

THE OLD-FASHIONED CHRISTMAS

By Andy Gregg

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Janie wants a real old-fashioned Christmas with homemade candles, old-time ornaments, and all the things that bring back the Christmas spirit of the old days. Her boyfriend, Ernest, doesn't have time to join in her Christmas spirit, for he's too busy working at the mission that helps the poor people. Everything goes wrong. The popcorn balls are too sticky. The homemade candles collapse. The Christmas tree falls down. Janie thinks that her old-fashioned Christmas is ruined, that she has lost Ernest, and that all the happy songs and carols can't restore the spirit. But it's only the display that's failed. With the help of Ernest and other members of her family, Janie rediscovers the old-fashioned Christmas spirit ... in herself.

SETTING

A modern living room with doors SL and SR. Closet or coat rack to one side. Coffee table, chairs, fireplace with a mantle at USC.

TIME: The present, about two weeks before Christmas.

PLACE: The Parker home.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 4 w)

SUSAN PARKER: The mother.

JANIE PARKER: The daughter, early 20s.

MYRTLE PARKER: George's mother.

GEORGE PARKER: The father.

ELAINE PARKER: Younger daughter, a teenager.

ERNEST ALLEN: Janie's friend, also in his 20s.

PAT O'TOOLE: An older man from the mission.

PROPS

Properties include a box labeled "Christmas decorations" holding silvery garland, tinsel, plastic holly; string of electric lights; round, bouncy "ornament" and star. Other properties are wastebasket; two different slip-on shoes worn by Janie; a small wooden box with hinged lid; coffee pot, trays, and cups; a bowl full of fake popcorn balls; lopsided Christmas tree and stand with legs; a Mobius strip of colored paper about three inches wide and three feet long; scissors; several wooden ornaments; a man's handkerchief; plate of snacks.

Also needed is a fake candle which can be made by using 10 or 12 small thread spools with a string through the middle. The string is tied to a small piece of wood at the top to keep it from falling through, and the bottom of the string is tied to a weight which is inside the bottom of the candle holder. This works on the same principle as a magician's collapsing wand.

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ACT I

(AT RISE: SUSAN is DC.)

SUSAN: (*Calling toward SL.*) Janie! Did you find those boots yet? Let's get them down before the snows comes. We never think about it until everybody's feet are frozen. (*Louder.*) Janie?

(JANIE enters from SL, carrying a large box.)

JANIE: Look what I found in the attic.

SUSAN: Why, it's the box of Christmas decorations.

JANIE: How did you guess?

SUSAN: It looks like the same box we put them in every year. I'll bet that if you look on the other side ... (*JANIE turns the box around to show a label on the other side: "Christmas Decorations."*) ... it'll say "Christmas Decorations." See? It still does. Some things never change.

(JANIE puts the box on the table and begins to pull out a strand of silver garland.)

JANIE: This is dusty.

SUSAN: Maybe we should run it through the dryer.

JANIE: We tried that once before, remember?

SUSAN: Oh, that's right. It melted.

JANIE: (*Taking out a handful of tinsel strands.*) I suppose this would, too.

SUSAN: Put that back! We didn't get the last of that out of the house until June. That stuff sticks to everything. It's made out of plastic and static. When I was young, we had tinsel made out of metal. Aluminum, I think. (*SHE takes the ball of tinsel and throws it into a wastebasket. MYRTLE enters from SL.*) No more of this. You may not remember a carpet covered with silver spaghetti, but I do.

MYRTLE: What silver spaghetti?

SUSAN: (*Pointing to the wastebasket.*) That stuff.

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MYRTLE: *(Looking at the basket.)* Looks like a wastebasket to me. *(Looks inside.)* Oh, you mean the tinsel.

SUSAN: This year we'll use something else to glitter the tree with.

JANIE: *(To MYRTLE.)* What did you use when you were a kid?

MYRTLE: We used tinsel.

JANIE: You had tinsel way back then?

MYRTLE: Sure. But we didn't call it tinsel way back then. We called it fur from a woolly mammoth.

JANIE: Oh, Grandma ...

MYRTLE: If it was white, it came from a very old mammoth.

(GEORGE enters from SR. He takes off his overcoat, and can brush snow from it, put it in a closet, or do other business with it during the next lines.)

JANIE: I didn't mean it like that.

MYRTLE: All our tinsel was white. You couldn't catch any young mammoths.

GEORGE: You always told me that you rode a dinosaur to school.

MYRTLE: Did I really? My goodness, I just can't remember anything past the stone age.

GEORGE: Oh, stop that, Mother.

MYRTLE: Who?

GEORGE: *(To JANIE.)* By the way, I invited your friend over.

JANIE: Who?

GEORGE: Who? *(To SUSAN.)* Are there a couple of owls in here? *(To JANIE.)* Who do you think I mean? Male. *(Holds HIS hand up at about ERNEST'S height.)* About this high.

JANIE: Oh, Ernest.

GEORGE: I thought you'd guess right away.

JANIE: Yes, Ernest. What's his last name?

SUSAN: Allen, and you know it.

JANIE: That's it. *(SHE gets a dreamy look.)*

GEORGE: Wake up!

JANIE: What?

SUSAN: You were dreaming about what's-his-name again.

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JANIE: I was not.

MYRTLE: This morning it took you fifteen minutes to put on your shoes.

JANIE: The laces had knots in them.

SUSAN: You're wearing slip-ons.

JANIE: (*Looking at HER shoes.*) Oh, I guess I am.

GEORGE: Two different kinds of shoes.

JANIE: But I got them on the right feet.

GEORGE: Yeah. Yours.

JANIE: (*Taking more things out of the box.*) Dad, do you think we could invite Ernest here for Christmas dinner?

(*GEORGE and SUSAN look at each other.*)

GEORGE: Well, I suppose we could. But won't he be with his own folks?

JANIE: He'll stay in town to help out at the mission.

SUSAN: Oh, that's right. He does something at that place for the poor people.

GEORGE: He's from down South somewhere, isn't he?

JANIE: Yes. His father's a preacher down there.

MYRTLE: Oh dear! He does belong to a respectable religion, doesn't he? I hope he's not one of those people who plays with snakes.

JANIE: I'm sure he doesn't play with snakes.

MYRTLE: Well, just so he doesn't bring them to dinner.

GEORGE: Sure, we could have him. (*To SUSAN.*) Couldn't we? (*SUSAN nods.*)

MYRTLE: He might be busy all day. Won't they be giving Christmas dinner to the poor people?

GEORGE: I sure hope so. The rich people don't need to eat there.

JANIE: Oh, I'm sure he can come to dinner.

SUSAN: You've asked him already?

JANIE: Well, no. (*SHE takes a round ornament out of the box.*) But I think he'd like to be here. Especially if we have some nice decorations. (*SHE drops the ornament on the floor; it doesn't break. It can be a ball and bounce.*)

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