

Late December Reds and Blues

A (post-)Christmas play by Barry Wallace

Synopsis: *It's the annual post-Christmas meeting of the Local Chapter of Santa Claus Support, International, a support group for people playing Santa Claus during the Christmas season. But their newest member seems a little too familiar...*

Knoxville, TN 37932
865-660-1177
barrywallace@yahoo.com

Copyright 2025

Late December Reds and Blues

Cast of Characters

CHARLES: A male Santa, in his 60's
TRAVIS: A male Santa, in his 40's
MARTIN: A male Santa, in his 60's
CAROLINE: A female Santa, in her 60's
TOM: A male Santa, in his 70's

Setting: A meeting or common room of some type.

Lights up on the harshly lit room. Five chairs are arranged in a loose semi-circle in the middle of the stage. A table is to the side with a coffee machine and styrofoam cups, and an open box of doughnuts. There are sad Christmas decorations haphazardly arranged around the room. A half-decorated Christmas tree is in the corner.

CHARLES and CAROLINE are seated in two of the chairs, holding cups of coffee. TRAVIS is standing by the table selecting a doughnut.

NOTE: When all members are seated, they should be arranged in this order (Stage Right to Left): TOM, CHARLES, MARTIN, CAROLINE and TRAVIS.

CHARLES

Do we have to use the hats?

CAROLINE

I think they're fun. It extends the magic.

CHARLES

I feel like I have bed-head.

TRAVIS

You always have bed-head.

CHARLES

I really need to get some sleep. Where is everyone else?

CAROLINE

Late December Reds and Blues

Martin is all that's coming. (*Checks her cell phone*) He says he's on his way.

TRAVIS

So what's everyone's main complaint this year?

CAROLINE

I don't have any.

CHARLES

You never do. It always goes super-smoothly for you.

CAROLINE

Super-smoothly? Did your grandkids teach you that?

CHARLES

I don't have any grandkids.

Silence. TRAVIS and CAROLINE look at each other. CHARLES smiles faintly. The door opens and MARTIN steps in.

MARTIN

Hey folks, sorry I'm late. Traffic is bad with all the returns going on.

Murmured "hellos" from the others. MARTIN moves to get coffee, while TRAVIS wanders part way out to look in the hallway.

Did I miss anything? Have we started?

TRAVIS

Caroline just stuck her foot in her mouth, but other than that...

CAROLINE

What are you looking for out there?

CHARLES

Come inside, let's get started.

Late December Reds and Blues

TRAVIS

I was just looking to see if there was anybody else.

CAROLINE

I told you Martin was the last one.

MARTIN

I love these meetings. I'm // ready to get started!

CHARLES

// Let's get this over with.

TRAVIS re-enters, closes the door behind him and sits in a chair. MARTIN has a doughnut in his mouth as he moves to a chair, holding his jacket and a cup in his hands.

When all are seated, a beat goes by as they all look at each other. Then after another beat, each reaches into a back pocket, jacket pocket, purse, etc and pulls out a Santa Claus hat. Then after one more beat, they all put them on their heads at the same time.

CAROLINE

This meeting of the 195 Local Chapter of Santa Claus Support, International will come to order on this date, December 26th, 20xx.

CHARLES, MARTIN, CAROLINE and TRAVIS *(together)*

Ho, ho, ho!

MARTIN

Caroline, may I do the Purpose this year?

CAROLINE

Sure, I guess so.

CHARLES

You do it every year.

Late December Reds and Blues

MARTIN

(Ignoring him) To remind everyone of our purpose, members of SCS-I all play Santa Claus at various charitable, neighborhood and other local events throughout the Christmas season. Each year on the day after Christmas we get together to compare notes, decompress about our unique experiences, and help each other cope with the various stresses of being the avatar of Kris Kringle in the world.

CHARLES rolls his eyes. TRAVIS drains his coffee.

CAROLINE.

Thank you, Martin. Er, well done. Ok, let's go around the room and tell who we are and what special role you play as Santa.

TRAVIS

You know this could just be a Facebook group. Or a Zoom.

CHARLES

We all know each other, Caroline.

CAROLINE

I know, but I like it. Charles, can you go first?

CHARLES

(Sighs) Ok, I'm Dr. Charles Simm--

MARTIN

Uh-uh! No last names, remember?

CHARLES looks at him as he've he'd just grown a third eye.

MARTIN

The charter of SCS-I specifically states that all members are to retain a certain degree of anonymity, to ensure free and open discussion. We all agreed when this chapter was formed it would be first names only.

