

The Man In The Red Suit

A Play In One Act

JONATHAN EMRYS

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The Man In The Red Suit

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FORWARD

The Man In The Red Suit was born from a need to express a “what if” scenario about meeting two legendary figures in history with the same letters in their names but who have completely polar opposite reputations. At one end of the spectrum we have one of the most beloved figures of the Winter Holidays in many cultures, and at the other end is the most feared adversary in Christianity.

The play started out as a debate between the two figures, and then evolved to become a debate about the two being the same figure. From this rather twisted concept the current play developed. Theatre seemed a perfect original medium for this storyline to play out, and the hope was to have the characters open the minds of the audience to the possibility that there may be more to a story than what is most obvious. Not to say that it is the truth, but that there are truths and ideas born through discourse. The story of *The Man In The Red Suit* is this . . .

A visit from a familiar stranger in a large red suit results in a heated metaphysical and spiritual debate which could cost the lives of one man’s family.

Mixed with generous portions of dark humor, this play asks many serious questions:

How does mortality influence the minds of men and women? How does the loss of loved ones affect the way we see ourselves and our futures? How can we be so sure that it's over? And why should we?

The Man In The Red Suit is an exploration of ourselves and our context within the universe. It is an exploration for a meaning to this life, death, and the afterlife . . . or the next life. It is about the search for individual truth, and hope against all odds. It is the discovery of a belief in something, wrapped up with a ribbon and a bow, and presented neatly in an elegant Red Suit.

CHARACTERS

CAROLER (female, teenaged): The epitome of a traditional English Victorian caroler – without the singing.

PERRY ROUSSEL (male, aged 30's): Angry at the world, untrusting of anyone or anything outside of his immediate circle of family and friends. He suffers from chronic heartburn caused by ulcers and stress.

THE MAN IN THE RED SUIT (male, aged 50's to 60's and 20's to 30's): Honest and blunt, with a mysterious underlying darkness. An enigma who wears many masks. Sincere. Truly believes in his cause, whatever it may be at the time, and will never waver. He keeps a constant state of good humor through even the darkest of moments.

THE LADY IN THE GREEN DRESS (female, aged 20's to 50's): The vision of a caring mother; unconditionally loving, nurturing, and inspirational at all times.

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THE MAN IN THE RED SUIT

INTRODUCTION

A Victorian CAROLER steps out onto the stage, wearing a matching bonnet, dress, and gloves, a contrasting scarf wrapped around her neck, and carries in both hands a tiny wreath of holly encircling the base of a burning candle in a candle holder. She stares down at the candle the entire time as she takes her place D.C., standing directly in front of the Audience. She waits for several long moments then looks up from the candle and at the Audience. She waits a few moments longer, looking at every face in every seat, then finally speaks:

CAROLER. A bright starry light on a cold winter's night, with snow fallen deep and everyone fast asleep, shines down upon this Christmas Eve, this night of miracles and mistletoe leaves.

Now a vessel filled with mother's milk, a breast of love where ne'er a drop gets spilt, invites a guest of a certain kind whose presence this night is neither expected nor divined.

So has this visitor come for cookies or with some loot?
Or does this jolly figure even belong in that large red suit?

(Looks back at the stage then back to the Audience with a smile.)

Believe.

(The Caroler abruptly blows out the candle and promptly EXITS.)

SCENE ONE

Bump In The Night

The CURTAIN RISES to reveal the living room of an upscale mountain cabin in Colorado, dressed for Christmas. There is a light coming from a roaring log fire U.C. A couch sits with its back to the audience in front of the fire C. A rolling green chalkboard rests in the U.L. corner of the stage. On the chalkboard is the end of a "Hangman" game with only the 1st and the 3rd of 6 letters not solved on the puzzle. The rest of the letters are "_-A-N-_-E-R", labeled a "thing". D.R. is a modest Christmas tree, with sparse but fun trimmings. Stage Left of the tree is a card table, with a deck of cards, digital camera, and a small plate of cookies.

