

CHRISTMAS IN HEAVEN

A Christmas Musical Drama

Carmen and Robert Allen

Cast of Characters

Charles Fenton	A young, married man with a small daughter.
Gloria Fenton	The young wife of Charles.
Missy Fenton	A small child with a lisp.
Mr. Colfax	The church music director.
Billy	A young boy in junior choir.
Pastor	The minister at the church.
Mr. Hatchett	A well-meaning, but over-zealous church member.
Mrs. Hatchett	The wife of Mr. Hatchett
Dr. Herbert	The Fenton family doctor.

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Director's Notes

Christmas in Heaven has been designed so that a church can fit the script into whatever Christmas numbers have been chosen by the music director. The opening selection, the junior choir numbers and the two choir programs could include solos or ensembles as well as choir arrangements.

The script has been written in a Reader's Theatre style. Actors should use the script and read their parts with off-stage focus. Costumes for the actors are not necessary. Dressing them in simple black and white outfits will provide consistency and focus the attention of the audience on the story. Actions which accompany the reading should be performed in pantomime. Placing the actors on stools can be helpful in maintaining the off-stage focus. The audience should be allowed to see the scene in their minds rather than having it acted out on stage.

Although Reader's Theatre allows actors to forego memorization, it should not be attempted without adequate rehearsal. Facial expression, bodily movement, and vocal emphasis should be used effectively to communicate the message of the script.

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OPENING SONG: Choir number on a Christmas theme.

CHARLES: Christmas has always been a special time around the Fenton house. It was during the holiday season that our daughter Missy said her first full sentence.

MISSY: Only twenty-thixth more thopping days ‘til Chrith-muth.

CHARLES: Christmas was a time of peace and contentment. The only disagreement that ever marred the season was the one about whether tinsel should be hung on the tree in straight lines or flung in glorious, glittering disarray, spangling the green with silver incandescence.

(GLORIA AND MISSY PANTOMIME PLACING TINSEL ON THE TREE.)

GLORIA: One at a time, Missy. Don’t listen to your father. He doesn’t know anything about tinsel.

MISSY: I think we have the moth beautiful three in all the world.

CHARLES: Christmas was a time for memories prompted by the cards that told us what was happening in the lives of all our very best friends.

GLORIA: Happy Holidays from our house to yours. The Olsons.

CHARLES: I didn’t realize our houses were that well acquainted.

MISSY: Oh, Daddy.

CHARLES: Who are the Olsons, anyway?

GLORIA: Don’t you remember? They are the family we met on vacation in the Black Hills two summers ago. The ones who shared their watermelon with us.

CHARLES: Oh, those Olsons. How could I have forgotten?

GLORIA: We’ll have to send them a card. You didn’t throw away the envelope with their return address, did you?

CHARLES: Christmas was love. Love for family and friends. Love for the season itself. And for my wife Gloria, love for God.

GLORIA: I think there's probably only one tree more beautiful than a Christmas tree, Missy.

MISSY: More beautiful than our three?

GLORIA: It's the tree we call the cross. The Christmas tree reminds us that Jesus was born in a manger. But the cross reminds us that He died so we could go to heaven.

MISSY: But I don't want to go to heaven, Mommy.

GLORIA: Why not, Missy?

MISSY: If I go to heaven, I'll miss Chrith-muth.

CHARLES: If I go to heaven, I'll miss Christmas. That was what gave Gloria the idea for the song. But I haven't told you. My wife loves music. She's not a professional, but she sings in the choir at church and she plays the piano for our singing here at home. That's how Missy learned the song and that's how Mr. Colfax, the church music director, found out about it.

MEDLEY OF CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS SONGS BY THE JUNIOR CHOIR

MR. COLFAX: That was a great rehearsal, boys and girls. Your parents are going to love this program. Now, before we go home, let's sing some of your favorites.

(MISSY RAISES HER HAND)

MR. COLFAX: Missy Fenton. I saw your hand first.

MISSY: Can we sing *Chrith-muth in Heaven*?

MR. COLFAX: I don't think I know that one, Missy.

BILLY: She means Christmas, Mr. Colfax. She can't say her s's.

MISSY: I can too.

BILLY: All right. Then say, "she sells seashells by the seashore".

MR. COLFAX: I don't think that will be necessary, Billy.

BILLY: Well, she can't say it. I know she can't. She can't say her s's.

MR. COLFAX: Why don't you tell us about the song, Missy.

MISSY: It's a thong my mother wrote. Would you like me to thing it to you?

MR. COLFAX: I certainly would. We would all like to hear it, wouldn't we Billy?

