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MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE

By Mindy Starns Clark

**Original song by David Starns
With lyrics by Mindy Starns Clark and David Starns**

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DEDICATION

*For my parents, who gave me the gift of music,
and for David, who gives me the gift of his songs.*

*The Playwright,
Mindy Starns Clark*

STORY OF THE PLAY

Have you ever wondered about the people who wrote the hymns that you sing in church every Sunday? Who were these people? And what events in their lives led them to sit down and write these songs—songs that would eventually become “hymnal classics” in the Christian church? MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE uncovers the true behind-the-scenes stories of seven people and how they were prompted by tragedy or triumph to write such treasured favorites as “Just As I Am” and “Onward, Christian Soldiers.”

Told in a series of vignettes, this play is incredibly versatile since it can be presented as a full-length musical, or divided into its individual stories to create seven shorter, one-act plays. (The segments range from five to forty minutes and can be easily mixed and matched.) Some of the segments provide hilarious comedy, while others present deeply touching drama. MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE includes the original song “Bringing a Hymn to Life” and is the perfect crowd pleaser for any group that loves to laugh and cry as they learn the stories behind some of their favorite songs.

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“BRINGING A HYMN TO LIFE” (page 5)

***MAN:** Adult, dressed in current day church clothes.

***WOMAN:** Adult, dressed in current day church clothes.

“BLESSED BE THE TIE THAT BINDS” (page 7)

***JOHN:** A minister of a small country church.

FRAN: The minister’s wife.

HURLEY: A poor parishioner.

GEORGIE: The minister’s son.

SALLY: The minister’s daughter.

3 OR 4 CHILDREN: Dressed simply, as they are poor.

5-10 TOWNSFOLK: Dressed simply, as they are poor.

“COME, THOU FOUNT OF EVERY BLESSING” (page 13)

***MARY:** A woman, nicely dressed.

***ROBERT:** A man, in a somewhat disheveled suit.

“JUST AS I AM” (page 18)

WILLIAM: A young minister.

***CHARLOTTE:** William's older sister, an invalid.

MARJORIE: An attractive woman, Charlotte's friend.

“HE LEADETH ME” (page 26)

JOSEPH: A public speaker.

CHOIR: Can be a duet, quartet, or full choir, in robes.

“ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS” (page 27)

B.G.: An eccentric, somewhat disheveled writer.

EVELYN: B.G.'s young, attractive secretary.

“DOXOLOGY” (page 32)

LORD WEYMOUTH: Man wears a costume of the late 1600s.

THOMAS KEN: Man in a bishop's robe.

MACAULAY: Man in black robe wearing glasses.

CHURCH OFFICIAL 1: Man in black robe wearing a cross.

CHURCH OFFICIAL 2: Man in black robe wearing a hat.

CHURCH OFFICIAL 3: Man in black robe carrying a Bible.

KING CHARLES: Man in black robe with crown.

KING JAMES: Man in black robe with crown and scepter.

“IT IS WELL” (page 35)

***MILLIE:** An English chambermaid.

***MR. SPAFFORD:** An attorney, dressed in somber clothing.

***MRS. SPAFFORD:** A grieving woman, dressed all in black.

***CAPTAIN:** A ship's captain, in uniform.

CLOSING – “BRINGING A HYMN TO LIFE” (page 45)

*** Denotes singing role**

SETTINGS AND SONGS

ACT I

"Bringing a Hymn to Life." Performed in front of closed curtain. Both Man and Woman sing.

"Blessed Be The Tie That Binds," 1782, England, a small country church. Benches for pews, makeshift podium, small desk and chair. Solo by John, then joined in singing by all others.

"Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," Late 1700s, England, a "stagecoach" formed by two chairs placed side by side in front of the curtain. Duet by Mary and Robert.

"Just As I Am," 1836, England, a simple living room. Desk, bookcase, easy chair, trunk and large portrait of a woman. Solo by Charlotte.

"He Leadeth Me," 1862, Philadelphia, no set required. Song by ensemble or choir.

"Onward, Christian Soldiers," 1865, England, the office of writer B.G. Office has a desk and two chairs. Song is sung offstage, with children's voices. (Can be pre-taped.)

"Doxology," England, late 1600s, no set required except for minimal props. Song is sung by audience.

ACT II

"It Is Well," 1873, with two settings: On SR is a room at an inn in Wales which has a rocking chair, small table with Bible on it and a lamp. On SL is the deck of a ship in the Atlantic, with the railing of a ship and a deck chair. Solo by Mr. Spafford, joined by Captain, then by Millie, then Mrs. Spafford.

FINALE: Featuring the entire cast. Reprise of "Bringing a Hymn to Life."

NOTE: See end of playbook for listing of props, costuming and sound effects.

“BRINGING A HYMN TO LIFE”

(AT RISE: In front of the closed curtain, MAN and WOMAN enter from side, dressed in their Sunday best with Woman carrying a purse and both holding bulletins as if they are leaving church. Man is humming “It Is Well.”)

WOMAN: *(Stopping MAN with a tug on his elbow)* Honey, do you always have to sing the hymns even after church is over?

MAN: Can I help it? I like “It Is Well.” It’s catchy. *(HE belts out “It Is Well” in an operatic bass, followed by the descant in a falsetto soprano.)*

WOMAN: Most hymns are pretty catchy. That doesn’t mean you have to sing them all day.

MAN: But you said it. Most hymns are pretty catchy. Even the ones that were written a hundred years ago.

(THEY continue walking, then stop again.)

WOMAN: Have you ever wondered how some of our more popular hymns came to be? You know, like who wrote the hymns? And what inspired them to write?

MAN: Hmm...I know there have been a couple of famous hymn writers, but most hymns were written by people we’ve never even heard of. For reasons I suppose we’ll never know.

WOMAN: I bet if we researched the origins of some hymns, we could find out the real stories behind them.

MAN: Their spark of inspiration, you mean? I bet we could. Of course, we would never find out everything.

WOMAN: No, but if we uncovered enough facts we could probably fill in some of the gaps ourselves...with a little imagination.

MAN: I think you’re right about that.

WOMAN: Well, should we try?

MAN: Sure, we can start in the church library—they have a great biography section.

WOMAN: I think that’s a great idea.

(MUSIC up. See end of play book. WOMAN sings:)

LONG AGO SOMEONE HEARD A TINY VOICE SAY,
“I HAVE A SONG.”
IN THE QUIET OF AN EMPTY ROOM, CARRIED AWAY
AS HE FOUND THE MELODY AND WORDS,
NOT WRITTEN HALF AS MUCH AS HEARD IN HIS HEART,
NOT DREAMING THAT WHEN HE WAS GONE
THE LORD WOULD LET HIS SIMPLE SONG LIVE ON.

(MAN sings:)

FROM DEEP INSIDE THE IDEA CAME—A SPARK FROM ABOVE-
FLOWING THROUGH A MORTAL HAND
A PRICELESS GIFT FOR UNDERSTANDING HIS LOVE
AND BRINGING IT DOWN TO A PLACE
WHERE, SINGING, WE MIGHT GLIMPSE THE GRACE OF GOD.

(MAN and WOMAN sing:)

BRINGING A HYMN TO LIFE, GOD’S WORD UNFURLED,

Make a Joyful Noise

6

THAT SOUNDS THE CALL ALL AROUND THE WORLD.
TAKING A VISION THROUGH TO SOMETHING NEW
A MESSAGE TO EVERY PERSON WHO IS
SINGING A HYMN.

(WOMAN sings:)

A SONG OF PRAISE, OR A SONG OF NEED, OR A SONG FROM THE CROSS
THE HOLY SPIRIT USED THEM ALL
AND STILL HE USES THEM TO CALL US "COME HOME"
HOME TO WHERE WE'RE FREE FROM SIN
TO KNOW THE VICTORY WITHIN OUR HEARTS.

(MAN and WOMAN sing:)

SO LET'S BRING OUR HYMNS TO LIFE, GOD'S WORD UNFURLED,
AND SOUND THE CALL ALL AROUND THE WORLD.
LET'S TAKE THE VISION THROUGH TO SOMETHING NEW
A MESSAGE TO EVERY PERSON WHO IS
SINGING A HYMN.

(LIGHTS down. MAN and WOMAN exit and stage front is cleared. They re-enter from each side of the closed curtain, each carrying a small podium. SPOTLIGHTS on each of them.)

WOMAN: Our first tale takes place in the year 1782. Perhaps we should "set the stage" so to speak.

MAN: Okay. Well, let's see, 1782. Benjamin Franklin attempts peace talks with Great Britain as the American Revolution continues to drag on.

WOMAN: Mozart's latest opera debuts in Vienna.

MAN: A new dynasty is created in Siam, with Bangkok as the capital.

WOMAN: Johann Sebastian Bach dies and Nicolo Paganini is born.

MAN: Inventions include a double-acting rotary steam engine and the air balloon.

WOMAN: And in Wainsgait, England, a pastor named, John Fawcett, stands in an empty church...

(SPOTLIGHTS off as WOMAN and MAN exit.)

“BLESSED BE THE TIE THAT BINDS”

Scene 1

(AT RISE: The Wainsgait Baptist Church. The room is sparse, though cheery, with benches for pews and a makeshift podium. In one corner is a small desk and chair. JOHN is sitting at the desk, holding an envelope and staring off into space when the door bursts open and in runs GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: Papa! You better come quick! I think Mama's dead!

JOHN: (*Unimpressed*) Oh really? Has she stopped breathing and turned stiff and cold this time?

GEORGIE: No, really, Papa. This isn't like yesterday when Grandma was taking a nap and I thought she had had heart failure. This time it's real. Mama was fixing the wagon and something slipped and I'm sure it must've chopped her arm off.

(FRAN enters, wiping her hands on a dishrag, and stands behind GEORGIE, who doesn't see her.)

JOHN: Chopped her arm off. I see. Was there lots of blood?

GEORGIE: Gallons and buckets full, Papa. You gotta come quick. I mean it, she's really dead this time. Probably.

JOHN: Well, I tell you what. Why don't you go clean up the mess and call the Constable and I'll be along just as soon as I finish writing this sermon.

GEORGIE: But, Papa—

JOHN: And listen, long as the Constable's here, why don't you go ahead tell him all about how Auntie Nester is really a government spy, and what the next door neighbors do whenever there's a full moon.

FRAN: And while you're at it, why not ask him what's the penalty for a wild imagination?

(GEORGIE spins around, surprised.)

GEORGIE: Mama! You're all right!

FRAN: Yes, Georgie, I'm fine. I scratched my finger, that's all.

(Several more CHILDREN, of various ages, appear in the doorway.)

SALLY: Georgie's in trouble! Georgie's in trouble!

GEORGIE: Get outta here, Sally!

FRAN: Come on, children. Let's run along now. Your father's working on his sermon.

JOHN: It's all right, Fran. Let the children come in for a moment.

FRAN: Okay, but only for a moment. You all have chores to do, and your father is very busy.

(The CHILDREN all enter.)

JOHN: Come, come children. Give your old Papa a hug. (*The CHILDREN gather around his chair. JOHN smiles at FRAN.*) The Lord has truly blessed us with a wonderful family, hasn't He? Wild imaginations and all.

FRAN: (*Smiling*) They are a handful.

JOHN: So, tell me, children. I have a question for you. A very important question, and I want you to think carefully before you answer.

GEORGIE: What is it, Papa?

JOHN: I just wonder...how do you really like living in Wainsgait?

GEORGIE: What do you mean, Papa? Wainsgait is our home. All our friends are here.

JOHN: I know. But we've lived here for six years, and it hasn't been easy on any of us. The people in this town are very poor, and as their minister, they can't afford to pay me very much at all.

SALLY: We don't mind being poor, Papa. Not most of the time, anyway.

JOHN: But, Sally, I can't help but wonder: Do you ever wish we had more, that we could afford better clothes and toys and things, like your cousins back in Yorkshire?

FRAN: An odd question to ask of children, don't you think, John? Children always seem to want more than they've got.

JOHN: Well, what about you, Fran? Don't you ever get tired of thinking up new ways to stretch the potatoes? Wouldn't it be nice to have some meat in our pot more than just once a month?

FRAN: Of course it would. But what does this have to do with anything?

JOHN: Oh, nothing. My mind just wanders sometimes. I see you fixing the wagon yourself, letting out the girls' dresses yet again, and I can't help but feel...I don't know. Like I'm not providing well enough for you all.

FRAN: That's nonsense, John! We're perfectly happy with what we have! Children, it's time to leave your father alone with his studies. You've all got chores to do. Get back over to the house. *(JOHN hugs the CHILDREN and they file out. FRAN follows them to the door, then closes it and turns to face John.)* Now, John Fawcett, just what is this all about?

(JOHN stands and picks up an envelope, walks to the window, and looks out.)

JOHN: Do you know how much money I made here last year, Fran?

FRAN: Not exactly. Enough to get by.

JOHN: Less than one hundred and fifty pounds. For the entire year! How we managed to survive on that is beyond me.

FRAN: The Lord provides, John. You've said that many times yourself.

(JOHN looks at FRAN, then down at the envelope.)

JOHN: Yes, the Lord provides. Sometimes in wondrous ways.

FRAN: *(More tenderly)* What is it, John? You've been acting odd all day. Come to think of it, you tossed and turned quite a bit last night. What's the matter, honey?

(JOHN holds up the envelope.)

JOHN: This came for me yesterday. My head has been in a bit of a spin ever since. I haven't known what to think.

(FRAN takes the envelope and reads the outside.)

FRAN: Carter's Lane Baptist Church? London?

JOHN: You've heard of it?

