

GSIS Fall Production 2012

November 16 & 17

*A Presentation of Three One Act Christmas Plays*

## **The Vision**

By William Grandgeorge

Based on a Short Story by Leo Tolstoy

(PDF Pages 1-53)

## **Gift of the Magi**

By Jon Jory

Based on a Short Story by O. Henry

(PDF Pages 54-82)

## **The Christmas Truce**

By Aaron Shephard

Based on letters written from the front

(PDF Pages 83-92)

# the vision

## SCENE 1

**THE PLACE:** *The dingy, dusty interior of a cobbler's shop in a remote village in Bavaria.*

**THE TIME:** *The past. Early morning; about the time the shops along the tiny street are being opened.*

**THE CURTAINS OPEN.** *Outside the door UR, there is the SOUND OF A KEY BEING FITTED TO THE LOCK; and in a moment, the door is opened. The proprietor, HANS LUMPERT, enters. About fifty-five years of age, he is ordinarily a calm, strangely quiet fellow whose most noticeable physical characteristic is his slight limp. He carries a lunch box; and except for the leather apron, he wears the winter clothing of a typical Bavarian*

cobbler. He pockets his door key, closes the door, and crosses with an air of suppressed excitement to the right of the counter at C. He puts his lunch box down, removes his overcoat, shakes the snow from it, drapes the coat across his arm, brushes the flakes from his cap, picks up the lunch box, limps around the counter, and moves toward ULC. He removes his mittens, opens the door to the small storeroom, exits, hangs up his coat and cap, lays his mittens down, and puts away his lunch.

He re-enters almost immediately, putting on his leather apron. That done, he briskly rubs his hands together as if to warm them, crosses to UC, kneels in front of the stove, shakes the grate vigorously, rises, opens the stove door, puts in two or three chunks of firewood, takes a match from his pocket, ignites it, presumably lights the fire, and closes the door.

Next, he returns to the storeroom ULC, finds an old broom, comes out, and begins to sweep the floor in the general area left of the counter. Although he does not sweep rapidly, one somehow senses a special urgency in his actions—as though he were in a greater hurry than ever before.

BRUNO enters UR, without his overcoat and slapping his arms to keep warm. He is a large man who wears a butcher's apron which—once white—is now spotted with blood. He crosses UC to the stove as he greets Hans in robust, jocular fashion.

BRUNO

Ah, good morning, Hans! You are late to your shop again, eh?

HANS

(As he sweeps.) How does a man as busy as myself have time to worry about being late?

BRUNO

*(With a laugh.)* Since when have you been busy? *(Stands for a moment with his back to the stove, watching Hans.)* Say! You do seem to be doing a better job than usual this morning. *(Faintly puzzled.)* Last Monday, I don't think you even touched the broom to the floor.

HANS

Today is not Monday.

BRUNO

*(Feigning shock.)* So it isn't! *(Scratching his head under his cap.)* Whatever could you be thinking—sweeping in the middle of the week? *(In mock reproach.)* You mustn't do that, Hans, or people will expect me to do the same for my butcher shop. *(Mumbles, shakes his head.)* Twice a week . . . what a foolish notion!

HANS

*(Sweeping dirt and remnants toward trash box L.)* I have a special reason.

BRUNO

Ah! *(Relieved.)* Because today is the day before *Christmas*. *(Nods.)* Now I understand.

HANS

*(Kneels and puts sweepings into trash box.)* Christmas has nothing to do with it. My reason is very—*special*.

BRUNO

Oh, ho! *(Comes C and stares at Hans across the counter.)* So the *Baron*—the great man of our small village—is going to stop by to have you mend his shoes, is he? *(Pompously; imitating the Baron.)* "My dear Hans! *(Rapping on the counter.)* My

dear, dear Hans, I have fourteen holes in my shoes, and I did so hope to have a pair of shoes for Christmas. Please! Would you find time to mend them today?" (*With a skeptical laugh; in his own voice.*) Fourteen holes nothing! Fourteen pairs of shoes would be more like it!

HANS

(*Straightening up.*) I am not sweeping for the Baron.

(*He carries the broom ULC and exits to the storeroom. BRUNO leans across the counter and calls after him.*)

BRUNO

But who else would you sweep for, my dear man?

(*HELMUT, the innkeeper; KARL, the baker; and HERMANN, the brewer, enter UR from the street. The three are dressed in clothes suitable to their respective trades, but they are not wearing greatcoats or overcoats—thus conveying the impression that their shops are nearby. They shake the snow from themselves and move toward the stove UC as they greet Bruno with enthusiasm.*)

KARL

Hello, my good Bruno! (*Jovially; brushing excess flour from his blouse.*) Here again, eh? Warming up on someone else's fire, I see.

BRUNO

(*Turning to face them.*) Ya, ya. (*Good-naturedly.*) You don't seem to stay away from it much yourself. Good morning, Helmut. Hello, Hermann. What's brewing?

(*All laugh boisterously. HERMANN comes down to right of Bruno as he loosens his collar and turns up his cuffs for greater comfort.*)

HERMANN

Always the joker—Bruno. Always the joker. A brewery is a cold place on a morning like this.

HELMUT

(*Crossing R and putting a foot on bench.*) He'd better be brewing *plenty*. Tonight being Christmas Eve, there'll be a lot of celebrations.

KARL

(*At URC.*) What kind of meat are people wanting for the holiday tomorrow, Bruno?

BRUNO

(*Crossing below counter toward L.*) Mostly lamb. It seems no one but the Baron can afford beef for Christmas.

HELMUT

(*With a glance around the room.*) Say! Doesn't it look cleaner in here than usual? (*KARL and HERMANN also glance about and murmur agreement.*) What is Hans doing—cleaning up for Christmas?

(*For some reason, this strikes them as being humorous; and they all laugh.*)

BRUNO

He's been cleaning up the shop, all right. But he won't say why.

HELMUT

I'm sure it's not the Christmas spirit.

HERMANN

(*Sobering.*) Father Albert was talking with me about Hans

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the other day. He thinks that since all of us are friends of Hans, we should get the poor fellow started back to church.

KARL

*(Skeptically.)* Ya, ya. And I ought to move *(nods)* yonder mountain in front of my bakery for an advertisement. *(Sits on bench URC.)* You couldn't drag Hans Lumpert into a church.

BRUNO

*(Moving DL and putting a foot upon cobbler's stool.)* Poor old Hans. *(Musingly.)* He never did go back, did he?

HELMUT

*(Sadly.)* Ya, when his children died so young, he quit for two or three years. *(Sits on bench R.)* And then, when his wife was killed on the mountain, he stopped going altogether.

HERMANN

*(Crossing and sitting on right edge of counter C.)* Hans is a strange fellow. You'd think he'd need the church now more than he ever did.

*(HANS emerges from the storeroom ULC, carrying a small table with a drawer in it. He sees his visitors and greets them with mock disdain.)*

HANS

Loafers! Loafers! Loafers! *(KARL, HELMUT, and HERMANN greet Hans in friendly, tolerant tones. HANS continues to speak as he carries the table forward and places it downstage of the counter C.)* Even on the day before Christmas you don't work.

HERMANN

Since when did the day before Christmas mean anything to you?

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HELMUT

Ya, you should talk about Christmas!

HANS

*(Fussing with the table.)* I should talk, I should talk. This is the day that will mean money—and lots of it—to you, my fellow tradesmen! *(To Helmut.)* This will be the biggest night of the year at your inn, won't it?

HELMUT

*(Sadly; shaking his head.)* Not this year, my friend. Not this year.

KARL

*(Rises, walks down to Helmut.)* So? Your Missus finally got you to close on this Holy Night, eh?

HELMUT

*(Uncomfortably.)* Not the Missus . . . not the Missus. I just think I should close, that's all. Just out of respect.

HERMANN

On Christmas Eve—such a big night? Everybody celebrating *(with a jeering laugh)*—and you just close out of respect!

*(HANS returns ULC, exits to the storeroom, and re-enters almost immediately with a candlestick and candle. The others, aware that HANS is practically ignoring them, pause and curiously focus their attention upon him. He comes down, fitting the candle to the holder, places it on the table, walks to LC, surveys the table and candlestick thoughtfully, shakes his head negatively, and walks slowly back to the table.)*

KARL

*(Explosively.)* I can't stand this guessing game any longer!



(Crosses to RC.) Hans, what is all this? (With a gesture.) Why are you cleaning everything up so? Always before, you have paid no attention to Christmas or any other church day. Why are you going to all this bother now? Why the table? Why the candle?

HANS

(At left of table; absently.) If I told you, you wouldn't believe me. (Shrugs.) So I won't tell you, at all.

HERMANN

(Standing and facing Hans.) Of course we would believe. Unless it is craziness, we would believe. (Glancing at the others for confirmation.) Wouldn't we?

BRUNO

Ya, of course we would believe. (Impatiently.) What do you think we are—fools or something?

HANS

(Going ULC again.) I would rather not answer that.

(He exits to the storeroom. The other men exchange puzzled, half-angry glances. HELMUT rises.)

HELMUT

Has he gone crazy? (Crossing to right of Karl.) Why, we even believed him the day he said the Baron came to this shop. No one else in town would believe, but *we* believed.

HERMANN

(Crossing to left of Karl, near LC.) Ya. I told him I believed. (Shakes his head sadly.) And now he won't tell us.

KARL

Do you suppose the Baron is coming again?

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BRUNO

No, he said it was not the Baron.

KARL

*(Suddenly.)* Maybe it is for the carolers!

HERMANN

If so, he has changed a lot. *Last year, when the carolers came to sing for him, he chased them out. Said he was too busy to listen.*

*(HANS, carrying a small white tablecloth, re-enters ULC and comes down to the small table below the counter. He lifts the candlestick, puts it temporarily on the counter, places the white cloth carefully on the table, replaces the candlestick at the center of it, crosses to RC near Karl, Hermann, and Helmut, and again studies the table. The other men glance wonderingly at the table and then strain to see Hans's face.)*

BRUNO

*(Unable to bear the suspense any longer.)* All right! All right! Tell us, now—why all this funny business?

HANS

I told you to never mind. If I told you, you wouldn't believe.

BRUNO

*(Coming to left of small table, near DC.)* Of course we will believe! *(Persuasively.)* Aren't we your friends?

HERMANN

Your very best friends?

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KARL

Ya, for twenty years I've been coming here every morning to talk to you.

HANS

To warm up at my fire, you mean!

HELMUT

*(With feigned outrage.)* Hans! That is no way to talk to friends.

KARL

Helmut is right, Hans. *(Pats HANS's back reassuringly.)* Now, take it easy and tell us.

HERMANN

Ya, we will believe you.

*(There is a pause. HANS walks slowly to the right of the small table, turns, glances dubiously at the faces of his inquisitors as if weighing their sincerity, finally smiles, and shrugs.)*

HANS

All right. You listen—I tell you. *(The others quickly converge on Hans. HERMANN, KARL, and HELMUT stand expectantly at the shoemaker's right; BRUNO stands at left of table, waiting.)* It was last night. I went to bed early—before nine o'clock. At first, I—I could not sleep. And then, for some strange reason—I don't know why—I said—I said a prayer.

THE OTHERS

*(In unison; astounded.)* A prayer? You?

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HANS

*(Uneasily; hurrying on.)* Later on, in the middle of the night, I suddenly woke up and—! *(Breaks off, discouraged, and shakes his head.)* Oh, no, you will never believe me.

BRUNO

*(Sharply.)* Go ahead!

THE OTHERS

*(Eagerly.)* Tell us!

HANS

Well . . . I had a . . . a *vision*.

HERMANN

A vision?

HELMUT

You saw something?

*(Hans's visitors exchange quick, questioning glances. HANS, realizing they are impressed by his words, speaks more strongly.)*

HANS

Ya. I had a vision about Christ!

*(The others listen intently, fascinated.)*

KARL

What happened, Hans? What happened?

HANS

It was very strange. Christ just looked at me and said, "I shall visit you, Hans, at your shoe shop tomorrow."

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*(There is a moment of utter silence as the others stare at Hans; then they look at each other in bewilderment. BRUNO nods; and the other visitors straighten their blouse cuffs, button their collars, and draw on their mittens in preparation for departure. HANS, realizing their complete disbelief, grows slightly desperate.)*

HELMUT

Well, I must be getting back to the inn.

KARL

Ya, ya, my cakes will be burning.

HANS

*(Holding out his hands to all of them.)* No, no! What I have told you is true! True! *(Walks two or three steps toward Karl.)* I tell you—I saw Him!

*(BRUNO moves below the small table and comes behind Hans.)*

BRUNO

*(Gently.)* Hans, it's all right to believe you saw it; but *(placing his hand on HANS' shoulder)* . . . to clean up your shop, that is wasted time.

HANS

*(Turning to him.)* No, Bruno! No! Christ is really coming here to my shop. He told me Himself!

HERMANN

*(Crossing and laying a hand on HANS' other shoulder.)* Why don't you go home, old friend, and rest?

HANS

*(Momentarily overwhelmed with sadness.)* You don't believe

me. You don't believe me. (*Suddenly angry.*) Get out of here, all of you! I have no time for you. I must clean my shop. (*As the others continue to gaze at him with a mixture of skepticism and compassion.*) Go on! Get out, I tell you!

