

ASSIGNMENT: CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

By Virginia Kidd

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Angel Charles Persindon has a month on earth to find out what is the "Christmas Spirit." He visits many places, but seemingly hasn't come up with the right answer. With only twenty-four hours to go, he happens onto the Cavindish Orphanage. The antics of two girls, Tiger and Lizzie, coupled with the visit of Mrs. Cavindish, almost ends up in a veritable explosion. Through Charley, the haughty Mrs. Cavindish is taught a lesson, as well as the girls.

SET DESIGN

The play takes place in the living room of the Cavindish Orphanage. A Christmas tree stands far UPS. The windows are frosted with snow, Christmas candles and ornaments are set about the room. Although these attempts at decoration are valiant and the room is neat and clean, the impression is still one of privation. The room is so arranged as to leave a playing stage area USC. Along the SR wall, a long table is set with a punch bowl and cups. The chairs of the room have all been moved to the SL area and are facing the center of the room as though providing audience seating for the UPS performance area. There are two doors into the room - one leading to the rest of the orphanage, USL and the other to the outside exit, SL. Through a window looking into a hall, the girls can see anyone approaching the living room from the other rooms of the orphanage.

SYNOPSIS

Scene 1 - Cavindish Orphanage Christmas Eve morning.

Scene 2 - The Orphanage that afternoon.

Scene 3 - The Orphanage that evening.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 10 w)

**VOICE FROM ABOVE
CHARLEY**

ORPHANAGE:

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| TIGER | LIZZIE |
| JOSIE | ELOISE |
| MARCIA | SUSAN |
| MRS. BROWN | MRS. LANDON |

THE GUESTS:

| | |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| MRS. CAVINDISH | JAMES |
| DORIS | CARSON |

TOWNSPEOPLE

(Minor parts may be combined or divided according to needs. Extras may be used as guests from town or girls in the orphanage.)

PROLOGUE

(AT RISE: The Imperial Celestial Halls of Heaven, Royal Receiving Room. CHARLES HORWITZ PERSINDON [Generally known as CHARLEY] enters nervously, having been given a Royal Summons. The scene is before the closed CURTAINS on the stage apron. Charley is garbed in a typical angel's costume with long flowing robes and wings, a man's brown felt hat perched habitually on his head. He walks along the stage front, searching for some sign of life. As he stops CS, he continues looking around uneasily.)

CHARLEY: Er, hello, there! *(Pause.)* I'm here, Sir. *(Another pause, during which CHARLEY scratches his head and again looks around.)* Uh, anybody home? *(CHARLEY chuckles at his own joke; his laughter is interrupted by the VOICE; Charley falls to his knees, clutching his hat to his chest.)*

VOICE: Charles Horwitz Persindon ... *(The VOICE, deep, resonant, and seeming to come from every direction, is heard, but no person is visible. CHARLEY turns confusedly to many directions.)*

CHARLEY: Yes, your Lordship? Er, your Majesty? Sir? Your Highness?

VOICE: Charles Horwitz Persindon, you have been asked to come here for a very special reason.

CHARLEY: Me?

VOICE: Yes. We have need of knowledge.

CHARLEY: I think you must have the wrong man, Sir.

VOICE: *(With a smile in the tone.)* No, Charley, we need you. You are an important part of this organization, you know.

CHARLEY: Me?

VOICE: Of course. And this is a very special occasion. As you know, my Son's birthday is about to be celebrated on the planet earth. You ... did know that?

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CHARLEY: Oh, sure, Sir. I remember them Christmases with pleasure. Me and the boys ... wow! I can't tell you the times we had every Christmas. Why, we used ...

VOICE: (*Patiently.*) Charley -

CHARLEY: Yes, Sir.

VOICE: I'm glad you remember the occasion. Now on the planet earth the people have something they call "Christmas spirit." You know of it?

CHARLEY: Well, more or less, Sir.

VOICE: This year we wish to find out what the people mean when they refer to "Christmas spirit." Often on earth two people use the same term and each means something different by it, you know.

CHARLEY: (*Nodding in agreement.*) Uh, yes, Sir.

VOICE: We want, this year, to find out exactly what Christmas spirit is ... to see how people really celebrate my Son's birthday.

CHARLEY: That sounds like a real good idea, Sir.

VOICE: Thank you, Charles.

CHARLEY: (*Mopping HIS brow with the end of his angel gown.*) Just ... uh ... just how did you plan to do that, Sir?

VOICE: Well, we had thought we might send an emissary to earth to find out for us.

CHARLEY: Oh, really?

VOICE: Yes, we thought he could talk to the people, look around, visit some cities, a village or two, get to know what earth is really like these days and ... well, bring back a report.

CHARLEY: (*Visibly shaken.*) Say now, that's a clever idea. Real clever. I'll say that's clever! Yes, sir, that's clever! (*HE snaps his fingers as he rises from his kneeling position.*) I know just the man for the job. Tom Johnson! You know Tom. He'll do you a great job. I'll just go and get him now. Really nice to have talked to you, Sir, Majesty, Royalty, Sir. (*HE tips his wrinkled hat which he has replaced a moment before.*) I'll just send him right along. (*CHARLEY is hurrying offstage as he completes his last lines. He is stopped by patient but knowing VOICE.*)

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VOICE: Char-ley.

CHARLEY: (*Stops and returns dejectedly to CS.*) Yes, Sir?

VOICE: We had thought to send you, Charles.

CHARLEY: (*Stretching HIS collar.*) Oh, uh - oh, me? Oh, me. Really, me? Ha ha - me! I'm - uh I'm not very good at mixing, your Lordship, Sir. In fact, I'm not the type that -

VOICE: Charley - do you mind?

CHARLEY: (*Trapped.*) Oh, no, (*Unconvincingly.*) I'd just love to.

VOICE: Wonderful! I was sure you'd feel that way. You'll find instructions in your room. We've made a list of the places you ought to visit. We've tried to make a complete cross section, giving you a good look at Christmas celebrations. I hope you find your trip enjoyable.

CHARLEY: (*Defeated.*) Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir.

VOICE: Then we'll expect your report in one month from today.

CHARLEY: Yes, Sir.

VOICE: We laid out some earth clothes for you to wear, Charley. Remember to stick your wings in. You do want to remain inconspicuous, you know.

CHARLEY: (*Emphatically.*) Yes, Sir!

VOICE: Are there any questions, Charles?

CHARLEY: No, Sir. But ... say! Did I ever tell you how good old Tom Johnson is at this sort of thing? Boy, he's great! He'd be just the guy -

VOICE: Charley -

CHARLEY: Yes, Sir. One month, Sir. So long, Sir. (*HE walks disconsolately offstage.*)

VOICE: So long, Charley ... and good luck!

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