

THE PLOT TO OVERTHROW CHRISTMAS

By Norman Corwin

Originally Broadcast Sunday, December 25, 1938

BACKGROUND

Norman Corwin wrote, produced and directed for several series, but a good portion of his prolific radio work was broadcast as what we would today call "specials." They were single programs put on as the occasion or the mood demanded. Usually they would pre-empt a regularly scheduled program.

Corwin was so highly regarded by CBS that they gave him virtual carte-blanche. Whenever he said he had a new program ready, CBS simply asked when he wanted to do it.

Among his most memorable programs were "We Hold These Truths", aired at the beginning of World War II, and "On A Note of Triumph", which celebrated V-E day in May, 1945.

This script was produced as a novelty item for a series called The Columbia Workshop. Although it pre-dates Dr. Seuss by many years, there certainly is a marked similarity of style.

Haman, one of the demented souls in this story, is a character from the book of Esther in the Old Testament. He was an advisor to the King. He plotted to destroy all the Jews, but most especially a man named Mordecai. He had built a gallows 50 cubits high (roughly 80-85 feet). But when his treachery was uncovered by the King, he had Haman hung from his own gallows. "Hung high as Haman", the old saying goes.

Here are Norman Corwin's own original notes on this production.

"This script when first produced ran twenty-six minutes thirty seconds, and I filled in the time required to make it 29:30 by trotting to the mike to thank the cast and wish our Christmas Day listeners well.

That kind of acknowledgment by an author is something I think should never be done. The extent of its bad taste can be appreciated only when you imagine a playwright coming on stage for a bow at the end of each performance of his play-or a closeup of the writer of the screenplay at the end of a motion picture.

The same applies to actors who, like authors, return to the mike breathless with exhaustion and say with a studied simplicity, 'Ladies and gentlemen..I hope you liked our little offering,' and so on. I believe that an actor should act and writer should write and never the twain should compete with Major Bowes.

It was unnecessary for me to go on the air when this play was repeated two years after its first airing. The pace was more leisurely. Mephisto and Santa both took plenty of time driving their points home, and accordingly the script timed 29:15 both in dress rehearsal and on the

air. It was simple to fill the remaining 15 seconds with a slow fade of Nero's fiddling.

CAST

It is always important to cast with an ear to contrasting color and range of voices, but in this script especially one must take care to keep the characters distinct.

Sotto Voce's speeches must have a low, confidential quality. In a comic way he bears the same relation to the action as the Narrator in 'They Fly Through the Air.' Nero should be biting, complaining, brittle; the Courier can betray the boredom of routine message-bearing. Mephisto may be interpreted in a number of ways, as demonstrated by the fact that Will Geer first played him as a 'veteran demon,' profoundly cynical, yet always the master parliamentarian. Martin Gabel, on the other hand, made him suave, sophisticated, insinuating, lecherous, domineering. He railed at his disciples, taunted them, scolded them.

Haman might be cast as a whining, shrill, unpleasant voice in contrast to Ivan's basso profundo. The latter sounds funny in a Russian accent if the actor can manage it. Legree, of course, has a Southern accent; and Lucretia Borgia should be hard as granite.

Santa's main problem is to sound not too young or too old. All radio Santas should be about forty years old. The range lies between voices like House Jameson's and Ray Collin's, with Orson Welles in between.

ACTING

Couplets are easier to read than free verse, but sometimes actors will overstress rhythm in their anxiety to give adequate values to rhymes. In the case of this script they cannot go far afield, since even a corny emphasis might be amusing wherever the rhymes themselves taste of corn. In some places when I have written double and triple rhymes such as "radio" with "hey-di-ho," 'sell ye these' with 'tell me please,' and 'trifle I'd like for you to see' with 'stifle your curiosity,' it will heighten the fun to give full values. Unless these places are pointed out by the director, the cast is likely to hurry over them.

SOUND

This is a simple script save for two complicated effects, representing the descent and ascent to and from Hell. In the first, as the directions indicate, it is necessary to sound great, rolling claps of thunder-quite as loud as the engineer can stand. He will complain as usual that it's too loud and that the station will be knocked off the air, and so on; but pay no attention to him. Over the second thunder clap, bring in the oscillator, but not with too much energy. Then lower the pitch of the oscillator slowly-it's a long way to Hell, and you don't get there in a flash. As soon as the violin begins to fade on physically, fade the oscillator mechanically, making the blend as smooth and imperceptible as possible.