There is a sudden FLARE-UP OF THE FIRE, then just as suddenly it GOES COMPLETELY DARK. JINGLING of bells is heard, then SCUFFLING, as a large red figure skulks around the room, laughing to himself in a low hardy voice.

A flashlight SWITCHES ON from the front of the couch, and up pops PERRY ROUSSEL, aged 30's. Perry grabs a ski pole leaning against the wall and holds it out in front of him as he stealthily crosses behind the couch to the table D.R. He stops when he finds himself staring at the back of a very large man, aged 50's to 60's, dressed in a red suit trimmed in white fur. The MAN IN THE RED SUIT is in every way the image of Santa Claus.

The Man in the Red Suit is leaning over the table eating a cookie when Perry pokes him in the back with the ski pole. The Man in the Red Suit slowly turns around with a half-eaten cookie in his hand, completely lacking any surprise. He wipes the crumbs off of his lush white beard.

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MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Got milk? (*Perry shines the light in the man's face as the two men stare at each other. The Man in the Red Suit, staring over his spectacles, suddenly bursts into a bawdy laughter.*) Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho! "Got milk?" Get it! I'm eating cookies and there's no milk! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

PERRY. (*Not amused.*) Who the fuck are you?!

(*The Man in the Red Suit never loses his smile, not even when frowning. He exuberates the total essence of Christmas, and the jolly spirit of happiness.*)

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Language, my boy. Language! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

PERRY (*Pressing ski pole into the Man's belly.*) Keep your voice down. What are you doing here?

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. (*In a booming voice.*) Well, my boy, I'm . . .

PERRY. (*Presses pole into the belly harder.*) I said, keep your voice down.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. (*Quieter.*) Or what? You'll "pole" me to death? Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho! You realize with that little thingy on the end of the pole, you can't push it in very far. I suggest something more like this. (*Reaches into his big black belt and pulls something from it, points the object at Perry like a gun or a knife and Perry backs away. The Man then holds it up to reveal a very large candy cane.*) This will penetrate the tummy much easier, and without all the mess. And it's good for you too . . . except for the calories . . . and cavities . . . and a couple of other "C" words . . . (*Smile starts to fall, then suddenly returns.*) But we don't want to think about those, now, do we? Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! 'Tis the season for joy and happiness, not naughty little "C" words. (*Pause; indicates flashlight; smile widens.*) Wouldn't it be nicer if we had more light in here?

PERRY. Yeah, that would be very nice, if it weren't for the fact that the power's gone out because of the storm.

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MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Did you at least try?

PERRY. Of course I tried. The power lines are . . . (*The Man in the Red Suit starts toward the wall C.R. near the door.*) Hey! Where are you going? (*The Man in the Red Suit smiles at him, pauses, then switches on the lights. The Christmas tree and other lights all come on.*) How did you do that?

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. I flipped the switch, my boy. It doesn't take a brain surgeon.

PERRY. But it does take an electrician. (*Thinks.*) You saw them repair the lines, then thought you'd make us your target. Or you're an employee of the power company, and you cut the lines to leave us vulnerable while you rob us.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. And then repair them again, so you could have power? Sounds like you're grasping at something you can understand, rather than coming to terms with who is actually standing before you.

PERRY. (*Sarcastic.*) And who might that be?

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Well . . . who do I look like, my dear boy?

(*Perry finds it almost laughable that someone would actually pull this gag.*)

PERRY. You tell me.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. I thought it to be fairly clear, but if you need glasses . . . (*Removes his spectacles and holds them out to Perry.*)

PERRY. Don't fuck with me, you son-of-a-bitch. You tell me what you want here, and I'll either give it to you and let you go, or I ram this spike through your fucking eye socket. You think I'm making myself clear enough without the need for glasses?

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. (*Puts spectacles back on.*) I think you're making a mistake. I'm not here to do any harm, my boy. I'm delivering gifts.

PERRY. Actually, from where I'm standing, you're

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eating ours.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. (*Sets cookie back on plate.*) I didn't realize. (*Beat.*) I thought you'd left them for me.

