

SANTA'S LETTERS

A FULL LENGTH CHRISTMAS COMEDY

By **Emmett C. Loverdy**

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

EDWARD KRIEGER.....	10 (214 lines)
SANTA CLAUS/MR. BARLOW ...	(125 lines)
BRIAN KRIEGER.....	38 (164 lines)
MAUREEN KRIEGER	15 (107 lines)
INGRID KRIEGER	7 (66 lines)
BETTY SCHMALL.....	30 (63 lines)
SHANNON LUNT	10 (32 lines)
TIM GRIMM/VINNIE	Tim Grimm is about 35. and Vinnie is an elf (114 lines)
CONNIE CHAPPEL	37 (18 lines)
COURTNEY CHAPPEL	15 (10 lines)

Note that Santa Claus and Mr. Barlow are played by the same actor and Tim Grimm and Vinnie are played by the same actor. All voiceovers may be prerecorded when they occur while their respective characters are on stage.

PLACE:

The downstairs living room and dining room, stairwell, and three upstairs bedrooms in the home of BRIAN KRIEGER and his family in Novato, California.

Off to one side is SANTA'S office, represented mainly by a desk with an intercom, a reclining chair, and perhaps a photo of Mrs. Claus hanging behind, where the wall would be.

Flown or rolled in as needed is the door to the principal's office at EDWARD'S school and the waiting bench just outside of it, the church (represented by two pews and church-like lighting), and the pool table and its accompanying lamp, which represent the pool hall.

TIME:

The present, beginning in late November.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

OVER BLACK:

EDWARD: (*Reading OVER:*) November twenty-three. Dear Santa Claus: My name is Edward and I am ten years old. Please do not come this year. There's too much yelling at my house...

SCENE:

Night. The modest home of BRIAN KRIEGER and his family in Novato, California. The downstairs living room and dining room, stairwell, and three upstairs bedrooms are all visible. At present, the focus is on the bedroom of an imaginative young man: dinosaur posters, various balls tossed into a neat pile in a corner. The bed is made.

AT RISE:

Lights up slowly on 10-year-old EDWARD KRIEGER in pajamas at his desk composing a letter.

EDWARD: (*OVER:*) We will miss you, but I'm too embarrassed. (*Starts to fold up letter, then adds.*) Love, Edward.

EDWARD seals the letter inside an envelope, puts it on his night table, and gets into bed as SANTA CLAUS reads over. SANTA'S a pretty sharp character.

SANTA: (*OVER:*) November 31. Dear Edward ... Ed, it's Santa Claus. Don't come? The last time somebody told me not to come, the guy's name was Scrooge. I had to send out three of my best people to work him over.

Lights down on EDWARD'S bedroom and up on SANTA'S office. The office is represented by a crowded wooden desk with an intercom, a comfy desk chair, and a photo of Mrs. Claus hanging where the wall would be. SANTA sits composing a letter. He is dressed in a red and white sweatsuit with a large "RUDOLPH ROCKS" logo on it.

SANTA: (*Reads.*) "Kid, I have to swing by on Christmas. That's what I do. I got some righteous loot for you. I'm not going to spoil the surprise except for one nifty item: I'm going to make you a brave kid, Ed. That's my gift. So use this bravery to talk to your people—get to the root of this yelling business. Love, Santa Claus." (*Presses*

SANTA'S LETTERS

intercom.) All right, Vinnie, this thing's ready to go out.

VINNIE: (*Via intercom; Brooklyn accent.*) I'll run it down to the box this afternoon.

SANTA: (*To intercom.*) Wait—I want to add something...

Lights on SANTA'S office fade to half.

In the KRIEGERS' kitchen/living room, a string of colored lights turns on. The string is being draped on the branches of a Christmas tree. As the lights rise on the living room, its contents can be seen: a couch, a television, a portable boombox cassette player, a coffee table, a desk with a chair, fax machine, and computer. There is a fireplace to one side, the inside of which does not face the audience.

Lights also rise on the kitchen, which features a stove, a breadbox, a refrigerator, shelves full of dishes, and a sink.

INGRID KRIEGER, 7, strings the tree lights. EDWARD, his father BRIAN KRIEGER, 38, and his other sister, MAUREEN, 15, hang decorations around the living room. A grey cloud seems to hang over them all.

SANTA: (*Reads.*) "P.S. Ed, no matter who started the yelling, I bet my head reindeer it wasn't you, squirt."

Lights down on Santa's office.

INGRID accidentally drops an ornament. She bursts into tears.

MAUREEN: Eddie, get a broom.

EDWARD enters the kitchen and hunts for a broom. BRIAN folds INGRID into his arms as MAUREEN looks on critically.

Eddie! Where's my broom?

As EDWARD spots a broom in a corner, he finds a letter addressed to him. Letter in hand, he dashes back out to the living room.

EDWARD: When did this come? (*Shows BRIAN the letter.*)

MAUREEN: (*Takes broom.*) Gimme. (*Starts sweeping up the glass.*)

BRIAN: What is it, Eddie? Junk mail?

EDWARD: It's a letter from Santa.

INGRID: The real Santa sent you a real letter?

MAUREEN: What a crock. (*Grabs letter.*) It's postmarked "November 31."

EDWARD: So?

MAUREEN: There's no such thing as November 31.

BRIAN: November only has thirty days.

MAUREEN: And there's no post office at the North Pole. There's no nothing, like inside your skull.

EDWARD: (*Opens letter.*) Santa's writing is worser than yours, Dad.

MAUREEN: Let me see it...

EDWARD: No! (*Hands letter to BRIAN, who scans it.*) You read it. It says he's coming anyway...

INGRID: (*Horrified.*) Anyway?? Why wouldn't he come???

EDWARD: Dad, should I vacuum or something?

MAUREEN: You should stop being a slob.

BRIAN: I think Santa would appreciate your vacuuming, Eddie. (*Excited, EDWARD takes the letter and heads toward the kitchen.*) Ed...

EDWARD stops.

Santa was right. The yelling has nothing to do with you.

