

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

THIS CHRIS MAS MORNING

THE STAGE PLAY

A COMEDY OF CHRISTMAS

TRAGEDIES

BY

RICH MELHEIM

Copyright © 2010 Rich Melheim

For performance rights enquiries email rich@faithink.com

This Christmas Morning Stage Play



ACT I

- Scene 1 Christmas at Grandpa's
- Scene 2 Bring On The Gifts!
- Scene 3 Poinsettia Mulch
- Scene 4 Christmas Dinner
- Scene 5 Caroling Round the Plastic Tree

ACT II

- Scene 1 Praise Father, Son & Whole Wheat Toast
- Scene 2 Peace, Perfect Peace
- Scene 3 This Christmas Morning

Listen to the author read this story, enjoy the song that inspired the book, "This Christmas Morning" by Robin Cain and read the novelette at www.faithink.com/TXM

This Christmas Morning Stage Play



CAST

Mom A mother of teenagers who is struggling to make Christmas morning special for everyone (one month following the death of her own mother).

Grandpa A crotchety old man who uses jokes and insults to keep people (and his own pain) at bay.

Dad Mom's businessman husband who can't stop wheeling and dealing on the phone, even during Christmas.

Leo Mom & Dad's teenage son who loves to torment his sister. He is the only one in the family who gets along with Grandpa.

Ariel (Melissa) Mom & Dad's teenage daughter who doesn't want to be part of the family. She is two years older than Leo.

Roy Mom's brother. Dewey's step-Dad.

Fern Roy's new wife. Dewey's Mom.

Dewey A mischievous and slightly destructive little boy who is the latest member of the family.

Young Grandma Mom's mother in a flashback.

Young Grandpa Mom's Dad in a flashback.

Child Mom when she was a child.

Pastor The pastor at Grandpa's church.

Usher The usher at Grandpa's church.

Turkey Delivery Person A turkey delivery person.

Carolers/Christmas Choir A group of singers who both carol at the house and sing in church

This Christmas Morning Stage Play



ACT I, SCENE I LIVING ROOM

From the darkness WE HEAR:

Dad

"Lights! Where'd she put the lights?"

Stage lights pop on to the living room of an old house decorated for Christmas. DAD, 42 and businesslike, sticks his head out from the closet with a cellular phone propped between his ear and shoulder. Son Leo, 14 with head shaved, sits mesmerized by an MTV rock video with his nose seven inches from the screen. ARIEL, 16 and Mom, 38, are throwing globs of tinsel at the tree. GRANDPA, 72, is sitting in an over stuffed chair reading the newspaper with an unlit cigar in his hand.

Dad (cont'd)

"Where'd she put the lights?"

Mom looks up from a box of colored bulbs and manages a plastic smile.

Mom

Oh honey, I know they're in there somewhere. That's where grandma always used to put them.
Ariel glances at Leo and clutches the tinsel.

Ariel

Mom, how come Leo doesn't have to help? Grandpa shifts his bifocals toward the sports page and mutters.

Grandpa

We used to have a real tree.

Dad speaks from the closet, clearly perturbed.

Dad

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

If you think they're in here, why don't you just come and look for them yourself. Leo, help your sister.

Grandpa
We used to have a real Christmas.

Mom
It's too late for that now.

Grandpa
Plastic! Hrrumph!

Mom
It's Christmas Eve. If you wanted a real tree you should have thought about that ahead of time and gotten it yourself.

Grandpa
You sound like your mother.

Mom
Why, thank you, Dad.
She nudges Leo on the floor with her foot.

Mom (cont'd)
Leo, your sister needs help.

Leo
Sorry.

Dad shouts from the closet.

Dad
What do you mean, 'sorry'?

Leo
I can't help her.

Dad
And why is that?

Leo
I'm neither a psychiatrist nor a plastic surgeon.

Ariel
Mom!

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Mom
Leo!

Mom picks up the aerosol can and begins to douse the tree. Grandpa glares.

Grandpa
Spraying that pine scent around just doesn't do it for me."

Mom
Oh, it's going to be fine.

Grandpa
Doesn't take the place of a real tree. A real Christmas.

Dad emerges from the closet empty handed and hovers above Leo, switching the television off.

Dad
You know, this television is rotting your brain.

Leo
Hey, I was watching that!

Dad
Go help your sister.
Leo pauses for a Moment and slumps as slowly as humanly possible across the room toward the sister. Grandpa looks down at his sleeves and frowns.

Grandpa
Anybody seen my cufflinks?

Mom
Let's see if we can't find something a little more in tune with the season. Mom seizes radio dial, tuning from commercial to commercial to Southern Evangelist to commercial until she comes across Bing singing "White Christmas." Leo and Ariel gag in unison.

Leo/Ariel
Oh, please!

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Grandpa
Cufflinks?

Dad walks over to the window. Grandpa joins him.

Dad
I wonder when your brother, Roy, and that
new wife of his are going to get here?

Grandpa
When? You mean "if". He doesn't know how
to drive on ice. Never did. Never will.
Come to think of it, he never learned how
to drive on a dry road, either. Anybody
seen my cufflinks?

Grandpa spies the silver ring in Leo's ear.

Leo
Maybe they stopped off at the Mega Mall.
Ariel drops her tinsel and turns.

Ariel
Mom, can we go to the Mega Mall for a Mega
Mall Christmas?

The phone rings. Mom's hands are full.

Mom
Somebody get that?
Grandpa reaches for Leo's ear.

Grandpa
Is that my cufflink?

Leo
No, Grandpa.

Grandpa
Well, what is it?

Mom
Can somebody please get that?

Leo
It's an earring.

Grandpa
Oh, excuse me. I thought I was talking to
Leo. Leo, my grandSON.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Mom drops her boxes and snaps up the phone.

Mom
OK. I'll get it. Hello?

She hands the receiver to Dad and smiles curtly.

Mom (cont'd)
It's Bob. Get rid of him.
Dad aims Mom toward the closet.

Dad
I still can't find the lights. They must
not be in there.
(to the phone)
Oh, hi Bob. How you doing? What? Yes. The
Smith project? All together on that one
big guy.

Mom spends three seconds in the closet and emerges
with a box of blue lights and a smirk.

Mom
Can some one help me with these lights?

Dad
Oh, those lights! No can do right now. No,
not you, Bob.

Ariel joins Grandpa clawing at Leo's ear. Mom starts
to hang the blue lights on the tree.

Ariel
Is that my earring?

Leo
Make her quit. Mom, make her quit.

Ariel
Mom! He has one of my earrings.

Mom
I can't help you right now.

Leo ducks behind his mother.

Leo
I'm going to kill her. I'm going to kill
her. She touches me one time and I'm not
responsible for what happens.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Ariel reaches for Leo again. He messes her hair.

Ariel

Mom! I just did my hair for tonight!

She raises her nose to the sky and stomps out of the room.

