

THE SCARLET RIBBON

By Alberta Hawse

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PUBLISHED BY

Eldridge Publishing Company
PO Box 14367
Tallahassee, FL 32317
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The Scarlet Ribbon

-2-

STORY OF THE PLAY

In Part I, a modern wife, serene in her happiness, scoffs lightly as her old-fashioned mother tells the children the biblical story of Christmas, acted out in pantomime with a narrator in Part II. In Part III, the modern wife finds, in near tragedy, that the scarlet ribbon of Christmas, which runs through the Bible, still binds the past and the future together in faith and hope. A presentation that offers easy rehearsal scheduling, and yet highlights the Christmas spirit.

SET DESIGN

In the living room there are two exits, SL and SR. There is a window in the center wall with a small table beneath it. Below the SL exit is a table with two or more straight chairs. Below the SR exit is a large armchair and, nearby, a footstool and hassock. In the USL corner is an untrimmed Christmas tree. If curtains are not used in Part II, a star on top of this tree may be lighted and used for the Star of Bethlehem. Aside from the tree, the room is decorated for Christmas and there is a lighted wreath in the window. The passage to the exits should be clear of furniture, if curtains are not used for Part II.

SYNOPSIS

PART I: Early Christmas Eve, in the modern living room of Martha's home.

PART II: In Biblical times, before the curtain (*or on the darkened set with spotlights on characters.*)

Part III: Several hours after Part I.

PLAYING TIME: Between 60 and 90 mins., depending upon the amount of music used in Part II.

The Scarlet Ribbon

-3-

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8m, 6w, 1 flexible)

- GRANDMA:** A modern Christian.
MARTHA: Her ultra-modern daughter.
JIMMY: Martha's husband.
TRUDY and JUDY: Their twin daughters.
MARY: The Virgin.
ANGEL: A tall young man.
SHEPHERDS: Two or more young men.
ISAIAH: The beloved prophet.
MICAH: Another prophet.
SIMEON: An old rabbi.
ANNA.: An old prophetess.
JOSEPH: Husband of Mary.
NARRATOR: An unseen reader.

The Scarlet Ribbon

-4-

PART I

(AT RISE: GRANDMA is in armchair sewing. The TWINS are making paper chains for decoration. MUSIC comes faintly from offstage as if from a street meeting outside the window. Nobody pays much attention to it until MARTHA enters SR, her arms full of packages, and glances angrily out of window.)

MARTHA: I do wish they would stop that racket! Sometimes, I don't mind it, but when I've a hundred things on my mind it drives me frantic. *(Puts packages on table under window.)*

TRUDY: I sort of like to hear the music, Mother, coming up through the snow. *(Listens for a moment. Strains of "Silent Night, Holy Night" are heard.)* I like that one especially.

JUDY: That's "Silent Night, Holy Night." *(Sings a line of it.)*

TRUDY: *(Breaks in.)* Well, I know that. I go to Sunday school as much as you do!

MARTHA: *(Straightens out JUDY'S hair ribbon.)* Hush, girls. No quarreling on Christmas Eve or Santa might forget to stop. *(Looks at GRANDMA.)* I do think I would enjoy a really silent Christmas Eve for change! *(Sighs.)* If only we hadn't been forced to take this apartment on this busy corner.

GRANDMA: *(Shocked.)* I can't imagine a person complaining of music on Christmas Eve, Martha. Especially that music.

MARTHA: That's not my idea of music.

GRANDMA: Well, I think it is very good music. There's a little girl down there no bigger 'n the twins playing a trumpet. I was watching her before it started to snow so hard. She had to blow on her hands to keep them warm.

MARTHA: What in the world are her parents thinking about?

GRANDMA: *(With unexpected asperity.)* Your soul, probably. If not yours, certainly someone's. There's a message to be brought to folks on Christmas Eve and that ... *(Nods toward the window.)* ... is one way of bringing it.

The Scarlet Ribbon

-5-

(Quotes softly.) "For unto us a child is born; unto us a song is given."

(MARTHA shrugs and stands at window looking down with a smug look on her face.)

TRUDY: Why do they stand on a corner preaching, Grandma? Sometimes there isn't anyone at all listenin'.

JUDY: Sometimes there is, too. Tonight, while Grandma and I watched, a lot of folks sort of stopped for a minute and dropped money in the little kettle.

MARTHA: *(Turns from window.)* Oh, I'll admit organizations like that do some good, but they haven't a thing I need.

GRANDMA: *(Quietly.)* "The heart is desperately wicked and deceitful above all things."

TRUDY: *(Out of patience.)* But you haven't told me why they preach on the corners!

MARTHA: *(Quickly.)* It's just an old fogy idea, Trudy. Street corner religion went out with the bustle. *(Continues rapidly as the TWINS open their mouths to ask questions.)* No, don't ask me what a bustle is. I'm too busy to tell you.

GRANDMA: *(Quizzically.)* She's always in one, whether she wears one or not!

MARTHA: *(Peers out window again and points.)* There! That's one of the things I've got against that sort of religion. It makes folks do such silly things. The old man that leads the meeting is kneeling right in the snow. He'll probably die of pneumonia.

GRANDMA: Don't worry about him, Martha. At least he's ready to go.

MARTHA: *(Exasperated, walks toward GRANDMA.)* Mother for goodness sakes, just what's wrong with me? You're acting as if I never heard of the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. Why, I've never done a single thing to make you ashamed of me in all the thirty years of my life.

GRANDMA: *(Pats MARTHA'S hand and says, gently.)* You have been a good girl, Martha; "yet lackest thou one thing."

The Scarlet Ribbon

-6-

JUDY: (*Looks up curiously.*) Didn't Jesus say that to someone?

GRANDMA: He said it to a beautiful young man who had never done a thing to make his parents ashamed of him, either. But when Jesus told him there was one thing he must yet do, he turned away sorrowful, for he did not want to do it.

TRUDY: What did Jesus want him to do?

GRANDMA: Sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor.

MARTHA: (*Cynically.*) Huh, I'd like to see that today.

JUDY: Why did Jesus want him to give up all his money?

GRANDMA: Because Jesus could read his heart, and He knew that the young man loved the money more than he did Jesus.

TRUDY: Did he ever give up his money, Grandma?

GRANDMA: No one knows for sure, Trudy, but I like to think that he did. Maybe something happened to him, something that showed him just how important Jesus is. I like to think that he gave up his money and went out and followed Jesus.

JUDY: I think he must have. The Bible says that Jesus loved him a lot. I guess he would just have to love Jesus back.

GRANDMA: He loves all of us a lot. But too many of us are just like the stubborn young man. We just can't leave all the things we're doing and follow Him.

MARTHA: Personally, I think it was unfair to ask him to give up his comfort, when the Bible says he had kept all the commandments and laws.

GRANDMA: That's what the Bible says he said. But had he, Martha? Do you remember the first and second commandments that Jesus said were the greatest?

MARTHA: (*Glibly.*) "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. And thy neighbor as thyself."

End of Freeview

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