

THE CASE OF THE MISSING MEANING

by Ben Fry



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The Case of the Missing Meaning

A hilarious detective spoof for Christmas

by Ben Fry

CAST OF CHARACTERS

SAM HEART

A “Bogart-esque” detective

MISS LEE

Sam's secretary

CHRISTINA D'AMOUR (*da-moor*)

A beautiful client

CLERK

RICH WOMAN

SANTA CLAUS

ELF

GIRL

BOY

MILO SHOOTER

Sam's old partner

ANGELA

Milo's wife

KID #1

KID #2

GRANDMA

GRANDPA

CHOIR DIRECTOR

JOSEPH

The smoker

MARY
The prima donna

WISE MAN
With the scratchy beard

ANGEL
With the broken wings

SHEPHERD
Of the stock exchange

POOR WOMAN

CHRISTIAN

Extras may be shoppers in the department store scene.
A choir is also needed to sing Off-stage.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This play is easy to stage and versatile. The running time is about a half hour. Production of *The Case of the Missing Meaning* can be as simple or as complex as available resources allow. The following suggestions on the set, props, costumes, and optional doubling of parts will guide you through a basic design for the play.

Set

The following furniture will be needed: One desk, one office chair, two tables, one large comfortable chair, six folding chairs.

The following pieces will need to be constructed: Painted picture of window with wintry scene on wooden frame; traffic light painted on wooden box, set on tall wooden stand.

The action follows detective SAM HEART from his office, to a department store, to the home of his ex-partner MILO SHOOTER, to a church, to a street corner, and finally back to his office. These locales may all be represented in one simple set.

Upstage Center is SAM's office. It has a desk with a chair behind it. The desk is cluttered with papers and magazines, a telephone, and a photograph. Behind the desk is a window, looking out to a snowy scene in the city. At one side of the desk is a coat rack.

Upstage Right is a table with clothes piled on it for a department store counter. Left of the table is a large chair where Santa Claus will sit.

Upstage Left is MILO SHOOTER's home, with a dining room table and six chairs. The table has a tablecloth, dishes, and food.

Downstage Left is a traffic light. Downstage Right or Downstage Center is where the church scene may take place. There are no set pieces required.

See staging diagram on the following page.

ELF: Green shirt, green tights, green hat in same style as Santa's, green cloth shoes with pointy toes.

GIRL: Pink dress.

BOY: T-shirt, blue jeans.

MILO SHOOTER: Long-sleeved dress shirt, dress slacks.

ANGELA: Dress.

KID #1: T-shirt, blue jeans.

KID #2: Dress.

GRANDMA: Dress.

GRANDPA: Dress shirt, dress slacks, white beard.

CHOIR DIRECTOR: Choir robe.

JOSEPH: Robe, brown beard.

MARY: Robe with hood.

WISE MAN: Robe, white cotton beard.

ANGEL: White robe, broken wings.

SHEPHERD: Robe, staff, wristwatch.

POOR WOMAN: Raggedy dress.

CHRISTIAN: Dark suit, dark overcoat.

Doubling the Parts (Optional)

Since the play only contains one character who appears throughout the play (SAM HEART) and one other character who appears at the beginning and end of the play (CHRISTINA D'AMOUR), players may perform multiple parts. The play can be performed with a full cast of twenty-three players or adapted to a smaller group with as few as twelve players.

To adapt the play to an ensemble cast of twelve, each player will need to double a part with the exception of the actor playing SAM HEART. The list on the following page suggests which characters should be doubled, the approximate amount of time between appearances on stage of the different characters, and what is involved in changing costumes. For parts where the entire costume must be changed, players are allowed at least six to seven minutes. In instances where a player must appear on stage in less than three minutes after his or her last appearance, he or she is required only to put on or take off a robe or another piece of clothing.

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Ensemble Cast of Twelve (6 M, 6 F)

1. SAM HEART
2. MISS LEE / ANGELA: (13 minutes) costume change.
3. CHRISTINA D'AMOUR / MARY: (14 minutes / 3 minutes) robe over D'AMOUR costume for Nativity scene; robe off for second appearance of D'AMOUR.
4. CLERK / CHOIR DIRECTOR: (11 minutes) robe over CLERK's costume for Nativity scene.
5. RICH WOMAN / GRANDMA: (6 minutes) costume change.
6. SANTA CLAUS/JOSEPH: (7 minutes) costume change,
7. ELF / SHEPHERD: (6 minutes) costume change.
8. BOY / KID #1: (4 minutes) no costume change necessary.
9. GIRL / KID #2: (4 minutes) no costume change necessary.
10. MILO SHOOTER / CHRISTIAN: (3 minutes) sports coat and overcoat over MILO's costume for street scene.
11. ANGEL / POOR WOMAN: (2 minutes) POOR WOMAN's costume beneath robe, robe removed for street scene.
12. GRANDPA / WISE MAN: (1 minute) robe over GRANDPA's costume for Nativity scene.