FRAN: Of course. Everyone's heard of Carter's Lane. It's one of the biggest Baptist churches in England.

JOHN: And one of the most influential. Not to mention prestigious. And wealthy.

FRAN: And?

JOHN: And...I've been called to be Pastor.

(FRAN quickly sits, looking as if she may faint.)

FRAN: Goodness. No wonder your head's in a spin.

JOHN: *(Smiling)* Is that all you can say?

FRAN: I don't know what to say.

JOHN: How do you feel?

FRAN: I feel...lots of things. Proud, John, very, very proud. Thrilled that your gifts have been recognized so far beyond the bounds of Wainsgait. Excited, I suppose, at the idea of life in London, a life of not having to scrimp and save quite so vigorously...and yet...very sad...at the thought of leaving our beloved congregation here. We've made so many dear friends.

JOHN: These are my feelings too, Fran. I go from one extreme to the other. One moment I tell myself I'll never again have such an opportunity to spread God's word to so many...*(JOHN goes to the window, then turns and raises his hand to gesture around him.)*...and then I look at our tiny little church here, and I know that there's God's work to be done here, too.

(FRAN steps closer to HIM.)

FRAN: This is our home. These people are like family.

JOHN: And yet—

FRAN: And yet, I'm sure there are many fine people at Carter's Lane, too.

JOHN: I do have my own family to think of. We've quite a few mouths to feed, Fran. It gets harder and harder all the time. I've been poor all my life. Now's the chance to finally have something. And why shouldn't we enjoy the comforts of a London parsonage? Why shouldn't there be meat in our pot?

FRAN: I don't know what to tell you, John. As your wife, I should be able to advise you wisely and all that, but I'm afraid I'm quite at a loss.

JOHN: As my wife, you provide me with infinite comfort just by being here.

(THEY hug for a long moment, then pull apart.)

FRAN: Ultimately, John, it comes down to the simple issue of God's will.

JOHN: I know. I suppose I'll just have to wait patiently until He shows me what that is.

(FRAN walks to the door, hesitates, then turns back toward JOHN.)

FRAN: John? There is one thing.

(JOHN has already turned his attentions to the papers on his desk and answers HER absently.)

JOHN: Yes?

FRAN: I wasn't going to bring it up quite so soon, but, considering everything...

(JOHN looks up at HER questioningly.)

FRAN: We do have quite a few mouths to feed.

JOHN: That we do.

FRAN: Well, we're going to have one more.

(HE stares at HER for a moment, then stands.)

JOHN: You don't mean....

FRAN: *(Smiling)* Yes. Perhaps it will be another boy. Let's just hope he doesn't have Georgie's imagination.

(JOHN runs to FRAN and hugs her.)

JOHN: My darling, this is wonderful news! Shame on you for not telling me sooner.

FRAN: I was waiting for the right moment. Now that you have this decision to make, well, I thought you should have all the facts.

(FRAN kisses JOHN'S cheek and exits, closing the door quietly behind her. John remains where he is and talks to himself.)

JOHN: Now that I have all the facts, I don't see that there's any decision to be made. *(HE looks up.)* Well, God. Looks like we don't have much choice.

(LIGHTS down.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: The desk is empty of all papers and things. JOHN enters, wearing his coat and hat. He stands at the window sadly. After a moment, FRAN enters. She is dressed in a coat and hat.)

FRAN: John? What are you doing? The wagons are loaded. The horses are ready.

(Embarrassed, HE wipes at his eyes.)

JOHN: Just checking to see if we've left anything behind.

(HE begins looking around the empty desk. FRAN goes to the window.)

FRAN: That's quite a crowd out there to see us off. Somehow I think it would have been easier to slip away secretly last night. Good-byes are always so hard.

JOHN: And so final....

(FRAN spins around to look at HIM.)

FRAN: We don't have to go, you know. There's nothing that says we can't unpack the wagons right now and forget we ever even thought of leaving.

JOHN: Francis Fawcett, don't do this.

FRAN: I know you don't want to go, John. Neither do I. Neither do the children. We've been happy here, we've managed to get by. One more little baby is not going to put us over the edge.

JOHN: Why are you doing this now? You're only making it harder.

FRAN: Why now? Because I got to thinking last night, thinking about a sermon I heard years ago, a sermon about finding God's will.

JOHN: And?

FRAN: And I always remembered it, because it was such an excellent sermon, and because it was so meaningful to me as a girl considering marriage to a certain brilliant young Baptist minister.

JOHN: *(Jealously)* Who?

FRAN: You, silly!

JOHN: Oh.

FRAN: You said then that God shows His will in many ways.

JOHN: That's true.

FRAN: You said that sometimes it's quite obvious, and sometimes it's not obvious at all. You said that after much prayerful consideration, sometimes the best you can hope for is a sense of peace, that knowing feeling He gives you that simply tells you you've made the right decision.

JOHN: So?

FRAN: So, I haven't had that many big decisions in my life, John. But with those that I have made, I have experienced that peace. I do know what you were talking about. *(JOHN turns away.)* I don't have that feeling now. Something about all of this just seems wrong.

JOHN: It could be that you are confusing God's will with your own desires, Fran.

FRAN: Maybe. But I don't think so.

(JOHN hesitates, then finally speaks firmly.)

JOHN: The decision has been made. They're waiting for us in London.

(JOHN starts to exit when HURLEY enters, followed by other TOWNSFOLK. The Fawcett CHILDREN come in and crowd around their PARENTS, who back up to accommodate everyone in the room. Hurley removes his hat and holds it in his hands.)

HURLEY: Reverend? Listen, before you go, there's something we all wanted to give you. I've been elected as spokesman.

JOHN: Yes, Hurley?

HURLEY: Well, it ain't much, but it's from our hearts, and we just want you all to know how much we love you. And how much we're going to miss you. *(HE holds out a small picture in a crude wood frame.)*

FRAN: Why, it's a painting of the church.

HURLEY: That's so's you wouldn't forget us. 'Cause we ain't never gonna forget you.

(FRAN begins to cry.)

HURLEY: Now, Miz Fawcett, don't you go worrying about us none. We'll get us a new preacher one of these days. And in the meantime, we'll be fine...I guess that's all we wanted to say. That and...God Bless.

(ALL are quiet for a moment.)

GEORGIE: *(Sadly)* Is it time to go now?

FRAN: Yes, Georgie, it is. Tell everyone good-bye. *(The CHILDREN begin to mingle with the TOWNSFOLK, hugging and saying good-bye. FRAN speaks to JOHN in the corner, in tears.)* Oh, John. I cannot bear to leave. I know not how to go! *(FRAN buries her head in JOHN'S shoulder as he hugs her.)*

JOHN: *(Sadly)* Nor do I. *(HE hesitates for only a moment.)* Unload the wagons.

(FRAN pulls back to look at HIM.)

HURLEY: What did you say, Reverend?

JOHN: I said...*(HE clears his throat and speaks more strongly.)*...I said unload the wagons! We're not going anywhere!

(A cheer goes up from FRAN and the CROWD as the LIGHTS go down.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: LIGHTS come back up, the congregation is sitting in the pews. JOHN is standing at the pulpit and papers are being handed out down the line.)

JOHN: ...As all of you know, this has been a very big week for my family.

(A murmur of agreement goes through the CONGREGATION.)

JOHN: First we packed up to leave, then we unpacked all the same. In the meantime, my lovely wife reminded me of a thing or two about the Lord's will. And all of you taught me a lot about the ties that bind us Christians together. *(HE holds up the paper.)* I've done a lot of thinking in the last few days since we decided not to go to London. My thoughts led me to a little hymn writing. The song sheet that has been passed out has the words to this new song I wrote, and I'd like to share it with all of you. I guess I'll sing the first verse, then all of you can join in on the rest.

(JOHN clears his throat and begins singing, softly at first, then more loudly:)

BLEST BE THE TIE THAT BINDS
OUR HEARTS IN CHRISTIAN LOVE!
THE FELLOWSHIP OF KINDRED MINDS
IS LIKE TO THAT ABOVE.

(The CONGREGATION joins in, with harmony.)

WHEN WE ASUNDER PART
IT GIVES US INWARD PAIN;
BUT WE SHALL STILL BE JOINED IN HEART,
AND HOPE TO MEET AGAIN.
AMEN.

GEORGIE: Wow. This song is so great, it's gonna become a classic in the Baptist church. I guarantee—they're gonna be singing this song a hundred years from now!

FRAN: *(Whispering loudly)* Hush, Georgie.

GEORGIE: It's true, Mama.

FRAN: *(SHE shakes her head.)* You and your imagination!

(LIGHTS down.)

Interim Scene

(AT RISE: LIGHTS up on MAN and WOMAN, at their podiums in front of the closed curtain.)

MAN: John Fawcett continued his ministry in Wainsgait for more than fifty years, until he died at the age of seventy-seven. And yet, in all of those fifty years, his salary never once exceeded the equivalent of a mere two hundred dollars a year!

WOMAN: I do know he became well-known as an outstanding preacher and scholar, and that he kept turning down prestigious offers for the rest of his life.

MAN: That's what I call devotion.

WOMAN: So...what do you think? Think we should jump ahead a few years, to the late 1700s?

MAN: Sure. The American Revolution has wound down....

WOMAN: But Napoleon is winding up....

MAN: And a man named Robert meets a woman named Mary on a stagecoach, riding across England.

(LIGHTS down.)

“COME, THOU FOUNT OF EVERY BLESSING”

(AT RISE: LIGHTS up on a “stagecoach,” just two chairs in front of the closed curtain, with two passengers, sitting side by side. ROBERT is wearing expensive clothes, but they are disheveled, and he occasionally takes sips from a bottle wrapped in paper. MARY is prim and proper and she quietly reads a book that she is holding on her lap. Robert is dozing and as he falls asleep, his head tilts down until it rests on Mary's shoulder. She tries to ignore him, but finally has enough.)

MARY: If you would please excuse me, sir!

(Startled, HE snaps his head up.)

ROBERT: What?

MARY: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle you, but your head...was resting...on my shoulder.

(ROBERT sits up straight, takes a sip from the bag.)

ROBERT: A thousand pardons, mum. It's just that I'm awfully tired.

MARY: Awfully drunk, you mean.

ROBERT: No, not really. There's no such thing as “awfully drunk.” There's wonderfully drunk, and blessedly drunk, but never awfully drunk. That, my dear madame, would be an oxymoron.

MARY: Really, sir. There is another seat. Must you sit here next to me?

ROBERT: Yes, I could sit there. But then I'd be across from you, and you'd have to look at me the rest of the trip.

MARY: So instead you sit next to me and I just have to smell you? Is that it?

(ROBERT grins.)

ROBERT: You...you're a feisty little thing, aren't you? You're what we used to call a “spitfire.”

MARY: The other seat, please?

ROBERT: Oh, I'm just kidding about all that. See, that seat has a broken spring—you can't sit on it. Believe me, my bum is killing me from when it popped.

MARY: Sir!

ROBERT: Oh, I'm sorry, ma'am. Sometimes I forget when I'm in the presence of a real lady.

MARY: That's a rare occasion, I take it.

ROBERT: Rare indeed. *(HE is quiet for a moment; SHE returns to her reading.)* Though, it wasn't always so.

MARY: Excuse me?

ROBERT: I used to associate with proper ladies like you all the time. 'Course, that was years ago, back in my religious phase.

MARY: How can you call religion a phase? You sound almost... contemptible.

ROBERT: Contempt...yes, you might call it that. *(HE takes a big drink.)* Doesn't matter. That's all in the past now anyway.

(ROBERT tilts his head the other way and closes his eyes. MARY hesitates, exasperated.)

MARY: Well now, really, you can't just leave it at that. What sort of proper Christian would I be if I didn't follow up on such a miserable plea for help?

ROBERT: *(Smirking)* A plea for help? Lady, everything about me simply shrieks "help." I think the Lord will forgive you if you leave this one poor soul by the roadside and get on with your hymn reading.

(MARY thinks for a moment, then closes her book and forces a smile.)

MARY: Where are you from, Mr...

ROBERT: Robinson. Robert Robinson.

MARY: Mr. Robinson. Are you from London originally?

ROBERT: No, I was born in Swaffham. My pop died when I was eight, and by the time I was fourteen, I was getting to be quite a handful for my mom. So she sent me off to London, to learn the barbering trade.

MARY: Sounds interesting.

ROBERT: I suppose. Mostly, I was too busy running around with a bunch of hoodlums to pay much attention to cutting hair. Believe me, Miss—what's your name, by the way?

MARY: Mary Winters.

ROBERT: Believe me, Miss Winters, I led quite the life. Why, I did things I bet you never even heard of.

MARY: Well, there's no need to be graphic. I take your word for it.

ROBERT: We certainly were a wild bunch, that's for sure.

MARY: So when did you enter your, as you call it, "religious phase?"

ROBERT: When I was seventeen. The gang and I went to a meeting where George Whitefield was preaching.

MARY: Oh, yes. I'm familiar with his work. A fine evangelist, a wonderful orator.

ROBERT: Yes, well, I didn't know that at the time. We just went there for some fun, to scoff at all the poor, deluded Methodists.

MARY: Yet...?

ROBERT: Yet, something happened to me that night. I can hardly recall those feelings now, but old Whitefield sure did a number on me. Then and there, I converted to Christ. Gave up all my sinful ways.

MARY: Praise be to God.

ROBERT: Yeah, right.

(HE takes a long drink from the bag.)

MARY: What happened then? Did your hoodlum friends lead you back into a life of debauchery?
ROBERT: *(HE grins.)* Heck, no. Why, within three years I was living in Cambridge, serving as a Baptist minister.

