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YES VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

A Play in Two Acts
by
ANDREW J. FENADY

Based on the Teleplay
by
VAL DeCROWL and ANDREW J. FENADY



Dramatic Publishing
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The Toledo Repertoire Theatre presented *YES VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS* in November 1997.
The production included the following artists:

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director Dr. Brian D. Bethune
Set and Prop Design James S. Hill
Light Design..... Marc Morales
Sound Design..... Brian Ratliff
Costume Design..... Holly Monsos
Stage Manager Sandra Sheperd

CAST

Edward P. Mitchell Andrew J. Fenady
Frank P. Church..... Tony Rado
Andrea Borland Kirsten Kedzierski
Teddy Tim Welly
Newsboy..... Jesse Dotts
James O'Hanlon..... Brady J. Sikorski
Evie O'Hanlon..... Laura A. Amico
Virginia O'Hanlon..... Maggie Reid, Katie Balzer
Sean O'Hanlon..... Timmy Fitzpatrick, Josh Stobinski
Dominic Donneli Zachary Boose
Celeste Donneli Jill Young
Maria Donneli Sara Sheperd
Julie Becky Fitzpatrick
Susan Elizabeth Fitzpatrick
Mrs. Goldstein Gloria Mouloupoulos
Goss, George, Pryor, Officer Akins Mark Lindberg
Chambers, Otho, Officer Flynn..... Joel Ungerleider
Barrington, Shannon, O'Hara Buzz Ziegler
Sam, Thief, Schuller, Red Joe Dennehy
Shorty, Scotty, Fritz..... Jerry Weber

YES VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

A Play in Two Acts

For 17 Men, 8 Women, extras (doubling possible)

CHARACTERS

EDWARD P. MITCHELL

FRANK P. CHURCH

JAMES O'HANLON

DOMINIC (DOM) DONNELI

VIRGINIA O'HANLON

MARIA DONNELLI

JULIE

SUSAN

SEAN O'HANLON

EVIE O'HANLON

ANDREA BORLAND

TEDDY MURRAY

MRS. GOLDSTEIN

CELESTE DONNELI

NEWSBOY

GOSS/GEORGE/TOM PRYOR/OFFICER AKINS

OTHO/CHAMBERS/OFFICER FLYNN

CORNELIUS BARRINGTON/SHANNON/O'HARA

SAM/THIEF/SCHULLER/RED

SHORTY/SCOTTY/ART FRITZ

and...

**Police Officers, Dock Workers, Old Man, Blind Man,
Uniformed Park Attendant, Little Girl, Wife, Husband, etc.**

ACT ONE

(The stage is completely dark. As a match is struck a spotlight illuminates a MAN who lights a cigar, takes a couple of puffs, then speaks.)

MITCHELL. My name is Mitchell. Edward P. Mitchell. I'm a newspaperman and this is a newspaper story. You could have read about it on the front page of the *New York Sun* back in 1897. That's before people went out to the movies, long before people stayed home and watched television—when people read books and told stories to their children. When people had to see things in their mind's eye and use their imagination. *(He takes a deep satisfying puff.)* I'm going to ask you to use your imagination while you're here and while I tell you that story. As the lights illuminate different parts of the stage and then dim, I'm going to ask you to imagine that you are in another time and in other places: The city room of a newspaper, my office—I'm the managing editor—a small shabby flat in New York City, and—well, you'll see as we go along.

(The following is to be added to MITCHELL's speech if production is so designed and directed.)

MITCHELL. And you'll also see the actors moving props and furniture on and off the stage between scenes.

MITCHELL. By the way, I hope this cigar doesn't bother you. In those days most men smoked cigars and, well, old habits are hard to break, but I'll try and puff downwind. *(He puffs again and does his best to blow the smoke upstage.)* It's been said that every story has to have a start and a finish, a beginning and an end. A lot of stories end in a cemetery. This one starts there.

(Lights reveal a tombstone and a MAN kneeling. Slight snow effect.)

A man named Frank P. Church—the best newspaperman who ever worked for me or anybody else—is at the side of a grave. In his pocket there is a gold watch—a watch that plays a tune as well as tells the time—and on the inside of the lid, there's a picture of his wife, Elizabeth. Oh, in case you can't read the lettering on the tombstone from out there, the inscription says: *(The spotlight on MITCHELL fades out.)*

MITCHELL'S VOICE. Elizabeth Church, born August 3, 1868, died December 24, 1896, and daughter Eleanor, died at birth.

(On CHURCH's face a two-day growth of beard. Coat open, muffler undone. His eyes darkly circled and filmy. His gloved hand brushes away the caked snow on the

tombstone. A pint of whiskey, nearly empty, is in his other hand. CHURCH drinks and adjusts the flowers already placed at the base of the tombstone. He corks the bottle, puts it in his pocket. CHURCH rises unsteadily. He removes a gold watch attached to his vest by a gold chain. He presses the stem. The lid opens and a tune plays. This tune, and variations thereof, become the musical theme of the play.)

CHURCH. Elizabeth.

(CHURCH closes the watch lid, returns the watch to his pocket. He pulls out the pint bottle and is going to drink again when he realizes that the bottle is empty. He turns and walks across the stage. As CHURCH crosses stage, lights go up slightly, revealing MITCHELL standing C. CHURCH walks past MITCHELL as if MITCHELL's not there, drops the empty whiskey bottle into a receptacle and walks offstage. Now only MITCHELL is illuminated.)

MITCHELL. The nineteenth century was coming to a close, New York City was stretching and growing in all directions. The city was running out of room, so it had to grow up. The buildings were getting taller. Underground tunnels were being built and across the island of Manhattan, bridges were being constructed to carry thousands of people to and from their work. And from across the ocean people came to find work and a new life. Italians, Greeks, Poles, Hungarians, Germans, Scandinavians, Syrians, Jews, Irish and all the rest.

(Lights go up on a section of stage revealing an impression of waterfront and loading dock. A stream of workers lifting heavy bales and carrying them away. We hear sounds of boat whistles and water lapping in the background.)

That good-looking young fellow in the corduroy coat is James O'Hanlon. *(Irish brogue.)* I don't have to tell you where he came from.

(As MITCHELL takes another puff, his light dims and the others, including O'HANLON, his friend DOMINIC [DOM] DONNELI and GOSS, a burly, gruff fellow, are featured. O'HANLON lifts a bale, turns and moves toward the ramp. GOSS moves quickly behind, tripping and causing O'HANLON to lose his balance and fall over his own bale. O'HANLON tries to rise but GOSS presses his booted foot on O'HANLON's arm. Some of the others laugh. Not DOM. Then GOSS releases the pressure of his boot and O'HANLON starts to get up.)

O'HANLON. What cause do you have for doin' that?

GOSS. You hit me, O'Hanlon. You swung your bale right at me and hit me.

O'HANLON. Not true. I didn't touch you.

GOSS. You callin' me a liar, mick?

O'HANLON. Now that's the truth. *(O'HANLON pushes past GOSS.)* Excuse me. I've got work to do.

GOSS. Did it again! Pushed me! *(To the others.)* Damn micks, comin' over here, takin' our jobs... *(GOSS motions to a SCRAWNY WORKER with a jerk of his hand. The SCRAWNY WORKER nods and takes off as GOSS*

spins O'HANLON and swings. O'HANLON ducks and GOSS loses his balance and nearly falls.) You lousy potlicker!

(The term infuriates O'HANLON. They fight. GOSS has weight but O'HANLON dexterity and uses it to good advantage until a couple of GOSS' friends grab O'HANLON and hold him as GOSS hammers both fists into O'HANLON's midsection. DOM tears in, slugs one of the holders, then the other. O'HANLON and GOSS trade punches until they are at the edge of the dock. O'HANLON throws a right and GOSS goes down. CHAMBERS, the boss, accompanied by the SCRAWNY WORKER, breaks through the crowd. CHAMBERS is better dressed than the dock workers and has an air of authority.)

CHAMBERS. Okay, O'Hanlon, Donneli, that's it for the both of you. They told me you started a fight again. O'Hanlon, what is it with you Irish? You're an angry lot, aren't you?

O'HANLON. Mr. Chambers, I had nothin' to do with startin' that fight...

CHAMBERS. But you had something to do with finishing it, I'll give you that. You got spunk, O'Hanlon, but I need workers on this dock, not troublemakers. You're through. You too, Donneli.

O'HANLON. Mr. Chambers, please. Dom was just trying to help, I had...

DONNELI. It's okay, Jim...

O'HANLON. It's not okay, damn it. *(To CHAMBERS.)* It's Goss who's always startin' it. This time he tripped me... called me a mick... and a...

CHAMBERS. Potlicker? (*A beat.*) Goss may be a bigot... and stupid at times, but he's been on the job a lot longer than the two of you. He pulls his weight, O'Hanlon.

O'HANLON. And I don't?! Donneli and I don't pull our weight? How would you know? You're never out here in the cold and snow and rain. You don't lift anything but a pencil...

(GOSS has risen and steps forward.)

GOSS. Mr. Chambers, I've got two good men to take their place...my nephews, they...

O'HANLON. You hear? That's the reason behind it all. You're not gonna be dumb enough to believe...

CHAMBERS. Dumb! Now just a minute, mick. I've had enough!

O'HANLON. Mick, is it? Well, so have I. There's other jobs.

CHAMBERS. Go find one.

DONNELI. We'll find two. (*DONNELI drapes an arm around O'HANLON's shoulder. Lights dim and O'HANLON and DONNELI start to walk away.*)

O'HANLON. Dom, you shouldn't've jumped in...you shouldn't have quit, what with your wife bein' so sick and all...

DONNELI. I couldn't just stand by, James. You would've done the same for me. (*Lights go dark. We hear...*)

GIRLS (*singing*). Virginia O'Hanlon turn around / Virginia O'Hanlon touch the ground / Virginia O'Hanlon show your shoes / Virginia O'Hanlon...

