

Captive Christmas

By Vin Merreale, Jr.

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CHARACTERS

<i>One</i>	<i>50, Angry Construction Worker</i>
<i>Two</i>	<i>68, Wino Accountant</i>
<i>Three</i>	<i>39, Female Ad Executive</i>
<i>Four</i>	<i>24, Nerdy Slacker</i>
<i>Five</i>	<i>42, Mild-mannered Marriage Counselor</i>
<i>Six</i>	<i>27, Hispanic Taxi Driver</i>
<i>Bernie</i>	<i>31, Deranged Kidnapper</i>

SET

A locked basement in an undisclosed city.

Captive Christmas

AT RISE: The curtain remains closed. The stage is in darkness, as offstage voices are heard.

BERNIE. *(Offstage, roughly)* Come on, move it! Through here. Let's go!

FIVE. *(Offstage.)* Look, buddy, I...

BERNIE. *(Offstage.)* I said move it!

FIVE. *(Offstage.)* You're making a big mistake here...

BERNIE. *(Offstage.)* If you don't stop stalling, you ain't never gonna see New Years, capiche?

FIVE. *(Offstage.)* But I'm not...

BERNIE. *(Offstage.)* Capiche?!

FIVE. *(Offstage.)* Uh... yeah. I capiche...

BERNIE. *(Offstage.)* Then move it!

FIVE. *(Offstage.)* I just want to know something.

BERNIE. *(Offstage.)* What's that?

FIVE. *(Offstage.)* Why me?

BERNIE. *(Offstage.)* Maybe I just like the way you dress..

(The two enter through the audience from the back of the theater.

BERNIE is a short, stocky man in his early thirties, with a dark hair and sinister expression. He is dressed in a black muscle shirt and sports an erratic haircut that could only be self-inflicted. He is prodding the other man toward the stage with a large pistol in his back. FIVE, his kidnapping victim, stumbles forward, because of his blindfold. He is a mild-mannered man in his early forties dressed like Santa Claus.)

BERNIE. Watch your feet, man!

FIVE. Whatta you expect with this blindfold on?

BERNIE. Any more whining outa you and it's gonna be Silent Night. You hear me?! *(Softening his tone.)* I don't know why you're complaining. You think I like doing this?

FIVE. Excuse me?

BERNIE. You think I like doing this? You think any of this brings me joy?

FIVE. Well, actually...

(They make their way to the front of the stage.)

BERNIE. *(Suddenly angry.)* Well, it don't! If I got caught, what jury in the world is gonna sympathize with a guy who kidnaps street corner Santas on Christmas Eve, huh? Tell me that, huh?!

FIVE. Then why...?

BERNIE. I mean, you kidnap anybody else and you're a big shot terrorist or a hardened criminal. They show your picture on the Nightly News and Entertainment Tonight. You get like twenty-four hour cable news coverage on CNN and 'MS-Hey-Look-At-Me.' Plus you get fan mail and love letters from head cases all over the world.

FIVE. Sounds exciting, but...

BERNIE. I even heard about this guy who's thing was blowing up Porta-Potties. Don't ask me why. After he splatters his tenth Porta-potty, ISIS 'friends' him on Facebook. Talk about your fifteen minutes of fame...

FIVE. I don't even like to use Porta-potties. Really, I...

BERNIE. You're missing the big picture here! It's not about kabooming a tin can crapper. It's about the notoriety. Psycho street cred. Feeding the media beast. Finding your niche among the nutjobs. Standing out in a crowd of crazies. It's not as easy as it sounds, let me tell ya...

FIVE. You have my sympathy. But if you let me...

BERNIE. So Porta-potty boy gets his own fan website...even after that embarrassing premature detonation incident and the thirteen surgeries to remove plastic seat fragments from his face and buttocks. But you just try and swipe a Santa and everybody thinks something's wrong with you.

(Shoves him forward with the gun.)

BERNIE. That's what you think, ain't it? You think there's something wrong with me, don't you?!

FIVE. Hey, I just...

BERNIE. Damned right you do!

FIVE. Really, I know you're upset about something, but I just want to...

BERNIE. Everyone'd think it was 'cause of my childhood or something. That's what they'd all think.. Like maybe when I was twelve and like my old man mighta put a mousetrap in my Christmas stocking as a joke...

FIVE. A mousetrap?

BERNIE. Hey, I ain't sayin' he did! It's just that, y'know, maybe that's what you might think they'd all be thinking. Or like maybe they'd say my old man mighta gone hunting on Christmas Eve and brought back a deer he shot, tied it up all tight and bloody on the roof of our old station wagon, and y'know, maybe told us kids we was gonna have Donner or Blitzen for Christmas dinner, and us being young and not knowin' any better might've believed him...

FIVE. Donner and Blitzen for dinner...?

BERNIE. I'm not saying he done that either! I'm just saying that's maybe what they'd all think and stuff...Or like some fancy-talkin' psychologist who ain't never even been to reform school might say that maybe my old man could've gift wrapped a hot watch, then kept his mouth shut when they arrested me for possession of stolen goods and I had to spend my entire Christmas vacation in lock-up... (Stops, remembering back.) Man, you should'a seen the look on my Mom's face...

FIVE. Boy, you sure had a rough...

BERNIE. Not that he woulda done any of that! My old man, he was okay, y'know?

FIVE. (*Dubiously.*) If you say so.

BERNIE. Maybe just a creepy sense of humor is all.

FIVE. No kidding.

VIN MORREALE, JR.

BERNIE. *(Suddenly cheerful.)* But enough whining! This is Christmas Eve!
(Growling.) Get your big red butt in the basement, Santa!

