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Dramatic Publishing

Yes Virginia, There Is a Santa Claus

A Radio Play in Two Acts

By
ANDREW J. FENADY



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(YES VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS—
Radio Play Playbook)

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For Norman Wolfe
and Miss Helen Marie Griffin—
her radio production class
at Woodward High School—
and Ms. Sunne Miller at WTOD

and Mary Frances

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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YES VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

A Radio Play in Two Acts

CHARACTERS

EDWARD P. MITCHELL
ANNOUNCER
SOUND EFFECTS MEN (2—non-speaking)
JIM/CLIFF (engineers)
FRANK P. CHURCH
JAMES O'HANLON
DOMINIC (DOM) DONNELI
VIRGINIA O'HANLON
MARIA DONNELI
JULIE
SUSAN
SEAN O'HANLON
EVIE O'HANLON
ANDREA BORLAND
TEDDY MURRAY
CORNELIUS BARRINGTON
GOSS/GEORGE/TOM PRYOR/OFFICER AKINS
OTHO/CHAMBERS/OFFICER FLYNN
NEWSBOY/SHANNON/O'HARA
SCHULLER/SAM/THIEF/RED
SHORTY/SCOTTY/ART FRITZ

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

ACT ONE

AT RISE: The stage is dark until lights illuminate a replica of a radio station of decades ago. Three walls covered by drapes, ceiling to floor, except for one padded door, L. Three old-fashioned standing microphones a few feet apart, C.

There are a couple of tables—one with a mike and with sound effects equipment—more equipment on the floor nearby.

Higher up, L, a clock slanted so we can't quite make out the time. Also, a framed control booth with two engineers: JIM (sound) and CLIFF (music) inside.

A sign above control booth—ON THE AIR—not now lit. A mid-size glowingly lit Christmas tree stands R. Two Christmas wreaths in evidence—one on the padded door; another on the window of the control booth.

ABOUT A DOZEN ACTORS and ACTRESSES onstage, dressed in the style of the late 1930s—early 1940s—vests, suspenders, snap brim hats, wide ties, wide-shouldered jackets, pleated pants—the WOMEN

with pompadours, seamed nylons, cardigan sweaters; a few of the ACTORS are very young.

TWO SOUND EFFECTS MEN are hovering over their equipment. The ACTOR playing EDWARD P. MITCHELL is at center mike and the ANNOUNCER is at mike, L.

VOICE FROM BOOTH (JIM). Ten seconds, everyone—ten seconds.

(ACTORS clear throats—walla—“one, two, testing,” etc.)

JIM’S VOICE. Six seconds—fiver—four—three—two—one...

(ENGINEER throws cue—ON THE AIR sign lights up.)

THEME MUSIC—“None But the Lonely Heart.”

ANNOUNCER. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen—children of all ages. Welcome to The Mummers Little Theater of the Air. Tonight’s broadcast is based on a true story that happened toward the end of the nineteenth century in New York City. We hope you enjoy our holiday presentation of *Yes Virginia, There Is a Santa Claus*.

MUSIC segues from theme to music with light Christmas background.

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 listened to the radio—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. I'm going to ask you to use your imagination while I tell you that story. 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 understand as we go along.

MUSIC becomes somber.

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. 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. The inscription on the tombstone says:

SOUND: wind effect.

“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 the gold watch attached to his vest by a gold chain. He presses the stem. The lid opens. A tune plays. Frank Church speaks one word.

MUSIC—from watch.

CHURCH. Elizabeth.

(CHURCH closes the watch lid—)

WATCH MUSIC stops. NEW MUSIC—lighter, brighter.

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 Manhattan Island, bridges were being constructed to carry thousands of people to and from their work. And people came from across the ocean to find work and a new life. Italians, Greeks, Poles, Germans, Scandinavians, Syrians, Jews, Irish and all the rest.

SOUND: 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.

MITCHELL (*cont'd*). That good-looking young fellow lifting a bale, on the wharf, is James O'Hanlon. (*Irish brogue.*) I don't have to tell you where he came from. (*No brogue.*) But I'll tell you where he's going. He's going down, tripped from behind by a bully named Goss.

SOUND: GOSS, tripping and causing O'HANLON to lose his balance and fall over his own bale.

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, Goss. I didn't touch you.

GOSS. You callin' me a liar, mick?

O'HANLON. Now that's the truth.

DOMINIC. You pushed him, Goss, I saw you.

GOSS. You stay outta this, guenna.

O'HANLON. It's all right, Dom. Now, excuse me, Goss. I've got work to do.

GOSS. Did it again! Pushed me! *(To the others.)* Damn micks comin' over here, takin' our jobs... Lousy potlicker!

O'HANLON. Potlicker, is it!!!

SOUND: fight—dock noises—punches.

MITCHELL. As dock fights go it wasn't bad. Goss had the weight, but O'Hanlon had speed and dexterity. Some of Goss' pals jumped in. So did O'Hanlon's friend, Dominic Donneli.

SOUND: fight effects continue—MUSIC.

Goss went down from a right cross by O'Hanlon. That's when Chambers, the boss, showed up.

MUSIC out. SOUND: wharf noise's continue.

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. Mr. Chambers, it's Goss whose always startin' it. This time he tripped me...called me a Mick...and a...

CHAMBERS. Potlicker? 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. 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...

GOSS. 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.

MUSIC. SOUND: street noises—dogs barking—girls singing and skipping rope.

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

(Skipping is VIRGINIA O’HANLON, age 8—nearby, her friend, MARIA DONNELI. The others include JULIE and SUSAN. The sing-song verse comes to an abrupt end.)

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? Huh, Virginia?

VIRGINIA. I can't see God, but—I believe in him.

(*A moment of silence—then:*)

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

MUSIC under MITCHELL's narration.

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.

MUSIC out.

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 Daily Sun.

SOUND: dishes—silverware.

Meanwhile, at the O'Hanlon's tiny apartment, James' wife, Evie, Virginia, and Sean, age 7, were at the kitchen table.

SEAN. Mom, can I have more?

EVIE. May I.

SEAN. May I?

EVIE. Well, Sean...

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