

CHRISTMAS VERSUS CLAUS

A sketch by Chris Neville-Smith

Cast, in order of festiveness

Lily	A little girl
Jack	A little boy, brother to Lily
Patch the Elf	Works for Father Christmas
Father Christmas	A festive distribution operator
Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer	Works for Santa Claus
Santa Claus	Father Christmas's bitter rival
A Tramp	The unexpected stranger

CHRISTMAS VERSUS CLAUS

*A living room on Christmas eve. Two stockings are hung up, and a glass of sherry and a carrot are left ready. It is the middle of the night and the lights are low, when who should emerge from the fireplace but **Father Christmas**?*

Father Christmas (quietly): Ho ho ho.

He looks every bit the character portrayed through generations of Christmas cards. He spies the stockings at the other end of the stage and quietly tiptoes across the room.

Father Christmas: Ho ho ho.

He then notices the sherry. He creeps to it, drinks it, but as he turns back he stubs his toe.

Father Christmas (in pain): Ho ho ho.

Patch the elf appears in the fireplace.

Patch: Is everything all right, Father Christmas sir?

Father Christmas: Yes! Yes! I'm fine!

Patch: Okay.

*Patch exits back up the chimney. **Father Christmas** has just opened the sack when **Lily** creeps in. She is an excitable six-year-old in her pyjamas. **Father Christmas** hasn't seen her yet, and when he peers round she ducks away. She then creeps back, and this time he spots her.*

Father Christmas: Hey? Aren't you supposed to be in bed?

Lily: Sorry. I heard something and- ... It's really you! It's Father Christmas!

Father Christmas: I can't give you presents until you're asleep.

Lily: Okay. I'm going back to bed.

*Lily exits. **Father Christmas** opens his sack, when **Lily** comes in, still quivering with excitement.*

Lily: Did you get the carrot for Rudolph?

Father Christmas: Ah, I beg your pardon. (*Takes carrot*) Just one thing. There's no such reindeer as Rudolph.

Lily: Oh.

Father Christmas: Not to worry. There's a lot of stories about me. But my name is Father Christmas, I have eight reindeer called Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, and Blitzen, and I live in Lapland.

Lily: Er, yes.

Father Christmas: But you don't need to worry about that. All you need to know, little girl, is that you need to write a letter to Father Christmas.

Lily: Okay.

Father Christmas: Not Santa Claus.

Lily: Uh?

Father Christmas: You get more presents if you write to Father Christmas. Anyway, I think it's time you went to bed.

Lily: Okay.

*But **Lily** doesn't leave. She is too excited.*

Father Christmas: Night night.

Patch re-enters. He has a tablet with him.

Patch: Father Christmas sir, I- ... *(Sees Lily.)* What's she doing here?

Father Christmas *(with a hint of sternness):* You said she was was asleep!

Patch: But the computer said she was. *(Checks.)* This can't be be right. The computer still says there's one child asleep.

Father Christmas: Okay, forget it! We'll have to do this the slow way. *(To Lily.)* I know Lily, because you've been a very good girl, just this once, I'll give you your presents now.

Lily: Thank you! Thanks you! Thank you!

Father Christmas sits down and Lily sits on his knee.

Father Christmas: So, the first think I've got for you is ... *(rummages in the sack)* Tropical Barbie!

Lily: Oh, thank you!

Father Christmas: And how about ... *(rummages)* a My Little Pony!

Lily: It's Skydancer! Skydancer's my favourite!

Father Christmas: And here is ... a dolly! And a cooking set!

Lily: How did you know I wanted these?

Father Christmas: It was all in the letter. But I know what you wanted most of all.

Lily: You do?

Lily gasps with excitement. She's expecting the best one.

Father Christmas: It's ... a make-up set!

Lily gets up and starts putting them in her stocking, obviously disappointed.

Father Christmas: Well, I'd better be on my way now. Merry Christmas. *(To Patch.)* And we'd better get a move on. We're behind schedule now.

Father Christmas and Patch are about to exit when Lily starts crying.

Father Christmas *(in a stern voice not seen up to now):* Patch?

Patch *(showing a hint of fear):* Yes, Father Christmas sir?

Father Christmas: You've done it again, haven't you? You've got the presents wrong!

Patch: No, that's can't be right. I'm sure I checked that letter.

Father Christmas: Check again! Check again!

Patch *(consulting a tablet):* Let me see. I could have sworn I'd ... Okay, here it is. Barbie, Pony, doll, cooking set, make-up set. That's what we gave her.

Father Christmas: Then why is she crying? I'm holding you responsible if we lose another customer to *him!*

Patch: I don't understand. There's nothing else in the letter. Just this thing about ... Ah. *(Shows Father Christmas the tablet.)*

Father Christmas: Ah. Now I understand. *(Approaches Lily.)* Now, Lily, I see you wrote in your letter that you'd like me stop Mummy and Daddy fighting.

Lily: Yes. They keep being to horrible to each other.

Father Christmas: I know, but I can't-

Lily: Daddy came over said he wasn't going to have Jack for Christmas and then Mummy shouted and Daddy shouted and now Jack's here and Daddy says-

Father Christmas: Hold on, who's Jack?

Lily: My brother.

Father Christmas: You've got a brother here.

Patch (*frantically checking the tablet*): Oh crap.

Lily: He stays at Daddy's for Christmas and I stay with Mummy (*crying again*) now Daddy says he doesn't want to see us any more.

Father Christmas: I know, Lily, I've got an idea that'll make it all better. Why don't you have a ride in my sleigh?

Father Christmas (*to Lily*): But the reindeer only fly if you sing Jingle Bells!

Lily: Thank you Santa! Thanks you so much.

Lily exits.

Father Christmas (*to Patch*): And for God's sake, find out about her brother before the ride's finished.

