SANTA'S CLARA

a one-act play by

George Cameron Grant

from his collection of one Christmas acts & monologues

4 X'MAS

On a sweltering Christmas Eve outside of Port Authority, a broken Santa Claus encounters a hardened young woman who has stopped believing in miracles, and must guide her back through memory, grief, and lost innocence before they both disappear forever.

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SCENE: The shadows of PORT AUTHORITY. A RECYCLING MACHINE, words *REDEMPTION CENTER* printed across it, stands upstage right, GARBAGE CANS stuffed to overflow with trash and BOXES of old clothes stand downstage before it. A broken WOODEN BENCH sits upstage left.

TIME: Dusk, on an unnaturally warm CHRISTMAS EVE.

AT RISE: A STREET KID, wearing a way too big VARSITY JACKET, matching wool CAP, SHORTS, and COMBAT BOOTS, fishes through GARBAGE CAN, picking out a still-wrapped half sandwich, just as a MAN dressed in a SANTA OUTFIT enters stage left, bulging RED SACK slung over his shoulder. Sweat-stained SANTA CAP, faded SANTA PANTS rolled up over his knees, MAN wears unlaced, RED CONVERSE SNEAKERS, his equally faded, opened SANTA COAT revealing the soaked RED BANDANA tied around his neck above a dingy, yellowed T-SHIRT through which he sweats profusely. Draped around his neck are countless pairs of worn-out, laced together, mismatched SNEAKERS, as well as a pair of cracked and faded patent leather SANTA BOOTS looped over his wide, also cracked, once SHINY BELT...

MAN
Ho! Ho! Ho! Merry -

...he approaches the Kid...

MAN
Christmas. Hey kid. *KID!*

...looking up, the Kid waves him off, resuming the search through the can...

MAN
This is Santa Claus you're passin' by here kid - *the real deal.* Don't you wanna' tell me what you want for Christmas? Last chance. Poor kid, how the hell can anybody get the Christmas Spirit in 90 degree weather? It's unnatural, I tell ya'.

...he again approaches the Kid...

MAN
Whatta' ya' say little man? Tell old Santa what's on your Christmas list.

...the Kid turns and kicks the Man in the shin...

MAN
Ow!

...grabbing his leg, the Man hobbles around...

KID
Buzz off, creep!

...t-shirt in hand, the Kid takes off, but not before the Man grabs the wool cap, revealing the long, multi-colored tresses of a teenage GIRL...

MAN
Hey, you're a -

GIRL
Give that back!

...she yanks the hat from his hand...

MAN
What's a young girl like you doing -

GIRL
Don't even *think* it, perv!

...she takes off, quickly disappearing...

MAN
Think it, think what? Holy Christmas, what's the matter with every...(grabs his ankle)...ouch! Gee, it's not like I stink or any -

...he sniffs his armpits and winces...

MAN
Whoa, that *is* pretty bad, guess I could use a little freshening up.

...he moves downstage to an imaginary HOTEL CLERK...

MAN
Accommodations for one, my good man, and don't forget, I want that special single night Holiday rate - I'll be checking out first thing and - the name? You must be new here, name's Claus, S. Claus...(somewhat irked)...pardon me, there's no 'E' at the end of that!...Yes, that's it...Oh, why yes, thank you, I'd like that very much.

...he slowly removes sack from his shoulder, wincing in pain...

MAN
Does get a little heavy after a day like today.

...lowering sack to floor, he removes a half-filled pint of WHISKEY from his Coat...

MAN
A toast! To the orphaned memories of Father Christmas!... (takes a long pull)...Ahhh, that's soooo good.

...wiping his lips on his sleeve, he yawns, stretches, then carefully lowers himself, face first, onto the bench, where he quickly falls asleep and begins to snore. A WOMAN IN HER 20'S enters stage right, dressed from head to toe in black. A face with pierced nose and eyebrows, her shredded tank t-shirt and arm tattoos are mostly covered by long, straight black and purple hair. She wears WORN-OUT SNEAKERS and BLACK TIGHTS torn at both knees. Toting a STUFFED BACKPACK, she drags a filled PLASTIC BAG toward the MACHINE, jolting the Man out of his deep slumber...

MAN
What the? Who - who's there?...

...struggling off the bench to his feet, he clears his throat and brushes himself off...

MAN
Ho, ho, ho, Merry Christmas, Merry -

WOMAN
Great! Another drunken Santa Claus!

MAN
Your good will is overwhelming.

WOMAN
You want Goodwill, their dumpster's across the street. Bad will?...(rolling up her sleeves, she stomps toward him)... Take another step closer and I'll give you all you can handle.

MAN
Whoa! Back off there, little girl.

