very conscientious of you, Margaret. Shows initiative.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

MARGARET. Yes'm.

LAURA. (*Quickly making last minute adjustments to gloves, hat, etc.*) I need to get a little more of the Christmas shopping done before Dr. O'Hanlon gets home from work. (*Another thought occurs to her.*) But now that I think of it, we *will* need to have our supper a little early, I suppose. We've got Virginia's Christmas pageant at St. Cecelia's tonight at seven, you remember.

MARGARET. Yes'm, I remember.

LAURA. (*Still rushing, another thought occurs to her.*) And that reminds me, as soon as Virginia gets home from school—which should be any minute—would you mind terribly going over her lines with her?

MARGARET. She's only got the one line, missus, and I'm certain she knows it. She's been recitin' it for a month.

LAURA. (*Trying to get out the door.*) Well, it never hurts to be prepared, does it?

MARGARET. No'm.

LAURA. (*And another thought occurs to her.*) Oh—and Virginia needs to have her supper even earlier. You won't mind if she has it in the kitchen, will you?

MARGARET. Of course not, missus. I'll enjoy the company.

LAURA. Very well then. (*Finally assured she's thought of everything.*) I should be back within the hour—I hope. (*Just as Laura turns to go, we hear some commotion from off in the front entry hall as eight-year-old VIRGINIA O'Hanlon and her friend MINNIE Gallagher enter excitedly.*)

VIRGINIA. (*Off.*) I'm home! (*Virginia and Minnie enter, both bundled up in coats, hats, mittens, and carrying schoolbooks.*) And Minnie's with me!

LAURA. Wipe your feet, Virginia! (*Virginia sighs and starts to exit back out to the entry hall.*) Hello, Minnie.

VIRGINIA. (*Off.*) Wipe yours, too, Minnie! (*Minnie, embarrassed, starts to rush off, then stops, remembering she needs to respond politely to Laura.*)

MINNIE. (*Awkwardly curtseying.*) Hello, Mrs. O'Hanlon.

VIRGINIA. (*Off, impatient.*) Minnie! (*Minnie rushes off. Virginia re-enters, now excitedly yelling at the top of her lungs.*) TWO WEEKS OFF FROM SCHOOL!

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

LAURA. Yes, Virginia, we're all well-aware—and please use your *inside* voice, sweetheart. (*Minnie re-enters. Margaret goes to the girls to help them remove their coats, scarfs, hats, and mittens.*)

VIRGINIA. (*Loudly whispering, as Margaret helps her with her things.*) Two weeks off from school! Two weeks off from school! (*Margaret giggles conspiratorially with the girls.*)

LAURA. Now listen, Virginia—I've got Christmas shopping to do before your father gets home, but I'll be back before you know it. (*She starts to leave, but Virginia interrupts her attempt.*)

VIRGINIA. Christmas shopping, huh? Well, you don't have to worry about me. Santa's bringing me everything on my list.

MINNIE. Everything?

VIRGINIA. Sure. (*A pause.*) I've been very good.

LAURA. Yes, well, we'll see about that. (*Once again, Laura starts to leave, but another thought occurs to her. She stops and addresses the girls.*) Oh—and Minnie can stay until it's time for supper, all right? Then she'll need to get home.

MINNIE. Thank you, Mrs. O'Hanlon.

LAURA. You're welcome, Minnie. (*Starting to exit again but stopping herself when something else occurs to her.*) And Virginia, your grandmother will be here for supper this evening. She's coming to see you in the play—

VIRGINIA. (*Interrupting, excited.*) Móraí's [*pronounced MOH-ree*] coming too? Goody!

MARGARET. (*Clarifying the change in plans.*) So that will be *three* in the dining room then, missus?

LAURA. I'm sorry, Margaret. I forgot to mention it earlier. Yes, three—assuming Frank makes it home tonight for supper.

MARGARET. Oh, surely, he will, ma'am, what with the church pageant and all.

LAURA. (*Unsure.*) We can only hope.

MARGARET. He has a hard job as city coroner, doesn't he, missus?

LAURA. Harder than I ever imagined. I suppose I wasn't prepared for his being gone so much overnight. (*After a brief pause.*) I know it makes it difficult for you to plan meals—one more, one less—

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

MARGARET. (*Trying to be reassuring.*) Don't you worry, missus. I always make extra for company—just in case. That's the way my mam taught me.

LAURA. (*Impressed.*) You see—there's that initiative again! (*Yet again, Laura starts to leave, but still another thought occurs to her. She addresses Virginia.*) Oh—and Virginia, Margaret will be going over your lines for the pageant with you—

VIRGINIA. (*Interrupting, impatient.*) It's only one—and I know it backwards and forwards.

LAURA. Just the same, there will be a lot of people in the audience—not to mention your grandmother!—and you want to be at your best for her, don't you?

VIRGINIA. (*Declaiming loudly to prove she knows it.*) “I am just a lowly sheep in the fields abiding.”

LAURA. (*Somewhat exasperated.*) That's fine, sweetheart. Now—I've got to run before it gets too late. You two listen to Margaret and be good girls, all right? (*On her way out.*) And keep practicing! (*Laura exits.*)

MARGARET. (*Calling off to Laura.*) Goodbye, missus. (*Turning to the girls.*) All right—you heard your mam, Virginia. Let's hear that line again.

VIRGINIA. (*Declaiming loudly again.*) “I am just a lowly sheep in the fields abiding.”

MARGARET. Again.

VIRGINIA. (*Even louder and more dramatic.*) “I am just a lowly sheep in the fields abiding.”

MARGARET. Third time's the charm, they say.

VIRGINIA & MINNIE. (*Loudly in unison.*) “I AM JUST A LOWLY SHEEP IN THE FIELDS ABIDING.” (*The girls collapse in a fit of giggling.*)

MARGARET. (*Who is also giggling.*) Very good—the both of you! I'm convinced!

VIRGINIA. Told you I knew it.

MARGARET. I never doubted it for a minute. (*Now to Minnie.*) Minnie, you're in the Christmas pageant as well?

MINNIE. Yes, ma'am.