(MARY is so startled, she drops her book.)

MARY: You? A Baptist minister?

ROBERT: Don't look so shocked, lady. I was quite the theologian in my time. *(HE leans over to pick up the book.)* Why, you may even have read some of my work.

MARY: I doubt it.

(HE looks to where the book has fallen open and hesitates for a moment.)

ROBERT: Don't be too surprised.

(HE hands her the open book. SHE takes the book without really looking at it, but leaves it open on her lap.)

MARY: In any event, Mr. Robinson, I have to wonder what on earth happened. What caused you to stray so far from the way of the Lord?

ROBERT: Honestly?

MARY: Yes.

ROBERT: Honestly, I couldn't even tell you. I think in the end...*(HE shrugs.)*...human nature won out. One day, my heart was bursting with the Lord's good grace, the next I started feeling kind of empty inside. *(HE is quiet and thoughtful for a moment.)* Sin, perhaps...one sin leading to another sin...before long, you've built up a wall between you and God that just can't be torn down.

MARY: The love of God can tear down any wall.

ROBERT: Maybe. Then again, maybe some folks just weren't meant to be Christians in the first place. It's like in that hymn there in your book. Third verse, second half.

(MARY lifts the book and reads.)

MARY: "Prone to wander—Lord, I feel it—Prone to leave the God I love."

ROBERT: That's it. That was always me. Prone to wander.

MARY: Oh, but Mr. Robinson. You're taking one isolated line from a beautiful hymn and twisting it around! You have to hear the whole song. The message here is so beautiful, so simple.

(MARY holds the book out for HIM to read, but he looks away and does not reply. He takes another sip.) Would you mind if I sang it?

ROBERT: *(HE shrugs.)* Suit yourself.

(MARY sings. As she sings, ROBERT is obviously disturbed, finally settles with his head in his hands.)

COME, THOU FOUNT OF EVERY BLESSING,
TUNE MY HEART TO SING THY GRACE;
STREAMS OF MERCY, NEVER CEASING,
CALL FOR SONGS OF LOUDEST PRAISE.
TEACH ME SOME MELODIOUS SONNET

SUNG BY FLAMING TONGUES ABOVE;
PRAISE THE MOUNT—I'M FIXED UPON IT—
MOUNT OF THY REDEEMING LOVE.

MARY: You know this song? (*ROBERT nods.*) Sing the next verse with me. Please?

(*ROBERT sits up, doesn't even look down at the hymnal as THEY sing:*)

HERE I RAISE MINE EBENEZER—
HITHER BY THY HELP I'M COME;
AND I HOPE BY THY GOOD PLEASURE
SAFELY TO ARRIVE AT HOME.
JESUS SOUGHT ME WHEN A STRANGER
WANDRING FROM THE FOLD OF GOD;
HE TO RESCUE ME FROM DANGER
INTERPOSED HIS PRECIOUS BLOOD.

MARY: (*Growing excited*) That's it, Robert!

(*MARY and ROBERT sing:*)

O TO GRACE HOW GREAT A DEBTOR
DAILY I'M CONSTRAINED TO BE!
LET THY GOODNESS LIKE A FETTER
BIND MY WANDRING HEART TO THEE.
PRONE TO WANDER...

(*ROBERT'S voice trails off here until he is silent, leaving MARY to finish the verse alone.*)

LORD, I FEEL IT—
PRONE TO LEAVE THE GOD I LOVE;
HERE'S MY HEART—
O TAKE AND SEAL IT,
SEAL IT FOR THY COURTS ABOVE.

MARY: Such a fine hymn. What do you think of it? (*ROBERT is quiet, staring out the window.*)
Mr. Robinson, are you all right? Do these words speak to you? What do you think of this
hymn?

(*ROBERT finally looks at HER and speaks slowly.*)

ROBERT: What do I think of it? My dear Miss Winters. (*HE shakes his head.*) I wrote it.

(*Shocked, MARY looks back at the page.*)

MARY: My goodness, Robert Robinson, it's true. But how...what...

(*ROBERT wipes his eyes and looks at MARY.*)

ROBERT: Yes, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago. (*HE looks
out of the window.*) And I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to again enjoy the
feelings I had then.

(MARY is quiet for a long pause, perhaps even wipes away a tear.)

MARY: Well, we're here. Is this where you get off, too?

ROBERT: Yes.

(MARY starts to get off, then stops and turns to ROBERT.)

MARY: Mr. Robinson, if I may be so bold. The answers you are looking for are right inside your very own hymn. As it says, "Jesus sought me when a stranger, Wandering from the fold of God." You've wandered far, Mr. Robinson. But to rescue you, He gave His blood, His very life. Won't you go back?

ROBERT: I don't know.

MARY: He's only a prayer away, you know. A good place to start, I think, is to replace that bottle with this Bible.

(MARY pats ROBERT'S arm, then exits. Robert hesitates, then resolutely puts down the bottle, picks up the Bible, then exits. LIGHTS down.)

Interim Scene

(AT RISE: ROBERT and MARY are gone, and MAN and WOMAN are at their podiums.)

WOMAN: Goodness. Did Robinson ever find his way back to God?

MAN: Robinson's last known conversation was the one he had on the stagecoach, so no one knows for sure. I'd like to think so. The words of his song certainly recognize that God seeks the lost.

WOMAN: Well, let's move on to another tale. The year is 1836.

MAN: Davey Crockett is killed at the Alamo and Texas becomes a republic. Arkansas is admitted to the Union.

WOMAN: Dickens and Emerson are all the rage.

MAN: Inventions include the screw propeller and phosphorus matches.

WOMAN: Betsy Ross dies.

MAN: And in Brighton, England, Charlotte Elliott dozes in the parlor...

(MAN and WOMAN exit.)

“JUST AS I AM”

Scene 1

(AT RISE: The living room of the Elliott's home. There is a desk under the window with a bookcase next to it. CHARLOTTE is sitting in a nearby easy chair, a shawl wrapped around her shoulders, a trunk resting on the floor near the chair. There is a large portrait of a woman hanging on the wall. Charlotte is dozing. WILLIAM enters through the door.)

WILLIAM: Charlotte? Charlotte! There you are.

(SHE stirs, opens her eyes, and smiles. Though only 47, she looks much older. As she speaks, she occasionally grimaces, as if she is in constant pain.)

CHARLOTTE: William. Is the bazaar over already? Goodness, I must've dozed the afternoon away.

WILLIAM: No, no. I came back early. There's something I must tell you. You'll simply never guess who is back in town. She was at the bazaar.

CHARLOTTE: Well, wait a minute. First things first. How is the bazaar going? Have you taken in much money?

WILLIAM: In a minute, Charlotte. First, you have to guess who was there.

(SHE looks at HIM for a moment.)

CHARLOTTE: Someone from our past, I take it.

WILLIAM: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: Well, let me see, little brother. Your first true love? *(HE frowns at HER.)* Oh, excuse me, I forgot. You haven't found one yet.

WILLIAM: Don't make fun, sis. You know how busy I am. True love is the last thing I have time for. I'm busy with the church, busy with raising money to build the school—

CHARLOTTE: Busy taking care of me.

WILLIAM: Come now. That's nonsense.

CHARLOTTE: No, it's not.

WILLIAM: Well, it's a labor of love, I assure you.

CHARLOTTE: Nevertheless....

WILLIAM: Nevertheless, I'll tell you who was there. Marjorie Desmond.

CHARLOTTE: Marjorie Desmond? I don't believe it! Why, I haven't seen her in nearly twenty years. What is she doing back? How did she look? Did you speak to her? Did you invite her over?

WILLIAM: Yes, I spoke to her, briefly. She's coming tomorrow for afternoon tea. Said she's dying to see you.

CHARLOTTE: What is she doing back?

WILLIAM: Don't know.

CHARLOTTE: How did she look?

WILLIAM: I don't know. Fine, I guess.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, William, you make me crazy! A typical man. Why, if it were a woman who had run into her, she'd already know everything that had happened in the twenty years since she's been gone.

WILLIAM: Charlotte—

CHARLOTTE: And she would be able to describe every inch of the woman in detail—she would have taken inventory of everything new and lovely about her.

WILLIAM: Don't kid yourself. If it were a woman who had run into her, she would have taken inventory of every wrinkle and gray hair—and then run home to the mirror to compare.

(CHARLOTTE laughs.)

CHARLOTTE: How grand it will be to see her again.

(There is a small RINGING of a bell offstage.)

WILLIAM: Ah. That must be the mail. *(WILLIAM exits SR.)*

CHARLOTTE: Oh good. *(Calling off to him)* Was her husband with her, did you see? Was she wearing a fancy dress?

(WILLIAM returns with a small stack of letters and hands them to CHARLOTTE. She takes the letters, flipping through them with slow, crippled fingers.)

WILLIAM: I told you, I only saw her for a minute. *(HE looks at HER.)* What is it with you, Charlotte? You get more mail in a day than most folks get in a year. What is all this?

CHARLOTTE: Never you mind, little brother. You just concern yourself with this little item right here.

(SHE pulls an envelope from the stack and hands it to HIM, smiling. He looks at it and pulls away his hand.)

WILLIAM: Another royalty check! No. Charlotte, I simply can't take it from you again.

CHARLOTTE: Of course you will.

WILLIAM: No, I won't.

CHARLOTTE: *(Sternly)* William, sit down. Right here.

(SHE indicates the chair next to her. HE sits.)

CHARLOTTE: William, we have already discussed this. *(HE looks away.)* Listen to me. I told you when I wrote my song that it was my little way of contributing to your fund raising. You have all of your projects, your bazaars—everything—and I feel so helpless because I can't be out there by your side helping you to raise the money you need. *(SHE leans closer to HIM.)* William, I believe in the school you want to build every bit as much as you do. A school for the children of poor clergymen—what could be more wonderful? William, the good Lord gave me a talent for writing songs. Let me use it for His glory. *(SHE holds out the envelope.)* Please. Let me do this.

(Finally, WILLIAM takes the envelope from HER and smiles.)

WILLIAM: If it's as big as the last one, it will help considerably.

CHARLOTTE: It does seem as if we have a hit on our hands, religiously speaking, of course.

WILLIAM: It's a beautiful song.

CHARLOTTE: That's because it came from my heart. With the Lord's inspiration, of course.

(WILLIAM stands.)

WILLIAM: Well, I suppose I should be getting back to the bazaar.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, go, go.

(WILLIAM walks to the doorway. CHARLOTTE returns her attention to her letters. William pauses.)

WILLIAM: Charlotte...for what it's worth, she looks quite...lovely. Not many wrinkles at all.

(Smiling, CHARLOTTE waves him away. WILLIAM exits. Charlotte opens one of her letters and reads it. When she is finished, she leans over to the trunk that is next to her chair and opens it. Carefully, she places the letter back in the envelope and then down into the trunk. She is opening the next letter as the LIGHTS go down.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: It is the next afternoon and the living room is empty except for WILLIAM, who is setting up for tea. After a moment, the DOORBELL is heard.)

WILLIAM: Charlotte! Did you hear the bell? It must be her.

CHARLOTTE: *(From offstage)* Okay. Let her in. I'm not quite ready.

(WILLIAM goes to the door and opens it to reveal MARJORIE. She is in her late 40s, very attractive, wearing a lovely, expensive dress, white gloves, and carrying a small bunch of flowers.)

WILLIAM: Marjorie. How good to see you again. *(HE kisses HER hand.)*

MARJORIE: William. Did I tell you yesterday that you don't look a day over 25?

WILLIAM: Considering that I'm almost 45, I'll take that as a sign of your generous nature combined with poor eyesight.

(MARJORIE laughs.)

MARJORIE: Why, my eyes have never been better.

WILLIAM: They still are a lovely shade of blue, too, aren't they? *(THEY smile at each other for a moment, then WILLIAM shakes his head.)* But...where are my manners? Come in, come in.

(WILLIAM takes her shawl, closing the door behind her. MARJORIE enters the room looking around her and smiling.)

MARJORIE: Why, the house is exactly as I remembered it! I don't think you've changed a thing!

WILLIAM: Really? Well. I don't really have much of a touch for decorating. And, of course, Charlotte can't—

(MARJORIE spies the portrait.)

MARJORIE: Oh look! I had forgotten about this portrait. It is so beautiful! Why, I do believe it was the most lovely of all the ones Charlotte painted. I never knew anyone with such a knack for portrait painting. But this one is wonderful. Of course, this was your mother, wasn't it? That's why she did such a beautiful job. Charlotte captured the love in her eyes. *(WILLIAM looks up at the portrait. MARJORIE flits across the room.)* So where is Charlotte? I'll simply explode if I don't see her soon!

WILLIAM: She's dressing. It takes her quite a while, you know....

MARJORIE: Don't I know it! My goodness, with these new fashions today, there's just so many layers and layers of silks and ruffles, not to mention the tiny little buttons and things. Why, it takes me hours to get dressed in the morning.

WILLIAM: Marjorie—

MARJORIE: I guess I'll simply have to wait for her. And what better way than by chatting with you? *(MARJORIE sits in the chair and gestures for WILLIAM to sit as well.)* So, tell me, is Charlotte doing much painting these days? Or has she gone to writing her humorous little verses full time? *(WILLIAM opens his mouth, but MARJORIE speaks before he can respond.)* My goodness, what a wit your big sister always had. She was so funny, and so lovely and popular. I tell you, William, when I got married and moved away, I do believe it was Charlotte I missed most of all. We had the most wonderful times together—though I'm afraid we weren't always ladylike.