PERRY. Nothing here is for you. I want you out of here now, or I will lay you out on the floor . . . (*Holds up the ski pole.*) . . . and I'll just keep poking at you until you're dead. And make no mistake about that, asshole.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. I sense hostility.

PERRY. You think? You come into our cabin, some fucking sicko home invasion creep, and you think that I'd just let you walk in here and hurt my family? If that's what you thought, you are sadly mistaken, motherfucker!

(The Man in the Red Suit's affect and voice changes – not quite as jolly, and just a little darker.)

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. My dear boy . . . you have such anger in you. Such distrust and hatred.

PERRY. Nah . . . just for you. This is your last warning . . . get the fuck out of here, now!

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. (*Returns to normal and laughs.*) I'm afraid that's not possible, Perry. The snow from the chimney has caved-in on the fire. The logs have gone out, and there's no other way out of here with all the doors and windows snowed-in. It would appear that I am stuck here.

PERRY. (*Droll.*) Ah, funny. Ha, ha. You obviously came up from the basement.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. When have you ever known the basement to remain dry, Perry?

PERRY. (*Lowers the ski pole.*) That's the second time you've called me "Perry".

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Indeed I did, Perry Roussel. (*Beat.*) Mind if I get some milk? I'm assuming it's still cold.

PERRY. (*Polite.*) No, please, feel free. (*The Man in the Red Suit starts for the kitchen door.*) But there aren't any clean glasses. You'll have to wash one out.

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MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Oh, I don't mind. (*He starts for the kitchen again.*)

PERRY. And unfortunately, the water lines are frozen, so you'll have to heat some water up first. (*Beat.*) I hope that's okay.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. That's fine, Perry. A little hard work never killed anyone.

(*The Man in the Red Suit EXITS through the kitchen door C.R. Perry quickly crosses to the bookcase U.L. and picks up the phone. He tries dialing a couple times, but each time it's no good.*)

PERRY. (*Worried.*) That's assuming he actually went in there for milk. (*Drops handset on phone.*) Oh, shit! What the fuck is the matter with me?! (*Spins around and watches the kitchen door.*) What the hell was I thinking?! (*Quickly rummages through three coats on wall pegs beside the front door D.L., laid out like *momma, papa, and baby bear's* coats.*) I can't believe I fell for his bullshit! (*One after the other he pulls out cell phones, watching the kitchen door the entire time. From the larger coat, a smart phone, but no signal. From the smaller coat, a smaller phone – again no signal. From the smallest coat a pink kids phone – still no signal. Perry starts to panic.*) Goddammit! Not good, not good, not good! (*Looks around the room.*) How did he get in here? (*Looks up chimney.*) That's ridiculous. There's no way anyone could fit though there. (*Crosses back to the kitchen door and stops in front of it, ski pole raised.*) How stupid of me! He could be in there right now, letting his buddies in through the window.

(*Perry thinks hard as he looks around the room in a panic. It finally hits him and he looks over to the closet. He crosses to the closet U.R., and from it removes a large old-style double-barrel shotgun. He compares it to the ski pole in his other hand and finally reaches a very hard moral decision as the LIGHTS GO OUT.*)

END OF SCENE I

SCENE TWO

Dipper, Dunker, Drowner

(The LIGHTS COME UP in the Cabin Living Room, where Perry has confidently positioned himself on the edge of the couch, holding the shotgun pointed at the kitchen door as it opens. The Man in the Red Suit ENTERS carrying a tall glass of milk.)

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. I love the little chunks of ice crystals when they form in the milk. It reminds me of. . .

(Perry pulls back the hammers on the shotgun.)

PERRY. The North Pole?

(The Man in the Red Suit sees Perry pointing both barrels of the shotgun at him, and freezes in place.)

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. I was going to say . . . my childhood. *(Big smile.)* But I suppose the North Pole works just as well. *(Pause; stares down at the barrels and back up at Perry.)* Having some doubts, are we, Perry?

PERRY. If you want to call it that. *(Polite.)* Sit down . . . please. Enjoy some cookies. My treat.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. *(Sits at the card table.)* My pleasure.