*(Five turns toward the sound of the man's voice. He tries to sound
compassionate and reasonable, despite the quiver of fear in his voice.)*

FIVE. Listen, friend. I'm not the real Santa... and I'm not your father...

BERNIE. Don't you go sayin' nothin' about my old man!

FIVE. Sure, I just...

BERNIE. You hear what I'm saying?!

FIVE. I only meant...

BERNIE. Just don't say nothin' against my Pops, is all!

FIVE. All I meant was... What have you got against me?

BERNIE. *(Suddenly clinical.)* Paranoid schizophrenia which manifests itself in
the transference or projection of feelings of hostility toward potentially
innocent or otherwise uninvolved people. *(Shrugs.)* I read that in a book
somewhere.

FIVE. Remind me to pick up a copy.

*(He pushes Five behind the curtain, Stage Left. The loud CLANG of
a steel door slamming.)*

BERNIE. *(Offstage.)* Now get in there, elf boy!

*(The curtain rises to reveal the large concrete cellar into which Bernie
has just pushed Five. A heavy steel door Upstage Left. A curtain,
Stage Right, provides access to an offstage storage room, offstage. A few
broken mannequins lean against the Upstage Wall. Old boxes and
yellowed newspapers are scattered throughout.*

*Also scattered throughout are four other people all dressed like Santa.
Five removes his blindfold and gapes at the strange assortment of Santa
Clauses.)*

FOUR. Welcome to the North Pole!

ONE. Sorry. The job's already taken.

(SANTA ONE is a tall, gruff-looking Santa in his mid-fifties. He sports a large beer belly and an expression of continual disgust. SANTA TWO is an aging vino. His back is to the audience, as he tries to sleep off his latest binge on a bed of old newspapers. SANTA THREE is a young woman in her late twenties, with no beard, but a perpetually angry expression. SANTA FOUR is a stoned slacker, with his real beard extending below his white wig and Santa cap, instead of a fake one. He sits cross-legged by the Stage Left wall. Santa Five looks at the others with stunned disbelief.)

FIVE. I don't believe it...

TWO. *(Rolling over.)* Awww, crap. Not another one!

THREE. Okay. As long as you are here, I'll warn you exactly like I warned the others. There are boundaries and personal space issues that need to be respected. Just because we're locked in here and we are all Santas does not mean we have a single thing in common. Or grants you permission to interact with me in any manner whatsoever!

FIVE. This can't be happening...

FOUR. Oh, but it is, dude. Swallow the red velvet pill and journey down the rabbit hole. Enjoy the now. Even if this particular trip is a Santa-filled hostage situation.

ONE. Ignore the psychobabble from squidbrain over there. He thinks he's one of them neo-retro-stoner-slacker types. He talks about living in the now, but his brain is set on half-past Woodstock.

FOUR. The 1960's were a righteously beautiful time, old dude.

ONE. How the hell would you know? You weren't even a date rape fantasy in your granddaddy's eye until the '90s.

FOUR. That's enslavement to calendar talk, old dude. Don't you know virtual reality is like virtually real, and like a wormhole through space-time?

ONE. Never knew anyone who could make internet trolls sound sane by comparison. Uh, where was I?

FOUR. Welcome committee, man.

ONE. Did I ask you?! *(To Five.)* Okay, to keep things straight, you are Santa Five.

FIVE. Santa Five?

ONE. Yeah. Names aren't exactly a priority here. It's not like any of us ever want to connect again after this thing is over.

FOUR. Welcome to the machine.

ONE. I'd like to welcome your head to the sweet spot on my nine iron.

FOUR. Negativity, man. Bad karma. I coulda been eating laced brownies and binge-watching video game championships on the Geek Channel. Instead, I get shoved in a cellar with Klu Klux Santa.

ONE. Ignore the wastoid. Anyway, we're going by the order that the fruitcake nabbed us. I'm Santa One. *(Gestures to the Wino on the floor.)* This raggedy thing that smells like the morning after a bachelor party is Santa Two.

TWO. Keep it down...I'm shleepin' here.

ONE. *(Points to the woman.)* Santa Three... Although I can't imagine why any guy...even a psycho...would want to grab her.

THREE. Have I told you to eat excrement lately? *(Turns to Five.)* Remember, this state takes sexual harassment very seriously. No Hashtag MeToo moments, or Stockholm syndrome foreplay allowed. You come on to me, and I'll make sure pieces of you start coming off you. I don't care if it 'tis the season to be jolly.' You ain't getting your jollies with me!

FIVE. Uh... charmed, I'm sure.

ONE. Don't expect to see that one on the cover of a Victoria Secret catalogue any time soon... *(Points to Four.)* Last...and definitely last...the poster child for the "I No Longer Fit In This Universe" Campaign... Your freak and mine... Santa Four.

FOUR. Merry Christmas. This is sorta like our own Santapalooza...only without all the sex, drugs and rock and roll. Still, might as well make the best of it. Since he snatched us on Christmas Eve, the odds are, he's not a religious fanatic. So probability of being beheaded on video is low.

FIVE. Comforting.

FOUR. *(Smiles.)* Gotta stoke the silver lining.

FIVE. How long have you all been here?

ONE. I've been cooped up with this fruit and nut brigade about six hours.

FIVE. Have you tried figuring a way out?

(They all look at each other. Pause, then...)

FIVE. Okay. That was probably a stupid question.

ONE. What the hell you think we've been doing down here? Jingling our bells? We tried everything short of having that hashhead gnaw through the steel door.

FIVE. No windows?

ONE. No windows. No air vents. Not even a mousehole. That's the only door and it's too thick to break down. The psycho knew what he was doing. That sicko son of a...

THREE. Hey! We can do without that kind of language.

ONE. Do my big bad words hurt your virgin ears?

THREE. Eat shit and die.