MARGARET. Do you want to go over your lines, too?

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

MINNIE. Oh, no, ma'am. I don't have any lines.

VIRGINIA. Minnie's a chicken.

MARGARET. (*Surprised, reproachful.*) Now, that's not a very nice thing to say, is it?

VIRGINIA. But—

MARGARET. (*Interrupting.*) But nothin'. Santa Claus wouldn't like that much, would he now?

VIRGINIA. (*Suddenly a little worried.*) No, he wouldn't,— (*Now explaining herself.*) —but what I mean is Minnie *plays* a chicken. In the stable scene.

MINNIE. All's I got to do is cluck.

MARGARET. Then that's a horse of another color, isn't it? Well, then, lass, go on—let's hear it.

MINNIE. Huh?

MARGARET. Cluck, Minnie, cluck! (*Minnie shyly looks at Virginia.*)

VIRGINIA. Go ahead. You can do it! (*Minnie clucks softly at first. Virginia and Margaret cheer her on, and Minnie starts to cluck louder and with more confidence.*)

MARGARET. Well done, Minnie! You'll be the best chicken in the barn tonight, won't you?

VIRGINIA. In the *stable*.

MARGARET. Well, wherever it is, you'll be the best! (*Now to Virginia.*) Once more, just for luck? All together now. Ready? One—two—three—

MINNIE. (*Clucks enthusiastically.*) **VIRGINIA.** (*Declaiming with zeal.*) "I am just a lowly sheep in the fields abiding."

MARGARET. (*Enthusiastically applauding.*) Minnie, that was fine! And Virginia, I don't believe I have ever heard a more fervent sheep! (*The doorbell rings. Margaret goes to answer it. Off, we can hear Margaret speaking to someone at the door: another young girl.*)

VIRGINIA. (*to Minnie.*) I still wish I had a bigger part in the play—like an angel—or even Mary.

MINNIE. (*By rote.*) "If wishes were horses—"

VIRGINIA. I know, I know.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

MINNIE. (*Gossipy.*) And speaking of horses, have you heard who just got her very own pony for an early Christmas present?

VIRGINIA. (*Jealous.*) As if I couldn't guess. (*Margaret enters with the two young Cunningham girls, CLARA and her little sister JANIE. Both are very well-dressed in fashionable coats and hats. Janie is carrying a fancily-wrapped Christmas present.*)

MINNIE. (*Finishing her thought, but also quite surprised to see Clara in the flesh.*) Clara Cunningham?!

CLARA. Why, hello, Minnie. Hello, Virginia.

VIRGINIA. (*Not at all pleased to see Clara and Janie but being polite.*) Hello, Clara. Hello, Janie.

MARGARET. These two young ladies have come to call on you, Virginia. Would you like to invite them in?

VIRGINIA. (*Almost impolite.*) Would I like to invite them—?

MARGARET. (*Taking charge.*) Come right in, girls. May I take your coats?

CLARA. No, thank you. We can only stay a minute. We've got so much to do before the pageant tonight. I'm very excited, aren't you, Virginia?

VIRGINIA. (*Not very enthusiastically.*) Yeah, sure. (*Giving Virginia a look, Margaret exits into the kitchen.*)

CLARA. (*Rubbing it in a bit.*) It was such an honor to be cast in the role of Mary last year, but now, two years in a row? Well, it's just thrilling beyond belief, let me tell you.

VIRGINIA. (*Trying in vain to cover her own disappointment.*) I bet.

JANIE. (*Proudly and a little snidely.*) And I'm an angel this year!

VIRGINIA. (*Annoyed.*) I know.

CLARA. Anyway, we have a present for you and your parents.

VIRGINIA. (*Somewhat suspicious, but a little excited.*) A present? For me?

CLARA. (*Correcting her.*) And your parents.

JANIE. (*Handing the box to Virginia.*) It's a fruitcake.

VIRGINIA. (*Barely hiding her disappointment.*) Oh.

CLARA. Monsieur Laurent, our French chef, makes dozens of them every year for us to give to all our neighborhood friends. And now, since you've moved uptown to *our* neighborhood, you get one, too.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

VIRGINIA. (*Not enthusiastically.*) Great. (*A pause.*) Thank you.

CLARA. You're welcome.

JANIE. (*Parroting Clara.*) You're welcome.

CLARA. Well, we have to be on our way. More fruitcakes to deliver!
(*Noticing Minnie.*) Oh, Minnie—I'm afraid we don't have one for you.

MINNIE. That's all right. You didn't know I'd be here.

JANIE. But we wouldn't have one for you anyway.

CLARA. See, they're only for our friends in this *exclusive* neighborhood—

JANIE. (*Interrupting.*) And since *you* don't live in this neighborhood—
(*Virginia notices that Minnie looks as if she might start crying.*)

VIRGINIA. (*Jumping to Minnie's aid.*) That's okay, Minnie. I'll be happy to give you some of my fruitcake. In fact, you can have *all* of it, if you want.

MINNIE. Thanks.

VIRGINIA. (*Still to Minnie but making a dig at Clara and Janie.*) And, anyway, *Santa* comes to *everybody's* neighborhood—and that's what *really* counts.

CLARA. Santa? (*Laughing.*) Seriously, Virginia? You still believe in Santa Claus?

VIRGINIA. Huh?

CLARA. You know—the red suit? The beard?

VIRGINIA. I know who Santa Claus is, Clara.

CLARA. Then you must know he's not real.

MINNIE. (*Shocked.*) Not real?

CLARA. Even Janie knows that.

JANIE. And I'm only seven.

VIRGINIA. What are you talking about? Of course, he's real.

CLARA. Have you ever seen him?

VIRGINIA. No, but—

CLARA. (*Interrupting.*) And do you know anybody who has?

VIRGINIA. Well, no, but—

CLARA. (*Interrupting.*) That's because there *is* no Santa Claus, Virginia.

VIRGINIA. There is too! He comes every Christmas Eve—just like clockwork!

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

CLARA. (*Snidely.*) And he travels the entire world in a single night in his sleigh pulled by flying reindeer!

VIRGINIA. (*Becoming defensive.*) Right!