(We reveal on opposite side of stage a half-dozen girls, ages 8 to 12, playing skip rope. Skipping is VIRGINIA O'HANLON, age 8, and nearby, her friend MARIA DONNELI. The others include JULIE and SUSAN. The sing-song verse comes to an abrupt end and VIRGINIA stops jumping, moves to sit on a stoop and removes one of her badly worn shoes.)

SUSAN. Virginia, why did you stop?

VIRGINIA. I've got a rock or something in my shoe.

JULIE *(sarcastic)*. Maybe Santa Claus will bring you a new pair of shoes for Christmas, Virginia.

SUSAN *(taunting)*. Yeah, maybe he'll drop them down the chimney. *(The GIRLS titter.)*

VIRGINIA. These are just fine.

JULIE. They were "just fine" a long time ago, maybe. Now, they're just junk.

MARIA *(protectively)*. Leave Virginia alone.

JULIE. Oh phooh! Besides, everybody knows there's no such thing as Santa Claus.

VIRGINIA. That's not true.

SUSAN. Oh, how would you know? Have you ever seen him, Virginia? I mean in real life. Ever see him?

JULIE *(still taunting)*. Sure she has. We all have. There was one on the street corner last year ringing a bell, asking for money.

SUSAN *(still taunting)*. And how about the one in Gimbles who smelled like whiskey and smokes? *(SUSAN and JULIE laugh.)*

MARIA. Of course there is a Santa Claus and of course Virginia hasn't seen him in real life, but that...

JULIE (to VIRGINIA). Then how can you believe in something you can't see?

VIRGINIA (*having put on her shoe, rises*). I can't see God but I believe in him. (*MARIA smiles triumphantly for VIRGINIA. JULIE looks to SUSAN for her retort. There is none.*)

JULIE. Come on, are we gonna play or not?

(The stage goes dark. Then a light on MITCHELL standing downstage, smoking a fresh cigar.)

MITCHELL. December is the month of the longest nights and the shortest days. And the *coldest* nights and days. It was one thing for James O'Hanlon and his friend Dominic Donneli to say they would get another job, it was a different thing to find one. They couldn't, they didn't.

(Lights come up near an alley on a sign: O'HARA'S BAR AND GRILL—DELIVERIES ONLY. As MITCHELL speaks, JAMES O'HANLON stops, picks up a small kitten and waits in the cold until the rear door opens and a small man, SHORTY, steps out with a bucket of garbage. SHORTY and O'HANLON exchange looks as SHORTY empties the garbage into a larger receptacle then places a newspaper on top. When SHORTY leaves, O'HANLON puts down the cat and picks up the newspaper.)

One stop on James O'Hanlon's daily rounds was the back entrance of O'Hara's Bar and Grill where his friend Shorty would leave a copy of yesterday's newspaper. Oh, of course the paper was the *New York Sun*.

(Lights illuminate combination living room-kitchen of the O'Hanlon apartment revealing JAMES' wife EVIE O'HANLON, VIRGINIA and SEAN, a precocious 7-year old, at the kitchen table. EVIE's plain housedress, worn sweater and apron do not diminish her natural beauty. A crucifix hangs near the kitchen nook.)

SEAN. Mom, can I have more?

EVIE. May I.

SEAN. May I? *(There is no more except what is in VIRGINIA's bowl.)*

EVIE. Well, Sean...

VIRGINIA. He may have the rest of mine. I'm all filled up.

EVIE. Virginia...

SEAN *(eagerly)*. I'll take it.

(The door opens and JAMES O'HANLON enters dressed against the bitter cold morning. EVIE approaches and kisses him. JAMES in turn kisses VIRGINIA and SEAN.)

EVIE. James, darlin', you left in the dead of the night.

O'HANLON. Heard there was a job at the power company.

EVIE *(brightens)*. And was there?

O'HANLON. Yes. But there were also a hundred men wantin' to fill it. That's what comes from readin' yesterday's newspaper.

EVIE. You'll find something.

O'HANLON. I will. But right now I've come home to find some tea... *(EVIE pours hot, slightly colored water from the pot into a cup.)* ...and to look at the bright, shiny faces of the O'Hanlon clan before they go off to school.

SEAN. And learn more about President McKinley.

O'HANLON. President-elect. Grover Cleveland is still in office to the end of the year.

EVIE. James, will you be going out again?

O'HANLON. I will as soon as I finish this bit of nourishment. And what about you, Evie? Have you had any breakfast?

EVIE. I have.

O'HANLON. Good. Well, then, I'll walk Virginia and Sean down the block.

VIRGINIA. I'm stopping at Maria's. Her mother is still pretty sick.

EVIE (*to O'HANLON*). And Dominic's found no work?

O'HANLON (*shakes his head*). Well come on, Sean, m'bucko, we're off. You to learn and me to earn.

EVIE (*kisses O'HANLON*). That's the spirit...

O'HANLON. Trouble is, there's too damn much spirit and not enough jobs.

EVIE. James...the children.

O'HANLON (*grins*). Yes, and aren't we lucky...they do favor your side of the family, don't they?

(As O'HANLON winks and tousles SEAN's hair...lights dim and stage goes dark. Spotlight up on MITCHELL downstage.)

MITCHELL. During those days, and part of the nights, Frank P. Church was spending less and less time at his desk at the *New York Sun* and more and more time brooding...and yes...drinking. His favorite watering hole was a place frequented by other gentlemen of the press. Though not nearly as frequently. Brodie's Bar and Grill.

(Lights go up giving us the impression of a bar. At a nearby table sits FRANK CHURCH. On the table, a bottle of rye and a half-filled glass. OTHO, a thin, Norwegian bartender, approaches tentatively.)

OTHO. Can I get you something to eat, Mr. Church? *(No response.)* Mr. Church... something to eat?

(CHURCH barely shakes his head "No." Three men have entered. CORNELIUS BARRINGTON, 30, tall, solid-shouldered, well dressed; GEORGE, late 40s, not as solid, not as well dressed; and SAM, chewing a cigar under his derby.)

OTHO. Morning Mr. Barrington.

BARRINGTON *(nods)*. Otho... *(BARRINGTON looks at CHURCH, takes a step toward him. CHURCH ignores him.)* Well, well, well... fellow newspapermen, take a look at who's here... or is it *still* here?

GEORGE. Lay off, Cornelius...

BARRINGTON. Shut up, George. If it isn't the great roving reporter... the egalitarian editorializer, Frank Himself Church...

GEORGE. Come on, Cornelius, let's have a drink.

BARRINGTON. ...friend and champion of the common man—would-be slayer of the capitalist dragon—dreaming up more drivel against the aristocracy—men like my uncle—right, Mr. Church?

SAM. Leave him alone. Let's eat and get back to the paper.

BARRINGTON. Oh, sure. *(To CHURCH.)* If you're looking for Dr. Livingston, Mr. Church, he's already been found—in Africa—not in a bottle.

(BARRINGTON laughs and walks away. CHURCH never looks at him. Lights fade to dark...then spotlight on MITCHELL. While MITCHELL talks we can hear the sounds of typewriters and the noise of the New York Sun city room.)

MITCHELL. Those sounds you hear are a heartbeat and a pulse, not of a man or woman, but of a newspaper. The city room of the *New York Sun*. That's right, a newspaper, like a human being, is a living creature. And every day, the life of a newspaper is filled with joy and sorrow, triumph and tragedy, with victory and defeat, just as in the lives of the people who read it. It's my job to get that paper to those people.

(Lights go up illuminating the city room. Reporters, desks, telephones, copyboys cutting through the cluttered area. A partially decorated Christmas tree; occasionally someone places a decoration on it. Feature ANDREA BORLAND, an attractive young reporter, at a tiny, but neat desk and TEDDY MURRAY, a copyboy. MITCHELL now moves toward an empty desk with an Oliver typewriter on it. He pulls a sheet of paper from the roller of the Oliver and mutters, reading from the paper.)

asdfghjkl...asdf... *(MITCHELL crumples the paper, opens a drawer, pulls out an empty pint whiskey bottle, but not so that it can be seen by the staff, places the bottle back and slams the drawer shut.)* TEDDY! Hey, Teddy, come here!

TEDDY. Yes, sir. Yes, sir, Mr. Mitchell.

MITCHELL. Have you seen Frank?

TEDDY. He went out, Mr. Mitchell...

MITCHELL. Out where?

TEDDY. Out the door. I don't know where, Mr. Mitchell.

MITCHELL. When?

TEDDY. Uh... hours ago ... maybe two.

MITCHELL. Well, when he comes back *in* the door, tell him I want to see him right away.

TEDDY. Yes, sir.

MITCHELL. He didn't give you any copy on that "Shame of Greatness" editorial, did he?

TEDDY. No, Mr. Mitchell.

MITCHELL (*starts to move, tosses the crumpled paper to TEDDY as he walks on*). Here, study this. You might grow up to be a great reporter yourself someday.

(MITCHELL is intercepted by ANDREA BORLAND.)

ANDREA. Mr. Mitchell...

MITCHELL. What is it, Miss Borland?

ANDREA. Did you like the story I did on the Vanderbilt Ball?

MITCHELL. I printed it, didn't I?

ANDREA. Well ... half of it.

MITCHELL. That's the half I liked. (MITCHELL heads toward his office.)

ANDREA. Thank you again for the opportunity... (*Trails off*.) Mr. Mitchell. (ANDREA watches a moment, looks toward CHURCH's desk then toward TEDDY.) Teddy.

TEDDY. Yes, Miss Borland? What do you need?

ANDREA. Some information.

(Lights go dim and dark. Then come up again on Brodie's Bar and Grill. CHURCH still seated at his table with less whiskey in the bottle of rye—ANDREA enters wearing a coat and hat. A couple of the customers react to the sight of a female inside Brodie's, so does OTHO.)

OTHO. I...I'm sorry, ma'am, but we don't serve ladies... escorted or unescorted.

ANDREA. Why not?

OTHO. I don't know, ma'am, I just work here and we just serve gentlemen.