CHARLES: So, Missy sang the song and to Billy's amazement every one of her s's came out loud and clear. But Billy wasn't nearly as surprised as Gloria when she answered the telephone later that evening.

(MR. COLFAX AND GLORIA PANTOMIME PHONES.)

MR. COLFAX: Mrs. Fenton, I heard a delightful new song this afternoon titled *Christmas in Heaven*.

GLORIA: You did?

MR. COLFAX: I hope you don't mind. Missy sang it for us at Junior Choir practice.

GLORIA: She did?

MR. COLFAX: I was wondering if you would be willing to sing it during our special Christmas program next month at church?

GLORIA: You were?

MR. COLFAX: If it's all right with you, I'll plan to include it on the program.

GLORIA: You will?

MR. COLFAX: Thank you, Mrs. Fenton. It's been great talking to you.

(MR. COLFAX AND GLORIA HANG UP THE PHONES.)

GLORIA: What did I just agree to do?

CHARLES: Like I said, she isn't a professional. It was a total surprise to her that anyone outside our family would enjoy her song. Right up to the night of the Christmas program she kept worrying that something would go wrong.

GLORIA: What if I'm walking down the aisle in the processional and my heel gets caught on the carpet?

MISSY: Our church doeth'nt have carpet down the center aisle, Mommy.

GLORIA: What if I open my mouth to sing and nothing will come out?

CHARLES: Don't worry, you'll do fine.

GLORIA: What if I can't remember the words?

CHARLES: Missy and I knew better. When the organist began playing and the bells started ringing, we knew it was going to be the best Christmas program ever put on by our church.

FIRST CHRISTMAS PROGAM. FOUR OR FIVE SONGS BY CHOIR AND ENSEMBLES.

PASTOR: Isn't it wonderful how God took the greatest tragedy of all history, the death of His Son, and transformed it into the greatest gift mankind has ever received. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace are ye saved)." Christ is the true gift of Christmas; the gift God gave to us so we could celebrate Christmas with Him for all eternity. Do they celebrate Christmas in heaven? They most certainly do. Heaven is where Christmas began.

GLORIA SINGS WITH CHOIR

"CHRISTMAS IN HEAVEN"

Sorrow spread to the legions of angels,
Their Beloved was going to earth.
Going down to a Bethlehem manger
Going down to a humbling birth.
"Do not fear!" came the voice of the Father,
Bringing tidings of comfort and joy.
And they echoed "Fear not!" to the shepherds,
Celebrating the birth of God's boy.

Angel choirs waited silently grieving,
Their Beloved was nailed to a cross.
They beheld as in anguish He suffered
Bearing infinite torment and loss.
"It is finished," they heard as He shouted.
"Satisfied," came the Father's reply.
Then He ordered a heavenly anthem
Celebrating His welcome on high.

Angels stand by the bed of a loved one,
Watching those who have gathered to grieve.
Weeping with all the family in mourning,
Giving comfort to those who believe.
"Sorrow not," says the Father in heaven,
"I have given the gift of my Son.
By His death comes eternal rejoicing
Celebrating the work He has done."

Chorus: Yes, they celebrate Christmas in heaven.
Celebrate by God's decree.
Angels carol on golden street corners,
And the old rugged cross is the tree.

CHARLES: It was a wonderful Christmas program. Gloria didn't trip on the carpet or forget her words or anything. And whoever had decorated the tree in the front of the auditorium had done it

correctly. The tinsel was flung in glorious disarray, spangling the green with silver incandescence. Afterward we went home and decorated our own tree.

(GLORIA HANGS TINSEL AND YOUNG MISSY IMITATES HER.)

GLORIA: One at a time now, Missy. Take each strand apart and hang it on its own branch.

MISSY: Do you think they'll have tinsel in heaven, Mommy?

GLORIA: I don't know if they'll have tinsel. But I do know that heaven will have the best gift that anyone could ever receive.

MISSY: What's that, Mommy?

GLORIA: The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

MISSY: I guess it would be fun to see Jethuth. But I still don't think I want to go to heaven.

GLORIA: Why is that, Missy?

MISSY: I don't want to go anywhere without you and Daddy.

GLORIA: Why Missy. We'll be in ...

CHARLES: I knew why she hesitated. Gloria had been attending church since just after Missy was born and it had really made a change in her life. She was a Christian and everyone knew it, especially me. I went to church too, so Missy would know it was the right thing to do. But as far as being a Christian? Well, nothing had ever happened to me the way it had to Gloria.

GLORIA: Missy, the best part of heaven will be seeing Jesus. But don't you worry. I'll be right there with you.

MISSY: Won't that be fun, Mommy? We'll have Chrith-muth in heaven with real angelth and real tharth and a real Jethuth too.

