

# **A CHRISTMAS REUNION**

*By Renee Vinson*

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**STORY OF THE PLAY**

The Murphys are back in another heartwarming, spiritual comedy! (*Meet them in "A Christmas Rapture."*)

This year the Murphys get a lot more than they bargained for when they adopt a nursing home patient for the Christmas holidays. What was hoped to be an opportunity to minister turns into a trial of their faith when Gus Swanson arrives.

Bitter and hardened from a past hurt, Gus makes life miserable for anyone around him. Even Grandma Guthrie, who first urged understanding, is fed up when "Grumpy Gus" tells her she can't cook!

But the faith of teenage Denita Murphy and an unexpected reunion between Gus and a young evangelist, make us consider the right to hold on to the sins of others without considering our own.

This wise and witty comedy about the power of Jesus' love is sure to bring the Christmas spirit to your home.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

(5M, 5W)

**GUS SWANSON:** a nursing home resident; in his early 70s; has a mean and nasty disposition.

**STEVEN SMITH:** a young evangelist in his mid 20s.

**DENITA MURPHY:** about 14, has a sincere faith in God. She's the only one who really sees the potential for good in Gus.

**CANDACE MURPHY:** Denita's mother.

**JACK MURPHY:** Denita's father.

**GRANDMA GUTHERIE:** Denita's grandmother, a spry, woman in her mid 60s.

**JAMIE MURPHY:** Denita's older brother, about 16.

**KYLE MURPHY:** Denita's oldest brother, a young evangelist, about 24.

**ALEX:** Jamie's fast talking friend.

**NURSE:** Drops Gus off at the Murphy home.

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**SCENES**

Scene: 1 Two days before Christmas, 1 pm.

Scene: 2 An hour later.

Scene: 3 The next day, Christmas Eve, 1 pm.

Scene: 4 Two hours later.

**PLAYING TIME:** About 30 minutes.

**PROPS**

Dust cloth, polish, and apron for Grandma; coats for everyone; filled grocery bag for Candace; wheelchair, small suitcase, and blanket for Gus; card with phone numbers for Nurse; 2 cups for Denita; 2 plates of cake for Steven; Bible in Christmas wrapping with tag.

**STAGE SETTING**

The Murphy living room is warmly comfortable and decorated for Christmas. A door, SR, leads to the outside. Upstage of it is a coat rack. CS is a sofa, flanked on each side by an end chair. A coffee table DS of sofa holds the family Bible, magazines, and a candy dish of peanut butter balls. A small phone table sits USL, near the bedroom exit. A decorated Christmas tree with presents underneath sits SL. DSL is the exit to the kitchen. Be sure furniture is arranged with enough space so Gus' wheelchair can move easily.

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Scene 1

(AT RISE: GRANDMA GUTHERIE is straightening up the living room, merrily humming a Christmas carol to herself while she is working. She comes to a pile of Jamie's "stuff" books, papers, etc. lying on the couch.)

GRANDMA: (To HERSELF.) That boy! (Raises HER voice.) Jamie! Jamie! (HE enters USL.) Please! For the fifteenth time, would you take this mess up to your room where it belongs!

JAMIE: (Laughs.) Oh, Grandma! This is just the third time, not the fifteenth!

GRANDMA: (Smiles.) Well, once is enough, young man! We've got to get things in order before Mr. Swanson comes. He's going to be here in about an hour. Your mother and I have knocked ourselves out cleaning and scrubbing. So, please (Piles his "stuff" in HIS arm.) pick up after yourself!

JAMIE: Aw, Grandma, I was gonna do it! (SHE frowns at him with a "Who are you trying to kid?" look.) Honest! Anyways, why is Mom going to so much trouble? There is nothing anybody could do to please that old man!

GRANDMA: (Shocked.) Jamie! What in the world are you talking about? Don't say that about Mr. Swanson!

JAMIE: It's true, Grandma! Grumpy Gus Swanson is one of the meanest old men I've ever known! I'm really glad our community has gotten involved in the Adopt-A-Nursing-Home-Patient-For-Christmas program. I'm sure it's a great idea. But why, oh why did we get stuck with that crab apple!

GRANDMA: (Bewildered.) Gus? Is that Mr. Swanson's first name? (JAMIE nods.) Are you telling me the infamous Grumpy Gus is this same Mr. Swanson?

JAMIE: (Slaps HIS knee and snickers.) You mean you didn't know?

GRANDMA: No, I didn't! He can't be all that bad, (Pauses.) can he?

JAMIE: (Folds HIS arms.) Hmph!

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GRANDMA: Now, Jamie! You know that Christ loves Mr. Swanson. He loved him so much that He died for him! Remember? So if Christ loves him, we must love him too. I can't imagine what it would be like to be shut away in an old folks home with no family to visit me. And then, on top of that, to be in a wheelchair!

JAMIE: But Grandma! Gus no more needs a wheelchair than you do! He just wants to be waited on hand and foot. Except that he likes to bite the hand that feeds him!