Satisfied with his triumph, Leo drops back to the floor and cranks the volume on the MTV video.

Leo

I'm not helping you anymore. I'm going to watch TV.

Dad

No. No. Nothing's wrong. Just the family thing. You know, the Christmas thing.

(covering the receiver.)

Can you hold it down?

Grandpa stares at the tree with a hand on Leo's shoulder and shakes his head.

Grandpa

You know what it's like to cut your own tree, boy? To go out into the woods, just you and the axe? Nature? I tell ya, it's a feeling like... like... like victory. Like nothing else. Like walking into a Norman Rockwell painting.

(Sigh)

Now those were the good old days. I ever tell you about the good old days, son?

Leo

Yes, Grandpa.

Grandpa

We used to put potatoes in our mittens to keep our hands warm on the way to school.

Leo

Rocks.

Grandpa

What?

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Leo

Before you told me it was rocks.

Grandpa

No. It was potatoes. Hot potatoes.

Leo

You said rocks.

Grandpa's voice raised above the TV.

Grandpa

Potatoes. Whose memories are these, anyway? Potatoes! Potatoes! P-O-T-A-T-O... He thought for a Moment, then sneered at the tree. "S. Plastic tree. Plastic garland. Plastic baby Jesus in a plastic manger. You know what you get with all this plastic, Leo?"

Leo

What's that Grandpa?

Grandpa

A plastic Christmas, kid. A plastic Christmas.

Grandpa sighs, scratches himself returns to the newspaper.

Mom

Ariel? Would you please come back here and help me out?

Grandpa

Ariel? Since when is it "Ariel"?

Mom

She wants to be called that now.

Grandpa

Melissa isn't good enough for her anymore? It was good enough for her grandmother.

Mom

I'm just trying to be supportive, Dad. She's such a sensitive girl.

Grandpa

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Ariel! What kind of name is Ariel? Sounds like something you'd break off a car.

Leo

There isn't going to even be a car left when I get my license." He laughed aloud until he noticed why his sister had left the room." Mom! She's wearing my shirt."

Ariel

You wear my earrings, I wear your shirt.

Leo

Take it off! Mom!

Mother intercepts Leo on his way to rip the shirt from her back and aims him back to the floor. He hisses, plopped down on the chair and turns the TV volume even higher. Mom turns Bing louder on the radio.

Dad

(yelling)

Yes, Bob. I think we can get together on this one. How about tonight? Oh, it's Christmas Eve. That's right. I don't think that will be a problem.

Mom

Honey, Roy and his wife are going to be here in an hour and we have to get the decorating done. You don't have time to go anywhere for anything.

Above the pandemonium, WE HEAR the sound of a cat gagging.

Grandpa

What's that?

Leo

It's the cat!

Dad

She's choking! Just a minute Bob. Get the cat!

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Leo

Oh, gross! She's going to throw up. She must have swallowed the tinsel again!

Mom

Get her off the carpet! Out the door! Out!"

They all dart for the choking animal, knocking over lamps and smashing decorations until, finally, Leo catches her by the tail and make for the front door. One step from the threshold, he drops the cat in disgust.

Leo

Oooohhhh!

Mom turns away, shading her eyes.

Mom

Can someone get the carpet cleaner, please?

Grandpa

Yeah. Might as well use the pine scent. Kill two birds with one stone. Pine scent. At least make it smell a little like Christmas around here. Dad is still holding the phone.

Dad

Huh? Bob, you don't want to know. Everyone turns away except Leo, who picks up a cuff link from the floor and cleans it off with his shirt.

Leo

Hey, Grandpa. I think I found your cufflink.

Grandpa

Gee, thanks kid.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play



Act I, Scene II

Lights come up on the living room, beautifully decorated for Christmas. The tree is trimmed, garlands are up, presents are wrapped and everything else has fallen neatly into place. Ariel and Leo are on the floor watching TV. Grandpa is snoring in the overstuffed chair. The phone rings. Mom calls from offstage:

Mom

Will somebody get that? I'm covered with flour. (Ring) Can somebody get that? (Ring) Can somebody please get that! (Sticking head out of the kitchen door). Leo!

Leo

All right.

Mom exits but he doesn't move. Phone rings once more.

Mom

Leo!

Leo

Mom

Ariel's closer.

ARIEL

Am not.

Leo

Am too.

ARIEL

Am not.

Leo

Am too.

Mom exits the kitchen wearing an apron and carrying a bowl. Her hands and face

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

are covered in flour. She picks up the phone and rubs her face, smearing flour on her forehead.

Mom

Yes? Oh, hello pastor. Yes. Yes, thank you. Yeah, it's good to be home. What? Yeah. It's been...

(blowing flour off her watch)

I guess it's been exactly a month. What? Oh, trying to hold everything together for Grandpa and the kids. Make it as much like Mom used to have it around here for the holidays.

(Pause)

What? What? Oh, no. No Grandpa didn't tell me about the food baskets for the shut-ins. How many... how many are there? 20? Well, my brother Roy and his new wife are due here any minute now. Couldn't you get the committee... uh... no? (sigh) He said what? I'd be glad to do it? Oh. Well, yes I suppose if mother always used to do it. OK. OK. Yeah. They're at church? I'll be over as soon as I can.

Glaring at Grandpa. Ariel exits. Mom steps over to Grandpa, picks up the newspaper covering his face, rolls it into a wad and whacks him on the nose.

Grandpa

What? What I do?

Mom

"Oh, pastor, my daughter would love to deliver your 20 food baskets on Christmas Eve."

Grandpa

Well, your mother always considered it an honor to be asked. And she never turned anyone down for anything. I thought you'd want to do it one last time. In her honor.

Mom

But why did you wait until now to tell me?

Grandpa

What? What I do?

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Grandpa
I forgot. Give an old man a break.

Mom
(Wadding the paper again)
I'll give you a break, all right.

Grandpa quickly picks up his glasses from the end table and puts them on, pointing to his face.

Grandpa
Glasses.

Mom
(Pointing to rolled newspaper)
Weapon.

Grandpa
(Grabbing Leo, smiling and holding him as a shield.)
Hostage.

Mom
(Looking at audience)
Diversion.
(Now looking at the window)
Oh, is that Roy pulling in?

When Grandpa looks away, she hits him with the paper.

Grandpa
(Holding head))
Pain.

Leo
(Looking at Mom and Grandpa, then to audience)
Weird.

Mom walks to the closet and takes out a winter coat.

Mom
OK. If I'm going to do this, then you're going to have to get off your....

Ariel walks back into the room with a pitcher of water for the tree.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Mom (cont'd)

...chair and get the kids to help finish everything in the kitchen before Roy and Fern get here.

Ariel
Where you going?

Mom
To church to get the Christmas baskets. Someone 'volunteered' me to deliver them.

Ariel
I can drive! I can drive.

Grandpa
That's a matter of opinion.