GLORIA: Yes, Missy. Christmas in heaven will be wonderful.

(TRANSITION: GLORIA LEAVES THE STAGE AND HER STOOL REMAINS EMPTY.)

CHARLES: The next year we didn't go to the church Christmas program. We went to the hospital instead so Missy could see her mother. They wouldn't let her go into the room; intensive care was off limits to children. She stood in the hall and grabbed my hand tightly as we watched the nurses come and go.

MISSY: Daddy, when will Mommy be home so we can decorate our Chrith-muth tree?

CHARLES: I don't know, Missy. Maybe we'll have to decorate the tree ourselves this year and surprise her.

MISSY: Will you hang the tinsel straight if we do?

CHARLES: I promise. I'll hang the tinsel so straight that your mother will say it's the most beautiful tree she's ever seen.

MISSY: Let's do it, Daddy. Then we can come back and get Mommy so she can see it.

CHARLES: Missy spent hours decorating that tree. Every piece of tinsel was hung just so. Not a branch was missed, from the bottom ones where she worked to the top ones where only I could reach. She watched me like a hawk to make sure I didn't try to fling even a single strand into place. When the tree was perfect, we went back to the hospital, but Gloria never came home with us. Two weeks after Christmas we buried her in a frozen cemetery on the edge of town. After the graveside service, Mr. and Mrs. Hatchett, from Gloria's church, stopped to talk to us.

MR. HATCHETT: Mr. Fenton, I know how hard this has been on you and Missy. If we can do anything to help, please let us know.

MRS. HATCHETT: Whenever I think of your wife, I remember that song she sang in the program last year. Isn't it wonderful to think that she will actually get to spend her next Christmas in heaven?

CHARLES: How can you stand there in front of my daughter and say that it's good that her mother died?

MRS. HATCHETT: But I didn't mean that. It's just that she was ready to die. She was such a wonderful Christian.

CHARLES: And I suppose that if she hadn't been she would have lived longer? Is that the way your God treats the ones He loves?

MRS. HATCHETT: Oh, but you mustn't blame God. He has a reason for everything He does.

CHARLES: Is that right? Does He share His reasons, or keep them a secret?

MR. HATCHETT: Please don't take offense, Mr. Fenton. We know you suffered a great loss. But she is better off where she is now, you know.

CHARLES: I know they meant well. But no one could tell me that it was better for Gloria to have died. After putting Missy to bed that night I took down the tree, put away the still unopened presents we had bought for Gloria and vowed I would never celebrate Christmas again. For eight long years I kept that vow. Missy continued to attend the church where Gloria had gone, but I never went with her.

(MISSY IS OLDER NOW AND NO LONGER HAS A LISP.)

MISSY: Daddy, the Junior Choir is singing in the Christmas program this year.

CHARLES: That's nice, Missy.

MISSY: Would you come and hear us sing?

CHARLES: No, Missy. Not this year.

MISSY: Daddy, I got the part of Mary in the Christmas pageant. They're building a manger scene at the front of the church and we're going to have a real sheep and a donkey.

CHARLES: That's nice, Missy.

MISSY: Couldn't you come, Daddy? Just this once?

CHARLES: No, Missy. Not this year. I didn't want to ruin the season for her. I bought expensive gifts and gave them to her on New Year's Day instead of Christmas. We decorated the house; but never with angels, or stars, or manger scenes, and we never had a tree with tinsel. Missy grew into a beautiful young lady, looking more like her mother every year.

MISSY: Dad, Mr. Colfax asked me to sing a solo for the Christmas program this year.

CHARLES: I'm not surprised. You have a beautiful voice. Sometimes when I hear you singing...

MISSY: What is it, Dad?

CHARLES: Nothing. It's nothing.

MISSY: Do you think you could come to the program?

CHARLES: No Missy. Not this year. That was just after Thanksgiving. On the first day of December Missy woke up with nausea and a terrible headache, the same symptoms which indicated the beginning of Gloria's illness. Fearing the worst, I rushed her immediately to the hospital.

DR. HERBERT: Mr. Fenton, I don't know how to tell you this.

CHARLES: It's what Gloria had, isn't it.

DR. HERBERT: I'm afraid so. It's so unusual and we know so little about it. But apparently, it's congenital. We'll do the best we can.

CHARLES: Trying to hide my fear, I went into the room where Missy lay on the big hospital pillows like one of her precious dolls.

MISSY: Don't worry, Dad. I'll be home for Christmas.

CHARLES: That's right, honey. We mustn't give up hope.

MISSY: I was wondering. It's been so long since we had a tree. Do you suppose?

CHARLES: Of course. Anything you want. I'll pick one up tonight.

