The Christmas That Almost Wasn't

By Rollie Anderson

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DEDICATION

To Martha and Ollie, my mother and father who raised me in a Christian home and did their best to instill in my heart a humble respect for God and His holy word.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Here's a wonderful comedy that's sure to charm audiences of all ages. When pre-teen brats Jimmy Pate and his cousin Brianne don't get the gifts they think they deserve, they pray to God and ask for no more Christmas. The next year, as the holiday fails to materialize, the two kids are the only ones who notice, in hilarious and heart-wrenching ways, that it's missing. The store owner doesn't have a clue about Christmas displays, the cable company operator never heard of Christmas movies, and even Jimmy's older sister thinks the only holiday in December is New Year's. Distraught, Jimmy and Brianne finally make their way to church on what is supposed to be Christmas Eve. There, with the help of their minister, they come to terms with their selfishness that led them to make such a foolish request and discover God's limitless power and love.

Performance time: About 75 minutes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(6 men, 8 women, 4 children, extras. Doubling possible.)

JIMMY PATE: A precocious, selfish pre-teen.

BETTY PATE: Jimmy's strict, tradition-loving mom.

BILL PATE: Jimmy's strong but sympathetic dad.

KATY PATE: A typically dizzy, detached teenager.

BRIANNE: Jimmy's equally self-centered pre-teen cousin.

AUNT AUDREY: Brianne's mom, Betty's sister.

UNCLE TED: Brianne's dad.

AUNT DEBORAH: Betty's sister, mother of four young children.

UNCLE LEE: Deborah's husband.

AUNT CLAUDENE: Bill's older sister, loves to bake fruitcakes.

MARGIE HAZELNUT: A stressed-out customer service representative.

MRS. WILSON: The friendly proprietor of Wilson's Department Store.

REV. RILEY: The family's gentle, wise minister.

FOUR YOUNG COUSINS: Either gender.

STREET BEGGAR

DOUBLING POSSIBILITIES:
Aunt Audrey, Aunt Deborah, or Aunt Claudene could double as Mrs. Wilson and Margie Hazlewood. Uncle Lee or Uncle Ted could double as the Beggar and Rev. Riley.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I
Scene 1: Christmas Day, last year. Pate family living room.
Scene 2: Later that evening. Jimmy's room.
Scene 3: The next year. Thanksgiving Day, mid-morning. The living room.
Scene 4: After Thanksgiving. Main Street and Wilson's Store.
***Scene 5:** Later that day. Living room and cable company.
Scene 6: The same afternoon. Katy's bedroom.

ACT II
Scene 1: Evening of what should be Christmas Eve. Main Street.
Scene 2: Christmas Eve night. The church sanctuary.
Scene 3: Christmas morning. Jimmy's bedroom
Scene 4: A few minutes later. The living room.

SETTINGS

The Pate family living room. The stage is over-decorated with every Christmas decoration possible. SR is the front door. Just inside the door is a huge, immaculately decorated tree. Presents are piled around the base. The hearth with all the stockings is USC. SL there is a large dining table filled with bowls and trays of food. The table has a gaudy Christmas centerpiece. Farthest SL is a swinging door that leads to the kitchen. The whole scene exudes the joyous spirit of Christmas Day. In addition to the main set, there are several other settings: Jimmy's room, Main Street, Wilson's Store, the cable company, and the church, all of which can be done very simply.

***Production Note:** In Act I, Scene 5, directors can choose to have Jimmy and Brianne offstage to make their phone call to the cable company. Their dialogue could then be read, reducing the amount of memorization for the two young leads.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: Christmas Day. The Pate family's living room. The curtain opens to a room full of family. Downstage are three COUSINS making faces at one of the UNCLES with his back to the audience who is taking their picture. All the other characters on the stage are talking, putting food on the table, laughing, etc. Up tempo traditional Christmas MUSIC is playing. Photo complete, the three young cousins gather by the tree, excitedly eyeing the presents waiting to be opened. They are soon joined by a FOURTH COUSIN as he runs in from the kitchen door as if being pursued. AUNT AUDREY, standing by the table, notices his fearful face.

In run his pursuers, ten-year-old cousins JIMMY and BRIANNE. They are conspicuous by their non-Christmas clothes. He sports a tee shirt with a heavy metal band's logo on the front and she wears an all black, almost Gothic-styled outfit. They stop in their tracks and suddenly act nonchalant as Jimmy's mother, BETTY, and Brianne's mother, Audrey, give them suspicious, warning looks. They shrug and give each other a knowing grin. Jimmy's sister, thirteen-year-old KATY, sits on the hearth, talking on the phone. Betty supervises the setting of the table with Audrey, along with AUNT DEBORAH. Jimmy's father, BILL, stands SL, talking with the men-folk, UNCLE LEE and UNCLE TED.

As the scene continues, Jimmy and Brianne lurk around the room doing mischievous things such as tossing olives and nuts across the stage at their cousins and looking away innocently, him sneaking up on Katy and putting a piece of ice down the back of her dress, her picking up a present and tearing a tiny hole in the paper to try to see what it is, etc.

The music fades away. The men stay off to the side, lost in their own quiet discussions. During this segment Katy continues to chat on her cell phone. Jimmy and Brianne finally take a seat and look impatiently bored. Betty pauses and surveys the room with a satisfied smile. She sighs and looks at Audrey and Deborah.)

BETTY: I just love Christmas. Don't you?

(AUDREY and DEBORAH exchange a glance.)

AUDREY: Yes, but I don't think anyone loves it as much as you do, Betty. You get into it more than anyone I've ever known. You're obsessed.
DEBORAH: No kidding. You're the queen of Christmas.
BETTY: Aww, you're just saying that to be nice, but I can't help myself. Christmas is wonderful. There's no other holiday that comes close. You know how I love to decorate, and I always say I've never met a Christmas ornament I didn't like! In fact, I still could use more tinsel here and there.

(AUDREY and DEBORAH roll their eyes in amazement.)

AUDREY: I don't know, Betty. It looks pretty festive to me.
DEBORAH: I wouldn't change a thing.
BETTY: You really think so? Hmm. *(Looking at her watch.)* Well, as usual, everything's on the table, the turkey is ready in the oven and we're all waiting for Aunt Claudene to get here. I swear, she'll probably run late for her own funeral!
AUDREY: Knowing Claudene, she probably walked out of the house without her precious fruitcake and she had to go back and get it.
BETTY: Oh, please, Audrey, just the mention of Aunt Claudene's fruitcake makes me lose my appetite. That thing's so heavy Bill could use it as an anchor for his bass boat!
DEBORAH: You'd think she would've gotten the hint last year when no one even touched it all day. What does she put in that thing? Broccoli? Beets? Paint thinner? It's terrible!
KATY: *(Loudly, into phone.)* Are you kidding me? I loved it!

(The three WOMEN look over at KATY, then back at each other, shaking their heads.)

End of Freeview

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