CHARLES

Late December Reds and Blues

(After a beat). Ok. My name is Charles.... *(he gestures to signify the omitted surname)* For the last few years, I've been playing Santa and visiting several kids in my neighborhood and a few other streets around my, um, around my house, there. Thereabouts. Give 'em gift bags, candy, and whatnot.

MARTIN

Well, I'm Martin. I've been the main Santa at Twin Rivers Mall. Since the day after Thanksgiving, I got to talk to 3,120 kids. That's 8 hours a day, an average of about 15 kids an hour, but just 26 days, not Sundays, since Thanksgiving was late this year. Oh, wait, I missed that second Tuesday for my granddaughter's recital, so... *(tries to do the math in his head)*

CHARLES

Even 3,000.

MARTIN

Wow.

CAROLINE

Ok, so I'm Caroline, I manage all the Santas at the big Fantasy of the Season event at the Convention Center. 5 Santa's, no waiting, ha ha! I even took a few shifts myself this year since my husband, Freddy, well, you know...

The rest chuckle silently, and CAROLINE smiles an embarrassed smile.

TRAVIS

How much longer will he have to be on crutches?

CHARLES

Don't ask.

TRAVIS

Right.

CAROLINE

Six more weeks. Go, Travis.

Late December Reds and Blues

TRAVIS

Yeah, that was one big kid.

CAROLINE

Be quiet. *Go, Travis!*

TRAVIS

Right, well, I'm Travis. I got to be Santa Claus at the end of the Gate City Christmas Parade this year. As most of you know, unfortunately Red Chamber---

MARTIN

Um!

CHARLES

Oh, for God's sake.

CAROLINE

It's ok, Martin. He was never a member of our chapter.

MARTIN

I know, but....

CHARLES glares at him.

All right, all right! We'll make an exception. In honor of Red.

TRAVIS

Like I said, since Red Chamberlain passed away back in February, I was given the privilege of taking over for him this year. I'd just like us to have a moment of silence for Red, if we could? To not only honor him, as being the Gate City Parade Santa for the last, what was it, 35 years?

MARTIN

36. *(He looks at CHARLES)* I can do it, too....

TRAVIS

Right, 36 years. But not just that, he was a really nice guy. He coached a lot of kids in Little League, gave of his time to

Late December Reds and Blues

anyone who asked. I didn't know him personally but I hear he was really generous and never had an unkind word. Very Santa-like. Anyway. Um...

TRAVIS removes his Santa hat and bows his head. MARTIN and CAROLINE do as well. CHARLES hesitates a moment, then removes his hat and then bows his own head. There is an extended moment of silence. After a few beats, CHARLES looks up at the group through half-closed eyes ("are we done?"). They are not. He sighs and closes his eyes again.

The door to the room opens and TOM steps in. Nobody hears him enter. He looks around the room at everyone with their heads bowed and eyes closed.

TOM

I'm sorry, didn't mean to // interrupt your prayer group....

Everyone in the circle jumps. TRAVIS stands in amazement, gaping. CAROLINE and MARTIN replace their hats quickly.

Together:

CHARLES

Holy carp. (*not* crap, **carp**)

CAROLINE

Oh, my goodness...

MARTIN

Gracious!

CHARLES

Good God, man, don't scare us like that. We're old, could've taken us all out at once.

TOM

(*Seeing the Santa hats*) Oh! I am in the right place!

TOM pulls out a Santa hat of his own and puts it on his head.

CAROLINE

Sure, welcome. Please sit down.

Late December Reds and Blues

CHARLES

I can't handle very many more of those...

CAROLINE

There's coffee and doughnuts...

TOM

Oh, I'm fine, thank you. *(He sits next to CHARLES on the far Right).*

MARTIN looks at CHARLES, gesturing for him to put his Santa hat back on. CHARLES does so reluctantly. TRAVIS slowly puts his own back on, but takes a step backward away from the group, his eyes never leaving TOM.

CAROLINE

(Turning on the charm) Welcome, fellow Santa! It's great to see you. Have you. You know. *(She notices TRAVIS is still standing)* Sit down, sweetie.

TRAVIS

Guys....don't you....?

CHARLES

For God's sake, Travis, it's already 15 after. Jeopardy comes on in an hour and I'd like to watch it. Can we keep going?

TRAVIS reluctantly sits.

CAROLINE

So, what's your name - your first name only - and what connection to being Santa do you have?