(Perry quickly pokes his head in the kitchen to ensure there's no one else in there, then uncocks the hammers and sits across from the Man in the Red Suit. He drops the barrels of the shotgun onto the

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table, pointed at the Man, who calmly dips a cookie.)

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. I like to dip my cookies. *(Takes a bite with a smile.)* Tell me, Perry. Are you a dipper, a dunker, or a drowner?

PERRY. What's the difference?

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. A dipper lightly touches the cookie to the milk, to allow it only to soak in a little of the milk's flavor. A dunker wants the full milk experience, but to keep his cookie firm and manageable. The drowner, on the other hand, enjoys tormenting his cookie by holding it under the milk until it's just about to crumble, then quickly gobbles it down. *(Politely eats the rest of the cookie.)* So which is it, Perry? Because you're looking an awful lot like a drowner right now.

PERRY. I'd say I'm a dunker . . . but under certain circumstances, I suppose I could have leanings toward drowning. *(Winces at some pain and grabs his chest.)*

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. *(Pushes the plate toward Perry.)* Cookie?

(Perry looks down at the cookie and feels another twinge of pain. He then pushes the plate back and pulls out some antacid tablets.)

PERRY. No, thanks. I'm fine. *(He chews down a tablet as he keeps his eyes on the Man.)*

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Such a shame. And cookies are so tasty too.

PERRY. *(Pain subsides.)* I called the Denver Police Department.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. That's very good, Perry. Smart man, you . . . calling the police.

PERRY. When the snowplow clears a path, the cops will be here to take you away.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Sounds exciting.

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PERRY. That means you'll be going to jail.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. It certainly sounds that way, doesn't it, Perry? I hope they have cookies.

PERRY. (*Long awkward pause.*) So, since it appears we may be here a while, do me a favor and tell me your name. After all, you already know mine.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. (*Big smile.*) You may call me . . . Nick.

PERRY. Ahhh . . . St. Nicholas, right?

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. (*Affect changes again.*) Not exactly.

PERRY. Who are you really?

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Now that would be telling.

PERRY. I knew it . . . You're not Santa Claus, are you?

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. What was your first clue, Perry?

PERRY. Well, mostly the fact that Santa Claus doesn't exist.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Doesn't he?

PERRY. Don't try to fuck with my head.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Trust me, Perry . . . if I wanted to, I could do so very easily.

PERRY. Then who are you really?

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. The truth?

PERRY. Yeah, the truth would be nice.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. You don't want the truth.

PERRY. I want it very much . . . and your life is hanging on that truth.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Do you really want the truth?

PERRY. (*Temper flares.*) Yes, dammit! I want the fucking truth!

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. (*As Jack Nicholson.*) You can't handle the truth! (*Laughs as Perry quickly stands up and presses the barrels of the shotgun to his chest. Long pause; never losing his smile but remaining still.*) Well, you caught me . . . (*Perry*

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backs away pulls the barrels from the Man's chest.) I'm not Jack Nicholson.

PERRY. (*Presses the barrels back into the Man in the Red Suit's chest.*) And you're not Santa Claus either. (*Perry pulls back the hammers on the shotgun.*)

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Please sit down, Perry, and allow me to explain.

PERRY. (*Reluctantly sits and uncocks the hammers.*) Go ahead, try to explain your way out of this.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. I am Santa Claus, Perry. Yes, I do exist. Regardless of how hard you try to deny it, I exist. C'mon, Perry, pull my beard. It's real.

PERRY. Pulling the beard doesn't prove anything.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. And pulling the trigger would prove even less. Why don't you put that gun down.

PERRY. I don't think so.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Have it your way. But you have to admit . . . I say I'm real, and you have no proof to the contrary.

PERRY. Except that I know you don't exist. Okay, let's just start with the basic proof we all know to be true.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. And what proof would that be, my dear boy?

PERRY. If you existed, my friends, my family . . . the whole fucking world . . . they'd have all seen you at one time or another.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. That's your proof, Perry?

