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## **Family Plays**



It's Sad,  
So Sad  
When  
an Elf  
Goes Bad

Comedy by  
Jerome McDonough

# IT'S SAD, SO SAD WHEN AN ELF GOES BAD

If enchantment and ease of production are on your Christmas shopping list, *It's Sad, So Sad When an Elf Goes Bad* is the best present you can offer your audience.

“Our annual Christmas play is back again with the same good fun and jolly Christmas spirit that has served us well the past several years. A delightful show for children of all ages.” (Austin Community College, Texas)

**Comedy. By Jerome McDonough.** *Cast: 12+ actors, flexible.* Jerome McDonough's first play for children has humor, suspense and an important Christmas lesson. A play easily performed for, or even by, children. *It's Sad, So Sad When an Elf Goes Bad* is the tale of Emmy, Santa's tiniest and most accident-prone elf. Between Emmy's natural clumsiness and mischievousness, Santa cannot find a spot for her in his organization except caring for Ralph, a reindeer forced unwillingly into retirement. The bitter pair wreak a Jekyll-and-Hyde revenge on Santa, but their plans backfire. The original production was cheered by children from three years of age through sixth grade in its two-day, seven-location tour. The teachers seemed to love it as much as the children did. This show is fun for all groups and a good workout in mime. *Sets and props are reduced to a stool and a storybook. The ensemble of 12 or more performers plus Santa Claus mime or, more frequently, become all other set and prop pieces. Designed for a quick and easy rehearsal schedule, only the narrator has lines—and even these may be read if rehearsal time is short. Approximate running time: 35 minutes. Code: ID3.*

## Family Plays

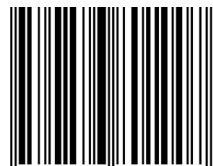
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It's Sad, So Sad  
When an Elf Goes Bad

# **It's sad, so sad When an elf goes bad**

**A Christmas Parable**

**by**

**JEROME McDONOUGH**

**Family Plays**

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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JEROME MCDONOUGH

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(IT'S SO SAD WHEN AN ELF GOES BAD)

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“Produced by special arrangement with  
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

# IT'S SAD, SO SAD WHEN AN ELF GOES BAD

## *Cast of Characters*

ELF – the story teller, a spry, elderly elf

SANTA CLAUS

EMMY – the shortest of the elves, and the clumsiest

RALPH – Santa's oldest reindeer; forced to retire

A CHORUS of 10 (more or less) males and/or females handles all the following roles:

Toy Train foreman	Music Box mistress
Dolly foreperson	Dolly
Rocking Horse foreperson	Rocking Horse
Punching Bag maker	Punching Bag
Toy Soldier sergeant	Toy Soldiers
Furniture, lab equipment, etc. (all set props are played in mime by Chorus Members)	

PLACE: Santa's place at the North Pole

TIME: Christmas

## PRODUCTION NOTES

### **Setting**

An open space. A stool is needed. The Chorus Members form a living cyclorama behind the acting area.

### **Props**

A storybook. All other props are mimed or created by Chorus Members.

### **Costuming**

A good Santa suit.

Elf, Emmy, Ralph, and all Chorus Members wear red, green, or red-and-green-layered tops (solid colors), jeans, and soft-soled shoes.

Elf and Emmy (who dress exactly alike) add floppy red elf hats. Elf also wears "granny glasses" and a gray wig, perhaps of the sloppy fright type.

Ralph wears a pair of obviously home-made antlers created by straightening, then forming, two coat hangers into the approximate shape on a round head base. The rig is then covered with athletic tape and painted gold or some horn-like color.

### **The Living Cyclorama**

Any Chorus Member not involved in a given scene stands upstage, turned out, providing the backdrop. Care should be taken to insure that this living wall is constantly balanced, rather than all members standing Left or Right. Further, posi-

(Continued on page 23)

## ABOUT THE PLAY

A play easily performed for, or even by, children, this is the tale of Emmy, Santa's tiniest and most accident-prone elf. Between Emmy's natural clumsiness and mischievousness, Santa can find no spot for her in his organization except caring for Ralph, a reindeer forced unwillingly into retirement. The bitter pair wreak a Jekyll-and-Hyde revenge on Santa, but their plans backfire. This, Jerome McDonough's first play for children, has humor, suspense, and an important Christmas lesson.