TOM

Thanks. My name is Tom, and I....well, I didn't play Santa this year, but I have in the past. A lot. And I kind of miss it. I heard this might be the right place to talk about that.

CAROLINE

Well, we're delighted to have you. I'm Caroline, by the way. That's Charles, he's Martin, and this is Travis.

Late December Reds and Blues

TOM

Hello, Travis.

TOM waves to TRAVIS, as if he knows him. TRAVIS waves back, weakly.

CAROLINE

Ok, now that that's out of the way, Charles, how did it go for you this year?

CHARLES

Oh, um, well, it was fine. Some of you know my daughter, Maggie. She came back into town for the holidays and ended up helping me a lot. It was nice. Really nice.

MARTIN

That's wonderful.

CHARLES

I didn't realize we had some issues to work through, but we really reconnected, I think. It was a nice Christmas present. And she's having a baby, so that's great. I, um, I guess this year was maybe the most rewarding I've had seeing the kids. Now that my wife is gone, it's just me in the house and it gets kind of quiet.

TOM

I can imagine how that feels.

CHARLES

Yeah. Anyway, I'm not going to dwell on that. So, really that's it. Things are going well, I'm enjoying this new thing in my life, and, can't wait for a new grandbaby.

CAROLINE

So you do have grandkids!

CHARLES

Well, not yet.

Late December Reds and Blues

CAROLINE

Martin, you're next

MARTIN

Oh, yes, well. One thing I did notice was an alarming increase in, shall we say, accidents.

EVERYONE

Ugh....

CAROLINE

Me too! We constantly had at least one suit at the cleaners.

MARTIN

What are parents feeding kids these days? If it's not coming out one end, it's coming out the other.

CAROLINE

And the suckers.

EVERYONE

Ugh...

CAROLINE

I gave one little charmer a candy cane. They took one big lick and stuck it into my beard while he was talking to me. I didn't notice. When he got up, he still had hold of it, and almost pulled the fake beard off my chin. Imagine what would happen if the kids learned Santa was a lady!

TOM

Imagine what would happen with a real one! (*He tugs on his own, real, red-and-gray-peppered beard*)

TRAVIS

Ohhhh....

CAROLINE

Travis, why don't you go next?

TRAVIS

Late December Reds and Blues

I...um. It was fine. Everything went fine. Can we take a quick break? *(He stands)*

A beat.

CHARLES, TOM and MARTIN

Sure, why not, sounds good to me, etc.

The three of them get up and wander over to the coffee machine and doughnuts. TRAVIS pulls CAROLINE DS out of earshot.

TRAVIS

I need to talk to you.

CAROLINE

For goodness sake, what is it?

TRAVIS

That new guy. Tom. Does he look familiar to you?

CAROLINE looks at TOM, who is chatting with the others.

Don't look! His red beard, and the red hair under his Santa hat?

CAROLINE

No, I don't recognize him.

TRAVIS

It's Red!

CAROLINE

I know it's red, I can see it,

TRAVIS

No, no, no, I mean *he's* Red. As in Red Chamberlain. As in the recently deceased Red Chamberlain. The one who I took over for as Santa, who died earlier this year?

Late December Reds and Blues

CAROLINE looks back at him again. This time TOM notices and waves at her.

Don't look!

CAROLINE

Oh, that's ridiculous. That's not Red Chamberlain.

TRAVIS

Did you know him?

CAROLINE

Of course I knew him. Well, I mean, not personally but I knew of him. Red is dead!

TRAVIS

What did he look like? Do you know? I never saw him outside of his Santa suit and giant fake white beard.

CAROLINE

You went to his funeral didn't you?

TRAVIS

No, I don't think it was public.

CAROLINE

Didn't you say he was your Little League coach?

TRAVIS

He coached some of my friends. I ran track. I'm telling you, Tom is Red!

TOM

(From the table) Did I hear someone say my name?

CAROLINE

(Quietly, to TRAVIS) Hush! *(To TOM)* No, just saying we should get started again.

Everyone starts returning to their seats.

Late December Reds and Blues

Tom, since you're new, why don't you go next? Where did you last play Santa?

TOM

I used to play Santa in a parade, actually. It's been a while. I do kind of miss it.

TRAVIS looks at CAROL pointedly ("See?"). She ignores him.

TOM

I remember one time this family was standing in the crowd just about at the very end. They had been waiting to see Santa forever. Mom with 3 kids. The youngest couldn't have been more than five, maybe six. The parade was wrapping up, the float that pulled my sleigh had stopped while the ones ahead of us could pull back into the staging lot. I watch his older brother and sister teasing him about the ratty old stuffed animal he was holding. I could tell it would be a few minutes so I climbed down, holding--

TRAVIS

--a brand new brown teddy bear.