WILLIAM: Marjorie, there's something about Charlotte that you need to know. I just assumed someone would've told you by now—

CHARLOTTE: *(From offstage)* William? I'm ready.

MARJORIE: What is it?

CHARLOTTE: *(From offstage)* William?

(HE looks at MARJORIE, then stands and exits. After a moment, he returns, pushing CHARLOTTE in a wheelchair. NOTE: If a wheelchair circa 1836 cannot be made or found, he may enter carrying her and set her down in the easy chair. MARJORIE is frozen.)

CHARLOTTE: Marjorie Desmond! I cannot tell you how many times I have dreamed of seeing you again.

MARJORIE: *(In a whisper)* Charlotte.

(Quickly, CHARLOTTE realizes what is going on. She glances at WILLIAM.)

WILLIAM: I guess I should leave you two ladies to talk. *(No one replies.)* I mean, I know how you gals go on when you get together. Just talk, talk, talk....*(Awkwardly, HE exits.)*

CHARLOTTE: Don't be so shocked, Marjorie. It's not all that bad.

(MARJORIE is still frozen. After a moment, she seems to snap out of it and remembers the flowers in her hand.)

MARJORIE: These—these are for you. *(SHE holds out the flowers.)*

CHARLOTTE: Posies!

MARJORIE: I remembered how much you always loved posies. *(CHARLOTTE reaches out for them with gnarled hands. MARJORIE looks at her hands, aghast.)* Charlotte. What happened to you? Why, when I moved away....

CHARLOTTE: When you moved away, I was the prettiest, most popular girl in Brighton, eh? *(MARJORIE nods her head.)* It's all right to be shocked, Marjorie. Sometimes when I look in a mirror, I'm shocked too.

MARJORIE: No, Charlotte, it's not that. It's just—

CHARLOTTE: I'm sorry, Marjorie. Someone should've warned you.

MARJORIE: Dear Charlotte. What happened?

(CHARLOTTE exhales deeply.)

CHARLOTTE: My health began to fail, rapidly, when I was thirty years old. I've practically been bedridden ever since. *(SHE shrugs.)* It hasn't been all bad, dear. In fact, some things quite

good have come out of it.

MARJORIE: Oh, Charlotte, how can you say that? Are you in pain?

CHARLOTTE: Constantly.

MARJORIE: Oh, I just feel so...petty.

CHARLOTTE: Why?

(MARJORIE stands and begins pacing.)

MARJORIE: Because all the way here, all I kept thinking, was I cannot wait to see my old friend Charlotte. I needed a shoulder to cry on...and yours were always the best of shoulders for that sort of thing.

CHARLOTTE: Why, Marjorie. Whatever is wrong?

MARJORIE: Oh, Charlotte, it doesn't matter now. You don't need my problems on top of your own.

(CHARLOTTE thinks for a moment, then reaches out for MARJORIE'S hand. Holding hands, Marjorie sits and looks at Charlotte.)

CHARLOTTE: As I told you, Marjorie. Some very good things have come out of this.

MARJORIE: Like what?

CHARLOTTE: Like I finally found the time to settle down and stop running from myself.

(MARJORIE chuckles self-consciously and then looks at CHARLOTTE.)

MARJORIE: Yes, I can see that. There is a sort of difference in you—in your eyes.

CHARLOTTE: Ah, that. *(SHE smiles.)* That's the peace.

MARJORIE: The peace?

CHARLOTTE: The peace of the Lord. When I invited Him into my life, He filled me with peace. In spite of all of my hardships, that peace has endured.

MARJORIE: *(Skeptically)* Hmm...have you been listening to one too many of your brother's sermons?

CHARLOTTE: No, in fact, it wasn't William that led me to the Lord at all. It was a Swiss evangelist, Dr. Caesar Malan—

MARJORIE: Oh, I've heard of him.

CHARLOTTE: *(SHE nods.)* He was here visiting William. I was 33 at the time, and feeling incredibly despondent about my situation.

MARJORIE: I can imagine.

CHARLOTTE: Dr. Malan spent a lot of time with me, talking to me, counseling with me....

MARJORIE: Was he good-looking?

CHARLOTTE: Marjorie!

MARJORIE: Sorry.

CHARLOTTE: He was very wise, and he told me something that has stayed with me always. He told me, "Charlotte, you must come just as you are, a sinner, to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." That very statement led me to give my life over to God. I have celebrated that day each year since. I call it my spiritual birthday.

MARJORIE: You seem happy, in spite of your pain.

(CHARLOTTE reaches for her trunk, opens it and pulls out a small book.)

CHARLOTTE: This is my personal journal, Marjorie. May I read to you?

MARJORIE: *(SHE nods.)* Of course.

CHARLOTTE: *(SHE flips through the pages.)* Here we go..."God sees, God guides, God guards me. His grace surrounds me, and His voice continually bids me to be happy and holy in His service."

MARJORIE: That's lovely, Charlotte. May I? *(CHARLOTTE hands HER the book and she turns a few pages then reads.)* "He knows, and He alone, what it is, day after day, hour after hour, to fight against bodily feelings of almost overpowering weakness, languor and exhaustion, to resolve not to yield to slothfulness, depression and instability, such as the body causes me too long to indulge, but to rise every morning determined to take for my motto, 'If a man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'" *(SHE closes the book.)* I do believe I'm going to cry.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, don't do that. It wasn't meant to be sad.

MARJORIE: No, it's just so touching....

(MARJORIE hands the book back to CHARLOTTE and dabs at her eyes with a handkerchief. Charlotte puts the book back into the trunk, then looks at Marjorie.)

CHARLOTTE: The grace of God isn't just for invalids you know.

(MARJORIE looks up at CHARLOTTE.)

MARJORIE: He wants nothing to do with me, I assure you. Not after the silly, empty life I've led. *(SHE stands again and begins pacing.)* My husband died.

CHARLOTTE: I'm so sorry.

MARJORIE: Oh, it's been almost two years now. I've dealt with it, fairly well, I think. I've just been thinking a lot lately about death...and life...and the meaning of it all.

CHARLOTTE: You said you wanted to cry on my shoulder.

MARJORIE: I don't know what led me to you. I just needed to talk these things over with someone. You've always been so sensible.

CHARLOTTE: I have no doubt, Marjorie. God has brought you here. He wants you to accept Him into your life.

MARJORIE: He doesn't want me. You don't know the life I've led. All the silly parties, the empty conversations, the wasted money...the wasted life. I am a sinner, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: That's His favorite kind of person, Marjorie. That's the kind Jesus gave His life for. *(SHE smiles.)* You know, I wrote a song, based on the words Mr. Malan told me. It's become quite popular among religious groups. Would you like to hear it?

MARJORIE: *(Sincerely)* You know I would.

(CHARLOTTE closes her eyes and begins to sing, a capella, "Just As I Am." She sings two verses.)

CHARLOTTE:

JUST AS I AM, WITHOUT ONE PLEA
BUT THAT THY BLOOD WAS SHED FOR ME,
AND THAT THOU BIDD'ST ME COME TO THEE,
O LAMB OF GOD, I COME! I COME!

JUST AS I AM, AND WAITING NOT
TO RID MY SOUL OF ONE DARK BLOT,
TO THEE WHOSE BLOOD CAN CLEANSE EACH SPOT,
O LAMB OF GOD, I COME! I COME!

(There is silence after SHE finishes singing. MARJORIE is crying. Charlotte speaks softly.)

CHARLOTTE: Marjorie. Would you like to pray?

MARJORIE: Yes!

(MARJORIE falls to her knees next to CHARLOTTE. Smiling, Charlotte places her hand on Marjorie's shoulder and bows her head to pray.)

CHARLOTTE: Our precious heavenly Father...

(As THEY pray, the CURTAIN closes.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: The same living room, thirty-five years later. A much older WILLIAM, dressed in black, is sitting in a chair in the middle of the room, the trunk open in front of him, with papers everywhere. One by one, he looks at the papers. A much older MARJORIE, also in black, enters, carrying two tea cups.)

MARJORIE: Well, I thought the funeral was just lovely. I think Charlotte would've been absolutely shocked at the number of people that were there, don't you? *(WILLIAM doesn't answer.)* When I think of Charlotte, I can't help thinking of the day thirty five years ago when she led me to Christ, right here in this room. My whole life changed that day. *(WILLIAM isn't listening.)* I found a Savior. I renewed a friendship that would last a lifetime. Eventually, *(Smiling at WILLIAM)* I even caught myself a husband. *(HE does not respond.)* William? Darling?

(SHE hands HIM his tea, but he waves it away.)

WILLIAM: I don't believe this.

MARJORIE: What?

WILLIAM: I've been going through Charlotte's trunk.

MARJORIE: Ah, Charlotte's trunk. Full of all her secret treasures.

WILLIAM: Do you know what's in here?

MARJORIE: No, not really.

WILLIAM: So far, I've counted four hundred of them—and that's not even half!

MARJORIE: What?

WILLIAM: They're from all over the world.

MARJORIE: Whatever is it?

(WILLIAM looks up.)

WILLIAM: Letters. Letters—every one of them talking about her hymn "Just as I Am." Listen to this: "Dear Miss Elliott, I cannot begin to say how your simple hymn has touched my heart and changed my life..." They're all like that. Hundreds of them!

MARJORIE: Well, what do you know?

WILLIAM: You know, in the course of my ministry, I had hoped to have been permitted to see some fruit of my labors, but I feel more has been done by this single hymn of my sister's.

MARJORIE: It certainly changed my life. I came back to this town a broken woman, until Charlotte led me to Christ. Her hymn still constantly reminds me that our eternal standing depends solely on God's merits, not our own.

WILLIAM: She was quite a writer.

MARJORIE: She was quite a lady. *(THEY hug.)* I can see her right now, you know. She's busy running and jumping and laughing, now that all of her pain is behind her.

(WILLIAM smiles at the image.)

WILLIAM: I miss her. She lived a full life, in spite of all her pain. And she has left an important part of herself with us. She left behind this beautiful song—a song that seems as if it will live on for a long, long time.

MARJORIE: Maybe so, William. Maybe so.

(The LIGHTS begin to dim as THEY stand and with their arms around each other, walk slowly out. LIGHTS down.)

Interim Scene

(AT RISE: The MAN and WOMAN are at their podiums in front of the closed curtain.)

WOMAN: After Charlotte Elliott's death, they found more than one thousand letters she had saved, all of them talking about what a blessing her hymn was.

MAN: That's what I call fan mail.

WOMAN: Now let's talk about the year 1862.

MAN: 1862. Let's see. The United States is embroiled in a Civil War.

WOMAN: In Europe, Sarah Bernhardt makes her debut, Victor Hugo writes *Les Miserables*, Manet and Monet reveal new works of art.

MAN: In the sciences, the speed of light is measured for the first time, and a man named Gatling invents a new gun.

WOMAN: And a man named Joseph Gilmore, at the age of 28, visits Philadelphia as a supply preacher. He has left the following account.

(MAN and WOMAN exit.)

"HE LEADETH ME"

(AT RISE: SPOTLIGHT up on JOSEPH, standing in front of the curtain. The tune of "He Leadeth Me" plays softly as he speaks.)

JOSEPH: I had been speaking about the 23rd Psalm at the Wednesday evening service of the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia, corner of Broad and Arch streets. I was especially impressed with the blessedness of being led by God. At the close of the service we adjourned to Deacon Watson's pleasant home where we were being entertained. During our conversation the blessedness of God's leading so grew upon me that I took out my pencil, wrote the hymn just as it stands today. I handed it to my wife, and thought no more of it. She sent it without my knowledge to the "Watchman and Reflector" magazine, and there it first appeared in print. Three years later I went to Rochester, New York, to preach as a candidate for the Second Baptist church. Upon entering the chapel I took up a hymnbook, thinking, "I wonder what they sing." The book opened up at "He Leadeth Me."

(The sound of a CHOIR comes up with the MUSIC; they sing the first verse:)

HE LEADETH ME! O BLESSED THOUGHT!
O WORDS WITH HEAVENLY COMFORT FRAUGHT!
WHAT E'ER I DO, WHERE E'ER I BE,
STILL 'TIS GOD'S HAND THAT LEADETH ME.
HE LEADETH ME, HE LEADETH ME,
BY HIS OWN HAND HE LEADETH ME;
HIS FAITHFUL FOLL'WER I WOULD BE,
FOR BY HIS HAND HE LEADETH ME.

(The MUSIC stops and JOSEPH looks up at the audience.)

JOSEPH: That was the first time I knew that my hymn had found a place among the songs of the church. *(SPOTLIGHT down. JOSEPH exits.)*

Interim Scene

(AT RISE: MAN and WOMAN enter.)

MAN: You know, they tore down that church in Philadelphia in 1926 and replaced it with an office building. If you go to the corner of Broad and Arch now you'll see a bronze plate, put there in commemoration, containing the words of the first verse of "He Leadeth Me."

WOMAN: So...are we ready for another story?

MAN: Sure are. Let's see. The year is 1865. The war draws to a close as the Confederate Army finally surrenders. Abraham Lincoln is assassinated, and a nation mourns.

WOMAN: Topping the best seller lists are Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and Lewis Carroll. "Hans Brinker" is published. Schubert's music is performed in Vienna, Wagner's in Munich.

MAN: Inventions abound: billiard balls, antiseptic surgery, railroad sleeping cars, ice machines, carpet sweepers.

WOMAN: The Salvation Army is founded.

MAN: Unfortunately, so is the Ku Klux Klan.

WOMAN: And in Yorkshire, England, a man named Sabine Baring-Gould prepares for the town festival they call Whitmonday...

“ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS”

Scene 1

(AT RISE: The office of Sabine Baring-Gould. B.G. is at his desk, working away. His office is a disheveled mess, as is B.G. himself. There is a window behind him. In the background is the faint SOUND of children playing. A timid KNOCK is heard at the door. Wrapped up in what he is doing, he doesn't hear. After a moment, the KNOCK is repeated, a little more loudly. B.G. looks up.)

B.G.: Is someone there?

EVELYN: *(From behind the closed door)* Yes, sir.

B.G.: Well, come in.

(The door opens tentatively and EVELYN, a timid but attractive young woman, enters. She is dressed in plain clothes and clutching her pocketbook. She clears her throat. B.G. looks up.)

B.G.: Yes?

EVELYN: Mr. Sabine Baring-Gould?

B.G.: Yes?

(SHE takes a step closer.)

EVELYN: Mr. Baring-Gould, the writer?

B.G.: Yes. What do you want?

(SHE takes another step.)

EVELYN: I'm Evelyn Howse, sir. Your new secretary.

B.G.: Well, glory hallelujah! *(HE comes around the desk, his enthusiasm startling HER, causing her to pull back.)* You don't know how glad I am to see you! My last secretary up and got married on me, and I've had no one to help with the filing and bookkeeping and letter writing since. Been almost a month now. Needless to say, things have gotten very far behind.

EVELYN: I'm sure I can help you catch up, sir.

B.G.: *(Sizing HER up)* Hmmm. Well. I hope you can. You did come well recommended by the agency. *(Shaking HIS head)* But you're too pretty.

EVELYN: Sir?

B.G.: You're too pretty. It's been my experience that the really pretty girls spend far too much time primping and not nearly enough working.

EVELYN: *(Confused)* Well, sir. That's never been a problem for me.

B.G.: Give me a plain girl over a pretty one any day, that's what I always say. And the really beautiful ones, well, forget it. Never get an ounce of effort out of them.

EVELYN: I've certainly never considered myself beautiful, sir.

B.G.: Yes, well, I suppose you're not.

EVELYN: Thank you. I think.

B.G.: You won't up and get married on me, too, will you? Have you a beau? Someone waiting in the wings?

EVELYN: N-no sir. Not at all.

(THEY look at each other for a moment.)

B.G.: Very well, then, First things first. *(B.G. sits at the desk, shuffles through some papers, then glances up to see EVELYN still standing there.)* Sit down, girl. Sit down.

EVELYN: Yes, sir. *(SHE timidly sits at the chair in front of the desk.)*

B.G.: For starters, don't call me sir. B.G. will do fine.

EVELYN: Okay...B.G.

B.G.: Good. Now, you passed your desk on the way in here, and I'm sure you saw that stack of papers on top of it. *(EVELYN nods.)* That's all to be filed. Why don't you get to that right off, and later on maybe you can do something with some of this. *(Gestures at the mess in HIS office)*

EVELYN: Yes, sir...B.G.

B.G.: Good. Now. Any questions?

EVELYN: Just a comment, sir, if I may. *(HE nods impatiently.)* I just wanted to say that I find this all quite thrilling, working for such a wonderful writer. I've read so many of your books, I can't tell you. My goodness, it seems like you've written just about every kind of book there is—religion, travel, folklore, mythology, history, fiction, biographies, theology....

(B.G. holds his hands up to stop HER, as he smiles proudly.)

B.G.: Don't. Stop.

EVELYN: If I could be so bold, sir—B.G., I mean. What is it that you are working on now?

(HE settles back in his chair and gestures at the papers on his desk.)

B.G.: Well, this was supposed to be a collection of my sermons, but I find that I am quite distracted today.

(The NOISE of children in the background grows slightly.)

EVELYN: Is it the children playing outside? I could go ask them to play elsewhere.

B.G.: Oh, heavens no, it's not that. No, I love that sound. Love children. *(B.G. rises to go to the window.)*

EVELYN: You love children? Does your wife...love children too?

B.G.: Huh? What? Oh, don't have a wife. *(EVELYN smiles broadly. B.G. is looking out of the window and doesn't notice.)* Though these kids are particularly rambunctious today. With good reason, of course. *(B.G. returns to his seat.)*

EVELYN: What do you mean, B. G.?

B.G.: They're excited about tomorrow. It's Whitmonday, you know.

EVELYN: Oh, yes. I had forgotten.

B.G.: The school festival will be bigger this year than ever before. We're combining our celebration with the next village over. I'm afraid that's what's distracting me.

EVELYN: Sir?

B.G.: Oh, it's a long story. *(SHE waits, so HE continues.)* Well, the children will be marching from our village to the next, and back again. We want them to sing as they march, and I'm in charge of picking out a song.

EVELYN: I see.

B.G.: Problem is, I just cannot find anything suitable at all.

EVELYN: Hmmm. That is a problem.

(HE flips through the papers on his desk.)

B.G.: There just aren't any good Christian marching songs. I'm so frustrated, I'm almost tempted

to write something myself.

EVELYN: Oh, sir, why don't you? That's a wonderful idea!

B.G.: *(Modestly)* You think so?

EVELYN: Oh, I do, I do. You'll never find exactly what you're looking for. I think you should just do it yourself.

B.G.: *(HE rises.)* Well...I do have some ideas. Some...brilliant ideas, actually.

EVELYN: That's the spirit.

(HE looks at his pocket watch.)

B.G.: But look at the time. The festival is tomorrow morning. I'd be up all night.

EVELYN: A famous writer like you, sir? Don't tell me you've never stayed up all night writing before?

B.G.: Well...of course I have. My star of inspiration shines brightest at midnight.

EVELYN: Well then. That's what you should do. If you write the song yourself, you know you'll end up with just exactly the right thing. *(HE looks hesitant.)* I'll even help you choose a tune.

We can use something the children already know. How about something by Haydn. Maybe his Symphony in D. *(SHE hums a few bars.)* That would make a fine marching song. A bit slow, perhaps, but...I think it could work...

(HE considers for a moment, then finally smiles.)

B.G.: You're a very persuasive employee, Miss Howse.

EVELYN: Well, I happen to believe very strongly in my boss, Mr. Baring-Gould.

(HE looks at HER for another minute, then finally returns to his desk, clears away the clutter, and grabs a pen.)

B.G.: Very well, then. I guess we're in business.

EVELYN: Wonderful, sir! *(SHE stands.)* Why don't I run down to the music store on the corner and see if I can't find the sheet music to that tune?

B.G.: Splendid. *(SHE goes to the door. HE watches her go.)* Um...Evelyn.

EVELYN: Yes?

B.G.: When you get back, first thing, why don't you put on some coffee? Looks like it's going to be a long night.

(THEY smile at each other. LIGHTS down.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: LIGHTS up on WOMAN at podium.)

WOMAN: Sabine Baring-Gould did write a song that night, and the children sang it for the festival. It was such a hit that they sang it the next year, and the next, and the next—And, well, six years later, we return to our little tale.

(WOMAN exits. When the LIGHTS come up again, it is six years later. The office is perfectly neat, though B.G. himself is still a mess. He is sitting at his desk, working. There is a sharp KNOCK at the door, and EVELYN enters, carrying a book.)

EVELYN: Big news, B.G. Big news. This was just delivered. Your latest and greatest.

B.G.: (*HE takes the book from HER and flips through it.*) Ah. Splendid! Hot off the presses, so to speak. They did a good job. Looks great. *The Book of Werewolves*, by Sabine Baring-Gould. Excellent.

EVELYN: I tell you, B.G. I do believe you must be the single most prolific author of our time. Just think of that. My husband, a legend in his own time.

B.G.: A legend, hmm? But, of course. I guess you're right.

EVELYN: (*SHE takes the book back and looks at it, smiling.*) Well, I must say, this is a red-letter day.

B.G.: Oh, doubly so. It's also Whitmonday, don't forget.

EVELYN: (*Looking suddenly nervous*) No, I didn't forget.

(*B.G. rises and goes to the window.*)

B.G.: And in just a few minutes, the children will arrive from the next village, singing the official Whitmonday song. Can't believe they're still singing it after—what's it been—six years? It has become a wonderful tradition, don't you think?

EVELYN: Well, not exactly.

B.G.: What do you mean? It's not a tradition, or it's not wonderful?

EVELYN: Well, B.G., just remember. Traditions change sometimes.

B.G.: What are you saying? Come on, girl, spit it out.

EVELYN: Well, B.G....I did something.

B.G.: Yes?

EVELYN: Well. You know your friend Arthur Sullivan? The one that writes music?

B.G.: (*Impatient*) Yes, yes, yes.

(*EVELYN nods.*)

EVELYN: Well, B.G., I've been speaking with him.

B.G.: About?

EVELYN: Well, you know, the words to your Whitmonday song are lovely, but the children have trouble marching to it. It's the music, you see. It's just too slow and draggy. I know I'm the one who first suggested that tune, but over the years, I've grown less and less fond of its pacing. Arthur agrees with me, and I know you respect his work.

B.G.: Yes, of course, he has a phenomenal talent. Get to the point.

EVELYN: Well, anyway, he sort of...composed a new tune.

B.G.: A new tune?

EVELYN: For your Whitmonday song.

B.G.: But, I don't understand. (*Thinking to HIMSELF*) A new tune...a new tune...but of course! I never thought of this. Why, you're a genius, my dear!

EVELYN: You're not mad?

B.G.: Why should I be mad? This is splendid! Arthur can write a new tune, use my words—which of course everyone adores—put them together and we will have a fantastic song! Evelyn, send word to Arthur, tell him I want to meet with him as soon as possible. We can get busy, work on the music, why, we should have this song ready in time to use on Whitmonday next year.

EVELYN: Um...B.G.?

B.G.: What, what, what? Now, where did I put my good pen?

EVELYN: Um...there's something else.

B.G.: What is it? Hurry up, dear, there's no time to waste.

EVELYN: Um...you don't understand. See, for the last few weeks, Arthur's been coming to the school and working with the children. He taught them his new tune with your words—as a

special surprise to you. Um. They're singing it...this year.

B.G.: *(Stunned)* What? What? Behind my ba—without my cons—Evelyn, how could you?

Well, I just don't know what to say. I need time to think. To decide how I feel.

EVELYN: The children will be along any minute, singing the new song.

B.G.: Well. I'm fit to be tied.

EVELYN: *(Goes to window)* In fact, B.G., here they come now.

(Softly at first, then more loudly, we hear the voices of CHILDREN singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers." EVELYN waits nervously, expectantly, watching B.G. as he listens to the song. Slowly, he begins keeping time with his fingers, then tapping his feet, then finally he smiles. The children continue to sing as they speak.)

ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS! MARCHING AS TO WAR,
WITH THE CROSS OF JESUS GOING ON BEFORE!
CHRIST, THE ROYAL MASTER, LEADS AGAINST THE FOE;
FORWARD INTO BATTLE SEE HIS BANNER GO!
ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS, MARCHING AS TO WAR,
WITH THE CROSS OF JESUS GOING ON BEFORE!

B.G.: I love it! I absolutely love it! Why, it's brilliant! What a perfect marching tune.

EVELYN: You like it! You like it!

B.G.: That Arthur Sullivan, he writes the best music. Why, he needs to drop that Gilbert fellow and work with me instead. No more "Gilbert and Sullivan." There's no future in that for him. From now on, it's "Baring-Gould and Sullivan." What do you think?

EVELYN: I think that's a wonderful idea.

B.G.: Of course, I am awfully busy with all my projects... Nevertheless, this song is first rate. Arthur's a genius. And, of course, since I'm a genius...it was inevitable. The song had to be...a masterpiece!

(B.G. hugs EVELYN. They begin singing along with the CHILDREN, then marching around the desk and clapping as they sing. LIGHTS down.)

“DOXOLOGY”

(AT RISE: A SPOTLIGHT comes up CS and LORD WEYMOUTH, dressed for the late 1600s, steps out. He has graying hair and a soft-spoken, elegant manner, if somewhat befuddled. As he speaks, he plays with his eyeglasses, which he takes on and off and periodically cleans. He addresses the audience directly.)

LORD WEYMOUTH: Hello. My name is Lord Weymouth, and I'm from Wiltshire, England. As I am addressing the late 1600s, my story is a bit out of chronological order here, but the writers thought that this might be a good time to take a step back and take a good look at one of hymndom's "forefathers," a man who had an enormous effect on the whole course of hymn history. And so, I am here to talk about my dearest friend in the world, Tommy Ken. Bishop Thomas Ken, actually, as it says on his tombstone. He was seventy-four when he died. I buried him, so to speak, even though he always said I would go first.

(A tinted SPOTLIGHT comes up to reveal KEN, standing in front of the curtain, SL.)

KEN: Ah, Lord Weymouth. I'll outlive you by a century!

(SPOTLIGHT down.)

LORD WEYMOUTH: ...He used to tell me that. Sometimes I almost believed him. But...*(HE sighs and shakes his head sadly.)*...Tommy was a wonderful man, an incredible human being, the kind of person that only comes along once in a great while. Why, the historian Macaulay said:

(A tinted SPOTLIGHT comes up to reveal MACAULAY, standing in front of the curtain, SR. Throughout this sequence, Macaulay, CHURCH OFFICIALS 1, 2, and 3, CHARLES and JAMES may all be played by the same person, if desired, with only a slight variation in costume for each one, i.e., glasses, hat, etc.)

MACAULAY: In his lifetime, Bishop Thomas Ken came as near to the ideal of Christian perfection as human weakness permits.

(SPOTLIGHT down.)