CLARA. (*Still snidely.*) And he lands on rooftops and slides down chimneys carrying a great big sack full of toys!

VIRGINIA. (*Even more defensive.*) Yes, Clara—everybody knows that!

CLARA. (*Even more snidely.*) Everybody knows it's a *fairy tale*, Virginia! A fairy tale made up by grown-ups to trick children into being good all year long.

VIRGINIA. (*So stunned in disbelief, she can hardly speak.*) But—but—

CLARA. (*Interrupting.*) He's not real, Virginia. Ask anyone—well, anyone who's not a baby! (*Clara and Janie laugh derisively.*)

VIRGINIA. I'm *not* a baby!

CLARA. No—you're just a *sheep*! (*Clara and Janie laugh again, then Clara changes her tone.*) Anyway, we have to go. See you at the pageant tonight. (*Clara and Janie start to leave, but Clara turns back and looks at Virginia again. Clara laughs as she and Janie exit.*) Ha! Santa Claus?! Really?

JANIE. (*Laughing.*) What a baby! (*We hear the front door open and close.*)

VIRGINIA. (*Frustrated, loudly calling toward to the front door.*) I am not a baby! Aarrgghh! That Clara Cunningham!

MARGARET. (*Entering from the kitchen, having heard Virginia's outburst.*) Have your little friends left already?

VIRGINIA. And not a minute too soon!

MARGARET. What's the matter, Virginia?

VIRGINIA. It's that Clara Cunningham. You won't believe what she just said to me, Margaret. She said—she said there's no Santa Claus!

MARGARET. (*Manufacturing the appropriate amount of shock.*) Oh, no, she didn't!

MINNIE. Oh, yes, she did!

MARGARET. Well, now—the very idea! Surely, she must have been pulling your leg.

VIRGINIA. No, she was serious.

MARGARET. Are you sure she wasn't just teasing you, lass?

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

MINNIE. She called Virginia a baby!

VIRGINIA. It's not true, is it, Margaret? That Santa's not real?

MARGARET. Of course, not, lass.

VIRGINIA. She said everybody knew about it but me.

MARGARET. Well, I, for one, don't know it. No Santa Claus? Why, that's just rubbish!

VIRGINIA. That's what I should have said to her: "That's just rubbish!"

MINNIE. "Just rubbish!"

VIRGINIA. Ooh, that Clara Cunningham! (*A pause.*) Of course, that's just like her, isn't it, Minnie?

MINNIE. Yeah.

VIRGINIA. She's just so— so—

MARGARET. (*After a pause.*) "So" what?

VIRGINIA. (*Trying to maintain her resolve.*) So—oh, I'm not gonna say it. *I'm not gonna say it!* I've worked too hard being good for Santa all year long to mess up now.

MARGARET. That's my girl.

VIRGINIA. (*Unable to hold back.*) She's so *snooty*, is all! Clara *and* her sister Janie! Just a couple of snoots!

MINNIE. But Clara's worse.

VIRGINIA. She's just a little spoiled brat.

MARGARET. (*Warning.*) Virginia—

VIRGINIA. (*Interrupting, heedless of Margaret's admonition.*) And she gets everything she wants, no matter what.

MARGARET. (*With a bit of sarcasm, knowing that Virginia is also fairly spoiled.*) Oh, *she* gets everything *she* wants? Is that right?

MINNIE. She just got her very own pony!

VIRGINIA. And did you see that fancy brand new coat with the fur collar and the fur muff? And in September, for her birthday, she got to pick out anything she wanted at F.A.O. Schwarz!

MINNIE. (*Nodding in agreement.*) Anything in the *whole store!*

VIRGINIA. And, to top it all off, guess who's gonna be "Mary" again tonight in the Christmas pageant?

MARGARET. (*With a slight note of sarcasm.*) Surely not Clara Cunningham?

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

VIRGINIA. Surely, *yes*, Clara Cunningham!

MINNIE. And her little sister Janie's the angel.

VIRGINIA. Ha! That's a laugh! That little brat's about as much of an angel as—

MARGARET. (*Interrupting, warning.*) Uhn-uhn-uhn! Careful, now. "You-know-who" might be listening.

MINNIE. (*Sotto voce, as a reminder to Virginia.*) She means Santa Claus.

VIRGINIA. (*To Minnie, frustrated.*) I know who she means, Minnie! (*Now to Margaret.*) Okay, okay. Let's just say I'd be surprised if those Cunningham sisters were on Santa's "nice" list—especially when they don't even *believe* in him!

MARGARET. You know, lass, Santa's list is a very well-guarded secret, known only to him—so you'd best not be conjecturin' who may or may not be on it.

MINNIE. Oh, everybody's on the list, Margaret—and you're either on the "nice" side or the "naughty" side.

VIRGINIA. Well, all's I know is I'm on the "nice" side. I always *have* been, and I always *will* be! I just have to *stay* nice, that's all.

MINNIE. Even to the Cunninghams?

VIRGINIA. (*Frustrated.*) Ugh. (*A pause.*) Even to the Cunninghams.

MARGARET. (*Picking up the gift-wrapped present.*) What's this?

VIRGINIA. (*Unenthusiastically.*) A present they brought.

MARGARET. Well, now, they can't be all bad then, can they? They brought you a lovely gift!

MINNIE. It's a fruitcake.

MARGARET. (*Setting the present back down, disappointed.*) Ah. (*We hear the front entry hall door open and SAM O'Hanlon, the younger brother of Virginia's father, singing "A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" by Theodore August Metz and Joe Hayden as he enters.*)

SAM. (*Off, singing.*)

WHEN YOU HEAR THEM BELLS

GO DINGA-LINGA-LING—

(*Sam enters dancing and singing, encouraging the girls to join his merrymaking.*)

ALL TURN AROUND AND SWEETLY YOU MUST SING.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

VIRGINIA. (*Over Sam's singing.*) Uncle Sam!

SAM. (*Singing and now dancing with Virginia.*)

WHEN THE BIRDS DANCE TOO,
AND THE POETS ALL JOIN IN,

THERE'LL BE A HOT TIME IN OLD TOWN TONIGHT!

