

Samaritan Christmas

By Terrell Anthony

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DEDICATION

*Dedicated to our incredibly loving, delightfully present God,
and to my world's best editor ever, my wife Nancy.*

STORY OF THE PLAY

Joanna is a hard-hitting public relations consultant, willing to work night or day for her clients, especially one who is a U.S. senator. On the night of Christmas Eve, the senator has driven into a ditch. Normally, Joanna would handle everything said to the public about the accident. But to her immense frustration, the senator delegates her chief of staff to communicate with Joanna, and he refuses to give Joanna many details. So, she presses her staff to find out what is happening.

Meanwhile, Joanna's younger brother, Jesse, has just arrived, prepared to celebrate with his sister. But Joanna is so caught up in dealing with the senator's accident and the seeming cover-up that she practically ignores Jesse.

Next door to Joanna's apartment, a young girl, Celia, sits in the hall, crying. Her mother has just died, and now her distraught grandmother is unable to get out of bed. So, against Joanna's wishes, Jesse brings Celia into Joanna's apartment and their lives. The result is life-changing for cynical Joanna, who comes to consider Christmas in a whole new way.

With short music interludes to mark the passage of hours, this story ably speaks to those without faith while encouraging all those who believe in the incredible power of Jesus's birth.

About an hour with no intermission

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 m, 1 w, 1 girl, 1 flexible, 2 offstage voices)

JOANNA: 30-40 years old. Highly successful public relations consultant for high-level politicians. Driven, action-oriented, cynical, with a steely edge and dry wit. She moves with authority and determination, never appearing frenetic or anxious. Raised by parents who occasionally attended church services, she prides herself on not “being religious.”

JESSE: Mid-20s to 30s. Joanna’s younger brother and only close friend. Intuitive, responsive, caring, non-judgmental, exceptional listener. He’s Joanna’s stabilizer and tireless supporter who knows her better than she knows herself.

CELIA: A 7-12-year-old girl. She’s extremely heartbroken but has learned how to survive, living with grief and disappointment as her companions.

NARRATOR: Voice and presentation need to embody warmth and authority. Important that he or she is visible, just off the stage set.

FEMALE VOICE: Senator who employs Joanna. Warm, sad, genuinely seeking forgiveness. Needs to be live, off-stage, channeled as if coming through a phone line.

MALE VOICE: Campaign manager for politician. Sounds like a deal maker with a grandiose sense of self. Needs to be live, off-stage, channeled as if coming through a phone line, if possible.

INSTRUMENTALIST: Violinist is preferred but a cello or oboe also works. These musical interludes carry the mood of Christmas throughout the play and crucially allow the actors time to breathe deep between fast-paced scenes.

*Note on casting: Remember that Joanna and Jesse need to appear no more than five years apart. Their shared family history will seem contrived if they appear to have a wider age gap.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Set design can range from intricate to suggestive. It can be a well-appointed front room of an upscale, high-rise apartment. Or it may feature dark curtains as suggestive walls that run between the three framed entrance/exits.

Entrances:

- DSL front door to apartment
- US doorway to bedrooms and bathroom
- CSR swinging door (or doorway) to kitchen

The crucial set pieces:

- DS sofa that seats three
- US dining room table and comfortable, high-backed chair
- a laptop computer (remains stationary on dining table)

Costumes:

Joanna - executive casual. Different outfits for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Jesse - casual but neat and stylish.

Celia - casual but not worn or dirty.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: NARRATOR stands onstage but slightly off the set. A single SPOT comes up on the Narrator, who looks out and addresses the audience.)

NARRATOR: More than two thousand years ago, the extraordinary happened on planet Earth. Baby Jesus, who would change the course of history, was born... And ever since, some of us have been wondering what to make of it.

(The SPOT fades on the NARRATOR as LIGHTS come up full on Joanna's high-rise apartment living room. Wearing earbuds and holding a phone, JOANNA enters through the US doorway. She talks quickly and paces before stepping behind her dinner table turned desk as she ends the call.)

JOANNA: Okay, Mason, tell me about the senator's accident... What? You texted... *(Looks at her phone and reads.)* "The senator was in a one-car accident this evening that put her in a ditch. Police responded and helped her get home because she wasn't injured." This isn't a press release. I need more detail to be able to control the narrative. I know her husband has the flu, so was she alone in the car? Had she been drinking at the party? If not, how did she wind up in the ditch? What was her interaction with the police? Etcetera, etcetera—everything the opposition will answer for us if we don't. So, put me on the phone with her. I won't grill her. I just need clarity to protect her. ... Then convince her to talk and call me back.

(SHE ends call and sits as she types rapidly on the computer keyboard. SFX: There's a KNOCK on the DSL front door. Joanna continues to type. Another knock. Joanna groans in frustration as she hurries to the door and opens it to see JESSE.)

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JOANNA: Jesse! *(Turns away from him and walks hurriedly back to her desk.)* You have a key. Let yourself in.

JESSE: *(Carrying a large shopping bag, he steps in and closes the door.)* Oh, okay... *(Watches JOANNA go back to rapidly typing.)* Am I interrupting?

JOANNA: *(Without looking up.)* I work around the clock, Jesse.

JESSE: Even tonight?

JOANNA: Every night.

JESSE: But—

JOANNA: *(SFX: Her phone BUZZES, SHE holds up a hand.)* I've a call. *(Answers.)* Jordan, assemble the rapid response team. I want them all online in a half hour.

(JOANNA disconnects and begins typing. JESSE moves into the apartment, peering at Joanna.)

JOANNA: *(Irritably looking up and over at JESSE.)* What?

JESSE: Well, ah, I thought we'd be together tonight.

JOANNA: Together?

JESSE: Yes, sister and brother.

JOANNA: Why?

JESSE: It's Christmas Eve.

JOANNA: *(Squeezes her eyes shut and moans.)* Oh, no! ...
What happened to Christmas coming at a good time?

JESSE: I'm not sure how to answer that.

JOANNA: *(Throws her hands out.)* Let's for one year act as if we're Jewish.

(JESSE peers at JOANNA without responding.)

JOANNA: *(Cont'd.)* Work with me, Jesse! You surely know the story of God being born as a baby is at best very poor marketing... *(Looks back to her screen and begins typing again.)* And I'm in the middle of a crises here.

JESSE: Is it about the senator driving into the ditch?

JOANNA: How do you know about that?

JESSE: Ah—

End of Freeview

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