Lights down on living room. In the kitchen, EDWARD pulls a sheet of paper and starts writing as his voice speaks over.

EDWARD: (*OVER:*) December 3. Dear Santa Claus: I guess since you are growed up you do not have to listen to a little guy like me. I'm going to vacuum. I hate vacuuming like anything but I want our house to be nice when you come. My Dad took me and my sisters downtown today to look at all your pretty lights. I wished my Mom could come with us but she is not here. So now I have to do the dishes way more than before. Love, Edward.

Lights down.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

SETTING:

Morning, several days later. The hallway outside the door to the office of the principal of EDWARD'S school. On the door: "RUPERT BRECHT, PRINCIPAL." The hallway itself can be suggested by a line of pools of light passing the door. A bench sits outside the door.

AT RISE:

EDWARD sits on the bench, waiting to go in. He clutches another letter from Santa.

BETTY SCHMALL, 30—EDWARD'S teacher—and pretty SHANNON LUNT, 10, approach. Neither notices Edward.

SCHMALL: (To Shannon) It can't be anything serious, Shannon. Henny always...your grandmother's been sick before.
SHANNON nods, unconvinced.

Eddie! He hasn't seen you yet?

EDWARD: Tommy Wofford's in there.

SCHMALL: (Nods, understanding; then, to Shannon.) Wait here—I'll go call the hospital. (Exits in a different direction.)

EDWARD: Are you in trouble, too?

SHANNON shakes her head.

Is your grandmother in trouble?

SHANNON shakes her head, then nods. She fights tears.

Is she sick?

SHANNON: (Nods.) Why are you here?

EDWARD: My letter at Show-and-Tell.

SHANNON: That was when my mom called. Letter from who?

EDWARD: Santa Claus.

SHANNON: Santa doesn't write back.

EDWARD: Anyway, Billy Hector kept laughing while I was reading it so I hit him.

SHANNON: What'd you ask Santa for?

EDWARD: I asked him not to come.

SHANNON: That was stupid!

SCHMALL: (*Enters.*) I'm sorry, Shannon. Your grandmother didn't make it.

SHANNON buries her head in MISS SCHMALL'S shoulder and cries.

SANTA: (*OVER:*) December 12. Dear Edward ... Kid, what about your pop and your sisters? If I'm a no-show on Christmas Eve, we're talking justifiable homicide.

EDWARD hesitantly creeps over and pats SHANNON on the head to comfort her.

(*OVER:*) Why didn't your ma come downtown with you to look at my pretty lights? You people spend more on those each year than you do on education. Love, Santa.

Lights down.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

SETTING:

The KRIEGERS' kitchen, that afternoon. More Christmas decorations are out: a Nativity scene, a toy train, etc. Several pots bubble on the stove.

AT RISE:

BRIAN, in shirt and tie, cuts vegetables. A leather portfolio sits on a countertop.

A persistent knocking begins in the living room, which is dark.

BRIAN: (*Calling out.*) Eddie? Eddie?? Maureen?? Somebody??

The knocking continues. The lights rise on the living room as BRIAN marches in to investigate. In a corner INGRID is methodically knocking the heck out of a hand-held electronic game with a large rock.

EDWARD: (*OVER:*) December 15. Dear Santa Claus: Since you're coming, my little sister Ingrid wants you to bring her a SeData SlayStation. She says she'll take good care of it.

BRIAN: What are you doing?

SANTA'S LETTERS

INGRID'S look says: "Isn't it obvious?"

EDWARD: *(OVER:)* She helps my dad cook. I cook sometimes but I burn stuff.

BRIAN gently takes the rock out of INGRID'S hand.

(OVER:) We had to buy a new pot at Thanksgiving because I tried to make cranberry sauce out of raspberry jam because I ate a cranberry once and it tasted awful.

BRIAN: Ingrid, someday they'll call you a genius.

INGRID: What do you call me, Daddy? *(Instead of answering, BRIAN kisses her cheek.)*

EDWARD: *(OVER:)* I think it would've worked if I had a recipe. *(A teakettle whistles in the kitchen. BRIAN dashes in and yanks the kettle off the stove, spilling it. (OVER:)* Everyone in my family is being nice but there's some yelling still.

MAUREEN bursts in loudly through the front door, home from school. Startled, BRIAN spills more of the boiling water.

INGRID: Daddy be careful!

BRIAN looks at her with ebbing tolerance, then wipes up the spill. INGRID assists.

BRIAN: Maureen? I need you to set the table, honey.

MAUREEN: *(Flouncing upstairs, which is still in darkness.)* Dinner's not ready.

EDWARD: *(OVER:)* I forgot you would be bringing presents to my sisters. Please still come but close your ears.

The doorbell rings.

BRIAN: Oh—my boss is here! Maureen, could you get that?

MAUREEN: *(From upstairs.)* I'm not here!

EDWARD: *(OVER:)* Ingrid wants Super Mario Brothers Jurassic Spelling Bee Gladiator Challenge IV with her SlayStation if your elves can get it. I saw it at Target.

Another knock, more insistent.

Don't forget to dress real warm on Christmas. Love, Edward.

BRIAN opens the door to reveal CONNIE CHAPPEL, 37, who barges in with a briefcase and several handwritten pages.

CONNIE: Okay listen to this.

BRIAN: CONNIE: Welcome.

CONNIE: *(Reads.)* "He Made Me a Heart-Shaped Pizza."

BRIAN: Where's Mr. Barlow?

CONNIE: He's in the car on long distance. *(Reads.)* "No candles, no wine, no music, no nothing. Just the light of the idiot box, a six-pack, and him in a stained sweatshirt. The Steelers were devouring the Mets, and it was Valentine's Day!"

BRIAN: What is this?

CONNIE: The "Indecent Proposal" contest—you know, where the person with the best story about popping the question wins a thousand bucks?

BRIAN: Oh. So?

CONNIE: This is my entry. *(Reads.)* "There's a knock at the door. Prince Charming's too wrapped up in his hockey game to lift anything but his beer so I open the door and it's the pizza guy."