As for the ascent, this is a tough one and may require three hands. It is made by starting the oscillator at a low growl and simultaneously beginning a recorded machine effect at low speed. Then raise the pitch

of the oscillator in direct proportion to the speed of the machine, and if possible add the wind to the general group acceleration. The volume should rise throughout, until the engineer's volume indicator approaches peak. Then come through with a great crash effect—as though Nero, in his express elevator, were smashing through the crust of the earth as the point predicted by Mephisto: Basel, Switzerland.

REHEARSAL ROUTINE

Set sound first, or else there will be a bad tangle with the cast. Make your violinist give you as much free wheeling in the way of a cadenza as he can manage, and put him through the paces with the oscillator three or four times to make sure he gets the top pitch—which incidentally should be set on the oscillator at a fixed frequency. Encourage vociferousness in your cast's background reaction at the general meeting, and get them to sound scrappy and fanatic."

CAST

Announcer
Sotto Voce
Messenger
Nero
Mephisto
Haman
Ivan, the Terrible
Caligula
Simon Legree
Lucretia Borgia
Stranger 1
Stranger 2
Stranger 3
Stranger 4
Santa Claus
Also needed is a violin player

The Plot to Overthrow Christmas
by Norman Corwin
MUSIC: One finger version of Jingle Bells, interrupted by...

SFX: Loud thunder

Announcer: The Columbia Workshop presents: The Plot to Overthrow Christmas, written and directed by Norman Corwin.

SFX: Cymbal crash

Announcer: Did you hear about the plot to overthrow Christmas?
Well, gather ye now from Maine to the Isthmus
of Panama, and listen to the story
Of the utter inglory
Of some gory goings-on in hell.
Now it happened in Hades,
Ladies

And gentlemen,
It happened down there that fiends held a meeting.
The fiends held a meeting for the purpose of defeating--
Christmas.
With the aid of a fade,
A fade on the radio,
We'll take you there with a hi and hey-di-ho!
To hear first hand the brewing of a plot
Down in the deepest stygian grott.

Sotto voce: (Confidentially) "Grott" is a poetical term for grotto.
(Whenever you hear my voce sotto
Or sotto voce, whichever you prefer,
It's just I, taking pains to make quite sure
That nobody makes a poetical allusion
Which might, in any way, create confusion.)
I return you now to the voice you were hearing
Before I had to do this interfering.

Announcer: In this stygian grott
The notables of limbo hatched a plot
And what went on in the sulphurous hole
We'll soon pick up by remote control.
Of course, such a pick-up is not made quickly,
As a matter of fact it's rather trickily.
You mustn't mind if it sounds erratic
That's merely intra-terrestrial static.
Don't be surprised if you're deafened by thunder
Just as we start on our journey under:
You'll hear earthquakes and all of the commoner varieties
of natural phenomenon.
And so below,
Via radio, (fading)
To regions where
Legions of the dam-ned go.

SFX: Cymbal crash
Followed immediately by prolonged thunder coming under and a theramin-
type noise to indicate descending. Noise of radio tuning. This fades
out as violin fades in.

Courier: (Entering and under the violin) Nero!
Do you hear? Nero!

SFX: Violin stops

Nero: How dare you interrupt me in the middle of a movement
of my favorite concerto? You should look to the improvement
of your manners.

Courier: Sir, if you please,
my apologies.
I would not have intruded upon your recital
If the matter were not so terribly vital.

Nero: The most important matter in the world is piddling
When it comes to be compared to Nero's fiddling.

Courier: Now what you say may be very true
But I've been sent here to summon you
To a great massed meeting of the tortured souls
Down in the grott of the flaming coals.

Nero: A meeting? What for? What's the big idea?
Why can't a fella have some peace down here?

Courier: Peace, poor soul, can't be found on the premises--
This is a region abounding in Nemeses.

Nero: Now you're talking like a travel folder.
Tell me, varlet, before I smolder:
Why are we meeting? Who's on the spot?

Courier: We're meeting in order to fabricate a plot--
A plot against the festival that mortal men
comfort in, gladden in, again and again.
You see, every year they get together...

Nero: (Interrupting) Never mind the facts.
I don't want to hear how mortal man acts.
The only information about which I care
Concerns the mass meeting and who'll be there.

Courier: His wickedness, Mephisto, will preside.