1 *(Time: A few days before Christmas. At Rise: Detective SAM*
 2 *HEART enters Stage Left and goes to his office. Throughout the*
 3 *play, SAM speaks directly to the audience.)*

4 **SAM HEART:** *(To the audience)* It was 8:02 a.m. when I walked
 5 into my dreary office on the east side of town. My
 6 secretary, Miss Lee, said I had no messages. It was the
 7 slow time of the year for guys in my racket. *(Walking*
 8 *behind desk and pointing out window)* Cold outside, people
 9 bundled up, everyone staying out of trouble. You see,
 10 that's my business. Trouble. My name's Sam Heart. I'm
 11 a detective. *(SAM removes his overcoat and sits in the chair*
 12 *behind the desk, picks up a magazine, puts his feet on the desk*
 13 *and talks to himself while thumbing through the pages.)*

14 I might as well take a look at the latest issue of *True*
 15 *Detective* magazine. Um, it's the Christmas issue.
 16 *(Stopping to look at a page)* "One Hundred and One Ways
 17 to Make Christmas Ornaments out of Concealed
 18 Weapons." *(Thumbs to next page.)* "A Guide to Shadowing
 19 Reindeer in the Snow." *(Thumbs to next page.)* "How to
 20 Disguise Yourself As a Christmas Tree." *(Rips page and*
 21 *puts in jacket.)* Better keep that one. Might come in
 22 handy. *(SAM's secretary, MISS LEE, enters Stage Left. She*
 23 *carries a steno pad. SAM puts down magazine and stands.)*

24 **MISS LEE:** Mr. Heart, there's a woman here demanding to
 25 see you.

26 **SAM HEART:** It's not my mother, is it?

27 **MISS LEE:** *(Sarcastically)* No, this is not your mother.

28 **SAM HEART:** Good. The old lady's been trying to get me to
 29 shovel her sidewalk since last winter. *(CHRISTINA*
 30 *D'AMOUR enters Stage Left. She is a gorgeous woman in a*
 31 *striking outfit. She floats Downstage Right and makes a stance,*
 32 *facing away from SAM and MISS LEE and looking over the*
 33 *audience. MISS LEE shakes her head in disapproval and exits*
 34 *Stage Left. SAM steps from behind the desk and moves*
 35 *Downstage as CHRISTINA pulls a mirror from her purse and*
 36 *applies some lipstick. SAM speaks to the audience.)* There she
 37 was. The most beautiful dame I'd ever seen. This was no
 38 "vision of sugar plums dancing in my head." No sireeee.

1 This was the real McCoy. *(To CHRISTINA)* Can I help
2 you, Miss McCoy? I mean. Miss Whatever-Your-Name-
3 Is?

4 CHRISTINA D'AMOUR: *(Sleekly turning to face SAM)* Are you
5 Sam Heart, the detective?

6 SAM HEART: That's what it says on the front door,
7 sweetheart. Who wants to know?

8 CHRISTINA D'AMOUR: I'm not your "sweetheart," and my
9 name is not "McCoy." It's Christina D'Amour.

10 SAM HEART: *(Sitting on front of his desk and crossing his arms)*
11 D'Amour, huh? Well, D'mour, D'merrier, that's what I
12 say.

13 CHRISTINA D'AMOUR: Please, Mr. Heart, this is not a
14 laughing matter.

15 SAM HEART: *(Looking at audience and shrugging his shoulders)* I
16 don't see anybody laughing.

17 CHRISTINA D'AMOUR: *(Walking toward SAM)* I read your ad
18 in the yellow pages. It says you specialize in finding
19 missing people and objects.

20 SAM HEART: That's true. Most of my clients are "losers."
21 What are you looking for, sweetheart — I mean, Miss
22 D'Amour?