PERRY. That's all the proof I need.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. But everyone in the world has seen me at one time or another. On the television, in newspapers, magazines, movies, and on the streets with little bells ringing in my hands.

PERRY. Those are all actors.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Are they, Perry? How do you know? One of them could have been me on occasion. (*Winks at Perry and smiles.*)

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PERRY. Okay, I'll give you that one. It's possible one of them could have been you . . . when you were staking out the next home for you to rob.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Is that all you've got, Perry? Personal attacks on my character, and the conjecture that every Santa out there is an actor?

PERRY. What can I say? It's the truth. But hey, you don't hear me saying that my parents and I would all wait up late on Christmas Eve – year after year – and still you never showed up.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. It sounds to me like you just did. Is that true, Perry? You really don't believe in a Santa Claus because you never saw me leaving presents under your tree?

PERRY. Not once. Not even as an actor. You never showed up.

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Didn't I? You're missing the obvious, Perry. What about the Air Force following my sleigh? With the U.S. Government saying I'm real, how can you not trust that to be the truth?

PERRY. Those Air Force sightings of Santa are faked, to entertain the children and to re-enforce a myth that keeps bad children in line. To maintain the parent's control over the child. You know, like the whole lump of coal in the stocking story, for all the little "naughty boys and girls".

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. (*Crossing to the couch.*) Do you really believe that, Perry? Have you every truly thought about that story? The coal? (*His back to Perry.*) In Victorian times, when it was freezing cold, and there were vagabonds, and street urchins dying left and right . . . how do you suppose those who survived stayed warm? Did bad children deserve coal in their stockings? (*Turns around to face Perry.*) No. But starving, freezing children did. One lump of coal provided warmth, and a way to cook food, long enough to keep some of them alive. (*Sits on the edge of the couch.*) So . . . what does that make me, Perry?

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PERRY. (*Long pause.*) Look pal, we could be here all night long with this, so come clean. Who are you really?

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. I'll admit I'm not just Santa, Perry. I'm much more than that. I am the hope that wells up inside the children of the world. I am the concentration of all good thoughts focused into a single moment in time. I am the tower that never leans, the color that never fades, the clock that never ticks, and the mind that never wanders. I am the snow that never melts, the heat that never cools. . .

PERRY. And never with a goat on a boat, or a mouse in a house, or on a plane or in a train . . . I get it! You're the never-ending fucking story, and I wish you'd just shut the fuck up, and tell me who the hell you are!

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Hammer . . . this is nail . . . hit me.

PERRY. What?

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. You're beginning to get it, Perry.

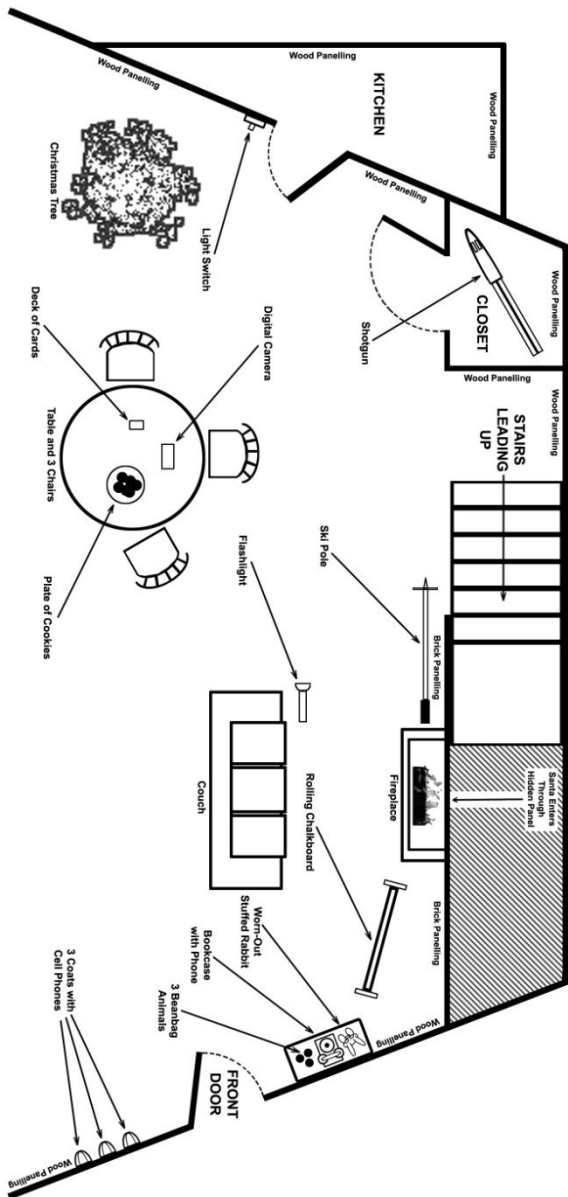
PERRY. What the hell are you talking about?