TWO. What the hell? Can't a Santa get any sleep around here?

THREE. You too, Two!

TWO. *(Rolls back over.)* Well, pardon me for breathing! *(Burps.)*

THREE. That's not breathing. That's polluting.

FOUR. Negativity, man. I warned you.

ONE. As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted...

THREE. Ha!

ONE. ...was that the whacko started his crime spree about six hours ago. He seems to grab another Santa every hour and sixteen minutes.

FIVE. You time him?

ONE. There ain't a hell of a lot else to do around here. The company ain't exactly what you'd consider 'prime cut.' Unless you like talking to a wino, a wierdo and a lesbian.

THREE. I am not a lesbian! Not that there's anything wrong with that...

ONE. You go to college in Massachusetts?

THREE. How did you know?

ONE. You vote Democrat?

THREE. Of course.

ONE. Then you're a lesbian.

THREE. Exactly the type of caveman logic I'd expect from a troglodyte like you.

ONE. If you ain't a lesbian, how come you're a Santa?

THREE. It's a free country last time I checked! And who said mythical characters can't be gender-fluid?

ONE. Why couldn't you just be Mrs. Claus? Not butch enough for ya?

THREE. Watch it, One... or you're gonna be missing your sack of toys!

ONE. Real lady-like, wouldn't you say. Five?

FIVE. I'd rather not get in the middle of...

THREE. Yeah, what is your opinion, Santa Five?

ONE. Go ahead. Tell us what you think of our little Saint Dyke?

THREE. Well?!

FIVE. Uh... I guess... I mean, um...couldn't you have been an elf or something, maybe?

THREE. Aaaaaarrrrgggh! Men!

FIVE. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to...

THREE. You are all alike! Tunnel-visioned, knuckle-dragging Harvey Weinsteins!

FIVE. I'm sorry. I'm just not used to female Santas.

THREE. Like there's some kind of glass ceiling up at the North Pole? Aren't there any sensitive men left in the world? Can't any of them understand how a woman really feels?

FOUR. I understand what you're feeling.

THREE. Shut up, moron. I'm being rhetorical!

FOUR. Harsh. Way harsh.

THREE. Your entire patriarchal plutocracy is so damned insensitive...

FIVE. Really, I'm sorry. I didn't know it meant so much to you.

THREE. Don't patronize me. I already have a father!

ONE. Yeah? What's her name?

THREE. Bite me.

ONE. I'm afraid my teeth would break.

FIVE. Why don't you ease up? Can't you see she's upset?

ONE. Great. Another bleeding heart liberal! And I thought the freak-osopher and the lipstick lesbian were bad enough.

FOUR. You become what you resist.

ONE. Yeah? Well, I'd like to resist a baseball bat, so's I could knock some sense into your furry little head!

FIVE. Why don't we all calm down? This is hardly the time for hostilities.

THREE. New guy's right...even if he does sound like such a wussy boy.

FIVE. What?

ONE. He's not a wussy boy. He's a wimp. We got us a wino, a weirdo, a dyke and a wimp!

THREE. I'm not a dyke!

ONE. (*Shrugs.*) Can't prove it by me.

FIVE. Cut it out, One! It's bad enough we all have to be here. We don't need a bellyaching Santa pushing us at each other's throats.

FOUR. I hear you. I know where you're coming from.

FIVE. You stay out of this, Four.

FOUR. More negativity. Damn.

(In frustration, One throws himself against the door, but the door doesn't budge. He rubs his sore shoulder and sits on the floor.)

ONE. I'm in Holiday Hell... Hey, wino. Pass the bottle.

TWO. Grab your own. They're over there.

(One rifles through some boxes and pulls out a few bottles of wine.)

FIVE. Could you throw me one, One?

(One grumbles and tosses him a bottle. Five examines the label.)

FIVE. Thanks. Hmmm. Chateau St. Emillion. It seems our captor has pretty sophisticated taste.

ONE. You're not going all Stockholm Syndrome on us now, are you?

FIVE. No. All I meant was that this is a fairly expensive French Burgundy. And a very good vintage.

TWO. My thoughts exactly. *(Buuuurp.)*

FIVE. My point was, your average punk would have picked a cheaper wine. This guy plans things. Pays attention to details. That tells us something about him. We may be able to use that to our advantage.

ONE. Well, aren't we Mister 'CSI – North Pole'?

FIVE. I pride myself on being a student of human behavior. You can tell a lot about a person by what they drink.

TWO. I concur.

ONE. Thanks for the advice, Professor Wussyboy. You give me a nine-millimeter automatic and I'll invite our host over for a special wine tasting. *(Pantomimes a wine glass.)* A fine bouquet. A robust flavor. A slight aftertaste of lead. *(Pantomimes shooting him.)* Bam. Bam. Bam. Bam!

FIVE. You've watched your share of Rambo movies, haven't you?

ONE. Yeah. What of it?

FIVE. Nothing. Nothing.

FOUR. How do you know so much about human behavior, Five?

FIVE. I'm a licensed marriage counselor.

THREE. Really? How long have you been married?

FIVE. I'm not married.

THREE. Divorced?

FIVE. No.

THREE. Separated?

FIVE. Actually, I've never been married.

ONE. So I guess knowing what the hell you're talking about isn't one of the job qualifications in your line of work?

FIVE. There's no need for sarcasm.

ONE. No need for orgasms either. But they sure are fun.

THREE. So based on your total lack of anything related to marital experience, you believe yourself capable of telling other people how they should feel and behave? What is it about testosterone that makes all men think they're automatically a cross between Albert Einstein and God?

FIVE. Direct experience doesn't always equate to knowledge and insight.

ONE. Maybe. But when I was a combat pilot in the Air Force, it made me feel just a tiny bit better knowing the guy teaching me to fly had been up in a plane at least once in his life.