23 CHRISTINA D'AMOUR: I need your help, Mr. Heart. I've got
24 to find Christmas.

25 SAM HEART: *(Pulling out a note pad and pen)* Chris Muss, huh?
26 How do you spell that last name? M-U-S-S?

27 CHRISTINA D'AMOUR: No. Mr. Heart, not Chris Muss.
28 Christmas. The holiday.

29 SAM HEART: *(Throwing note pad on desk)* Ah, you mean jingle
30 bells and tannenbaum and ho-ho-ho?

31 CHRISTINA D'AMOUR; Exactly, Mr. Heart. I'm looking for
32 Christmas.

33 SAM HEART: *(Walking toward window)* Listen, sweetheart, I
34 mean, Miss D'Amour. Take a look. *(Points out the window.)*
35 Decorations. Snow. A Santa Claus on every corner. Isn't
36 that Christmas out there?

37 CHRISTINA D'AMOUR: You don't understand, Mr. Heart.
38 *(Walking Downstage Right and looking over audience)*

1 Everyone I meet tells me the real meaning of Christmas
2 is lost. It has disappeared. I've got to find it, Mr. Heart.
3 (*Turning toward SAM*) It's the meaning of Christmas I'm
4 looking for.

5 SAM HEART: The meaning, huh? Sounds like you need a
6 dictionary instead of a detective.

7 CHRISTINA D'AMOUR: (*Walking toward SAM*) You can't find
8 the real meaning of Christmas in a dictionary, Mr.
9 Heart. (*Pointing out window*) It is out there somewhere,
10 but it's hard to find. Please help me, Mr. Heart. I'm
11 willing to pay whatever it takes. (*Opening purse and*
12 *pulling out money*) I have plenty of money.

13 SAM HEART: (*Walking toward CHRISTINA*) Now you're
14 speaking my language, sweetheart. I get fifty dollars a
15 day plus expenses. And I need three days as a deposit.
16 (*CHRISTINA counts the money and hands it to SAM.*)
17 Y'know, Miss D'Amour, December twenty-fifth is only a
18 few days away. If I'm going to find the meaning of
19 Christmas, I've got to hurry.

20 CHRISTINA D'AMOUR: I know it won't be easy, Mr. Heart,
21 but I'm sure you can do it. You've got the courage.
22 You've got the brains. You've got the ... the ...

23 SAM HEART: (*Proudly*) The heart?

24 CHRISTINA D'AMOUR: Actually, I was thinking you had the
25 time. Your secretary said work had been kind of slow.

26 SAM HEART: All right, Miss D'Amour, I'll take your case. But
27 I'm not making any promises. Even if the meaning of
28 Christmas is still around, it may be hard to find.

29 CHRISTINA D'AMOUR: I know you'll do your best, Mr.
30 Heart. (*Pulling a piece of paper from her purse and handing it*
31 *to SAM*) Oh, and here's something else you'll need.
32 (*Hands SAM the slip of paper.*)

33 SAM HEART: What is this?

34 CHRISTINA D'AMOUR: (*Walking Stage Left*) Oh, it's my
35 Christmas gift list. I thought as long as you'll be out, you
36 might as well pick up a few things for me. I just hate
37 Christmas shopping. Traffic. Crowds. Oooo.
38 (*CHRISTINA shakes with a chill and exits Stage Left.*)

SAM HEART: *(To audience)* So there I was. A hundred and fifty bucks, a list of names and gifts, and an impossible task: to find the meaning of Christmas. And I thought that falcon thing was tough. *(As SAM puts on his overcoat, puts the money in his pockets and goes to his desk to pick up his note pad and pen, the CLERK and the RICH WOMAN enter Stage Right. CLERK stands on the right side of the department store counter. RICH WOMAN stands on the left side. RICH WOMAN is holding a man's shirt in her hands. As SAM speaks to the audience, CLERK and RICH WOMAN pantomime an argument. A few SHOPPERS begin walking back and forth across the stage. SAM walks Downstage Left.)*

Since I didn't know where to start my search for the meaning of Christmas, I decided to work on Miss D'Amour's shopping list first. She wanted to purchase a tie for her father, so I decided to go to a nearby department store. *(Gesturing around him)* Crowds of folks were walking aimlessly up and down the aisles, searching for that perfect gift. Maybe this was the true meaning of Christmas. *(SHOPPERS stop crossing stage as SAM steps up to the counter behind RICH WOMAN. CLERK and RICH WOMAN's argument becomes audible.)*

CLERK: I'm sorry, ma'am, but the price you see is the price you'll have to pay.