Sets and props are reduced to a stool and a storybook. The ensemble of 12 or more performers plus Santa Claus mime or, more frequently, become all other set and prop pieces. Designed for a quick and easy rehearsal schedule, only the Narrator has lines -- and even these may be read if rehearsal time is very short.

The original production was cheered by children from three years of age through sixth grade in its two-day, seven-location tour. And the teachers seemed to love it as much as the kids did.

If enchantment *and* ease of production are on your Christmas shopping list, IT'S SAD, SO SAD WHEN AN ELF GOES BAD is the best present you can offer your audience.

## DEDICATION

*for Brian Christopher*

*Here's an early Christmas present for your earliest Christmas*

*and to*

*the original gnomes*

*Kristy Melton, Dora Andrade, Charles Mixon, Rick Durmon, Charis White, Ricky Moulder, Danny Oliver, Greg Sasueda, Tim Purviance, Becky Lookingbill, George Yancey, Jackie Pacino, Mike Altendorf, Barry Vaughn, and Janet Duke.*

Illustrations

By James D. Kemmerling



**PRODUCTION NOTES** (continued from page 3)

tions on the Cyc must take into consideration the location of the next entrance (e.g., don't let the action lag while a Chorus Member crosses from Up Right to Down Left to get into position for a scene; place each Chorus Member as near as possible to the location of the scene).

Transitions from scene to scene should be made in character, the character cued either by the previous scene or the one being set up. Above all, avoid the feeling of people rushing to some nameless predetermined point. Character and tempo establish mood and flow.

**Timing**

Much of the script is taken up with descriptions of setting and actions. Almost without exception, the reading of such descriptions takes longer than the action itself. Tempo of the play should be kept up, a constant flow maintained from opening to closing. Each scene will find its own meter, but great gaps should be avoided at all costs. Additionally, narration should overlap most transitions. Avoid a "move-stop-talk-action" feeling.

Nonverbal sounds are cued at various places in the show. These were found to add to the fun of the show for the young audiences. Casts may certainly find other sounds to add to the show to increase this effect, but words should be avoided. The author has made a conscious effort to leave nearly all verbal statements to the narrator. An exception that comes to mind is the "Silent Night" hymn at the closing and even this may be sung nonverbally (hummed or dah-dah-dee-dah'd) since the song is so familiar.

**Yule Message**

May God bless all of you Santa Clauses who will be sharing IT'S SAD, SO SAD WHEN AN ELF GOES BAD with the next generations of children. If your time permits, carry the show to some children who will have no other Christmas shows – or Christmas happiness. Celebrate, as the Shakers did, with simple gifts. Merry Christmas.

