

## **When Santa came for tea**

Dear Uncle George thought it would be a jolly nice idea to invite Santa Claus over for tea. The excitement he imagined in his nephews' and nieces' faces when he announced his jolly idea brought tears to his dear old eyes.

It didn't take much to coax a neighbour to dress up in a rented Santa suit - a dusty bottle of whisky long forgotten in the broom cupboard did the trick - and soon the great day came.

The crowd that gathered in Uncle George's living room was a sight to make the heart soar. It was crammed with sparkly-eyed children, tanked up for years by their parents and other assorted relatives on the god-like aura of Santa. And dear old Uncle George was ready with a song too, cranked up to ear-piercing volume on his neighbour's new stereo system, borrowed in exchange for another bottle of whisky he'd discovered in the toilet tank.

With perfect timing, Uncle George pressed the Play button, and in strode Santa Claus with a hearty "Ho, ho, ho" and a scattering of dust from his fake beard, which made him cough. The song was "Santa Claus is Coming to Town," and as Santa circled the room, beaming between his coughing fits at each child in turn, it was like Santa himself singing the words of the song: "He's making a list; he's checking it twice; he's going to find out who's naughty and nice; Santa Claus is coming to town."

"How jolly," everyone thought, but they noticed that some of the children had stopped smiling, and one little girl's bottom lip began to tremble too.

Her mother immediately leapt into protective mode. She elbowed Santa aside, punched the Stop button and rushed to her daughter's side. "It's all right, my dearest, it's just a song; Santa's not really like that."

The little girl's lip stopped trembling, but then she sniffed a snorty sniff and said, "But Mommy, you said yourself that Santa wouldn't bring me any presents if I was naughty. You said it yesterday when I was screaming and throwing things in the toy store when I couldn't get what I wanted."

"Well, yes, that's right, dear," her Mother replied, "I did say that, but all Mommies use Santa as a threat at Christmas-time to get their children to behave. It's tradition."

Santa in the rented suit also laid a gentle hand on the girl's shoulder and said, "Yes, my dear, Mommy and me are only doing what religion's been doing for centuries. Threats have been jolly useful in getting lots of naughty adults to behave too. And you'll be using threats on your own children one day as well, so cheer up kiddo, you've cottoned on to the secret of fear religion and stressed-out parenting all in one go."

He thought he'd try another "Ho, ho, ho" at this point, but he sucked in more dust from his fake beard and turned purple with another coughing fit instead.

"How jolly this all is, isn't it?!" cried Uncle George as he pressed the Play button to finish the song.