

Return to Christmas

by
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DEDICATION

To my wife Renae, for being my inspiration.

STORY OF THE PLAY

A young woman minister in a small-town church finds herself tangled in a web of despair. Besides her normal workload, she finds Christmas barreling down on her like a 10-ton locomotive. Like everyone, she too is caught in the trap of commercialization where everything has to be bigger and better, including the Christmas Eve worship service. How is she supposed to get it all done? How is she supposed to inspire a congregation when she feels so uninspired herself? It is only through adversity and some help from an unlikely character that the shroud of hype is lifted and she remembers what is really important about Christmas.

SET DESIGN

The main set consist of three rooms. The main office, the pastor's office, and a conference room. The main office is center stage with the pastor's office and conference room flanking it. Lighting is used to shift from one room to the next.

The set has to be changed for the sanctuary scene. Center stage is converted to the front of a church with the audience as the congregation. This is then changed back to the main office.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 M, 6 W)

LUELLA: Secretary, friend and confidant of the minister. She is an overly optimistic person but is still grounded. She usually wears bright and sometimes over-the-top clothing.

REV. SARAH: Minister. Idealist. Believes deeply in her calling to minister to people and to be a guiding light for her congregation. Becoming increasingly stressed out by the volume of work being thrown at her.

JOHN: Quite old but very active. He insists on doing many of the odd jobs around the church. Likes to tell jokes.

SLECVA: Foreign-exchange minister. He is from Vllatenstan (fictitious breakaway republic from the former Soviet Union). Due to a fire at the local hotel he is temporally stuck in the U.S. because his passport burned.

CINDY: Christmas pageant director. Fairly timid person and needs constant approval of her work.

BETSY: Middle-aged woman with a sour attitude towards life and everything in it.

HARRIET: Old lady. She is grumpy and likes to gossip.

MILDRED: Old lady. She is happy and sees the best in everything and everyone. Hard of hearing. Best of friends with Harriet.

HENRY: Middle-aged homeless man. Staying at the church and claims to be waiting for a family member to pick him up.

PAUL: Rev. Sarah's husband.

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PROPS

Coats for all characters
Message slips
Planner
Small tool box
Matches
Evergreen wreath
Apples
Can of soup
Box
Gavel
Attendance/minutes for meeting
Donation plate
Coins
Silver tray with finger sandwiches
Silver tea pitcher
Duffel bag
Can of air freshener
Small ornaments
Axe
TV remote
Small bag with sandwich
Kleenex
Baby (doll) Jesus
Gifts
Coffee cups

TIME

Performance time approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Seven days before Christmas. LUELLA is working in the office. She is wearing a very bright holiday outfit. SARAH enters wearing a heavy coat.)

SARAH: Good morning, Luella.

LUELLA: Good morning, Sarah. Cold enough for you?

SARAH: Any day that I have to put on a coat is too cold for me. *(Hangs coat on rack.)* Well, what's going on so far this morning?

LUELLA: I'm working on the bulletin for this Sunday. I see your calendar is pretty full; you have women's fellowship this morning, Christmas church service at Sunset Nursing Home at 3 o'clock this afternoon, and you are teaching confirmation class at 7 o'clock tonight. And there were some messages on the answering machine. *(Picks up message slips, reads them one at a time and hands them to SARAH.)* One from Father Mark at the Catholic church, wants you to call him about the community Christmas worship service.

SARAH: *(Takes slip.)* OK.

LUELLA: *(Reading the next slip.)* One from Frank Wright at the newspaper, wants you to call *him* about the community worship service so he can cover it for the paper.

SARAH: *(Takes slip.)* OK, that shouldn't be too hard.

LUELLA: *(Holding and reading the last slip.)* And the final one is from Cindy, wanted to know if you had some time today to discuss the Christmas pageant.

SARAH: *(Takes final slip, concerned.)* Hmm, I wonder what's wrong. *(Looks at her own planner.)* And let's see, today I really need to get the Christmas Eve service organized and my sermon written. *(Considers tasks, then to LUELLA.)* So, do you have all your shopping done? Only seven more days 'til Christmas, y'know.

LUELLA: Just have a few more things left to buy, then I'll be all done. Thank heavens.

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SARAH: You're lucky. I've barely started. I bought a few things, but I still have a lot more to get, and I don't know when I'm going to get back up to the mall. I've got meetings every night this week and Paul has been working late.

LUELLA: Work busy for him, too?

SARAH: Yeah, they have a bunch of end-of-the-year stuff to do, and they are trying to get done early so they can shut down for a week between the holidays.

LUELLA: That would be nice. Are you going to see your parents over Christmas?

SARAH: Yeah, (*Sighs.*) for a few days.

LUELLA: You don't sound too thrilled about it.

SARAH: Well, I love seeing them and being there, but it's such a long drive and you never know about the roads this time of year. It's just that by the time the Christmas Eve service is over, I'm wiped out. It used to be that Christmas was always so much fun. But now, it just seems like ... *work*, it's just too much.

LUELLA: It does seem to be a big rat race with fighting the crowds at the malls and trying to get the latest toys.

SARAH: Tell me about it.

LUELLA: Well, you just need the right frame of mind. When I go I just pretend that it is like the county fair. There's lots of people walking around gawking at stuff, people trying to sell you things you don't want or need, and the best of all, lots of weird food to eat. Make it into an adventure!

(Door opens to the office and JOHN shuffles in, slightly stooped, carrying a small tool box that appears to be quite heavy.)

LUELLA: Good morning, John.

SARAH: Good morning, John. Here, let me help you with that. (*Takes "heavy" toolbox, which she lifts easily, and sets it on the desk.*)

JOHN: Season's greetings to you fine ladies. I trust all is well in your worlds.

LUELLA: It is and how are things with you?

End of Freeview

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