LORD WEYMOUTH: Tommy had an impact on so many lives, in so many ways...but perhaps I should supply a bit of background. Tommy became an orphan in early childhood, yet he managed to make it through school all the way to Oxford University.

(SPOTLIGHT up.)

CHURCH OFFICIAL 1: *(To KEN, who is kneeling)* You are hereby ordained to the ministry of the Church of England. You will serve as a chaplain to the Bishop of Winchester.

(SPOTLIGHT down.)

LORD WEYMOUTH: Tommy's illustrious career in the ministry was stormy and colorful. After Winchester, he was sent to Holland, to serve at the Hague. He was so outspoken in denouncing the corruption among the authorities that they asked him to leave.

(SPOTLIGHT up.)

CHURCH OFFICIAL 2: Bishop Ken, you must stop this continual haranguing of the authorities.

KEN: I'd sooner leave here altogether than hold my tongue even for a moment.

CHURCH OFFICIAL 2: As you wish.

(SPOTLIGHT down.)

LORD WEYMOUTH: Tommy never did know when to quit. When he got back to England, King Charles II appointed him as one of his personal chaplains. You'd think Tommy would have learned his lesson, but no. He challenged the King outright, rebuking all of his moral sins.

(SPOTLIGHT up.)

KEN: Shame on you, your highness, this has got to stop. God does not look kindly on graft, and you know it.

(SPOTLIGHT down.)

LORD WEYMOUTH: Nevertheless, King Charles admired Tommy, called him courageous, joked about him, even.

(SPOTLIGHT up.)

CHARLES: It's chapel time. I guess I must go in and hear Bishop Ken tell me my faults.

(SPOTLIGHT down.)

LORD WEYMOUTH: Eventually, King Charles rewarded Tommy by making him the Bishop of Bath and Wells. However, just twelve days after Tommy's appointment, King Charles died. James II stepped into power and clashed almost immediately with the headstrong Tommy.

(SPOTLIGHT up.)

KEN: Your highness, I refuse to read the Royal Declaration of Indulgence.

JAMES II: You will read it!

KEN: I will not!

JAMES II: Then it's off to the Tower of London with you!

(SPOTLIGHT down.)

LORD WEYMOUTH: Eventually, Tommy was acquitted and released from the Tower of London. England's next ruler, William III, didn't like him much better than King James had. In the end, King William removed Tommy from his bishopric. The remaining years of Tommy's life were spent with my family and me, in our home, in quiet obscurity. Tommy never did become exactly mellow, but neither did he remain quite so headstrong. But, I digress. I am here to talk about hymns, about the affect that Tommy had in that area. You know, he always felt very strongly that change was needed.

(SPOTLIGHT up.)

KEN: The music we're using in the church is all wrong.

CHURCH OFFICIAL 3: How do you mean, Bishop Ken? We sing all of the Biblical canticles.

KEN: I know, but Christians want to praise God by singing! They should be allowed to express that without being limited only to the canticles!

(SPOTLIGHT down.)

LORD WEYMOUTH: Tommy was one of the first to produce hymns that were songs in their own right, and not just versification's of the Psalms. Tommy wrote many hymns that were to be used as an aid to daily devotions. One of these, in particular, became very popular. In fact, I would venture to say that its four simple lines have been the most frequently sung words of any known song for more than three hundred years. Tommy talked of it sometimes.

(SPOTLIGHT up.)

KEN: Lord Weymouth, perhaps it is vanity, but even now, every time I hear that song, a warm rush runs right through my heart.

(SPOTLIGHT down.)

LORD WEYMOUTH: If Tommy were here now, he would ask you to stand—*(Said to the audience with the appropriate hand gesture)*—go ahead, stand up—and he would close his eyes and listen as you sang his most beloved hymn of all. I believe you call it...the "Doxology." Sing it with me now, if you would, please.

(The organ plays as the AUDIENCE and CAST join in.)

PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW;
PRAISE HIM, ALL CREATURES HERE BELOW;
PRAISE HIM ABOVE, YE HEAVENLY HOST;
PRAISE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY GHOST. AMEN.

LORD WEYMOUTH: God bless you. Now that you are on your feet, this would probably be an appropriate time to take a short intermission.

(LORD WEYMOUTH exits. End of ACT I.)

ACT II

Interim Scene

(AT RISE: WOMAN and MAN take their places on each side of the curtain.)

WOMAN: The year is 1873.

MAN: Ulysses S. Grant is President of the United States. The cities of Buda and Pest unite to form the capital of Hungary, and there is a famine in Bengal.

WOMAN: Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, is published. Cezanne and Manet unveil new paintings. Tchaikovsky's latest symphony premieres in Moscow.

MAN: Color photography and typewriters are invented.

WOMAN: Official rules are developed for the American sport of football.

MAN: A new lawn game, called tennis, is introduced in Britain.

WOMAN: The year is 1873.

(WOMAN and MAN exit.)

"IT IS WELL"

(AT RISE: The curtain opens to reveal two distinct areas. SL is dark.. SR is a parlor-type room, with a rocking chair, a small table with a lamp and a Bible on it, and a window. MRS. SPAFFORD is dressed plainly in black. She wears a shawl over her shoulders. LIGHTS dimly up on SR as Mrs. Spafford rocks silently in the rocking chair, staring off into space. MILLIE enters from the right, carrying a tea service. She is English, MRS. SPAFFORD is American.)

MILLIE: Good heavens, love! If you insist on sitting in this lonely old room all by yourself, the least you could do is let some light in! (MILLIE sets down the tea service and pulls open the curtains as more LIGHT comes up.) Why, it is a beautiful morning out there—you'd do good to go out and take a walk later. I'll go with you if you'd like. (MRS. SPAFFORD continues to stare straight ahead, hardly seems to notice her visitor. MILLIE pulls up the other chair across the table and begins to serve tea.) Ah, well, all in good time. First let's get some warm tea into you.

(MILLIE holds the cup out to MRS. SPAFFORD, who finally sees the cup and looks over at her, slightly startled.)

MRS. SPAFFORD: Millie, I'm sorry. Did you say something?

MILLIE: Nothing worth repeating, love. Have some tea, won't you? (MRS. SPAFFORD takes the cup that is held out to her, takes a small sip, sets it down, and goes back to her rocking.)

Oh, come on now. You won't be getting your strength back that way, you know.

MRS. SPAFFORD: (Sighs deeply) Does it matter?

MILLIE: Does it matter? Why, Mrs. Spafford, of course it matters. We've got to get you fit for travel. Much as I appreciate the business, you can't stay here at my little inn hiding away forever. (MILLIE reaches into her pocket for some papers, holds them up for MRS. SPAFFORD to see.) I mean, I know you told me you didn't want to be bothered with them, but you've been getting more and more letters and cables all the time, you know. Everyone's so concerned. (MRS. SPAFFORD rubs her eyes tiredly.) Why Mrs. D.L. Moody herself sent word

just this morning that she wants you to come directly to her home to stay with her, just as soon as you feel up to making the trip.

MRS. SPAFFORD: *(Nodding absently)* The Moody's are friends of my husband.

MILLIE: Ah, and speaking of your husband...you mustn't let him come all this way, to find you like this. I mean, he should be arriving before too much longer, shouldn't he? Crossing the ocean can't take forever.

(MRS. SPAFFORD stands suddenly, obviously pained by this last remark. She walks to the window and looks out.)

MILLIE: I'm sorry, love. I didn't mean to say it just that way...

MRS. SPAFFORD: Don't apologize, Millie. You've been more than kind to me. Taking me in, feeding me, seeing that I get a proper night's sleep....

MILLIE: That's what you're paying me for, mum.

MRS. SPAFFORD: Don't be modest, Millie. You know you've gone far above and beyond the call of duty...*(MRS. SPAFFORD continues to stare out the window. MILLIE finally puts down her tea and joins her at the window.)* I'm not going anywhere. I mean, at least I'm close to the dock here. I can even see a bit of it. There—just the corner of the dock, right there. *(SHE suddenly turns to face MILLIE, very agitated.)* You will tell me when my husband's ship gets here, won't you?

(MILLIE nods and puts her hand on MRS. SPAFFORD'S shoulder.)

MILLIE: You miss him very much.

MRS. SPAFFORD: *(Takes a deep breath and turns back to the window)* I do believe, Millie, if he does not get here soon, I shall absolutely go out of my mind.

(LIGHTS down immediately. LIGHTS up SL, where we see the railway of a ship, and behind it a deck chair and, behind that, a wall with a porthole. MR. SPAFFORD is dressed plainly, if somewhat affluently. As the LIGHTS come up, he is pacing up and down the railing, bent over, looking for something, patting all of his pockets.)

MR. SPAFFORD: I must be going out of my mind! Where is it? Captain? Have you seen my pocket watch?

(CAPTAIN enters from SL, dangling a pocket watch by its chain. He is a large, white-haired gentleman, wearing sailor's clothing and a captain's hat. MR. SPAFFORD is still looking for the watch and doesn't notice.)

CAPTAIN: Well, let's see. Is it a fine gold watch, with a picture of the scales of justice carved out of the cover?

MR. SPAFFORD: Yes, that's the one.

(CAPTAIN opens the watch.)

CAPTAIN: Does it have an inscription inside that reads...*(HE squints his eyes.)* "To my darling Horatio. All my love, Jennie"?

MR. SPAFFORD: Yes! That's the one. Have you seen it?

(CAPTAIN closes the watch and holds it.)

CAPTAIN: Can't say that I have. *(HE waits a beat.)* I'm just kidding, my friend. Here's your watch. I found it this morning out here next to the railing. You must've dropped it during your midnight pacing last night.

(MR. SPAFFORD gratefully takes the watch and arranges it in his pocket.)

MR. SPAFFORD: Oh, God bless you, Captain. My wife gave this to me the day I graduated from law school. It's worth a lot to me.

CAPTAIN: I can see that. It is a fine watch. Would make a nice ante in a friendly game of poker...*(HE pulls out a deck of cards.)* What d'ya say? You put up your watch, I'll match it with a full week's pay.

MR. SPAFFORD: *(HE smiles.)* You know better than that, Captain. You're not talking to a gambling man.

(CAPTAIN shakes his head, tucking the cards back into his pocket.)

CAPTAIN: Well, it was worth a try. If you get tired of all your hymn singing and Bible totin', you know where to find me.

MR. SPAFFORD: Ah, yes. And if you get ready to hear how the good Lord can provide you with eternal life, you know where to find me.

(The CAPTAIN waves HIM away good naturedly and exits. Mr. Spafford sits in the deck chair, then slowly puts his head in his hands. Finally, he wipes his eyes, and looks up.)

MR. SPAFFORD: Oh, dear God, it is so hard to keep up the facade. *(HE gets up and begins to pace as he prays.)* I am trying to be strong in you, Father, you know that. But when a man's heart is broken, his spirit sometimes follows...*(HE stops for a moment, catches his breath, finally shakes his head.)* Dear Lord, here you have placed me on a ship full of men in need of your Word—and I am trying, God. But I cannot see past my own grief enough to guide anyone else. Please forgive me. Please, give me strength.

(Suddenly the CAPTAIN reappears.)

MR. SPAFFORD: Yes, Captain?

CAPTAIN: I almost forgot to tell you. You said you wanted me to let you know when we reached the coordinates where the SS Ville du Havre—

MR. SPAFFORD: *(Interrupting)* Yes?

CAPTAIN: Should be there 'bout sunset tomorrow evening. I'll know more, as we get closer.

MR. SPAFFORD: Very good. Thank you, Captain. *(HE turns away.)*

CAPTAIN: Uh, Mr. Spafford. I'm usually not real nosy about my passengers' private affairs, but this one's got me quite curious. Why do you want to know when we get there? There won't be anything to see. Not anything at all. Just water.

(MR. SPAFFORD takes a deep breath, finally meets CAPTAIN'S eyes.)

MR. SPAFFORD: I'm afraid I'd rather not go into it at the moment. Please understand—

(CAPTAIN holds up both hands.)

CAPTAIN: No, no, by all means. It was none of my business. I'm sorry for asking.

(CAPTAIN exits. MR. SPAFFORD stands at the railing.)

MR. SPAFFORD: Please give me the strength to get through this. *(HE pulls out his pocket watch and looks at it lovingly. Finally, he puts it away.)* And, please, help her to hold on till I get there.

(LIGHTS down SR. LIGHTS up immediately on SL.)

MILLIE: Hold on, Mrs. Spafford. Just hold on till I get there. *(MILLIE is just entering through the door to see MRS. SPAFFORD carrying the tea service. Millie takes it from her quickly.)* Shame on me for leaving this in here. I can't have my paying guests doing the housework, now can I? *(MRS. SPAFFORD smiles as MILLIE takes the tray away and quickly returns, talking all the while.)* Although, come to think of it, in your case, it might not be such a bad idea. Get the blood flowing at least, get your mind occupied with other things.

MRS. SPAFFORD: I'm afraid there's not a task you could dream up capable of doing that, Millie.

MILLIE: Ah, dearie, my heart aches so for you and your husband both. Surely there must be something I can do to help you through the worst of it.

MRS. SPAFFORD: There's nothing anyone can do. *(SHE returns to her rocker and pulls her shawl more tightly around her shoulders.)*

MILLIE: You know, my mama always used to say, talking it over with the Lord might be a good place to start.

MRS. SPAFFORD: The Lord? The Lord? I'm afraid He isn't interested in hearing the kinds of things I would have to say to Him right now.

MILLIE: *(Takes the other chair)* Then maybe you should try talking to a friend.

(After a moment, MRS. SPAFFORD stops rocking and looks at MILLIE.)