GRANDMA: Well just remember this, Jamie. Jesus loved the unlovable. People that nobody else would give the time of day to always seemed to be the ones He made time for. *(SHE smiles.)* Please! Try to be patient with Mr. Swanson. I'm sure he needs us!

JAMIE: *(Puts HIS arm around GRANDMA.)* Okay, Grandma. Okay. You win! The sermon got through. *(HE shakes his head.)* It's gonna take a lot of praying, though!

*(HE exits USL with his "stuff." GRANDMA continues to dust and straighten things. SHE mumbles to herself, "Grumpy Gus! Dear Lord, help us!" There is a knock at front door SR.)*

GRANDMA: Come in!

*(Enter ALEX SR. HE repeats his lines quickly with no chance for Grandma to reply, even though SHE tries.)*

ALEX: Hi, Grandma G.! Cute outfit! Is Jamie around? Are those peanut butter balls? *(HE makes a mad dash for the candy dish and gets a handful.)* Thanks a million! *(HE stuffs his mouth with candy.)* I'll just go upstairs and check things out. *(Exits quickly USL.)*

GRANDMA: *(Throws HER hands up and laughs.)* That boy!

*(Enter DENITA SR, pulling her coat off and hanging it on the coat rack.)*

DENITA: Was that motor mouth I just saw?

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GRANDMA: Now, Denita! It's not nice to call people names.

DENITA: Well, how many words did you get in when he walked through the door?

GRANDMA: *(SHE thinks for a moment.)* Not very many.

DENITA: *(Smiling.)* C'mon, Grandma! How many?

GRANDMA: *(Smiles back.)* None, actually.

DENITA: *(With a note of triumph.)* I rest my case! *(GRANDMA continues her work. DENITA goes over to the candy dish and gets a peanut butter ball.)* So! When is Mr. Swanson going to be here?

GRANDMA: *(Surprised.)* What? Did you say, "Mr. Swanson"? It's nice to know that everyone doesn't call him Grumpy Gus.

DENITA: *(Seriously.)* Grandma G., I've never called him Grumpy Gus! All the other kids do, I suppose. *(SHE pauses for a moment and gets another piece of candy, but she doesn't eat it.)* I know he's mean, but Grandma, something had to make him that way! Actually, I prayed and asked Jesus to send Gus, I mean Mr. Swanson, to our home.

GRANDMA: Are you kidding? *(SHE laughs.)* You are something else, Denita! I'm so proud of you! I suppose all the other families adopting patients were praying, "Oh Lord! Send us anyone, but please, don't send us Gus?!" *(SHE looks at the candy in DENITA's hand.)* You had better eat that before it melts.

DENITA: *(Puts it in HER mouth.)* So! You never said when he was coming.

GRANDMA: *(Smiles and tousles DENITA's hair.)* Our guest of honor will be here in about an hour.

DENITA: *(Excited.)* I can hardly wait! This is great, Grandma! *(SHE kisses her GRANDMA on the cheek as she exits USL.)*

*(In a few moments JAMIE and ALEX enter from USL.)*

JAMIE: What's Denita so excited for? She about flattened us running up the stairs!

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GRANDMA: Believe it or not, she's excited about our house guest!

ALEX: *(Shakes HIS head.)* I always knew that girl was strange! *(GRANDMA gives HIM a disapproving look.)*

JAMIE: *(Quickly.)* See you later, Grandma G.! We're going to the church to finish all the props for the Christmas program tomorrow night.

ALEX: Yeah! I sure don't want to be here when ol' Grumpy Gus comes around! What a bummer!

GRANDMA: Alex! Aren't you forgetting that Christians are supposed to show love?

ALEX: You've never met Grumpy Gus! *(GRANDMA frowns and puts her hands on her hips.)* Oh, Grandma G.! I see what you're saying. And you are right! But you've never seen Grumpy...I mean, Mr. Swanson, in action.

GRANDMA: All I know is what I've heard from you kids.

ALEX: Aha! Let me just give you a taste of what's in store! *(HE goes over to the easy chair and sits. He talks like an old man.)* Get them kids outta my room! Why, if I couldn't sing no better than that, I'd have my vocal chords cut out! And why in the world did they bring fruit baskets? It'll take me five years to chew all that fruit! And nuts! What am I supposed to do with nuts? Crack 'em with my false teeth? Nurse! Get these pesky children outta my face! Sorry little-

GRANDMA: *(Interrupting quickly.)* That's enough, Alex!

ALEX: *(Comes to HIMSELF.)* Oh. *(Smiles.)* Sorry! I got carried away. *(Rises.)* Come on, James. Let's make like a banana and split! I'm really gonna be praying for you, Grandma, cause you're sure gonna need it!

*(JAMES and ALEX quickly exit SR. JAMIE grabs his coat as he goes.)*

GRANDMA: That boy! *(SHE sighs and resumes her housework.)*

*(In a few moments CANDACE enters SR with a bag of groceries.)*

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