BRIAN: Who's Barlow talking to?

CONNIE: Some country. He won't be long—he doesn't speak the language. *(Reads.)* "Romeo has the gall to ask me to pay for it! So I cough up and I open the box ... and lo and behold! We're talking a heart-shaped pizza—all round and perky—with the words 'Will you marry me?' spelled out in little blobs of sausage!"

BRIAN: *(Impressed.)* What did you say?

CONNIE: *(Reads.)* "What could I say but 'yes'?" *(Shivers happily.)* What do you think?

BRIAN: Aren't you two divorced?

CONNIE: He was an imbecile. But so romantic!

The blustery BARLOW in a suit and a Fedora barges in, cellular phone to his ear. BARLOW should be played by the actor playing Santa.

BARLOW: *(Into phone.)* Idiots. They're all idiots. *(To Connie.)* Is dinner ready?

CONNIE: No.

BARLOW: *(Into phone.)* We got a bunch of idiots here, too.

SANTA'S LETTERS

TIM GRIMM, 35, comes in the front door. TIM should be played by the same actor playing Vinnie.

TIM: Brian, my lad. Constance.

BARLOW: *(Into phone.)* Him?? He's got the ethics of a cobra!

CONNIE: Come on, boys, time to set the table. *(To Barlow.)* Get off the phone! We're starving!

CONNIE pulls silverware out of the drawers and hands it to TIM and BRIAN, who don't know what to do with it.

BARLOW: *(Into phone.)* I have to go. It was good talking to you. Don't ever call me again. *(Hangs up.)*

TIM and BRIAN freeze.

CONNIE: He's kidding. *(Frowns.)* Wrong—little fork and little spoon go outside.

BARLOW: Sweethearts, what have you got for me?

BRIAN grabs the leather portfolio from the kitchen and opens it on the dining room table. It contains renderings of military aircraft.

I hate this crap.

BRIAN and TIM: The drawings???

BARLOW: Nah—they're fine. I mean the whole idea! Enerdyne—once the king of military aircraft manufacturers—now sells model kits to kids! *(Points at drawing.)* That's not to scale. If the pilot's head was that big it would explode at two Gs.

TIM: But I used my own head...

BARLOW: *(To Brian.)* You like working at home?

BRIAN: I love it. So do my kids.

BARLOW: It was the least we could do. Send me the rest of the drawings by Monday. When the hell are we eating?

BRIAN heads upstairs. CONNIE takes a platter into the dining room and begins serving. One by one, the lights go up on the upstairs bedrooms. In hers, MAUREEN struggles to write a Christmas card.

MAUREEN: *(Reads to herself.)* "Dear Billy. Even though you're my

cousin I think you're a dork but my dad is making me send you this Christmas card. Maureen."

BRIAN pokes his head in and whistles for her to get moving. She ignores him. Lights up on EDWARD'S bedroom. He sits on his bed reading another letter from Santa.

SANTA: (OVER:) December 19. Dear Edward. SlayStation? What about Slaystation 2? Anything less and you're talking Pong.

EDWARD: (To himself.) "Pong"?

BRIAN: (Pokes head in.) Chow time.

Lights up on INGRID'S bedroom, where she is methodically batting one of her dolls against a bedpost. The doll's head flies off. BRIAN enters and gathers up the doll and the head. EDWARD, BRIAN, and INGRID head downstairs.

EDWARD: Dad? What's "Pong"?

BRIAN: An evil plot to enslave the minds of children.

EDWARD: Really???

BRIAN: It once enslaved me. Where's your sister? (EDWARD shrugs and continues to read and walk.)

SANTA: (OVER:) Ed, tell your other sisters that if they write their wishes on a piece of paper and leave it under their pillows on Christmas Eve, I'll dispatch a couple of my elves to do the legwork.

EDWARD: (To TIM as they enter the dining room.) What's "legwork"?

TIM: It's a dance that people do to get out of doing what they're supposed to. Also called "footwork." (Carries a platter of steamed vegetables out to the table.)

BARLOW: (Seats himself and unfolds his napkin.) Now we're talking.

INGRID: (Whispers.) Daddy, who's that man?

BRIAN: (Whispers.) That's Daddy's boss, sweetheart.

INGRID: (To Barlow.) Do you fix airplanes?

BARLOW: We build 'em. I hope we can fix 'em.

INGRID: (Hands him doll.) Can you fix Irene?

BARLOW: (Examines doll.) "Irene", huh? She looks more like a "Sally." (INGRID wrinkles her nose at the name.) Don't like "Sally", huh, Princess?

INGRID: Princess! That's a pretty name!

BARLOW: That's your name. You're the princess. So what's wrong with Irene?

INGRID: She won't stop crying. She keeps me awake.

SANTA'S LETTERS

BARLOW continues to pantomime talking with INGRID as EDWARD reads his letter.

SANTA: (*OVER:*) So you think The Claus should dress warm. Well kid, you know my big red coat? It's like wearing a sleeping bag. And it's padded—you didn't really think I was that fat, did you? Believe me, underneath I look like an aerobics instructor. (*EDWARD mouths "aerobics instructor," confused OVER:*) Will you get to see your mother during the holidays? Love, S.C.

EDWARD'S smile collapses. He stuffs the letter away. The other voices in the room become audible again.

INGRID: (*Nods.*) ...uh-huh. And, um, my Daddy took us shopping and I got a ornament that's all glass. It's on the tree—you can see it if you want.

BARLOW: Maybe after dinner.

INGRID: And the Christmas tree in the park—there's this one that's really big—(*Stretches up tall.*)—it was totally lit up and it looked so pretty I started crying!

EDWARD rolls his eyes.

INGRID: (*To Edward.*) Well I did!

BARLOW: Irene is crying because she suffers from neglect. Hug her more. Bang her against the wall less.

INGRID: Okay.

BRIAN: Ed, get Maureen down here so she can meet everybody.

EDWARD: She'll abuse me.

BRIAN: Go.

EDWARD climbs the stairs while the others eat and pantomime small talk.