Mom
The turkey's gotta go in the oven now and the cranberries have to be prepared and the pie...
(exasperated sigh and a pause)
and somebody's got to peel the potatoes and...

Grandpa
We'll take care of it. Troops! To the kitchen.
Leo & Ariel jump up and start moving.

Mom
Grandpa, you too.
(Looking at the kids' quick response.)
How'd he do that?
(Snapping back)
Oh, and the list's on the counter. Don't you dare come out until it's all done. You hear me? Every last bit of it.

Grandpa
Ours is not to reason why.

Ariel
I feel like I'm in a prison camp.
Grandpa aims Ariel into the kitchen.

Grandpa

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Silencio! Macht shnell. Our is not to make
reply.

He shoves Ariel gently forward.

Leo
Even Mr. Scrooge gave Bob Cratchet
Christmas Eve off.

Mom
The kitchen.

She points to the door, then watches them exit.

Grandpa
Our is but to do or die.

Grandpa shoves Leo sharply forward.

Mom
And don't you dare mess anything up in
here while I'm gone. We've got the living
room finally together. Don't touch
anything. Better yet, don't even breathe
on anything in here.

Grandpa peaks his head out the door, salutes and
waves a frying pan.

Grandpa
Let me rephrase that: Ours is but to do
and fry.

Mom
(Pointing to the kitchen)
The kitchen!
(She puts her hat and scarf on,
muttering to herself)
I don't know, Lord, this isn't working.
I'm trying so hard...

Grandpa
(From the kitchen)
Ours is but to make the pie.

Mom
...trying so hard to make Christmas OK
for Dad and the kids. It's not been easy.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

I hardly had time to do my own things, let alone Dad's. The baking, the cookie exchange, my cards, volunteer work at my own church. Now I've got to do it all for him, too. I don't really think I can make it the way she made it. I'm not my mother. I'll try my best. That's all I can do, right God? Try?

Mom walks toward the door and nearly trips on a golf club.

Mom (cont'd)

Grandpa, put these golf clubs away. Someone is liable to trip on them!
Mom exits. Grandpa and Leo peek out the kitchen door with pots on their heads.

Leo

Is she gone?

Grandpa

Yes, Captain. She's gone. Turkey's in the oven. And the 24 hour Christmas Americana Wrestlemania Marathon starts in three minutes. Ho ho ho! Doesn't get any better than this, eh Leo?

Leo

Uh, it would if I could have one of your beers, Grandpa.

Grandpa

Don't push it, kid.

Leo

(Shrugging)

Worth a try. What about the rest of the stuff on the list?

Grandpa looks at the list, then stuffs it in his mouth and chews.

Grandpa

What list? I never saw any list. When you get to my age, people expect you to lose things. Right? Must have misplaced it.

Leo

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Grandpa, you're way cool.

Grandpa
Yeah, I am, aren't I. Heh!

Ariel
Hey, you guys. Get back in here. I'm
telling Mom.

Grandpa
Are we going to take orders from her? She
doesn't even have a helmet on. Here's my
MCI Card, Arie - el. Why don't you call
your boyfriend back home. Maybe after a
half hour or so on the phone you'll forget
about our little lost list.

Ariel
(Snatching the card)
Make that an hour and I'll forget my own
name.

Grandpa
I wish you would.
(To Leo)
Ariel. What kind of a name is Ariel?
Sounds like something you break off a...

Leo
Car.

Grandpa
Yeah, car. You know, kid: that's what I
like about you. You think like me.
Leo looks at the TV Guide.

Leo
Here it is. 24 Hour Christmas Extravaganza
Wrestlemania Marathon. What a way to spend
'oh holy night': with the greatest of the
World Wrestling Federation in your own
living room.

Grandpa looks at the tree and sighs.

Grandpa
Yeah. I bet Hulk Hogan never had a plastic
Christmas tree. Oh well. On with the
Wrestlemania!

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Grandpa gives Leo a fake body slam and throws him out of his favorite chair. Leo inches up 7 inches from the screen. The phone rings. Leo starts to get up. Grandpa motions him down.

Grandpa (cont'd)

Wait!

Leo

What? Nobody's here to get it.

Grandpa

You're going to be serving women the rest of your life if you don't learn early. Now sit down and count to seven.

Leo

Count to seven.

The phone rings seven times. Ariel calls from the kitchen.

Ariel

Can somebody get that? Can somebody get that? Will someone please get that?

Ariel finally bursts out of the room and picks it up.

Ariel (cont'd)

Grrr! Hello.

Grandpa

They can't stand to let it ring more than seven times.

Ariel

(On phone)

Uh huh. Uh huh. No.

Grandpa

Near as I can figure it, it must be a genetic defect built into the X chromosome.

Ariel

Uh huh. Uh huh. OK. Bye.

Grandpa

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

(Smiling to Leo)
Oh, was that the phone?

Ariel
(Sarcastic)
"Was that the phone?"

Grandpa
Who was it?

Ariel
I don't know. Pastor something something something. I think it was a hyper... a hyphenized... a name with a dash in the middle.

Grandpa
What did pastor want?

Ariel
I don't know. Something about the food baskets that Mom's picking up.

Grandpa
What about 'em?

Ariel
I don't know. I'm supposed to ask you if you remembered to order the turkeys from your friend who has the turkey farm. They weren't in the baskets.

WE HEAR a car screech and garbage cans crash.

Grandpa
Shoot. I'll order them right away.
Rising, he looks at his sleeve.

Grandpa (cont'd)
Has anyone seen my other cufflink?

Ariel rushes to the window.

Ariel
Uncle Roy's here.

Grandpa
Fool kid never did learn how to drive on ice.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Dad walks into room with another phone toward the door.

Dad

Gotta go, Bob. Brother-in-law and his new wife are here. You know. Yeah. The family thing. OK, I'll see if I can slip away for a while to talk about that Andersen Window account. Maybe tomorrow. What? Oooo, you're right. It's Christmas.

(Pause)

Better not make it until after ten.

Uncle Roy and Aunt Fern are standing in the entry with arms full of packages and luggage as the door swings open.

Dad

Roy! Fern, how are ya?

Leo

Hey, Uncle Roy! Can you show us again how you thread spaghetti from one nostril to the other.

Ariel

Oh, gross up.

Grandpa

What? Does he floss his brain that way?

Roy

Hey Dad, how are you?

Grandpa

(A two-syllable moan)

Dad

So how's business going?

Roy

Fine. Fine. Where's Martha?

Dad

She's out doing some last minute deliveries. You know, the church thing.

Roy

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Uh, say... Fern and I have a little...

Fern
Surprise...

Roy
Yeah, surprise with us this Christmas.

Leo/Ariel
All right!

Grandpa
I don't want another cat in this house
until I kill the last one you gave me.

Dad
Well, Xmas is a time for surprises.

Roy
(Reluctant)
Uh, yeah. Well, to tell you the truth...