WOMAN
Little girl?

MAN
My intentions are completely honorable.

WOMAN
Yeah, right. The last “honorable” guy I met tied me to a bedpost all night and tossed me to the gutter in the morning.

MAN
That's horrible!

WOMAN
No, just the way it is. Most guys are about as hard to read as a stop sign, it's the ones who *pretend* they're something else, now *those* are the ones you have to worry about.

MAN
All this pessimism from such a little - *young lady* - now how about showin’ Santa some Christmas Spirit.

WOMAN
You mean like the kind I'm smelling on your breath?

MAN
Uh, um - I admit that with all the running around I do, sometimes a little "spirit-ual" motivation is required.

...he tries gaging whiskey level in BOTTLE...

MAN
Damn eyes, they're useless.

...he removes a pair of small, round WIRE-RIM GLASSES from his inside coat pocket, puts them on closely examines the bottle...

WOMAN
And what's with all the shoes, you some kinda' travelin' salesman or somethin’?

MAN
Salesman, no, traveling? Let's just say it helps to rotate the footwear. Never know when you’re going to pop a hole.

WOMAN
I didn't realize hiking was in the fake Santa handbook.

MAN
Fake? Such an unkind word - so judgemental. Now would you believe...

...looking up, he sees her and gasps, dropping BOTTLE...

MAN
Dear God!

...he frantically rubs his eyes beneath GLASSES...

WOMAN
What's wrong?

MAN
It can't be!

WOMAN
Hey mister, you OK? You're not gettin' a stroke or heart attack or nothin', are ya'?

MAN
Same eyes. Same mouth. And the mole - there's the mole.

...the Woman quickly covers the cheek he almost reaches...

WOMAN
Don’t touch me - and stop staring at me like that!

MAN
It's you, it really is you!

WOMAN
Me? Me who? And who are you?

MAN
All these years, all those shoes, and poof! I lift my head and there you are, standing right before these tired, bloodshot eyes.

WOMAN
Better keep that hat off in this heat, old man, your brain's starting to broil.

MAN
My brain's never been better.

WOMAN
Then tell me what's going on here.

MAN
I'm not so sure you're ready for the answer.

WOMAN
Try me.

...with a heavy sigh, he sits on the bench...

MAN
I'm Santa Claus.

WOMAN
Yeah, right.

...she returns to the garbage...

MAN
What I mean is, I'm *your* Santa Claus.

WOMAN
And I guess your sack's just chock full of wonderful toys and goodies just for me.

...he removes PLASTIC BOTTLE from SACK and holds it up...

MAN
I wish it were.

WOMAN
Sure you do.

...she fishes a bag of half-eaten burgers from the trash and begins devouring them...

MAN
You’re hungry.

WOMAN
Mind your own business.

...standing, he removes several bags of cellophaned TABLE CRACKERS from his coat pocket and offers them to her...

MAN
Here, take these.

WOMAN
Go away!

MAN
Please.

...she hesitates, turns, then quickly grabs crackers...

WOMAN
Thanks. Now why don't you get lost before I scream for the cops, alright?

MAN
I already am lost, dear girl - and so are you.

WOMAN
Me? Lost?

MAN
Until right now.

WOMAN
Really? Oh, I feel *much* better...(looks around)...sure picked a great place to find somebody.

MAN
Can't think of a better one - *findings* can happen anywhere.

WOMAN
Findings?

MAN
When a lost one's been found.

WOMAN
Lost ones, *findings*, why am I listening to this?

MAN
I know you think I'm crazy, but -

WOMAN
Think?

MAN
I found *all* my lost kids very quickly, but you, *you* were the toughest.

WOMAN
Me? One of *your* lost kids? Look, mister, you are *not* my father, my father left me a long time ago.

MAN
I know.

WOMAN
No you don't! You don't know *anything* about me, how could you?

...she begins frantically feeding bottles into MACHINE...

WOMAN
I'm tired, I'm hungry and I'm getting real angry, so why don't you just take your wino Fairy Tales and -

MAN
You weren't *always* like this.

WOMAN
Don't keep saying that! How would *you* know what I was like?

MAN
Because I remember one time when you were all bright eyes and a smile.

...turning toward him, she jabs an empty plastic bottle under his chin...

WOMAN
You don't remember anything about me because you've never been part of my life and you never will be part of my life - EVER! Why am I even talking to you?

...she resumes feeding machine...

WOMAN
All I want is my deposit so I can get a little "Christmas Spirit" of my own, a safe place for the night -

MAN
Anything you say *Dawn.*

DAWN
And I'm not wasting another second with some crazy, burnt out...(she turns to him)...what did you call me?