FIVE. Maybe it's just that I haven't found the right woman.

ONE. That's what the farmer said to his sheep, every time he took the flock out on a Saturday night.

FIVE. Why do you always have to make jokes at other people's expense?

ONE. I'm not sure. But my anger management class told me it was wonderful therapy.

(Five turns to Four in exasperation.)

FOUR. Don't look at me, man. I think marriage is an archaic institution. Nothing more than state-licensed sex by contract.

FIVE. You've been dumped, haven't you.

FOUR. Thirty-two times. The pawn shop is getting tired of me hocking the same engagement ring.

FIVE. I always tell my clients you can't give up on love because of a few bad experiences.

ONE. They're dumb enough to pay to hear that. I can ignore you for free.

(Santa One turns and sulks in the corner. Santa Two has passed out again, and Santa Four is rocking out to the music in his head. Five turns to Santa Three in desperation.)

FIVE. So... you come here often? *(Shrinks from her angry expression.)* It's a joke. A little humor to lighten the mood.

THREE. I find it hard to be amused by your poorly disguised animosity towards women.

FIVE. Animosity?

THREE. Disgust. Jealousy. Contempt. When you feel threatened or uncomfortable, you turn to the only woman in the place and diminish her with a patronizing pick-up line. Was I supposed to blush and bat my eyelashes and wait for you to rescue helpless little me from this situation? Because as far as I can see, that door is still locked and you're still a pig.

TWO. You tell him, sishter!

THREE. Aren't you late for your diabetic coma?

FIVE. I'm sorry. It was just a joke.

THREE. There's no such thing as 'just a joke.' It's nothing more than brutality with a smile. Why do you think they call it a 'punchline?'

ONE. *(Laughing.)* Better not take her to a comedy club on your first date.

FIVE. I was only trying to lighten the tension, that's all.

THREE. Don't try that old 'It'll-release-all-your-tension, baby' line with me, Mister Relationship Expert. I've been down that mattress before. Oh, you may think you're all so evolved, but as far as I can see, you're all just three footstomps out of the cave and still obsessing about the size of your club!

ONE. She got you there, wimp-boy.

FIVE. Really, I didn't mean anything by it.

THREE. Of course not! Don't ever let even the remotest possibility of meaningful conversation creep into your sexual harassment.

FIVE. What sexual harassment? Look, I'm sorry if I offended you.

THREE. Why are you so hostile towards us? What did our entire gender ever do to you?

ONE. Not much...by the look of him.

FIVE. What's that supposed to mean?

ONE. Hey, if the ruby slipper fits...

FIVE. Oh, because I refuse to abuse or condescend to women, you automatically assume I'm gay?

ONE. (*Sbrugs.*) That'd explain why you hang out with elves.

FOUR. It's nothing to be ashamed of, Five. I think being a gay marriage counselor takes real courage. Besides, it's legal in a few countries now.

FIVE. I'm not gay!

ONE. Come out of the closet or stay in it. It's your lifestyle.

FIVE. Nobody's coming out of the closet! I wasn't in the closet to begin with! Uh...not that there's anything wrong with it...

THREE. Spoken like a real politically correct hatemonger.

FIVE. I have lots of friends who are gay. Seven! Well, six and a half, because technically Randy goes both ways...

ONE. And how many ways do you go, kid?

THREE. Leave pansy boy alone, One! He has enough problems with his all-consuming hatred of women.

FIVE. I'm not a pansy boy! And I don't hate women!

ONE. That's right. He's not a pansy boy.

FIVE. That's right.

ONE. He's a wussy boy. That's what she called him.

FIVE. So now you're listening to her?

ONE. Hey, don't blame me for your confused sexual identity.

FOUR. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

FIVE. I do not have a confused sexual identity! And even if I did, I sure wouldn't accept your diagnosis of me...or hers!

THREE. I suppose you didn't mean anything by that comment either?

FIVE. Well, no...I didn't. Or maybe I did...I'm sorry. That was uncalled for.

THREE. Standard operating procedures for those with Y chromosomes.

ONE. Which may or may not apply to him.

FIVE. Shut up, One!

FOUR. It's okay, Five. I happen to like Lady Gaga and the Fashion Channel.

FIVE. Will you all stop picking on me?!

ONE. Sounds a bit paranoid to me. Don't let us interrupt your mental melt-down.

FIVE. (*Jumping up.*) I'm not having a mental melt-down! I am constructively voicing my frustration in a positive... (*Suddenly embarrassed.*) ...and overly loud...uh, voice...

(*Five sits. Embarrassed. An awkward silence.*)

THREE. So people actually pay you to help them solve their emotional problems?

ONE. Well...I know I feel purged...

FIVE. I'm not operating at my peak here. In case you haven't noticed, I've been under a bit of stress with this whole kidnapping thing.

ONE. Look at that. He can't even take responsibility for getting pissed. What a wuss...

FIVE. Aaaaaarrrrrrggh!

(Five leaps up and throws himself ferociously at the larger man. Santa One simply raises his hand, which connects with Five's forehead, knocking him backward on his butt.)

ONE. By the way, wussy boy. You fight like a girl. You really should get your mama to give you some boxing lessons.

(Santa Three casually gets up and saunters over to the big man.)

ONE. And what do you want, little girl?

THREE. Haaayyaaaah!!

(She throws a single punch to the belly, knocking him to the floor.)

THREE. My mama was a third-degree black belt. She fought like a girl too.

FOUR. Awesome! I am so gonna pick you as my avatar in my next video game.

(Santa Three sits back down and opens a small bottle of pills. Every few minutes, she pops another one in her mouth.)

FIVE. Uh, Thanks for taking my side.