ANDREA. Have you served a gentleman named Church? Francis P. Chur... *(ANDREA sees CHURCH, moves toward the table and speaks softly.)* Mr. Church...Mr. Church...

CHURCH *(after a beat, looks up)*. Well, well, well...and where's your tambourine?

ANDREA. What tambourine?

CHURCH. Aren't you from the Salvation Army?

ANDREA. No. I'm Andrea Borland from the *New York Sun* and you know it.

CHURCH. Do I? What else do I know?

ANDREA. You ought to know that Mr. Mitchell is looking for you.

CHURCH. Edward P. Mitchell is always looking for me... lately.

ANDREA. He's also looking for that article.

CHURCH. Oh, yes, "The Shame of Greatness"...what a shame...

(CHURCH pours from the bottle. We now reveal CORNELIUS BARRINGTON near a post. How long he's been there we don't know.)

ANDREA. Mr. Church, it's probably none of my business ...

CHURCH. That's right. Your business is "Society," isn't it, Miss Borland? Balls and teas ... and cortill ... cotillions and such as that.

ANDREA. Mr. Church, have you finished the article?
(CHURCH winks, pulls a couple of sheets from inside his pocket, places them on the table and tries to smooth them out.)

CHURCH. Just about, Miss Borland. Just about ... finished. There has to be a finish to every story ... finish ...

(CHURCH puts both arms atop the table and lowers his head onto both wrists. ANDREA looks a moment, then takes up the papers, reads and shakes her head sadly. [Note: If possible, reveal sloppily typed copy—parts X'd and started again.] ANDREA folds the pages and places them in her purse. She walks out—lights start to dim. The last light remains on BARRINGTON then stage goes dark. Lights illuminate a small hall area in the building where the O'HANLONS live. JAMES O'HANLON entering, MRS. GOLDSTEIN dressed to go out. O'HANLON has The Sun in his corduroy coat pocket.)

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. Good afternoon, Mr. O'Hanlon. How did the day go?

O'HANLON. Not as hoped, Mrs. Goldstein, not as hoped.

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. Still no job?

O'HANLON. Afraid not.

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. Well, something will turn up. Like my dear dead Saul used to say, "The silver lining doesn't make the coat, it's the person wearing it."

O'HANLON (*doesn't understand the correlation*). Thank you, Mrs. Goldstein. I'll remember that.

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. *Got vil zein mit du*. God be with you, Mr. O'Hanlon. (*She is on her way.*)

O'HANLON (*sotto*). And it best be soon, Mrs. Goldstein. It best be soon.

(Lights dim and go to dark, then come up in MITCHELL's office, a corner area, MITCHELL, at his desk, responds to a knock.)

MITCHELL. Come.

(MITCHELL pulls a loose kitchen match out of his vest pocket, relights his cigar after striking the match on his desk, as ANDREA BORLAND appears, carrying neatly typed sheets of paper. At first MITCHELL doesn't look at her.)

ANDREA. Mr. Mitchell ...

MITCHELL. Yes, Miss Borland, what is it? You want back the other half of your Vanderbilt piece?

ANDREA. No, sir ...

MITCHELL. What've you got there? Something I overlooked for the front page?

ANDREA. I ran into Mr. Church when I went out to eat ... he ... wasn't feeling very well.

MITCHELL. Is that so?

ANDREA. But he asked me to give you this. *(She hands him the copy and waits tentatively as he reads. His expression gives nothing away.)*

MITCHELL. I'll tell you something, Miss Borland.

ANDREA *(nervous)*. Yes, sir.

MITCHELL. Drunk, Frank Church is...still the best newspaper man in this or any other town. *(ANDREA nods with relief and starts to move away.)* And, Miss Borland...

ANDREA. Yes, sir.

MITCHELL. Frank Church didn't always drink. Only since his wife and baby died almost a year ago.

(She nods again and walks out as MITCHELL goes back to the article. Lights go dark and come up on the O'Hanlon apartment at night. SEAN is busy with some imaginary play. EVIE is ironing. O'HANLON is putting on a well-worn sweater.)

O'HANLON. It's getting colder every ni... Evie, where's your shawl? *(He looks around the room. No answer from EVIE. She continues ironing.)* The one your mother sent you from Innisfree? *(Silence. But SEAN looks up.)* ...the one she knitted for you...to keep you warm? Ah, Evie...

EVIE. The yarn from that shawl... *(She glances at SEAN, then continues.)* was enough to make three gifts, James, for my loved ones, besides...

O'HANLON. Because I can't afford to buy Christmas gifts...

EVIE. Besides I'm quite warm enough, thank you... (*She approaches her husband.*) ...and, James O'Hanlon, if it's warmth I need then I know where to find it.

O'HANLON (*smiles*). Do you now? (*He tickles her. She takes an affectionate swing at him. He dodges, then hugs her. They tussle and laugh.*) You should know better than to mix with an old dock-fighter like me!

(They break up laughing and hugging. SEAN also laughs as VIRGINIA and MARIA enter. MARIA's already flushed complexion blushes even more.)

VIRGINIA (*to MARIA*). Don't worry, they do that all the time. Hi, Mama...Papa. (*EVIE and O'HANLON separate. O'HANLON opens his arms and smiles as VIRGINIA approaches.*)

O'HANLON. How are my favorite little girls today?

MARIA. Fine, Mr. O'Hanlon.

EVIE. How's your mother, Maria?

MARIA. Not so good, Mrs. O'Hanlon. She coughs a lot. It scares Papa and all of us.

EVIE. I'm sure it must.

O'HANLON. Your father's having no luck job hunting either, then?

MARIA. No, sir.

O'HANLON. Tell him...tell your father I'm very sorry. (*To EVIE*) I feel like it's my fault.

MARIA. I'll tell him, but don't feel bad, Mr. O'Hanlon. Papa says you're a fine man and he says you two'll be working together again. Well I'd better be going now. (*MARIA starts for the door, VIRGINIA and EVIE with her.*)

EVIE. I'll make some soup and bring it your mother, Maria. That ... and a prayer is the best medicine of all.

MARIA. Papa prays all the time...sometimes I think God must already have too much on his mind. (*MARIA leaves. EVIE puts her arms around VIRGINIA.*)

EVIE. How sick is she? Do you know?

VIRGINIA. I hear the neighbors talking. They say Mrs. Donneli might never get well.

EVIE. Dear God.

VIRGINIA. But she will...that's all Maria wants for Christmas...for her mother to get well. That's all she wants from Santa Claus.

(Lights dim over this with the last spotlight on VIRGINIA. Lights come up on city room. CHURCH now in better shape at his desk. MITCHELL holding a folded edition of The Sun whacks it against CHURCH's desk. ANDREA BORLAND is at her tiny workplace. There are a few more decorations on the Christmas tree.)

MITCHELL. "The Shame of Greatness"! Good stuff, Frank, very good! You working on that Tamany Hall story? (*CHURCH nods.*) How's it coming?

CHURCH. It's coming.

MITCHELL. Will it be finished in time to give the boys at city hall a Christmas present?

CHURCH. It'll blow the pants off the boys at city hall...if you print it.

MITCHELL. You write it, Francis. I'll print it.

(MITCHELL, in an expansive mood, walks away as TEDDY approaches holding The Sun and reading while jabbing the air with his free hand.)

TEDDY. "Ask the Captains of Industry. Ask the Robber Barons...ask the Politicians about that bridge"...that's the way I'd like to be able to write someday, Mr. Church, with both fists...like John L. Sullivan. Yes, sir, a real humdinger.

CHURCH. First of all, Teddy, my boy, you've got to learn to unmix your metaphors.

TEDDY. Uh, what does that mean, Mr. Church?

CHURCH. It means I'm busy right now.

TEDDY. Sure, Mr. Church. I'll talk to you later.

CHURCH. Second of all...

TEDDY. Yes, sir?

CHURCH. In case you haven't heard, John L. Sullivan is no longer champion. He got beat by James J. Corbett.

TEDDY. Yes, sir, I know. But as far as I'm concerned John L. Sullivan will always be champeen. Yes sir, a real humdinger... *(After TEDDY walks away, CHURCH pulls open a drawer, takes out a half-full pint bottle of rye, slips it into his pocket, rises, rips out the sheet from the Oliver, crumples it, tosses it into the wastebasket and starts to walk toward the men's room. At ANDREA BORLAND's desk he pauses, stops.)*

CHURCH. Miss Borland.

ANDREA. Yes?

CHURCH. I suppose you expect me to thank you.

ANDREA. For what?

CHURCH. Don't be precious, Miss Borland. I can't abide preciousness. For writing that article and by-lining my name.

ANDREA. No, Mr. Church. I owe you thanks.

CHURCH. For what?

ANDREA. Do you remember lecturing at a journalism class at NYU a few years ago?

CHURCH. Not particularly.

ANDREA. Well, I was one of three females in that class. I was ready to quit...until that day. It's because of what you said that I didn't. What you said and what you've written.

CHURCH. Miss Borland...

ANDREA. So please accept my thanks. Besides, they were your ideas. All I did was rearrange a few words.

CHURCH. If you say so, but that article...tomorrow it'll be yesterday's newspaper and you can wrap a fish in it.

ANDREA. What do you mean?

CHURCH. I mean that's all it's good for. Nothing that you or I, or anybody else writes for a newspaper has a life span of more than twenty-four hours.

ANDREA. I don't believe that.

CHURCH. That's your privilege—and your delusion. Now, excuse me. *(Starts to walk away, but stops.)* By the way. What happened to those other females in that class?

ANDREA. They ... got married.

CHURCH. Uh, huh. They showed uncommonly good common sense. *(Lights dim. Last light goes out on ANDREA. We hear a young boy's voice in the dark.)*

BOY'S VOICE. Daily! Daily! Get your *New York Sun*! *New York Sun* daily!

(Lights illuminate a part of the stage. VIRGINIA, bundled, carrying her books, walks and pulls her scarf around her head. The dull afternoon sun abruptly becomes bright. VIRGINIA catches sight of something... She moves toward it and picks it up. A shiny copper penny.)

