

A CIVIL WAR CHRISTMAS

By Brian Shoop

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DEDICATION

To the "D-team" - Mark and Maureen Gullickson and Cheri Biggs. Thanks for your years of selfless and tireless and paycheck-less service. Your names also belong on this play.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Three wounded Confederate soldiers are confined to a make-shift field hospital and cared for by a black woman, Liddy. As the differing personalities begin to clash, the men gradually uncover a dark, common past which has shaped their present and threatens to destroy their future. They become embroiled in their own personal "civil war," and each struggles with his own form of slavery. Liddy, assumed to be a slave, offers the only key to freedom for them all: the self denial and humility of the first Christmas. A CIVIL WAR CHRISTMAS is an unlikely approach to the Christmas story. However, from its unique perspective, the essence of Christmas shines unobstructed.

SETTING

One set, the interior of a deserted farm house in the Oklahoma territory. It is shortly before Christmas during the Civil War.

PROPS

Pillow, bowl of water, cloth, tray, blankets, Bible, paper, pen, envelopes, pitcher of water, basin, drinking glass, pine boughs, soup bowls and spoons.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 1 w)

LIDDY SLOAN: Young, strong African American woman who loves the Lord and is mature spiritually.

ELI BANKS: Insecure, smallish man who compensates by being a driven, power-hungry authoritarian. He is a Colonel who has his sights on a General's star, and what he fears most in life is failing to achieve this goal.

MATTHEW CRAWFORD: A simple rural Texan driven by guilt, hatred, and pride. He seeks revenge at any cost for his brother's death.

JONAS WHITMAN: An educated Texan native who is watching his hopes and dreams for the "perfect life" crumble in despair because of a leg lost in the war.

COSTUMES

For Jonas' missing leg, the actor used a muslin "sling" during rehearsal which looped around both shoulders and draped down long enough to hold his foot up behind him. For costuming, he bound the right foot to the back of his left leg, as high as was "comfortable," with an ace bandage and gaffer's tape. Then he slipped into oversized trousers, the right leg of which had been tied up just below the knee. He wore a heavy robe open in the front in which the folds and mass disguised any remaining bump where his foot was lodged. A crutch fashioned from a forked tree limb, as though Liddy had made it for him, completed the illusion. The effect was quite believable.

Although not particularly authentic, wrapping Matthew with modern gauze worked best, especially the type of gauze that sticks to itself. To make the color more realistic you can tea-dip the rolls before application. The color is absorbed unevenly, giving a more natural appearance. Also, a light open robe over his shoulders simplifies the bandaging.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: LIGHTS up to early morning in an old living room that has been made into a makeshift hospital for three wounded Civil War SOLDIERS. Matthew is stealthily making his way across the room clutching his pillow. His arms and chest are completely bandaged. He stops over the bed of a sleeping soldier and stares down at him.)

JONAS: *(Groaning with discomfort.)* There's mo-o ...!
(MATTHEW turns, startled, and stares at JONAS. Moments of silence follow. More groans.) More comin-n-n ... mo-a-u-h ...

(MATTHEW hurries back to his bed as he calls out.)

MATTHEW: Nurse! Liddy, I think one of 'em's waking up!
JONAS: *(Awaking in fear.)* He-e-e-o-o-o ... l-u-u-ugh!

(LIDDY SLOAN enters with a bowl of water and a cloth on a tray. She crosses to JONAS.)

LIDDY: Well, look who come back wif us. I's right here, Mr. Whitman. I's right here. You all right?

MATTHEW: There goes havin' all the soup to myself.

LIDDY: You don' pay Maffew no mind, Mr. Whitman.

JONAS: Where ... where am ... I?

LIDDY: You in da friendliest place in all da Oklahoma territory dese days.

JONAS: Did ... what ... happened?

LIDDY: You lived. *(LIDDY begins to pat HIS forehead with the dampened cloth.)*

MATTHEW: If you're talkin' about the battle, we won. The fight lasted 'til dark. But the Yanks ran off overnight. Probably moved on North. That's been 'bout two weeks ago. The Colonel prob'ly run 'em down by now. I'd lay odds.

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(JONAS begins to struggle to remove his blankets. LIDDY stops him.)

LIDDY: Here now, Mr. Whitman. What're you up to?

JONAS: My foot hurts and it's on-fire hot.

LIDDY: Which foot, Mr. Whitman?

JONAS: This one. My right.

MATTHEW: You ain't got no right foot. Don't you remember why you're here?

JONAS: What?

LIDDY: You right foot done got hit by a musket ball up at Bird Creek. Dem doctors cut off what was left and brung you over here. Now you been unconscious for ten days.

(JONAS stares at the covers over where his foot should have been. Tentatively, he reaches down his leg and withdraws his hand with a start when it ends below the knee.)

JONAS: They took my foot?

MATTHEW: And your leg below the knee. You don't remember nothin'?

JONAS: They took my foot!

MATTHEW: Well, it wasn't like it would have done you any good. You ever seen a foot after a musket ball hits it?

(LIDDY tries to silence MATTHEW with hand gestures.)

JONAS: Does anyone know ... that I'm ... where are we?

LIDDY: Dey all done move on. You safe now.

JONAS: Yeah but, does anyone know ... family, I mean?

LIDDY: Dey's no way to get no word out yet. Maybe a week or so.

JONAS: Nobody knows.

LIDDY: *(Patting HIS arm.)* Well, we know, Mr. Whitman. Fo' now, dat'll hab to do. *(SHE exits, giving MATTHEW a warning look first.)*

MATTHEW: Well now, I finally got me someone to talk to. It's been a long two weeks.

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JONAS: You're Matthew Crawford. *(Pause.)* I met you in Denton before we headed north.

MATTHEW: *(Suddenly recognizes HIM and turns away.)* I ah ... I don't remember.

JONAS: You said you were looking for some fella with a scar on his forehead. *(JONAS is clearly focused on his missing foot.)*

MATTHEW: I said, I don't remember!

JONAS: *(Preoccupied by HIS missing foot.)* Well. I reckon it doesn't matter.

MATTHEW: I remember you from Caving Banks, though. Screamin' like a woman when they took your leg.

JONAS: Let me take a bone saw to your shin and see if you make any noise! *(Pause.)* I truly don't remember. It's been two weeks?

MATTHEW: Fever. Liddy didn't expect you to make it.

JONAS: Liddy?

MATTHEW: My ... uh ... the colored girl.

JONAS: Oh, uh huh. My foot is driving me crazy! Or, at least it seems ... it's very strange. So, what happened to you?

MATTHEW: I got grazed by a lucky shot from one of them Injun Yanks. Hardly even drew any blood. Just knocked me out for a spell.

JONAS: Then what are all the bandages for?

MATTHEW: It seems I fell plumb into one of the camp fires. Just lay there on my belly and burned. Should o' died by all rights, but I figure somebody pulled me out. I woke up here.

JONAS: You don't know how you got here?

MATTHEW: I just know I'm alive.

JONAS: Don't it hurt?

MATTHEW: Oh no. Feels great. What do you think?

JONAS: What about him? *(Indicates man in third bed.)*

MATTHEW: Same as you. Two weeks nearly, and not a word. He took a musket ball in the head too, only he ain't gonna be so lucky.

JONAS: Well, he's alive too. That's somethin'.

MATTHEW: Yeah. That's somethin'.

End of Freeview

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