THREE. I wasn't. He had it coming.

FIVE. I guess there are times karate can be as effective as counseling.

THREE. Is that your professional opinion?

FIVE. In his case...you bet.

THREE. You're not a very good counselor, are you?

FIVE. No, I'm not. Evidently, I'm just a pretentious ass who can pontificate about other people's problems but can't even identify his own.

THREE. Sounds like a pretty accurate diagnosis to me.

FIVE. I can't believe I let that guy get to me like that.

FOUR. Guys like that specialize in getting to people. (Indicating Three.)
And people like her always believe they're being gotten.

THREE. You two are talking about me, aren't you?

FOUR. What makes you think we're talking about you?

THREE. Your nostrils are flaring.

FOUR. (*Touches his nose.*) Are they? Cool...

THREE. It's a primitive male instinct going all the way back to Neanderthal days. Men do that right before they are going to attack something...or someone.

FIVE. Nobody is going to attack you, Three. We're on your side.

THREE. Yeah. That's what Sitting Bull said to General Custer. That's what the Hitler said to Stalin. That's what pimply-faced Leonard Witherspoon said to me in the back seat of his VW bug.

FOUR. Been there. Done that. Demands extreme flexibility.

THREE. You can't help yourselves. All men are predators and they consider all women their prey. And I'm so damned tired of being used...

FIVE. Don't you think that sounds a tiny bit paranoid?

THREE. Don't talk to me about paranoia. Talk to them!

FIVE. Them? Them who?

THREE. Let me remind you that 'Paranoia' is a term coined by psychologists - male psychologists - to keep us in our place.

ONE. Here we go again.

THREE. Why do you hate us so much? Why must you vent your hostilities and sick repressions on those who are most willing to nurture you?

TWO. Third time tonight I heard this speech...

FIVE. I...I don't try to. I really do respect women.

ONE. Don't let her bully you, kid. Act like a man!

THREE. And do what? Smack me around?

ONE. Only until your tongue stops tap dancing.

THREE. *(Rising.)* That does it! This time, you're going down for good!!

(Three leaps at One, but Four and Five hold her back.)

FIVE. Grab her, Four. Hold her back!

(No matter how hard she struggles, they will not let her go.)

THREE. It's a conspiracy! You're all in this together!

FOUR. Easy, sister. Chill a bit. I spent most of my life listening to jerks like him. You can't let them get to you. He only wants to push your buttons.

FIVE. Four is right. You can get him madder by just smiling and ignoring what he says. Act cool.

ONE. You can't cool down someone who's frigid.

THREE. Frigid! Frigid?! I'll have you know I melted better men than you!

ONE. Yeah. But most of them were inflatable.

FIVE. One!!

THREE. I'll kill him!

(She lunges again but is still restrained by Four and Five. The pills have started to make her woozy and unsteady on her feet.)

FIVE. Calm down, Three!!

THREE. *(Crumbles.)* I hate you all. I hate your arrogance. I hate your condescension. I hate your hormones!

ONE. Guess who ain't getting my vote for Miss Congeniality.

FIVE. Stuff it in your stocking, Santa! *(To Three.)* Calm down, Three. We're not all...

THREE. Just leave me alone! All of you! Just leave me alone!

(She pulls away from the others and retreats to a corner, Stage Left. She pulls out a second bottle of pills, continues swallowing them throughout the following. Her movements are getting slower, more erratic.)

THREE. What time is it, anyway?

FOUR. A little after eleven, I think. Coming up on midnight, Christmas Eve.

ONE. What difference does it make? We're all gonna rot in here.

THREE. Who asked you?

ONE. Lady, you are a guaranteed cure for a Viagra overdose.

THREE. And you could be the advertising campaign for 'America's Got Morons.'

ONE. Moron? I happen to be a hardhat and a Gulf War veteran! I was dodging shrapnel while you were safe at home crying over Sex & The City reruns!!

FIVE. Excuse me, but aren't you taking an awful lot of those pills?

THREE. What's it to you? You a pharmaceutical counselor now?

FIVE. I only meant I don't think it's a good idea to take so many.

THREE. Mind your own business. This is something I've been planning to do for a long time. Seven and a half months...

(He snatches the bottle from her, looks at the label.)

FIVE. Are you crazy? This stuff will kill you!

THREE. Give me back my pills!

FIVE. No! You are going to kill yourself if you take that many.

THREE. Give me back my pills!

FIVE. No!

THREE. Please? Haven't you done enough to me already?

FIVE. I am not going to sit here and let you kill yourself!

ONE. Great. I can see the headlines now... 'Hostage dyke turns suicidal Santa.'

THREE. What do you know about my life? You think your little marriage counseling certificate tells you anything about what it's like to be me?!

FIVE. No, it doesn't... But it does help me recognize pain when I see it.

(She is much weaker now. Flails blindly at the bottle in his hand.)

THREE. Give me back...my pills...

FIVE. I don't care what hardships or heartaches you've had in life. Nothing can be this bad.

THREE. Oh, yes it can... You have no idea...

FIVE. Please, let me help you.

THREE. I don't want your help. I don't need your help... I'm not your patient... give me back those pills...

FIVE. I can't let you hurt yourself.

THREE. ...'s my choice... I don't belong in a world that values pectorals over...personality. Where IQs get less use than IUDs...

FIVE. A few bad attitudes are not worth dying over.

THREE. ...where no one cares at all, unless you look like the Playmate of the Month...

FIVE. You're wrong...

THREE. *(Struggling to her feet.)* Don't you dare tell me I'm wrong! All my life... ever since I was a little girl... you men have trapped me behind walls of inferiority... ever since I can remember, you smothered me with pink dresses, Barbie dolls and tea party manners... they all tell me what I can do and what I can't... what I can be and what I can't...And if I ever dared to do what I wanted to do...I'd be shouted down with horrified stares...or stupid insults from men like him...