VIRGINIA *(just above a whisper)*. A penny.

(She looks around. Nobody nearby. She hears the NEWSBOY's voice and closes her fist around the penny. NEWSBOY, carrying about a half-dozen newspapers, now appears on stage. Several others cross stage.)

NEWSBOY. Daily! Daily! Get your *Sun* daily!

VIRGINIA. How much?

NEWSBOY. Two cents. *(VIRGINIA shows disappointment. The NEWSBOY has extended one of the papers.)* Did you want a paper, little girl?

VIRGINIA. Not now, thank you.

NEWSBOY. Okay. *(Walking away.)* Get your daily *Sun*! Right here, *New York Sun*... *(Lights dim. Stage is dark. Sound of wind. A kitten meows. We hear JAMES O'HANLON's voice.)*

O'HANLON'S VOICE. Ah, there you are again. Looks like you could use a friend right now.

(Lights come up revealing the back of O'Hara's Bar and Grill near alley. O'HANLON has the kitten in his hands.)

O'HANLON. How about it, Tabby? Want to be friends...
(*Scuffling, shouting, commotion. The kitten jumps from O'HANLON's arms.*)

O'HARA'S VOICE. Help! Help! Somebody out there!
Stop him. He's a thief. Police! Police! Stop him!

(*The THIEF runs out of O'Hara's back door and crashes into O'HANLON who grabs him. The THIEF slugs O'HANLON and starts to run. But O'HANLON tackles him. The THIEF has a knife, takes a couple of swipes at O'HANLON, manages to rip the sleeve of O'HANLON's coat, but O'HANLON grabs and bangs the THIEF's knife hand against the ground. The THIEF drops the knife. O'HANLON lands a telling punch, picks up the knife and rises as two POLICEMEN appear. So do several citizens. Finally, O'HARA also appears.*)

OFFICER 1. Which one is it?

OFFICER 2. They *both* look like thieves to me. (*The THIEF rises, seeing his opportunity to take advantage of the OFFICERS' confusion.*)

THIEF. Grab him! He's the man you want! Look out...he's got a knife. (*The OFFICERS turn their guns toward O'HANLON who stands with the knife.*)

O'HANLON. No! That's not true...I was waiting out here when he came running out!

OFFICER 1. What were you waiting for?

O'HANLON. My ... my newspaper.

OFFICER 2. They sell them on corners, Bub, not alleys.

O'HANLON. Yesterday's paper in the trash. (*To crowd.*)
Surely one of you there can identify this man as the thief...

O'HARA (*steps forward rubbing his hand*). I wish I could be sure, officers. I...I'm O'Hara.

O'HANLON. Where's your kitchen help?

O'HARA. Shorty?

O'HANLON. Yes! Shorty knows me. He knows I'm here every day waitin' for the paper.

O'HARA. Shorty's on an errand.

(Two more officers push through the crowd, SERGEANT FLYNN and OFFICER REEVES.)

FLYNN. Here! What's goin' on here?

O'HARA. A thief...one of these two...came up behind me, knocked me on the head and stole the money from my cash box.

O'HANLON. Well, then, that's it! The thief would have the money on him, wouldn't he! *(The THIEF breaks for it, pushing past the OFFICERS, but O'HANLON is after him, catches him, the THIEF swings. O'HANLON ducks, slugs the THIEF, spins him around and pins his arm behind him. TWO OFFICERS hold on to the THIEF as FLYNN searches and finds the money in the THIEF's pocket.)*

FLYNN. So he would. And so he does. *(To the OFFICERS.)* All right, boys. *(The TWO OFFICERS lead the THIEF away.)*

THIEF *(to O'HANLON)*. I'll get you for this! You'll see! I'll get you! *(FLYNN hands the money to O'HARA, then turns to O'HANLON.)*

FLYNN. I'm Sergeant Flynn. I want to thank you, Mr...

O'HANLON. O'Hanlon. James O'Hanlon.

FLYNN. O'Hanlon, huh? That's a good name. Quick thinkin' and good with your fists too, James O'Hanlon. I apologize for the mistake. *(FLYNN and REEVES walk away. The rest of the onlookers start to disperse.)*

O'HARA. Can't thank you enough, Mr. O'Hanlon. It's true business hasn't been too good lately...can't offer a reward, but might I offer you and the family some fresh-baked bread and some cold cuts...

O'HANLON. I thank you, but, well, no thanks, I...

O'HARA. Come now—it's the least I can do...step inside and let me serve you a hot Irish while I get it ready for you. *(O'HARA leads O'HANLON upstage.)* 'Tis the season you know...

O'HANLON. That it is...Mr. O'Hara that it is. *(The stage starts to go dark.)*

O'HARA. And we'll see that you get that newspaper, too, Mr. O'Hanlon.

(O'HARA and O'HANLON go in through the back door. FLYNN starts to follow but O'HARA closes the door, leaving FLYNN outside. Lights come up on opposite downstage corner. MARIA's mother, CELESTE, lies on a sofa—a blanket partially covers her ashen and sunken face. The sofa and sparse furnishings threadbare. MARIA lifts a spoon of soup to CELESTE's lips as VIRGINIA watches.)

MARIA. The soup is helping, Mama, I can tell. You're feeling better, aren't you?

CELESTE. Yes, Maria... Virginia, please thank your mother again for stopping by...

VIRGINIA. I will, Mrs. Donneli...see you tomorrow, Maria. (*VIRGINIA walks into darkness.*)

MARIA. You'll get well, Mama. But you've got to try.

CELESTE. I will. I'll try to be well again and be your mother...

(Lights dim. But now standing at what would be the doorway is DOM DONNELI, helpless, hopeless. The light finally goes out on him as we hear in the darkness...)

CELESTE'S VOICE. ...and be a wife to your father, God knows that.

MARIA'S VOICE. Santa knows that, too.

(As lights come up ANDREA BORLAND is walking. She is interrupted by a smiling CORNELIUS BARRINGTON.)

BARRINGTON. Miss Borland. Andrea Borland.

ANDREA. Have we met?

BARRINGTON. Just now.

ANDREA. Then how do you know my name?

BARRINGTON. I'm a newspaper man. Cornelius Barrington. It's my business to know things—and people. You're a damn fine writer, Miss Borland.

ANDREA. You've read my society pieces?

BARRINGTON. No, your article, "The Shame of Greatness."

ANDREA. I don't know what you're talking about. (*ANDREA starts off. BARRINGTON steps in front of her and grins.*)

BARRINGTON. Sure you do. We both do. How'd you like to work for my paper. *The Chronicle*.

ANDREA. Do you own *The Chronicle*, Mr. Barrington?

BARRINGTON. No, but my uncle does. That makes it easy for the both of us. Of course you'd have to take a slightly different perspective of things.

ANDREA. What things?

BARRINGTON. Well, you could start by writing an exposé—call it “The Ghost of Frank Church”—about how you wrote that article.

ANDREA. I did no such thing, Mr. Barrington, and I strongly recommend that you be extremely careful about what you say or write.

BARRINGTON. Really? Why?

ANDREA. Because my uncle is a lawyer. A damn fine lawyer and that makes it easy for the both of us.

(Lights go black and rise on the O'Hanlon apartment. VIRGINIA and SEAN are doing homework. EVIE is mending the torn corduroy coat. O'HANLON, with a copy of The Sun sits in his chair and whacks at the newspaper.)

O'HANLON. He's right, damn it! He's right!

EVIE. What is it, James? Who's right?

O'HANLON. The man who wrote this editorial in *The Sun*. It's titled “The Shame of Greatness.”

EVIE. What's it about?

O'HANLON. About this country—listen. *(He reads.)* “We have become a great nation. But at what cost? Ask the red man, the black man, the elderly, the ill. We have built a great railroad across the forty-five states and

bridges across rivers, but there is no bridge of brotherhood. Why? Because there is no *profit* in that bridge.” (*O’HANLON rises and walks about as he continues.*) “Ask the Captains of Industry, ask the Robber Barons, ask the Politicians about *that* bridge.” (*O’HANLON folds the paper and smacks it across the back of his chair.*) He’s right! Damn it, he’s right...hard to believe fifty years ago our people came to this country because they were starving in Ireland. Potato famine, indeed. High rents, hah! It’s no different here!

EVIE (*soothing*). James ... (*O’HANLON angrily smacks the paper flat up against his fist. It startles EVIE. She rises, turns angry.*) Stop it! Stop feeling sorry for yourself! If I hear one more time how poor we are...how hungry we are... (*She continues, calming.*) We’ve got our health, our family together, a roof over our heads and blankets on our beds...and God...we have God. You can be poor if you want to, James O’Hanlon, but not me. I’m rich and I grow richer every day of my life. (*O’HANLON takes a long look at his wife. Frayed apron, old dress, worn shoes. He suppresses a smile—almost.*)

O’HANLON. I really don’t think the Vanderbilts or the Morgans have anything to worry about... (*EVIE and O’HANLON smile, then laugh.*)

SEAN. Daddy, who are the Van-do-bilts and the Morgans?

O’HANLON. Oh, a couple of neighbors just a little ways across Manhattan.

EVIE (*holds up the repaired coat*). And here is your evening cape, Mr. Vanderbilt—just as good as... (*She was about to say “new.”*) as it was this morning. (*O’HANLON takes the coat and kisses EVIE on the cheek. VIRGINIA smiles, returns to her homework, but has trouble*

concentrating. She looks at her father, contemplating an approach, EVIE notices VIRGINIA's dilemma.) Havin' trouble with somethin', darlin'?

VIRGINIA. No, Mama. Just thinking.

O'HANLON. Oh... I've had a feeling there's been something on your mind...

VIRGINIA. More than something.

O'HANLON. Want to come over here and talk about it?
(VIRGINIA smiles, moves from the table to her father, sits on his lap as he strokes her hair in a tender moment.) All right, then, what is it?

VIRGINIA. Papa, is there a Santa Claus? *(O'HANLON and EVIE exchange looks and SEAN pays attention.)*

O'HANLON. What makes you ask, Virginia?