Jerome McDonough

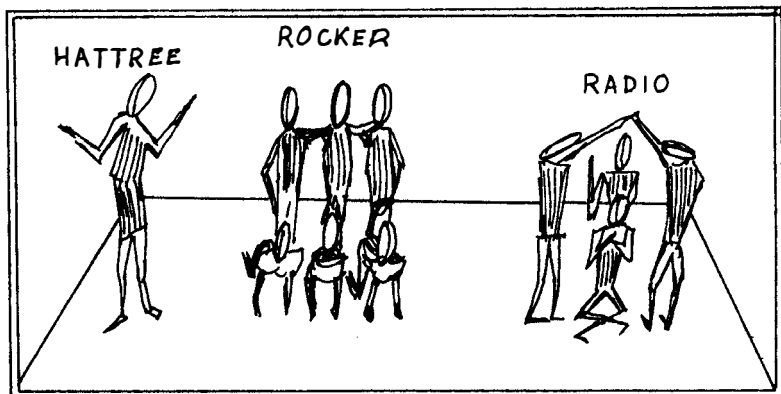


DIAGRAM A

**RALPH'S ROOM**

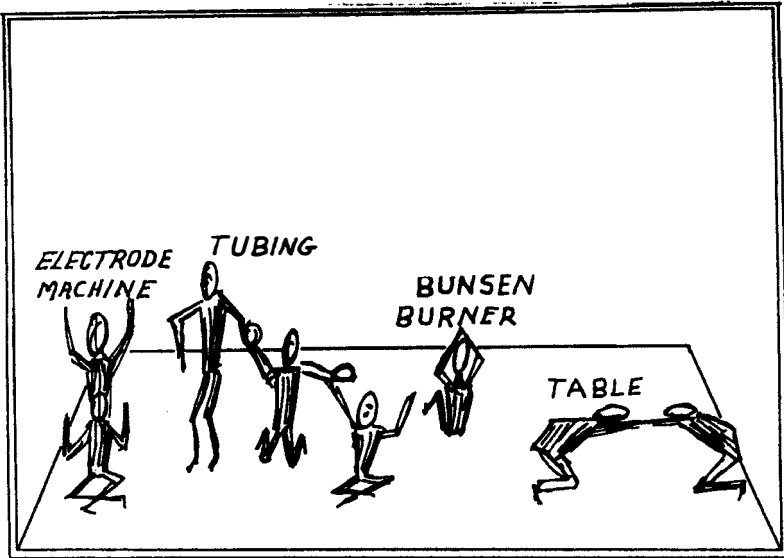


DIAGRAM B

# MAD SCIENTIST

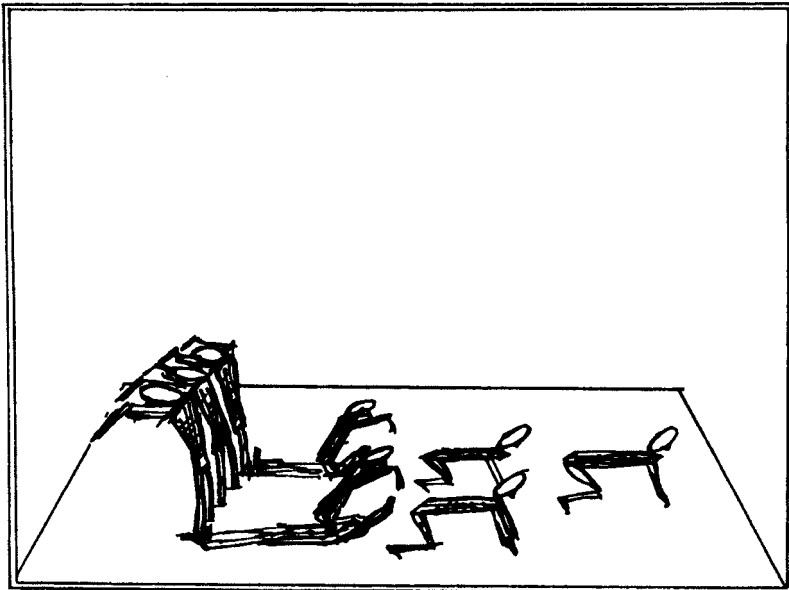


DIAGRAM C

# SLEIGH

Drawings by James D. Kemmerling

## IT'S SAD, SO SAD WHEN AN ELF GOES BAD

By Jerome McDonough

*[At rise, a spry elderly female ELF enters from Left, shuffling across the stage. The CHORUS is already in place, forming a living cyclorama upstage of the acting area. Otherwise, the stage is bare except for a large, bright storybook resting against a stool far Down Right. The ELF lustily vocalizes "Jingle Bells," substituting "de-de-de" when she forgets the words. Her voice is in the typical "old" loose-dentured style]*

ELF. Dashing through the snow, in a one-horse . . . de-de-de—  
O'er the hills we go, laughing all . . . de-de—  
Bells on . . . *[Stops, perplexed at the loss of words, then proceeds, undaunted]*  
Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle . . . de-de-de *[She glances at the audience, but continues on]*  
Oh, what de-de it is to . . .