MAN
I said - Merry Christmas, Dawn.

DAWN
How do you know my name?

MAN
You told it to me.

DAWN
I never met you before in my life.

MAN
Sure you have, you just don't remember.

DAWN
That's crap, complete crap!

MAN
And what a beautiful little girl you were. Long, dark brown pigtails, cheeks full of freckles - here, see for yourself.

...reaching under SANTA COAT, he removes a crinkly, yellowed PHOTO...

DAWN
Give me that!

...she reaches for photo, but he pulls it back, retreats to the bench and sits...

MAN
You can look, but you can’t touch - not yet.

DAWN
Why not?

MAN
It’s the rules.

DAWN
Rules? What rules? You’re not making any...(connecting with the image)...hey, that's - that’s me - on Santa's lap in MACY's when I was...

...she studies photo closely, the Man, then photo...

DAWN
Holy - is that - is that really you?

MAN
Handsome devil, wasn't I?

DAWN
OK, so what if that is you, what are you doing *here* the day before Christmas?

...he pulls photo away...

MAN
I was fired.

DAWN

Fired?

...tucking photo inside his coat, he stands...

MAN

That's right, fired. Bounced, canned, Mister Ho-ho-ho given the old heave-ho! I ended thirty-two Thanksgiving Day parades - began thirty two Christmas Seasons - thirty two! Then at the end of parade number thirty-two, seven years ago, I was taking the freight elevator to the North Pole when I was intercepted by a security guard who escorted me to the office of some angry little man who informed me that my Clausial services would no longer be required that Christmas Season, or any other for that matter. Someone else would be sitting on my gold and red throne - to be precise, the nephew of the parent company's new CEO. Funny, isn't it, Santa getting fired by a parent company. But there it was, tossed to the gutter, just -

DAWN

(Just)like me.

MAN

Yes. Just like you.

DAWN

That sucks.

MAN

As a matter of fact, you're right, it did suck. It sucked so bad that I took the elevator to the top floor, climbed the stairs to the roof and flung myself, suit and all, onto the big red star at Seventh & 34th. It was, I'm happy to report, a direct hit.

DAWN

But you're here, how did you survive?

MAN

I didn't.

DAWN

You di - wait a second, are you trying to tell me you're -

MAN

Yep, as a doornail.

DAWN

Jeez, does that mean I'm -

MAN
No, Dawn, you're alive, a little lost maybe, but very much alive.

DAWN
Thank God.

MAN
Happy to hear it still matters.

DAWN
So does this make you some kind of Angel or Ghost or -

MAN
Let's say I'm just one lost soul reaching out to another. Kind of a "Lost Claus for Lost Causes."

DAWN
That what you think *I* am, a Lost Cause?

MAN
Look around you, Dawn, there are more of you out there now than ever before.

DAWN
Why are you doing this to me?

MAN
Are you happy?

DAWN
I survive.

MAN
How sad. So young to just "survive."

DAWN
At least I didn't kill myse...(looks away from him)...sorry, that was mean.

MAN
No, it’s the truth...(he holds up the PHOTO)...do you remember what you asked me for?

DAWN
No!

MAN
No, you don't remember, or no, you don't want to remember?

DAWN
I don't know - can I have that picture now, please?

MAN
Are you ready to go back, back to who you were *before* you were lost? Back to this picture?

DAWN
Why do I have to go anywhere? All I want to do is get a closer look at -

MAN
The rules?

DAWN
(Stomping her feet)
Fine!

...she suddenly grabs picture from his hand and bolts cross stage. Staring into the yellowed image for several seconds, her eyes glaze over, her legs wobble, then suddenly stiffen, as she scales the photo in his direction...

DAWN
This is stupid! You're just an old drunk in a disgusting, smelly Santa suit and I'm not listening to another...

MAN
Dawn?

...he picks photo up as she drops to her knees and covers her ears...

DAWN
...ridiculous word...

MAN
Dawn.

DAWN
...not...one...

MAN
Dawn!

DAWN
(Softening, almost childlike)
...yes?

MAN
Who am I, Dawn?

DAWN
Who are you?

MAN
That’s right, who am I?

...she slowly looks up at the now beaming Man...

DAWN
(Now like an 8-year-old)
Why, you’re Santa - who else would you be?

MAN
Come with me, Dawn.

...she accepts his extended hand, stands, and follows him to the bench, where he sits and motions for her to sit on his lap...

MAN
Sit, sit, come tell Santa what you’d like for Christmas.

...she sits on his lap...

DAWN
Please Santa, don’t bring me any toys, I don't want any dolls, and I really don't need any more tea sets.

MAN
What *do* you want, Dawn?

