

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

A short comedy by
Arthur M. Jolly

Based on "Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas" by
Major Henry Livingston Jr.
(Formerly attributed to Clement Clarke Moore)

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

FIRST NARRATOR

SECOND NARRATOR

CHORUS (Individual members speak as CHORUS ONE, CHORUS TWO, etc.)

MAMMA

PAPA

ELDEST CHILD

YOUNGEST CHILD

MOUSE

SUGAR PLUMS

DOROTHY

ST. NICHOLAS

Some roles could be doubled for small casts (Mouse, Dorothy, the Sugar Plums and St. Nicholas never appear together), or lines could be divided for more Narrators, more Chorus Individuals and more Children. There could be a thousand Sugar Plums if there's room on the stage. If there are more than two narrators, thought should be paid to keeping the characters consistent: First is naive, childlike, excited; Second is knowledgeable, wise but with limited patience.

For younger casts, it would also be possible to have an actual teacher play the role of Second Narrator and divide First Narrator among several students.

SETTING

Christmas Eve. A bedroom, but maybe just implied.

(Lights up:)

(A CHORUS and two NARRATORS.)

FIRST NARRATOR: *(Proudly:)* I proudly present—

SECOND NARRATOR: "Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas,"
by Major Henry Livingston Jr.

FIRST NARRATOR: What? No! We're doing "The Night
Before Christmas"!

SECOND NARRATOR: That's the first line of the poem—
the poem is called—

FIRST NARRATOR: "The Night Before Christmas," by Samuel
Clemens.

SECOND NARRATOR: I think you mean Clement Clarke—

FIRST NARRATOR: *(Quickly:)* "The Night Before Christmas"
by Clement Clarke!

(Beat.)

SECOND NARRATOR: Moore.

FIRST NARRATOR: What?

SECOND NARRATOR: Moore!

FIRST NARRATOR: CLEMENT CLARKE!

SECOND NARRATOR: Moore!

FIRST NARRATOR: *(Screaming:)* "The Night Before
Christmas" by CLEMENT CLARKE!!!

SECOND NARRATOR: MOORE!

FIRST NARRATOR: THAT'S AS LOUD AS I GET!

SECOND NARRATOR: WHY ARE YOU YELLING?

FIRST NARRATOR: YOU TOLD ME TO!

SECOND NARRATOR: STOP YELLING!!!

FIRST NARRATOR: Okay.

SECOND NARRATOR: Clement Clarke Moore.

FIRST NARRATOR: Oh!

SECOND NARRATOR: But he never actually wrote the poem. He published it and then claimed he wrote it when it did really well. Major Henry Livingston Jr. wrote it.

FIRST NARRATOR: I was today years old when I learned that. How does it go?

CHORUS: 'Twas the night before Christmas—

(MAMMA, PAPA and TWO KIDS enter and set up a tableau.)

FIRST NARRATOR: What's a Twas?

PAPA: *(To First Narrator:)* You're a Twas.

MAMMA: It means "It was."

SECOND NARRATOR: You're meant to be in a tableau.

ELDEST CHILD: I have an inner monologue.

SECOND NARRATOR: Not "inner" — In a.

ELDEST CHILD: In a what?

SECOND NARRATOR: A tableau. Strike a pose!

(Mamma, Papa and Children start vogueing.)

ELDEST CHILD: Our teacher [director] said that our parents [old people in the audience] would laugh if we did this.

YOUNGEST CHILD: But we have no idea why it's meant to be funny.

SECOND NARRATOR: A tableau. You just hold still and make a stage picture.

(They strike their tableau and take a selfie.)

Can we just start again? Thank you!

CHORUS: 'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through
the house,
Not a creature was stirring – not even a mouse!

(A MOUSE enters, stirring a big mixing bowl with a wooden spoon.)

(It looks at the audience in alarm, squeaks at being discovered and scurries off.)

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.

FIRST NARRATOR: Wait a second! Who's St. Nicholas?

SECOND NARRATOR: He was a bishop who lived in Turkey
about seventeen hundred years ago.

FIRST NARRATOR: And they're still waiting for him? It's
going to be a long night!

YOUNGEST CHILD: You don't know St. Nick?

ELDEST CHILD: St. Nicholas dropped a sack of gold coins
through the window of a house where three poor girls lived,
each night for three nights so their father could pay their dowry.

MAMMA: And people told stories of how good he was...

PAPA: He came to be known in many countries, by many
names.

CHORUS ONE: In the Netherlands, he was Sinterklaas, or
Saint Klaus.

SECOND NARRATOR: Klaus is short for Nicholas.

FIRST NARRATOR: I knew that. Now.

CHORUS TWO: In England, they call him Father Christmas.

CHORUS THREE: In France, Père Noël.

(Option: Here may be added more lines for inclusivity for everyone in the cast. Someone has a Santa story from a different country? Give them a line! What if they share a heritage that doesn't have Santa at all? Even better! Just as an example: "The land we are on used to be the home of the Muskogee people. Traditionally, they didn't celebrate Christmas, but they have their own stories, including Chief Hobbythacco – the Handsome Fellow – who brings them gifts" might be a possibility – or as is appropriate for your area and your cast. Just about every culture has a winter celebration of some kind. Be inclusive and respectful and make everyone feel a part of this show!)