MAUREEN: (*Reads to herself.*) "Dear Aunt Tilly. Congratulations on your new baby. I hope you keep better track of it than you did your last husband. Your niece, Maureen."

EDWARD enters MAUREEN'S room. Before she can glare, he backpedals out and shuts the door. Then he knocks.

MAUREEN: Enter, swine.

EDWARD: *(Entering.)* Dad says you got to come down for dinner and meet his boss.

MAUREEN: I thought I told you never to come in my room!

EDWARD: But you just said “Enter”— *(She pitches a stuffed toy at him.)* It’s his boss!

MAUREEN: Who cares? He’s just here to fire him.

EDWARD: *(Closes door.)* What do you mean?

MAUREEN: If Dad can’t see the pattern he’s dumber than you are. Every time Barlow has dinner at somebody’s house, he cans them. Every time.

EDWARD: Maybe he doesn’t like the food.

She throws another stuffed animal at him. He goes back downstairs and resumes eating amid ad-libbed dinner conversation. MAUREEN lugs a suitcase out from under her bed. When she opens it, pre-packed clothes are visible inside. She adds a few necessities and closes the lid. She puts on a jacket, picks up her purse, and lugs the suitcase downstairs. She pauses to listen to the conversation in the dining room.

BARLOW: Delicious, Bri.

BRIAN: Thank God.

BARLOW: Why? Did He do the cooking? *(BARLOW breaks up; BRIAN and TIM follow suit.)* Hey! It wasn’t that funny. *(TIM and BRIAN cease laughing. This disgusts Maureen.)* Bri...why don’t you send the kids into the kitchen for some lemonade?

BRIAN: You do the pouring, Ed.

EDWARD drags a thoroughly confused INGRID into the kitchen.

INGRID: But I don’t want any lemonade!

BARLOW: Our budget’s up in the air. I can only guarantee you and Tim another two months on this project.

BRIAN: I understand.

Appalled, MAUREEN lugs her suitcase out the door. Lights down.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

SETTING:

Several hours later. All is as it was except that inside the upstairs bathroom the light is on and the door is closed.

AT RISE:

EDWARD and INGRID enter the front door. EDWARD'S eyes are puffy, and INGRID cries quietly. BRIAN follows them in. The phone rings.

BRIAN: *(Into phone.)* Hello?? *(Listens, disappointed.)* I see. Please let me know if you hear... *(Nods.)* Thank you, Officer.

BRIAN hangs up. He glances at his children and opens his mouth to speak...but doesn't bother. They know.

EDWARD: *(OVER:)* December 22. Dear Santa, My sister Maureen ran away from home. Have you seen her anywhere? She's fifteen and she's always mad at me.

EDWARD: She might be in Spain!

BRIAN: How would she get to Spain?

EDWARD: She was saving up.

BRIAN picks a number out of an address book, dials, and pantomimes talking into the phone throughout the following.

EDWARD: *(OVER:)* I think if you brought my sister back it would be a great Christmas present for us especially my Dad because I don't think he's going to be able to sleep. Maybe she thought if my Dad lost his job it would be cheaper if she wasn't here to eat food and stuff.

BRIAN: *(Into phone.)* Thank you, Diane. Sorry to call so late. Yes, if you hear anything. *(Hangs up.)* You two wash up for bed, okay?

EDWARD: I can't sleep.

BRIAN: Try, Ed. I better start those dishes before the food evolves.

EDWARD: Come on, Ingrid—go wash up.

INGRID: Nooooo! You first.

EDWARD: I'm older.

BRIAN: Tonight we're doing it alphabetically.

EDWARD counts off the alphabet on his fingers. Upon reaching the "E's", he trudges upstairs. He spots the light under the bathroom door.

EDWARD: Ingrid, you stupid! You left the light on in the bathroom!

INGRID: No I didn't!

EDWARD: I sure didn't!

BRIAN tears up the stairs as fast as humanly possible. MAUREEN opens the bathroom door wearing pajamas with her hair wrapped in a towel. BRIAN wraps her in his arms.

MAUREEN: Daddy be careful my hair's wet—

But BRIAN isn't listening. MAUREEN hugs him back.

EDWARD: *(OVER:)* Reenie gets mad at my Dad a lot. I think she misses my Mom. Love, Eddie. P.S. Can you bring my dad a new job? *(Lights down.)*

ACT ONE, SCENE 5

SETTING:

SANTA'S office, night.

AT RISE:

SANTA paces, Edward's letter in hand.

SANTA: Find a lost sister? Get some guy a new job? What do these people think I am? *(Presses intercom.)* Vinnie, I'm shooting blanks here.

VINNIE: *(Via intercom.)* Is it the kid in California? What's he want now?

SANTA: The impossible.

VINNIE: *(Via intercom.)* Don't be so dramatic.

SANTA: Could we spare a couple of gorillas to go look for his sister? She ran away.

VINNIE: *(Via intercom.)* When he wants presents, does he call the police?

SANTA: What about those trolls we got handling security?

VINNIE: *(Via intercom.)* Trolls? Would you want trolls looking for *your* sister?

SANTA: But no one ever gives them any lip...

VINNIE: *(Via intercom.)* You want me to pull this kid's file?

SANTA: He's clean, trust me.

VINNIE: *(Via intercom.)* Clean? The sister's a runaway; the dad's a deadbeat—

SANTA: Don't worry about the file. If I can't trust these kids, who's there

left to believe? (*Lights down on SANTA'S office.*)

ACT ONE, SCENE 6

SETTING:

Christmas Eve, about ten p.m. The living room, dining room, and stairs are lovingly decorated. A plate of burnt chocolate-chip cookies waits on the mantel. The stage is in darkness as EDWARD reads over:

EDWARD: (*OVER:*) Dear Mr. Santa Claus: My sister came back from running away and she's still as mean to me as ever. Please disregard the previous message. Love, Edward.

AT RISE:

Lights up on the living room and stairs. BRIAN and INGRID, all dressed up, wait at the front door. EDWARD pulls a tray of hot, burnt cookies out of the oven.

BRIAN: Maureen honey, are you coming?

