The Man Who Wanted to Be Santa Claus

By Pat Cook

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Story of the Play

"Who IS that guy?" That's what they're asking each other at the local police station when Santa Claus shows up handing out gifts. It's not so much the gifts that amaze Howard and Bertie but the fact that ol' Santa seems to know them all so well…and they haven't a clue who's wearing the red and white. It's not like they haven't seen people dressed for the holidays, especially since Earlene drops in costumed first as an elf and then a big bunny. Even Chief Culpepper has been known to don the Santa Claus suit.

As if this weren't enough to keep them guessing, state investigator Russell Brooks arrives to check on some irregularities which have been reported. It doesn't take long for Brooks to get on the trail of the phantom Kris Kringle and then he gets his first big break – he finds Santa's bag of presents and, in it, a collection of old wallets. Could it be that Santa is a pickpocket? And just when he's set the trap to catch his man he ends up with not one but three Santa Clauses!

From singing messengers to lovesick reporters this holiday tonic is just the antidote for a cynical world and goes a long way to prove things aren't always what they seem to be. Especially for one old gentleman. He knows what it's like to be *The Man Who Wanted to Be Santa Claus.*

A little yuletide yarn hoping to prove once and for all
that things aren't always what they seem to be.

CHARACTERS
5 men, 5 women and an 8-year-old girl

BERTIE NESBIT…Amiable secretary, 50-ish.

HOWARD CULPEPPER…Cranky officer, mid-40s.

EARLENE FARLEY...Wise-cracking mama's girl, 20s.

LUCY ADAMS…Smart, small town reporter, mid-20s.

JANIE…Young and honest mother.

MATTIE PARNELL…Janie's 8-year-old cynical daughter.

WALTER HONEYWELL…Jubilant gentleman, mid-60s.

RUSSELL BROOKS…A by-the-book type, mid-20s.

CHIEF CLIFF CULPEPPER…Howard's wise brother, late 40s.

MILDRED PLOWBERG…Feisty postal worker, late 50s.

HARPER JESSUP…Department head, mid 40s.

Time: A few days before Christmas.

Place: Small town police station.

SETTING

The setting for this little yuletide yarn is a small town police station. The room, while serviceable, is of an earlier time, the furniture passed down from other stations, while the walls sport old photographs and yellowed newspaper articles.

The floor plan consists of three doors. The first, or front door, is located SL, which leads outside. The second door, located on the US wall near the SR corner leads to the Chief's office. The third door, located on the SR wall also near the SR corner leads to the storage/file room and back door.

The furniture is just what you'd expect. One desk, with accompanying chair, located parallel to the SR wall facing the room and another one parallel to the US wall facing out. On the SR desk rests a telephone and an out-of-date computer. In front of the desk is a chair. Behind the US desk against the US wall is a table supporting a dispatcher's radio and transmitter. There are several chairs, placed in two rows near the USL corner, also facing the room. There is a small wooden table on the SL wall just DS of the front door. On this table there is a small, slightly worse-for-wear Christmas tree.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: BERTIE is trying her best to decorate the Christmas tree. SHE holds a small cardboard box from which she withdraws now and then an old ornament and holds it before the tree. HOWARD is trying diligently to work at the SR desk. However, as Bertie aims and places each ornament, HE cannot keep his concentration.)

BERTIE: *(Holding an ornament.)* And this one… goes…about…here. *(SHE starts to place it on the tree but then stops.)* No. Not there. It…goes…about…HERE! *(Starts again to place it but again stops.)* Nope, not there. What about…here? *(SHE again tries to place it. HOWARD warily looks over at her and then resumes his paperwork.)* No, too busy. What about…HERE! *(SHE places it and smiles, then frowns and pulls it off the tree.)* No. Too much red there. *(Places the ornament.)* There! THAT'S where it should go.

HOWARD: *(Mumbling.)* Good, I can sleep tonight.

BERTIE: *(Pulls out another ornament.)* Now, what about this one. It…should…go…THERE! *(SHE places the ornament then pulls it back.)* Nope, too crowded already there. *(SHE aims.)* What…about…over…here? *(SHE places it.)* There, that looks great.

HOWARD: I'm all over goose-pimples.

BERTIE: Maybe not. *(SHE pulls the ornament back.)*

HOWARD: I knew it was too good to be true.

BERTIE: What about…HERE! *(SHE places the ornament. HOWARD looks at her in anticipation.)* Could be…could be…looks pretty nice…uh…NO! *(SHE retrieves the ornament.)*

HOWARD: I know how this is going to end up…

BERTIE: *(Aims again.)* This…one…goes…about…HERE! *(SHE pulls it back.)* No, no, that's no good.

HOWARD: I promised myself I wouldn't let it get to me this year.

BERTIE: *(Places the ornament.)* What…about…here! *(Stops.)* No, that one is no -

HOWARD: *(Yelling.)* Bertie, WILL you just finish decorating that tree and soon!? Is that too much to ask!

BERTIE: My, my, aren't we in a snarky mood.

HOWARD: *(After a slight pause.)* If I understood what "snarky" meant I'd probably get mad.

BERTIE: Oh, wouldn't THAT be an improvement.

HOWARD: We go through this EVERY year! You take your sweet time pulling out one dusty doodad from that box after another and driving everybody crazy with your dithering about putting it here and then there and then here again while you try to fix up that moldy plastic plant like you're dressing your daughter for the senior prom!

BERTIE: Just trying to spread a little Christmas cheer around the place.

HOWARD: And by the time you finish it'll be Labor Day!

BERTIE: Well, you COULD help, you know?

HOWARD: You want me to help? *(HE jumps up and moves to her.)* I'll help, all right. Sit and watch. Won't take me two minutes.

BERTIE: Be my guest. *(SHE hands the box to HIM.)* This ought to be good.

HOWARD: Nothing to it. *(HE yanks an ornament out and shoves it in the tree.)* This one goes here! *(Pulls out another ornament.)* This one goes here! *(Pulls out another ornament.)* This one here. *(Shoves it into the tree.)* And now the tinsel. *(HE then pulls out a handful of tinsel.)*

BERTIE: Howard, you're not even hanging them! *(HE draws back his fistful of tinsel and is about to throw it when BERTIE grabs his arm.)* Howard!

HOWARD: What?!

BERTIE: You're hanging tinsel, not trying to keep it from stealing third base!!

HOWARD: Hey, this always works for me.

BERTIE: How? You never decorate a tree.

HOWARD: I mean when I fix spaghetti.

BERTIE: *(Takes the tinsel from HOWARD.)* Gimme that. I'LL do it.

End of Freeview

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