Fern
What he's trying to say is, my ex...

Roy
Her ex...

Fern
He ran off with his karate instructor for
the holidays...

Roy
Big woman. Strong woman.

Fern
...to Pango Pango...

Roy
Kind of at the last minute. Big woman.

Grandpa
Pango Pango?

Fern
And we weren't planning on it but...

Roy
Ummm, what we mean to say is...

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Fern

What we're trying to say is... well...

Roy and Fern look at each other and cringe.

Fern/Roy

We had to bring Dewey with us.

Music hits a melodramatic note and all look at audience.

Everyone

Dewey!

Grandpa

He still owes me \$746 for the chandelier at the funeral home!

Dewey bursts through the doors, yelling at the top of his lungs.

dewey

Where's my presents?

SONG: Bring On The Gifts

As the song progresses, Dewey moves through house accidentally knocking over the tree, bumping books and pictures off shelves and basically undecorating everything. At the last line of the song Mom enters.

Dewey

So bring on the gifts!

Mom

I'm home!

The door slams, a picture on the wall falls down and Mom's smile turns to horror. She drops the food baskets in her hands. Lights fade and she speaks under her breath.

Mom

Dewey.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play



Act I, Scene III

Lights come up on a clean and orderly living room. Mom and Ariel are redecorating the tree. Grandpa is transplanting a knocked-over poinsettia. No one else is in the room yet.

Ariel

Couldn't we just leave him in the car?

Dad

He's only going to be here for three days.

Grandpa

Three days? It only took the Hindenburg only three minutes to explode and turn to ash.

Dad

Grandpa...

Ariel

We could bring his food out to the car. I'd even cook it for him. Dad looks up as if considering it for a Moment.

Dad

Yeah, we could, couldn't we.

(Snapping out of it.))

What am I saying? No, Dewey is a member of this family now. That means he's welcome in this house.

Ariel

But, Dad...

Dad

Quiet. Here they come.

Dewey and Leo enter from the kitchen carrying food to the table.

Leo

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Yeah, it was really gross. So keep the cat away from the Christmas tree. Especially from the tinsel. Ya got it?

Dewey

Got it.

Leo exits. Dewey looks around for the cat, picks up a piece of tinsel from the floor, smiles a mischievous smile and dangles the tinsel.

Dewey (cont'd)

Kitty, kitty. Here kitty, kitty.

Grandpa works to repot the tipped poinsettia.

Grandpa

You know, Dewey, I used to have other grandchildren.

Dewey

Oh yeah?

Grandpa

Did you ever hear the story of the old widowman who used to lock little neighbor children in the furnace and turn them into fertilizer ash for his flowers?

Dewey

No.

Grandpa

Story goes, he had the prettiest poinsettias in the county.

(Leaning in to Dewey)

This county.

(Nodding)

This county, Dewey.

Dewey gulps. Grandpa looks back to his plant.

Grandpa (cont'd)

Gol-darnit. If this plant doesn't need a good dose of fertilizer right now.

Drooping a bit, don't you think?

WE HEAR the phone ring. Dewey & Mom talk simultaneously.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Dewey
I think I'll get the phone.

Mom
Can someone get the phone?

Dewey
Hello?

Mom exits the kitchen with platters full of food.

Mom
Who is it, Dewey?

Dewey
It's the turkey farm. They're bringing the turkeys for your food baskets. How many do you want?

Mom
Twenty.

Dewey
(To the phone)
Twenty.

Mom
(To Grandpa, Dad & Ariel)
Can you guys come in and help me, please.

Mom, Grandpa, Dad and Ariel exit. Dewey whispers into phone.

Dewey
What kind of turkeys are they?
(Flashing an evil smile)
Oh, no. No! They got to be fresh. Yeah. Real fresh. We want live ones. Yeah. No. We want to kill them ourselves. Yeah. OK. Hurry them over, it's almost time for dinner. OK. Goodbye.

Mom exits the kitchen with another platter of food.

Mom
Thank you for answering the phone, Dewey.

Dewey
(Sickeningly sweet)

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

It's my pleasure to be of service.

Mom
They gonna bring the turkeys?

Dewey
Any time now, Aunt Martha. Any time.

Roy
What a fine young man.

Fern
See! Dewey can be very helpful.

Dewey
(Smiling to audience)
Any time.

Dewey glances around room, picking a piece of tinsel off the tree.

dewey (cont'd)
Kitty kitty.



Act I, Scene IV

The family is gathered around the beautifully prepared Christmas table waiting for Mom to bring in the turkey. Ariel dips her finger into the gravy boat.

Ariel
This gravy doesn't taste like grandma.

Leo
I hope not.

Ariel
Hope not what?

Leo

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

That it doesn't taste like grandma. She's dead.

Dad

Leo!

Leo

Well, she is.

Mom enters with a beautifully basted turkey. Everyone 'ooo's and ahh's. Dad lights candles and dims the room lights.

Dad

Can you say 'grace' Dad?

Grandpa

I'd rather not. Anyone seen my other cufflink?

Mom

Come on, pop. It's tradition.

Grandpa

(Winking at Leo)

OK, grace!

Mom

Da-ad!

Fern

Hats off, Dewey.

Dewey

Why?

Roy

That's just the way we do it here.

Dewey

Why?

Grandpa

God can hear you better.

Dewey

Oh.

Mom

How about if everyone holds hands?

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

All but Dewey and Ariel hold hands.

Dewey
No way I'm holding hands with a girl.

Fern
Dewey!

Ariel
I'm not a girl. I'm a woman.

Leo
Ha!

Dewey
No way I'm holding hands!

Mom spies the turkey and attaches Dewey's hand to one leg and Ariel's to the other, completing the circle.

Mom
OK, Grandpa.

Grandpa
Do I have to?

Mom stares at him. He folds his hands and bows.

Grandpa (cont'd)
OK. OK. Ah, bless us oh Lord and these thy gifts which we are about to receive through Christ our Lord. Ummm... on this blessed night we are mindful of those who have little or nothing before them. And... ah... on this first Christmas without our dear Grandma Melissa...
(clearing his throat))
...we pause to... to... we are...
(choking up)

Mom
It's OK Dad.

Leo
We all hope she's having a hell-of-a...

Mom elbows Leo.

Leo (cont'd)

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

...heck of a first Christmas up there with you and Jesus and all the rest of your company of heavenly ghosts. And... Amen.

Everyone
Amen.

Mom
Heavenly hosts.

Fern inspects her plastic goblet.

Fern
Oh, what a lovely table you've set.
And your crystal, is it Bohemian?

Mom
No, I couldn't find any of Mom's good crystal...

Grandpa
I packed it away.

Mom
...so I used Grandpa's next favorite.
(Smirking at Grandpa)
It's plastic.

Grandpa stares at his goblet in disbelief and taps it with a fork.