Nero: Naturally.

Courier: And several of the Borgias will be sitting by his side.
And down in front by the sizzling sodium
Will be many personalities noted for their odium.
Haman, Caligula, Medusa and Legree...

Nero: That's all very nice, but what about me?

Courier: Oh, you'll be sitting in row A, center.
'Tween Ivan the Terrible-the tormentor--
And Circe...

Nero: Mercy!
Why, they're both deranged!

Courier: Do you wish me to see if your seat can be changed?

Nero: Yes, if you will, please.

Taste comes first, even though a soul may be
Eternally cursed.

Courier: Right-o! (Exiting) See you at the meeting then?

Nero: Yes. And now, back to my fiddling, again.

SFX: Violin begins, and continues under...

Sotto voce: This is I, the sotto voce person.
It should have been explained that Nero is rehearsin'
for nothing in particular.
He's just that way.
While hell's fires burn,
He likes to play.
It makes him feel a little more at home.
It's just an avocation he picked up in Rome.

SFX: Violin fades while...

Cast: (Voices fade in—a crowd, expectant. Continue briefly, then...)

SFX: Gavel pounds three times.

Cast: (Voices continue briefly and then under for...)

Mephisto: (Over voices) The meeting will now come to order, please.

Cast: (Voices fade out as Mephisto continues)'

Mephisto: I've called you here from over sixty seas of boiling pitch
And blazing phosphorous to stop what constitutes a loss
For us.

Cast: (Slight laughter)

Mephisto: We've lost prestige and I greatly deplore
That we stand in danger of losing more
In the way of confidence and spirit.
We're far from our goal; we're nowhere near it.

Cast: (General agreement)

Mephisto: And this is the reason:
Though we've done well
In carrying forward the work of Hell
We've left a very big job unfinished.
After all these years there is undiminished
Good will on Earth every late December
Because of Christmas.

Cast: (More agreement)

Mephisto: Now please remember that as long as this continues to be
The race of man will not belong to me.
I will listen now to any questions you may want to ask;
And then, suggestions.

Cast: (Clamoring for attention)

Haman: Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chariman!

Mephisto: (Over noise) Brother Haman has the floor.

Cast: (Noise subsides)

Haman: You say we've done well in our efforts to sell evil.
I say we've done better. We have carried out the letter of your law.
We've done what I think is a pretty good job.
And I say as a veteran demon...

Ivan: Sit down there, Haman,
Enough of this folly..

Haman: Sit down yourself,
You're out of your trolley.

Ivan: Sit down. For I am Ivan, the Terrible.

Voice: You're telling us! Why, you're unbearable.

Cast: (Laughter)

Mephisto: (Above the noise) Fellow demons! This is no way to act.
I warn you: proceed with a little more tact.
I want more decorum
In this forum!
These personal remarks you make must cease.
Now, brother Ivan, speak your piece.
Ivan: I merely want to say,
In a casual way,
That Haman is a radical,
He always gets fan-yat-ical.
Why, anyone would think to hear him snort,
That the work of the devil should just stop short.
Anybody'd think to hear him talking,
That dragons and lizards should stop walking
The ways of the world...

Haman: Mr. Chairman, brother Ivan is a demagogue.
With a brain like a fly and the manners of a hog.
Now he says that...

Cast: (Loud response, drowning out voice)

SFX: Gavel, three times

Mephisto: Now, that's enough!
We shall hear from others.
Surely there must be among you brothers
Enough of venom and malevolence
To crush a mortal man's benevolence.
It comes to this: Are we going to let a little holiday
Like Christmas
Get the better of us all down here below?

Cast: (Like a college cheer) No! No! No! No! No! Etc.

Mephisto: Very well, then sirs, Very well, let's go!
Let's lay down plans now to overthrow this Christmas business
And all that guff of holly and mistletoe and stuff.

Cast: (General agreement)

Caligula: (Over the din) Mr. Chairman! Mr. Chairman!

Mephisto: Brother Caligula may take the floor.

Caligula: Mr. Chairman, I abhor,
As a former emperor,
Anything which curbs our rule.
I suggest we start right in
Manufacturing more sin.
Let us give some presents, too.
Candy sticks and things to chew,
Fruits and nuts and little cakes,
Poisonous as rattlesnakes.

Cast: (General agreement, some laughter)

Caligula: Let our subtlest worker be
Bichloride of mercury.
Let us wrap in tinsel bright
Little gifts of dynamite.

