

Undercover Christmas: Arson or Accident

By Hope Bunch

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DEDICATION

To two special men: my husband, Billy Bunch, and my friend, Andrew Frodahl.

Billy and I will celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary this year. He is a loving husband and a wonderful father to our children. Friends say when it comes to being a grandpa, Billy is the "Gold Standard." Need I say more about this man? He doesn't complain about the endless hours that I spend at Christmas Play practice each year or the countless hours spent at my desk. He is the most unselfish person I know and I could not have a better husband.

In 2015, our church produced "Believing in a Finley Christmas" by Andrew Frodahl. I had a question, so I contacted Andy. He graciously responded and answered all of my questions. I sent him a few pictures from our show, and he replied, "If you ever do another play of mine, I'll come to VA to see it." I did not forget those words! When "Chapter 7 Christmas" came out in 2017, we quickly ordered our scripts and I reminded Andy of his promise. He came to see our show and our cast and crew absolutely loved him. This was the beginning of our unlikely friendship. I told Andy that I had always wanted to write a Christmas play, but I didn't think I could do it. He suggested that I just put some ideas on paper, so I decided to give it a whirl! Without him, I would have not had the courage to even try. Thanks, Andy!

STORY OF THE PLAY

Just one year ago, Doc Nash's Free Health Clinic was facing closure. With a visit from the Undercover Boss, Lou Grant from the Matthew Chapter 25 Foundation approved a grant, thus saving the Clinic. But town councilwoman Beatrice Chandler now wants the Free Clinic closed. Her son will be opening a new medical practice and she doesn't want any competition. She pays a visit to Doc, hoping to buy him out. When Doc refuses, Mrs. Chandler storms away in anger as she is accustomed to getting what she wants. Then, the unthinkable happens – a fire! It destroys much of the Clinic and the home of Doc's neighbor, who barely escapes with his life! Initial reports from the fire inspector suggest arson! But who would do such a thing? And why? The mystery begins to unravel when Lou Grant returns and once again goes undercover. Sometimes we rush to judgment and place blame where it doesn't belong. This play teaches us to look for the good in people and to not be so quick to find fault. In the end, we see how friends and neighbors come together in times of adversity and loss. Those we least expect to help are often the ones who are the most generous and willing.

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SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene 1: Monday, December 9, in the evening
Scene 2: Tuesday, December 10, the next evening
Scene 3: Wednesday, December 11, the next morning
Scene 4: Wednesday, December 11, later that day
Scene 5: Thursday, December 19, a week later, afternoon
Scene 6: Sunday, December 22, 3 days later, early afternoon
Scene 7: Sunday, December 22, that evening

SETTING

The living room and kitchen of the Nash family farmhouse in rural Baynesville, Virginia. Decor is simple and somewhat dated or old-fashioned. The living room is stage right. A sofa, rocking chair, coffee table and occasional chairs fill the room. An old afghan is tossed over the back of the sofa. A dining table with four chairs is center stage left, where much of the action takes place. Upstage of the dining table is a buffet or serving table, with a dining room cabinet as space allows. The upstage wall has an exterior window. The door to the kitchen is on the upstage left side of the room, and the door leading to the front porch is downstage left.

A Christmas wreath is on the downstage left exterior door, and a small candle and candle ring or Christmas figurine sit on the kitchen table throughout the play. A tree and other Christmas decorations are added just before Scene 5 to show a lapse of time.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(9 m, 6 w)

DOC BEVERLY NASH: Director of the Nash Free Clinic. In his late 50s or 60s.
FRANCES: Doc's wife, a nurse who works at the clinic. In her late 50s or 60s.
MARY ALICE: Inept receptionist, in her 30s with visible tattoos; she looks like Danielle from *American Pickers*.
BUBBA PACKETT: A real country boy! The only eligible bachelor in Baynesville.
MRS. BEATRICE CHANDLER: Member of the town council; everyone kowtows to her.
LOUIS GRANT: Private investigator in his 30s or early 40s.
LUTHER WASHINGTON: Doc's neighbor, about 75 years old.
CHARLIE CRANE: A retired contractor, and a patient.
DOTTIE JO CRANE: Charlie's wife.
FRED WILKINS: Patient.
WILL BOTTS: Patient.
JENNY DOLEMAN: Patient.
HENRY DOLEMAN: Jenny's husband, a painting contractor.
CHRIS NICKS: Patient.
LORETTA LYNN SANDERS: Country girl, just moved to Baynesville.

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Scene 1

(AT RISE: It is Monday evening, December 9th, at the home of Doc and Frances Nash. DOC is seated at the kitchen table and FRANCES is serving soup into bowls while standing at the buffet.)

DOC: *(Shivers.)* Hope I'm not getting sick. I just felt a chill.

FRANCES: Oh, I hope not! Probably just this cold spell. This soup is coming. Hope you're hungry. *(Brings the bowls to table.)*

DOC: Make sure mine is good and hot. *(Sips his coffee.)* I'm going to go turn up the heat.

(DOC goes to the thermostat on the wall as FRANCES pours some water into glasses.)

FRANCES: Maybe this hot soup will warm you up. It is your favorite, Brunswick stew!

(FRANCES sits across the table from DOC. He smells of the soup, grabs her hand and smiles.)

DOC: I'm glad I wised up and asked you to be my wife, Frances.

FRANCES: I didn't think it would happen, you know, me and you, after all these years. But when the sparks started flying...

DOC: Yes, I remember those sparks! *(Flirting.)*

FRANCES: *(Dismissing him.)* Eat your soup, man, before it gets cold.

DOC: Now don't be embarrassed, Frances. It was just nature taking its course. It was meant to be.

FRANCES: And on Valentine's Day, we'll be celebrating our first anniversary.

DOC: *(As they begin to eat.)* These last twelve months have certainly been interesting.

FRANCES: Starting with the \$100,000 grant from the Matthew 25 Foundation.

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DOC: That was a shock! I doubt the Free Clinic would still be open without it.

FRANCES: It sure has made life easier, not having to worry about money.

DOC: Say, when Lou was here, didn't he say he would be back this December with another check from the Foundation? Have you heard Mary Alice mention anything about it?

FRANCES: Trust me, if she had heard anything from Lou Grant, we would know about it. She fell fast and hard for that man.

DOC: Too bad he lives all the way up in D.C. They really hit it off, those two.

FRANCES: Yes indeed. I haven't seen that twinkle in her eyes since he left town. She finally found someone who was "her type," only to find out that he lived three hours away.

DOC: When is that girl of ours supposed to be back from her cruise?

FRANCES: Tomorrow. And it won't be one minute too soon!

DOC: I'm surprised to hear you say that. I didn't think you had missed her *that* much.

FRANCES: I did miss her but I'm not talking about me. Poor Bubba Packett has been coming by the clinic every evening, asking if I've heard from his "Suga."

DOC: I just don't understand that match-up. Mary Alice likes life in the fast lane and you just don't get much more redneck than Bubba Packett. I don't even know that boy's real name.

FRANCES: Uh...yes, you do. It's Bubba. That's what his momma and daddy named him.

DOC: For real? (*FRANCES nods "yes."*) But is he right for her? Doesn't seem like a match made in heaven.

FRANCES: No, I wouldn't say that either, but it was a match made in Baynesville. I think Jenny introduced them.

DOC: Little Beverly's mother?

FRANCES: Yes, she and Mary Alice have become really good friends since they met at the clinic last year. Bubba is one of her husband's hunting buddies.

End of Freeview

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