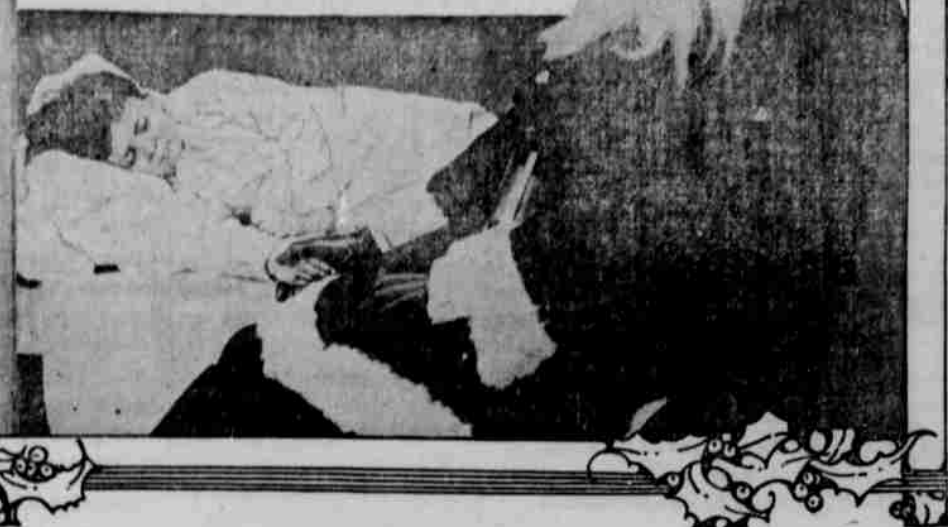


AN AMATEUR SANTA CLAUS



By HAMILTON POPE GALT

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WE had all agreed that Mr. O'Shaughnessy was the very one to be Santa Claus at our Christmas tree.

"No," he said, "No!"

We had never seen Mr. O'Shaughnessy so vehement before.

"That is one thing I will never do—no, not if the czar of Russia were to command it!"

"Why?" asked some one from a safe distance.

"Because I played the part once, and I will never do it again. I may as well tell you about it, and then you'll know that it is of no use to bother me about it any more."

"One Christmas I was broke, I was hungry, and my feet were on the ground. I had asked a thousand people for something to do, anything to



"I WANT THAT."

do, and finally a manager in a department store said, 'All right; we'll make a Santa Claus out of you.'

"I told him I didn't feel much like a Santa Claus inside."

"Oh, we'll fix that all right," he said and handed me a pillow.

"So, with pillows and boots and gloves and a fur coat outside and nothing at all inside, I started in to be Santa Claus in the toy department. While I was thinking about my wife and the two kids at home needing money, and me with no steady job, and other things like that, I heard one of the fellows in the store say to the boss:

"Say, that St. Nicholas of yours is about as jolly as a hymn book. He reminds me of a funny song entitled 'Silver Threads Among the Gold.' Why don't you throw him out?"

"I will when I get time."

"I tried to liven up a little after hearing this praise of my histrionic talent, but it wasn't much use."

"Pretty soon I saw a boy coming down the aisle like a wolf on the fold. He was also seeking whom he might devour. He was followed by an anxious looking maid and a gentleman in a silk hat, who was an indulgent millionaire father."

"The kid snatched along in an independent, bored way, swinging his arms kind of reckless, as if he was in hopes of breaking something and relieving the monotony."

"When he came up to where I was sitting he stopped. He had seen plenty of toys, but I guess I was something new in the way of a St. Nicholas."

"He called his daddy and pointed to me."

"I want that," he said.

"Oh, no, dearie," said the maid. "Here, look at this nice giraffe! See! It does this!"

"The kid shook the nurse off irritably."

"He doesn't seem to take much interest in the giraffe," I remarked to the father.

"No, nor anything else," he answered in a patient, weary tone. "He has had all these toys before, and he knows all about them, inside and out. He had one of these giraffes last year and broke it open to find out what

was in it, and he was mad when he found there was nothing."