MAUREEN appears at the top of the stairs in sweatpants and a t-shirt.

BRIAN: We've been waiting twenty minutes—

MAUREEN: Dad, I'm too old for church.

EDWARD: (*Bringing in a plate of cookies.*) Owowowowowowowowow—
ow— (*Places them on the mantel.*)

BRIAN: You could have told us that sooner. There's probably no parking left...

MAUREEN: They're too young to go to Midnight Mass anyhow!

EDWARD: I am not!

MAUREEN: I was twelve before Mom let me stay up past nine-thirty!

BRIAN: If I choose to let my children stay up late once a year—

MAUREEN: You just want to be at Midnight Mass because that's when all the single women go!

INGRID: Daddy, are you trying to find us a new mommy?

BRIAN: No, sweetheart. You've already got a wonderful mommy. No one's going to take her place.

INGRID: Okay.

BRIAN picks up INGRID and carries her out the front door.

EDWARD: Don't touch my cookies. I made them for *him*. (*Grinning,*

MAUREEN stuffs one of the cookies into her mouth. (As he exits.)
Dad!! (Lights down.)

ACT ONE, SCENE 7

SETTING:

A church, later that night.

AT RISE:

Pools of colored, patterned light and a few pews suggest a stately church. MISS SCHMALL stands singing along with the choir. CONNIE and COURTNEY, her 15-year-old son, are in the row behind. TIM stands with a stack of programs, ushering. BRIAN, INGRID, and EDWARD enter. TIM hands each a program. EDWARD, mesmerized, gazes up at an unseen choir loft. CONNIE taps BRIAN'S shoulder. When he turns around, she smiles invitingly. He smiles back politely.

INGRID: (Jostling Edward.) Scoot down! I can't see!

EDWARD: (Loud whisper..) You're not 'posed to see! Shush. (MISS SCHMALL finally notices Edward. She taps his shoulder. He shrieks in terror. Mortified.) Miss...Miss...Miss Shhhh... Uh, hi. Hi.

SCHMALL: Hello, Eddie. Are you here with your family? (EDWARD nods, staring.) Everything okay? You look a little green.

EDWARD: I thought when school got out you went back to your planet or something. (Taps BRIAN, eyes still on Schmall.)

BRIAN: Whatcha got, son? (Sees Schmall.) Oh! Who's this?

EDWARD: My teacher. I forgot her name.

BRIAN: Mrs...?

SCHMALL: Schmall. Miss Schmall. (Catches herself.) Betty Schmall.

BRIAN: (Shakes her hand.) I once had a dog named Betty.

SCHMALL: Well...she must have been very special.

BRIAN: Forgive me.

EDWARD: Don't worry, Miss Schmall—Betty was the coolest dog in the world.

SCHMALL: What kind was she?

EDWARD: A Boxer. She sure was ugly.

BRIAN: I'm sorry—we're ruining the service for you...

SCHMALL: Not at all. (To Edward.) Betty sounds terrific.

SCHMALL resumes singing, but steals another look at Brian. Lights down.

ACT ONE, SCENE 8

SETTING:

In the living room morning sunlight is brushing gold onto the branches of the still-lit Christmas tree. It's Christmas! A plateful of cookie crumbs sits on the mantel. Underneath the tree are littered many brightly-wrapped gifts.

AT RISE:

EDWARD creeps quietly down the stairs and into the room. EDWARD steals toward the gifts under the tree with reverential caution. He kneels...picks up a gift...shakes it...quickly puts it down. He picks up another...and another... He lies down on his side, staring at the gifts...until slumber tugs his eyelids closed. His smile remains. The sunlight grows stronger and brighter. EDWARD sleeps on. BRIAN walks quietly down the stairs. Upon spying his sleeping son, he smiles. A moment to treasure...INGRID'S door flies open as she bounds out and down the stairs.

BRIAN: Shhhhhhhh.

Points at Edward. INGRID nods, understanding. MAUREEN'S door opens and she comes stomping out. INGRID intercepts her.

INGRID: *(Importantly.)* Shhhhhhhh. *(Points at Edward.)*

BRIAN: *(Whispers.)* Should we wake him?

INGRID: *(Whispers.)* What if he hits me?

BRIAN: *(Whispers.)* He wouldn't dare—not on Christmas.

MAUREEN: *(Aloud.)* Sure he would.

INGRID and BRIAN: *(To Maureen.)* Shhhhhhhh!

MAUREEN: Are we going to do this or what? *(Tip-toes downstairs, then gently—almost tenderly—puts her mouth to EDWARD'S ear.)* Wake up!!! *(EDWARD jolts up, bumping MAUREEN'S nose.)*

EDWARD: Omigod!

MAUREEN: *(Clutching nose.)* Ow! You snodface!

EDWARD: What?

BRIAN: Are you all right honey? Let me see...

MAUREEN: I'b fide!

EDWARD: I'm the one who got teeth stuck in my head!

BRIAN: Okay, who goes first?

INGRID: Me!

EDWARD reluctantly hands INGRID a large gift, into which she tears.

EDWARD: *(OVER:)* December 25. Dear Santa...

INGRID unwraps a SlayStation 2 system—she is ecstatic! She hugs everyone.

(OVER:) Thank you for the SlayStation 2 you got Ingrid. You are the best. Hope you like the cookies I made. Love, Edward.

INGRID is so happy she hugs everyone a second time.

(OVER:) P.S. In your letter you said my “other sisters”—but I only got one more sides Ingrid. I thought you were s’posed to know that stuff. P.P.S. Here is the photo we took with you at the mall. How come you didn’t recognize me? *(The doorbell rings.)*

EDWARD: I got it!

EDWARD opens the door to reveal TIM and Connie. TIM has a bottle of cheap wine.

TIM: Merry Christmas!!

CONNIE: Good morning! Merry Christmas!

MAUREEN: *(Rising in disgust.)* Good night.

BRIAN: *(To Maureen.)* Honey, we have guests.

MAUREEN: Hi, guests. Bye, guests. *(Goes upstairs into her bedroom.)*

TIM: Bri, I invited a few people over.