SAM HEART: *(To CLERK)* Listen, babe. I'm looking for a tie.

CLERK: Sir, you'll have to wait your turn. *(Pointing to RICH WOMAN)* There are people ahead of you.

RICH WOMAN: *(Turning toward SAM)* Yes, young man, move to the back of the line. *(To CLERK)* Now listen here, young lady. Your store advertised men's shirts at thirty to forty percent off. This is a man's shirt, and you're trying to tell me it's not thirty to forty percent off.

CLERK: No, ma'am. Those shirts are not on sale. *(Pointing behind RICH WOMAN and SAM)* The shirts on the back row over there are on sale. These are not on sale.

SAM HEART: Listen, sweetheart, all I want is a simple tie.

CLERK: *(To SAM)* I thought I told you to wait your turn.

RICH WOMAN: *(Looking at SAM)* The nerve, the audacity of

- 1 some people. (*To CLERK*) Now, as I was saying, these
2 shirts must be on sale. You advertised that your shirts
3 are on sale, and this is a shirt, and it must be on sale.
- 4 CLERK: But ma'am, it's not on sale. The shirts on the back
5 row are on sale. These shirts are not on sale!
- 6 RICH WOMAN: But I don't want any of the shirts on the back
7 row. I want this shirt.
- 8 CLERK: Then you'll have to pay full price!
- 9 RICH WOMAN: Absurd!
- 10 SAM HEART: (*To RICH WOMAN*) Listen, old girl. How much
11 would you save if that shirt there was on sale?
- 12 RICH WOMAN: (*Turning toward SAM*) Oh, nine, ten dollars.
- 13 SAM HEART: (*Pulling out cash and starting to count*) I tell you
14 what. I'll give you ten bucks if you'll just buy the shirt
15 and get out of my way.
- 16 RICH WOMAN: I've never been so insulted in my life. I'm one
17 of the richest people in this city.
- 18 SAM HEART: Then what are you complaining about? Buy
19 the shirt!
- 20 RICH WOMAN: My good man, I did not get to be one of the
21 richest people in this city by throwing away my money
22 on overpriced shirts. If it's not on sale, I don't want it.
23 (*RICH WOMAN tosses shirt onto counter and exits Stage Left.*)
- 24 CLERK: (*Grabbing shirt*) Thanks a lot, mister. You just blew a
25 sale for me. (*CLERK puts up a sign that says "ON BREAK"*
26 *and exits Stage Right.*)
- 27 SAM HEART: Hey, sister, come back here. What about my
28 tie? (*To AUDIENCE*) Well, that's certainly not the
29 meaning of Christmas. Next time I want a necktie, I'll
30 just beat up a Boy Scout.
- 31 SANTA CLAUS: (*Off-stage*) Ho-ho-ho! Merry Christmas!
- 32 SAM HEART: It sounds like old Kris Kringle is visiting this
33 enclave of capitalism. (*SANTA CLAUS enters Stage Right,*
34 *followed by an ELF, a little GIRL, and a little BOY. SANTA*
35 *carries a red bag full of "goodies."*)
- 36 SANTA CLAUS: (*Walking Downstage and facing the audience*) Ho-
37 ho-ho! Merry Christmas! (*SANTA walks to his chair, slings*
38 *his bag over the back of the chair and sits down. ELF stands on*

1 *his right.)*

2 **BOY and GIRL:** (*Jumping up and down in front of SANTA and*
3 *shouting*) **Santa! Santa! Santa!**

4 **SANTA:** (*Motioning BOY and GIRL to move to the left*) **Now,**
5 **children, line up so old Santa Claus can get his**
6 **bearings.** (*BOY and GIRL stop jumping and shouting and*
7 *line up to the left of SANTA. SANTA speaks to ELF, softly in*
8 *gruff manner.*) **How long is it before my next break?**

9 **ELF:** (*In a whiny, mean voice*) **You just got here, you lazy old**
10 **geezer!**

11 **SANTA CLAUS:** (*Shaking his fist*) **Why, Santa Claus ought to**
12 **punch your Christmas lights out, you smart-mouthed**
13 **little munchkin.**

14 **ELF:** (*Jumping back*) **I'm not a munchkin. I'm an elf, and proud**
15 **of it.**

16 **BOY and GIRL:** (*Jumping up and down and chanting again*)
17 **Santa! Santa! Santa!**