Patch and Lily exit. A long pause. Then, Santa Claus enters through the fireplace. He is dressed similar to Father Christmas, but his outfit maybe looks a bit more ragged.

Santa Claus (*quietly*): Ho ho ho.

He spies the stockings and tiptoes across the room.

Santa Claus: Ho ho ho.

He then notices the sherry glass. He creeps to it, and finds it empty.

Santa Claus: Bloody parents.

Santa Claus turns round and stubs his toe on the same thing.

Santa Claus: Shit! Shit! Shit! Shit! Bastard! Bollocks! Bollocks! Bastard! Bollocks! Bastard!

Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer appears in the fireplace.

Rudolph: Santa, are you all right?

Santa Claus: Shut up Rudolph! Leave me alone!

Rudolph exits back through the fireplace.

Jack (*off*): Dad?

Santa Claus: Damn it!

Jack: Dad, is that you? What are you doing here?

Jack, Lily's nine-year-old brother, enters. For a moment, he stands dumbfounded.

Santa Claus: No, I'm not your dad!

Jack: Are you- ... But I thought- ... Dad says you don't exist.

Santa Claus: Oh, does he now? We know who put him up to that, don't we?

Jack: Huh?

Santa Claus: No, it's fine kiddo. You don't believe in me, I'll be off!

Jack: But I thought-

Santa Claus: Or is that too difficult for you? Kids go to Peter Pan and they're all "I believe in Fairies", but that's too good for Santa, isn't it? Well, if you won't say you believe in me, you won't want-

Jack: Okay, I believe in you! I believe in Father Christmas!

A menacing silence.

Santa Claus: What did you just call me?

Jack: But you are Father Christmas? Aren't you?

Santa Claus (*grabbing Jack*): Don't you *ever* say that bastard's name again.

Jack: What?

Santa Claus: Oh yeah, it's all Father Christmas this and Father Christmas that. Listen kid, I'm the real deal, he's the imposter. He used to work for me! "But it's too expensive working at the North Pole!" he says. Who did he think he was. Next thing I know, he sets up in Lapland! The Finns gave him tax breaks, EU trade access, everything!

Jack: Huh?

Santa Claus: They deserted me. All the reindeer. Most of the elves. But they don't get rid of me that easily! No-one gets the better of- (*sees Lily's full stocking*): He's been. The bastard's already been!

Jack: That's Lily's stocking.

Santa: What? This is your fault, isn't it? You let write to Father Christmas, didn't you?

Rudolph *re-enters.*

Rudolph: Is something wrong, Santa?

Santa Claus: No. Just this kid said he'd be staying with his dad only he's now staying with his mum's and it's taken us ages to find him and we're already behind schedule, and now I find out he lets his little sister write to Father Christmas. That's order we've lost to-

Rudolph: Santa ...

Santa Claus: What?

Rudolph *points to Jack, who has almost been reduced to tears during the tirade.*

Rudolph: You've got to stop-

Santa Claus: Shh! Did you hear that?

Rudolph: Hear what?

Santa Claus: I'm not sure ... Oh I know, it was the sound of someone talking back!

Rudolph: Yes, but-

Santa Claus: Do I have to remind you how much you owe me?

Rudolph: Look, I was just saying-

Santa Claus: Actually, that's a good point. It could have been the address. Once they put Lapland on the envelope, the Finnish postal service always send it to him ... (*To Jack*) Jack, I'm sorry I shouted. I'm sure it's all a misunderstanding. I've got an idea. If you promise to make sure you are your sister write to Santa Claus and address it to the North Pole, I'll give you *all* the presents you want. Do we have a deal.

Jack: Okay!

Santa Claus: Good boy. Now, let's see what I've got for you? First of all, ... toy guns!

Jack: Oh, thank you Santa! "Make my day, punk!" (*Fires the guns making "pow" noises.*)

Santa Claus : And now it's ... Robocop!

Jack: No way! You got me Robocop! "Your move, creep!" (*Plays with Robocop making "Dagagagagagaga" noises.*)

Santa Claus: And here's a toy ninja sword.

Jack: Cool! Slash! Slash! Swish! Swish! "Finish Him!" (*Thrusts sword down.*) Aarrgghhhh!

Santa Claus: Erm, okay. What else? A woodcutter's axe!

Jack: Brilliant! (*Pretend to hack down a door with an axe.*) Chop! Chop! Chop! Heeeeere's Johnny!

Santa Claus: Er, kid, just out of interest, what films does your dad let you watch?

Jack: What was that?

Santa Claus: Never mind. Don't blame me when you go loopy. Right, one more present. It's ... *(stops dead as he pulls out a can of mace – a real one)* ... hang on.

Jack: That's ace! *(Snatches the can.)* This is NYPD! *(Pretends to spray making a fsssst noise.)* Freeze, you motherf-

Santa Claus *(snatching the can back):* Rudolph, this is a real can of mace.

Rudolph: Is it?

Santa Claus: Of course it is. "Danger. Keep out of reach of children." If *he* finds out we've given pepper spray to-

Jack *(snatching the can back):* That's mine!

Santa Claus: Look, I don't think a little boy should-

Santa Claus *tries to take the mace off Jack, but Jack points it as his face.*

Jack: Stand back! I'm not afraid to use it!

Rudolph: Um, Jack. Why you have a ride in Santa's sleigh?

Jack: I can have a ride in the sleigh?

Santa Claus: That's right. We'll give you a ride then you swap your present, okay?

Jack: Cool!

Santa Claus: Thank God. Come on then! It's up the chimney.

Santa Claus, Rudolph and Jack *exit through the fireplace. Lights change, and the three take their positions in the sleigh, which can be represented by the three half-seated in mid-air. Santa is in the middle.*

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