Dewey
Gramps, is your dead wife in heaven?

Grandpa
Don't call me gramps.

Fern
What would you like Dewey to call you?

Grandpa
How about long distance?

Mom
Dad!

Grandpa
All my life I've enjoyed annoying people,
and now suddenly you want me to just up
and stop?

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Mom
(Unamused)
Answer the boy, Dad.

Grandpa
What was the question?

Dewey
Is grandma Melissa in heaven?

Grandpa
Damn right.

Mom
Dad!

Grandpa
Well she'd better be. After all the time
she spent down here making the
arrangements.

Leo
If she is, I bet the angels are sure
having better gravy than we are.

Dad
Leo!

Ariel
(Sarcastic)
Well, maybe we just should have had
Grandma leave her deathbed at the hospital
and freeze us a batch before she kicked
off.

Dad
That's about enough.

Leo
Do you think she would have?

Mom
Leo!

Grandpa
Actually, she probably would have if you
had asked her. That's just the kind of
lady she was.

Ariel

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Don't say lady. Say woman.

Grandpa
Your grandma was a lady.

Ariel
Woman.

Grandpa
A 'lady' in the true sense of the word.

Mom
Would you guys knock it off please. Its
Christmas. Let's talk about something
else.

Dewey
I want to open my presents.

Roy
We already told you, Dewey, at this house
we don't open presents until Christmas
morning.

Dewey
No fair!

Grandpa
That's the way we've done it since your
Dad and Auntie Martha were little and
that's the way we'll do it now.

Dewey
Who thought that stupid idea up?

Grandpa
I did.

Dewey
Stupid.

Grandpa
(Waving a butter knife)
Look, kid, I'm trying really hard to be
civil here, but you're making it very
difficult for me.

Fern
Roy!

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Roy
(Matter of fact)
Leave the boy alone, Grandpa.

Dewey
What's 'civil'?

Leo
That means trying to be nice even though
he'd really rather cut your little tongue
out with a butter knife.

Fern
Can we please quit picking on Dewey?

Dewey
My 'real' Dad always lets me open presents
on Christmas Eve when I'm at his house.

Roy
Well, you're not at his house.

Grandpa
We could make arrangements.

Dewey
My 'real' Dad always lets me do anything I
want.

Grandpa
Maybe that's your problem.

Mom
Can we please change the subject?

Grandpa
(Under his breath)
Little fart.

Mom glares up at Grandpa.

Ariel
Abraham Lincoln said that if you can't say
anything nice about someone, you shouldn't
say anything at all.

The family eats in silence for 10 seconds.

Leo

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

If that's the case, it looks like it's going to be a real 'silent night'.

The meal continues on in silence for 20 seconds. Dewey sticks his tongue out at Grandpa. Grandpa sticks it back at him.

Fern

I really like the way you've decorated here. It's very festive. Especially the tree.

Grandpa

Plastic.

There is another pause as people eat and glare at each other.

Ariel

I read in the Unofficial US Census that there are 94,135,860 homes with real trees in America but 97,978,140 with artificial trees.

Mom

That's nice, dear.

Grandpa

Fascinating. Pass the cranberries.

Ariel

Artificial trees are more popular among the elderly, less affluent and less educated.

Grandpa

(Looking at Mom)

Less educated. It figures. Pass the stuffing.

Dad

Say, as long as we're all together this might be a good time to talk about what to do with your mother's memorials.

Mom

Not now, dear.

Grandpa

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

No, that's fine. Now's as good a time as any.

Dewey

Do we have to talk about dead people at Christmas? I want to open presents.

Grandpa

She's not a dead person. She's your dead step-grandmother.

Fern

Dead grandmother.

Ariel

Could we not talk about 'dead'?

Leo

Pass the dead turkey, please.

Roy

What were you thinking about as far as memorials?

Dad

Well, we could send it...

Grandpa

How much is in there?

Dad

So far there's about four hundred dollars.

Grandpa

Four hundred? Is that all? I got a bunch of cheap friends.

Dad

I thought we might use it at your church to help with the carpet fund.

Grandpa

Your mother was against the carpet fund.

Mom

Or the sanctuary renovation.

Grandpa

She liked the sanctuary just the way it was.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Ariel

How about the youth fund?

Grandpa

Your grandmother hated kids.

Ariel

Did not!

Grandpa

Did too.

Leo

I got an idea. Why don't we donate it to flood relief?

Grandpa

Now there's a thought. Your grandmother always did like a good disaster.

Dewey

Is that why she married you, Gramps?

Grandpa holds up the knife.

Grandpa

You're getting awfully close to the poinsettia pot, boy.

Mom

Do we have to talk about this, now?

Dad

Why not? Christmas is a time for giving, isn't it?

Mom

Yes, and it's giving me a headache.

Roy

Martha tells me you haven't gone out much since the funeral. I'm a bit concerned. You should be doing more with your friends instead of sitting around here all day watching soap operas and ball games.

Grandpa

(Defending himself)

I also watch the weather channel.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Mom

You know what he means.

Grandpa

What else are you supposed to do when all your friends are dead and you don't like any of your loved ones?

Mom

All your friends are not dead. What about Arnie Wilowicz?

Grandpa

Dead.

Roy

How about your old card partner, Finster?

Grandpa

Folded his hand permanently last February.

Roy

Oh.

Mom

How about those people you used to bowl with? The Wombats.

Grandpa

Wombats? Dingbats! Besides, they're a couple. Who wants to go out with a couple? And they're moving to Sun City after New Years. Might as well be dead. All those old people...

Dad

Your best buddy, Mergen. He's not dead.

Grandpa

Hardly.

Dad

(To Roy)

Just got married to a 23 year old.

Grandpa

Yeah. He'll be dead soon.

Dewey

What does he mean by that?

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Leo
You'll know when you're older.

Ariel
I miss grandma.

Dewey
I want to open presents.

Mom
We all miss grandma, Meliss... Ariel.

Leo
I especially miss her gravy.

Ariel
I remember the last time we talked before she got sick. I had just broken up with Palo Brzinski and was looking for some matches to incinerate his lettermen's jacket. Grandma Melissa brought out Grandpa's welding stuff and said the sweetest thing to me before we torched it. She said: "Honey", she always called me honey, she said "Honey, this is a difficult time of life for both of us. Your hormones are just kicking in, and mine are just kicking out."

Dewey
I want to open my presents.

Mom
Can we please talk about something else!

Leo
Mom, if you keep cutting us off, there won't be anything left to talk about soon.

Mom
How about we go around the table and tell what Christmas means to us.

Everyone groans.

Mom (cont'd)
Come on. It'll be fun. Ariel, you first.

SONG: Christmas Means Much More

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

The phone rings under the table. Dad pulls it out.

Mom
Honey!

Dad
I was waiting for this call. It'll just
take a minute. Hello, Bob.

Dewey
(Yelling)
I want to open presents.