VIRGINIA. Because all my friends say... well, almost all my friends say there's no such thing. They say that Santa Claus is a lie. They say somebody made him up...

O'HANLON. Oh, they do. And what do you think, Virginia?

VIRGINIA. I want to think so, but...

O'HANLON. But what?

VIRGINIA. I'm just not sure. Please tell me true, Papa, do you think there really is a Santa Claus?

O'HANLON *(points to the newspaper in his hand)*. See this paper?

VIRGINIA *(nods)*. I can sort of smell it, too.

O'HANLON. Never mind that... This paper tells me what's going on around us. It's like taking a world trip. It keeps me informed, gives me confidence that people do indeed achieve their goals. It also makes me aware that some don't. But mostly I choose to read the positive things... not the obituary notices.

VIRGINIA. What's the ob... obit... ?

O'HANLON. Obituary. It tells of death. I only read about life.

VIRGINIA. Papa... do you think your paper could tell me if there is a Santa Claus?

O'HANLON. Virginia, if you see it in *The Sun*, it's so.

VIRGINIA (*kisses her father*). Thanks, Papa. (*Lights dim to black. We hear CHURCH's voice in the darkness. Then OTHO's.*)

CHURCH'S VOICE. Good night, Otho.

OTHO'S VOICE. Good night, Mr. Church.

(*Lights come up revealing CHURCH and OTHO, at Brodie's Bar and Grill. BARRINGTON enters the scene.*)

BARRINGTON. Good evening, Mr. Church. (*CHURCH ignores BARRINGTON and starts past him.*) In a hurry? well, that's all right. I've already conveyed my congratulations on that powerful editorial to Miss Borland. (*CHURCH stops.*) You see, Otho, Mr. Church knows all about "Shame." He attacks the Captains of Industry—the Railroad Builders—Robber Barons—the exploiters—while he shamelessly exploits the talents of his little lady friend. A nice cozy little setup you've got there, Church. What else does she do for you? (*CHURCH turns and takes a step towards BARRINGTON.*) Don't think of getting physical, Mr. Church. In the first place, you're out of shape. In the second place, I've done some fighting. Captain of the Yale boxing team, you know. (*CHURCH starts to turn and walk away—but whirls and swift-punches BARRINGTON, knocking him cold.*)

CHURCH. Did a little fighting myself—around Hell's Kitchen, Captain. (*Lights go out. We hear CHURCH's voice.*) Good night, Otho.

(*Lights illuminate a small bed. By candlelight, VIRGINIA is just finishing writing a letter. When she finishes—she reads.*)

VIRGINIA. "Dear Editor, I am eight years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says "If you see it in *The Sun*, it's so. Please tell me the truth. Is there a Santa Claus? Virginia O'Hanlon."

(*Lights off on VIRGINIA. A spotlight comes up on MITCHELL.*)

MITCHELL. Well, those are the main people in the story, except for Mr. Schuller and we'll get to him in a minute. When he wasn't at Brodie's Bar and Grill, Frank Church kept making noises on his typewriter, but he wasn't fooling me, or Andrea Borland or himself.

(*Lights come up on part of the stage revealing JAMES O'HANLON and DOM DONNELI walking, looking at the "Help Wanted" section of The Sun. As O'HANLON and DOM move off, VIRGINIA comes along and stops in front of a U.S. mail box.*)

The next day James O'Hanlon and Dom Donneli were out again trying to find work. And Virginia was out trying to find an answer.

(MITCHELL's light goes off as VIRGINIA takes an envelope out of her reader, addressed in neatly printed letters: "Editor, *The Sun*, 280 Broadway, New York, New York." There is no stamp. she stands contemplating her stampless dilemma. Mr. SCHULLER, a mailman, appears behind her.)

SCHULLER. Ah! Virginia! How are you, liebchen?

VIRGINIA. Oh!?

SCHULLER. I'm sorry I startled you.

VIRGINIA. No ...not really, Mr. Schuller.

SCHULLER (*points*). A letter for Santa, maybe?

VIRGINIA. Not exactly, but it's about him.

SCHULLER. Why not to Santa himself?

VIRGINIA. I'm not sure I'd get an answer.

SCHULLER. Ah, I see. (*A beat.*) Yah, Santa is pretty busy right now. (*SCHULLER looks at the address on the envelope.*) How can you be so sure this party will answer?

VIRGINIA. Papa says *The Sun* tells him everything he wants to know. (*Mimicking.*) "Virginia, if you see it in *The Sun* it's so." (*Smiles, proud of her impression.*)

SCHULLER. Well then, it's best you get it mailed and the sooner the better.

VIRGINIA. I don't have a stamp, Mr. Schuller, can I buy one? I have a penny. Is that enough?

SCHULLER. Ah, sure, but keep your penny. Let Otto Schuller take care of it. (*SCHULLER reaches inside his jacket and pulls out a stamp. With ceremony, he licks the stamp and places it on the envelope.*) My gift to you, liebchen. I'll see that it gets there safely ...and Merry Christmas.

VIRGINIA (*beams*). Thank you, Mr. Schuller... and Merry Christmas.

(Lights dim and out. Then up on the city room of The Sun. CHURCH is returning from the men's room, walks past ANDREA BORLAND and goes to his desk. Discreetly, he removes the whiskey bottle from his pocket, then sits placing the bottle in an open drawer. He lifts the gold watch from his vest, flips open the lid, looks at the picture as the tune plays. TEDDY appears.)

TEDDY. Someday, Mr. Church, I'm going to have a watch like that...

CHURCH. What?

TEDDY. A watch that's pure gold and plays a tune... a real humdinger.

CHURCH. Sure you will...

VOICE. Boy! Boy! Copyboy!

(TEDDY hurries off. CHURCH listens to the tune then removes the picture from the lid and closes it. He un-snaps the watch from the chain, takes an envelope and writes TEDDY MURRAY. He places the gold watch in the envelope, seals it and places it in the drawer. He rises, takes his coat down from the nearby tree rack and starts out. [Note: Now there are more decorations on the little Christmas tree.] We hear a familiar voice, then see MITCHELL.)

MITCHELL. Going out, Frank?

CHURCH. Yeah, yeah. City hall. Got a hot tip.

MITCHELL (*forced smile*). Well, don't let it cool off.

CHURCH. I won't.

(CHURCH leaves as lights dim, then go out except for a spot which follows MITCHELL as he walks downstage with his ubiquitous cigar.)

MITCHELL. That took place after I had gone through the day's mail. I knew something had to be done before it was too late... I wasn't exactly sure what that something was, but a plan had begun to take shape in the mind of a certain newspaperman.

(Lights come up slowly on Frank Church's apartment, first on the flames of a gas burner, then on the rest of the room, a man's room, or at least the impression of a room. The essentials, besides the gas burner include a window, door, a couple of chairs, a table with a bottle of whiskey and a glass on it...and somewhere a large wedding certificate with photos of Frank and Elizabeth. CHURCH turns the knob of the gas burner so the flames are extinguished. Slowly he turns the burner back on. There is an ominous hissing sound from the flameless burners. He goes to the window, makes sure it is closed tightly, then moves to the chair, takes up the whiskey glass and gazes at the framed wedding certificate. As he drinks there is a knock.

CHURCH. Who is it?

MITCHELL. Ed Mitchell.

CHURCH. Just a minute.

(CHURCH moves toward the heater, turns it off, goes quickly to the window, opens it a few inches—then goes to the door and opens it.)

CHURCH. What is it, Ed?

MITCHELL. Happened to be in the neighborhood.

CHURCH. Did you?

MITCHELL. Well, can I come in? *(CHURCH motions him in, closes the door, walks to the table and pours himself a drink. As he does, MITCHELL takes a couple of breaths, steals a glance at the unlit heater and the open window.)*

CHURCH. Want a drink?

MITCHELL. Thanks, no.

CHURCH. Well, what do you want, Ed? Must be something.

MITCHELL. No. Just a visit...and an invitation. Martha wanted me to ask you if you'd like to come over for Christmas dinner.

CHURCH. Couldn't you ask at the paper?

MITCHELL. I suppose I could... are you all right, Frank?

CHURCH. Why? You have any complaints about my work?

MITCHELL. No complaints...

CHURCH. Because there are a couple of other papers...

MITCHELL. Frank, you've got to quit torturing yourself...

CHURCH. Do I? *(Drinks.)* It took me a good many years more than it does most men to find the right woman and marry her. She could have had her pick of a hundred better men—young, rich—with the stuff that proper husbands are made of... *(CHURCH drinks again.)*

MITCHELL. It wasn't your fault, Frank. There was an epidemic. A lot of other wives died...

CHURCH. Sure they did. And they died with their husbands at their side. But not Elizabeth... and the baby.

MITCHELL. Frank...

CHURCH. We were married over three years and I never had Christmas dinner with her, not once. The first year it was a flood in Pennsylvania, the second a revolution in Asia, and when Elizabeth was dying of pneumonia, I was in Panama writing about yellow fever.

MITCHELL. Frank, Elizabeth married a newspaperman. She knew that and loved you. Did you ever hear her complain?

CHURCH. No, I didn't. I never heard or noticed a lot of things—about her...until it was too late. (*CHURCH finishes the drink and starts to pour another one.*) You sure you won't have a drink... a "close to Christmas" drink?

MITCHELL. I'm sure. And, Frank, you...

CHURCH. Oh, don't worry, ol' pal, I'm still married to the newspaper, and I promise to be a good husband.

MITCHELL. Yeah. (*Over this, MITCHELL has pulled out a cigar and a kitchen match. He lights the cigar, then goes over to the gas heater with another match and starts to light the heater, cautiously turning the knob.*) Let me know about Christmas dinner.

CHURCH. What're you doing?

MITCHELL. It's a little chilly in here. There, that's better. (*MITCHELL walks to the window and presses it down as he talks.*) By the way, Frank, I've got an interesting assignment for you.

CHURCH. Already have an assignment, the Tamany Hall exposé, remember?