*[It finally dawns on her that there are people out front. She does a "take" at them] Oh! [With a quick wave] Hello. [Looks at audience, confused] What are you doing here? [An impatient CHORUS MEMBER runs to her, whispers in her ear. She speaks to CHORUS MEMBER, indicating audience] They're doing a Christmas play? Terrific. [Plopping on stool, leaning her chin on her hands] Go ahead. [CHORUS MEMBER points to her. She points to herself, astonished. CHORUS MEMBER testily picks up the storybook and thrusts it in her hands]*

ELF. *[Reading cover]* "It's Sad, So Sad When an Elf Goes Bad."  
*[She opens the book all the way to the back page and reads aloud]* The end. *[A now-livid CHORUS MEMBER snaps the pages back to the front]* Short, isn't it? *[Looking at book again, getting it]* Oh. *[CHORUS MEMBER returns grumblingly to his place as she starts to read]* "North of the forests, north of the towns, sits a miniature village on the frozen north ground . . ." *[On her own, elaborating]* Frozen is right, boy. It's cold enough to crack your socks! *[CHORUS MEMBER clears his throat loudly. ELF waves him away]* O.K. O.K. *[Returns to book, but starts to "dog" the reading, not caring for the style]* "Santa lives in a big house, while his dwarfs, elves and gnomes live nearby in a circle of dwarf-, elf- and gnome-homes." *[Losing all patience with the*

*verse]* Who writes this stuff? Gnome-homes. *[To audience, closing book]* I can tell this story better first-hand. *[Throws book down, opens her mouth, starts to speak, but can't get it moving. Sheepishly picks up the book again. Excusing herself]* Just to refresh my memory. *[Looks at book, mumbling, nodding, then starts in]* O.K. Now, this story's about Santa and reindeer and all that, but mostly it's about – *[proudly]* elves. Of course, you've heard that we elves are small, but years ago an elf showed up who was really a shrimp – Emily Eleanor Elizabeth Elf. *[Looks toward Left. EMMY steps on from Left, stops and waves to crowd]* Everybody called her Emmy, for short. *[Thinks about this, chuckles]* For short! *[Laughs to herself as EMMY searches the sky for strength. ELF clears her throat when probably nobody else laughs. SANTA enters from Right looking at Emmy wearily]* Anyway, she was also, without a doubt, the most accident-prone elf in history. And, to tell the whole truth, some of her “accidents” happened because she was mischief-prone, too. *[During above, SANTA has beckoned to EMMY. She runs to, and into, him. He brushes himself and wearily leads her off Right]* Santa about went crazy trying to find her a job in his workshop. The toy train yard was their first stop.

*[The CYCLORAMA has dispersed to form a toy train. One chorus member becomes the ELF TRAIN FOREMAN, Right. The TRAIN, facing Left, consists of two people on all fours followed by another standing person (engineer), two people facing each other with heads bent and arms joined (coal car), two people facing each other with forks poised (diner), two card-playing people facing each other (club car), a person leaning toward Downstage and waving lantern (conductor), and a person standing upright with fists facing the rear (caboose with lights). When the TRAIN moves, the ENGINEER leans out and “rings” the bell, the DINER PEOPLE jerkily raise food to their mouths, the CLUB CAR PEOPLE deal and receive cards, the CONDUCTOR waves his lantern, and the CABOOSE alternately opens and closes each fist, suggesting the end lights. The ELF TRAIN FOREMAN, whistling “Casey Jones” – or some other railroad song – checks the train components from Right to Left and then flips a switch on the back of the “locomotive” with a ratchet sound. The TRAIN starts to move around in a small oval, saying, very clearly, “Choo, choo, choo.” The FOREMAN switches the train off when it re-arrives at its original location. The ELF FOREMAN is polishing the “headlight” as SANTA and EMMY enter from Right. SANTA*