(Sam continues to "la di da" to the tune of the song and to dance with Virginia, who enthusiastically joins in the singing and dancing. Sam encourages Minnie to join him and Virginia.) Minnie! Come on! Dance with us! *(Minnie is reluctant, but Sam and Virginia are able to coax her into joining the fun.)*

SAM, VIRGINIA, & MINNIE. (*Singing in unison when they get to the title phrase.*)

THERE'LL BE A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TONIGHT!

(The girls continue to dance and sing together as Sam leaves them to enlist Margaret to join in the fun.)

SAM. (*Still dancing, putting on a broad Irish dialect to impress Margaret.*) Well, if it isn't Margaret Murphy, the fairest lass Ireland ever saw? Come dance with me!

MARGARET. I don't dance with strange men.

SAM. (*Still feigning an Irish brogue.*) Then I had better introduce myself, hadn't I? How do you do, Miss Murphy? George Samuel O'Hanlon's me name, and dancin's me game! *(Sam approaches Margaret again, his arms set in dancing posture.)*

MARGARET. Is it now? Well, it's not *my* game, Mr. O'Hanlon, so I'd best leave you to it. *(Margaret picks up the fruitcake present and starts to leave toward the kitchen.)*

VIRGINIA & MINNIE. (*Finishing their singing and dancing.*)

THERE'LL BE A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN TONIGHT!

(The girls giggle, still dancing a bit, as Sam talks to Margaret.)

SAM. (*No longer employing the Irish brogue.*) One of these days, Margaret Murphy, you're going to fall for the charms of Sam O'Hanlon.

MARGARET. (*Smiling confidently, as she exits, carrying the fruitcake with her into the kitchen.*) Not if I can help it.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

SAM. (*Calling off to Margaret.*) That's the thing, though—you won't be able to help it. I'll be so ruddy charming you won't know what hit you! (*Turning to Virginia and Minnie.*) Right, Virginia?

VIRGINIA. (*Giggling.*) Sure!

SAM. Minnie?

MINNIE. (*Shyly.*) I guess so.

SAM. (*Referring to Minnie's lackluster response.*) What's the matter, Minnie? Don't you believe in romance?

MINNIE. Huh?

SAM. Haven't you ever had a crush on some handsome young lad?

MINNIE. (*Gasping, then ...*) No!

SAM. Well, don't you fret. You *will*, mark my words—and then you'll change your tune.

VIRGINIA. Can I ask you a question, Uncle Sam?

SAM. Of course.

VIRGINIA. And you'll tell me the truth?

SAM. When have I ever lied to you?

VIRGINIA. Swear?

SAM. Oh, I never swear, Virginia—at least not in front of children. (*He laughs at his own joke.*)

VIRGINIA. No, I mean swear to tell the truth!

SAM. The whole truth and nothing but the truth? Why, yes, your Honor—I promise!

VIRGINIA. Okay, then. (*A pause.*) Is there really a Santa Claus?

SAM. (*Putting on a show while stalling for an answer.*) “Is there really a Santa Claus?” Did you hear that, Minnie? What kinda question is that?

VIRGINIA. I'm serious. Is there?

SAM. Why ... absolutely!

VIRGINIA. You're sure?

SAM. Sure as shooting! Of course, there's a Santa Claus! (*Suddenly feigning indignance.*) Who says there's not?

MINNIE. Clara and Janie Cunningham.

SAM. (*Affecting a “Western” accent.*) Oh, them Cunningham varmints, huh? (*Putting on a show complete with shadow boxing.*) Lemme at 'em!

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

I'll show 'em what's what! No Santa Claus?! Why, the very idea makes my blood boil!

VIRGINIA. (*Imitating Sam shadow boxing.*) Mine, too!

MINNIE. (*Imitating Virginia imitating Sam.*) Mine, too!

SAM. We'll show 'em, won't we? And just imagine the look on their faces when jolly ol' St. Nick shows up Christmas morning and proves us right! You betcha there's a Santa Claus—believe you me!

VIRGINIA. (*Satisfied for now.*) Okay, Uncle Sam. I believe you.

SAM. Well, you'd better! I mean, really—can you beat that? No Santa Claus? What's this world coming too? (*Shaking his head.*) Tsk, tsk, tsk. (*Changing his tone.*) Now, in the meantime—what about tonight? Are you two ready for your big show?

VIRGINIA. (*Confidently.*) Sure am!

SAM. (*Laughing.*) That's what I like to hear! What about you, Minnie?

MINNIE. (*Timidly.*) I guess so.

SAM. (*Sarcastically.*) Oh, Minnie, your enthusiasm never ceases to astound. (*Now trying to pep her up.*) Come on now, Minnie-Hah-Hah—it's your opening night! Let's see some excitement!

MINNIE. I'm nervous.

SAM. Nervous? Well, of course, you're nervous. All the great actors throughout history have been nervous on opening night.

MINNIE. They have?

SAM. Take it from me, kid. Why, every opening night I've ever had, I've been a bundle of nerves.

VIRGINIA. (*Incredulous.*) You, Uncle Sam?

SAM. Yes, me. Would you believe I was so stricken with stage fright on my opening night with the Bowery Burlesquers that I was sick to my stomach?

MINNIE. That's sorta how I feel.

SAM. And that's perfectly natural, Minnie—but you know what?

MINNIE. What?

SAM. There's a magical remedy for stage fright.

MINNIE. What is it?

SAM. It's a special secret only we actors know. (*A pause.*) Should I tell you?

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

VIRGINIA. Tell us, tell us!

SAM. Can I trust you to keep it a secret?

MINNIE. Yes, tell us!

VIRGINIA. We promise!

SAM. Okay, here goes: Right before you go on stage— (*He stops for dramatic effect.*)

VIRGINIA. Yes?

SAM. —you close your eyes— (*Now changing his tone.*) Let's practice, all right? Go ahead. Close your eyes. (*A pause.*) Are they closed tight? Minnie?

MINNIE. Yes.

SAM. Virginia?

VIRGINIA. Yes! I can't close them any tighter.