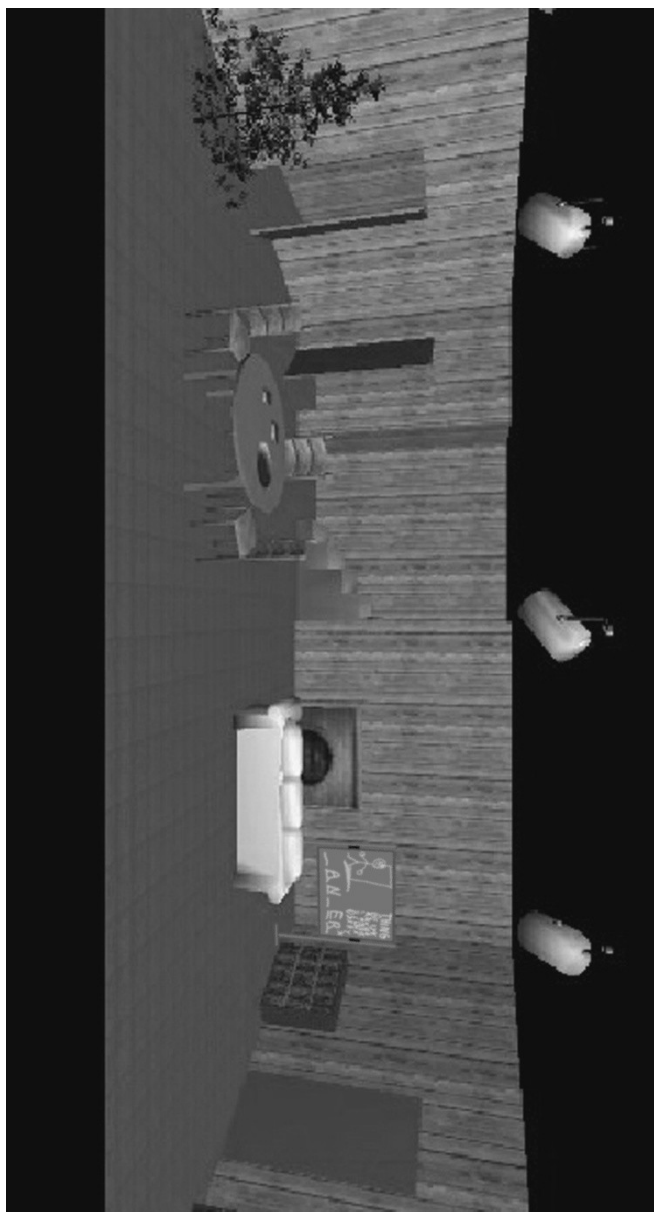
MAN IN THE RED SUIT. Exactly!

PERRY. Start making sense, would you?

MAN IN THE RED SUIT. You see, Perry, I wasn't always Santa. I took on that persona so that I could help children. The unfortunate and the forgotten. Aye, but here's the rub . . . the person I really am could never put smiles on the faces of children, nor be understood to leave gifts under trees on this sacred day. (*Leans forward.*) You want the truth, Perry? Then you need look no further. (*Proceeds to remove the Santa costume as the LIGHTS FLICKER then GO OUT.*)

END OF SCENE II





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