18 **SANTA CLAUS:** (*Gruffly, to BOY and GIRL*) **Oh, shut up!** (*BOY*
19 *and GIRL stop and look at SANTA, bewildered. SANTA turns*
20 *his charm back on.*) **I mean — quiet down, children. You**
21 **wouldn't want Santa to put you on his naughty list,**
22 **would you? Now, line up, like I told you, or Santa's**
23 **heading back to the North Pole where it's safe.** (*GIRL*
24 *gets in front, BOY slides behind her. SAM looks at the*
25 *audience, shrugs, and steps to the end of the line.*) **OK, little**
26 **girl, come sit on Santa's lap and tell me what you want.**

27 **GIRL:** (*Sitting on SANTA's lap*) **I want a laptop computer, a**
28 **DVD player, my own cell phone, a genuine imitation**
29 **mink fur stole, and a — what was that last thing? Oh,**
30 **yes, a doll.**

31 **SANTA CLAUS:** **Well, dear, I think your list is a little long.**
32 **I'm not sure Santa can get all that in his sleigh.**

33 **GIRL:** **Oh, that's OK. This is just a formality. My folks already**
34 **bought all this stuff for me anyway. It's hidden in the**
35 **attic, so don't bother coming by this year. I won't have**
36 **to put out those stale old cookies and milk.** (*GIRL hops*
37 *off SANTA'S lap and scurries Off-stage Right while SANTA*
38 *grunts and raises his hand in a threatening mariner.*)

- 1 **SANTA CLAUS:** OK, OK, who's next?
- 2 **BOY:** (*Hopping roughly on SANTA's lap*) How's it going, Santa?
- 3 **SANTA CLAUS:** (*Physically aching from the BOY's weight but*
 4 *trying to hide it*) Oh, just fine. What can I get you, son?
- 5 **BOY:** Let's see. I want a He-man, a Transformer, a Skeletor,
 6 a Laser Pistol, a Slime-a-Nator and a Stealth Bomber.
- 7 **SANTA CLAUS:** I don't suppose you want me to throw in a
 8 nuclear disarmament treaty?
- 9 **BOY:** Is that a new Nintendo game?
- 10 **SANTA CLAUS:** (*Pulling a lollipop from his pocket and handing it*
 11 *to BOY*) Here. Take a lollipop and get out of here.
 12 (*SANTA shoves BOY off his lap. BOY hits ground and looks up*
 13 *at SANTA.*)
- 14 **BOY:** (*Getting up and brushing himself off*) Just wait till I get my
 15 Junior-Size Super Commando Uzi. I'll show you. (*BOY*
 16 *points hands at SANTA and makes machine gun sound.*
 17 *SANTA grunts and puts up his fists. BOY runs Off-stage*
 18 *Right.*)
- 19 **SANTA CLAUS:** (*To himself*) They get worse every year.
 20 (*Looking at SAM*) You're awfully big to be visiting Santa.
 21 I hope you don't expect to sit on my lap.
- 22 **SAM HEART:** No, Mr. Claus. The name's Heart. Sam Heart.
 23 I'm a detective. I want to ask you a few questions.
- 24 **SANTA CLAUS:** (*Worriedly pointing his finger*) Now listen, I
 25 haven't bounced any checks since last summer. Money
 26 gets a little tight around that time of year, y'know.
- 27 **SAM HEART:** This is not a personal question, Mr. Claus. I
 28 need an opinion.
- 29 **SANTA CLAUS:** Opinion, huh? My time ain't free, buddy.
 30 (*SANTA looks the opposite way and holds out his palm toward*
 31 *SAM.*)
- 32 **SAM HEART:** So, even jolly old St. Nick's on the take, huh?
- 33 **SANTA CLAUS:** Gotta feed those reindeer.
- 34 **SAM HEART:** (*Pulling out cash and handing it to SANTA*) OK,
 35 here's a ten spot. That ought to buy you some holly and
 36 mistletoe. Now, here's my question. What's the meaning
 37 of Christmas?
- 38 **SANTA CLAUS:** (*Turning toward SAM*) The meaning of