Cast: (More agreement)

Caligula: Work things, so that men will fear
Whenever twelve twenty-five draws near.
Soon, at this rate if you please
Men will hang from Christmas trees.

Cast: (Agreement and applause)

Mephisto: My dear Caligula permit the chair
To say you've got something there.
And now with this fine start,
Let's hear some more.

Nero: Mr. Chairman, may I level
With the devil?

Mephisto: Yes, Brother Nero, you may have the floor.

Nero: With all due respects to Caligula's views
I think there's a better method we can use.
I've just lately that men are giving the razz
To classical music by making it jazz.
They're swinging Bach and what is keener
They're doing the shag to Palestrina.
As a connoisseur of music, of course I love
The works of Rimsky-Korsakov.
But today I note, with a bitter shrug,
They've made Sheherazade a jitter-bug.

Mephisto: Much as we admire your clever rhyme
Will you get to the point? We're wasting time.

Nero: I was just about to say when interrupted
That Christmas can easily be corrupted

If you take and swing all the Christmas carols.
Why think of the evil!
Just barrels and barrels
Of sacrilege every time you play
A pious song in a profane way.
Why, once you entice them to swing Noel
Then victory belongs to us, fiends. Well?

Cast: (Agreement and applause)

Legree: Mr. Chairman! Mr. Chairman!

Mephisto: Mr. Simon Legree!

Legree: I'd like to say that it seems to me
That you-all is barkin' up a coonless tree.
I think Mista Nero has made a wrong guess.
The way to go about it is to get in Congress
And bribe a bunch of Senators who know dere oats
And jes' make a purchase of a block of votes.
And den dey can legislate a situation
Where dey rules ol' Christmas right out of de nation.
Dey can all get togedder and pass a law
Where dey ain't gonna be no Christmas any maw!.

Cast: (Agreement)

Haman: I think that Legree's suggestion is a beaut.

Ivan: It's very cute.

Haman: And quite astute.

Mephisto: To me it seems a bit impractical
Because you'd have to be so tactical.
For instance, now, a Senator who would sell
His vote to our lobbyists
Might very well go out and become a tool
Of agencies representing the Yule.

Ivan: By the eternal night, he's right.

Cast: (Agreement)

'Borgia: Mr. Chairman! Mr. Chairman!

Mephisto: Yes, Miss Borgia..

Borgia: I think we should all give pause
to think about this Santa Claus.
He is the man behind the scenes,
The symbol of what Christmas means.
If we could rub him out, my friend,
Our troubles would be at an end.
Just think how it would tickle us
To liquidate St. Nicholas.

Cast: Some agreement.

Borgia: A girl like me could fascinate
The guy-and then, assassinate!

Mephisto: Do you think you could do it, pretty one?
Are you sure you wouldn't be by pity one?

Borgia: Sometimes you are an awful tease,
My master, Mephistopheles.
Ain't I murdered several dozens?
Poisoned Uncles, Aunts and Cousins?
Don't my work down here is Hades
Make me first among the ladies?

Cast: (Small laughter.)

Borgia: Men of virtue all have cussed me
I am sure that you can trust me.

Haman: Of that we haven't a particle of doubt, Miss Borgia,
I'm sure we all have nothin' but kind feelin's Towardja.

Borgia: (Laughing)

Cast: (Laughing with Borgia)

Haman: But many times a woman spy, alas, adores
her victims,
Dames make poor ambassadors.

Borgia: Do you imply that such defects
are found inherent in my sex?

Haman: I do.

Borgia: Well, listen here old ironsides,
You're headed for some cyanides.
You've crossed a Borgia,
And you know the consequences
That follow.

Cast: (Wonderment at what she means.)

SFX: Gavel pounds twice as next line begins

Mephisto: Come, come disciples. This is very bad.
There's nothing to be gained by getting mad.
Suppose we put the matter to a vote.
All those in favor of the motion made by fiend Caligula,
Which was to shade the glamour of the holiday by using
Selected poisons of our choosing.
All those in favor will please signify
By rising to their feet and saying Aye!

Caligula: Aye!

Mephisto: One vote in favor-Caligula's. And those opposed?

Cast: Nay!

Mephisto: The motion is defeated.

SFX: Gavel pounds once.

