

A Stranger for Christmas

*Dramatized by Carol Lynn Pearson
from her book by the same title*

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Florence and Myrna, residents of a rest home in Pasadena, make up a story to test Myrna's children. Florence has never had a real family Christmas. Myrna had years of storybook Christmases with her five children who live in Idaho, but now her health needs have brought her to a warmer climate. Florence fantasizes that a family would come along and take her in for Christmas, but of course no family would put themselves out that way. Yes, they would, says Myrna, her children would. She taught them to be caring in just that way. "Would not," says Florence. "Would too," says Myrna. "Then let's find out."

And thus is born Genevieve, a fictitious little old lady in a rest home near to Myrna's children in Idaho Falls. If one of them will agree to take in Genevieve, Florence's dream will as good as come true. She will really believe in Christmas then. Myrna calls her children one by one -- and one by one they turn her down. Both women are desolate.

In a final surprise scene that brings laughter and tears, the dreams of all concerned come true in a real family Christmas. This story is based on the best-selling book of the same name.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 7 w, 3 b, 3 g)

MYRNA: Older woman in rest home.

FLORENCE: Another, Myrna's best friend.

RUTH: Their nurse.

Myrna's adult children

RICHARD: Myrna's oldest.

ROSEMARY: Richard's wife.

BEVERLY: Myrna's daughter.

JOY: Myrna's other daughter.

DALE: Myrna's son.

SUSIE: Myrna's youngest.

Myrna's grandchildren (all school aged)

ROBBIE and JULIE: Richard and Rosemary's children.

BRETT and BRADLEY: Dale's sons.

SARA and SHELLY: Susie's twin daughters.

SETTING

At stage left is a room in a rest home, fairly cheerful with pictures on wall and flowers on dresser. Two older women, Myrna and Florence, share this room. At stage right, raised a little, if possible, is a small kitchen containing a table and chairs and a counter, on which stand a telephone, microwave, toaster, etc. With slight changes, it will represent the different family homes of Myrna's children.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: The retirement home. MYRNA sits at a little desk, writing a letter. FLORENCE sits in her wheelchair, watching TV. A television voice is heard.)

MAN: *(Voice over.)* ... With blue skies predicted through the Christmas weekend. And now stay tuned for our Wednesday night movie, the delightful musical, "Annie"!

(FLORENCE levels the remote control at the television as if it is a weapon, pushes the button and the sound abruptly stops. She turns her wheelchair away from the television in disgust.)

FLORENCE: Huh uh! I'm not in the mood for that tonight, seeing Daddy Warbucks go to an orphanage to get somebody to entertain for Christmas. Why didn't he go to an old folks' home and ask for a little old lady that he could entertain for Christmas?

MYRNA: *(Brushing her hair.)* Well, maybe because orphans are cuter than little old ladies. Didn't you ever notice that?

FLORENCE: Cute? *(She leans back in her wheelchair and smiles.)* I used to be cute, cuter than Shirley Temple, they all said. Then I grew up. You know what a woman is who's not quite beautiful? She's interesting. Then handsome. When you become handsome, you know you're really over the hill.

MYRNA: You were almost a star, weren't you, Florence?

FLORENCE: Better. Stars come and go. I was a character actress. And I was never out of work for long. *(Points to a picture on her dresser.)* That's my favorite part — the one in the red dress — the queen!

MYRNA: *(Smiles.)* You play the queen very well.

FLORENCE: *(Regally.)* Yes. *(Pause.)* But wouldn't that be wonderful? What if tonight somebody, not Daddy Warbucks – old men don't interest me – but a family, a family, a real one with children and everything, walked

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FLORENCE: *(Cont'd.)* right in the front door here and said, "We'd like to borrow a grandma for Christmas. Let's see. That one over there, the handsome one in the red dress, we'll take her."

MYRNA: *(Enjoying it.)* Oh, Florence.

FLORENCE: *(Transfixed.)* And then they would take me to their home for three days, and they would hang up my stocking along with theirs by the fireplace, and we would all sing Christmas carols around the piano, and I would polish the silver for Christmas dinner, and they would ask me what Christmas was like when I was a little girl, and they would tuck me in on Christmas Eve right along with the children and get me up early to open the presents, and there would be a few packages with my name on them under the tree, little things the children had made, and... *(Sighs.)* Wouldn't that be wonderful? I've never had a Christmas like that. I never had a family, you know, never even married.