DAWN
Don’t you know?

MAN
Not unless you tell me.

DAWN
What I want - *all* that I want - is to be Clara in the Nutcracker, so I can dance for my Daddy and make him proud of me. Can you make that wish come true for me, Santa?

MAN
I'm sure your Daddy would be proud of you no matter what, Dawn, but if it's really *that* important to you -

DAWN
It is, Santa, it *really* is!

MAN
More than anything?

DAWN
More than anything in the whole wide world!

MAN
And have you been a good little girl, Dawn?

DAWN
Yes, Santa, very, *very* good.

MAN
Then so be it! You'll get your wish, my dear.

DAWN
Oh, thank you, Santa, thank you!

...she leaves Man's lap and runs down stage into a spotlight as he withdraws into shadows...

DAWN
Daddy! Daddy! Santa's giving me my wish, I'm going to be Clara...(her voice now dreamier and more trance-like)... really! I'm going to be Clara...I'm going to be...I'm going ...to my opening night...on this perfect day...standing... standing in my beautiful blue dress, tip of my nose barely touching the closed curtain...when will it open? Will it *ever* open? Oh God, everyone I love in the whole world is on the other side of that curtain - Auntie Gen, Uncle Jack, Grammy Violet, Grampa Walter and...(peeking through the imaginary curtain for a brief second)...Daddy. Oh, I love you so much, Daddy. I'm not even nervous. I want you to be proud of me. Oh, thank you, Santa, thank you so much for...(NUTCRACKER music begins)...listen, there it is, there's the music - the curtain's opening. It's time. *I'm ready!*

...lights go down as DAWN/CLARA begins her NUTCRACKER solo in spotlight...

MAN (O.S.)
Your performance is flawless. And as the music fades and the curtains close, incredible applause fills the theatre.

...Dawn walks downstage to await CURTAIN's reopening...

MAN
Curtains re-open! Smiling, cheering faces everywhere, and in the center of it all, at the foot of the stage before you, your Father reaches up and hands you *the most beautiful bouquet of Roses you've ever seen!*

...accepting a bouquet of ROSES from the shadows, she gracefully bows...

DAWN
I'm in heaven. The curtain closes and re-opens. Applause - so much applause. Applause so loud it almost sounds like thunder, maybe too much...thunder...the curtain closes one more time and -

...she looks out, squinting, as music fades...

DAWN
What was that? Thought I saw something. Something wrong - there's something wrong - WHAT'S WRONG? The thunder's gone. It's suddenly quiet - spooky quiet - deathly quiet. I feel sick - so sick - sinking feeling - no, don't do that, please don't do that. Keep it closed! PLEASE DON'T OPEN IT! DON'T OPEN THAT CURTAIN! DON'T OPEN IT! NOOOOO!

...she collapses to the ground and lies motionless. After several moments, she stirs and slowly stands, brushing herself off while still clutching the bouquet...

DAWN
Everyone tells me they never saw Daddy happier than from the moment he handed me those Roses until the second he fell to the floor.

...extending the ROSES, she gently lofts them into the DARKNESS...

DAWN
And as I tossed them into the hole that held him, I promised myself that I would never come back or look back - that I would never wish for anything *ever* again - that I would never dance again, dream again, and never believe in anything - or *anyone* - ever, ever, *ever* again, *especially* -

...lights up as she angrily turns to find herself standing before the Man, now the GREETING CARD SANTA of every child's dreams - perfectly dressed, snow white fluffy beard, and a brand new pair of laced together SPARKLING RED CONS draped about his neck. Flinging herself at him, she begins pounding on his chest. Unflinching, he calmly absorbs every blow, her fury eventually fading as, exhausted, she slides down his legs to the floor. First placing a comforting hand upon her head, he gently helps her to her feet, the pristine white gloves brushing away her tears...

SANTA
My journey is over
but yours just begins
The child that was lost
has been found once again
With pigtails and freckles
a quarter-moon grin
To find who you are
you must know where you've been

...removing the SPARKLING RED CONS from his neck, he drapes them around hers...

So slip on these sneaks
run as fast as you can
Make a wish, find a friend
build a house that will stand
But don't ever forget
every gem has its flaws
And one crack in the jewel
does not make a Lost Cause

...removing the old photo of them from beneath his red coat, he offers it to her. She takes it...

SANTA
Merry Christmas, Dawn.

DAWN
Merry Christmas...Santa.

...they embrace. NUTCRACKER finale begins as Santa guides her toward a waiting spotlight, then vanishes into the now darkened stage. A smiling Dawn grasps the Red Cons to her chest, then gracefully pirouettes forward, as lights fade into...

BLACKOUT