(HELMUT, KARL, and HERMANN shrug helplessly, turn away, and file UR. HELMUT opens the door and goes out, followed by KARL. HERMANN hesitates, takes a step toward Hans, as if to protest, then stops, turns away, crosses to UR, and goes out. BRUNO gives HANS a final pat on the shoulder, hurriedly goes UR, is about to follow Hermann, hesitates, turns in doorway, and calls back to Hans.)

## BRUNO

I'll come back later, Hans—when I have taken care of my customers—and talk to you.

(*He exits UR, closing the door. HANS looks after him sadly, crosses R to the window, and glances out for a moment. Finally, he turns, crosses back to RC, studies the small table, gets another idea, hurries to front of table, opens the drawer in it, extracts many unusual objects, finds what he is looking for—a small Bible—replaces the other objects, closes the drawer, and blows a large quantity of dust from the volume. Then he arranges the Bible reverently on top of the table beside the unlighted candle. Once again, he steps back and surveys the results; and once more, he registers dissatisfaction. Shaking his head, he walks ULC and exits into the storeroom.*

MRS. DANNEWITZ, a middle-aged woman, enters UR. Wearing a ragged coat and apparently in a great hurry, she walks to the right side of the counter C, pauses, glances around, and taps her foot impatiently. After a moment, she walks around below the small table, crosses to L, surveys the rows of shoes on the shelves, selects one,

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*marches determinedly back to the right of the counter again, and raps the heel of the shoe forcefully against the top of the counter.)*

MRS. DANNEWITZ

Hans! (*Loudly.*) Hans? Where are you?

(HANS *re-enters hurriedly at ULC.*)

HANS

Excuse me, Mrs. Dannewitz. I was busy in the back room. (*Pleasantly; moving to left of counter C and facing her across it.*) And what do you want this morning?

MRS. DANNEWITZ

Sixteen sheep! What did you think I wanted? (*Waving the shoe in his face.*) I came for my shoes, of course.

HANS

Ya, ya. They are all ready for you, Mrs. Dannewitz.

(*He takes the shoe from her hand, limps to shelf L, finds its mate, returns to left of counter C, gets some wrapping paper from beneath it, and quickly wraps the shoes.*)

Let's see now . . . two new soles. That will be three francs.

MRS. DANNEWITZ

There was only a hole in *one* shoe.

HANS

(*Patiently; as he wraps.*) Ya, but I couldn't fix just one, could I? Or one leg would be higher than the other. (*Chuckles.*) Then you would walk like me. We wouldn't want to be like that, would we, now?

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MRS. DANNEWITZ

*(Coldly.)* Very well! *(Takes coins from her purse and slaps them down onto the counter.)* Here are your three francs!

HANS

*(Handing her the package.)* And here are your shoes. *(She takes the package; he picks up the coins.)* Good-bye, Mrs. Dannewitz. And a Merry Christmas to you.

MRS. DANNEWITZ

*(Shortly; crossing UR.)* And a good day to you.

*(She exits UR, slamming the door behind her. HANS immediately exits to the storeroom and, after a moment, returns with a small framed picture of Christ. As he walks down to the table below counter C, he takes a cloth from his pocket, blows the dust from the frame, and proceeds to polish it. This finished, he returns the cloth to his pocket, places the picture on the table, and arranges it into a grouping with the candlestick and the Bible. He backs away, studying the results, steps to the table again, adjusts the picture slightly, moves away, looks again, nods, and crosses UC to the stove. He takes a match from his pocket, strikes it on the stove, ignites it, crosses down to the small table again, lights the candle, blows out the match, returns to the stove, opens the door, tosses the dead match into it, closes the door, comes DC, gazes at the improvised shrine he has created, nods, and smiles with satisfaction. BRUNO hurriedly enters UR and walks excitedly down to right of Hans.)*

BRUNO

I'm sorry I couldn't get back sooner, Hans, but the Baron's cook was in! Even the Baron is having lamb for Christmas. She wanted a fancy cut, though. *(HANS, his back stiffly toward*



*Bruno, walks away from him and crosses to LC. BRUNO, aware that HANS is miffed, changes his tone.)* Now, Hans, be reasonable. *(With a step toward Hans.)* Christ is not going to visit you today or any other day. Get the notion out of your head!

*(He walks to stove UC and warms his hands. HANS turns and appraises him thoughtfully.)*

HANS

Bruno . . . you *are* my friend, aren't you?

BRUNO

Of course, of course.

HANS

*(Sorely troubled; crossing to left of counter C, well upstage.)* Then why do you doubt me? Why can't you believe what I have told you?

BRUNO

Because it just isn't reasonable. Christ has other things to do than visit you in your shop.

HANS

*(Sternly.)* He will be here.

BRUNO

*(Trying to be patient.)* But a dream is just a *dream*, Hans.

HANS

It was not a dream. It was a vision.

BRUNO

*(Turning from stove and facing Hans across the counter.)* But, Hans, if Christ were to visit anyone in this village, He

wouldn't have chosen *you*. (*Accusingly.*) You haven't been to church in four years!

HANS

That's enough. You don't believe me. You will never believe me! (*Heatedly.*) Get back to your butchering of dumb sheep! That is all you can ever understand! (*Crossing toward cobbler's stool DL.*) I have work to do.

BRUNO

But, Hans, if you would only—!

*(He moves C, raising his hands imploringly, but not knowing what other arguments to offer. HANS whirls toward Bruno and points toward door UR.)*

HANS

Good-bye, Bruno! I can see that my faith is not enough for you. (*Proudly.*) But it is enough for me! Christ *will* come to my shop today!

*(BRUNO gives up, shrugs, and—with a bewildered expression—crosses UR, and exits. Off beyond the window R, the VOICES OF THE CAROLERS can be heard in the distance as they sing a Christmas hymn of faith. HANS listens for a moment; the tightness of his face gradually relaxes into a smile, and he begins to hum snatches of the hymn. His spirits rising, as the SINGING GROWS LOUDER, he hastens ULC, reaches into the storeroom, brings out the broom, hurries downstage below counter C, and begins to sweep the Right half of the shop as the CURTAINS SLOWLY CLOSE.)*

## TRANSITIONAL NOTE

*The house lights do not come up; the auditorium remains in darkness as the singing of the carolers continues backstage. The necessary alterations in the appearance of the setting must proceed swiftly and efficiently. Presumably, the floor is cleaned; the shelves are dusted; the firewood restacked neatly in its box, and the rows of shoes are put in proper order. In reality, there will not be time to effect these changes in detail—only to suggest them. The inventive director must devise ways to make the setting seem very clean and well-ordered.*

*Although there was no window in the author's original production, it is recommended that at least one window—a very large one with simulated panes—be positioned in the Right wall or, if backstage space permits, in the wall Up Right Center. Such a window, in addition to providing additional interest-elements in the setting, can also prove useful in a number of ways: The characters can use it in suggesting the location of the other shops as they glance out through it from time to time; and, of course, it would provide an excellent frame for The Carolers as they pause outside and sing their songs of Christmas. If the window is situated in the rear wall, a suggestion of the other shops and dwellings might be painted in perspective on the exterior backing. In the first scene, the panes of the window could be made to appear grimy and partially obscured with dust on the inside and frost on the outside. Before Scene Two, this window frame can be slipped out of the opening in the flat; and an entirely new frame with "clean" panes inserted in its place. A change of this scope, while not difficult, can do a great deal toward altering the appearance of the shop.*

*When the scenic adjustments have been made, the SINGING FADES OUT; and—with the stage still in darkness—THE CURTAINS OPEN on*

## SCENE 2

**THE TIME:** *Several hours later. Noontime.*

**THE PLACE:** *The interior of the cobbler's shop—bright and immaculate now.*

*As the CURTAINS OPEN, the LIGHTS GRADUALLY COME UP, revealing HANS seated at his last DL. He is cutting a new sole from a small sheet of leather; and each time a scrap falls to the floor, he quickly picks it up and tosses it into the trash box under the shelves L. As he repeats the process, he reveals how nervous and excited he is; but he is in excellent spirits.*

*MRS. LOEHR, a widow of very limited means, enters UR, followed by her small daughter, HILDA, a child of perhaps nine or ten. As they move toward the right side of counter C, it becomes apparent how very poor they are. The mother's coat, although clean and well-mended, is nearly in rags; and the little girl, rosy cheeked and pretty, is wearing clothes more befitting a street urchin than the child of an average Bavarian home. MRS. LOEHR carries a package of laundry and a tattered purse. HANS hears his visitors, looks up, and greets them in friendly fashion.*

HANS

*Ah! Good day to you, Mrs. Loehr. (Stands and walks toward left of counter C.) And how are you, Hilda?*

HILDA

Hello, Mr. Lumpert.

MRS. LOEHR

Hello, Hans. (*Places package on counter.*) I have brought your laundry. I thought you might be needing it—tomorrow being Christmas, and all.

HILDA

(*Crossing UC to stove.*) May I warm myself at your fire, Mr. Lumpert? It's terribly cold out.

HANS

Why, of course, child. (*To Mrs. Loehr; as he picks up the package.*) How much do I owe you this week, Mrs. Loehr?

MRS. LOEHR

I'm afraid it's not a question of what you'll be owing *me*. The question will be how much I'll be owing you. (*To Hilda.*) Come here a moment, dear.

(*HANS places the package of laundry beneath the counter. HILDA obediently skips downstage and stands beside Mrs. Loehr, near the counter.*)

Hilda, you see, has gone right through the sole of her shoe.

HANS

(*Beckons Hilda.*) Here. Let me have a look at that shoe, Hilda.

(*HILDA skips around the counter and moves up beside Hans. He lifts her up and seats her on the edge of the counter, facing him. She crosses her legs in a careless, childlike fashion while the cobbler inspects the faulty shoe.*)

Oh, this can be fixed. (*Confidently.*) This can be fixed.

*(Pauses, examines the shoe more closely, feels the toe of it, and exclaims with dismay.)* Oh—Mrs. Loehr! What a shame! This shoe is too small for the child. Already her toe is pushing the end of it.

MRS. LOEHR

*(Unhappily.)* Ya, I know. I've been saving to buy her a *new* pair of shoes for Christmas, but I . . . I couldn't make it. I'll be hard-pressed to pay for the repairing of the old one.

HANS

*(Gently, but firmly.)* It wouldn't pay to cut a new sole for them.

HILDA

*(Stretching out her feet and studying her shoes distastefully.)* Besides . . . these old shoes are not pretty.

MRS. LOEHR

*(Quickly.)* Yes, Hilda, but we shall have to make them do. You can polish them a bit.

*(HANS removes the package of laundry from beneath the counter, walks ULC, and exits to the storeroom, discreetly leaving his customers to discuss their problem. They remain silent. MRS. LOEHR counts the few coins in her battered purse. HILDA gazes at the shoes on the shelf at L. In a moment, HANS re-enters, comes down to LC, and looks quizzically at his visitors, as if ready to hear their decision. Receiving no response, he shrugs, crosses to L, surveys the rows of shoes, selects two pairs, smacks them together, and brings them to the left side of counter C. HILDA eyes them with ill-concealed envy.)*

HANS

These are the kinds of shoes she should have—if they will fit.

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*(Places them on counter for inspection by MRS. LOEHR and HILDA.) Beautiful shoes for a beautiful little girl!*

MRS. LOEHR

*(Regretfully; turning away.) They are beautiful. But we cannot afford to—*

HILDA

*(Pleadingly.) Couldn't I just try them on, Mother? Please?*

HANS

*(Softly; to Hilda.) Indeed, you may! It will cost you nothing to try them on, at least.*

*(HILDA quickly slips off the left shoe from her foot, and HANS proceeds to fit the new one to it. HILDA grimaces. HANS quickly removes the shoe and shakes his head, muttering.)*

No . . . these are too small. *(Puts it down and picks up the left shoe of the second pair.)* Here. Perhaps these will be better.

*(He fits the second shoe to her foot. She smiles, then exclaims with delight. HANS removes the old shoe from her right foot, and fits it with the mate of the one HILDA is admiring. HANS chuckles with pleasure.)*

There! You see, Mrs. Loehr? A perfect fit!

MRS. LOEHR

*(Turning and glancing at Hilda's feet.) I'm sure they're very nice, Hans, but—*

HILDA

*(With a cry of delight.) They're so pretty, Mamal (Holds her feet up, admiring them.) I like these. They feel like—like magic! They make my feet want to dance!*

HANS

They're really a very solid shoe, Mrs. Loehr. I made them only last week. (*Smacks one of the shoes on Hilda's foot affectionately.*) Good leather, too. Plenty of room. (*Pushes the space on the shoe between the end of the shoe and Hilda's toe.*) Room to grow. They'll last her a long time.

MRS. LOEHR

Oh, yes, yes, I'm sure they would. But we couldn't—couldn't take them today. (*Falteringly.*) You see, Hans, I—I promised Hilda a bit of lamb for Christmas, and I cannot—

HILDA

(*Slipping off the counter.*) These are the prettiest shoes I've ever seen, Mother!

HANS

(*Pleased; pats her head.*) Let me see you walk in them, Hilda.

(*HILDA walks gaily and lightly below the small table and crosses to RC, where she does a little whirl on her toes. HANS, watching her smilingly, comes around below the counter and moves up beside Mrs. Loehr.*)

Ah! She is light on her feet. Can you *dance* in the new shoes, Hilda?