BRIAN: Great! What time should we be at your place?

TIM: They’re coming here.

BRIAN: You invited strange people to my house?

CONNIE: You need cheering up.

BRIAN: Tim, I’m not ready to host a party!

TIM: Connie and I will do all the work.

CONNIE: Just be out of the shower by one.

EDWARD: We’re going to have a party?

BRIAN: No.

TIM: Yes.

BRIAN: No.

TIM: I hate to tell you this, Elliott, but your pop suffers from a rare disease. The only known cure is to have a party.

EDWARD: Dad, you got a disease??

BRIAN: Of course not—

TIM: It's called "poor me."

EDWARD: Is it contiguous?

BRIAN: Grimster, you're scaring him.

INGRID: Is my daddy sick, Mr. Grimm?

BRIAN: No, sweetheart.

INGRID: Then why does he have to cure you?

BRIAN: He doesn't; he... *(To Edward.)* Ed, get out the vacuum.

EDWARD: Yay! We're having a party! We're having a party!

BRIAN sighs as the lights go down.

ACT ONE, SCENE 9

SETTING:

Santa's office, that morning. It is empty.

AT RISE:

The phone rings.

VINNIE: *(Via intercom.)* Santa's HQ merry Christmas how may I help you.

SANTA: *(OVER; lots of cellular phone static.)* Vinnie? Vinnie, is that you?

VINNIE: *(Via intercom.)* Santa? Where are you—caught in a hurricane?

SANTA: *(Via phone.)* I'm on the cellular. I'm just finishing up the Hawaii drops.

VINNIE: *(Via intercom.)* How's the weather down there?

SANTA: *(Via phone.)* I'd like to ditch this coat.

VINNIE: *(Via intercom.)* You want me to have the massage guy standing by when you get back?

SANTA: *(Via phone.)* No, I'm just going to hit the hay. Line him up for tomorrow. And book me the Jacuzzi at two o'clock.

VINNIE: *(Via intercom.)* The Grinch has it at one—it may need some cleaning.

SANTA: *(Via phone.)* I made a drop at that kid's house.

VINNIE: *(Via intercom; after a beat.)* Which kid?

SANTA: *(Via phone.)* The one who told me not to come. What could be simpler? "Don't come!"

VINNIE: *(Via intercom.)* So what are you going to do, send someone out to take his presents back?

SANTA: *(Via phone.)* The tooth fairy could swing by...

VINNIE: (*Via intercom.*) You are *not* taking back his presents.

SANTA: (*Via phone.*) Maybe it was a veiled cry for help. What if the kid's in some cult where they kill you for getting a present??

VINNIE: (*Via intercom.*) Boss, get going. You still got a coupla million deliveries to make before daybreak.

Several clicks as the call disconnects, then a dial tone. Lights down.

ACT ONE, SCENE 10

SETTING:

The Kriegers' downstairs, a few hours later. Several trays of party-type food have been laid out: crudités, lunch meats, rolls, condiments, cookies, fruit salad. A dish of M&Ms. Standard party fare.

AT RISE:

Christmas music plays on the boombox. At the television, INGRID and Connie watch as Tim demonstrates how good he is on the SlayStation. He's not that good. MAUREEN has been cornered by Courtney. Her crush on him is painfully obvious.

MAUREEN: I'm so excited next semester we have third period together...

COURTNEY: How's my hair?

BRIAN reads entries for the "Indecent Proposal" contest.

BRIAN: Tim, you won't believe some of these entries!

A SlayStation character dies a noisy death.

TIM: Pipe down, Bri—you just made me get munched!

INGRID: Now can I try?

TIM reluctantly hands the game control to Ingrid. He and CONNIE join Brian.

TIM: (*Examining an entry.*) "Me and my friend Carol were in Paris and Carol dragged me to the top of the Eiffel Tower right at noon one day because 'there's no shadow' or some stupid reason. Anyway, when we got to the top my boyfriend Reggie was sitting there on his knees with a ring and roses—and he'd even hired some guy to play the

SANTA'S LETTERS

violin!"

CONNIE: Pathetic. (*EDWARD enters from the kitchen bearing a huge plate. He begins to pile on grub.*)

TIM: (*Reads.*) "I said yes, and Reggie collapsed. He's afraid of heights and he barfed all the way down in the elevator, so I know he loves me." Who wrote that?

BRIAN: They're all anonymous.

EDWARD keeps piling on...and piling...and piling...

COURTNEY: Hey, you want some M & M's?

MAUREEN: Sure. (*Spots Edward.*) Oh my god. Don't you have enough?

EDWARD: No.

MAUREEN: (*Dragging him away.*) Eddie, don't embarrass me. (*To Courtney.*) Courtney, I'm sorry my little brother is being such a pig. He's kind of an outpatient.

COURTNEY: Isn't that what food is for?

EDWARD grins triumphantly at Maureen. The doorbell rings.

MAUREEN: Answer it, you nasty little carnivore.

EDWARD opens the door. Standing there are SHANNON LUNT and MISS SCHMALL wears a long overcoat.

SHANNON and SCHMALL: Surprise!

EDWARD, shocked, shuts the door on them.

SHANNON: (*Through door.*) Owwww! Owwwww!

MAUREEN: Eddie, what did you do?

EDWARD: Nothing!

SHANNON: (*Through door.*) By doze! By doze! You brogue by doze! (*Horrified, EDWARD yanks open the door.*) Got you!

EDWARD: Dumb doofus. (*Shuts door on them again.*)

BRIAN opens the door to reveal SHANNON sitting atop SCHMALL'S shoulders so that they look like one tall person.

BRIAN: And whom have I the pleasure of addressing?

Giggling, SCHMALL pokes her head out from under the overcoat. Upon seeing BRIAN, she nearly drops SHANNON.

SHANNON: Whoa, horsey!

SCHMALL: (*Lets SHANNON down and takes off overcoat.*) Uh, hello. I'm Edward's teacher. At school. Honest.

BRIAN: Yes, we met last night.