*taps him on the shoulder and he smiles to see Santa – then drops the smile when he sees Emmy. EMMY smiles at him. SANTA presents Emmy to the foreman and exits Left, the FOREMAN still imploring him to take Emmy away. But the train is too tempting for EMMY. She starts, at full speed, to check out the train. She hits every spot, blowing the whistle (“toot”), grabbing food from the diners, peeking at players’ cards, swinging the conductor’s lantern, and finally standing on the rear landing, waving off Right. The FOREMAN can’t quite catch up until she reaches the end. He scolds her, dragging her back toward the engine. He shows her the starting control and then emphatically gestures that she must not start the engine. She nods as he is distracted by someone “calling” him off Left (perhaps SANTA whistles to him). He exits as EMMY admires the train, patting the engine. Finally, she can stand it no longer, and, with a gleam in her eye and a great “RRRRRRRAAAAAAKKKKK” sound, she pushes the switch on the engine – the wrong direction. The TRAIN starts to move, but backward instead of forward, with the sound also backward: “Ooch, ooch, ooch.” EMMY runs back and forth, trying desperately to make the train stop, but it hits a “derail” as it rounds the first curve. The cars start falling apart with much crashing, screeching, noise, and confusion. Cars and people lie everywhere. EMMY frantically tries to stand them up, but they tumble back. She tries joining their hands, not noticing that the FOREMAN has re-entered. He seethes near the Left entrance as EMMY finally sees him. She grins, praying inwardly. He quietly crosses to the disaster, looks at it, looks at her and points off Left emphatically, throwing her out. She scoots off Left. The FOREMAN starts to pick up the pieces as the narration begins again]*

ELF. Emmy just wasn’t railroad material, not if you like your trains in one piece, at least. [*Following scene sets up during the next sentence*] Santa tried the Music Box shop next, figuring Emmy couldn’t foul up there. But he proved that even Santa Claus doesn’t know everything.

*[Three chorus members lie at Center in a circle, forming the base of the music box. Two others stand within the circle, hands raised and joined, facing each other in the classical pose of minuet dancers. The MUSIC BOX FOREWOMAN, Right, humming a ballet tune, looks over the box, then pulls an arm up from one base person and “twists”*

*it with a little “kkkkkkkk, kkkkkkkk, kkkkkk” sound, simulating the winding crank of a music box. When the winding stops, the DANCERS start their graceful in-and-out minuet dance, accompanied by the base which hums a minuet tune. (Da ta-da, ta-da, ta-da, ta-da, Da ta-da, da ta-da) The music slows down, as do the DANCERS, at the same tempo. The FOREWOMAN steps back, moving always with the studied grace and theatricality of a dance mistress, and approves the box, then panics when she sees EMMY and SANTA approaching from Left. SANTA pushes Emmy toward the woman and exits Right. The FOREWOMAN rushes after Santa, leaving Emmy alone with the box. She looks it over, is dissatisfied with the figures and adjusts them from the upstage side. She peeks off to be sure the mistress is gone, then vigorously turns the crank with a much louder “KKKKKKKKK, KKKKKKKKK” sound. When the machine is wound up, the FIGURES, rather than minuetting, break into a full-blown contemporary dance with much body motion, arms flying everywhere. The base “scat sings” (dooba-dooba, doo-wah, etc.) the accompaniment, some current hit, even rocking in time to the music. EMMY boogies along as the FOREWOMAN drags SANTA back in. At first, the FOREWOMAN does not see the change, then notices it with a double-take over her shoulder. She flies into a prima donna rage, breathing heavily and bouncing up and down, unable to move toward Emmy. SANTA sees that the situation is impossible, so he just walks across, grabs Emmy’s hand and takes her off Left, shaking his head. EMMY sticks her tongue out at the dance mistress, then becomes the “lost lamb” again as SANTA looks at her. The FOREWOMAN finally gains a bit of control and tries to stop the shameless dancing. Freeze as narration begins again]*

ELF. Emmy was no musician, either. Let’s face it. Whether it was all her fault or not, trouble followed Emmy like a muddy puppy.

*[CHORUS has moved to next position during above. At Left is a FOREMAN and a BABY DOLL. At Left Center is a ROCKING HORSE and FOREMAN. At Right Center is a bouncing Chorus Member-turned-BASKETBALL and a FOREMAN. At Right is a kneeling PUNCHING-BAG and FOREMAN. Other chorus members are interspersed, turned out. All active people freeze until their segment is cued. After each segment, that pair freezes again. EMMY crosses, Left to Right, stopping to work and be thrown out at each location.*

ELF. Santa put her in the dolly works but, instead of saying, "Mama," the babies said . . .