(She waves a weak arm in One's direction. She is really getting disoriented now.)

THREE. Well, newflash, mister, you man you... I hate the color pink...and this...this is one thing I can do to prove you all can't use me anymore! Now gimme that bottle!

(Three leaps at Five who clutches the bottle. He tries to fight her off, even though she pummels him.)

FIVE. No! Suicide never solved anything!

FOUR. Actually, if you read Sartre, he would disagree...

FIVE. Shut up, Four! One, give me a hand here. *(Grabs her flailing arm.)* Stop fighting, Three!

THREE. Ow! You're hurting me. *(Weakly.)* Can't everyone stop hurting me...?

(She collapses to the floor. The pills are really taking effect now, and she finds it difficult to sit up.)

FIVE. I will. Once you promise to forget about killing yourself.

THREE. Why don't you just rape me and make my humiliation complete?

FIVE. I don't want to rape you.

THREE. Oh, I'm not good looking enough for you? Is that it?

FIVE. That's not it at all. I think you are sweet and smart and amazingly attractive.

(She is fading fast. Her voice reverts to that of a small child.)

THREE. You're just saying that to keep me from vomiting on you...

FIVE. No...well, yes. But I also want you to live.

THREE. ... why?

FIVE. Why? Because... because you should.

FOUR. He's right.

THREE. ...another 'should'...

FIVE. I don't want you to die.

THREE. ... why...?

FIVE. Because I would feel bad.

THREE. ...you would?

FIVE. Of course.

FOUR. We all would.

THREE. ...really...?

FIVE. Men can show compassion too, you know.

THREE. ...oh... *(Barely holding her head up.)* ...are you a transvestite...?

ONE. Ha!

FIVE. Why are you being so cynical?

(She rallies a bit. She sits up, but her speech becomes distorted and slurred.)

THREE. ...cynical...cynical is all they leave you... all they ever leave you...
When you're good...and work hard...but they pay someone more... just
because they can...I don't know...grow a beard...Cynical is when your
boss... expects favors... that leave you feeling cheap...and dirty...
Cynical is when... when your boyfriend runs off with your step-mom...

FOUR. Your step-mom?

THREE. ...and your car...and all your savings... all that leaves you is
cynical...

FIVE. I'm so sorry.

THREE. ... don't be sorry... Don't you dare feel sorry for me... I'm a big
girl... a woman... I can take care of myself...

FIVE. Of course you can.

THREE. *(Distantly.)* ...she had bigger boobs, you know... the tramp he left
my mom for musta had forty-eight double D's... Maybe double G's... or
W's. Do they go all the way to W's?

FIVE. That's just the pills talking.

THREE. *(Eyes going wide.)* The pills can talk?!

(She picks up the empty bottle to apologize to it.)

THREE. *(To the bottle.)* I'm so sorry.... I didn't know you could talk! I just thought you were...you know...pills... *(To Five.)* ... I feel kinda funny... do you know anyone with forty-eight double W's..? ..real ones, I mean..?

FIVE. No. It doesn't matter. All that matters is that we get you feeling better, okay?

THREE. ... mine are thirty-threes, you know... 'B' cups... most men, that's all they notice about you...

FIVE. Not me. The first thing I noticed was your eyes.

THREE. ...my eyes..?

FIVE. They are really beautiful. Grey, with just the slightest specks of green. Oh, and your Santa costume. I noticed that too.

THREE. ...you noticed my eyes? I have two of them you know...

FIVE. I know. How about you and me try to walk off those pills. And then maybe we can talk more, okay?

THREE. With the pills? They can talk you know... I wish someone had told me that earlier...Hate to think of them having a conversation in my stomach ... *(Giggles drunkenly.)* Hey...it's dark in here! Oh yeah, just wait 'til we get to her intestines! Hee hee hee...

FIVE. That's the best 'talking pill' impression I ever heard. But try to focus... How many of these pills did you take?

THREE. I don't know... maybe forty or fifty...

FIVE. Forty or fifty?! We have to get you to vomit!

(Five tries to pick Three up as she is too weak to stand.)

ONE. Vomit? That's disgusting.

TWO. Wha..? Did I do it again?

(Two feels the floor around him and finds nothing. He rolls over on his side again.)

FIVE. Give me a hand with her, Four! *(To Three.)* It'll be okay. You are going to be all right.

THREE. ...this is really very nice of you... most men aren't this nice...unless you got big boobs...

FIVE. I'm not most men.

FOUR. She's going to be okay. Isn't she?

FIVE. *(Frightened.)* I don't know...

THREE. ... I... I'm sorry I called you a wussy boy... you're not really a wussy boy, you know...

FIVE. I know. Just please don't die on me...

(Five and Four drag her off, Stage Right. One looks through the curtain at them, then paces the stage. He is clearly concerned but doesn't know what to do... and that's a feeling he can't stand. After a moment, a strange look crosses his face. He turns to the sleeping wino.)

ONE. Did you just..?

TWO. *(Without turning over.)* It happens.

ONE. Great... We've got a suicidal Santa with her head in a bucket... and I'm left alone with the Ghost of Christmas Gas!

CURTAIN

End of Act One

ACT TWO

AT RISE: Later that evening. Santa Two is still passed out on the floor. Empty wine bottles everywhere. Santa One, having drunk a bit too much himself, has assembled a circle of half mannequins around him, and is playing 'Spin The Bottle' with them.)

ONE. Okay, Esmerelda. It's your turn to Spin The Bottle. What's that? You want me to spin for you? Well, if you insist...

(He gives the empty bottle a spin.)