1 **Christmas, huh?** (*Standing up and stroking his beard*) **Well,**
 2 **I'd say the meaning of Christmas is selfish, conceited**
 3 **kids who have more junk than they'll ever use and want**
 4 **more.** (*Scratching his cheeks*) **I'd say it's a lousy part-time**
 5 **job and an itchy cotton beard.** (*Looking at ELF*) **I'd say it's**
 6 **ungrateful midgets who want to stick it to you any way**
 7 **they can. But the real meaning of Christmas?** (*Holding*
 8 *up the money*) **It's right here.** (*Looking at watch*) **I think it's**
 9 **time for another break.** (*Counting money as he crosses Stage*
 10 *Right*) **This should buy me plenty of, uh, eggnog.** (*Turning*
 11 *to SAM*) **Santa's got to do something to keep warm.**
 12 (*SANTA exits Stage Right. ELF hops in SANTA's chair.*)

13 **SAM HEART: Looks like that Santa's ho-ho-ho is gone, gone,**
 14 **gone.**

15 **ELF: Mr. Heart, you want some advice?**

16 **SAM HEART: Sure, shorty.**

17 **ELF: You'll never find the meaning of Christmas in a**
 18 **department store. You've got to go where they really**
 19 **know how to celebrate Christmas. To someone's home.**
 20 **To a family.**

21 **SAM HEART: A family, huh? Good advice.** (*Stepping toward*
 22 *audience and thinking out loud*) **I'll go see my old partner**
 23 **Milo. He gets together with his entire family every**
 24 **Christmas. That's where I'll find the meaning.** (*To ELF*)
 25 **Thanks a lot. How can I ever repay you?**

26 **ELF:** (*Looking the opposite way and holding his palm out toward*
 27 *SAM*) **I'm sure you'll think of something.** (*SAM hands ELF*
 28 *money. ELF exits Stage Right, laughing.*)

29 **SAM HEART:** (*To audience*) **With the kind of money I've**
 30 **invested in the North Pole today, I should have**
 31 **controlling interest in Santa's toy shop.** (*SAM counts his*
 32 *money and looks at the shopping list as MILO SHOOTER, his*
 33 *wife ANGELA, KID #1, KID #2, GRANDMA and GRANDPA*
 34 *enter Stage Left and take their places at the dining room table.*
 35 *MILO pantomimes eating. ANGELA and GRANDMA*
 36 *pantomime an argument. KID #1 and KID #2 pantomime a*
 37 *fight. GRANDPA is sitting with his head on the table, napping.*
 38 *SAM puts the money and shopping list in his pocket.*)

1 It was right around noon when I arrived at the home
2 of my old partner, Milo Shooter. He'd given up the
3 detective game to go into real estate. Said that was
4 where the real danger was. (*Looking around the stage as if*
5 *examining outside of home*) After scoping out the beat-up
6 old house he'd bought for himself, I had to agree. (*SAM*
7 *walks toward the dining room table, stops, and knocks in the*
8 *air with his fist while stomping his foot on stage floor. KID #1*
9 *gets up from the the table and pantomimes opening a door.*)

10 **KID #1:** Yeah, what d'you want?

11 **SAM HEART:** I'm here to see your dad, Milo Shooter.

12 **KID #1:** My dad gave at the office. (*KID #1 starts to slam the*
13 *door. SAM puts his hand against the imaginary door to stop it.*)

14 **SAM HEART:** Hold on there, tyke. I'm not trying to save the
15 whales. I just need a few minutes with your pop. Want
16 to ask him about the meaning of Christmas.

17 **KID #1:** (*Toward the table*) Daddy, Daddy, there's a religious
18 nut at the door!

19 **MILO SHOOTER:** (*Getting up from table and marching toward*
20 *door with a turkey leg in his hand*) So who's bothering me
21 in the middle of my meal? (*Recognizing SAM*) Sam Heart?
22 What in the world are you doing here?

23 **KID #1:** (*To MILO, motioning with his fists in the air*) You want
24 me to give him the ol' one-two punch, Dad?

25 **MILO SHOOTER:** (*Pushing KID #1 toward, the table*) Go finish
26 your broccoli. (*To SAM*) Come on in, Sam. Take a load
27 off. (*SAM crosses through imaginary door and looks back at*
28 *MILO. MILO pantomimes closing the door.*)

29 **SAM HEART:** Actually, this is not a social visit, Milo. Got
30 some business I want to talk over with you.

31 **MILO SHOOTER:** Ahhhh, tracking down a crazed murderer,
32 huh? Looking for some lost treasure? Maybe a little
33 undercover work?

34 **SAM HEART:** Actually, I'm looking for the meaning of
35 Christmas.