(*HILDA obligingly spins through a simple little dance, laughing merrily the while.*)

HILDA

Oh, I can, I can! (*When she stops dancing.*) They feel so (*with a prolonged sigh of joy*) . . . so nice!

MRS. LOEHR

(*Uneasily.*) What is the price, Hans?



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HANS

(*Thoughtfully.*) It is a complicated price, Mrs. Loehr. First of all, you must not charge me for the laundry you have just now brought. (*Quickly.*) But *after* today, you must promise that you will always charge me the full price!

MRS. LOEHR

And then—?

HANS

And then (*crossing to Hilda near DR and putting a hand fondly on her shoulder*) . . . Hilda must promise me that she will come to my shop once each month and dance for me as long as the shoes last. (*Turns to MRS. LOEHR.*) Is that a fair price, Mrs. Loehr?

MRS. LOEHR

It is too fair, I'm afraid. My husband would not have wanted me to take charity.

HANS

It is not charity. Hilda is dancing for me, isn't she?

HILDA

(*Delightedly.*) I will dance for you! I *promise* I will dance for you!

HANS

Then it is settled. (*MRS. LOEHR tries to protest, but he holds up his hands.*) No more arguments! (*Returns to MRS. LOEHR, takes her by the arm, and guides her with gentle insistence toward door UR.*) Good-bye now. (*HILDA runs to her mother and takes her by the hand.*) And have a Merry Christmas.

MRS. LOEHR

But we shouldn't . . .

## THE VISION

33

HANS

Move along, move along. I am busy today, and I am expecting a very special visitor.

MRS. LOEHR

(As HILDA leads her toward door UR.) But, Hans, you should at least let me pay what I can!

HANS

Good-bye. (*Pushing gently against the backs of Mrs. LOEHR and HILDA as he politely forces them through door UR.*) Good-bye. I'll hear no more.

(*HILDA and Mrs. LOEHR exit to the street. HANS closes the door behind them, smiles, hurriedly crosses around to left side of counter C, picks up Hilda's worn-out shoes, carries them L, and drops them into the trash box. Then he crosses to ULC, reaches into the storeroom, gets the broom and dustpan, goes to right of counter C—where Mrs. Loehr and Hilda have stood—sweeps the area thoroughly, gathers the dust into the dustpan, carries it to L, dumps it into the trash box, puts the broom and dustpan inside the storeroom door ULC, returns to his cobbler's bench DL, sits, and begins to trim another shoe sole.*)

FATHER ALBERT, a tall, dignified man in clerical garb, enters from the street UR and comes to RC, glancing about with obvious concern as he tries to locate Hans. HANS sees him and rises respectfully.)

HANS

Good afternoon, Father Albert. You don't come to my poor shop very often.

FATHER ALBERT

Hello, Hans. (*Taking off his gloves.*) It is a very cold day out-

## THE VISION

side. (*Hastily; with a smile.*) That is not why I have come, of course, but—

HANS

(*Hurriedly moving UC.*) I will build up the fire in my stove, and you can warm yourself.

(*He opens the door to the stove, puts in two or three pieces of firewood, closes the door, and shakes the ashes from the grate. FATHER ALBERT, meanwhile, moves up-stage to the bench along the wall URC, and studies Hans covertly, wondering how best to bring up the subject of his visit.*)

FATHER ALBERT

(*Clearing his throat.*) Hans, I . . . well, I was talking to some of the men at the inn just now; and I decided I should stop in at your shop and talk to you.

HANS

I'm glad you did, Father.

FATHER ALBERT

(*Rubbing his hands together, warming himself at the fire.*) Would you like to tell me about—about your vision, Hans?

HANS

(*Crossing slowly to RC, deep in thought.*) So they told you. (*Pauses, turns to Father Albert, speaks quietly.*) It is just like they said, Father. Last night I had a vision. In the vision, I saw Christ; and He said that He was coming to visit me here in my shop today.

FATHER ALBERT

What else did you dream?

HANS

It was not a dream. It was a—

FATHER ALBERT

Yes, Hans, I know. (*Carefully; with a step toward Hans.*) Was there anything else in your vision?

HANS

(*Walking close to Father Albert.*) Nothing else. He is coming, that's all.

FATHER ALBERT

(*Puts his arm paternally about HANS' shoulder.*) Hans, you mustn't take these things too seriously. Dreams—visions—can mean many things. Perhaps it was just a symbol or—

HANS

He will come.

FATHER ALBERT

But, Hans, I was only about to say—

HANS

(*His voice rising.*) He will come, Father! He said He would come, and He will.

FATHER ALBERT

(*Sighs, pats HANS' shoulder.*) Well, it is after lunchtime. I must be going home. (*Puts on his gloves, starts UR toward door.*) I'll stop by again later this evening, perhaps.

HANS

(*Following him to doorway.*) Then you will see. He will come.

## THE VISION

FATHER ALBERT

(Turns in doorway, facing Hans.) Well, good-bye for now, Hans.

HANS

You don't *believe*, do you, Father?

FATHER ALBERT

(Carefully.) Hans, it's not exactly that I don't . . . well . . . we'll talk about it later.

(He shakes his head and goes out UR.)

HANS

Good-bye, Father. (Closes door, walks thoughtfully DC.) He will come. I know He will come.

(He crosses to the cobbler's bench DL, picks up a piece of leather, absently puts it down, takes out his watch, glances at it, turns, goes ULC, disappears for a moment into the storeroom, re-enters with his lunch box, brings it to the counter, opens the box, and begins unpacking the contents, placing them about on the counter top as if he were arranging a banquet for a king. Finally, he picks up a sandwich and is about to take a bite from it.

He stops, however, and stares hopefully toward the door UR as it opens and THE WANDERER enters. A rather distinctive man of middle age, he is plainly weary and travel-worn. His clothes somehow fit him well, despite their age and oft-mended condition. He wears a long dark overcoat and a hat, rather than a cap. HANS eyes him closely and, realizing that the newcomer is not The One he awaits, the eagerness drains from his countenance. Nevertheless, he greets his visitor pleasantly.)

Oh—hello there. Is there something I can do for you?

## THE WANDERER

How do you do? (*Walking slowly and rather painfully toward right of counter C.*) Do you . . . do you fix shoes?

## HANS

(*Puts sandwich down.*) Why, yes. Certainly. Can I help you? (*Fearful that THE WANDERER is about to fall, HANS hurries around below the small table, meets him near RC, takes him by the arm, and half supports him.*) Are you all right? You look terribly tired. (*Guiding THE WANDERER toward bench R.*) Come. You had better sit down.

## THE WANDERER

(*Near exhaustion.*) I . . . I'm all right. It's just that I . . . I have been walking . . . a long way. (*As HANS seats him.*) I . . . I lost the heel of my boot somewhere along the road.

## HANS

(*Kneeling and inspecting the boot of THE WANDERER.*) Ya, ya, I can see. Walking in this weather is difficult at best, and with no heel—

## THE WANDERER

(*Apologetically.*) I . . . I looked for it along the path. But the snow was deep, and I could not find it anywhere.

## HANS

(*Removing the boot from the foot of THE WANDERER.*) Well, now, let's just take off the boot. And I'll see what can be done. You remain here and rest. Or, better still (*nodding toward UC*), move closer to the stove where it is warmer.

(*HANS hurries DL, taking the boot with him. THE WANDERER rises unsteadily and—hampered by the absence of*

## THE VISION

*one boot—walks unsteadily UC. As HANS bends over his cobbler's last, searching for the proper pieces of leather, THE WANDERER turns his back toward the stove and watches Hans uneasily, almost nervously.)*

## THE WANDERER

Tell me, Shoemaker, will . . . will two francs pay for the repair of the boot?

## HANS

Well, I don't . . .

## THE WANDERER

*(Coming down to right of counter again.)* You see, I . . . I have only two francs. I had intended to buy a bowl of soup at the inn; but, with the boot as it is, I could walk no further. *(Desperation coming into his voice.)* And I must get to Heidelberg! They tell me there is work there.

## HANS

*(Turns, looks at his visitor, and smiles.)* Then I guess two francs will do.

*(THE WANDERER nods and smiles gratefully. HANS puts the boot down near his last, takes several small pieces of leather, and begins forming them into the rough outline of a heel. THE WANDERER is about to turn away and go back to the stove, but his glance is caught by the well-displayed lunch on the counter. He hesitates, glances briefly toward Hans, sees that the cobbler is busy, moves very close to the counter as if fascinated, and stares hungrily at the repast. HANS turns, sees THE WANDERER gazing longingly at the food, pretends that he doesn't, and walks absently to LC, keeping his eye on the heel he is shaping from the bits of leather in his hand. Irresistibly drawn to the food, THE WANDERER slowly raises his hand and reaches toward a*

*sandwich. HANS glances up; THE WANDERER withdraws his hand quickly, guiltily. HANS smiles understandingly and speaks casually.)*

Perhaps you can help me, Stranger.

THE WANDERER

Help . . . you?

HANS

*(Nodding toward counter.)* It seems that I packed too much lunch for myself. Perhaps you would eat the rest of it for me? I wouldn't want it to grow stale—or have to throw it away.

*(There is a short pause as THE WANDERER stares at him, eager for the food, yet not sure that his unexpected good fortune is real. HANS raises his voice and speaks encouragingly.)*

Go ahead. I have eaten all that I wish. *(As THE WANDERER seizes a sandwich and begins to wolf it hungrily.)* Just help yourself. *(Turns, walks back to cobbler's bench DL.)* While you are repairing your appetite, I shall be repairing your boot. We must hurry, though. I have a Visitor coming—an *important* Visitor—and I wouldn't want to keep Him waiting!

*(As HANS works and THE WANDERER eats, the LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE OUT, leaving the shop in darkness as the CURTAINS CLOSE slowly.)*

### TRANSITIONAL NOTE

*The house lights do not come up; and, actually, the curtains need not be drawn if Hans and The Wanderer can move*



*quietly and quickly about in the darkness and—with the aid of a few well-rehearsed stagehands—remove all evidence of Hans's lunch and the boot he is supposed to be repairing. Since Hilda appears early in Scene 3 to report that The Carolers are coming to sing for Hans, it is quite conceivable that their distant music could create a kind of "musical bridge" at this point in order that the audience's attention-span not be broken. At the same time, the singing could suggest an interval of elapsed time between the close of Scene 2 and the beginning of*

### SCENE 3

**THE TIME:** *The end of the same day; about six o'clock that night.*

**THE PLACE:** *The cobbler's shop again.*

*As the CURTAINS OPEN, the LIGHTS GRADUALLY COME UP within the room. Darkness has fallen, however; so the place is necessarily less bright and cheerful than it was at midday. The candle on the small table downstage of counter R has now burned very low. The dark blue sky of night becomes discernible beyond the window; and as the scene progresses, MOONLIGHT REGISTERS AND GROWS BRIGHTER, illuminating to a faint degree the street of the little Bavarian village.*

*HANS stands near RC, peering hopefully toward the window R. After a moment, somewhere off toward UR in the distance, the TOWER CLOCK STRIKES SIX TIMES, signifying the close of the working day. HANS*

*listens impatiently, takes his watch from his pocket, checks it, sighs, replaces his watch, paces impatiently to the window, peers out anxiously, turns from it, sighs, shrugs resignedly, crosses DL, picks up an old shoe, takes a cloth from his pocket, and listlessly begins to polish the toe of the shoe as he stands with his back toward the door UR.*

BRUNO, HERMANN, KARL, and HELMUT burst in UR. Although they are weary from a large day's work, they are possessed by a certain boisterous camaraderie and a definite sense of excitement occasioned by the impending holiday. The four now wear their greatcoats or heavy street coats, woolen mufflers, caps, and mittens; for they have closed their shops—with the exception of Helmut—and are homeward bound. They are, of course, consumed with curiosity; but they try at first to conceal it with talk of small things, ignoring Hans the while.

## BRUNO

*(As he enters and heads for the stove.)* Well, well! *(Rubbing his mittened hands together.)* It turned out to be a big day at my butcher shop, after all. People, no matter how poor, simply cannot resist the idea of a cut of meat at Christmastide.

## HERMANN

*(Following Bruno and drawing off his mittens.)* And in Bavaria, I have decided, the brewer stands next to Saint Nicholas as the man of the hour!

## HELMUT

*(With a scornful laugh.)* Ya, ya. Especially when people can sit before the warm fire at my inn and sip your brew and pretend they have been good for at least *one* day of the year!

## KARL

*(Closing door UR and stamping snow from his feet.)* For my

money, it is the cakes and the pies and the cookies and all the other goodies that really make the Holiday! And at my shop today, it seems I sold them by the hundreds. (*Following HELMUT toward the stove.*) People always seem to find a few coins for buying sweets at Christmas.

*(The four form a kind of semicircle in front of the stove, all facing downstage as they stand with their hands behind their backs. There is a pause. The men glance covertly at Hans, hoping he will join their talk. When he pays no attention, they nudge each other; and HELMUT clears his throat meaningfully.)*

HELMUT

But shoes! Who has money for shoes on a day like this?

*(There is utter silence from HANS, as he busily and carefully polishes the toe of the shoe. BRUNO looks at the other men; they shrug and shake their heads. BRUNO moves forward two or three steps.)*

BRUNO

*(To Hans.)* Well? Well, Hans, has He come yet? *(After a pause; impatiently.)* Has He?