MRS. SPAFFORD: It didn't all start with the accident, you know. No, I'm afraid that was just the most recent of a long line of tragedies. And each time, I ask myself, how much can one person take?

(MILLIE lets the question rest.)

MILLIE: Had a hard life, have you?

MRS. SPAFFORD: *(Surprised)* Oh, no, it was a good life, quite a good life, actually, up until just a few years ago. Horatio had a thriving law practice. The girls were all enrolled in a nice school...between my church activities and taking care of the baby, I had quite a full life. *(SHE stands and paces slowly.)* But then little Milton got this cough, you see. At first, we thought nothing of it. The girls were certainly healthy enough, and Horatio and I were fine. His cough didn't go away. We saw doctors, we went to specialists...*(SHE pauses and rubs her eyes. She speaks more softly.)* Have you ever seen a child's coffin, Millie? *(MILLIE puts her hand to her mouth sadly.)* It was only this long...*(SHE holds out her arms, then slowly closes them around nothing until she is cradling herself.)* And then my baby was gone.

(LIGHTS down, LIGHTS up on the ship.)

MR. SPAFFORD: It's gone. I had it, and now it's gone.

(MR. SPAFFORD is sitting on his chair, which is next to the rail. He is chewing on the end of a pen, a pad of paper in his lap. The CAPTAIN is nearby.)

CAPTAIN: Lose your pocket watch again, did you?

MR. SPAFFORD: What? Oh, no. I'm doing a bit of writing. I had the perfect line, but I lost it.
(*HE smiles.*) Oh, don't worry. It happens to me all the time.

CAPTAIN: Writing, you say? I thought you were a lawyer.

MR. SPAFFORD: Oh, I am. Lawyer by trade, writer by hobby. I dabble in poetry, religious verse, mostly. I find it helps calm my nerves.

CAPTAIN: (*HE coughs, speaks softly.*) Must not be working too well.

MR. SPAFFORD: Excuse me?

CAPTAIN: I said, it must not be working too well. (*MR. SPAFFORD is taken back.*) Well, don't look so surprised, my friend. You're not exactly a model of calm, now are you? (*Embarrassed, MR. SPAFFORD slips his pen into his pocket and looks away.*) Come on now, lad. Who did you think you were foolin'? You been out here every night, practically all night long, since we left port, just pacing up and down, up and down this walkway. It's enough to make a captain dizzy.

MR. SPAFFORD: I wasn't aware I was being observed.

CAPTAIN: Well, don't flatter yourself. I ain't been kept up nights worrying about you.

(*MR. SPAFFORD doesn't know whether to be angry or laugh. Finally, he smiles.*)

MR. SPAFFORD: I guess it's fair to say that there's a lot on my mind.

CAPTAIN: Like the S.S. Ville du Havre....

(*MR. SPAFFORD pales and stands. CAPTAIN looks at him curiously.*)

MR. SPAFFORD: Yes. Something like that. (*The TWO MEN stand side by side at the railing, looking out at the water. Finally, Mr. Spafford speaks.*) Water as far as you can see...makes me think of the river, back home, where I grew up. 'Course, the river is a peaceful thing—always has been. But this...this ocean...I look out at that water, and I feel only turmoil. Where's the stillness, the calm? (*HE shakes his head.*) Peace is the last thing that comes.

CAPTAIN: Say what you will, Mr. Spafford, she's everything there is to me. Peace and contentment, fear and foreboding. The sea is my wife, Mr. Spafford—she's my lord and saviour, if you will. Every bit as much as your god is God to you.

(*The CAPTAIN starts to leave. MR. SPAFFORD grabs his arm and he pauses.*)

MR. SPAFFORD: I pray for your soul nightly, Captain.

CAPTAIN: Aye, I just bet you do. The next time you get down on your knees, you think about this. That "religion" of yours is all fine and well behind the stained glass windows. But I live in the real world. I don't know that it could do me any good out here at all.

(*LIGHT down, LIGHTS up on the parlor.*)

MRS. SPAFFORD: Oh, Millie, this isn't doing me any good at all. Talking about it just brings everything back—brings all the feelings back.

MILLIE: It's good to get it out, love. You need to get it out.

(*MRS. SPAFFORD sits in the chair, resigned.*)

MRS. SPAFFORD: Maybe so. (*SHE stares off into space.*)

MILLIE: (*After a moment*) So after your boy passed away, what happened then?

(MRS. SPAFFORD takes a deep breath.)

MRS. SPAFFORD: I nearly lost it, I'll tell you that. But the girls needed me. I couldn't hide in my sorrow forever.

MILLIE: And your husband?

MRS. SPAFFORD: *(SHE shrugs.)* Mostly, he buried himself in his work. That whole spring, we hardly saw him at all. Just his way, I guess.

MILLIE: At least he was providin' for you.

MRS. SPAFFORD: Well...Millie...by then our luck had already turned.

MILLIE: What do you mean?

MRS. SPAFFORD: Horatio was working hard, all right. He invested everything he made and all our savings in real estate along the shore of Lake Michigan.

MILLIE: Sounds lovely.

MRS. SPAFFORD: Oh it was, it was. Right up until the Chicago Fire of 1871.

MILLIE: Oh, no.

MRS. SPAFFORD: We lost everything, Millie. Everything we had worked so hard for—just wiped out in a single night.

MILLIE: You poor dear. How much can one person be expected to take?

MRS. SPAFFORD: More than that, obviously. I mean, the worst was yet to come, wasn't it?

(LIGHTS down, LIGHTS up on the ship. MR. SPAFFORD is still in his chair at the railing, alternately thinking and scribbling on paper. Deep in thought, he is writing a letter. Finally, he pauses to read.)

MR. SPAFFORD: Wasn't it...just a few weeks ago, my dear Jennie, that we all held hands at the dock and prayed that God would be with us till we met again? How weeks can seem like years and yet also like only moments. I need you so badly, my heart is actually aching. I write this letter to you with no way to send it, yet still I feel compelled to write. The closer this ship draws to that fateful place, the deeper the churning in the pit of my stomach, and I grasp at the calming vision of you, waiting for me, on the opposite shore. How you must be holding on, day by day...*(HE makes corrections as he reads the next part.)* I am leaning so heavily on the strength the Lord provides. In times of our deepest sorrow, I seem always to find myself drawn closer to God. But you...*(HE pauses, then scribbles.)* ...you, dear Jennie...I am afraid for you, because I know how you are. *(HE pauses, smiles slightly, shakes his head.)* In the face of tragedy, you turn away from God. You always have. We cannot blame Him for what has happened, any more than we could blame Him for Milton's death, or for the fire. Whatever our lot in life, Jennie, God wants us to say—

CAPTAIN: *(From offstage)* Mr. Spafford? *(CAPTAIN strolls in.)* I'm sorry to disturb your verse-writin'—

MR. SPAFFORD: Actually, this time it's just letter-writing.

CAPTAIN: Well, anyway, I just wanted to let you know we should be there in a couple hours. Right around sunset.

(MR. SPAFFORD stands, puts down the paper, holds the rail with one hand for support.)

MR. SPAFFORD: Thank you, Captain. I appreciate your letting me know.

(CAPTAIN starts to exit, turns and looks at MR. SPAFFORD.)

CAPTAIN: Are you okay? You look a little green around the gills.

MR. SPAFFORD: Touch of seasickness, I guess.

(CAPTAIN nods, unconvinced, turns to go.)

CAPTAIN: Gee, think of that. The water's calmer today than it has been this whole voyage.

(CAPTAIN exits. MR. SPAFFORD grips the railing with both hands. He talks to the sky.)

MR. SPAFFORD: Dear God, Jennie, I'm scared. To actually be where it happened. To watch the sea billows roll and know that right there...*(HE inhales deeply.)*...I can't do this.

(LIGHTS down, LIGHTS up on the parlor.)

MRS. SPAFFORD: I can't do this.

MILLIE: Of course you can, love.

(MRS. SPAFFORD is pacing, very agitated.)

MRS. SPAFFORD: Millie, please don't think me rude if I ask you to leave now. I'm so very tired, and I just want to be alone.

MILLIE: *(SHE hesitates, finally speaks.)* Of course, mum. *(SHE stands, walks to the door, then turns back. She points to the table.)* Why don't you do a touch of reading, love? There's the Good Book, right there.

MRS. SPAFFORD: *(Looks at it, folds her arms across her chest)* No, thank you.

(MILLIE hesitates, reaches in the drawer and pulls out a pen and some paper.)

MILLIE: If you can't talk to me and you can't talk to God, maybe you should try writing a diary.

MRS. SPAFFORD: Millie, please, I can't think about this any more.

MILLIE: You've got to get it out, love. It's not healthy to keep it in.

(MRS. SPAFFORD seems somewhat defeated.)

MRS. SPAFFORD: Well...I can't write a diary. I always feel so stupid. "Dear Diary, Blah, blah, blah."

MILLIE: Then why don't you write a letter. Write a letter to your husband.

MRS. SPAFFORD: I can't send it. He's on a ship.

MILLIE: The point is in the writing, love. Not in the sending.

(MILLIE exits. MRS. SPAFFORD pauses, finally, goes hesitantly to the paper, picks it up, sits and chews on the end of the pen. Finally, she speaks as she writes.)

MRS. SPAFFORD: Dear Horatio...*(SHE pauses for a long moment, then writes again.)*...I just don't know where to begin...*(SHE wipes her eyes and continues.)*...perhaps by saying "Forgive me."

(LIGHTS down, LIGHTS up on the ship.)

CAPTAIN: Forgive me, Mr. Spafford.

(CAPTAIN is standing at the head of the railing. MR. SPAFFORD looks up from his perch, still writing.)

MR. SPAFFORD: Captain?

(CAPTAIN steps closer and takes his hat off.)

CAPTAIN: I've just been speaking with some of the crew, and I feel that I simply must apologize. They told me...about you.

MR. SPAFFORD: About me?

CAPTAIN: About your family. About the Ville du Havre. I'm afraid I didn't understand before. Of course this is difficult for you. It was a terrible tragedy. The Lochearn was a smaller vessel than the Ville du Havre, I understand that it was quite foggy that night...

MR. SPAFFORD: Please, Captain, it isn't necessary to apologize. We all have our crosses to bear.

CAPTAIN: Well, if I made sport of you, it's only 'cause I didn't understand. I just wanted you to know that.

MR. SPAFFORD: Thank you, Captain. You're a decent fellow.

(The CAPTAIN turns to go, then turns back.)

CAPTAIN: I have to ask you something. *(MR. SPAFFORD looks up at HIM questioningly.)* How can something horrible like this happen, and yet you still believe in God? What kind of a God would make such a thing happen?

MR. SPAFFORD: God is benevolent, Captain. He allows tragedies to happen, but He doesn't make them happen.

CAPTAIN: Nevertheless—

MR. SPAFFORD: Nevertheless, when something like this does take place, He uses it, just as He uses everything, for the greater good.

CAPTAIN: You're telling me He can make something good out of the deaths of hundreds of innocent people?

MR. SPAFFORD: Believe it or not, Captain. As tragic as it all was, He will find ways to turn the loss into something good—maybe in hundreds of different ways.

CAPTAIN: How can you say that? Look at you! We're almost there. And the closer we get to where it all happened, the more you're about to jump right out of your skin! How can a "benevolent" God expect you to cope with something like this, and still come out of it believing in anything anymore?

(MR. SPAFFORD turns to the railing and thinks for a moment. Finally, he speaks.)

MR. SPAFFORD: It's true. I am finding this voyage much more difficult than I could ever have imagined. I am anticipating that moment with incredible fear and dread. *(HE turns to the CAPTAIN.)* I have to cling to what He tells us in the Bible, Captain. His grace is sufficient. He will give me His strength as I need it.

CAPTAIN: You're a stronger man than I, Mr. Spafford.

MR. SPAFFORD: No, I'm not. But God is stronger than both of us. His peace will surround me when the time comes.

(LIGHTS down, LIGHTS up on the parlor. MRS. SPAFFORD is still writing. She pauses to read what she has written.)

MRS. SPAFFORD: When the time first came for us to leave, we both thought that coming to Europe was the right thing to do. Lord knows the girls and I needed to get away for some rest after all that had happened. Your joining up with Moody and Sankey's religious campaign seemed like such a wonderful idea. Dear Horatio, I don't ever want you to feel guilty that last minute business kept you from accompanying us on the ship. There's nothing you could have done had you been there. *(SHE looks up and speaks to herself, growing even more upset.)* Perhaps, if you had been there, I would be mourning you now, too...*(With a sob, SHE catches her breath and throws down the paper and pencil.)* Dear God! My girls! My babies. *(SHE cradles herself as she cries.)* Horatio, I know what you want me to do. I know what you want me to say. But... I...can't....

(LIGHTS up on the ship. The LIGHT on the parlor also stays up. MR. SPAFFORD is again alone, working on his letter. They each speak toward the audience, not to each other.)

MR. SPAFFORD: I can't...imagine your grief, Jennie. As great as mine is, yours must be greater still....

MRS. SPAFFORD: I still can hear the screaming, Horatio. I still can feel the great lurch of the ship. I still can feel the terror of that moment...

MR. SPAFFORD: That moment when it happened, if time could only be reversed. If only I could have been there....

MRS. SPAFFORD: If you had been there, Horatio, you would know that I tried to save them, I tried as hard as I could. I would have given my life if I could....

MR. SPAFFORD: I would have given my life if I could, to save you from this pain. To save you all. The Captain says that we're almost there, my darling Jennie, almost to the place where it happened. This is the moment I have dreaded for days.