BABY DOLL. [*As EMMY not-too-gently squeezes her*] "Am-am." [*"Mama" backwards. EMMY is thrown out*]

ELF. Rocking horses didn't turn out much better. [*EMMY leaps onto the ROCKING HORSE, which immediately rears up, whinnies loudly and bucks Emmy off toward Left. EMMY is thrown out as FOREMAN tries to control the HORSE*] Basketball wasn't her game, either. [*FOREMAN is bouncing the human BASKETBALL. EMMY jumps in, bouncing the ball madly and, naturally, it springs a big leak with a "sproosh" sound, followed by a hissing. It flattens out on the stage as EMMY is booted again*] Even punching bags were more than Emmy could handle. [*FOREMAN is punching the bag. The kneeling BAG leans backward, then rises again on each punch. EMMY arrives, watches for a moment, then gives the bag a knockout punch. The BAG stays down. EMMY gestures for it to come back up, but it vehemently shakes its head. EMMY exits Right, kicking her foot angrily. The next scene is set up during following sentence*] Her last chance was the toy soldier armory.

[*Four TOY SOLDIERS, rifles at Left Shoulder Arms, face each other, two facing Right, two Left. The shop SERGEANT, growling "The Marine's Hymn," moving Right to Left, winds each one up (with sound). Each TOY SOLDIER starts marching in place. After all four are marching, counting "Hip, hoop, heep, heep" in a high-pitched voice, the two groups advance toward each other, barely missing as they pass. After two more steps, they march about-face smartly back to their original positions and halt. SERGEANT stands, Left, proudly, at Parade Rest. EMMY is "pushed" on from Right. SERGEANT at first tries to throw her out, then grudgingly accepts her. He demonstrates another feature of the soldiers to Emmy. Moving Left to Right, toward her, he flips a switch on the back of each soldier. Each comes down to a grimacing bayonet assault position and freezes. EMMY tugs on the Sergeant's sleeve and gestures that she might improve their performance. He gestures, as if to say, "So how would you do it?"*]

ELF. As always, Emmy had an "improvement" to offer.

[*EMMY moves to the center of the Soldiers and "speaks" whisperingly to them. They all woodenly nod agreement. She bobs her head,*

*signalling, and all SOLDIERS begin advancing toward each other. When they are at bayonet point, however, they lower their rifles, shake hands and slap backs all around, then join, arms about each other, in a high-pitched "singing" ("la, la, la," etc.) of "The Whiffenpoof Song" ("We are poor little lambs who have lost our way," etc.) The SERGEANT is outraged as EMMY conducts the Soldier's Choir. He pushes her toward the Left wing and tries to break up the song-fest, but the SOLDIERS physically draw him into their midst making the sputtering SERGEANT sway with them. EMMY implores the Sergeant to give her another chance, but he's too busy. All freeze on Narrator's first sentence as EMMY stands disconsolately Down Left]*

*ELF. Army life was out, too. [All CHORUS MEMBERS return to Cyc position] Poor Emmy. She didn't want to be a stinker—but it came so naturally to her. By now, none of the other elves would have anything to do with her. [EMMY crosses sadly to Center as CHORUS MEMBERS turn in, reacting very negatively to her. Some snub her, some protect their heads, an elf mother protects her thumb-sucking infant, and a group of kid-elves point and laugh. Freeze on all reactions. Narration continues during this action] Everybody thought she was a loser and even Emmy was starting to believe it, but, with Christmas only two days away, Santa was too busy to help. [SANTA enters from Left, watching the disconsolate Emmy, Center] Finally he said, [SANTA mimes the words; ELF lowers voice, imitating Santa] "Go take care of Ralph." [SANTA exits. EMMY looks at audience and mimes saying, "Ralph?"] So she did. [EMMY moves a few steps toward the Narrator, miming saying "Ralph?" again. Narrator speaks the cue emphatically] So she did! [EMMY does "Ralph?" again. ELF is stunned that Emmy is unaware of Ralph] You don't know who Ralph is? [EMMY shakes her head. All CHORUS MEMBERS laugh at her. ELF indicates audience] They do! [Narrator looks at audience's blank expressions. More aghastness from Narrator] You don't either? [CHORUS all wave deprecatingly at the audience and turn out]*