MITCHELL. This won't take long—and I've got a deadline.

CHURCH. What is it?

MITCHELL (*smiles*). That's newspaper business. I'll tell you at the office—tomorrow. (*MITCHELL goes to the door and opens it.*) Good night.

CHURCH. Ed.

MITCHELL. Yes?

CHURCH. Thanks for turning on the heater. I wouldn't want to catch pneumonia. Would I?

MITCHELL. No, you wouldn't.

(MITCHELL goes out the door and closes it. Lights start to dim and go to darkness as CHURCH stares at the wedding certificate with the photo of himself and Elizabeth. Spotlight finds MITCHELL standing DL.)

Well I wonder if you've guessed the little scheme that I had in mind, and how—if it worked—it might affect the lives of Frank Church, Virginia O'Hanlon and the rest of these people—and maybe even you. We'll give you a chance to think it over, talk about it for a few minutes, if you like. Some of you old-timers out there might even want to grab a smoke. That's up to you. But if you do, don't forget the surgeon general's warning. (*MITCHELL takes a puff of his cigar, then removes a watch from his pocket and glances at it.*) We'll start with the second part of the story in just about ... ten minutes. (*Lights go out.*)

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

AT RISE: *The stage is still dark as EDWARD P. MITCHELL's silhouette walks on. He strikes a match. At the same time, he is illuminated by a spotlight. MITCHELL lights his cigar, takes a satisfactory puff. He removes his watch from his pocket and checks the time.)*

MITCHELL. Well, it's just about time we got back to the story of the O'Hanlons and Frank Church. (*MITCHELL pockets the watch and smokes as he continues talking to the audience.*) Of course you know I didn't just happen to stop by Frank Church's flat. I knew he was close, too close, to doing something desperate—something final. Virginia O'Hanlon's letter was on my desk. She was a child in need of an answer. And Frank Church was a man in need of a reason to go on living. As of yet, neither one was aware of the other. But I intended to do something about that. Before that long, cold December night had given way to the first light of dawn, James O'Hanlon was already out on the street. He had heard of a place that might be doing some hiring. He wanted to be first in line for the job—and he was. James O'Hanlon had been standing in the cruel cold for more than an hour.

(Over his last line, MITCHELL's spotlight fades to darkness as another area of the stage is illuminated revealing JAMES O'HANLON standing with upturned collar and threadbare gloves, moving his feet, waiting. After a few moments DOMINIC DONNELI enters.)

DONNELI. Jim?!

O'HANLON. Good morning, Dom.

DONNELI. Ah, I'm not so sure. How long you been waitin'?

(As O'HANLON and DONNELI speak, SCOTTY, RED, who carries a folded newspaper, and SHANNON appear.)

O'HANLON. I don't know ...about an hour. Shorty, over at O'Hara's, said they might be puttin' on some help today.

DONNELI. That's what my uncle told me too. He works just across the street.

O'HANLON. How's Celeste feelin'?

DONNELI. Not good. Not good at all. Don't know what we're gonna do. She's just not getting any better.

O'HANLON. Things'll come right, Dom. You'll see.

(ANDERSON and BRAWNSKI appear.)

(To the men.) Mornin'. *(SCOTTY and RED manage a "Mornin'."* *The others don't bother. They know the more applicants, the less chance each has at getting a job.)*

SCOTTY. Damn, this is the coldest winter I can recall.

RED. It'll warm up.

SCOTTY. Sure it will. In June.

SHANNON. What time is it?

RED. About five-thirty. How many they puttin' on?

SCOTTY. I don't know.

SHANNON. What's the pay?

SCOTTY. What's anything pay? Ten cents an hour.

RED. What do you expect with wheat at fifty cents a bushel and seven-cent cotton? The workin' class out of work and unorganized and nobody gives a damn. This country's going to hell in a handbasket.

SHANNON. If you don't like it here, brother, there's plenty of other countries.

RED. Maybe the whole world's only one country. (*He holds up the folded paper.*) You ever hear of a man named Karl Marx?

SHANNON. No.

RED. You will.

SHANNON. I don't want to hear about him unless he's got a job to offer.

RED. Maybe he has. The *International Workers of the World*. Maybe he's got a lot of jobs to offer.

SHANNON. Then what are you standin' around here for? Go find your friend Karl.

(*Over the last speech, a small man, TOM PRYOR, has appeared, dressed warmer than the others.*)

PRYOR. All right. Let me through here.

SCOTTY. Why?

PRYOR. Because I'm Tom Pryor and I do the hiring.

SCOTTY. Sorry, Mr. Pryor.

PRYOR. Sure you are. Need one man. Coal passing for one day for one dollar. Regular man'll be back tomorrow. Well, you're all about the same size, so, who was first? *(A slight pause, then O'HANLON nudges DONNELI forward.)*

O'HANLON. He was. This man right here.

DONNELI *(starts to protest)*. Jim, Jim, what're you saying. I...

O'HANLON. Here's your man, Mr. Pryor.

PRYOR. All right. You, follow me. And to the rest of you, good morning and Merry Christmas. *(The men start to drift away. Some say "Merry Christmas," and some don't. Only O'HANLON and DONNELI are left.)*

DONNELI. Jim, you need this job as much as I do ...

O'HANLON. Not as much as Celeste does. Besides I got a line on another job. Got to get goin'.

(O'HANLON walks away. DONNELI stands a beat, but realizes that he better not keep MR. PRYOR waiting. As he moves, the lights dim, then find MITCHELL behind his cluttered desk. A reporter, ART FRITZ, with a cup of coffee in one hand and a cable in the other, is handing MITCHELL the cable. MITCHELL picks up his eyeglasses and reads.)

FRITZ. Mitch, more from Cuba. They killed Colonel Ruiz.

MITCHELL. What?

FRITZ. Looks like things are heating up down there.

MITCHELL. Yeah.

FRITZ. Want me to follow up on this?

MITCHELL. Yeah, Fritz.

FRITZ. Okay.

(Over this, CHURCH has entered. FRITZ turns, crosses stage past CHURCH.)

Hello, Frank. *(CHURCH nods as FRITZ passes and exits. MITCHELL looks up from the cable and removes his eyeglasses as CHURCH approaches.)*

MITCHELL. Nice crisp day, huh, Frank? *(CHURCH ignores the small talk.)*

CHURCH. All right, Ed, what's the assignment?

MITCHELL. Frank, you and I have been working together for a long time. Only you've been doing most of the work, while I sit here gaining weight and losing my eyesight. *(MITCHELL tosses the eyeglasses on his desk.)* You've covered wars, fires, famines, floods, anarchists, contagious diseases and...

CHURCH. That's my job.

MITCHELL. And there's nobody better at it.

CHURCH. Ed, are you sure your middle initial isn't "B" for Barnum or buncombe? *(MITCHELL ignores the remark, rises from his desk and proceeds.)*

MITCHELL. But this could be the toughest assignment I've ever handed you.

CHURCH *(suddenly interested)*. Big?

MITCHELL. Very big.

CHURCH. Important?

MITCHELL. Very important.

CHURCH *(intrigued)*. Dangerous?

MITCHELL. It could be. *(He picks up an envelope from his desk and hands it to CHURCH. It is VIRGINIA's letter. CHURCH takes it, opens it and starts to read.)*

CHURCH. Don't you know?

MITCHELL. I know that you're the man to do it.
(*CHURCH reads the letter to himself, then looks at MITCHELL.*)

CHURCH. Is this your idea of a joke?

MITCHELL. No, it's my idea of an assignment.

CHURCH. Come on, Ed, I write editorials, remember?
That's what I get paid for.

MITCHELL. I know what you get paid for—and this is
going to be an editorial. Right on the front page.

CHURCH. You said it yourself—crime, corruption, contro-
versy—*that's* what I write about.

MITCHELL. Not this time. Besides, this is controversial.

CHURCH. Why don't you give it to that...female reporter
you hired?

MITCHELL. Because I'm giving it to you.

CHURCH (*waves the letter*). What do I know about all
this?

MITCHELL. Frank, even you were a kid once.

CHURCH. Yeah, and it took me years to get over it.

MITCHELL. Nobody gets over it. Frank, if you can answer
this question, then you've answered a lot of other ques-
tions.

CHURCH. You might not like my answer.

MITCHELL. I'll take that risk. Frank, maybe, just maybe,
after all your other editorials are forgotten, when all the
issues of today are resolved—a hundred years from
now—when there are new issues to be considered—
some kid will be asking this same question. And you,
Frank P. Church, will have already written the answer.

CHURCH. You'll print what I write?

MITCHELL. You write it, Francis. I'll print it.

(CHURCH turns and leaves, MITCHELL walks to his desk, picks up a half, unlit cigar from the ashtray, lights it and looks to the city room. Lights dim, go out briefly, then come up on a small area—the city room—CHURCH has his coat in hand and is still holding VIRGINIA's letter. He is intercepted by ANDREA BORLAND.)

ANDREA. Mr. Church, I've just finished an article. May I ask your opinion ...

CHURCH. You may. *(ANDREA brightens.)* If you're going to Brodie's Bar and Grill ... it's for men only. Remember? *(CHURCH leaves. ANDREA stands a moment, then ...)*

ANDREA. Teddy! Copy!

(TEDDY appears. ANDREA hands him her story.)

TEDDY. Yes, Miss Borland.

ANDREA. Here. I'm going out for a while.

TEDDY. On a story?

ANDREA. That's right, Teddy. Every story has to have a finish.

(Lights dim and go out on TEDDY standing. In the darkness we hear VIRGINIA's voice reading the letter. Half-way through, a light comes up on FRANK CHURCH wearing his overcoat. He stands in front of a sign, BRODIE'S BAR AND GRILL, looking at the letter in one hand and holding an unopened pint of rye whiskey in the other.)

VIRGINIA'S VOICE. Dear Editor, I am eight years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, "If you see it in *The Sun*, it's so." Please tell me the truth. Is there a Santa Claus?

