

THE HOPE CRADLE

A Christmas Play

By Melanie R. Sita

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STORY OF THE PLAY

The holidays are approaching and the members of St. Peter's Church of Riverview have to choose – spend Christmas Eve with some local orphans or hold their traditional celebration. While many members are generous with material gifts, sacrificing their time is quite another matter. Add a famous New York talent agent looking to audition the two best singers in the congregation, and soon competing desires threaten to tear apart any plans for a harmonious Christmas celebration.

Set in the 1940s, this play beautifully reveals its characters' choices and convictions, as they move toward what Christmas is ultimately all about - compassion and hope.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene 1: A Christian home, Christmas Eve, present day.

Scene 2: St. Peter's Church, before Christmas, 1940s.

Scene 3: St. Peter's Church fellowship hall.

Scene 4: Riverview Orphanage, several days later.

Scene 5: The Duvall living room, several days later.

Scene 6: St. Peter's Church, Christmas Eve.

Scene 7: Riverview Orphanage, a short time later that evening.

Scene 8: Christian home, about an hour later.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 m, 10 w, 9 children, extras, doubling possible)

REV. WILFORD ANDERSON: Kind, but somewhat frustrated leader of a congregation made up of Riverview's finest citizens.

DANIEL ANDERSON: Young adult son of Rev. Anderson. Innocent and full of his father's wisdom and passion for the less fortunate.

MRS. CLARISE HARRINGTON: Director of Riverview Children's home, determined to find help for the children.

VIVIAN DUVALL: Proud mother of Victoria and Suzanne. Willing to do anything to launch her daughters in showbiz.

VICTORIA DUVALL: Oldest daughter of Vivian, mid-twenties. Has a beautiful voice. Eager to go to New York to sing professionally.

SUZANNE DUVALL: Victoria's younger sister, with almost as much talent. She also wants to go to New York.

ELLIOTT DANDRIDGE: Victoria's fiancé. Used to the finer things in life. Feels Victoria is very lucky to have him. Encourages her career: it will help maintain his lifestyle.

MRS. BEA WITHERSPOON: Church lady.

DORIS WITHERSPOON: Teenage daughter of Mrs. Witherspoon.

MRS. MARGARET TATE: Church lady.

GLORIA: Friend of Victoria and Suzanne.

AUDREY: School friend of Victoria and Suzanne.

BRADLEY MARTIN: Young soldier, home on leave. Worked in stables before recently going into service.

JACKIE VALENTINE: Flamboyant New York talent agent. Used to being treated like royalty by Broadway hopefuls.

SYDNEY HOUSTON: Jackie Valentine's assistant. Used to being at his beck and call; keeps him organized.

*Cast of Characters continued on next page.

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ORPHANS

TOMMY: Bitter young boy about 9 years old.

FREDDIE: (M/F) Likes to make everyone laugh, age 10.

FRANKIE: Adventurous and creative boy, age 7-9.

GRETA: A serious little girl, age 7-9.

DORIAN: Helpful, mother-like child, age 13-14.

ELIZABETH: Orphan who lives in a fantasy. Believes she's
being mistaken for poor child. Age 10-12.

LILLY: Beautiful singing voice, about 12.

CHARLIE: (M/F) Young orphan, age 5-6.

MODERN DAY FAMILY

GRANDFATHER: Adult Tommy.

BONNIE: Modern-day mother. Looking for meaning of
Christmas.

BRAD/VICKIE: (M/F) Bonnie's son/daughter. Child of the 90s.
Self-centered. Unwilling to give time to the homeless or to
any charity.

EXTRAS (Optional)

Members of the congregation.

Organist.

Additional children at orphanage.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: The present. Simple decor with Christmas tree. BONNIE is calling to her son, BRAD. GRANDPA sits in the recliner, sleeping. Brad is listening to music on a walkman, playing a video game. He can't hear Bonnie calling to him.)

BONNIE: Brad, Brad ... *(Picking up earphone.)* Bradley!

BRAD: What???

BONNIE: Please, Brad, won't you go with me to the homeless shelter? We have so much. Some of those families are having such a rough time.

BRAD: No, Mom, I'm not going to any homeless shelter. I hate those places, and to tell you the truth, the people there, they scare me.

BONNIE: How do you think the children that live there feel?

BRAD: I don't know! They're used to it. I'm not. Anyway, it's not my problem.

BONNIE: Well, if you change your mind, I would certainly appreciate it. And I know quite a few of the kids there would really be blessed by your presence.

BRAD: Please, Mom, I hate when you talk like that.

BONNIE: Like what?

BRAD: That church talk ... "blessed" and stuff like that. I hate that.

BONNIE: OK, OK, fine, never mind, I'm leaving. Would it be too much to ask you to do me a favor?

BRAD: What?

BONNIE: Would you mind checking on Grandpa while I'm gone?

BRAD: Do I have to?

(BONNIE glares at HIM with her hands on her hips.)

BRAD: *(Continued.)* Fine. I'll check on him later.

(BONNIE kisses him good-bye. BRAD continues to play the video game for a few moments, appears to lose, and turns it off.)

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(Bored, he pauses, then goes to check on GRANDPA, still sleeping by the tree. Grandpa has a tiny old box on his lap.)

BRAD: *(Shakes HIM.)* Grandpa, you all right?

GRANDPA: *(Startled awake.)* Of course, I'm all right, why wouldn't I be all right?

BRAD: Sorry. Mom told me to check on you.

GRANDPA: Well, thanks, but I'm fine. Where did your mom go?

BRAD: *(Rolling eyes.)* She's down at that homeless shelter. She wanted me to go. I think she just likes making me feel bad.

GRANDPA: *(Laughing.)* Nothing has changed in my sixty-five years. It's always been the parents' job, you know, to make their kids feel bad.

BRAD: Mom thinks I owe something to those homeless people, because I have it better. But my life is no bed of roses with Dad gone! School...and homework is a pain. And soon I'll have to look for a job, 'cause Mom never has enough money for the things I want. Why would I want to do anything for anyone else when my life is so messed up?

GRANDPA: Well, things would have been quite different for you had things been different in my life many years ago. Some very special people put their dreams aside for me and it changed everything. You know, I never thought about it before, but it did, it changed everything for you too. I'll tell you, the way things were going, a homeless shelter could've easily been your home too.

BRAD: What do you mean?

GRANDPA: Well, I was adopted and that changed everything for me ... and for you. Did I tell you? I grew up in an orphanage? Yessir, I was one angry young man. Who knows where I would have ended up ... and what venom I would have passed along.

BRAD: Wow, Grandpa, I never knew that!

GRANDPA: I don't know, maybe God felt it wasn't important until now. The timing just seems right.... *(LIGHTS dim.)*

End of Scene

Scene 2

(AT RISE: It is the 1940s at the church. REV. ANDERSON is almost at the end of his sermon. The CONGREGATION is listening. Some of its members are fidgeting.)

REV.: And so as we approach the celebration of the birth of our Lord, we will begin to understand that from His humble beginnings here on earth, Jesus showed us what He meant by "picking up our cross, denying ourselves and following Him." Incredibly, He left His heavenly kingdom to become a man, putting Himself at the mercy of His own creation to tend to His needs ... I tell you, if I live to be a hundred, I will never understand love like that. *(Pause to ponder.)* Well ... I'll save the best for next week. *(Pause.)* Now, before we end the service this morning, I would like to introduce Clarise Harrington. She is the director of Riverview Orphanage and she would like to share a few words with you. Miss Harrington, please ... welcome *(Motions CLARISE to podium, then sits.)*

CLARISE: Good morning. Thank you all so much for inviting me to speak. As Rev. Anderson said, my name is Clarise Harrington, I'm Director of Riverview Orphanage, and I am here on the behalf of my very special residents. *(Smiles.)* As you know, the holidays are almost here. My goodness, it's getting so commercialized, don't you think? It's still four weeks away and already our town is decorated to the hilt. All the tinsel and lights are so beautiful ... *(Smile fades.)* Well ... with all the sights and sounds of Christmas everywhere *(Wipes tears.)* it just makes it all the more painful for our children. It's harder each year to distract them and try to keep up their spirits. *(PEOPLE in pews begin to fidget. Uncomfortable, they squirm in seats, whispering quietly. CLARISE notices, so she gets to point.)* That's why we thought we might try something different this time. I am here to ask you ... the children would be very appreciative ... if you might consider ... *(Ends sentence quickly.)* spending Christmas Eve with us.

End of Freeview

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