MISSY: And the tinsel. You won't forget the tinsel?

CHARLES: No, Missy. I won't forget the tinsel. When I left the hospital that evening, I stopped and bought the biggest tree I could find. For the next two weeks I spent my days at the hospital with Missy. Nights, I decorated that tree, hanging every strand of tinsel just so. I knew that making this a real Christmas wouldn't be enough to keep Missy here, but I had to try. Missy had been in the hospital for just over two weeks when her doctor stopped me in the hallway outside her room.

DR. HERBERT: Mr. Fenton. I have good news. Your daughter is improving rapidly.

CHARLES: I thought she seemed stronger. But how?

DR. HERBERT: Well, strange as it may sound, we probably couldn't have saved her if it hadn't been for your wife.

CHARLES: Gloria?

DR. HERBERT: There are less than ten instances of this disease in medical history as far as we can discover. By looking at your wife's records and seeing what didn't work, we were able to start Missy's treatment where your wife's left off, so to speak. I guess, in a way, you could say that the death of your wife saved your daughter's life.

CHARLES: Thank you, Dr. Herbert. I think Gloria would have wanted it that way. I didn't realize it immediately but I had God's reason for allowing my wife to die, the reason I had demanded eight years earlier. At the time, all I could think of was telling Missy she was going to be all right.

MISSY: Hi Dad. Was that Dr. Herbert out in the hall?

CHARLES: He says you've been a model patient and he's going to be sorry to see you go. Do you just want to stay here in the hospital for Christmas?

MISSY: Oh, Dad. If I stay here, I won't get to see your tree.

CHARLES: Then I guess I had better take you home. I wouldn't want you to miss all the glorious tinsel, flung in glorious disarray, spangling the green with silver incandescence.

MISSY: Dad. You wouldn't.

CHARLES: You're right. I wouldn't. I wouldn't want anything to spoil this perfect Christmas.

MISSY: Dad?

CHARLES: What is it, Missy?

MISSY: Do you really want this to be a perfect Christmas?

CHARLES: It will be Missy, just because you are coming home.

MISSY: I know. But there is something else I would really like you to do.

CHARLES: This Christmas you can have anything you want.

MISSY: Do you think we could attend the Christmas program at church? I won't get to sing my solo since I haven't practiced. But I would like to hear the choir sing.

CHARLES: All right, Missy. We'll go. Missy wasn't released from the hospital until Sunday afternoon, the weekend before Christmas. I wanted to take her straight home to see the tree, but she insisted that I keep my promise and stop at the church first to hear the Christmas program. I pushed her wheelchair into place behind the last pew just as the choir started to sing

SECOND CHRISTMAS PROGRAM: FOUR OR FIVE SONGS BY CHOIR AND ENSEMBLES.

PASTOR: Every time we celebrate the Christmas season I can't help but think about that other great holy season, Easter. There was a reason why Christ was born. There was a reason why God allowed Him to die. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God allowed Christ to die so that we could live.

CHARLES: When the preacher started to speak, I thought at first that he was talking about Gloria and Missy. Those were the same words Dr. Herbert had used. "It was the death of your wife that saved your daughter's life." Then I realized the Pastor wasn't talking about them at all. He was talking about me.

PASTOR: Jesus Christ loved us so much that He was willing to die for the fatal disease we call sin so that we could be saved from that same disease. That is the reason for Christmas. The reason Christ was born, and the reason He died.

CHARLES: There wasn't any invitation. I wouldn't have known what to do if there had been. But right there in the pew next to Missy's wheelchair I told God that I knew I was dying and needed help. I told Him how thankful I was that Jesus had died so I could live. Then I apologized

for being mad at Him all these years. When I looked up again, the pastor was talking about Missy.

PASTOR: Mr. Colfax tells me that Missy Fenton was scheduled to sing in the program tonight before she went into the hospital several weeks ago. We've all been praying for Missy and we're so glad to see her tonight. Missy, would you like to come down here and join the choir as they sing their final song?

(MISSY LOOKS UP AT HER FATHER.)

MISSY: Dad?

CHARLES: Let's go. As I pushed the wheelchair down the aisle, the organist started to play music which sounded strangely familiar. It was Gloria's song, the one she had sung the last Christmas before she died. Missy looked back over her shoulder and whispered.

MISSY: She's there, Dad. In heaven. She's waiting for us to come. And she's making sure the tinsel is hanging straight.

CHARLES: Then we were there at the front. As the choir started to sing, Missy's soprano floated out over the top, just like her mother's had done. Gloria's song was Missy's song. But it was more than that. It was my song, too.

REPRISE: CHRISTMAS IN HEAVEN.

THE END