KARL

*(Also moving downstage.)* Just tell us if He has come.

HELMUT

Yes, Hans, tell us all about it. *(Coming down beside Karl.)* Hurry! I must get back to the inn.

*(HANS turns at last and faces his friends for a moment; then his gaze drops toward the floor.)*

HERMANN

*(Coming down beside Karl.)* He didn't come, did He? Christ didn't come today!

HANS

*(Looks up; with determination.)* Not yet, but He will. *(Moves to shelf at L and places the shoe upon it.)* The day is not yet over.

BRUNO

Aw, Hans—why don't you forget that silly dream?

HANS

Stop calling it a dream. *(Heatedly; crossing and facing the others across the small table downstage of counter C.)* Besides, what does it matter to you? Why do you come here and bother me?

KARL

The whole town is laughing at you.

HELMUT

*(Crossing to right of small table.)* All day you have wasted in making this—this shrine for a Visitor who will never come! *(Points disdainfully.)* At least, you could get a better candle.

HANS

That is the only candle I have. *(Suddenly crossing below table and moving UR.)* And a man can give only the best that he has! God doesn't expect more than that! *(Flings open door UR.)* Now! Why don't you go back to work—the lot of you?

HERMANN

*(Irritably; crossing UR.)* We have done our work for the day

—and closed our shops. (*As he goes out.*) And you should do the same.

HELMUT

(*In an aggrieved tone; as he moves after Hermann.*) A fine thing! (*To Hans.*) We come here as your friends—and you order us out.

HANS

(*As HELMUT files past him and goes out UR.*) Friends? Hah! When I truly need friends, all you can bring me are jibes and jokes.

KARL

(*Bitterly; as he crosses UR and goes out.*) And why wouldn't people joke? If you could only hear what the rest of the villagers are saying about you—!

BRUNO

(*The last to go.*) Honestly, Hans—we came here only because we are worried about you! (*Starts to turn back.*) The whole town is saying you are as crazy as—!

HANS

(*Sharply; cutting him off.*) Good-bye! (*After a short pause.*) And a Merry Christmas—to all of you.

(*BRUNO sighs sadly, turns, and exits after Hermann, Helmut, and Karl. HANS quickly closes the door, suppresses a dry sob of disappointment, and hurriedly crosses to C where he leans wearily against the right side of the counter, his back toward UR. From up the street, off UR, the SINGING OF THE CAROLERS can be heard. In a moment, HILDA LOEHR opens the door UR and calls out excitedly.*)

THE VISION

45

HILDA

Mr. Lumpert! Mr. Lumpert! They are coming!

HANS

*(Still leaning against the counter, his back toward her.)* Go away. I don't wish to see anyone . . . now.

HILDA

*(Near doorway UR; shyly determined.)* The carolers are coming!

HANS

*(Straightens, faces her.)* Oh . . . hello, Hilda.

HILDA

I told them about these beautiful shoes you have given me. So they are coming here to sing.

*(HANS gazes at her silently for a moment; then, with an effort, he smiles, crosses to her, stands beside her, and puts an arm about her shoulders. The SINGING DRAWS NEARER.)*

HANS

Thank you, child. You are one of the kind ones.

*(HILDA turns and peers off through the partially open doorway.)*

HILDA

*(Happily.)* Here they come now!

*(HANS opens the door wide; and—with his arm again about the shoulders of the little girl—he and HILDA face the door as THE CAROLERS assemble just outside and sing a carol of Noel.)*

## THE VISION

NOTE: Should it seem desirable, THE CAROLERS may actually enter UR and form a large semicircle in the right half of the shop as they sing their song. An alternative would be to have THE CAROLERS join hands as they enter singing, wind their way about the shop, and go out again—singing all the while. If the director wishes THE CAROLERS to be visible but not enter, they can group themselves in the moonlight—preferably beyond a window URC—and remain there until they have concluded their singing. If an alternate plan of this kind is followed, it will of course be necessary to adjust the positions of HANS and HILDA.

*When the song is ended, HANS calls gratefully to the singers and waves to them.)*

HANS

Thank you. Thank you! Merry Christmas! A Merry Christmas to all of you!

HILDA

Good-bye, Mr. Lumpert. I must go now. I'm supposed to sing and dance with the others, you know.

*(She exits UR and runs after The Carolers. HANS waves good-bye to her.)*

HANS

*(Calling off.)* Good-bye, Hilda. And thank you. *(Closes door, walks thoughtfully across to right of small table below counter C, stares down at the low-burned candle, and murmurs.)* Thank you.

*(MRS. BETZ and her TWO CHILDREN enter UR. The three are poorly and inadequately dressed. The children are coatless and apparently have bad colds; for they*

*are coughing, sneezing, and blowing their noses. MRS. BETZ, twenty-five or thirty years of age, would—if given half a chance—be a very attractive woman; and even though circumstances compel her to live and bring up her children in near-poverty, there remains an admirable resolve and assurance within her. The TWO CHILDREN, half-frozen, see the stove, break into a run UC, and eagerly whirl around the stove to warm themselves as quickly as possible. HANS turns and sees them.)*

MRS. BETZ

Good evening, Mr. Lumpert. I was afraid that we were going to be too late—that you would have closed already.

HANS

*(Hurrying around to left of counter C.)* Plenty of time, Mrs. Betz. Plenty of time. *(Reaches under the counter and brings out a package containing a pair of shoes.)* Your shoes are wrapped and waiting for you. *(Placing package on top of counter.)* Would you like to see them?

MRS. BETZ

*(Graciously; as she moves to right of counter.)* That won't be necessary, Hans. They will be fine, I'm sure.

HANS

*(Pleased.)* Ya . . . just like new. *(Sees that MRS. BETZ is already fumbling with her purse.)* Four francs, please. *(Notes that the TWO CHILDREN, having warmed themselves at the stove, are now whirling each other about at RC.)* And how is everything with your family, Mrs. Betz?

MRS. BETZ

*(Fishing for coins inside her purse.)* Not very good, Hans. *(As ONE OF THE CHILDREN goes into a short paroxysm of*



*coughing.*) The children have such bad colds! All this past summer, I tried to get enough money together to buy them new coats. But with my husband out of a job, and the new tax, and all—

HANS

*(Sympathetically.)* Yal! The new tax!

MRS. BETZ

And the children simply won't stay inside when I am away working! Today they just had to come out to hear the carolers. *(Smiles, brings a few coins from her purse.)* They both love music. And the carolers were so good this year, weren't they?

*(She extends the money to him.)*

HANS

They were very good. *(Accepts the money.)* Thank you. *(Calls across to THE CHILDREN, who are dancing now.)* Children! Listen to me, children! *(They stop and shrink away slightly.)* You should stay inside the house when weather is like this. *(They look down, abashed. HANS speaks to Mrs. Betz.)* Have you tried making coats for them?

MRS. BETZ

*(Shakes her head sadly.)* Cloth is very high. *(Picks up the package of shoes.)* It has taken me more than two weeks to get enough money together just to pay for the fixing of these shoes. *(Puts package under her arm and starts slowly toward UR, motioning to THE CHILDREN to follow her.)* Come along, children. We must hurry home. *(Over her shoulder.)* Good-bye, Hans.

HANS

*(Watching them as they near door UR.)* Good-bye. *(Sud-*

denly.) Oh—Mrs. Betz. (*She turns, hesitating.*) Wait a minute, please—there by the fire. I have something here in the back room which I have been meaning to show you. (*Hurrying ULC.*) Warm yourselves for a moment. I'll bring it right out.

(*He exits to the storeroom at ULC, leaving the door open. MRS. BETZ guides THE CHILDREN across to the stove; and they stand there, warming their hands. HANS re-enters at ULC, carrying a rather large cardboard box tied with assorted old ribbons. He moves to the left side of counter C and places the box upon it.*)

MRS. BETZ

(*Curiously.*) What is it, Mr. Lumpert?

HANS

(*Removing the ribbon and opening the box.*) I just may have something here in this old box. It won't hurt to look—if you can spare a minute. Ah, yes. Here we are.

(*He removes various items of children's clothing from the box and places them gently on the counter top. MRS. BETZ, puzzled, moves down to the right of counter C, leading THE CHILDREN by the hand.*)

MRS. BETZ

Hans! What is that? What do you have here?

HANS

Just some . . . some old things.

MRS. BETZ

Old things? (*Staring amazed at the brightly colored coats HANS is now holding.*) Why, Hans—these coats—they look like new!

## THE VISION

HANS

Ya . . . nearly new. (*With something of an effort.*) I . . . I bought them for my own two children . . . only a week before they . . . died. (*Shrugs, rushes on quickly.*) But that has been many years now. I don't know why these things have lain around so long. Probably because I have been a sentimental old man. (*Brusquely; shoving the two coats toward Mrs. Betz.*) Here. You take them now.

MRS. BETZ

Oh, Hans, no! (*Protesting and gently pushing the coats back toward Hans.*) No, Hans—no! I couldn't take things that you—

HANS

(*Half-angrily.*) Take them! They do nobody good packed in this old box. The moths will take them soon—if you do not! (*Brusquely; to THE CHILDREN.*) You—youngsters! Come here. Come around the counter here. I have something for you.

(*The TWO CHILDREN hold back at first; but, at the urging of MRS. BETZ, they finally move around below the small table and huddle together near LC. HANS quickly fits a coat to each and then steps back to eye the results. The TWO CHILDREN stare curiously from their new coats to HANS's face; then they size each other up and down, turning this way and that. MRS. BETZ laughs softly. HANS chuckles and wipes his eyes.*)

The coats are yours to keep. (*Pats the TWO CHILDREN affectionately on the head.*) The fit is not too bad. (*To Mrs. Betz.*) And they will grow into them. (*Suddenly returns to counter, scoops up the smaller items of clothing he has previously removed from the box, dumps them back into it, replaces the lid, lifts the box, and places it in MRS. BETZ's arms.*) And these things, too.

MRS. BETZ

*(Overwhelmed with gratitude.)* Oh, Hans! How can I ever thank you?

HANS

Look!

*(He points to the TWO CHILDREN as they dance gaily around DC and across to RC where they stop, admiringly appraise their new possessions, and lovingly stroke the material with their small fingers.)*

They will be happy and warm. That is all the thanks I'll ever need, Mrs. Betz.

*(The TWO CHILDREN resume their impromptu dance as they move UR and exit. MRS. BETZ gazes at HANS for a moment, turns away, moves after the CHILDREN, pauses in the doorway UR, looks back at Hans, and murmurs softly.)*

MRS. BETZ

Thank you, Hans Lumpert. You—you are a good man.

HANS

*(Shrugs.)* And a crazy one—if you can believe what they say in the village.

MRS. BETZ

*(Fighting back the tears.)* No. No, Hans. You must not say that!

*(She turns and exits at UR hurriedly, almost colliding in the doorway with MRS. FRITZ SCHENKEL, who is just entering the shop. MRS. BETZ murmurs an apology and exits, calling after her children. MRS. SCHENKEL re-*

*gains her poise and glares off after the departing Mrs. Betz. A rather large, self-important woman whose clothes are a bit too expensive and whose jewelry is a bit too showy, MRS. SCHENKEL is the wife of the village money-lender. She carries a large purse. HANS is obviously surprised to see her.)*

MRS. SCHENKEL

*(Mutters haughtily.)* Well! The people in this town simply have no manners.

HANS

Oh—Mrs. Schenkell It's nice to see you. You haven't been to my shop for a good many years.

MRS. SCHENKEL

*(Turning and marching toward counter.)* And I wouldn't be here tonight if that husband of mine would listen to what I tell him and buy *new* shoes in Heidelberg—instead of bringing his old ones to you to be mended!

HANS

*(Reminiscently.)* Yes, Fritz has always come to my shop—ever since the days when he was the best candlemaker in the village.

MRS. SCHENKEL

*(Haughtily.)* Well, he's the best moneylender now—and the biggest. And the people of this town had better not forget it.

HANS

*(Quietly.)* You can be sure they won't, Mrs. Schenkel.

MRS. SCHENKEL

*(Impatiently tapping her foot.)* Well? Well? What about my

husband's shoes? He was too ill to come for them himself. Are they finished? Are they done? I haven't got all night to stand here and dawdle.

HANS

I said they would be done. (*Reaches beneath the counter and brings out a pair of shoes.*) And they are done.

MRS. SCHENKEL

(*With a titter.*) I was afraid that with all this mumbo jumbo about Christ coming (*with a scornful glance around*) to this dingy old shop, you might have been too busy to work.

HANS

(*Firmly polite.*) I have always done an honest day's work, Mrs. Schenkel. (*Slips the shoes into a paper sack.*) That will be twelve francs, please.

MRS. SCHENKEL

(*Getting some coins from her large purse.*) Well, it's after closing time now. (*Tossing coins onto counter.*) Did your Visitor come—or didn't He?

(*HANS picks up the coins, pockets them, takes out his watch, looks at it, and shakes his head unbelievably. MRS. SCHENKEL tosses her head and laughs rudely.*)

Hah! I thought not. It was just a dream. (*Picks up her husband's shoes.*) Any fool could have told you that, Hans Lumpert! (*Turns away, marches UR, opens door, turns back.*) Merry Christmas, Hans! (*Mockingly.*) Pleasant dreams!