ONE. How about that? It's you and me again!

(He looks around to make sure no one is watching, then picks up the half a mannequin and gives it a quick kiss.)

TWO. And I thought the guy who kidnapped us was bonkers...

ONE. How long have you been awake?

TWO. *(Without turning over.)* Long enough to be glad I'm not a mannequin.

(Santa One starts to pace again.)

ONE. I don't know how much longer I can take this!

(The steel door flies open. One jumps back as a young Santa is pushed onstage.)

BERNIE. *(Offstage.)* Get in there, elf-boy!

(SANTA SIX is thin, Hispanic, with no beard and no belly. His Santa costume is more like a tight and shiny red suit, with more stylish boots. One looks on dubiously, as Santa Six yells at the steel door.)

SIX. If I ever get a hold of your sister, man!

ONE. *(Shaking his head.)* Wonderful. Just wonderful.

SIX. Who are you?

ONE. Who do I look like?

SIX. Santa Claus.

ONE. Bright boy. I never heard of a spic Santa before.

SIX. Watchu say?!

ONE. Nothing personal. But you can't tell me anybody really believes you are the real Saint Nick. I mean, look at you... you got no beard. No belly... And you ain't never gonna get a tan like that at the North Pole.

SIX. You got yourself a problem, man?

ONE. (*Sighs.*) I hate to see Christmas go ethnic.

SIX. I only got one thing to say to you.

ONE. Yeah? What's that?

SIX. Santa Claus.

ONE. Huh?

SIX. Santa Claus. Santa Claus...

ONE. So?

SIX. So you telling me that 'Santa Claus' sounds Caucasian?

ONE. (*Mouths it to himself.*) You got a point there.

SIX. Let me tell you. The man's a home boy. And you see his sled, man? I mean, he's the original low rider.

ONE. That explains why there's no hubcaps on his reindeer.

SIX. Your mama.

ONE. What about her?

TWO. Keep it down, will ya?

SIX. Who's he? No, don't tell me...

ONE & SIX. (*Together.*) Santa Claus...

ONE. And notice he's not bilingual.

SIX. Looks like he has enough problems with only one tongue.

ONE. Yeah. Look, I don't mean to come down hard on you or anything, but don't you feel like a clown in that get-up?

SIX. You telling me you don't feel like a clown in yours?

(One looks at his Santa suit, then smiles. Hands Six a wine bottle.)

ONE. Aw, what the heck. Have some wine, kid.

SIX. *(Sitting beside him.)* Gracias. I don't normally imbibe with brain-dead racists... but I guess you don't normally drink with any of us pigmentally challenged types either.

ONE. Not in public.

SIX. Maybe you should. Then you wouldn't be so scared of us.

ONE. You think I'm scared of you?

SIX. In my neighborhood, you stay healthy by knowing who is scared of you and who ain't. So maybe the man has a little twitch or shake in his voice or something... But you pick it up, and he knows you pick it up... and you stay healthy. You? You're just scared of anything that don't look exactly like you.

ONE. What the hell do you know? You're just a punk kid.

SIX. Yeah. I'm a punk kid and you're a phony old redneck tryin' to be the meanest dude in town... But it's okay. I'll try to be scared of you if you want. *(Lifts his bottle.)* To all the white folk who first settled America.

ONE. Now you're talking.

(They clink bottles and toast.)

SIX. ... who couldn't have found there way here if it wasn't for a crazy wop sailor and the Spanish queen who picked up the tab for his ride.

ONE. You tryin' to tell me that Columbus would never have discovered America without the Spaniards?

SIX. Hey, if the ship fits, sail it.

ONE. And how many of you wetbacks signed the Declaration of Independence?

SIX. None. We had better things to do than fight a war that starts with a tea party. And no ancestor of mine would be caught dead in those poofy powdered wigs they wore. They'd be laughed out of the barrio.

ONE. Yeah? Well, we kicked your butts big-time in the Mexican American War.

SIX. Naw, man. After the Alamo, we just lost interest... And we never wanted Texas anyway. Too many Texans, you hear what I'm saying?

ONE. *(Smiles.)* You know something, kid? You're all right. Cheers..

SIX. Salute`.

(They toast. Santa Three enters through the Stage Right curtain, aided by Santas Five and Four.)

THREE. Really. I'm fine now.

FIVE. *(Noticing Six.)* Who's he?

ONE, TWO & SIX. Santa Claus.

FOUR. Hmm. Good harmony.

ONE. You feeling better?

THREE. What did you say?

ONE. Just wanted to make sure you weren't gonna up and die on us or anything. No big deal.

THREE. I'm okay... Thanks for asking.

ONE. Like I said. No big deal. This here is Santa Six.

SIX. Santa Six?

ONE. It's better than one of those three-mile-long Mexican names. Like Don Rodrigo Gonzalez Burrito, or something.

SIX. Do they ever come and take shavings of your brain for fertilizer samples?

ONE. Hey, I'm in charge of the insults around here.

SIX. Yeah, then who explains them to you?

ONE. Your mama.

(They both smile and give each other a 'high five.')

SIX. I'll make a redneck of you yet.

ONE. Only if I get a lobotomy first.

(They slap another 'high five.')

SIX. Good one!

FOUR. Why do I feel like we just stepped into the Twilight Zone?

ONE. Don't mind the slack-jawed loser. He's Santa Four. That's Santa Five.
The Wino's Two and I'm Santa One.

FOUR. Don't forget Santa Three.

ONE. Like I could.

SIX. Buenos Dias. You feelin' sick, Santa lady?

THREE. It's nothing... A little case of attempted suicide brought on by
seven months of depression over what I thought was typical male
aggression.

FIVE. Ahem...