Mephisto: Up we bring the plan of Brother Nero's; viz.,
To swing the hymns and pious music.
All those for will please respond by raising up a paw.

Nero: For!

Mephisto: And those against.

Cast: Nay!

Mephisto: Very well.

SFX: Gavel pounds once.

Mephisto: Now, the project of Legree's.
Who is there here who totally agrees?

Legree: Ah do.

Mephisto: Legree votes for himself. And those opposed?

Cast: Opposed!

Mephisto: And now all those who favor Borgia's cause,
It being to eliminate Santa Claus.

Cast: Aye! Aye! Aye!

Mephisto: And those opposed?

(Silence)

Mephisto: It seems to me the woman has a way with them,
At least she has carried the day with them.

Cast: (Laughter)

SFX: Gavel pounds once. Mephisto: The motion is carried. Now we will
decide
Which one of us will take Nick for a ride.
We'll all draw lots, and thus settle the moot
Point of who'll be sent to execute.

Cast: (Murmur of expectation, continue softly under next lines.)

Sotto Voce: This is your old friend, sotto voce,
Visiting down where it's eternal noche.
(Noche is Spanish for night, you know.
It's merely a reference just to show

That English isn't all I have to go by.)
Oh well, I guess I missed my calling.
I should have been a lobbyist.
You see, I'm stalling
To give them time to finish the voting.
Let's see, the weather. Now I'm quoting
The Daily Hellion: Continued heat
Both overhead and under feet.
Fresh and moderate gases blowing
Up to gale force and then going
North, by westerly.
Light showers of brimstone
By the evening hours.
That's what it says here.
I'm not fibbing. Ha-ha.
How am I doing with my ad-libbing?
This is a thing a gabber's have fun with.
Say, the drawing should soon be done with,
We expect the results any moment now
As soon as...

SFX: Gavel pounds three times.

Cast: (Din subsides)

Mephisto: The lots have been drawn
And I'm glad to say
The honor has fallen Nero's way!

Cast: (Yells of approval)

Mephisto: Now, Nero, you are charged with a great task,
It's the vilest deed that we could ask
A fiend to do.
We'll be proud of you.

Nero: Now just one moment.
How do I get there?
What do I wear?

Cast: (Laughter)

Nero: Is it dry or wet there?
Is it fact or fancy or just word of mouth
That he lives at the pole--
Is it North or South?
If he dwells in the regions to which I've referred,
Must I pass through a camp of Admiral Byrd?
What should I use when it comes to the showdown
A gun or a dagger? So give me the lowdown.

Mephisto: Now, Nero, you needn't sound so tragic,
You'll get to earth by the blackest magic.
To create an express elevator
Is simple for an expert spell-creator.
With a lot of pyrotechnic dazzle
We'll let you off on a hill in Basel,

Switzerland.
From there you will make your way through ice
with a blowtorch.
After a while, you're bound to reach
Santa's domicile.
And once you get there, ah, my dear Nero
All of our work will have gone for zero
If you don't succeed in your assignment.
A disadvantage of our confinement
In Limbo's the fact the we only get
One chance in all the eternal roulette
Of circumstances...

Nero: I know. If at first we don't succeed
We can try and try again.
But there is no need because nothing will come of it
Meaning no offense, do you mind if I take my departure hence?

SFX: Gong

Sotto voce: That, my friends, was a big brass gong.
It's used in this story right along
To indicate that we're about to travel
To points where the plot will further unravel.
And now, if Ambassador Nero elects
We'll have another spot of sound effects.

SFX: Strange, sci-fi kind of sound blending a machine and wind and
theramin-type noises. Plays for 20 seconds and then gives way to a
crash, followed by wind only under the following--

Nero: Tell me, stranger, is this Basel, Switzerland
Or is it already Donner and Blitzerland?

Stranger 1: (Correcting) Donner and Blitzenland's 5000 miles away.

Nero: Thank you mister, and good day!

SFX: Gong. Wind continues.

Nero: Tell me stranger, I've been walking inland
for weeks. Where am I now?

Stranger 2: (Scandinavian accent) In Finland.

SFX: Gong. Wind continues.

Nero: Tell me stranger, because I've lost stock,
where am I now?

Stranger 3: (Russian accent) In Vladivostok.

SFX: Gong. Wind continues.

Nero: Listen stranger, after all these centuries of blistering heat
Now I have to suffer from freezing feet.
I'm wincing with pain from this pesky toe...