(CHURCH stuffs the pint of rye in one pocket and VIRGINIA's letter in another. Lights dim and the stage is dark. [Note: The following scenes can be as elaborate or as modest as desired—so long as they convey the essence of the editorial that appeared on the front page of The Sun on that December of 1897. There should be appropriate music accompanying each scene.])

ONE—

(Lights up. A Santa Claus stands in front of a store ringing a small bell, chanting "Toys For Orphans, Toys For Orphans—Merry Christmas—Merry Christmas—Thank You—Thank You"—as people pass by from out of a store and deposit toys into a box with a sign TOYS FOR ORPHANS. FRANK CHURCH stands watching, then moves on as lights dim.)

TWO—

(Lights illuminate the entrance of a church. From inside, YOUNG VOICES of a church choir are singing "Hallelujah!" FRANK CHURCH appears, listens as SEVERAL PEOPLE walk inside, then CHURCH moves on as lights dim, illuminating only a cross, and then go to dark. We continue for a time to hear the choir in the darkness.)

THREE—

(Lights illuminate an OLD MAN in threadbare garments sitting on a stoop. He strains, trying to rise. A POLICEMAN appears, looks a moment at the OLD MAN who becomes apprehensive. After a beat the POLICEMAN reaches out and helps the OLD MAN to his feet. The OLD MAN looks with gratitude at the POLICEMAN who says "Merry Christmas." CHURCH watches as the OLD MAN smiles and walks away. Lights dim and go to darkness. The stage remains in darkness. We hear Christmas music played by a band.)

FOUR—

(Lights reveal a park. A band which we do not see is playing Christmas music. CHILDREN skate and laugh in the background just beyond the rim of a rise. CHURCH enters, walks toward a park bench and sits. At another park bench a BLIND MAN sits with his white cane, smiling and keeping time with the music, CHURCH absorbs the tableau. He sees something on the snowy ground, reaches down and picks it up. It's a baby's rattle. He shakes it, just enough to hear the sound of the rattle. The sobs and crying of a young child are heard. As the crying continues with plaintive calls of "Mommy, Mommy...Daddy, Daddy," we see a UNIFORMED PARK ATTENDANT who appears escorting a LITTLE GIRL four or five years of age. He does his best to comfort her as the lost child cries out for her parents. A distraught young WIFE and HUSBAND make their way to the ATTENDANT and their little CHILD. The WIFE with tears

in her eyes takes the child and hugs and kisses her as the HUSBAND does his best to soothe both WIFE and CHILD.)

WIFE. Mary, Mary, oh sweetheart! Thank heavens! Here, come to Mommy. It's all right, Mary. We're right here. Mommy and Daddy are right here with you. It's all right, baby...

HUSBAND (*to ATTENDANT*). Thank you, sir, thank you very much. We were over there listening to the music... and all of a sudden... she was... gone. I... well, thank you... very much...

ATTENDANT. You're very welcome. And I wish you all a Merry Christmas.

HUSBAND & WIFE. Merry Christmas. God bless you. Merry Christmas. (*The COUPLE with the CHILD walk away. The ATTENDANT watches them a moment with a smile, turns, looks at CHURCH, then moves in the opposite direction. CHURCH looks at the baby rattle, then at the wedding ring on his finger. He rises, then moves on, still holding the rattle. Lights dim and go dark. The stage remains in darkness. The music segues to a CHOIR singing "Ave Maria."*)

FIVE—

(Lights reveal the tombstone and grave of Elizabeth Church and the baby. CHURCH places fresh flowers at the grave...and then the baby rattle. He stands in silent prayer then moves away. He crosses, as before, and stops at the receptacle. CHURCH removes the pint of rye, still full, and drops the bottle into the receptacle. He

walks away into the darkness. In a moment, ANDREA BORLAND appears. She looks at the bottle and smiles. Lights go to darkness then come up on MITCHELL standing downstage.)

MITCHELL. That night Frank Church went back to his desk at the city room of *The Sun*. He put a sheet of paper into the roller of his typewriter, thought about the question an eight-year-old girl named Virginia O'Hanlon had asked.

VIRGINIA'S VOICE. Please tell me the truth. Is there a Santa Claus? *(We hear the sound of typewriter keys striking the paper, slowly at first, then gaining momentum, faster, then with almost rapid-fire eagerness—the keys, the typing bell, the roller being reset and the keys striking again.)*

MITCHELL. Then Frank Church proceeded to answer Virginia's question.

(Lights come up on the O'Hanlon apartment. EVIE is at the open door where MRS. GOLDSTEIN stands with a covered pot.)

EVIE. Well, good morning, Mrs. Goldstein. What a nice surprise!

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. I hate to ask, but could you nice people take this brisket off my hands? *(She pushes the pot forward. EVIE is literally forced to take it.)*

EVIE. I don't understand.

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. Since my dear dead Saul left me... three years ago next September...I always cook too much...habit, you know. I'd really appreciate it if you'd

enjoy this with your family. It's the finest...Saul left me well enough off, you know...

EVIE. Mrs. Goldstein...

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. It's for you and your family...now enjoy and Merry Christmas.

EVIE. Thank you and a very Happy Chanukah to you, Mrs. Goldstein, God bless you.

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. He always has.

(MRS. GOLDSTEIN leaves. EVIE turns holding the pot, pushes the door closed and sees JAMES O'HANLON.)

EVIE. Mrs. Goldstein brought by some beef...

O'HANLON *(harsh)*. I heard.

EVIE. Feelin' right this mornin', James?

O'HANLON. It's the day before Christmas. How should I feel, Evie? No work, no gifts, no tree, no...

EVIE. We have food on our table...

O'HANLON. Who put it there? Surely not me. I'm the breadwinner, Evie...or at least I should be! But who feeds us? Some old lady who says she cooks too much.

EVIE. How it came about is not important. It's the thought...

O'HANLON. Thought! I think too, Evie! I think every day of the week...how I can't take care of my family...

EVIE. You should listen to yourself sometime. You certainly don't practice what you preach.

O'HANLON. What do you mean?

EVIE. You're a fine one to be tellin' your little girl about the gift of friendship and love.

O'HANLON. She's exactly that, Evie, a little girl. She's too young to know the hard truth. That will come soon enough for her.

EVIE. Shh. Keep your voice down. You'll raise the children.

O'HANLON. I'm sorry. I'm just tired. Tired of doing nothing. I want to work. I *need* to work...to provide for my family.

EVIE. Have faith, James.

O'HANLON (*flares*). Faith! Damn it, Evie, how much longer am I to hold on? I'm running out of hope. I have to face the stark reality. How much can a man take?!

(O'HANLON sees an expression on EVIE's face that goes beyond him. He turns and sees VIRGINIA and SEAN standing at the edge of the room.)

I'm sorry, children. There was a crazy man here a minute ago. But he's gone now. (*VIRGINIA and SEAN run to their father and put their arms around him. He responds.*)

VIRGINIA. It's all right, Papa.

SEAN. Yeah, Papa, it's okay...really.

(There is a knock on the door. EVIE goes to the door and opens it. POLICE OFFICERS AKINS and BLAKE are there.)

AKINS. Mrs. O'Hanlon?

EVIE. Yes?

BLAKE. Is Mr. O'Hanlon at home?

O'HANLON (*comes closer*). Yes, what is it?

BLAKE. Mr. O'Hanlon, would you come down to the station with us, please?

O'HANLON. What's it all about, officers? (*Both OFFICERS step inside.*)

AKINS. It'll all be explained at the station.

SEAN. Is my Pa bein' arrested?

EVIE. Of course not! (*Beat.*) Is he, Officers?

AKINS. Mr. O'Hanlon's wanted for questioning in the matter of the robbery at O'Hara's Bar and Grill a short time back.

O'HANLON. But I told the police everything I know. Please, Officers, it's Christmas Eve.

BLAKE. We're well aware of that fact, Mr. O'Hanlon, we have families too.

O'HANLON. It's that thief, isn't it? He's up to something. He said he'd get even. (*To EVIE.*) See what I mean, see what I get for bein' a "hero"?

AKINS. Please, Mr. O'Hanlon.

O'HANLON. I'll get my coat. (*O'HANLON takes his coat, starts to leave with the POLICEMEN. As they exit:*) Maybe that crazy man wasn't so crazy after all. (*EVIE, VIRGINIA and SEAN stand silent for a moment. A NEWSPAPER BOY'S VOICE is heard outside. "Paper! Get your daily paper! New York Sun!"*)

VIRGINIA. Mama, may I go down to the street for a minute?

EVIE (*still distracted*). I guess so. But bundle up real warm.

SEAN. Can I go too?

VIRGINIA. No, Sean. I'll be right back.

SEAN. I never get to do nothin'!

(Lights dim and go to darkness. Then a single light comes up on MITCHELL in shirtsleeves and vest standing alone downstage with his cigar in one hand, a copy of the New York Sun in the other. In the background, the noise of the city room—with more laughter, excitement and merriment than usual.)

MITCHELL. I had been in the newspaper game for a long time and had covered some pretty big stories. The assassination of President Garfield. The bombing of Haymarket Square. The dedication of the Statue of Liberty. Geronimo's surrender. The killing of Sitting Bull. The Sino-Japanese War. Coxey's Army and a lot more. But I never saw anything quite like the reaction, the excitement...inside what some people call a jaded city room, as there was that day when Frank Church's editorial appeared on the front page of *The Sun* in reply to the letter from eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon.

(Lights up on city room. Now the Christmas tree is completely decorated. Reporters milling, discussing the editorial, some with drinks, all with smiles, some even working. ANDREA BORLAND at her tiny desk, but glancing at CHURCH who has retrieved his gold watch from the envelope. Lighting now favors CHURCH desk area. CHURCH slips photo of Elizabeth back into the lid as the tune plays, closes the lid and puts the gold watch in his pocket.)

CHURCH. Teddy! Teddy, come here!

(TEDDY appears, hurrying as always. He has a newspaper in his hand. CHURCH reaches into another pocket and pulls out a different watch.)

TEDDY. Right here, Mr. Church. Say, that article was a ...