(*She goes out at UR and closes the door. HANS shakes his head, moves down beside the small table, stares unhappily at his improvised shrine, checks his watch again, and trudges sadly across toward the window R.*)

## THE VISION

HANS

Maybe . . . maybe He is just . . . a bit late.

*(He stands with his hands behind his back and peers through the window. FATHER ALBERT quietly enters UR, closes the door, sees Hans, and comes to RC.)*

FATHER ALBERT

*(Softly.)* Good evening, Hans.

HANS

*(Without turning.)* Good evening, Father. I was about to close my shop for the night.

FATHER ALBERT

*(Removing his hat.)* I . . . I would like to talk with you, Hans.

HANS

*(Wearily.)* No talking, Father. He didn't come. *(Bitterly.)* He didn't come . . . and He said He *would* come.

FATHER ALBERT

Hans, I had a thought this afternoon. *(HANS turns to face him.)* Tell me. Who *did* come to your shop today?

*(HANS sinks dejectedly upon the bench at R and stares glumly at the floor.)*

HANS

What difference does it make?

FATHER ALBERT

It could make a lot of difference, Hans. *(With gentle urgency.)* Tell me, won't you?

HANS

Every one?

FATHER ALBERT

Yes. The name of every one.

HANS

I don't know the names of all of them—exactly. But—well, there was Bruno, the butcher—as always. Then Hermann, the brewer. And with him was Karl, the baker. And Helmut, who keeps the inn. They come every day, of course.

FATHER ALBERT

*(Insistently; sitting on bench, at Hans's left.)* There must have been others.

HANS

*(Nods.)* Mrs. Dannewitz, I think it was, came next. She didn't like the price—as usual. Then, just before noon, Mrs. Loehr came in.

FATHER ALBERT

The widow?

HANS

*(Nods again.)* She wanted me to fix the shoe of her daughter, Hilda.

FATHER ALBERT

But you didn't!

HANS

*(Startled.)* How—how did you know that?



## THE VISION

FATHER ALBERT

Ours is a small village, Hans. Hilda's shoes had grown too small. So you gave her a new pair. And you charged her not a cent!

HANS

(*Abashed.*) It was nothing. The widow Loehr works hard and has little money. The husband—the father of the child—is dead, and—

FATHER ALBERT

Jacob *Betz* is not dead. As we all know, he drinks too much and works too little. *His* wife, poor soul, is not a widow. Yet just now you gave—

HANS

(*Shrugs.*) So you know about Mrs. *Betz* and the children, too.

FATHER ALBERT

(*Nods.*) I know, Hans. I know that you gave them the beautiful red coats—coats that you treasured because they once belonged to your *own* dear children!

HANS

(*Pathetically.*) I . . . I do not wish to speak of that.

FATHER ALBERT

(*With a strange insistence.*) You must tell me, Hans! Were there not *others*?

HANS

There were others. (*Faintly accusing.*) You came, Father. (*Dully.*) Like the others, you tried to talk me out of my vision. I should have listened.

FATHER ALBERT

Nol (*Rising; with sudden vehemence.*) It was I who should have listened. Had I done so, I am sure I could have helped you.

HANS

(*Rising.*) No one can help a foolish addlepate like me. (*Crossing to small table below counter C.*) I am sorry, Father. It's long after closing time, and I must lock up. I have wasted the day. And now it is ended.

(*He bends and blows out the candle, which has now burned very low. FATHER ALBERT crosses to RC, pleading.*)

FATHER ALBERT

Hans! Listen to me! I don't yet understand all that has happened, but I feel deeply that I have somehow wronged you! There is a hidden meaning here. Something—I don't know what—cries out to me that here, in this humble shoeshop, it has been a strange and wondrous day!

HANS

(*Crossing below table and starting toward ULC.*) I know that it has been a long and difficult day. (*Hesitating at LC, not wishing to offend his visitor.*) And now, if you will excuse me, Father? I—I'm very tired. I wish to go home and fix myself a bite of supper. I haven't eaten since early this morning.

FATHER ALBERT

(*Surprised.*) You have had no lunch?

HANS

(*Vaguely.*) I—I gave it away.

## THE VISION

FATHER ALBERT

Gave it away? (*With a step toward Hans.*) To whom?

HANS

(*Indifferently.*) A man—a stranger. He said he was going to Heidelberg, but he was hungry and had lost the heel of his boot. And so—

FATHER ALBERT

(*With a smile.*) And so—while you mended his boot—you gave him your lunch to eat! (*Suddenly; with great elation.*) Hans! All at once I understand. Christ *was* here today!

HANS

(*Stares at Father Albert.*) You mean the stranger—the one who was going to Heidelberg—was—was—?

FATHER ALBERT

No, no, Hans! That is only part of it. (*Hurrying down to right of the small table and eagerly taking up the Bible.*) There is more to it than that. *Much* more!

(*HANS, with a growing joy, moves down and faces FATHER ALBERT across the table. In the distance can be heard the SINGING OF THE CAROLERS as they draw nearer to the cobbler's shop and wend their way up the opposite side of the street.*)

HANS

You are not joking with me, Father?

FATHER ALBERT

No, Hans. Your vision was true.

HANS

*(Tensely.)* And you believe?

FATHER ALBERT

Yes, Hans. *(His gaze meeting HANS's and holding it.)* I believe.

HANS

*Why, Father?*

FATHER ALBERT

You have clothed the naked . . . you have fed the hungry . . . and you have made the cold warm again. *(Excitedly; leafing through the Bible and walking toward DRC.)* It is all here in the Book. I remember the words, but I wish to find them and show them to you.

HANS

*(Hurrying to the left of Father Albert.)* In the Bible, you mean? Where, Father? *Where?*

*(The SINGING OF THE CAROLERS IS MUCH NEARER now.)*

FATHER ALBERT

Look. *(Points to a passage as HANS peers across his shoulder.)* Here it is. *(Reads.)* "Insofar as ye have done these things unto these, the least of my brethren, ye have done them also unto me."

*(The two men stand for a moment, as if frozen. Although HANS has previously extinguished the flame of the candle at the improvised shrine, the area around it somehow seems slowly suffused with a GREAT LIGHT, beamed*

## THE VISION

*brightly down, perhaps, from an Unseen Source. A genuinely happy expression comes to HANS's face. Outside, the VOICES OF THE CAROLERS can be heard in joyous song as they seemingly pass the shop and move on up the narrow street, and the CURTAINS SLOWLY CLOSE.)*

(END OF THE PLAY)

# GIFT OF THE MAGI

adapted by Jon Jory

FROM THE STORY BY O' HENRY

*(A Bare Stage. There are six CAROLERS who serve as both singers and narrators. They also change the scenes for us using a small sofa, an easy chair, a table, two straight back chairs and a door frame on rollers to create various settings in our play. As the play begins the CAROLERS sing a carol chosen by the director and place the table, the sofa and two straight back chairs to represent the Dillinghams' flat. DELLA, our heroine, enters from one direction and her husband JIM from another. She carries a gold homemade star which she carefully places on the tip top of a small, scraggly tree. The CAROLERS end their song and scatter across the stage to watch.)*

DELLA. There! What do you think, lad? Is it not the most wonderful, indeed the most delightful tree of any Christmas anywhere?

JIM. Well...

DELLA. Yes?

JIM. It is...most original.

DELLA. Faint praise. We may not, sir, have the largest goose, nor an amplitude of gifts, but we have beyond argument the most glorious tree.

*(The tree falls over.)*

Oh dear.

JIM. Not to worry, Della. I'll put that right before you can say, Jack Robinson.

*(Sets the tree up, steps away from it.)*

You see, you have a husband who can put anything to rights.

*(The tree falls over again. DELLA laughs.)*

You're laughing at me.

DELLA. At both of us.

JIM. And why is that?

DELLA. Because we work so hard for our happiness. And sometimes even against the laws of gravity.

JIM. But we are happy, laws or no laws.

DELLA. Indeed we are Mr. Young. You won't see us fall over.

*(He laughs.)*

And now, if there's enough sugar in the house, you are to have the ginger cookies you've been asking for.

*(DELLA freezes in place. One of the CAROLERS steps forward as narrator. JIM stands with his back to us, just outside the door-frame.)*

CAROLER ONE. Jim and Della had been married for one hundred and seventy-one days, by actual count in her journal, when the snows began. Now snow is a wonderful thing if you have good shoes and something over your ears.

*(DELLA hears JIM stamping the snow off his shoes outside the door.)*

DELLA. Get in here, boy.

JIM. Blizzard conditions out there.

*(He enters. She reaches up and covers his ears with her hands.)*

DELLA. Your ears are freezing, your nose red, and your poor feet soaked.

JIM. Now Della, don't fuss me.

DELLA. I will fuss you. They are saying there is influenza in the city, and you dressed like a ragamuffin.

JIM. Indeed not. I am dressed in all the finery of a first rate accountants clerk.

DELLA. Whose pay has been unfairly reduced. How dare they?

JIM. We're all in the same boat at the firm, Della. It was either a one third reduction for all or they must let one of us go.

DELLA. And look, look, here's an icicle in your hair!

JIM. Don't say that so loudly, everyone will want one.

*(She sits him down and begins taking off his shoes.)*

And I won't have you looking askance at these feet. There's a fellow in the office splurges on a newspaper every day and when he's done he gives it to me and I stuff it in my shoes. Dry as toast, I assure you.

DELLA. Oh Jim.

JIM. 'Oh Jim' what?

DELLA. It's not right for you to be going about with newspaper in your shoes. It makes me sad, it really does.

JIM. Now, I won't have that. If I don't see a smile, I won't share my feast.

DELLA. A feast, Jim?

JIM. Indeed. Close your eyes. The smile please.

*(She provides it.)*

That's better. Now you shall have something wonderful indeed.

*(Takes something out of his pocket and pops it in her mouth.)*

DELLA. Mmmmmmm. Chocolate! I haven't had chocolate in ages. Heavenly!

JIM. And now for me.

*(Tosses a chocolate in the air and catches it in his mouth. He does a quick soft shoe.)*

Excellent. Now, you see, we needn't waste time or money on dinner and you can...

*(Unfolds one of the papers he has had in his shoe.)*

Read me the latest installment of Mr. Dickens' 'Great Expectations.'

DELLA. But it's damp.



**JIM.** A small price to pay for my newest invention, readable shoe leather.

*(DELLA laughs. They settle down. She reads from the beginning of chapter nine. After three or four sentences, the CAROLERS carol and clear the stage. Leaving only DELLA center. CAROLER TWO helps DELLA on with her coat. DELLA exits. The door frame is moved to new position as CAROLER TWO speaks.)*

**CAROLER TWO.** The next day, once Jim had left for work at the accounting firm of Framm and Gilder, Della took a tram, then walked a mile and visited her sister Dot...

*(DOT enters and joins DELLA center. A third sister enters and joins them when she is mentioned.)*

There were three sisters in all, Della, Dot and Donna Marie. Their mother had been born in Denver and had married a tradesman called David Danby. Her alphabet had never gotten over it.

*(The three sisters stand side by side.)*

Donna Marie, the hardiest and most adventurous moved west to a faraway place called Cedarcrest, Utah...

**DONNA MARIE.** I am moving west to a faraway place called Cedarcrest, Utah. As I will be the best looking girl there, I plan to marry the richest citizen, have three children and when there are roads, go about in a carriage.

**CAROLER TWO.** And she did.

**DELLA.** But when shall we ever see you, Donna Marie?

**DONNA MARIE.** Once a decade, regular as clockwork.

*(Exiting.)*

You shall barely know I'm gone. Write often, and send marzipan.

*(She is gone.)*

**CAROLER TWO.** But Della and Dot were great friends, though as different as salt and pepper, and barely a week ever went by without Della dropping in for a visit.

*(DELLA now enters through the door frame.)*

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DELLA. Dot, it's me, are you home?

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door  
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DOT. (*Hurrying forward to embrace her:*) I most certainly am. I had a presentiment you'd come and the water for tea is freshly hot. Della, you're flushed. You're not unwell, I hope?

DELLA. The cold has turned every complexion in the city bright red. I'm fine, really.

e ac-  
lked

DOT. Well, I don't believe that for a start.

DELLA. You don't?

and

DOT. No, sister I don't. Sit.

(A CAROLER puts a chair behind DELLA and she sits.)

heir  
nan

I accuse you Della of merely playing at being cheerful. You may fool some, but you don't fool me. Now turn your chair to the fire and I will fill you with boiling hot tea until you smoke like a steam engine.

(*She exits.*)

to a

DELLA. Do you keep a fire all afternoon?

Ce-  
lar-  
ads,

DOT. We do, yes.

DELLA. It must be very costly.

DOT. Not if you marry well.

DELLA. (*Speaking to DOT who is offstage:*) Oh hush. But you're right for once sister. I'm not at all cheerful. I'm worried and fretful and not fit for human companionship.

(DOT returns with tea. Two CAROLERS place a table on which DOT sets the tray. DOT now sits on a chair near DELLA, which yet another CAROLER provides.)

DOT. Well, honesty is the best policy. Sick to death of being poor, that's your condition.

as  
out

DELLA. My dear Jim has now to stuff newspaper in his shoes because of their poor condition.

DOT. That's terrible Della.

DELLA. It makes me heartsick and furious and I'm not sure which  
the most.

DEL  
cerie

DOT. Well, you are stubborn as glue. So many opportunities and  
you marry for love.

