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Dramatic Publishing
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

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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 Moralez
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 Moulopoulos
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

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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.)

MAN. 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] DONNELLI 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

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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...
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.