CHURCH. Real humdinger?

TEDDY. You bet!

CHURCH. Teddy, here's a little present for you. It's not real gold and it doesn't play a tune, but it was my first watch and it helped me to get started every day—for a good many years. Merry Christmas.

TEDDY *(overwhelmed, near tears)*. Th... thanks, Mr. Church... Merry Christmas. *(TEDDY hurries away. MITCHELL has been watching. He takes a step closer.)*

MITCHELL. Francis, you've given us all—including yourself—a very merry Christmas.

CHURCH *(nods)*. Ed, please tell Martha I'll be glad to join you for Christmas dinner.

MITCHELL. Excellent! *(MITCHELL extends his hand.)*
Excellent! *(They shake.)* *(As MITCHELL leaves, CHURCH looks at ANDREA for a moment then moves to her desk. She rises.)*

CHURCH. Miss Borland, you are very adept at following people.

ANDREA. I had hoped you didn't notice.

CHURCH. Yes, well I did.

ANDREA. Mr. Church, I wonder if you'd mind following me somewhere. *(CHURCH looks puzzled. ANDREA smiles.)* Every story's got to have a finish.

(Lights dim and go dark. A spotlight comes up on MITCHELL standing downstage.)

MITCHELL. I had an idea where Andrea Borland was taking Frank Church, and it wasn't to Brodie's Bar and Grill. That day, thousands upon thousands of people in New York were reading his editorial. In years to come it would be read and re-read by millions in many languages, in many countries all over the world. But what about the little girl for whom it was meant? What about Virginia O'Hanlon?

(Lights up on O'Hanlon apartment. EVIE setting the kitchen table, SEAN helping. VIRGINIA is checking on something hidden behind a chair and then joins her mother and brother.)

EVIE. I don't know what's keeping... *(Looks at door.)* he's been gone...

SEAN. You think Papa's in jail?

EVIE. Sean! Of course not. He's probably...

(The door bursts open. O'HANLON appears with a shopping bag and a big brown bag in his hands while also carrying a small Christmas tree over his shoulder. The O'HANLONS are stunned. They joyously rush to him.)

O'HANLON. Is this the home of the O'Hanlon clan?! Am I in the right place?!

EVIE. Oh, James, darlin', we were so worried. What happened? What's this? *(O'HANLON sets the bags and the tree down.)*

O'HANLON. No Santa Claus, huh? No faith, no hope, huh? Well, I'm here to tell you different.

VIRGINIA & SEAN. What, Papa? Tell us, Papa!

O'HANLON (*points to the tree*). Do you like it?

EVIE. It's the most beautiful cut-down tree I've ever seen, but if you don't tell us what all this is about, James O'Hanlon, I'll scream... or faint... or both.

O'HANLON. Virginia, place the gifts around the tree, mind you don't step on them, Sean boy.

SEAN. I won't, Papa—you bet I won't.

O'HANLON. Don't scream, Evie... or faint. Just listen. Well, to make a long tale short... oh speaking of tails... (*O'HANLON moves quickly to the open door, reaches outside and brings forth a cardboard box. He lifts the flaps of the box and produces the kitten from O'Hara's alley. The kitten meows as O'HANLON hands it to SEAN.*) For you, Sean, m'boy.

SEAN. Oh, Papa!

O'HANLON. He was a friend when I needed one.

EVIE. James, how can we afford a kitten, much less all of this?

O'HANLON (*teasing*). Let him eat brisket!

EVIE. Oh, you!

O'HANLON. Ah, come now, let me tell you all what happened. (*The family gathers as O'HANLON sits in his favorite chair.*)

VIRGINIA & SEAN. Yes, Papa, tell us! Tell us what happened!

O'HANLON. Well now, it seems that the fellow I helped catch at O'Hara's has got himself a record in Chicago. And several other states want him bad enough to have offered a reward. Here, darlin'. (*O'HANLON removes a wad of money from his pocket and hands it across to EVIE.*)

EVIE. Praise the Lord!

O'HANLON. 'Course that's what's left after I bought some gifts and the food...and the tree.

EVIE. I'll make it stretch.

O'HANLON. Just for a week. I got another surprise at the police station.

EVIE. What more?

O'HANLON. It seems the fair city of New York has need of policemen. Because of the incident at O'Hara's and at Sergeant Flynn's recommendation...they've asked me to become one of New York's finest. They said I displayed "extreme heroism."

SEAN. Oh, Papa, can I see your badge? Can I?

O'HANLON. What a bright goose of a boy! Not yet, Sean, I start the day after Christmas. That's when I get my badge...and so does Dominic Donneli.

VIRGINIA. What do you mean, Papa?

O'HANLON. Sergeant Flynn said the precinct could use several good men. I suggested Dom.

EVIE. That's the best medicine Maria's mother could have.

SEAN. Can we open our presents now, Papa? (*VIRGINIA goes to where she hid something and returns with a plainly wrapped package for her father.*)

O'HANLON. Nope, Christmas morning as always, Sean. It's tradition. What's this, Virginia?

VIRGINIA. This present can't wait 'til tomorrow, Papa. It'll be too late. I found a penny and...well it's for you. Please open it. (*They are all surprised. O'HANLON unwraps the package.*)

O'HANLON. All right, we'll make an exception since "tomorrow will be too late."

VIRGINIA. It's today's paper, Papa...not a soggy, smelly one from yesterday. The newsboy let me have it for a penny.

EVIE. The spirit of generosity knows no bounds.

O'HANLON. Thank you, Virginia. I love you. (*He hugs VIRGINIA.*)

VIRGINIA. I love you too, Papa.

O'HANLON. Well now...(*Glances at front page.*) I won't be reading the "Help Wanted" section anymore, but...hold on a moment. Would you all come over here a minute please...and right on the front page! (*O'HANLON settles in his chair. The family settles in to listen. As he starts to read they are surprised, excited and fascinated.*) "Is there a Santa Claus? We take pleasure in answering at once and thus prominently the communication below; expressing at the same time our gratification that its faithful author is numbered among the friends of *The Sun*." (*O'HANLON pauses and looks at their faces.*) "Dear Editor, I am eight years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, 'If you see it in *The Sun*, it's so.' Please tell me the truth. Is there a Santa Claus?" (*VIRGINIA is awestruck as her father finishes this part.*) It's signed Virginia O'Hanlon, 115 West 95th Street.

VIRGINIA. Well, what did they say, Papa?

O'HANLON (*reading*). "Virginia, your little friends are wrong."

(*A look of great relief takes over VIRGINIA's face. DOMINIC DONNELI and MARIA appear at the doorway. DOM holds a copy of The Sun.*)

“They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe, except what they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men’s or children’s, are little.”

(DOM and MARIA are joined by MR. SCHULLER and MRS. GOLDSTEIN, who enter through the door, both holding copies of The Sun. They exchange quiet smiles with DOM and MARIA as O’HANLON continues to read.)

“In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared to the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.”

(O’HANLON looks around acknowledging the friends who have arrived, then continues.)

“Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! How dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.”

(SERGEANT FLYNN appears through the doorway. He too holds a copy of The Sun. O’HARA and SHORTY appear. O’HANLON continues reading.)

"Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they do not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus."

(ANDREA BORLAND has arrived and stands in the doorway. Next to her, FRANK CHURCH has appeared and removes his hat as O'HANLON continues to read.)

"The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor man can see. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world..." *(As the reading of the editorial continues, we hear CHURCH's VOICE [recorded] meld into O'HANLON's, then CHURCH's VOICE takes over the reading.)*

O'HANLON & CHURCH. "You tear apart a baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside..."

CHURCH'S VOICE. "...but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest men, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men who ever lived could tear apart." *(All those gathered, all who have given something to the O'HANLONS are receiving something in return. ANDREA's eyes are on FRANK CHURCH.)* "Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance can push aside that curtain and view the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else as real and abiding. No Santa Claus! Thank God he lives, and he lives forever!"

(Lights have been dimming and the stage is almost dark now as O'HANLON's VOICE blends with CHURCH's, then CHURCH's VOICE fades but we continue to hear O'HANLON's.)

O'HANLON'S VOICE. "A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood."
(Pause.) And now, children, it's time to go to bed. We'll open the rest of the presents first thing in the morning.

SEAN'S VOICE. I can hardly wait.

O'HANLON'S VOICE. You'll have to, Sean m'bucko. We all will.

(In the darkness we hear "Joy to the World" and then familiar voices as lights come up slowly.)

JAMES. And Evie, this is for you.

(By now the lights are up on the O'Hanlon apartment. It's Christmas day. Only the members of the O'HANLON FAMILY are present. The Christmas tree is now completely decorated with popcorn, and shiny ornaments, and it seems bigger, fuller, more beautiful.)

EVIE. Oh, James, thank you. *(EVIE unwraps a blue shawl.)*

O'HANLON. It matches your eyes, darlin' ...and will keep you warm.

EVIE. Thank you, James...and I've never felt warmer... and happier.

O'HANLON. You will from now on, Evie. Well, children, we've opened all the presents and I do believe this is the merriest Christmas anybody's ever had. *(It appears that*

all the presents have been opened and are being enjoyed by the family. But SEAN sees something else behind the Christmas tree. He goes to the tree and lifts a beautiful new pair of shoes tied together.)

SEAN. Look, Virginia, there's another present. It must be for you. *(SEAN gives the shoes to bright-eyed VIRGINIA.)*

VIRGINIA. Who're they from? *(EVIE and JAMES look at each other. Both surprised. "From you?" EVIE silently asks with a look. "No." JAMES O'HANLON shrugs. VIRGINIA holds up the shoes and smiles.)* They must be from Santa Claus!

(Lights fade out on the O'HANLON FAMILY, as simultaneously a spot comes up downstage on MITCHELL and his cigar.)

MITCHELL. No Santa Claus! Thank God he lives ... and he lives forever. You see, some stories don't really have an ending. They go on forever. So, until next year, Merry Christmas. *(MITCHELL walks off and the stage goes dark.)*

END OF PLAY

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