SAM. Okay, then. (*Changing his tone again.*) Now—imagine seeing all the people in the audience out there in their seats. (*A pause.*) Can you see them?

VIRGINIA & MINNIE. Yes.

SAM. Good. Now—imagine that none of them—not a single one!—is wearing a stitch of clothes! They're all just sittin' out there in their birthday suits! (*Sam laughs uproariously and Virginia giggles uncontrollably. It takes Sam and Virginia a second to realize that Minnie, however, is so mortified that she's on the verge of tears. Sam tries to control his laughter.*) Oh, no, Minnie—what's wrong?

VIRGINIA. What is it, Minnie?

MINNIE. (*On the verge of tears.*) Mommy and Daddy—they're *naked!* (*Minnie bursts out crying.*)

VIRGINIA. It's just pretend, Minnie! (*Margaret, having heard Minnie's wails, enters from the kitchen.*)

MARGARET. (*Going to Minnie and holding her.*) What is it, Minnie? What's happened, darlin'?

MINNIE. (*Choked with sobs, looking at Sam.*) I can't tell! It's a secret!

MARGARET. (*Angrily, now also looking at Sam.*) A secret, is it?

SAM. It was just a little game—

MARGARET. (*Interrupting, angrily.*) Oh, just another one of your little games, Mr. O'Hanlon? I guess we can see how this one's turned out!

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

VIRGINIA. Uncle Sam was just trying to help us get ready for the show tonight.

SAM. It was a perfectly harmless little gag.

MARGARET. *(Still angry.)* Oh, harmless, was it? *(Now to Minnie, who has mostly stopped crying.)* Now, now, lass—that's better, isn't it?

MINNIE. Yes.

MARGARET. All right, then. *(A pause while Minnie collects herself.)*

Now, Minnie, dear—maybe you had better be getting back to your house before it gets dark, don't you think?

VIRGINIA. *(Complaining.)* Aaawww, really?

MARGARET. *(Going to get Minnie's things from the rack in the entry hall where she'd put them before.)* I think it's time. Don't you, dear?

MINNIE. Maybe so. *(Minnie follows Margaret towards the entry hall. Margaret returns with a shawl for herself and helps Minnie into her coat, hat, etc.)*

SAM. Oh, gosh, Minnie, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I was just trying to get a laugh, you know? *(Extending his hand.)* Still friends?

MINNIE. *(Shakes his hand gently.)* Okay.

SAM. *(Smiling.)* Okay.

MINNIE. *(Starting to leave.)* Bye, Virginia. See you tonight.

SAM. And you'll be great tonight, Minnie. You'll knock 'em dead!

MINNIE. *(Suddenly mortified and on the verge of tears again.)* Dead?! *(Minnie starts to wail again.)*

SAM. No, no, no, no, no! Not really, Minnie—it's just a figure of speech!

VIRGINIA. Oh, no, not again! Uncle Sam!

MARGARET. *(Her eyes shooting daggers at Sam.)* It's all right, Minnie, dear. Come on, come on. I'll walk you home. *(As she and Minnie exit.)* Shush, shush, shush. Everything will be fine. Come on, dear.

SAM. *(After Margaret and Minnie have gone, ashamed.)* Hoo, boy! I really did it this time, didn't I?

VIRGINIA. It's all right, Uncle Sam. Minnie just cries—a lot.

SAM. Yeah, I noticed.

VIRGINIA. And, anyway, I thought it was funny.

SAM. Minnie's crying?

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

VIRGINIA. No—I meant your actor’s secret. Everybody— (*Now whispering excitedly.*) —*naked!* (*She starts giggling again.*)

SAM. (*Conspiratorially, egging Virginia on.*) Yeah, it is pretty funny at that, huh? Especially at St. Cecelia’s! Hoo, boy! Can you imagine Sister Aloysius? (*Sam grabs an antimacassar from the back of the settee to serve as a makeshift wimple to comically imitate a sour-faced nun discovering she’s naked. Virginia giggles even more boisterously, which encourages Sam even more.*) Or Father Doyle? (*He grabs a pillow from the settee and stuffs it under his coat to mockingly imitate the overweight priest. Virginia is really laughing hard now.*) Or how about Móraí? (*Sam does a comical imitation of his very proper mother, whom Virginia calls Móraí, trying to cover up her sudden nakedness. Virginia is absolutely cracking up. Neither of them hears the front door open nor notices that Virginia’s father FRANK O’Hanlon, carrying a copy of the evening Sun newspaper and his doctor’s bag, has entered the room accompanied by his mother MARY ANN [Móraí] O’Hanlon. Both are bundled up for the cold. They stand looking on as Sam continues his imitation and Virginia laughs uncontrollably. Mary Ann, particularly, is not amused.*)

FRANK. (*Interrupting the shenanigans.*) What’s all this? (*Sam finally notices Frank and Mary Ann, quickly ceases his imitation, and starts to calm himself. Virginia, recognizing her father’s voice but not turning to look at him or her grandmother, still laughs wildly.*)

VIRGINIA. (*Through her giggles and laughter.*) Uncle Sam’s pretending he’s Móraí—and she’s *naked!* (*Sam attempts to gesture to Virginia to stop talking and notice who has entered before she gets them both into more trouble.*)

MARY ANN. (*Utterly offended.*) Well, I never!

VIRGINIA. (*Shocked and guilty, finally noticing her grandmother.*) Móraí?!

FRANK. Hello, Sam.

SAM. (*Sheepishly.*) Hiya, Frank. You see, we were just—I mean Virginia and me—we were just goofing around and—

FRANK. (*Interrupting, trying to smooth everything over for his mother’s benefit.*) Never mind, Sam.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

MARY ANN. (*Appalled.*) And just what did you mean that I am—*unattired?*

SAM. Oh, it's nothing, Mother. Just having a little fun, that's all.

MARY ANN. (*Still peeved.*) At my expense, so it seems.

SAM. (*Teasingly placating his mother.*) Nothing to get yourself worked up into a lather over. (*Winking at Virginia.*) Right, Virginia?

VIRGINIA. (*Giggling.*) Right.