DOT

DELLA. Not again, Dot.

DEL

DOT. You turned away a successful grocer and quite a handsome  
dentist.

But I

DELLA. He was five foot three.

DOT. Do you think he stands on a box to pull teeth?

Real

*(They laugh.)*

DELLA. You married for love.

The

DOT. No Della the dauntless, I did not. I married for house and  
position and dry shoes.

DELLA. You never told me.

CAI  
a ha  
pan

DOT. You never asked.

DELLA. Well I am pleased with my Jim, and if only his feet were  
dry, all would be perfect.

At t  
Mr.

DOT. Well Henry has multitudes of shoes and would, with plea-  
sure, spare Jim a good pair.

DELLA. Oh, no! I didn't come to beg. Pray don't think that of me.

DEI  
shal

DOT. Della, Della, I don't.

DELLA. I must go.

Five

DOT. Now I've upset you.

DELLA. Jim's off early on Thursdays.

Wh

DOT. Della, I have to ask you. You will have Christmas, won't you?

CL

DELLA. What do you mean?

DEI

DOT. Have you the money to buy Jim a present?

DELLA. Yes, I do. You will be proud of me at last. I've saved on groceries all the year, and taken in a bit of laundry.

DOT. You're not doing laundry, Della?

DELLA. Don't tell Jim. Please. He would feel put down.

*(Smiling.)*

But I've a jam jar of money to turn into a magnificent present.

*(Hugs her sister.)*

Really, I must go.

*(A compliment:)*

The tea was hot as blazes.

*(The CAROLERS sing and change the setting back to Della and Jim's flat. A CAROLER steps forward.)*

CAROLER THREE. Now, Jim and Della lived in what was called a half-flat at eight dollars a week, half-furnished with one window pane broken and cockroaches not an unknown commodity.

At the front door were nine mail slots, five occupied and one saying Mr. and Mrs. James Dillingham Young.

*(DELLA re-enters the apartment and takes out a jam jar containing her 'fortune' in change.)*

DELLA. *(She is alone.)* Now see here James Dillingham Young, you shall have new shoes as fine as any Captain of Industry.

*(She begins to count the change.)*

Five cents, nine cents, fourteen, twenty-four, twenty-seven...

*(There is a knock at the door.)*

Who is it?

CLARICE. Clarice.

DELLA. Coming.

*(Opens door.)*

Oh, Clarice. My dear you look quite pale. Are you all right?

CLARICE. Oh Della, if only we were.

DELLA. Come in, come in. Goodness don't stand in the draft.

CLARICE. I am mortified to call on you in such circumstances.

DELLA. We are neighbors Clarice, it is the natural thing. You seem faint. Sit down. A glass of water?

CLARICE. If you would be so kind.

*(DELLA pours her a glass from a pitcher.)*

Please forgive the intrusion.

DELLA. Poor Clarice. Out with it girl, what has happened?

CLARICE. It is hard to share misfortune, even with a friend.

DELLA. We'll have no ceremony here. Tell.

CLARICE. They have let my Bill go from his job at the Trolley barn.

DELLA. Oh no.

CLARICE. Fifteen men they sent off. Della, that's over half.

DELLA. But why? How? How can they make do without mechanics?

CLARICE. People can no longer afford to ride.

DELLA. Not even five cents?

*(CLARICE shakes her head.)*

Had you money saved?

*(CLARICE shakes her head and wipes her eyes.)*

CLARICE. It happened three weeks ago. I've been embarrassed to say. Oh Della, we've not eaten for two days.

DELLA. Nothing at all?

CLARICE. Our last cent went for rent. Even so we couldn't pay it all.

DELLA. Well, criminey sakes, you must have groceries!

CLARICE. I am sure you have little yourself.

DELLA. Quite wrong. Here, come and see my pirates' treasure!

*(Pulls CLARICE to the table and puts the jar of coins in front of her.)*

You see? Rich as Croesus. And we shall split the booty like good shipmates.

CLARICE. I couldn't, Della.

DELLA. Indeed you will. There is far more than I need, I assure you.

CLARICE. Just enough for bread.

DELLA. Cup your hands girl.

*(She pours coins into CLARICE's hands.)*

Bread, butter, marmalade, potatoes...

CLARICE. Stop. Stop!

DELLA. A chop for Christmas Day. An orange for your stocking. And chocolate to make you smile again.

CLARICE. *(Very serious:)* Please stop.

*(DELLA does.)*

That's far more than half Della.

DELLA. Balderdash.

CLARICE. I don't know when I can repay you.

DELLA. The more delightful as it will be a surprise.

CLARICE. Your Jim is a fortunate man to have found such a generous spirit.

DELLA. Comes with a sharp tongue though. Actually it's contrariwise, it is my inestimable luck to have found his good heart. Enough.

Hurry. The shops will be closing. A good meal will cheer Bill up a hundred fold. Go. Go.

*(DELLA kisses CLARICE on the cheek and mock-playfully pushes her from the room. She comes back to the table.)*

There are many without supper tonight.

*(Bucking up:)*

Well Jim my lad, your Christmas may be just a little less luxurious...

*(Looks at the jam jar.)*

But, see, there is plenty left.

*(Pours out the coins and begins to count again.)*

DELLA. One, two, three and five is eight, ten is eighteen, nineteen, twenty-four, forty-nine...

*(As DELLA counts, across the stage JIM and two cohorts of the same age leave work together.)*

ART. Columns of numbers. Columns of numbers. Is there nothing more to life than addition?

DIGSBY. Another year with the firm and they'll let us subtract.

ART. If there is a single soul in all the universe less important than an accounting clerk, I know him not!

JIM. Well, we've jobs in hard times. Many haven't.

ART. The eternal optimist.

DIGSBY. And very irritating after a day's work. Were you run over by a coal truck you'd be praising its speed and durability.

ART. Did you get the notice today?

DIGSBY. Cut our salary from thirty to twenty a week, the office is cold as the Arctic...

ART. We're told to use less ink and less paper...

DIGSBY. Next they'll be telling us to use fewer numbers...

ART. And on top of that...

DIGSBY. It's raining!

*(All three put up their umbrellas.)*

JIM. Dismal weather.

ART. Along with horrible everything else.

DIGSBY. I say enough! Is a man a man or a mouse? Must we not have our bit of cheese in our cold, dank holes? Christmas in two days. Enough deprivation, enough scrimping, enough saving. Let us live for the moment!

ART. Good point that.

DIGSBY. See here, instead of going home to our flea bitten digs and our weeping wives and starving cats, I say we cast worry to the winds, remove ourselves to O'Rourke's Emporium for a chicory coffee, a slab of roast beef, the famous cream pie and hear Sadie the Lady sing "You haven't got your ducks in a line, Mrs. Donaldson"!

ART. Done! Off we go!

JIM. I can't.

DIGSBY. And why? Why, why, why is that James?

JIM. Because it will cost two dollars, and I've just enough for Della's present.

DIGSBY. A man in love with his wife is the most infuriating creature in God's menagerie.

ART. Jim, me lad, you must sometimes think of yourself to be in any state to think of others.

JIM. Well, I mustn't be in the 'state' of being two dollars poorer. A Merry Christmas to you gentlemen.

*(Starts to go.)*

DIGSBY. Oh Jim?

*(When JIM turns back, DIGSBY lifts him over his shoulder in a fireman's carry.)*



JIM. Stop. Put me down.

DIGSBY. Sorry boyo, sometimes friends must prevent friends from acting like horrible, passionless, humorless prigs.

*(Starts off with him.)*

JIM. Digsby, you idiot, I can't do this. I haven't the money for it!

*(They exit. Our focus goes right back to DELLA at the table.)*

DELLA. *(Still counting:)* One dollar seventy, seventy-five, six, seven, eight, nine, dollar eighty, eighty-five, six seven. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. Surely that can't be all, though I've counted it twice. Perhaps I did give Clarice half but...I've saved every penny for months with this result. What sort of Christmas can I make for Jim with this amount? I've been so counting on cheering him up, as he deserves. What a fool I've been. What a fool!

*(She freezes. A CAROLER steps forward.)*

CAROLER FOUR. And thus Mrs. Young and Mr. Young, separately...

JIM. *(Steps on stage.)* How could I be such an idiot? A king's ransom for overdone beef.

CAROLER FOUR. ...And desperately had to give up the romantic dreams of young love, and face the cold, hard facts of cold, hard cash.

*(DELLA sits at the table recounting the money yet again. JIM, elsewhere on the stage counts from his pocket into his hand.)*

JIM. One dollar. A dollar ten, twenty, thirty, thirty-five...

*(Looks in another pocket.)*

Thirty-six, seven, eight. Wait, wait!

*(Tries a third pocket.)*

A nickel and a penny.

JIM. One dollar and forty-six cents.

DELLA. One dollar, eight-seven.

JIM. Criminey! What have I done? Spent three times that amount on a dinner I couldn't afford? Why did I listen to them? Poor Della. What of her Christmas? What a miserable, thoughtless, self-serving, heartless creature I am. What on earth can be done?

CAROLER FIVE. And so, on a dreary day proceeding Christmas eve, Della sat with her head in her hands and her husband Jim made his way home in a driving rain, his umbrella forgotten in O'Rourke's Emporium, his head bowed and his hands deep in his pockets.

*(A WOMAN passing JIM, speaks to him.)*

WOMAN WITH UMBRELLA. Terrible wet night, Sir. Care to share my umbrella?

JIM. No thank you Madam. Truth be told, I rather hope I drown.

WOMAN WITH UMBRELLA. Keen wit, sir. Hah-ha. Nice to meet a fella who can laugh at himself when he's wet. Hah-ha.

*(And she passes on. JIM arrives at the door to his flat.)*

JIM. *(To himself:)* The unforgivable monster returns home.

*(He enters.)*

Good evening, Della.

DELLA. Good evening, Jim.

JIM. Della, you've been crying. Oh, please tell me you haven't been crying?

DELLA. Crying? Of course I haven't, Jim. Why on earth would I be crying?

*(They look at each other.)*

Well, actually I have.

*(Suddenly noticing:)*

Oh my heavens, you are soaking wet!

Where on earth is your umbrella?

JIM. Finishing my cream pie at O'Rourke's.

DELLA. Empty those pockets immediately, and then divest yourself sir, and get straight into your nightshirt.

*(Places objects from his pockets, including a gold pocket watch on the table.)*

JIM. But why? Why have you been crying?

DELLA. Your grandfather's watch! The dearest thing you have! Oh Jim, you don't think water's gotten into the works?

*(JIM picks it up and opens the cover.)*

JIM. Well, that would be a fine reward for my being a perfect idiot!

*(Listens to it.)*

DELLA. Is it all right? Oh tell me it is.

JIM. *(Relieved:)* Ticking away.

DELLA. Thank heaven. It would have cost a small fortune to repair.

JIM. *(Looking at the watch:)* A small fortune, yes.

DELLA. Oh Jim, I'm so glad you're home. I have so much to tell you.

JIM. And I you.

DELLA. What?

JIM. That you have the most beautiful hair in the world.

DELLA. Oh Jim, don't flatter, I'm a terrible, terrible person.

JIM. No Della, I'm a terrible person.

DELLA. No, I am.

JIM. No, really, I am.

DELLA. Why are you a terrible person?

JIM. Why are you a terrible person?

CAROLER SIX. *(Stepping forward. JIM and DELLA freeze.)* At this moment we must ring down the covering curtain of marital privacy as each revealed to the other their very terrible financial missteps,

which had called all of Christmas into question. Tears were shed and the evening ended on a note of melancholy quite unsuitable to the season.

*(Speaks directly to the audience:)*

All of you close your eyes for a moment. Now open them. It's the next morning.

DELLA. Good morning Jim.

JIM. Good morning Della

JIM. I'm so sorry about last night.

DELLA. I'm so sorry about last night.

DELLA. It's a new day. Goodness, you'll be late to work.

JIM. We've an extra day given for Christmas. Though if you ask me, it's to save the firm money and not simple good will.

*(Kisses her forehead.)*

I must be off though. I've certain necessities I must attend to.

DELLA. My situation exactly.

JIM. You too have...certain necessities?

DELLA. Certain necessities, yes.

JIM. Well then, we'd better get about them.

DELLA. Indeed we had.

*(He starts to go.)*

DELLA. Jim?

JIM. Yes Della?

DELLA. You haven't any shoes on.

JIM. Haven't I?

*(Looks down.)*

No, indeed I haven't. Always best to have shoes on when one goes out.

JIM. V

*(Sits to put them on.)*

DELL.

DELLA. Jim?

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JIM. What?

DELLA. I've been thinking that Christmas isn't really about presents.

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moth

JIM. Absolutely. My thought exactly.

DELLA. If our presents to each other were very, very small... Why that would be more in keeping with the spirit?

CAR

JIM. Yes. Hmmm. See your point.

DELI

DELLA. You do really?

CAR

JIM. Yes. Clear as a bell.

*(Picks watch up off table.)*

Almost forgot my watch.

CAR  
who  
one,

DELLA. Jim?

JIM. More in keeping with the spirit. Well put Della.

CAI

*(Starts out.)*

DEI

DELLA. Where are you off to?

JIM. Off to? You're asking me where I'm off to?

Boo

DELLA. Yes, Jim.