TOM

Well, yes, as a matter of fact, I think it was. Anyway, this little one couldn't close his mouth, he was in awe that Santa was paying attention straight to him. I handed him the bear and this young fella gave me a hug. He whispered something in my ear, what was it? *(He searches his memory)*

TRAVIS

(Standing up) Guys, I just remembered, I do have a story to tell.

MARTIN

Travis, don't you think you should let Tom finish his thought?

TOM

No, no, it's fine. Fine. I'm very interested in hearing this young fella's story.

Late December Reds and Blues

CAROLINE

Young fella...

TRAVIS

I'm sorry, I spoke out of turn.

CHARLES

Go ahead, son.

TOM lays a finger aside his nose, smiling, as he looks at TRAVIS encouragingly.

TRAVIS

Right. Well, um, so, when I was a kid, I, um, my dad, he left us. I guess three kids were too much for him. My mom, rest her soul, she tried. My older brother, Steve, he was a handful. And my sister wasn't much better though she actually turned out pretty well. They both did, finally. But me, I was always a quiet kid, you know, kept to myself. Didn't really have many friends in the neighborhood. At Christmas, mom did what she could for us. Her mom - my grandmother - lived on the east coast so was too far away to help much. I usually got my brother and sister's old toys, maybe a new shirt for Christmas. I'm not complaining, I promise. There were others besides us that were way worse off. Anyway, I had this old, I don't know, it was a stuffed....something - maybe a leopard? -- that had been run over by the car in the driveway. It was awful. It was threadbare, both its eyes were missing and it stunk. That's all I really had. And I loved it more than anything. I called him Tigger and he had an old green ribbon around his neck. One Christmas season mom had the afternoon off and took all three of us to the holiday parade there at home in Gate City. We got there late so we could only find a spot at the very end. My brother suddenly decided he wanted Tigger so he kept trying to pull it out of my hands, but I held on tight and mom was hollering at my sister, Becky about something. Steve and I were wrestling when I looked up and there he was - Santa Claus. Climbing down out of his sleigh. My brother backed away - he always was kind of a coward - but I stood right there, clutching my Tigger. Santa walked over to me, holding a--

Late December Reds and Blues

MARTIN

A new teddy bear?

*CHARLES, MARTIN and CAROLINE look to TOM in amazement.
TOM just smiles and listens.*

TRAVIS

Yeah. It had a bright blue ribbon. He offered him to me. I was tempted. I have to tell you. I did touch it for a second. But I thought about it, and I.... well, I leaned forward and whispered something to Santa.

CAROLINE

Just like....? *(She indicates TOM)*

TRAVIS

Santa listened to my suggestion. He smiled, a warm, loving smile, the kind you see only when you've done something special, or come up with the exact right answer. Santa looked over at my brother and motioned him to come forward. He handed that teddy bear to Steve. Santa said, "Your brother has a present for you that he asked me to give to you." Steve didn't say a word. But he smiled, too. Then Santa reached into his suit and pulled out a little girl teddy bear, with like, a pink bow, that he gave to my sister.

MARTIN

Did he end up giving you anything, Travis?

TRAVIS

He came back over to me, and said, "You must love your Tigger very much." I don't know how he knew his name, but I held him up to Santa. And then he said--

TOM

"He already is magic, but here's some extra for you both."

TRAVIS

That's right. That's what he said. That's exactly what he said. And Santa took him, and hugged us both close, and then gave him

Late December Reds and Blues

back. By then the sleigh float was ready to go, so he waved goodbye and was gone. Years later, I learned that that Santa was named--

TOM stands and moves toward the door.

TOM

Well, I really appreciate you folks letting me spend a few minutes with your group. I've had a charming time getting to know you.

CAROLINE

Wait, we want to know...

CHARLES

How did..."

MARTIN

Travis, what was your Santa's real name?

TOM

Travis, thank you for your marvelous story. I'm sure that Santa was very pleased to meet you. Whatever happened to your Tigger, by the way?

TRAVIS

(Searches his memory, in a bit of a daze) Um, I don't know, actually. We moved a couple of times after that and he kind of got lost in the confusion. I haven't seen him since I was maybe 10?

TOM

That's too bad. I'm sure he was well-loved. Well, this one is pleased to have met all of you. See you next Christmas! Ho ho ho!