"I want that," said the boy again, pointing to me.

"He has taken a fancy to you," continued the pa.

"I can't see that I have any advantage over the giraffe," I said.

"Just then the boss of the store came along. He was just busting himself for the millionaire."

"My boy wants your Santa Claus," said the gentleman to the boss.

"And the kid jumped up and grabbed me by the hand and began pulling at me and fighting the maid off with the other hand."

"Well," said the boss, "take him along, Mr. Van Veegle. It will be no loss whatever to us, I assure you."

"This recommend seemed to sort of encourage the millionaire."

"I will pay you for your time," he said to me.

"As the little fellow was pulling my arm off I got up and went along. He towed me through the aisle against a tide of open mouthed people. We got into a big red automobile, and the millionaire said to the chauffeur, 'Home as quick as possible, for goodness sake!'"

"Away we went, my white whiskers flying in the wind."

"Pretty soon the millionaire said to the chauffeur: 'Look here, you needn't display us any more than necessary. Kindly pick out some quiet streets.'"

"The kid was sitting next to me, holding my hand."

"The chauffeur started to slow down in front of a mansion when the millionaire gave a shout:

"Hold on!" he said. "Drive on quick! I forgot Mrs. Van Veegle has company. We'll go around the back way."

"We were turning the corner to go around the other way when the millionaire shouted again suddenly, 'Turn around quick!'"

"We were dodging somebody or other that he knew."

"Finally we passed through a big gate, and the boy towed me around through a conservatory or two into a swell room."

"The man swore. There were a lot of ladies there still. They seemed to take a great interest in the pageant."

"Well, what on earth!" screeched the millionaire's wife.

"While the man was explaining to his wife the boy led me around all over the house by the hand. He would not let go."

"He had to have me sit beside him while he ate his dinner, and I had a

my hand and fought them off when ever they got too near."

"When bedtime came they tried to tell little Van that Santy wanted to go home now and work on the toys for Christmas, but he held on tighter than ever and insisted that I would have to sleep with him."

"This made it pretty bad. If I was to pull off my boots and my beard and my stomach and one thing and another the boy would be paralyzed with



TAKING SANTA TO KINDERGARTEN.

feared, they said, and for me to turn in boots, beard, stomach and all with little Van in his little bed seemed utterly impossible."

"We compromised by my sitting by his bed and holding his hand until he went to sleep. Would you believe it? That boy was the lightest sleeper you ever saw! Every time I tried to take my hand away his eyes would open and he would take a tighter grip."

"I sat up all night holding that kid's hand. I had a man in attendance, who brought me everything I wanted, and I had collected a ten from Papa Van, but I didn't get much sleep."

"The boy had me with him all the next day. I had to be with him when he got his bath and his breakfast, and I attended kindergarten with him."

"I was 'it' at kindergarten, too, but along about 4 o'clock he lay down on a couch and went sound asleep."

"I stole from the room softly and unobserved. I had had enough of the job and was resolved to escape."

"Just as I was getting out of the front door a good sized boy came along and started to blab something about 'Hello, Santa Claus!' and tried to grab hold of me."

"I paralyzed him by pulling out my stomach and hitting him over the head with it."

"I gained the street and flew for home, dodging this way and that to baffle pursuit and shedding beard, boots, cotton and fur all along the way."

"I hid for three days and then emerged and got a nice little job loading coal on a ship. I have always gone in for a sane Christmas ever since that little experience."

We did not press Mr. O'Shaughnessy.



"HE TOWED ME THROUGH THE AISLE."

big, fat butler shoving my chair around for me and waiting on me. I got some birds and one thing and another under my pillow and my furs, but I was awful warm."

"It was too warm for comfort when it got around that there was a real, live Santa Claus at the Van Veegle house. All the children came from all over the neighborhood to maul me."

"But young Van kept a tight grip on

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