

CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

by Marla Steele Guerrero

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Have you ever received a gift you didn't really want? One you never asked for? A young married couple, Stephen and Pamela, find themselves on the receiving end of Grandfather's will, and the inheritance – should they choose to accept it – is his retarded adult son. Although they are Christians, Stephen and Pamela undergo a critical test of faith and marriage, as they share the Christmas season with this unexpected "presence," Uncle Duncan, and some friends and family members who complicate their custodial decision and their holiday.

Humor and pathos color their unfolding dilemma and interpersonal challenges. Christians in the audience will experience a vicarious identification of spiritual trial, and skeptics will wonder at the representation of God's selfless love in the giving of His own Son.

CHARACTERS

(4 m, 4 w, 1 girl; doubling possible)

In the Prologue:

GRAMPIE.....an elderly man of warmth and humor.

In the Play:

PAM.....late 20s-early 30s. The wife of Stephen, a young woman of sincere but fragile Christian faith; it is her spiritual journey that must carry audience identification. She is both loving and self-pitying.

STEPHENlate 20s-early 30s. Husband of Pam, he is a Christian whose initial restlessness is transformed into a mission of zeal. He can be insensitive in his pursuit of the good, but displays warmth and affection readily.

JULIA.....30s-40s (Scene 1 only). A lawyer of some humor and humanity, she is more perceptive than businesslike.

DUNCANmid-to late 30s. He is the retarded uncle in Stephen's newfound custody. He is intellectually a child, but miraculously in tune to the Spirit of God. His voice and mannerisms should betray a significant handicap, but he must be under-standable.

MARYearly 30s. The very pregnant friend of Pam and Stephen, wife of Vic. She is good-humored and likable. Her physical discomfort can predispose her typically good nature to one of snapping exhaustion.

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- VIC.....early 30s. Husband of Mary and friend of Pam and Stephen, he is a decent fellow who alternately comforts and requires comfort.
- LESLIEmid 40s. A woman of languishing self-indulgence whose cultural samplings and worldly experiences give her a superior air. She loves to create scorn in ordinary people like Pam and Mary.
- JACKmid to late 40s. Husband of Leslie and financial underwriter of her caprice. Warm and dramatic, he is simultaneously impressed by his wife's pagan brilliance and the Christianity he witnesses. He is Americana, at home in Las Vegas or in exotic ports of call.
- GINA.....age 5-7. Daughter of Mary and Vic; guileless and affectionate.
- PUPPYeither a real puppy or a real dog of mature years in a small breed.

(DOUBLING: The actors playing Grampie and Julia may double as Jack and Leslie.)

NOTE ON THE PRODUCTION

The prologue is not necessary to the understanding and development of the play and the characters. However, it does begin the program on a lighter note and with a “down home” tone. The elderly man who narrates the scene may evoke audience suspicions that he is the “Grampie” referred to throughout all the scenes. He also gives a comprehensive overview of what will unfold.

In the original production, seasonal songs, sometimes two or three, were sung between the scenes to create a full-length evening. All songs mentioned in the text of the play are suggested only.

The following paragraph was included in the original program:

I consider every life to be a unique gift from God. Sometimes a life can be affected by mental, emotional or physical handicaps. While such conditions may inflict pain and challenge familial endurance, the lives so touched are no less precious or purposeful in the scheme of God’s plan. In “Christmas Presence,” the portrayal of a retarded man is intended to celebrate the love and wonder such a special person can embody and impart. The character of Duncan is based on the true persona of a man whose demeanor and abilities are very similar. Rather than politely exclude or ignore the population Duncan represents, I have chosen to depict the humor and the heartaches of the many “Duncans” and the people who love them. I hope you will join me in recognizing their realities and worshipping their Creator. What better occasion than Christmas?

– Marla Steele Guerrero

SETS

The prologue can take place on the forestage or in front of a curtain. A screen or blank wall will be needed for the slide show. The set for the lawyer's office needs a desk and one or two extra chairs. It may be set up on the side of the stage. The main setting is Pam and Stephen's living room. It has a sofa, a coffee table, a phone and a Christmas tree only partially decorated. There are entrances to the kitchen and a hallway leading to the front door and the rest of the home. Later, a sewing machine is added.

COSTUMES

Costumes are casual contemporary, a bit more expensive on Leslie and Jack. Duncan enters wearing a jacket and later wears an apron with a pocket. Mary wears a "dressed up" maternity outfit. Stephen changes into a suit.

PROPS

A camera, a "clicker" (in the prologue only), a will, a ledger statement, to-be-wrapped presents, a robe, a duffle bag, a gorilla mask, a self-sewn stuffed dog, a sewing project, papers, Mickey Mouse ears, a plate of burnt cookies, a doughnut, department store bags and boxes, a complete nativity set, a box, a long popcorn necklace, a tray of cheese and crackers, mugs or glasses, a thermos or pitcher of hot cider, Christmas ornaments or garlands, wrapped presents, mints and munchies, a cup of tea, parts for a finger puppet, a Bible, a blanket, a red bow.

SOUND EFFECTS

phone ringing
doorbell
panting
puppy squeal

End of Freeview

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