Roy
Not now, Dewey.

Dad
No, no. This is a good time. Just
shoveling on the old feed bag. You know,
the Christmas dinner thing. Yeah.

Mom
Tell Bob to call back later!

Dewey
I said I want my presents!

Roy/Fern
Dewey!

Dewey
Jesus Christ!

Grandpa grabs Dewey by the face to shut his mouth.

Grandpa
Your dead step-grandmother allowed no
swearing in this house and I'll be damned
if I'm going to let it start with the
likes of you!

Everyone begins shouting at the same time.

Dewey
I want presents! I want presents! I want
presents!

Grandpa grabs a turkey leg as a weapon.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Grandpa

There'll be no swearing in this house. You understand?

Leo

All right, Grandpa! Let the Dewdster have it!

Fern

Don't you ever speak to the child like that again. If we're not welcome in this house, we'll just pack up and go.

Roy

Calm down, Fern. Calm down. Dad, I think you owe my family an apology.

Dad

Can you guys just keep it down? I'm on the phone!

Ariel

I want out of this family! Out! Out! You understand me?

Mom

Calm down, everyone. Sit! Sit! Can we please calm down!

Mom jerks the carving knife out of the turkey and screams at the top of her lungs.

Mom

Ahhhh! This is Christmas! The season of love and family and good will! Now would everyone just shut up, sit down and eat! Mom glares around the room, eyes bulging, and head snapping from one person to the next.

Dad

Uh, Bob? I'll have to get back to you on that one, Bob. You know, the uh... the wife thing.

Doorbell rings. Dad, Grandpa, Roy, Leo and Ariel jump immediately up.

Everyone

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

I'll get it!

Mom aims the carving knife toward Leo.

Mom
Leo can get it.

Leo holds his hand up like a POW.

Leo
Uh, sure. I'd be happy to, Mom.

Leo walks to the door and opens it. Mom raises her finger to her mouth to silence everyone, still clutching the knife.

Leo
Mom, the turkeys are here.

Mom
Tell the man to put them in the food baskets in the...

Leo looks out the door, stunned.

Leo
No. I mean the turkeys are here. The turkeys.

Mom
Yeah. Just have him put them...

Leo
No, Mom. The turkeys. The 'gobble gobble' turkeys.

Mom gets up and moves to the door.

Mom
So, what's the big deal? Just have him take them to the... the...

She peers outside. WE HEAR the gobble of turkeys as feathers fly through the door. (If you can pull it off, arrange for a live turkey to walk into the room.) Mom steps back into the room and collapses on the sofa.

Mom

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Merry Christmas.

Ariel

This gravy doesn't taste like grandma.

(Lights)



Act I, Scene IV

The family is cleaning dishes from the table.
Grandpa walks over to closet, digs out a large bag
of mixed bird seed and heads to the door.

Ariel

What are you doing with that bird seed,
Grandpa?

Grandpa

Oh, just bringing it out to put some more
by the cat feeder next to the front
window.

Ariel

You mean the bird feeder.

Grandpa

No.

A bird hits the front room window and falls down.

Grandpa

I mean cat feeder.
Grandpa opens the front door.

Grandpa

Here kitty, kitty.

Roy exits the kitchen with Dewey.

Roy

Another tradition we have at Grandma's
house is that after dinner when the dishes

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

are done, we all sit around the piano and sing Christmas carols.

Dewey
What songs do you sing?

Dad
The old traditional favorites. You know, like the carols they sing at church.

Dewey
I don't go to church.

Roy
We're all going to church tonight as a family.

Dewey
When I'm with my real Dad I never have to go to church. The last time he was in church he got mad at the pastor and hasn't been back since.

Leo
When was that?

Dewey
I don't know. At his confirmation or something.

Mom exits kitchen, drying her hands. Ariel shuffles through the piano bench but finds no books.

Ariel
Where are all the old carol books?

Mom
In the piano bench.

Ariel
They're not here.

Mom
Grandpa, any ideas?

Grandpa
I put them in a box to Goodwill with all the rest of your mother's old stuff.

Mom

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

What old stuff?

Grandpa

You know. All her clothes and sewing and stuff.

Mom

You didn't throw her quilting?

Grandpa

I don't know.

Mom

Dad! She was making a quilt for us before she died. The last thing she asked me was if I'd finish it and give it to Ariel from the both of us.

Grandpa

I don't know where it is.

Mom

Dad!

Grandpa

Hey, I'm sorry. Let's sing.

Mom

I can't believe you'd throw that away!

Grandpa

In the words of my beloved daughter: "Can we talk about something else?"

Ariel

All that's in this bench is one old Norwegian song book.

Grandpa

Are the notes in Norwegian?

Ariel

No.

Grandpa

Good. Then play them.

Ariel

Mom, you do it.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Mom

I can't believe you threw the quilt.

Grandpa

Are we going to sing or simply sit here
and dwell on the past?

Ariel points to a song in the book.

ARIEL

Let's do this one.

Mom begins to play "Good King Wenceslas". Everyone
sings first line, then 'la la's' from there except
for the last words in each line: Stephen, even,
cruel & gruel.

Mom

OK. Here's an easier one.

Mom begins to play "Hark the Herald Angels". At the
seventh line Dewey blares out:

Dewey

With the jelly toast proclaim!

Mom

Angelic hosts, Dewey. Angelic hosts.

Mom begins playing "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear".

Mom

Everybody knows this one.

Ariel and Leo begin to fight on the fifth line.

Leo

Peace on the earth, good will to men!

Ariel

All!

Leo

Men!

Ariel

All! That's excluding me as a woman!

Leo

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

I'd like to exclude you as a sister.

Ariel

Mom. He's so mean.

Mom

That's enough.

Mom plays "Angels We Have Heard On High". Everyone sings the first line, then "la la" until the Gloria.

Leo

Besides, you're not a woman.

Ariel hits Leo.

Ariel

Mom!

Dewey

What's this inexpensive day old stuff?

Roy

Excelsis Deo.

Dewey

Egg shells?

Fern

Let's do one Dewey knows. What would you like to do, Dewey?

Dewey

"We Three Kings."

Mom

I can play that. Dewey, why don't you sing it for us?

Dewey

(Proudly singing along)

We three kings of glory and tar, tried to smoke a burning cigar.

Leo

What a little brat.

Dewey

Mom, he's calling me names.

Grandpa

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

(To Dewey)
Maybe he should have called you a taxi.

Dewey
(To Roy)
What's that mean?

Mom begins to play "Silent Night".

Mom
Everybody know this one.

Dewey
(After third line))
Who's Round John Virgin? Is he really fat?

Doorbell rings. Dewey gets up to open the door and trips over Grandpa's golf club.

Mom
Are you through with those golf clubs,
Dad? I thought I told you to put them away
if you were through with them.

Grandpa
Oh, what happened?

Leo
Dewey tripped over them.