36 **MILO SHOOTER:** Hmmmm, business kind of slow, huh? Well,
37 come on in. Meet the family. (*MILO leads SAM to table.*
38 *KID #1 and KID #2 continue fighting, GRANDMA and*

1 ANGELA's argument becomes audible. GRANDPA is softly
2 snoring.)

3 GRANDMA: You always make your gravy too thin. You
4 should listen to what I tell you.

5 ANGELA: Mother, I wish you would just leave me alone.

6 GRANDMA: Is that any way to talk to your mother?

7 MILO SHOOTER: *(To ANGELA, clearing throat)* Dear. Angela,
8 dear. We have company.

9 ANGELA: *(To MILO, standing up)* Now what have you done?
10 Invited one of your lousy friends from the office
11 without telling me? You know how to ruin a perfectly
12 good holiday.

13 MILO SHOOTER: Dear, this is my old partner, Sam Heart,
14 from the detective agency.

15 ANGELA: So your friends at the office aren't good enough?
16 You have to bring home some of the rabble you used to
17 run around with. *(To KID #1 and KID #2)* And would you
18 two stop that fighting? Stop that fighting, or you'll have
19 to leave the table without finishing your dinner. *(KID #1*
20 *and KID #2 stop fighting, look at their mother, look at their*
21 *plates, look at each other and continue fighting. ANGELA*
22 *shakes head in disgust.)*

23 GRANDMA: *(To GRANDPA)* Melvin, Melvin, wake up. We have
24 a guest. *(GRANDMA pushes on GRANDPA's arm and it slides*
25 *off the table, startling him awake.)*

26 GRANDPA: Break out the life rafts. We're under attack!

27 ANGELA: So, Milo, are you going to ask him to sit down or do
28 we have to wait until he leaves to finish our meal?

29 SAM HEART: Actually, ma'am, if I might interrupt. I'm only
30 looking for one thing. I'm looking for the meaning of
31 Christmas.

32 ANGELA: The meaning of Christmas? Well, you've come to
33 the wrong place. All Christmas means to us is squeezing
34 two dozen relatives we see once a year into a three-
35 bedroom, one-and-a-half-bath home. What does
36 Christmas mean? It means going into hock buying
37 presents for people you don't even like. Come back the
38 day after Christmas, Mr. Heart, and you'll see what the

1 holidays mean to us. It's just a big mess we spend the
 2 rest of the year trying to clean up. *(SAM and MILO turn*
 3 *and walk back to the door. ANGELA sits down and the family*
 4 *returns to its silent squabbling.)*

5 **SAM HEART:** *(To audience)* Well, it looks like I won't find the
 6 meaning of Christmas at that family dinner table.

7 **MILO SHOOTER:** *(Putting his hand on SAM's shoulder)* Sam, do
 8 you really want to know where to find the meaning of
 9 Christmas?

10 **SAM HEART:** That's what they're paying me for, Milo.

11 **MILO SHOOTER:** *(Pulling a TV remote control from his pocket)*
 12 Right here.

13 **SAM HEART:** A remote control?

14 **MILO SHOOTER:** Noooo. Look. *(MILO points remote control*
 15 *toward the audience and presses a button. SAM and MILO look*
 16 *over the audience.)*

17 **MILO SHOOTER:** Football. Tons and tons of football on
 18 every channel. *(Clicking the remote control)* Every year
 19 between Christmas and New Year's! Football! Football!
 20 Football! It's the best time of year.

21 **SAM HEART:** Football, huh? Well, I don't think that would
 22 satisfy my client. I don't even know if she likes football.

23 **MILO SHOOTER:** *(Turning toward SAM)* That's un-American!

24 **SAM HEART:** *(Turning toward MILO)* I guess I'd better go.

25 **MILO SHOOTER:** Hey, I've got one more idea, Sam. Lots of
 26 people seem to spend time in church around Christmas.
 27 Maybe you can find some meaning there.

28 **SAM HEART:** Church, huh? Well, it's a slim hunch, but I'll
 29 give it a try.

30 **MILO SHOOTER:** *(Motioning toward audience with remote*
 31 *control)* Sure you don't want to stick around for the
 32 second half?

33 **SAM HEART:** I'll catch the highlights on the evening news.
 34 *(SAM walks Stage Right as MILO and his family exit Stage*
 35 *Left. SAM speaks to the audience.)* No luck at department
 36 stores, or with Santa Claus, or in the family home. What
 37 did I have to lose by heading to the nearest place of
 38 worship? *(Looking around stage as if looking around inside*



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