Stranger 4: (accent of some kind) No spik English. Eskimo.

SFX: Gong. Wind continue.

Nero: I declare by my phrenetic soul

I must be over the magnetic pole.

My watch has stopped..

Can that be right?

I wonder...

(Whispering) Ah-----a light

a light!

(Regular voice) In a moment now

You'll hear me knock on Santa's door,

And he'll unlock it, nevermore to lock again.

(Evil laugh)

SFX: Knock on door. Wind continues.

Santa: (From way inside house) Coming!

Nero: So is doom! (Laughs)

SFX: Door opens. Wind continues.

Santa: How do you do, sir.

Nero: Very well, indeed. And you sir?

Santa: Splendidly. Won't you come right in?

SFX: Door closes. Wind stops.

Santa: Take your coat off. I can see your chin

Is frozen;

Also your hands and knees.

Sit down while I get you some anti-freeze.

Nero: Don't bother sir, I will not be long,

I'm about to perpetrate a fearful wrong.

In short, I'm going to do away with...

Santa: (Interrupting) Take it easy.

Do not play with that gun.

I know all about you.

Nero: Really?

Santa: Haven't I had my agent's scout you for weeks?

You've come all this way to abolish Christmas

And let me say...

Nero: Listen, Santa, I'm no callow stripling,

I've read Ernest Hemingway and Kipling.

And also "The Shooting of Dan McGrew,"

And plenty of detective stories, too.

And just to show you what broad guy I am

I've also the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám.

Do you think that a fellow with his reading so graded

Could have learned so little as to be dissuaded

From the main objective?
Why, don't make me giggle.

Santa: I'd feel a lot better if you didn't wiggle
That gun so.
Much as I'm impressed with your education
I honestly believe that a figure of your station
Should have given more thought to the ways of man
And less devotion to the cult of Pan.

Nero: By others, no doubt, your wisdom may be prized
But I didn't come here to be criticized.
In fact, I came to dispatch a duty
So don't hand me any of this tutti-frutti.
If you have any last words you want to say
Then spill 'em. I haven't got all day.

Santa: What's the rush? Unless I've counted wrong
The polar day has always been six-months long.

Nero: Well, after I've disposed of you I've got to hurry
Right back to hell, or they'll begin to worry.

Santa: Not about you, but about your career in homicide.
Do you think the mere loss of you would make them hysterical?
There only interest is numerical.

Nero: Think so?

Santa: Mephisto wants to rule just as much of humanity
As possible, for reasons of personal vanity.

Nero: By the Styx! You're right! To think that he'd dare!...
Are there any ladies here? Will you permit me to swear?

Santa: My answer to that is an emphatic no!
There are several lady dolls in the toyroom below.

Nere: Oh, Claudius. Oh, Cassius. Oh, Naphthalene.
What a fool I've been. What a fool I've been!
But wait, I think I see what you're after,
You're as clever as a big time Roman grafter.
You remind me now of my royalty
Just to get me in a mood for disloyalty.
Do you think I could be that meanly deceptive
to Satan? Why, Santa, I'm keenly perceptive.
I can see right through all your clever ruses
Nero can be plenty foxy when he chooses.
I'll have you know that I'm partly a dreamer,
Partly a wit and partly a schemer.
I'm part philosophical and also part mystic...

Santa: I suppose you fancy that you're highly artistic.

Nero: Fancy? Why I have such a sense of beauty...

Santa: Don't hand me a helping of tutti-frutti.

Any creature who really had beauty in his soul
Would appreciate Christmas. He would know that the whole
Idea of the holiday was one of such power
That all the fiends below would gnash their fangs and glower
Yet, never in a million years could do it harm
Because it has a glory, a greatness, a charm
You know nothing about.

Nero: That so?

Santa: The spirit that it venerates,
The good cheer that it generates
Are things far, far beyond you.
For all your wealth, no man on earth could sell ye these.

Nero: Am I so cursed as that? Will you tell me, please,
What beauties there may be that I have never seen?

Santa: Have you ever seen
A Christmas tree, tall and green,
Smelling of woodlands,
Covered with a sheen
Of silveriness?
It's branches bending low
With the fruits of human kindness
Instead of snow?

Nero: No.