CHORUS FOUR: When Dutch settlers came to America, Sinterklaas became known as Santa Claus.

FIRST NARRATOR: This is a poem about Santa Claus? I LOVE SANTA!

SECOND NARRATOR: So, can we get on with it?

CHORUS: The children were nestled all snug in their beds –

FIRST NARRATOR: Get to the bit about Santa!

CHORUS: While visions of sugar plums danced in their heads!

YOUNGEST CHILD: Excuse me?

PAPA: What, child?

YOUNGEST CHILD: I don't know what a sugar plum is!

(SUGAR PLUMS enter and dance. This might be two Sugar Plums doing the latest viral dance craze or a whole chorus line of Sugar Plums dancing Rockettes style. Make it what you will!)

SUGAR PLUMS: We're any small, round candy made out of hardened sugar!

ONE SUGAR PLUM: We're not even plum-flavored.

SUGAR PLUMS: It's all about the shape!

(The Sugar Plums dance off.)

ELDEST CHILD: So M&M's count?

YOUNGEST CHILD: While visions of M&M's danced in their heads!

CHORUS: And Mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap.

(Mamma and Papa pull out two jars with brains floating in them.)

PAPA: Go to sleep, my little science experiments!

MAMMA: Time for your nap! Mwah-ha-ha-ha!

SECOND NARRATOR: Seriously?

(Sheepishly, they put the brains away.)

CHORUS: When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.

FIRST NARRATOR: Whatsa matter? Nothing, what's the matter with — wait. It's meant to be what's a motto, then what's the matter with — I messed that up. Never mind. Carry on.

SECOND NARRATOR: If you're quite done.

ST. NICHOLAS: *(Off:)* Clatter, clatter, clatter!

PAPA: What was that?!

CHORUS: Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.

(Papa runs to the window and pretends to vomit up a sash of the kind worn by a pageant winner. [Maybe they use their nightcap to throw up into, then pull the sash out of it?])

PAPA: Bleeuurgh! ...My goodness, when did I eat that?

FIRST NARRATOR: Ew! This is not an appropriate poem for kids!

SECOND NARRATOR: *(To Papa:)* No! A window sash is the wood frame. You open the window.

PAPA: Oh, much better.

SECOND NARRATOR: Can we get on with this?

CHORUS: The moon on the breast of the new fallen snow –

FIRST NARRATOR: Wait –

SECOND NARRATOR: Keep going.

CHORUS: Gave the lustre of midday to objects below.

SECOND NARRATOR: Thank you.

CHORUS: When what to my wondering eyes should appear –

FIRST NARRATOR: It's Santa! I know it's going to be Santa!

CHORUS: But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny rein-deer.

FIRST NARRATOR: Oh.

CHORUS: With a little old driver so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment he must be St. Nick.

FIRST NARRATOR: St. Nick! Nicholas! Saint – that's the – yes!

CHORUS: More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name.

ST. NICHOLAS: *(Off:)* Now, Dasher! Now, Dancer! Now
Prancer and Vixen! On, Comet! On, Cupid! On, Donner and
Blitzen! To the top of the porch! To the top of the wall! Now
dash away! Dash away! Dash away all!

FIRST NARRATOR: Let me see!

(First Narrator tries to push Papa away from the window.)

PAPA: Get back on your side!

MAMMA: What's going on?

PAPA: Go back to sleep!

ELDEST CHILD: I want a glass of water!

MAMMA: Now look what you've done—you've woken the kids!

YOUNGEST CHILD: I had a dream scary M&M's were coming to get me!

PAPA: Go to sleep!

CHORUS: As leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky—

FIRST NARRATOR: Leaves and farmhouses.

(DOROTHY enters.)

DOROTHY: Auntie Em! Auntie Em! It's a wild hurricane!

SECOND NARRATOR: Wrong story!

DOROTHY: Well, this is no place like home!

(Dorothy exits.)

CHORUS: So up to the housetop the coursers they flew,
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too!

ELDEST CHILD: *(To Papa:)* Were you really not going to wake us?

YOUNGEST CHILD: You just looked out the window and saw a flying sleigh—maybe get the kids up and say: hey, check this out!

ELDEST CHILD: It's not even a school night!

FIRST NARRATOR: They've got a point. You should have woken your kids.

MAMMA: And your wife.

PAPA: Maybe I was scared.

FIRST NARRATOR: Of miniature reindeer?

PAPA: Maybe I thought I was dreaming.

SECOND NARRATOR: Can we get on with it?

CHORUS: And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.

MAMMA: Papa! There's someone on the roof! Call the police!
Call the fire department! Get a really long stick!

SECOND NARRATOR: Stop it! You're all asleep!

(To Papa:)

You're too wonderstruck to speak.

(To First Narrator:)

And you're meant to be over here with me.

FIRST NARRATOR: I wanted to see Santa.

SECOND NARRATOR: Just do it right!

CHORUS: As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

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