MARY ANN. (*Still a bit annoyed.*) Well, I don't know about that. (*Now putting her upset aside.*) Virginia, come give your grandmother a kiss on the cheek. (*Virginia crosses to kiss her grandmother, which appeases Mary Ann.*) That's a dear.

FRANK. And what about your tired, old papa? (*Virginia gives Frank a kiss, too. Frank begins to remove his coat, hat, gloves, etc. He exits to hang them in the offstage entry hall.*)

MARY ANN. Virginia, shouldn't you be getting ready for the pageant at St. Cecelia's tonight?

VIRGINIA. Oh, Móraí, I've been ready for weeks. Wanna hear?

MARY ANN. I'll hear it tonight, dear—

VIRGINIA. (*Interrupting, declaiming loudly.*) "I am just a lowly sheep in the fields abiding."

FRANK. (*Returning, still carrying his copy of the Sun newspaper which he sets on a chair.*) Impressive.

SAM. I'll say! Hey, Virginia—whaddaya say you quit school and join your favorite uncle on the stage down at the Bowery Burlesque?

VIRGINIA. (*Excited.*) Really?!

FRANK. (*Gently but firmly, to Virginia.*) No, not really. You're eight years old, and your job is going to school at St. Cecelia's—just like my job is working as the deputy coroner for the borough of Manhattan.

MARY ANN. Continuing to don the mantle of medicine just as your father did, God rest his soul, and his father before him.

SAM. (*Mostly to himself.*) And I see where this is going—

MARY ANN. (*Interrupting, continuing her thought.*) Unlike my youngest son who has decided to fritter away *his* life playing in the vaudeville—

SAM. (*Interrupting, still mostly to himself.*) And there it is—

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

MARY ANN. (*Interrupting, continuing her thought.*) —and I swear on your father’s grave, Samuel, that my only granddaughter will *never* go on the stage.

VIRGINIA. But what about tonight, Móraí? (*A pause.*) The Christmas pageant?

MARY ANN. (*Caught.*) Oh. (*Then justifying.*) Well, that’s *church*, dear. That doesn’t count.

VIRGINIA. But it’s still acting—

MARY ANN. (*Firmly.*) It’s not the same thing, Virginia.

FRANK. (*Changing the subject.*) May I take your coat, Mother?

MARY ANN. (*As Frank helps her to remove her coat, etc.*) Where’s your girl—that—oh, what’s her name again?

SAM. Margaret. (*Switching into his broad Irish brogue again.*) The lovely Margaret Murphy. (*Frank exits to hang up his mother’s coat, etc. in the entry hall off.*)

MARY ANN. (*Aware of Sam’s apparent interest in Margaret.*) Lovely, you say? I hadn’t noticed—but then I never really notice much about the help—and as far as I’m concerned, neither should you, Samuel.

SAM. Oh, is that right?

VIRGINIA. Margaret went to walk Minnie home after Uncle Sam made her cry.

FRANK. (*Re-entering, to Sam.*) You did *what*?

VIRGINIA. Oh, it’s all, right, Papa. You know how Minnie is.

SAM. I didn’t mean to, if that’s any consolation.

FRANK. It’ll have to be, I guess. (*Changing the subject.*) Mother will be joining us for supper this evening before the Christmas pageant at St. Cecelia’s. Any chance *you* might—?

SAM. (*Interrupting.*) Can’t. Sorry. I promised some of the Bowery boys I’d have a bite with them before the eight-forty tonight. And anyway, I gotta run. (*Starting to exit.*) I gotta get to the cobbler’s shop down on 14th Street before he closes. I can’t exactly stop the show without my tap shoes, can I? (*Sam does a quick tap step, which Virginia applauds. Sam bows to accept Virginia’s applause. He goes to Mary Ann and gives her a kiss on the cheek.*) Goodnight, Mother. A pleasure to see you, as always. (*Now to Virginia.*) Hey, kiddo—sorry to miss your show tonight, but my show’s

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

gotta go on, too, you know? (*Starting to exit again.*) Oh—and remember that actor’s secret I taught you! (*Sam winks at Virginia and, behind his mother’s back, does a quick bit of his imitation of Mary Ann naked. Virginia giggles, and Sam exits.*)

FRANK. (*To Virginia.*) So, you’ve got secrets now, huh? Anything you want to tell your father?

VIRGINIA. Nope. A secret’s a secret.

FRANK. And where, pray tell, is your mother—unless that’s a secret, too?

VIRGINIA. Out shopping for Christmas presents.

FRANK. Ah, I see. (*Winking at Mary Ann.*) Doing her bit to help out old Santa Claus, huh?

VIRGINIA. (*Rolling her eyes.*) Papa, Santa’s got his *elves* to help him. He doesn’t need Mama’s help.

FRANK. (*Looking at Mary Ann.*) Oh, that’s right. I forgot.

MARY ANN. (*Sitting.*) Did you write a letter to Santa this year, Virginia?

VIRGINIA. Right after my birthday.

MARY ANN. But your birthday’s in *July*!

VIRGINIA. The early bird catches the worm, *Móraí*. And besides, I’m not taking any chances.

MARY ANN. And just what did you ask Santa to bring you?

VIRGINIA. (*Quickly, by rote.*) A big girl doll, a Chinese Checkers game, a new pair of ice skates, and a bicycle.

MARY ANN. (*Looking at Frank.*) That’s quite a list.

FRANK. (*Taking a seat.*) And it’s all she’s been talking about since August. She’s not the only one who can recite it by heart. (*We hear the front door open and close in the offstage entry hall. Margaret, shivering from the cold, enters, not expecting to see Frank and Mary Ann.*)

MARGARET. (*Removing her shawl, and noticing Frank and Mary Ann.*) Oh, Dr. O’Hanlon! You’re home—

FRANK. (*Rising to speak to Margaret.*) For once I got to skip out a little early this afternoon. I stopped by my sister’s house on the way here to pick up Mother.

MARY ANN. Good afternoon— (*Mary Ann looks to Frank when she can’t remember Margaret’s name.*)

FRANK. (*Quickly, sotto voce.*) Margaret—

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

MARY ANN. (*Finishing her thought.*) —Margaret.