EDWARD: (*Zombie-like.*) My teacher is at my house. This just doesn't happen.

SCHMALL: (*To BRIAN.*) Do you mind a couple of crashers?

TIM: I told you, Penny, you aren't crashing! I invited you!

BRIAN: It's a pleasure, really.

EDWARD: (*To SHANNON.*) You want something to eat?

SHANNON: Sure. (*EDWARD leads SHANNON to the food.*)

SCHMALL: Shannon just lost her grandmother. Her family's in such disarray right now that I wanted to whisk her away for a few hours so when Tim told me about this...

BRIAN: I'm glad you came.

SCHMALL: We won't stay long—I promise...

BRIAN: May I take your coat?

SCHMALL: (*Handing BRIAN her overcoat.*) Thank you.

BRIAN: (*Hangs coat in closet.*) So how long have you known Tim?

SCHMALL: We just met last night at church.

TIM: (*To BRIAN.*) I work fast.

SCHMALL: (*To BRIAN.*) Oh, we were just...he was just being...I mean, we aren't...

BRIAN: (*Starts to make her a sandwich.*) It's "Betty", not "Penny"—am I right?

SCHMALL: Like the dog.

EDWARD: (*To SHANNON, weirding out.*) Is she your aunt?

SHANNON: No, just a friend of the family.

EDWARD: It's still weird.

Lights down.

ACT ONE, SCENE 11

SETTING:

New Year's Eve, about 7:30 p.m. Most Christmas decor has been dismantled; the tree remains.

AT RISE:

INGRID plays SlayStation expertly. An endless series of explosions and

death-cries as she pulverizes on-screen enemies.

SANTA: (OVER:) December 28. Dear Ed. Kid, you're a hurricane—you never cease to blow me away. Those cookies! The vacuuming!! But your thank-you letter really floored me. Nobody does that, Ed. Nobody.

INGRID: Nailed you, you bootyhead. (EDWARD descends the stairs reading SANTA'S latest letter.)

SANTA: (OVER:) Sorry I didn't recognize you when you and your sisters visited me at the mall but our crummy health plan doesn't cover an optometrist.

EDWARD: Ingrid, what's a "optometrist"?

INGRID: It's a doctor that works on optopuses.

EDWARD: No. For real? (Enters kitchen, reading.)

SANTA: (OVER:) Okay, okay. I blew it. I'm sorry.

BRIAN heads down the stairs dressed elegantly. EDWARD begins eating a bag of crackers as he reads.

INGRID: Daddy, why can't we come with you?

BRIAN: It will just be a roomful of grownups acting like children. Ed, don't spoil your appetite.

EDWARD nods, still reading and eating.

SANTA: (OVER:) So keep in touch. I'll have my people give your letters special handling. Love, The Sanity Clause.

The doorbell rings. Lights up on MAUREEN'S bedroom where MAUREEN, in a slip and brushing her hair, screams.

MAUREEN: Can somebody answer that???. (EDWARD reads as he heads to the door.)

SANTA: (OVER:) P.S. Ed, why did your sister Maureen run away? Didn't she like what I brought her?

MAUREEN: Tell him I'm not ready!

EDWARD: You can stop brushing it—your hair's going to stay ugly!

EDWARD pulls the door open to reveal MISS SCHMALL— casually dressed—and TIM, in a suit.

BRIAN: Hey, Grimster! (Spots SCHMALL.) Oh...hello... Are you joining

us?

TIM: She's the sitter I got you.

BRIAN: What about your niece?

TIM: She scrounged up a date.

BRIAN: If I'd known you didn't have plans, I would've...

SCHMALL: Really, it's no trouble.

BRIAN: But it's New Year's Eve...

MAUREEN: I'll be right down!

EDWARD: (*Shouts upstairs.*) It's just old people for Dad!

BRIAN: One of my daughter's dresses might fit you.

SCHMALL: Please...it's okay. (*Looks at EDWARD.*) Isn't it, Eddie?

EDWARD: (*Shrugs.*) Sure, as long as I don't have to do any schoolwork.

BRIAN: Grimm, gimme a sec to finish getting ready. (*To EDWARD.*) Entertain the old people, will you Ed?

EDWARD nods. BRIAN dashes upstairs.

INGRID: (*To SCHMALL.*) Are you a good teacher?

SCHMALL: I think so.

INGRID: (*To EDWARD.*) Is she any good?

EDWARD: (*Shrugs.*) I guess.

INGRID: (*To SCHMALL.*) If you're not, I'm going to different school.

TIM and SCHMALL converse with INGRID in pantomime while EDWARD reads.

SANTA: (*OVER:*) Old Poly-Poly here has to make a request of you, Big Ed: ask your sister Maureen to not run away again.

EDWARD: I can't do that!

SCHMALL: Can't do what, Eddie?

EDWARD: Nothing. (*Resumes reading.*)

SANTA: (*OVER:*) Ask her to talk to you first before she hits the road again. (*EDWARD shakes his head in disbelief. OVER:*) Do it, kid. Do it for me—Old Bowlful of Jelly. Fifteen is a rough age. You be a good brother to her now and maybe she'll help you get a leg up when you're fifteen.

EDWARD: What's "get a leg up"?

TIM: It means to jump to the head of the pack.

EDWARD: Is it like "legwork"?

TIM: Yeah, but more sleazy.

EDWARD: (*With funereal gravity.*) I'll be back. (*Walks upstairs.*)

MAUREEN stands in front of her mirror in her slip, still brushing. A pretty dress is laid out on her bed. EDWARD knocks.

MAUREEN: Go away!

EDWARD: It's *me*.

MAUREEN: Definitely go away.

EDWARD: I need to talk to you for a moment.

MAUREEN: What is it? Courtney will be here—

EDWARD: (*Enters.*) Um...

MAUREEN: Speak, freak.

EDWARD: I'm thinking!

MAUREEN: It's usually hard the first time.

EDWARD: Don't run away again.

MAUREEN: Try to stop me.

EDWARD: If you do, I'll...

MAUREEN: You'll what, you sawed-off little—

EDWARD: I'll miss you. A little.