MYRNA: *(Almost guiltily.)* I've had lots of Christmases like that. *(Caught up in remembering.)* Up in Idaho with Jack and our five children — oh, Christmas time was magic, like something right off the cover of "Ladies' Home Journal." The bright green wreath on the door ... the spicy smell of the gingerbread house ... the sound of presents being wrapped in the other room ... Oh, there were the usual tensions and squabbling, but when Christmas really settled in, everybody sort of softened and mellowed and glowed — just like the colored bulbs on the tree.

FLORENCE: Did you really make gingerbread houses?

MYRNA: Every year. Made a new one every year, from scratch. Stained glass windows from candy, Santa Claus on his sleigh out front. January first we'd all sit down and eat it. Oh, Florence, I've told you about the gingerbread houses!

FLORENCE: I know, I know.

MYRNA: *(Slowly.)* Only this year ...

FLORENCE: I'm sorry, Myrna. I know how you'll miss them.

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MYRNA: Even after they married, they always came home for Christmas. I was lucky they all settled near to Idaho Falls. But then Jack died.

FLORENCE: I know.

MYRNA: And my arthritis was getting worse. Could hardly straighten out my fingers.

FLORENCE: I know.

MYRNA: "Go to a warmer climate," said the doctor. "Like Southern California." So I moved down here to my sister's. Then she died.

FLORENCE: I know. And the children had a family council and decided the best thing was to leave you here. Richard flew down and found the classiest rest home available. And they flew you home for the summer and for Christmas.

MYRNA: Have I told it that often? I must be getting old.

FLORENCE: And then, in September, the heart attack. "No more travel," said the doctor. "A change of altitude could be fatal."

MYRNA: No more travel. No more Christmases.

FLORENCE: I'm sorry, Myrna.

MYRNA: *(Attempting cheer.)* But they're all going to call me on Christmas day. They had a phone put in here so they could call me anytime they wanted. And they're going to videotape our Christmas program and send it to me. And I've got all those memories, all those wonderful, wonderful memories. Some people don't even... *(She stops, catching herself.)*

FLORENCE: *(After a moment's silence.)* Now, why couldn't they?

MYRNA: Why couldn't they what?

FLORENCE: Come in here and adopt a grandma for Christmas. Why couldn't a family do that? Just once before I die I would love to have a real family Christmas, with a gingerbread house and everything.

MYRNA: Well ...

FLORENCE: *(Shakes her head.)* Dream on. Once in a while those things happen in the movies, but only because some scriptwriter thought it'd make a good story.

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FLORENCE: *(Cont'd.)* Not in real life. People are too busy with their own lives to bother with a stranger. Especially at Christmas. Christmas is for families. And if you don't belong, you don't belong.

MYRNA: Well, no, I don't know about that, Florence. I know a lot of people -- good, wonderful people -- who aren't too busy to bother with a stranger.

FLORENCE: Oh, I'm sure you know folks that'd give canned goods to the poor or even go to the old folks' home and sing carols. But to take somebody in? To really give somebody a Christmas? *(Shakes her head.)* Christmas started out that way, with no room for a stranger. And that's the way it'll stay. If you don't belong, you don't belong.

MYRNA: *(Takes her cane and walks to the window, turns around.)* Why, Florence, I ... I don't like that.

FLORENCE: Well, I don't either, Myrna, but there you have it.

MYRNA: I mean, well, I mean I don't believe it, Florence. I believe there are lots of people who have got room in their hearts and in their home for a stranger.

FLORENCE: Name one.

MYRNA: Well, I ...

FLORENCE: *(Staring at her with regal defiance.)* Go ahead. Name one!

MYRNA: *(Pause.)* My children. Any of the five of them.

FLORENCE: *(Laughs and claps her hands.)* Your children? They would sit down to dinner and say, "You know what we need for Christmas? We need to find a little old lady who wants a family, and we need to bring her here for three days and let her share Christmas with us." That's what your children would say?

(MYRNA walks back to the chair by the bed and sits down.)

MYRNA: Well, maybe not just exactly that. They might not just think it up themselves. But if it was pointed out to them, if they knew there was a little old lady who

End of Freeview

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