And he's gone, before anyone can say another word.

MARTIN

What was his name, Travis? The Santa from your parade?

Late December Reds and Blues

TRAVIS

That Santa's name was Red. Red Chamberlain. The same one that inspired me to finally take his place this year, to fill his boots, as if anyone could.

MARTIN

Wait, are you saying...? *(He indicates the door where TOM just left)*

CHARLES

That, my friends, is impossible. My wife and Red's wife were first cousins. We went to her family reunions.

MARTIN

Did you actually see him there?

CHARLES begins to speak, then stops. He thinks.

CHARLES

No, actually, he never joined her, for whatever reason. In fact, I don't think I ever met Red face to face. I saw him every year for the parade, but he was always dressed head to toe as Santa.

CAROLINE

Me too. Did anybody know Red personally?

They look around the room at each other, everyone shaking their heads, "no."

MARTIN

What was Red's real name, do you know?

CHARLES

I'm not sure, everyone always called him "Red" because of his hair.

CAROLINE

Wait, I remember. His obituary in the paper, I cut it out. It said his name was William Chamberlain. William Thom.....as....
(She trails off as the realization hits her) Chamberlain...

Late December Reds and Blues

MARTIN

Thomas? As in Tom?

CHARLES

Ok, this is impossible.

CAROLINE

I can't see how.

MARTIN

Travis?

TRAVIS just shrugs. They stare at each other. After a tense moment or two of quiet and wonder, the group simultaneously stand and prepare to leave. TRAVIS moves DS away from the rest.

CAROLINE

Well, I need to get supper on.

MARTIN

I know, me too. Jerry gets upset when he's hungry.

CHARLES

(Checks his watch) Jeopardy ain't gonna watch itself. And then I need to figure out what new grandkids wear...

CAROLINE

Congratulations to your daughter, by the way!

CHARLES

Thank you. I'm still in a bit of shock.

MARTIN

So, same time next year, everyone?

The three of them nod in agreement. TRAVIS remains DS. CAROLINE lingers, looking after him.

MARTIN

So how many houses did you visit this year, Charles?

Late December Reds and Blues

CHARLES

25. With 37 different kids. It took me 3-1/2 days.

MARTIN

I saw over 3,000 kids, you know.

CHARLES

3,000 even, remember? Nobody wants to hear you brag, Martin. Ho ho ho!

MARTIN gives CHARLES a dirty look. They both exit, waving. CAROLINE moves DS and puts her hand on TRAVIS' shoulder.

CAROLINE

Are you ok?

TRAVIS nods, still staring off into the distance.

CAROLINE

That wasn't Red, you know? You know that, right? Red died. Last February. He had a heart attack and passed away.

TRAVIS

I know. But, I mean, Tom...

CAROLINE

Tom was Tom. Someone who likes to play Santa just like the rest of us do, and enjoys bringing smiles to children at Christmas. Just stick with that, you'll be fine.

TRAVIS

It's kind of nice to think about, though.

CAROLINE

That we were apparently visited by a ghost Santa tonight?

TRAVIS

Late December Reds and Blues

No, I mean, that maybe Red chose his successor when I was just 6 years old. Crazy, I know. But it probably changed my life. I didn't realize it till now.

CAROLINE

That's what Santa does.

She hugs him, and starts to clean up.

TRAVIS

No, you go on home. I'll take care of all this.

CAROLINE

Are you sure?

TRAVIS

Totally. Go. Merry Christmas, Caroline.

CAROLINE

Merry Christmas, Travis. Ho ho ho!

TRAVIS

Ho ho ho...

CAROLINE hesitates then exits, closing the door behind her.

TRAVIS puts away the various cups and plates in the trash, as well as the empty doughnut box. Sighing, he opens the door to exit.

As he starts to leave, he notices something in the doorway blocking his way. Leaning down, he picks up a Christmas gift, wrapped in a green ribbon. Curious, he turns back toward the audience and stares at the box. He opens the package. He then gasps softly and pulls out a run-over, threadbare, stuffed leopard with its eyes missing, wearing a green ribbon, similar to the one around the package, tied in a bow around its neck. TRAVIS carefully sets the box down on a chair and stares at the stuffed animal.

Late December Reds and Blues

He sniffs it tentatively, and wrinkles his nose in disgust. But his expression changes as he closes his eyes and hugs the stuffed animal tightly.

We hear sleigh bells softly in the distance as we...

FADE TO BLACK

END OF PLAY