JIM. I'm not sure. Well now, that's not true. I am sure. It is just that I cannot say. Or rather I could say but if I did say...well, in this case saying would...

CA  
Fin

DELLA. Jim?

DE

JIM. What?

CA

DELLA. Go.

DE

ie goes

**JIM.** Where?

**DELLA.** Jim?

**JIM.** Oh, yes. Certain necessities. Spirit of the season. Back quicker than lightning reveals a rabbit in the park.

*(Exits blowing her a kiss.)*

esents.

**DELLA.** Oh dear. Well, it's quite obvious Della Dillingham Young he's gone to buy you a Christmas present. And what, what are you to do? You with your one dollar and eighty-nine cents? Well, as my mother says whenever I say "What on earth am I going to do"

. Why

**CAROLER ONE.** *(As Della's mother:)* Try.

**DELLA.** *(Scooping up the money:)* And so I will.

**CAROLER SIX.** And so she did.

*(The CAROLERS sing, the room is cleared and DELLA weaves through the streets peopled by CAROLERS as shoppers. The mood is upbeat.)*

**CAROLER SIX.** Della found herself among busy, merry crowds who even in hard times were bent on making the holiday a special one, even if it meant only window-shopping instead of buying.

**CAROLER TWO.** *(Passing her:)* A happy holiday, Miss.

**DELLA.** I hope so. Thank you.

*(She stops at a window.)*

**Boots.** At least a good used pair to give him a January of dry feet.

*(Opens an imaginary door and enters.)*

: that  
case

**CAROLER THREE.** *(A shopkeeper:)* A good day to you Miss Robert's Fine Boots and Gently Used Footwear at your service.

**DELLA.** My husband is in dire need. Medium sized.

**CAROLER THREE.** A small medium or large medium?

**DELLA.** Is there a medium medium?

CAROLER THREE. I fear not. You might try a large small medium. That section there. Any that catch your fancy?

DELLA. Are they all previously worn?

CAROLER THREE. Reshaped and fumigated, every one. Few enough have the price of a new boot these days.

DELLA. The brown pair. Second shelf?

CAROLER THREE. A bargain at three dollars and ten cents, Miss.

DELLA. The black pair with the square toe?

CAROLER THREE. Let you have 'em for...well, two dollars and fifty.

DELLA. (*Discouraged:*) The grey pair.

CAROLER THREE. Four dollars, Miss. Sorry Miss.

DELLA. They cost such a great deal.

CAROLER THREE. Highway robbery I say. Just tell your husband to fill the old ones up with newspaper.

DELLA. Oh dear.

*(Leaves the shop and almost immediately pops into another.)*

Good day.

CAROLER FOUR. And a good day to you, Missy.

DELLA. So many wonderful watches!

CAROLER FOUR. (*A line he's said a hundred times:*) Drop into Butterfield's for a good time.

DELLA. A good time?

CAROLER FOUR. (*Patiently:*) Watches. Time. Butterfield's. A good time. Tic, toc.

DELLA. Oh. Oh, of course. My mind was elsewhere.

CAROLER FOUR. Any 'where' I can help with?

DELLA. What?

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CAROLER FOUR. A little worried are we? Afraid you haven't the scratch?

DELLA. Beg your pardon?

e. Few

CAROLER FOUR. The scratch, the moolah, the chinks...the money?

DELLA. I'm afraid you are a mind-reader.

Miss.

CAROLER FOUR. So, what's the amount on hand my little wayfarer?

DELLA. One dollar and eighty-nine cents.

d fifty.

CAROLER FOUR. Couldn't give you half a watch for that I'm afraid.

DELLA. Well, it's not exactly a watch I'm wanting. Jim, my Jim, has a beautiful gold Norwich watch passed down from his grandfather. But as he has no watch fob he must carry it loose in his pocket.

sband

CAROLER FOUR. What?! Great heavens, loose in his pocket? An antique family watch? Boy's a perfect madman. First, most likely, he'll be pocket picked by all the sharps 'round here. Or, out it falls into the snow never to be seen 'til spring. You get this 'Jim' a watch fob this instant if you've a single care for him.

DELLA. He does have an old leather strap...

CAROLER FOUR. (*Horried:*) Leather strap!?

DELLA. He does say it hurts such a fine watch's feelings.

CAROLER FOUR. And so it does indeed. Why to honor his family pride he'd be wanting a gold or platinum fob, nothing less.

But-

DELLA. But they're desperately dear I assume?

CAROLER FOUR. Now look here, I can see you and this Jim are down on your luck at this moment...

good

DELLA. You can see that?

CAROLER FOUR. It's all in the eyes, dearie. A little sad, a little weary, a bit cast down if I may say so. 'Windows to the soul' eh? Truer word was never spoken.

DELLA. Does everyone I pass see such things in me?



CAROLER FOUR. Hard times people don't look at each other, eh? Shopkeeper looks though.

DELLA. How much would a gold fob cost then?

CAROLER FOUR. Well, in the circumstances I'd go gold twenty-five, platinum twenty-three.

DELLA. (*Eyes cast down:*) I cannot afford that sir.

CAROLER FOUR. Mmmm. Let the platinum go for twenty-one.

DELLA. I'm afraid not.

CAROLER FOUR. Don't be downhearted girl. Times always turn. This 'Jim' has eyes in his head he'll prefer you to gold.

DELLA. It's what he deserves though, and what I want for him. Thank you for your time.

(*Turns to go.*)

CAROLER FOUR. Miss?

(*DELLA turns back.*)

Take this card. I've a friend deals in fine hair such as you've got. She's a tough old nut but she'd be pleased to see you.

(*Holds out a card to DELLA, who takes it without looking at it. She steps into the street.*)

DELLA. A dollar and eighty-nine cents. What could I have been thinking?

(*The CAROLERS sing softly.*)

CAROLER FIVE. (*Passing by:*) Happy Holiday, Miss.

(*DELLA, lost in thought doesn't reply. Finally she starts off.*)

CAROLER ONE. Dropped something Miss.

(*DELLA picks up the card that has slipped from her fingers. She reads it.*)

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other, eh?

DELLA. 'Madam Vodskaya. Hair goods of all kinds for all purposes. We buy and sell.'

twenty-

CAROLER TWO. (*While the CAROLER speaks DELLA moves to one side of the stage and takes down her hair while JIM, on this opposite side examines his watch.*) Now, there were but two possessions of the Dillingham Youngs in which they took unseemly pride. One was Jim's gold watch and the other was Della's hair. Had the Queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window to dry just to drive the Queen into a fit of jealousy. And had King Solomon been the janitor with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed just to see said Solomon pluck his beard from envy.

one.

DELLA. Well Della, you must cease to indulge in the sin of pride. Off you go now.

ys turn.

(*And she does.*)

or him.

JIM. Well Jim, you must live in the present now, not the past. Off you go now.

(*And he does. The CAROLERS sing. A small table and a chair are brought on. MADAME VODSKAYA, an older woman with blazing red hair and a temper to match, sits at the table working on a wig. DELLA knocks at the door.*)

've got.

MADAME VODSKAYA. (*Roaring:*) Who is it? Step in and state your business.

ing at it.

DELLA. (*Peeking in:*) Would this be Madame Vodskaya's?

e been

MADAME VODSKAYA. Does it not say so on the brass plate on the door!

DELLA. Please excuse me. I fear my nerves have gotten the best of me.

ff.)

MADAME VODSKAYA. It's your hair not your nerves I'm interested in. Step over here into the light.

(*DELLA does.*)

rs. She

Well, hair worth seeing for once. Good color. Good texture. Sit down, I'll chop it off.

DELLA. Well, you see...

MADAME VODSKAYA. I do see.

DELLA. The reason I've come is...

MADAME VODSKAYA. (*Still examining DELLA's hair.*) Quiet! A tragic tale, I'm sure. No tales is tragic as mine. Sit! I was once a countess in Russia. My husband was killed by a wild boar. Revolutionaries threw me out a second storey window into a snowbank. I walked hundreds of miles without shoes to the border. My beloved afghan hounds were eaten by wolves on the journey during which I had to amputate my leg with a hatchet and eat grasshoppers raw.

DELLA. Oh dear.

MADAME VODSKAYA. So do not insult me with your tragic tale.

DELLA. I won't.

MADAME VODSKAYA. So?

DELLA. Ummmm.

MADAME VODSKAYA. Don't waste my time, I have a temper!

DELLA. I want to sell my hair.

MADAME VODSKAYA. You don't want to sell your hair! You do this for some man. Men are the scum of the earth! I have killed two men. One I shot in a duel, the other I strangled with a silk scarf. Without your hair you will be as ugly as a post, on the other hand I pay the best prices.

DELLA. Thirty dollars.

MADAME VODSKAYA. Twelve.

DELLA. Twenty-five.

MADAME VODSKAYA. Fifteen.

DELLA. Twenty-one.

MADAME VODSKAYA. Eighteen.

DELLA. Done.

MADAME VODSKAYA. Fool, I would have paid twenty!

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*(She picks up her scissors.)*

Step into the other room. You will regret this all your life!

*(The two women exit. The CAROLERS sing. DELLA re-appears and returns to the watch shop.)*

CAROLER FOUR. Ah. Welcome back. The girl with the boy with the gold pocket watch. Good heavens, what have you done to yourself?

DELLA. Oh, please don't.

CAROLER FOUR. *(Staring at her:)* Well, hair grows.

DELLA. The platinum watch fob you showed me?

CAROLER FOUR. Still in the case. Twenty-three dollars I believe I said.

DELLA. You had said...twenty-one.

CAROLER FOUR. Had I? Twenty-one then.

DELLA. But you see, I haven't twenty-one.

CAROLER FOUR. You haven't twenty-one?

DELLA. Nineteen ninety-seven actually.

CAROLER FOUR. Really? Afraid I couldn't do that.

DELLA. Oh please. I've set all my hopes on it. Please help me.

CAROLER FOUR. Now don't cry. I can't stand tears, I always cry myself.

DELLA. *(Hopefully:)* So you'll sell it for what I have?

CAROLER FOUR. No. Mouths to feed, you see.

DELLA. Well, of course you must see to your family. It's final then, the price?

*(He nods.)*

A Merry Christmas sir, to you and yours.

*(Starts to go.)*

CAROLER FOUR. Wait.

*(She turns.)*

Take off your scarf girl.

*(She does.)*

Poor thing. You look like a plucked chicken. You may have the fob for twenty dollars.

DELLA. I've only nineteen ninety-seven.

CAROLER FOUR. *(He stares at her.)* Take it for heaven's sake!

*(Gives her the fob, she gives him her money.)*

DELLA. Thank you. Thank you, thank you. You are the very spirit of the season!

*(She exits.)*

CAROLER FOUR. Lord help you when he sees you. I hope the lad's worth it.

*(The CAROLERS sing. The set is changed back to Della's flat. She takes off her coat, puts the fob in a drawer and picks up a hand mirror.)*

DELLA. Oh dear. Oh my. Well, there you are Della, ravaged and chopped. Could anyone love this, even Jim? If Jim doesn't kill me before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what, what could I do?

*(A knock at the door.)*

Who is it?

CLARICE. It's Clarice.

DELLA. Come in.

*(Settles herself so she may be regarded by her visitor.)*

Come in Clarice.

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(CLARICE enters.)

CLARICE. Della I... Oh, I'm terribly sorry, I thought Della... I'm Clarice. You must be her sister Dot, she speaks of you so often. I only came to return some money she lent me.

(Puts an envelope on the table.)

My husband found work and...I don't mean to chatter. So very nice to meet you. Tell Della I dropped by if you will be so kind. Ta ta.

(She exits, closing the door behind her.)

DELLA. Well, this is not a good sign. I didn't mean to become someone else. I only meant to buy Jim a gift that honors him.

(Looks again in the mirror.)

Horrible.

(Puts the mirror down.)

What on earth am I to do?

(Puts her head in her hands. JIM enters in a high good humor.)

JIM. Well, Mrs. Young, I have accomplished the "certain necessities" we spoke of in very high style if I do say so myself and...

(She looks up at him. He is dumbstruck.)

DELLA. Well, Jim?

(He stares at her for a long minute.)

You must say something.

JIM. (A bit of an automaton.) Something. I'm saying something.

DELLA. Oh Jim, is it unforgivable?

JIM. (Still staring:) I really must say something.

DELLA. Yes please, please do.

JIM. You haven't any hair.

DELLA. I know.

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JIM. On your head, no hair.

DELLA. I know.

JIM. Where did your hair go?

DELLA. I'll tell you.

JIM. Because, on your head there is no hair. It's not there, your hair, it's bare.

DELLA. Jim darling, don't look at me that way. I sold my hair because I couldn't live through Christmas without giving you a present.

JIM. But...your...hair?

DELLA. It grows awfully fast Jim, really it does. Before you know it I'll have...

JIM. Hair?

DELLA. Yes.

JIM. On your head?

DELLA. Yes. Say Merry Christmas Jim, and let's be happy. I've a wonderful gift for you.

JIM. (*Processing:*) You've cut off your hair.

DELLA. Wake up, boy! It's sold I tell you. Sold at Madame Vodskaya's Fine Hair Goods. She's a Russian countess whose dogs were eaten by wolves and she cut off her leg with a hatchet.

JIM. That's nice.

DELLA. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me for I sold it all for you. It was for love, Jim.