Grandpa
(Winking at Leo)
Then I'm through with them.

Dewey hobbles over to the door and opens it. The carolers are singing "New English Carol". Dewey slams it immediately shut.

Fern
Who was it, Dewey?

Dewey
I don't know. Somebody wanting money, I think.

Roy
Singing beggars?

Dewey

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Yeah. You can't be too careful out here in the country.

Mom
Let them in, Dewey.

Carolers enter and sing.

SONG: New English Carol

As carol concludes Dewey takes center stage and sings at the top of his lungs to the tune of "Angels We Have Heard On High"

Dewey
Inexpensive day old bread!

Grandpa picks up the repotted poinsettia, preparing to strike. Lights begin to fade.

Mom (cont'd)

Put the plant down, Dad.

Grandpa
I'm going to get him.
(Lights out)

Act II, Scene I

Lights come up on the front pew of a church. The family shuffles in to the only open pew, directly in front. Leo is rocking out to his Walkman. Ariel is putting nail polish on. Grandpa is missing.

Dewey
How come we have to sit in the front row?

Mom

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Because we're late and these are the only seats left.

Dewey

How come these are the only seats left?

Leo

Because everybody goes to church on Christmas. It's tradition.

Dewey

What's tradition?

Leo

That's something you always do because you've always done it before whether anyone knows why you're doing it or not.

Dewey

How come we're late?

Mom

Because your Uncle was on the phone talking business when we should have been leaving.

Dewey

How come he made a business call on Christmas Eve?

Mom

That's one you can ask him, Dewey.

PASTOR steps into the pulpit as Grandpa enters. The only seat left is next to Dewey. Grandpa reluctantly sits.

Pastor

We will now take our Christmas offering as the choir sings a new song written especially for our church this Christmas.

Grandpa

Great. I'm late parking the car and I still make it in in time for the offering. Once more around the parking lot and I would have missed it.

Roy

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

(To Grandpa)

How come they're doing the offering before the sermon at church now?

Grandpa

Have you ever heard this guy preach?

Roy

No. What does that have to do with anything?

Grandpa

If they waited until after the sermon, no one would give a cent.

The plate is passed while the music starts. Dad's beeper goes off. Mom snatches it from him and puts it in the plate as it goes by.

CHOIR'S SONG: Christmas Presence

Following song, Pastor gets into the pulpit and begins the sermon. He speaks in muted, incomprehensible sounds as background a la the adults on a "Peanuts" television special.

Dewey

What's he talking about?

Grandpa

I don't know. I never know what he's talking about.

Dewey

(Loudly)

How much did you get?

Fern

Shhhh!

Dewey

(Whispering to Grandpa)

How much did you get?

Grandpa

What do you mean?

Dewey

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

How much? From the offering plate?

Grandpa
I don't follow.

Dewey
(Waving \$20)
I got a twenty.

Grandpa
Give me that.

Grandpa snatches the bill from the boy and waves it around, looking for an usher. When no one comes, he slyly tucks it into his own pocket. Dewey colors in the hymn book.

Dewey
I wonder what they're going to do with my Dad's quarter.

Grandpa
What do you mean?

Dewey
With the quarter my Dad threw in the plate. What do they do with it?

Grandpa
I don't know. Probably send it to the missionaries or something.

Dewey
How do they send it?

Grandpa
What?

Dewey
How do the missionaries get it?

Grandpa
Huh? Oh, in the mail, I suppose.

Dewey
Oh.
(Pause, then a confused look)
But it takes 32 cents just for a stamp. If they send it to the missionaries, they'll end up owing seven cents for each letter.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Grandpa

If everyone did that, the missionaries
would go broke in no time.

Dewey

He should have given the missionaries
another dime.

Grandpa

Yeah. Cheapskate.

Dewey stands on the pew and looks around.

Dewey

What kind of place is this, anyway?

Grandpa

It's a church. A Christmas place. Now sit
down and shut up. They're talking about
God's love.

Dewey

If this is a Christmas place how come I
don't see a single window with Santa on
it? There's not one stinking reindeer in
the whole building. They do have a
Christmas tree, though.

Grandpa

Plastic.

Fern

Shhh. You're not supposed to talk in
church.

Dewey points to the Pastor and speaks loudly.

dewey

He is!

Everyone

Shhhhhh!

Grandpa

Let me explain here. You know the origin
of Santa Claus...

Dewey

What's origin?

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Leo

That's where he comes from.

Dewey

Well, du-uh! Of course I know where he comes from: the North Pole.

Grandpa

No. Not the 'fictionary peeping Tom in the red union suit Santa Claus'. The original Santa Claus was first 'Saint Nicholas'. Nicholas was real. A fine Christian man who cared for the poor and gave food to the hungry and homeless.

Dewey

If they were homeless, how did he get it down their chimneys?

Grandpa

He didn't. He doesn't. He went from place to place helping real people with real problems. And not just at Christmas, either. He helped them all the time.

Dewey

Why?

Grandpa

Because he was... he was... I don't know. I suppose he was grateful.

Dewey

For what?

Grandpa

Well, for life. Family. For all his many blessings. I don't know. Ask him yourself tonight when he shows up tonight to bring your gifts.

Dewey pauses and returned to his coloring in the hymn book.

Dewey

Was there a real Mrs. Saint Nicholas?

Grandpa

I don't know. I really don't.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Dewey
I think there was.

Grandpa
Why's that?

Dewey
Because most old men need a round old woman to keep them from getting too cranky.

Grandpa
(Long thoughtful pause)
You're probably right, kid. You're probably right.

The congregation rises and sings the Doxology. Dewey belts out the last line louder than everyone else.

Dewey
Praise father, son and whole wheat toast!

Grandpa
Whole wheat toast? Inexpensive day old bread? With the jelly toast proclaim? Kid's got some kind of wheat deficiency.

Everyone
Amen!
(Lights)



Act II, Scene II

WE HEAR snoring heard from the darkness. Mom appears and turns the hall light on, then spies Grandpa sleeping in the lounge chair. Walking into the living room, she leans over and gently shakes him.

Mom

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Wake up, Grandpa. Wake up and go to sleep.
(Straightening up)
Now that makes a whole lot of sense.

Grandpa
(Stirring, half-asleep)
Melissa, tell Martha and Roy that they
have got to do their chores or they can't
go to town. Zzzzzzz.

Mom tucks the afghan around Grandpa as Uncle Roy
walks in from outside.

Mom
How was your walk?

Roy
Brisk. But relaxing. I should be able to
sleep now. I went down to the bottom of
the hill where we used to play in the big
woods.

Mom
Yeah.

Roy
It's a shopping mall now.

Mom
I saw it when we came for the funeral.

Roy
And the old school? Gone.

Mom
Yeah. Condos.

Roy
Things really change, don't they? Well,
I'm going to turn in.