MARGARET. (*Noticing Mary Ann's faux pas, curtseying.*) Afternoon, ma'am. (*After a short uncomfortable pause.*) Would you like a cup of tea, or—?

MARY ANN. Yes, that would be nice. (*Mary Ann picks up the Sun newspaper and starts perusing it.*)

FRANK. (*Sitting again.*) Thank you, Margaret.

MARGARET. (*Nodding and starting to exit.*) Sir.

FRANK. Oh, and Margaret— (*Margaret stops and turns towards Frank.*) I understand there was a bit of an upset with my brother and Virginia's little friend. I appreciate your seeing Minnie home.

MARGARET. You're welcome, sir. (*Margaret starts to exit to the kitchen.*)

VIRGINIA. Can I go with Margaret and have a cookie?

MARY ANN. (*Without looking up from the paper, correcting Virginia's usage.*) May I go with—

VIRGINIA. (*Interrupting.*) May I go with Margaret and have a cookie?

FRANK. I don't see why not. But just one—you don't want to spoil your supper.

VIRGINIA. (*Exiting quickly ahead of Margaret.*) I won't. (*Virginia exits to the kitchen. Margaret follows.*)

MARY ANN. She will—just you wait and see. (*We hear someone entering the offstage front entry hall. Immediately, we see Laura, carrying some packages wrapped in paper and string, entering.*)

FRANK. Ah—there you are!

LAURA. (*Surprised.*) You're home?! (*Seeing Laura laden with packages, Frank goes to her.*)

FRANK. Here, sweetheart, let me help with those.

LAURA. Oh, don't bother. I've got them— (*Just as she finishes her thought, she drops a package. Frank arrives just in time to catch it. Laura smiles.*) Nice catch.

FRANK. Thanks. Think I'm ready to try out for the Giants this spring? (*He kisses Laura lightly.*)

LAURA. You must be exhausted.

FRANK. (*Covering.*) I'm fine.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

LAURA. (*Noticing Mary Ann.*) Hello, Mrs. O'Hanlon.

MARY ANN. Hello, dear. (*Mary Ann also gives Laura a light kiss.*)

LAURA. I was just out getting some Christmas shopping done while there's still time. (*Removing coat, hat, and gloves.*) Where are Virginia and Minnie?

FRANK. Virginia's in the kitchen with Margaret, and apparently Sam was here earlier and scared Minnie off.

LAURA. (*A bit shocked.*) What?

FRANK. I don't think it was anything serious. You know Minnie.

LAURA. Well, I'm just happy to have you home.

FRANK. No happier than I am, sweetheart. (*After a pause.*) Believe it or not, there wasn't a single dead body brought into the morgue this afternoon.

LAURA. (*Sotto voce, a bit embarrassed.*) Frank! We have company.

MARY ANN. Oh, I'm used to it, dear. We doctor's wives become accustomed to the most astonishing topics of conversation.

LAURA. I suppose. Still, it was one thing hearing about the ailments of living and breathing patients, but now that Frank's working as a coroner—well, let's just say it's taking some getting used to.

FRANK. (*Trying to curtail the conversation.*) Now, sweetheart—

LAURA. (*Interrupting.*) I suppose I should have expected the long hours, but the gruesome stories he brings home are quite another matter altogether.

FRANK. All I *meant* was that it was a rare occurrence, as well you know, not to have to work late into the evening—because, unfortunately, murder doesn't take a holiday at Christmastime.

LAURA. (*Scolding.*) Frank—! (*Laura exits to the front entry hall to put away her coat, hat, etc.*)

MARY ANN. That's certainly how it seems if you believe what you read in the newspapers. Why, just this morning, the *New York World* ran a story about the most ghastly killing of a young girl in Canarsie. It was horrifying—the things those witnesses reported seeing!

FRANK. Mother, how many times have I told you *not* to read those scandal rags like the *World*—or the *Journal* either, for that matter? Pulitzer and Hearst are just falling over each other to see who can come up with the

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

most lurid headlines and sell more papers. (*Virginia enters. She's munching on a cookie and holding another one in her hand. Frank picks up the Sun newspaper from where Mary Ann had left it. Laura re-enters from the entry hall.*) The only newspaper that still relies on facts is the *New York Sun*. If you read it in the *Sun*, you can believe it.

LAURA. What's that in your hand, Virginia?

VIRGINIA. (*Speaking with her mouth full.*) A cookie. Papa said—

FRANK. (*Interrupting.*) I told her I thought one cookie would be all right.

LAURA. (*To Virginia.*) And how many have you had? (*Virginia shrugs.*) Well, if you don't know, maybe you'd better go put that one back.

VIRGINIA. (*Complaining.*) But it's Christmas!

LAURA. Exactly—and what will Santa Claus think about a little girl who talks back to her mother? (*Virginia doesn't answer.*) Now, scoot! (*Virginia exits back to the kitchen.*) She needs to eat her supper *early*, Frank. She'll fill up on those cookies and spoil her appetite.

FRANK. (*Looking at Mary Ann.*) So I've heard.

MARY ANN. Her appetite won't be the *only* thing that's spoiled. (*Laura, smarting from Mary Ann's innuendo, gives Frank a look.*)

FRANK. (*Defensive.*) If you don't mind my saying so, Mother, if anyone spoils Virginia, it's you.

MARY ANN. Well, in my defense, she *is* my only granddaughter.

FRANK. (*Knowing where the conversation is headed.*) I know.

MARY ANN. And if I had *more* grandchildren, then Virginia might not be so spoiled.

FRANK. (*Frustrated.*) Mother, really,—

MARY ANN. (*Interrupting.*) All I'm saying is that Virginia ought to have a little brother or sister as a playmate. Someone she could learn to share with.