*(He rises and embraces her.)*

CAROLER FIVE. As Della and Jim are otherwise engaged let us regard for a brief moment the question of economics. Eight dollars a week or a million a year. Does any sum add up to happiness? And if not, must we always be counting?

*(JIM pulls back to arm's length.)*

JIM. Make no mistake about me, Dell. There is nothing at all in the way of a haircut that could make me care for your any less, but...

*(Takes a package from his pocket.)*

If you'll unwrap this package, Della, you may see why you had me going awhile at first.

*(She takes it.)*

DELLA. Now Jim?

JIM. Now, I think, would be the very best time.

*(DELLA sits with the package and quickly opens it. A pretty box is inside the paper. She looks up at him.)*

And now the lid.

*(She opens it. A shriek of both delight and horror.)*

DELLA. The combs! The combs for my hair that I worshiped so long in the Broadway window! They're beautiful. Oh Jim, pure tortoise shell. They're extraordinary.

JIM. For your hair.

DELLA. Poor boy! I see in the advertisements that there are wonderful unguents and lotions for baldness.

JIM. Well thank heaven your not quite bald, Della.

DELLA. I will concentrate on growing hair both night and day, Jim.

*(Looks at combs.)*

Sometimes it's the best fun to wait for the perfect moment, boy.

*(Hugs him again.)*

And now you shall have a fine present to equal them.

*(Gives him a small box.)*

Open it, James Dillingham Young, open it and be amazed.



*(He opens the box and takes out the platinum fob. He holds it in the palm of his hand, looking down at it.)*

JIM. A watch fob.

DELLA. Yes.

JIM. A very, very beautiful, unequalled and remarkable watch fob.

DELLA. Isn't it a dandy Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. It was a great adventure.

JIM. I've never seen a better.

DELLA. You must look at the time a hundred times a day now.

JIM. Della...

DELLA. Give me your watch. I've been waiting and waiting to put it on.

JIM. *(Kisses her on the forehead and then sits smiling on the couch with his hands behind his head.)* Come and sit with me Dell.

DELLA. But...

JIM. Sit with me.

*(She does.)*

Now this is the best present.

*(Puts his arm around her.)*

And let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em for awhile. They're too nice to use at the present.

DELLA. But Jim...

JIM. Shhhhh. I'll tell you a Christmas story. There was once a beautiful princess with glorious waves of splendid hair almost down to her knees who ran away from a very fine palace to marry a... well let's say...and impecunious woodsman and they lived in a very small and badly ventilated cottage on the east side of the...forest. They were poor but unimaginably happy. So at Christmas, with the coin of the realm in short supply the Princess sacrificed her royal hair to buy the down-at-the-heels woodsman a watch fob, while he,

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the head-over-heels in love woodsman, sold his watch to buy his true love a set of tortoise shell combs for her hair.

DELLA. Oh Jim. Oh no!

JIM. Well now Della, it's only a story of course. But it's a good story I think, for while there will always be more hair and watches in the world there will never be anyone I care for as much as you.

DELLA. Or I you.

*(The CAROLERS begin to sing 'The Twelve Days of Christmas.' DELLA inclines her head on JIM's shoulder. They look out at us, content. The lights narrow down on them and then, go out.)*

*End of Play*

# The Christmas Truce

By Aaron Shepard

ROLES: SOLDIERS 1–4 (John, Philip, Tom, Andrew) plus Pantomime performers

NOTES: The Christmas Truce of 1914 is one of the most remarkable incidents of World War I and perhaps of all military history. Starting in some places on Christmas Eve and in others on Christmas Day, the truce covered as much as two-thirds of the British-German front, with thousands of soldiers taking part. Perhaps most remarkably, it grew out of no single initiative but sprang up in each place spontaneously and independently. Nearly everything described here is drawn from first-hand accounts in letters and diaries of the time. Britishisms include using *Nowell* instead of *Noël*, and *football* instead of *soccer*.

SETTING: The stage is dark but with the faint glow of dawn approaching. We see gnarled dead trees, destroyed machines of war, and burms thrown up by soldiers having dug trenches. It is no-man's land. For best effect, place SOLDIERS in positions around the stage as if in the trenches. The action described can be performed in pantomime by other actors in the no-man's land of the stage.

SOLDIER 1: *(to audience)* Christmas Day, 1914. Dear mother,

SOLDIER 4: *(to audience)* My darling Meg,

SOLDIER 2: *(to audience)* My good friend Charles,

SOLDIER 3: *(to audience)* My dear sister Janet,

SOLDIER 1: It is 2:00 in the morning and most of our men are asleep in their dugouts.

SOLDIER 4: Yet I could not sleep myself before writing to you of the wonderful events of Christmas Eve.

SOLDIER 2: In truth, what happened seems almost like a fairy tale, and if I hadn't been through it myself, I would scarce believe it.

SOLDIER 3: Just imagine: While you and the family sang carols before the fire there in London, I did the same with enemy soldiers here on the battlefields of France!

SOLDIER 1: As I wrote before, there has been little serious fighting of late. The first battles of the war left so many dead that both sides have held back until replacements could come from home. So we have mostly stayed in our trenches and waited.

SOLDIER 4: But what a terrible waiting it has been! Knowing that any moment an artillery shell might land and explode beside us in the trench, killing or maiming several men. And in daylight not daring to lift our heads above ground, for fear of a sniper's bullet.

SOLDIER 2: And the rain—it has fallen almost daily. Of course, it collects right in our trenches, where we must bail it out with pots and pans. And with the rain has come mud—a good foot or more deep.

SOLDIER 3: It splatters and cakes everything, and constantly sucks at our boots. One new recruit got his feet stuck in it, and then his hands too when he tried to get out—just like in that American story of the tar baby!

SOLDIER 1: Through all this, we couldn't help feeling curious about the German soldiers across the way. After all, they faced the same dangers we did, and slogged about in the same muck.

SOLDIER 4: What's more, their first trench was only 50 yards from ours. Between us lay No Man's Land, bordered on both sides by barbed wire—yet they were close enough we sometimes heard their voices.

SOLDIER 2: Of course, we hated them whenever they killed our friends. But other times, we joked about them and almost felt we had something in common.

SOLDIER 3: And now it seems they felt the same.

SOLDIER 1: Just yesterday morning—Christmas Eve Day—we had our first good freeze. Cold as we were, we welcomed it, because at least the mud froze solid.

SOLDIER 4: Everything was tinged white with frost, while a bright sun shone over all. Perfect Christmas weather.

SOLDIER 2: During the day, there was little shelling or rifle fire from either side. And as darkness fell on our Christmas Eve, the shooting stopped entirely.

SOLDIER 3: Our first complete silence in months! We hoped it might promise a peaceful holiday, but we didn't count on it. We'd been told the Germans might attack and try to catch us off guard.

SOLDIER 1: I went to the dugout to rest, and lying on my cot, I must have drifted asleep. All at once my friend was shaking me awake, saying, “Come and see! See what the Germans are doing!” I grabbed my rifle, stumbled out into the trench, and stuck my head cautiously above the sandbags.

SOLDIER 4: I never hope to see a stranger and more lovely sight. Clusters of tiny lights were shining all along the German line, left and right as far as the eye could see.

SOLDIER 2: “What is it?” I asked in bewilderment, and someone answered, “Christmas trees!”

SOLDIER 3: And so it was. The Germans had placed Christmas trees in front of their trenches, lit by candle or lantern like beacons of good will.

SOLDIER 1: And then we heard their voices raised in song.  
(*singing*) “Stille nacht, heilige nacht . . . .”

SOLDIER 4: This carol may not yet be familiar to us in Britain, but one soldier knew it and translated: “Silent night, holy night.” I’ve never heard one lovelier—or more meaningful, in that quiet, clear night, its dark softened by a first-quarter moon.

SOLDIER 2: When the song finished, the men in our trenches applauded. Yes, British soldiers applauding Germans!

SOLDIER 3: Then one of our own men started singing, and we all joined in. (*singing*) “The first Nowell, the angel did say . . . .”

SOLDIER 1: In truth, we sounded not nearly as good as the Germans, with their fine harmonies. But they responded with enthusiastic applause of their own and then began another. (*singing*) “O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum . . . .”

SOLDIER 4: Then we replied. (*singing*) “O come all ye faithful . . . .”

SOLDIER 2: But this time they joined in, singing the same words in Latin. (*singing*) “Adeste fideles . . . .”

SOLDIER 3: British and German harmonizing across No Man’s Land! I would have thought nothing could be more amazing—but what came next was more so.

SOLDIER 1: “English, come over!” we heard one of them shout. “You no shoot, we no shoot.”

SOLDIER 4: There in the trenches, we looked at each other in bewilderment. Then one of us shouted jokingly, “You come over here.”

SOLDIER 2: To our astonishment, we saw two figures rise from the trench, climb over their barbed wire, and advance unprotected across No Man’s Land.

SOLDIER 3: One of them called, “Send officer to talk.”

SOLDIER 1: I saw one of our men lift his rifle to the ready, and no doubt others did the same—but our captain called out, “Hold your fire.” Then he climbed out and went to meet the Germans halfway.

SOLDIER 4: We heard them talking, and a few minutes later, the captain came back with a German cigar in his mouth! “We’ve agreed there will be no shooting before midnight tomorrow,” he announced. “But sentries are to remain on duty, and the rest of you, stay alert.”

SOLDIER 2: Across the way, we could make out groups of two or three men starting out of trenches and coming toward us.

SOLDIER 3: Then some of us were climbing out too, and in minutes more, there we were in No Man’s Land, over a hundred soldiers and officers of each side, shaking hands with men we’d been trying to kill just hours earlier!

SOLDIER 1: Before long a bonfire was built, and around it we mingled—British khaki and German grey. I must say, the Germans were the better dressed, with fresh uniforms for the holiday.

SOLDIER 4: Only a couple of our men knew German, but more of the Germans knew English. I asked one of them why that was.

“Because many have worked in England!” he said. “Before all this, I was a waiter at the Hotel Cecil. Perhaps I waited on your table!”

“Perhaps you did!” I said, laughing.



SOLDIER 2: One German told me he had a girlfriend in London and that the war had interrupted their plans for marriage. I told him, “Don’t worry. We’ll have you beat by Easter, then you can come back and marry the girl.”

He laughed at that. Then he asked if I’d send her a postcard he’d give me later, and I promised I would.

SOLDIER 3: Another German had been a porter at Victoria Station. He showed me a picture of his family back in Munich. His eldest sister was so lovely, I said I should like to meet her someday. He beamed and said he would like that very much and gave me his family’s address.

SOLDIER 1: Even those who could not converse could still exchange gifts—our cigarettes for their cigars, our tea for their coffee, our corned beef for their sausage. Badges and buttons from uniforms changed owners, and one of our lads walked off with the infamous spiked helmet!

SOLDIER 4: I myself traded a jackknife for a leather equipment belt—a fine souvenir to show when I get home.

SOLDIER 2: Newspapers too changed hands, and the Germans howled with laughter at ours. They assured us that France was finished and Russia nearly beaten too.

SOLDIER 3: We told them that was nonsense, and one of them said, “Well, you believe your newspapers and we’ll believe ours.”

SOLDIER 1: Clearly they are lied to—yet after meeting these men, I wonder how truthful our own newspapers have been.

SOLDIER 4: These are not the “savage barbarians” we’ve read so much about. They are men with homes and families, hopes and fears, principles and, yes, love of country.

SOLDIER 2: In other words, men like ourselves.

SOLDIER 3: Why are we led to believe otherwise?

SOLDIER 1: As it grew late, a few more songs were traded around the fire, and then all joined in for—I am not lying to you —“Auld Lang Syne.”

SOLDIER 4: Then we parted with promises to meet again tomorrow,

SOLDIER 2: and even some talk of a football match.

SOLDIER 3: I was just starting back to the trenches when an older German clutched my arm. “My God,” he said, “why cannot we have peace and all go home?”

I told him gently, “That you must ask your emperor.”

He looked at me then, searchingly. “Perhaps, my friend. But also we must ask our hearts.”

SOLDIER 1: And so, dear mother,

SOLDIER 4: dear wife,

SOLDIER 2: dear friend,

SOLDIER 3: dear sister,

SOLDIER 1: tell me, has there ever been such a Christmas Eve in all history?

SOLDIER 4: And what does it all mean, this impossible befriending of enemies?

SOLDIER 2: For the fighting here, of course, it means regrettably little. Decent fellows those soldiers may be, but they follow orders and we do the same.

SOLDIER 3: Besides, we are here to stop their army and send it home, and never could we shirk that duty.

SOLDIER 1: Still, one cannot help imagine what would happen if the spirit shown here were caught by the nations of the world.

SOLDIER 4: Of course, disputes must always arise.

SOLDIER 2: But what if our leaders were to offer well wishes in place of warnings?

SOLDIER 3: Songs in place of slurs?

SOLDIER 1: Presents in place of reprisals?

SOLDIER 4: Would not all war end at once?

SOLDIER 2: All nations say they want peace.

SOLDIER 3: Yet on this Christmas morning, I wonder if we want it quite enough.

SOLDIER 1: Yours truly,

SOLDIER 4: Yours always,

SOLDIER 2: Sincerely,

SOLDIER 3: With all my love,

SOLDIER 1: John

SOLDIER 4: Andrew

SOLDIER 2: Philip

SOLDIER 3: Tom