MRS. SPAFFORD: Four days, Horatio, I was four days in the lifeboat before they finally brought us to shore at Wales. The Ville du Havre sank in twelve minutes, but to reach land took us four days...

MR. SPAFFORD: Four days I waited for news. Four days I knew the ship had gone down, but didn't know if the five of you had gone down with it. My beautiful wife. My four beautiful daughters. Until I die, I won't forget your words.... *(HE reaches into his pocket and pulls out a well-worn piece of paper.)*

MRS. SPAFFORD: ...the words in my telegram were the only words I could say. Two words....

MR. SPAFFORD: Two words....

(HE holds up the telegram and THEY speak in unison.)

MR./MRS. SPAFFORD: Saved alone.

(There is a long silence. Finally, the CAPTAIN enters and speaks in a soft voice.)

CAPTAIN: We're here, Mr. Spafford. This is where the S.S. Ville du Havre collided with the Lochearn. This is where they went down.

(MR. SPAFFORD inhales deeply and looks out at the water. After a long moment, he begins to speak slowly.)

MR. SPAFFORD: When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll. Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say...*(A long pause as HE finds the strength to say it.)*...It is well. *(Another pause, as HE begins to feel it more strongly.)* It is well with my soul. *(MUSIC up as HE begins to sing.)* It is well—*(MUSIC stops. HE falters for a moment and*

MRS. SPAFFORD speaks angrily.)

MRS. SPAFFORD: It is not well, Horatio. My babies are gone. I had four beautiful daughters and they are all dead! You want me to say it is well with my soul, but it is not!

(MILLIE enters, standing in the doorway. The MUSIC begins again at the refrain. MR. SPAFFORD has pulled himself together and he sings slowly. MILLIE also sings.)

MR. SPAFFORD: IT IS WELL...

MILLIE: IT IS WELL...

MRS. SPAFFORD: *(Spoken)* No!

MR. SPAFFORD: WITH MY SOUL...

MILLIE: WITH MY SOUL...

MRS. SPAFFORD: *(Spoken)* No! *(MRS. SPAFFORD runs to MILLIE, who holds her as she continues to sing.)*

MR. SPAFFORD/MILLIE:

IT IS WELL, IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL.

(In harmony, MR. SPAFFORD and MILLIE sing the next verse. As they sing, Millie takes MRS. SPAFFORD by the hand, impressing upon her the words.)

THO SATAN SHOULD BUFFET, THO TRIALS SHOULD COME,
LET THIS BLEST ASSURANCE CONTROL,
THAT CHRIST HATH REGARDED
MY HELPLESS ESTATE,
AND HATH SHED HIS OWN BLOOD FOR MY SOUL.
IT IS WELL, IT IS WELL,
WITH MY SOUL, WITH MY SOUL,
IT IS WELL, IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL.

(Deeply impressed by what he has seen, CAPTAIN steps up to the rail and joins MR. SPAFFORD and MILLIE, with harmony, in the next verse.)

MY SIN, O THE BLISS OF THIS GLORIOUS THO'T.
MY SIN, NOT IN PART, BUT THE WHOLE,
IS NAILED TO THE CROSS,
AND I BEAR IT NO MORE:
PRAISE THE LORD, PRAISE THE LORD, O MY SOUL!

(The refrain plays in the background as THEY speak.)

MR. SPAFFORD: Why, Captain, am I to believe what I'm seeing and hearing?

CAPTAIN: Mr. Spafford, this is the real world. And you have made a believer out of me!

MILLIE: Out of my darkest nights, He has been there to get me through. Turn to God, lass. He alone can give you the strength you need.

(As the last verse begins, ALL FOUR sing. Mrs. Spafford is tentative at first, then she stands and sings more strongly.)

AND, LORD, HASTE THE DAY
WHEN MY FAITH SHALL BE SIGHT,
THE CLOUDS BE ROLLED BACK AS A SCROLL:

THE TRUMP SHALL RESOUND
AND THE LORD SHALL DESCEND,
"EVEN SO" IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL.

(At the final chorus, the FOUR come together. MR. and MRS. SPAFFORD hold hands as they sing. The accompaniment plays dramatically.)

IT IS WELL, IT IS WELL,
WITH MY SOUL, WITH MY SOUL,
IT IS WELL, IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL.
IT IS WELL, IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL!

(The SPAFFORDS hug tightly. The curtain closes.)

Closing Scene

(The MUSIC from the previous scene ends with a flourish, except for one instrument that carries through and continues to play softly as WOMAN and MAN enter from SL. Woman is humming "It Is Well.")

MAN: Now you're doing it.

WOMAN: Doing what?

MAN: Singing a hymn.

WOMAN: Well, now that I know the stories behind them, how can I help it?

MAN: Pretty incredible, huh?

WOMAN: Oh, yes. I think from now on, I'll be more aware of all the hymns that we sing, of the part they play in worship, of the people who created them....

MAN: Ordinary people who, inspired by God, just happened to do something pretty extraordinary.

WOMAN: Makes you wonder....

MAN: About...?

WOMAN: About the potential in all of us. *(SHE nods and looks out at the audience.)*

MAN: May we never stop exploring it.

WOMAN: And may we always use it for God's glory.

(The MUSIC turns into the very first song, and WOMAN and MAN stand as the curtain opens. ALL of the other characters come together on the stage. SINGING:)

MR. SPAFFORD:

LONG AGO SOMEONE HEARD A TINY VOICE SAY "I HAVE A SONG."

CAPTAIN:

IN THE QUIET OF AN EMPTY ROOM, CARRIED AWAY
AS HE FOUND THE MELODY AND WORDS,
NOT WRITTEN HALF AS MUCH AS HEARD IN HIS HEART,

CHARLOTTE:

NOT DREAMING THAT WHEN HE WAS GONE
THE LORD WOULD LET HIS SIMPLE SONG LIVE ON.

ROBERT:

FROM DEEP INSIDE THE IDEA CAME—A SPARK FROM ABOVE—

MARY:

FLOWING THROUGH A MORTAL HAND—A PRICELESS GIFT FOR UNDERSTANDING HIS LOVE—

JOHN:

AND BRINGING IT DOWN TO A PLACE—WHERE, SINGING, WE MIGHT GLIMPSE THE GRACE OF GOD.

WOMAN:

BRINGING A HYMN TO LIFE, GOD'S WORD UNFURLED,
THAT SOUNDS THE CALL ALL AROUND THE WORLD.

WOMAN/MAN:

TAKING A VISION THROUGH TO SOMETHING NEW
A MESSAGE TO EVERY PERSON WHO IS—SINGING A HYMN.

ALL:

BRINGING A HYMN TO LIFE, GOD'S WORD UNFURLED,
THAT SOUNDS THE CALL ALL AROUND THE WORLD.
TAKING A VISION THROUGH TO SOMETHING NEW
A MESSAGE TO EVERY PERSON WHO IS
SINGING A HYMN.
SINGING A HYMN.

THE END

PROPS

Man: Bulletin, small podium

Woman: Bulletin, purse, small podium

John: Envelope, papers, coat and hat, paper handouts

Fran: Dishrag, coat and hat

Hurley: Hat, small picture in crude wooden frame

Robert: Brown bag with bottle in it

Mary: Book, Bible

Charlotte: Shawl, wheelchair, small book

William: Letters, tea set

Marjorie: White gloves, small bunch of flowers, shawl, handkerchief, two tea cups

Evelyn: Pocketbook, book

B.G.: Papers (for desk), pocket watch, pen

Weymouth: Eye-glasses, handkerchief to clean glasses

Mrs. Spafford: Shawl

Millie: Tea service, papers, pen and paper

Captain: Pocket watch, sailor hat, deck of cards

Mr. Spafford: Paper and pen, well-worn piece of paper (telegram)

COSTUMES: Use costumes appropriate to the time period mentioned, unless otherwise specified.

SFX

Ringing bell

Doorbell

Faint sound of children playing

Knock on door

Louder knock on door

Louder noise of children playing

Knock on door

Children singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers"

Bringing a Hymn to Life

Music by
David Starns

Lyrics by
Mindy Starns Clark
& David Starns

$\text{♩} = 85$

1 *mp*

The piano introduction consists of two staves. The right hand plays chords in a 3/4 time signature, and the left hand plays a simple bass line. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

5 Long a - go some - one heard a ti - ny voice say _____

The vocal line begins on the fifth measure. It features a melody in the treble clef with lyrics underneath. The melody is simple and follows the rhythm of the lyrics.

5

The piano accompaniment continues from the first system. The right hand plays chords, and the left hand plays a bass line. The key signature remains one sharp.

9 "I have a song." In the qui - et of an emp - ty room,
deep in - side the i - dea came, a

The vocal line continues from the previous system. It includes a double bar line at the end of the first phrase. The lyrics are: "I have a song." In the quiet of an empty room, deep inside the idea came, a

9

The piano accompaniment continues from the previous system. It includes a double bar line at the end of the first phrase. The key signature remains one sharp.

Make a Joyful Noise
49

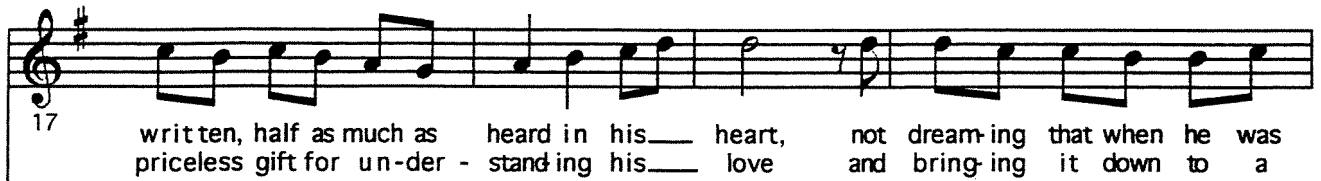
13 car - ried a - way _____ as he found the me - lo - dy and words, not
spark from a - bove _____ flowing through a mor - tal hand, a



13



17 writ - ten, half as much as heard in his _____ heart, not dream - ing that when he was
priceless gift for un - der - stand - ing his _____ love and bring - ing it down to a



17



21 gone, the Lord would let his sim - ple song live _____ on _____
place where, sing - ing, we might glimpse the grace of _____



21



21

Make a Joyful Noise

50

25 From God

25 *ff*

29 Bring - ing a hymn to life God's word un

29 *ff*

33 furred, that sounds the call all a - round the

33

33

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for the hymn 'Make a Joyful Noise'. It consists of four systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff with treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The first system starts at measure 25 with the lyrics 'From God'. The second system starts at measure 29 with the lyrics 'Bring - ing a hymn to life God's word un'. The third system starts at measure 33 with the lyrics 'furred, that sounds the call all a - round the'. The piano accompaniment features chords and moving lines in both hands, with dynamic markings of *ff* (fortissimo) in several places. There are repeat signs and first/second endings in the piano part. The page number '50' is at the top, and the publisher information 'Eldridge Plays' is at the bottom.

Make a Joyful Noise
51

37 world. Tak- ing a vi- sion through to some thing

37

37

37

Detailed description: This system contains the first four measures of the piece. The vocal line starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). Measure 37 has a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) over the words 'Tak- ing a'. The piano accompaniment consists of a right hand with chords and a left hand with a simple bass line.

41 new, a mes - sage to e - very per - son

41

41

41

mp

Detailed description: This system contains measures 41-44. The vocal line continues with the words 'new, a mes - sage to e - very per - son'. The piano accompaniment continues with chords and a bass line. A mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking is placed below the piano part in measure 43.

45 who is sing ing a hymn - - - - - A

45

45

45

mp

Detailed description: This system contains measures 45-48. The vocal line begins with 'who is sing ing a hymn - - - - - A'. The piano accompaniment continues. A mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking is placed below the piano part in measure 46. The system ends with a fermata over the final note of the vocal line.

Make a Joyful Noise

52

49 song of praise a song of need, a song from the cross_____ the

49

49

Detailed description: This system contains the first line of music. The vocal line (treble clef) starts at measure 49 with the lyrics 'song of praise a song of need, a song from the cross_____ the'. The piano accompaniment (grand staff) begins at measure 49 with a series of chords and a bass line.

53 ho - ly spirit used them_ all and still he u - ses them to call us come_

53

53

Detailed description: This system contains the second line of music. The vocal line (treble clef) starts at measure 53 with the lyrics 'ho - ly spirit used them_ all and still he u - ses them to call us come_'. The piano accompaniment (grand staff) continues from the previous system.

57 home, home to where we're free from sin, to know the vic - to - ry with -

57

57

Detailed description: This system contains the third line of music. The vocal line (treble clef) starts at measure 57 with the lyrics 'home, home to where we're free from sin, to know the vic - to - ry with -'. The piano accompaniment (grand staff) continues from the previous system.

Make a Joyful Noise

53

61 in our hearts. So let's bring our hymns to life

ff

61

65 God's word unfurled and sound a call

65

69 all a-round the world. Let's take the vision

69

Make a Joyful Noise
54

73 through to some - thing new, a mes - sage

73

73

73

Detailed description: This block contains the first system of music, measures 73-76. It features a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The vocal line starts with a whole rest in measure 73, followed by the lyrics 'through to some - thing new, a mes - sage'. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand.

77 to ev - ery per - son who is sing - ing a hymn

mp

77

77

77

Detailed description: This block contains the second system of music, measures 77-80. The vocal line continues with the lyrics 'to ev - ery per - son who is sing - ing a hymn'. A triplet of eighth notes is marked above the notes for 'sing - ing'. The piano accompaniment continues with chords and a bass line. The dynamic marking *mp* is present in both staves.