MAUREEN: You'll *what*?

EDWARD: I'll miss you, you pukeface!

MAUREEN: Don't call me a pukeface, you—

EDWARD: I don't want you to run away again! And if you're going to...
um, tell me first.

MAUREEN: I'd never take you with me—

EDWARD: I don't want to go with you! I don't want you to go at all!

MAUREEN: Why?

EDWARD: 'Cause you're my sister!

MAUREEN: So?

EDWARD: I love you! Moron!

MAUREEN: Is this a joke?

EDWARD: I love you and you're a moron!! A big one!!!

MAUREEN: (*Hugs EDWARD tightly, then breaks away.*) Get out of here.

EDWARD: Okay. Moron.

MAUREEN: I said get out of here you little pain in the butt!

EDWARD: I'm going!

MAUREEN: If you ever tell Dad what you just said, I'll knock you so
hard...

But EDWARD is already halfway downstairs. MAUREEN grabs a Kleenex and wipes her tears away—and smears her makeup.

(*To herself.*) Damn. Now I have to start all over!

BRIAN: What was that all about?

EDWARD: Dad, Reenie's sniffing—she's got a cold!

Lights down on MAUREEN'S bedroom as she starts to put her dress on.

BRIAN: A cold?? She can't be out all night with a cold!

MAUREEN: I don't have a cold!

TIM: Bri, shall us old people shove off?

BRIAN: In a minute, Tim...

MAUREEN: (*From upstairs.*) He's waiting for my date to get here so he can look him over. Aren't you, Daddy?

BRIAN: You will, too, when your daughter has her first date. (*MAUREEN descends the stairs, and she is a vision. All are speechless.*) You look absolutely stunning, Reenie.

TIM: (*Stunned.*) Ditto.

SCHMALL: (*Points at TIM.*) What he said.

MAUREEN: (*Shyly.*) You really think I look nice? (*The three adults and Ingrid nod vigorously.*) I know one person who won't butter me up. (*To EDWARD:*) What do you think, Scumbucket?

EDWARD: You don't look as vile as usual.

MAUREEN: (*Touched.*) Thanks. (*The doorbell rings.*) Oh my God! (*Dashes into kitchen.*) Stall him, Daddy—I'm going to barf!

BRIAN opens the front door to reveal COURTNEY, who is dressed in full Santa Claus regalia—including a pillow strapped around his skinny midsection.

COURTNEY: Evening, Mr. Krieger. Is Maureen at home?

MAUREEN is pounding glasses of water.

EDWARD: Are you related to Santa??

COURTNEY: Dude, I'm his nephew.

BRIAN: Maureen will be ready in a moment, Court. (*To EDWARD*) He's pulling your leg, Ed.

EDWARD: (*To COURTNEY; warningly.*) I'm on to you.

BRIAN: Maureen! Courtney's here!

From the kitchen, MAUREEN squeaks.

SCHMALL: I'll check on her. (*Heads into kitchen.*)

TIM: What's with the get-up?

COURTNEY: I'm Santa at the party tonight.

EDWARD: You're not Santa.

COURTNEY: I am tonight.

BRIAN: Uh, while you're busy being Santa, who will be dancing with my daughter?

COURTNEY: (*Shrugs.*) Lots of guys.

EDWARD starts composing a letter.

BRIAN: Does Maureen know that she is Santa's date?

COURTNEY: I thought I told her...

EDWARD: (*OVER:*) Dear Santa...My dad thinks it's really cool that you write back. (*In pantomime, BRIAN lays out for COURTNEY the rules: what time MAUREEN is due home, no smoking, no drinking, no pawing, etc. COURTNEY nods. OVER:*) I showed him your letters and he whistled and said that those people were really bending over backward. I figure he meant your elves. Do they do gymnastics? (*In the kitchen SCHMALL rubs MAUREEN'S shoulders, brushes her hair, and reassures her. OVER:*) I hope you and Mrs. Claus are good. Do you go on vacation after Christmas, like to Florida? Love, Edward.

SCHMALL leads a very shy MAUREEN into the living room.

MAUREEN: (*Surprised.*) Courtney?

COURTNEY: You ready? Let's go.

Barely glancing at her, COURTNEY exits. MAUREEN follows, dismayed. SCHMALL and BRIAN wave after MAUREEN like proud parents.

INGRID: He's a creep, Daddy.

EDWARD: What makes him a creep?

INGRID: He didn't tell her she looks pretty.

EDWARD: Guys don't worry about that stuff.

INGRID: Eddie, that's why you're going to die single.

BRIAN: Any opinions, Miss Schmall?

SCHMALL: I think the Santa costume was a bit of a shock.

BRIAN: He said he told her...

SCHMALL: If my date dressed up like Santa, I'd dress like Mrs. Claus. Then people would know we're together. (*Smiles.*) Please call me Betty.

TIM: I thought the guy was a real winner.

SCHMALL: Also, Ingrid's right—he didn't say one word about how gorgeous Maureen looked.

BRIAN: Do you think I should go pick her up?

SCHMALL: Are you kidding?? She would die!

BRIAN: But if he's a jerk...

SCHMALL: Until she thinks he's a jerk, it doesn't matter what anyone else says.

BRIAN: And this makes perfect sense to you? (*SCHMALL nods. To TIM.*) Are we out of here?

TIM: We are.

BRIAN: (*To SCHMALL.*) We'll be back by one.

TIM: Three at the latest.

BRIAN: (*As they exit.*) Grimm, don't make trouble. She's a nice lady.

SCHMALL: (*To children.*) Anything special you guys want to do tonight?

INGRID: How come you're not going to a party?

SCHMALL: I could ask the same of you.

INGRID: I'm too young. What's your excuse?

SCHMALL: No one invited me.

INGRID: My daddy did.

SCHMALL: He was just being nice.

INGRID: Isn't that why you invite someone to a party? To be nice?

SCHMALL: What are you going to be when you grow up—a lawyer?

INGRID: Nope. A teacher.

Lights down. END OF ACT ONE.

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