Santa: Have you ever closely witnessed
What takes place any Christmas
Morning on a young child's face?
Or perceived any beauties
Purer than the joys
Distilled in the hearts of little girls and boys?
Have you ever watched a fire in a fireplace
On a Christmas Eve,
Or listened to grace
At a table heavy with fruits and cakes
And all the wonders that a kitchen makes?
Fowls and pastries, wines and meats,
And Nuts and raisins and candied sweets?
Have you ever seen mistletoe hanging from a ceiling?
In the frosty air heard a far bell pealing?
Have you ever come back from a sleigh ride tingling
And your feet keeping time with the sleigh bells' jingling?
Have you ever the beauty of a sprig of holly,
Or felt for a moment how it feels to be jolly?

Nero: (Amazed) Golly!

Santa: Have you ever known how exceedingly pleasant
It is to unwrap a Christmas present?
Did you ever know how much cheer it lends
To be wished a Merry Christmas by all your friends?
Did you ever experience the fun of giving,
Do you know at all of the joys of living?

Nero: (Contrite) I guess I don't.
For all of me I never knew such things
could be.
Just think how long in ignorance I've slept.

Santa: It must have been the company you kept.

Nero: I was a wicked tyrant once, you know.

Santa: Ah, yes, but that was centuries ago.
You had no real way of knowing.,

Nero: Perhaps.
I guess that I'll be going.
I really should be getting on my way.

Santa: But do you have to?
Don't you want to stay?

Nero: You see, I'm just a bit...

Santa: Embarrassed?

Nero: Why, yes sir.

Santa: Now, don't look so harassed.
I know why it is you came
And who it was that sent you.
But that's all done with.
I take it you repent you
Of all your past mistakes.

Nero: With many pains and aches
Of conscience.

Santa: Then you are welcome here.
Please, take your hat off.
Your coat, your muffler also.
Take your spat off.
What happened to the other one?
No matter.
You're pretty thin. You'll presently be
Fatter.
I serve good food here,
I'll get you a platter
Of steak and mushrooms. Medium or rare?
I'll bet that you're hungry as a bear.
Now just sit down. That's it.
Right over here and tell me,
Will you have some wine or beer?
I never touch the stuff myself
But I manage to keep on hand
A little rye for purposes medicinal.
I mean, your chin should be unfrozen,
What a state it's in.

Nero: A while ago you asked me if understood
Good cheer.
I do so now, St. Nicholas,
I see it standing here.
I want to aks you something, sir,
Now please, don't give a yelp.
Is there any sort of work to do
Where I can be of help?

Santa: Indeed there is. Indeed there is.
And I'm glad you asked me.
I have so many toys to make this year
The jobs got past me.
But first, you sit and eat this bowl.
I've got a little trifle I'd like for you to see.
So will you sit right down here
And stifle
Your curiosity.
(Walking away) I'll get it for you right away,
It's down the hall a piece.

Nero: Well, who'd ever think it,
Will wonders never cease?
At last, after all these centuries,
I'm so happy I could buzz.
It shows you what a lot
A little Christmas Spirit does.
As Emperor I envied oft
The cheerfulness of peasants.
And now...

Santa: (Approaching) Well, here it is, now,
Nero, my boy.
By way of Christmas presents
I offer you this little gift.

Nero: But Santa, for what reason?
Santa: A very good one, sir. To whit:
Compliments of the season!
Well, go ahead, open it.
Why stand there so, reflecting?

Nero: I'm just collecting
Thoughts, St. Nick,
My thoughts I'm just collecting.
Just think how far a tiny bit of fellowship
Would carry us.
Oh well!

SFX: Package being unwrapped.

Nero: I say!

Santa: Hmm?

Nero: What's this? What's this?
It is a Stradivarius!

Why, thank you! Thanks a million times.
I don't know what to say to you.
I'll tell you what I'll do, St. Nick,
I'll start right in and play for you.
I'll play, I'll play, I'll play, I'll play, I'll
All night and day
For you.

Santa: Fine. Now here's some music.
I'm sure you'll play it well.
It's a little piece entitled,
Noel, Noel.

MUSIC: Violin playing The First Noel. Continues under next part.

Sotto Voce: This is I. Remember me?
Your Sotto Voce friend?
I've just come back
To tell you that
This story is at an end.

MUSIC: Violin continues playing, then softens for...

Announcer: You've been listening to
The Plot to Overthrow Christmas,
Written and Directed by Norman Corwin.
This is the Columbia Broadcasting System.

MUSIC: Up and play to end.
Applause.