THREE. But these Santas showed me that I might have over-generalized a
bit..

TWO. *(Rolling over.)* Huh? You mean she didn't die?

THREE. Not tonight. *(Smiles up at Five.)* Let's say I put those pill plans on
hold for a while.

FIVE. A long while, I hope.

THREE. There's still nothing in it for you, you realize.

FIVE. I think you've made that abundantly clear. Besides, the image of you
spewing your intestines into that steel bucket is not exactly something
that inspires romance. *(Happily.)* And since none of us can seem to get
out of here, we might as well make the most of it. Whatta you say?

FOUR. That's the spirit! How 'bout we sing *Heck The Dolls* or *Violent Kites* and all those other Christmassy Classics?

SIX. That dude been smoking kitty litter?

ONE. Naw. That's just what happens when cousins marry.

FOUR. *(Singing.)*

OH, THERE'S NO SPACE LIKE HOSTAGE FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

SIX. Bing Crosby, he ain't.

ONE. You know Bing Crosby?

SIX. Sure. White Christmas. Typical racist song. But the man had good pipes.

ONE. Amigo, you surprise me.

SIX. No problem, man. You all know *Jingle Bells?* Heh? *(Singing.)*

DASHING THROUGH THE SNOW...

FOUR & SIX. *(Singing.)*

IN A ONE HORSE OPEN SLEIGH...

SIX. *(To One.)* C'mon, Amigo. Show us whatchu got.

ONE, FOUR, FIVE & SIX. *(Singing.)*

O'ER THE FIELDS WE GO...

ALL. *(Singing.)*

LAUGHING ALL THE WAY!

TWO.

Ha ha ha!

ONE, FOUR, FIVE & SIX. *(Singing.)*

BELLS ON BOB TAILS RING...

FOUR. Hold it.

ONE, FIVE & SIX. *(Singing.)*

MAKING SPIRITS BRIGHT...

FOUR. Wait a second...

(The song grinds to a stop, as everyone looks at Santa Four.)

ONE. What now?

FOUR. What are bob tails?

FIVE. I don't know.

SIX. Me, neither.

FIVE. Aren't they the tails on horses?

FOUR. I thought horses had long tails?

ONE. Dammit all! The squidbrain spoiled our song!

FOUR. I only wanted to know. I've been singing it for years and I never knew what it meant.

ONE. Bob tails are horse tails, you moron!

FOUR. But horses have long tails?

ONE. So they cut them off for the song! And for that you had to spoil the whole damn mood!

SIX. Chill, old dude. We can sing more. We got time.

FIVE. Yeah... we got time.

FOUR. Time is all we got.

FIVE. Maybe months.

ONE. Or worse... Hours.

(They all stop and silently consider the situation they're in... and the bleaker prospects which may await them. One and Six chug heavily from their bottles.)

FIVE. Hey. does anyone know how long until midnight?

TWO. Eleven minutes, twenty-one seconds.

ONE. Wonderful. We got us a digital wino.

TWO. Eight thousand, six hundred and fifty-one minutes to New Year's.

ONE. Yeah, right. And how many seconds?

(Two sits up and thinks for a moment.)

TWO. Five hundred and eighteen thousand, four hundred and thirty-nine.

FIVE. Wow. How'd you do that?

TWO. I'm... *(Burp.)* ...good with numbers.

ONE. Like eighty-six proof.

TWO. Go on. Ask me anything.

FIVE. Okay. What's one hundred and ninety-four times four thousand and seven?

TWO. Seven hundred and seventy-seven thousand, three hundred and fifty eight.

FIVE. Divided by eighteen?

TWO. Forty-three thousand, one hundred and eighty-six, point five, five, five, five six... Rounded up of course.

FIVE. That's incredible.

FOUR. Ninety-seven times four?

TWO. Three hundred eighty-eight.

FIVE. One hundred eighty-four million divided by twenty-six point two?

TWO. Uh, let's see... carry the nine... *(Smiles.)* Seven million, twenty-two thousand, nine hundred and seven!

FOUR. Awesome!

TWO. Yup.

FIVE. Not that I mean to knock your lifestyle choices, but you really should have done something with that talent of yours.

TWO. I did do something. The booze helps me undo it.

ONE. Don't tell me he's one of those "I drink to forget winos"...

FOUR. Give him a chance, man.

TWO. Wassa matter? You think just because I'm a drunk by profession, I ain't got no brain cells?

ONE. None that aren't fermenting.

TWO. There was a time I could have bought and sold any of you... I was one of the best corporate accountants this city ever saw!

ONE. Do we have to listen to this?

SIX. Chill out, amigo. I want to hear the old dude's story.

FOUR. In vino veritas.

TWO. That's the truth. There's more geniuses on Skid Row than in half the elected offices in this country!

SIX. There are more politicians on Skid Row than in half the elected offices in this country.

FIVE. So what happened to you?

TWO. It was so long ago... *(Slips back into the memory.)* I used to be a top CPA... Number sixty-two in one of the Big Eight accounting firms... Senior Partner... plush office, plush house, plush secretary...

(He stops to take a long swallow from the bottle he grips tightly.)

TWO. It ain't as easy as you think. I had to fight my way to the top... clawing through endless boxes of little numbers, climbing over the bodies of those poor bastards addicted to calculators and adding machines... Yeah, you people don't realize it, but accountancy is played for keeps!

ONE. Ain't that a load of..

THREE & FOUR. Ssssh!

FIVE. So what happened? Couldn't you take the pressure?

TWO. Pressure? Hell. I could take anything they threw at me. Back then, I was a master of the game. I had the killer instinct. It got so's I could look a man in the eye and tell right then and there whether or not his books were balanced...

(His voice grows stronger. And he swaggers with a gleam in his eye.)