FRANK. Believe me, we would like nothing more. It's just that, unfortunately—at least, so far—it hasn't been in the cards for us. Give us time. (*Frank looks at Laura, who is very uncomfortable with the conversation.*)

MARY ANN. You're going to run *out* of time, if it doesn't happen soon. You know, Frank, a woman is a ticking clock.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

FRANK. I know, Mother. I am a physician, and I am fairly well-versed in biology. (*Margaret enters from the kitchen with the tea tray, putting a halt to the conversation. She sets it down and pours the tea.*)

MARGARET. (*Handing the tea to Mary Ann.*) Here you are, ma'am.

MARY ANN. Thank you, dear.

MARGARET. Cream or sugar?

MARY ANN. No, thank you. This is fine.

MARGARET. (*To Laura.*) Care for tea, missus?

LAURA. (*Covering her discomfort.*) No, thank you, Margaret. Not right now.

MARGARET. (*To Frank.*) Sir?

FRANK. None for me. Thank you.

MARGARET. (*To both Laura and Frank.*) I'll just leave it here, if you change your mind. (*Margaret exits to the kitchen again. As she does, Virginia enters.*)

MARY ANN. You know, Frank, I certainly didn't mean to imply—

FRANK. You weren't exactly being subtle, Mother.

VIRGINIA. I put the cookie back, just like you told me to. I didn't eat it—I promise.

LAURA. That's fine, sweetheart. Now,— (*Shifting the focus of the conversation away from herself.*)—have you told your grandmother what you've asked Santa Claus to bring you for Christmas?

MARY ANN. Oh, yes—she's recited her entire list to me. (*To Virginia.*) You have some high expectations of Santa this year, don't you, dear? Are you sure he's going to be able to bring you all those presents?

VIRGINIA. Why wouldn't he? I've been very good.

MARY ANN. (*Hemming and hawing.*) Oh, I'm sure you have, Virginia—but it's just that—well—

VIRGINIA. (*Interrupting.*) What is it, Móraí? Don't *you* believe in Santa Claus?

MARY ANN. (*Taken aback.*) Believe in Santa Claus? (*Looking at Frank and Laura.*) Doesn't everyone?

VIRGINIA. No, they don't—at least not according to those Cunningham sisters. They said I was a baby to believe in Santa.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

MARY ANN. Well, you're certainly not a baby, are you, Virginia? You're—what now? Eight?

VIRGINIA. Eight-and-a-half.

MARY ANN. Well, then!

VIRGINIA. Clara Cunningham says Santa Claus is just a story that grown-ups made up to get children to be good all the time.

FRANK. She does, eh?

VIRGINIA. Is that true, Papa?

FRANK. (*Stalling.*) What? That Santa's only something parents invented to keep their children in line?

LAURA. (*To Virginia.*) Heavens no, sweetheart! You can't think that.

VIRGINIA. I don't want to think it, but now I just don't know. (*A pause.*) So, is he real or not?

MARY ANN. It's perfectly all right for you to believe in Santa Claus, Virginia.

VIRGINIA. But is he *real*, Móraí?

MARY ANN. (*Trying to avoid answering.*) Oh, Virginia— (*She doesn't finish her thought, but instead, goes silent.*)

VIRGINIA. Mama, is he?

LAURA. Virginia, I'm sorry Clara's gone and upset you like this. You know, people say all sorts of things, but you can't let what they say matter so much to you—and anyway, I'm sure she was just teasing.

VIRGINIA. But you're not answering my question! (*To her father now.*) Papa, you know just about everything there is to know, right?

FRANK. Now, hold on there, sweetheart. There's an awful lot out there in the world to know—

VIRGINIA. Well, you know more than anyone *I've* ever known—so you'll tell me, won't you?

FRANK. (*Giving in.*) I'll try.

VIRGINIA. So, Papa—is Santa Claus real or not?

FRANK. (*Stalling again.*) That is an age-old question, Virginia. And speaking as a doctor and as a man of science—well, what I mean is that one has to look at the evidence, examine the facts—

LAURA. (*Interrupting, worried.*) Frank—?

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

FRANK. (*Responding to Laura's warning.*) Right. So, sweetheart, I guess, well,— (*Suddenly noticing that he's still holding the Sun newspaper in his hand.*) —well, I think the best thing to do is consult an expert. Someone who knows about a lot more things than your papa. Someone whose job it is to report the facts.

VIRGINIA. Who? Who knows more than you?

FRANK. (*Holding up the newspaper.*) The *New York Sun*, that's who. (*After a pause.*) Here's what I think you ought to do: Write a letter to the editors of the *New York Sun* and ask them.

VIRGINIA. (*Surprised.*) Really?

MARY ANN. Oh, I don't know, Frank. A newspaper doesn't have the time to waste on a little girl.

LAURA. (*Relieved.*) A letter to the editor? Why, I think it's an excellent idea! What do you think, Virginia?

VIRGINIA. Write a letter to the paper?

FRANK. Sure, why not? People do it all the time.

VIRGINIA. But I *am* just a little girl—do you think they'll answer if I write?

FRANK. Oh, you're not so little—you're eight years old.

VIRGINIA. Eight-and-a-half.

LAURA. Even better!

VIRGINIA. Well, maybe,— (*The possible consequences dawning on her.*) —but what if they *do* answer and they say Santa Claus *isn't* real?

FRANK. I guess that's the chance you have to take. You want to know the truth, don't you?

VIRGINIA. Yes—but—oh, I just don't know, Papa.

LAURA. There's no way to know unless you try, Virginia.

MARY ANN. But remember, dear: Newspapers are very busy writing about presidents and governors and all sorts of important people. Don't be disappointed if you never hear from your letter.

FRANK. But then again, you might. So, what do you say, sweetheart?

VIRGINIA. (*After a pause.*) You know what? I'll do it.

FRANK. Good girl!

VIRGINIA. I'll write to the *Sun* and ask them to tell me the truth about Santa Claus—the honest-to-goodness truth! If the *Sun* tells me there isn't

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

any, I'll believe it. And if they tell me that Santa Claus is *real*, then that Clara Cunningham will be sorry she ever teased Virginia O'Hanlon!
(Laura and Frank ad lib applause and congratulations, while Mary Ann looks on skeptically. The lights dim.)

**BLACKOUT
CURTAIN
END OF ACT I**

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
ORDER A COPY AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM***