

CHRISTMAS TRAPPINGS

By Brian Shoop

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PUBLISHED BY
ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY
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STORY OF THE PLAY

A blizzard in a small Oklahoma town causes an array of acquaintances and strangers to be stranded in a diner during the Christmas season. Each is seeking something new, but no one is quite sure of the real meaning of life or where theirs should lead. While getting to know one another, and with some of the secrets they reveal, a life-altering discussion ensues with new meaning for all. Each discovers freedom from the "trappings" that life experiences may hold.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 2 w, 1 flexible, 1 child, extra voices)

SEAN CORDELL: Pastor of a church, middle-aged, also plays younger self, early twenties.

JANA: Owner, waitress of diner, well organized, set in her ways, middle-aged.

BENTON ELMORE (ELMER): Middle-aged with a secret past.

ROSS: Newspaper reporter from out of town. (Written for male, Jon Ross, but can be played by a female, Joan Ross.)

CARMEL: A traveler with a small child, mid-twenties.

CODY: Carmel's child, does not speak, five years old.

(Also voices of a radio DJ and a rescuer.)

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SETTING

A small town, roadside diner in Oklahoma in the early '70s. It is clean, but its motif is 15 years old, and the furniture is worn and in need of replacement. Lettering, painted backwards on the large plate window, declares, "Lucky's Roadside Diner," and a cardboard sign reading "Closed" on one side and "Open" on the other hangs in the center of the door. Above the door is a small bell which rings when the door is opened. Behind the counter, a blackboard touts the daily special, "Wednesday - Hamburger Steak Platter." The wall around the blackboard is cluttered with mounted fish, a deer's head, and many photographs of various sizes, some framed, some just pinned up or stuck behind other things.

PROPS

Pre-set Props: Old radio (optional); condiments and napkin holders; Jana's overcoat, scarf, and purse containing keys; chalk, eraser and calendar; dial telephone, box of Christmas decorations containing a small nativity, lights, Rudolph nose, wreath, etc.; flashlight.

Carry-on Props: Coffeepot and cups; cup of hot chocolate and blanket; Ross' luggage containing motel towel and Bible; rubbing alcohol, paring knife, two feet of tubing, first-aid kit, bowl.

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(AT RISE: OLDER SEAN, wearing a minister's collar, enters through the front door and surveys the diner.)

OLDER SEAN: Look at this. It's just like it was. Never changed the décor. *(Notices the audience.)* Oh, hello. Forgive me, I didn't see you there. I'm just ... I usually don't just talk to myself like that. I'm Sean Cordell, Montpelier, Ohio. I'm pastor at the Montpelier Community Church there, only I'm on vacation right now. Which is unusual because I don't travel much. Takes an act of God to get me out of the pulpit. Come to think of it, it took an act of God to get me into the pulpit, too. Actually, that's why I wanted to come in here - this is the place. Must be 25, 30 years ago now. Whew!

Tell me something. If you found out that your life was about to be changed by an act of God, would that make you fearful? Yeah, you hear "act of God" and you think catastrophe or trouble. "Act of God" means bad things, right? Well, I am one man who can stand here and give you a definitive answer to that question: it depends! It depends on your perspective. It depends on how much you know about God.

The first time I was in this place, I was completely ignorant. I knew nothing about God. But God knew all about me. And He knew all about the group of travelers that He assembled here that night. Beautiful, man!

You know, you say "act of God" in Oklahoma, and most folks think you're talking about a tornado. Well, it was severe weather all right, but this time, it was a blizzard. Yes sir, right here in north-central Oklahoma, December 21, 1973.

(BLIZZARD SOUNDS grow in the background.)

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OLDER SEAN: *(Continued.)* I can still remember how the wind howled that night. I'd never heard anything like it ...

(OLDER SEAN exits as an old radio begins to whine out a fuzzy rendition of some CHRISTMAS SONG that doesn't quite cover the HOWLING WIND outside. JANA enters from a swinging door wearing a waitress' uniform with an apron and a lace hankie folded into a corsage. She crosses to the door, stands for a few seconds studying her watch, then turns the hanging sign over from "Open" to "Closed." She then moves to one of the tables and arranges the salt, pepper, and other condiments to a precise pattern that only she sees. The song on the radio ends.)

RADIO DJ: *(Recorded.)* I'll tell you what, Elvis maybe seeing blue, but there is nothing but white in good old Enid and surrounding areas tonight. Old Man Winter is threatening to give us a white Christmas we'll never forget. The OHP continues to report blizzard conditions over most of the area. You heard me. I said, blizzard conditions. Welcome to Oklahoma, huh? Several highways are described as "impassable" by the highway patrol, and there are reports of stranded motorists. It is fearsome out there, folks! If you do not have a dire life-or-death emergency, please, please do not get out in this stuff. You just stay right there by the fire, and keep your dial right here on KZIN, your country cousin radio station, and we'll just keep playing this good ... old ... country ... music.

(Another country Christmas song begins to play. Meanwhile, JANA continues setting things in order on each table, then crosses to the counter. Next, she erases the special of the day, takes some chalk from a drawer, briefly checks a calendar by the blackboard, and scrawls, "Thursday - Hamburger Steak Platter." She dons her coat and buttons it, removes a scarf from the pocket and wraps it around her neck. She reaches under the counter without looking, and produces her purse from which she removes her keys.)

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(She turns off the radio, and crosses to the door, takes one last look around the room, opens the door which JINGLES a little bell attached to it, turns out the LIGHTS, closes the door, and screams.)

ELMER: *(Offstage.)* It's just me.

JANA: I know that. I ... I just didn't expect to see anyone.

What are you doing back here? I'm closed.

ELMER: I hope you're not planning to go home tonight.

JANA: Of course I'm going home. What do you mean?

ELMER: I only got about 200 yards. You have to get all the way to Medford.

JANA: It's only five miles. I've driven home every night for 27 years, in all kinds of weather.

ELMER: Not this kind. Hey, can we talk about this inside? I'm frozen.

JANA: I can't. I told you, I'm closed.

ELMER: I won't ask you to make me anything.

JANA: No. I should be passing Myers Creek by now. This is upsetting.

ELMER: Okay, it's like this. You either open that door or I'm going to kick it down. I've got to get warm.

JANA: *(Pause.)* I don't like this. Not one bit.

ELMER: Well, it's not like I had anything to do with the weather.

(The keys JINGLE in the lock, the door opens and SHE flips the LIGHT on. She stands aside as ELMER enters and moves into the room.)

JANA: How long will you be?

ELMER: Till I can leave.

JANA: I am not staying all night in this place. *(Pause.)*

Should I make you some coffee?

ELMER: I'm not asking for anything.

(JANA exhales sharply and exits through the swinging door without even removing her scarf.)

End of Freeview

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