Grandpa
(From his sleep)
I tell you, Missy, some people would kick
if they were hung with a new rope.
Zzzzzzz.

Mom
Some things change. Some don't.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Roy

It's been really hard on him, hasn't it.
This last month.

Mom

He doesn't show it. Stubborn old goat.

Roy

Tries not to.

Mom

It's either jokes or insults with him.
That's his way of dealing with it.

Roy

Dealing with it? That's his way of denying
it. Keeping people away. But how about
you?

Mom

Me? I'm fine. OK.

(Long pause)

No. I'm not OK. I'll be OK. But not yet.

Roy steps up and she hugs him.

Mom (cont'd)

Not just yet.

Roy

You know, no matter how old you are, as
long as your parents are alive, you're
still somebody's baby. Someone's little
girl. Little boy. But once they're gone,
you have to grow up quickly. You don't
have the choice.

Mom

Maybe deep inside it forces us to see that
we're not going to last forever, either.

Mom

Maybe.

(Pause)

I kinda like it the other way...
somebody's baby.

Roy

Me too.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

(Pause and another hug)
I gotta go to bed.

Mom
Big day tomorrow.

Roy
And I'm sure that Dewey will be awake by
six when the rooster crows.

Mom
Or when the turkey he stashed under his
bed starts to gobble.

Roy
He didn't...

Mom
Gotcha.

Roy
(Getting up)
Goodnight.

Roy steps away, then stops.

roy (cont'd)
And Martha? You're doing a good job. With
Christmas I mean.

Mom
Thanks. It means a lot.

Roy
Except, of course, for the gravy.

Mom throws a sofa pillow at Roy. He exits. She gets
up and unplugs the tree.

Mom
The fact is, I'm not doing that great a
job. I can't do it like she did. Juggle
all this.
Unseen by Mom, Grandpa stirs, reaches into
his pocket for his hearing aid, puts it in
and turns it on.

Mom (cont'd)

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Clean house. Cheery disposition. Smiling children. Christmas baking. Homemade - I love that word but I hate that word. It just reminds me of everything she was that I'm not. I'm trying to make this such a perfect Christmas for Dad... for everyone, but I can't do it. I just can't. How did you do it? How did you do it all? Or did you? Was that just my perception as a kid? God...

(snapping out of it)

Am I talking to God or my mother? As a kid I used to get them somewhat mixed up. Am I mad at her for dying or at God for taking her or at myself for not being able to do anything about it... fix it.

(long sigh)

I wish I could find some peace.

Mom picks up a music box on the coffee table and opens it. The song "Peace, Perfect Peace" starts to play softly in the background to set the mood for the flashback. A tight spot hits a dark corner where YOUNG GRANDMA MELISSA, 24, is rocking LITTLE MARTHA, 5, to sleep. Lights on Mom fade to low.
FLASHBACK

LITTLE MARTHA

Momma, what's heavenly peace?

A YOUNG GRANDPA, 28, steps out from the shadows and sits at the foot of the rocker.

YOUNG Grandpa

That's when you and your brother are finally asleep and your mother and I have a little quiet in the house for a change.

Young grandma

Poppa!

young Grandpa

No. It's true. We sneak past the hall, tuck you in, kiss you on the forehead and tell you how much we love you. Then we tiptoe into the kitchen for a cup of tea and thank the good Lord that you came into our lives. And in those few Moments each night in this quiet house, your mother

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

and I come as close to heavenly peace as anyone outside of heaven, I suspect.

little martha
Momma, do you have to die to sleep in heavenly peace?

Young Grandma
Is that what's kept you awake tonight?

Little Martha
No. Yes. What happens when you die?

Young Grandma
Oh honeygirl, you don't have to worry about that for a long, long time.

Young Grandpa
I think it's kinda like this: You know when you sometimes fall asleep in the car on the way home from town and a few hours later you wake safe and snug in your own bed? How do you get there?

Little Martha
You and Momma carry me in.

Young Grandpa
How do you know? You don't see us.

Little Child
I just know.

Young Grandpa
Well, when you die, I believe you go to sleep and your heavenly father carries you safely into the warmth and light of heavenly peace.

Little Martha
How do you know?

Young Grandma
We just know.

young Grandpa
We just know.

Little Martha

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

When I go to heaven, will I sleep in heavenly peace?

Young Grandma
Yes, sweetheart. Oh yes.

Little Martha
Why?

Young Grandma
Because heavenly peace is resting in Jesus. Trusting in Jesus. And where ever Jesus is, there is peace.

WE HEAR a baby crying.

Little Martha
We should tell Jesus to go in and be with baby Roy.

young Grandpa
Then we'd all have a little more peace.

little martha
Will you be there? In heavenly peace?

young Grandpa
We'll probably get there before you.

Little Martha
To get things ready?

Young Grandma
To get things ready.

Little Martha
(To Young Grandma)
You'd better go first.

Grandma
Why's that?

lITTLE MARTHA
Cause Daddy might not know what to do to get things ready for the rest of us.

young Grandpa
(Shaking his head, smiling)
She's right.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

young Grandma
Shhhh. Shhhhh. Peace... peace...

SONG: Peace, Perfect Peace
Little Martha falls asleep as Young Grandma sings. As the spot and song fade out, the music box fades back in. Mom shakes herself, closes the box and steps over to kiss Grandpa's forehead. As she does, he stirs and talks in his sleep.
FLASH FORWARD

Grandpa
Oh, Missy. No more pie. You're going to make me wider than I am tall. Zzzzzz.

Mom
Good night, Dad. And if Mom can spare some more time from your dreams to come over and visit me for a while tonight, I could use her company. Especially tonight.

Grandpa
I'll ask her.

Mom
(Turning away)
Thanks.
(Turning back, wondering)
Good night, Dad.

Grandpa
(Sigh)
Goodnight.

Mom
Love you, Dad.
Grandpa emits a two syllable sigh that could be interpreted as 'love you', but not clearly.



This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Act II, Scene III

The sun rises through the window. Wind is howling, wind chimes are clanging and the door suddenly blows open. Grandpa stirs and rises. On his way to the door, he knocks the music box over and it breaks. He stands in the open doorway, holding the box with the wind howling. Mom steps in, surprised.

Mom

Dad, what are you doing?

Grandpa laughs sarcastically under his breath.

Mom

What are you doing?

Grandpa

Shhhh. Waiting for Santa Claus.

Mom steps to the door and peers outside.

Mom

What are you looking at?

Grandpa

Winter. Cold. (Sigh)

Mom

Come out of the doorway. You'll catch your death...

Grandpa

Death.

Mom

You'll catch your death of cold.

Grandpa

The winter of my life...

Mom

What are you talking about?

Grandpa

(Laughing sarcastically again)
You have no idea.

Mom

Dad, I know what you must be feeling...

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Grandpa
(Snapping angrily back)
You don't have any idea how I feel! My
world...

Mom
Life is not over just because Mom is
gone...

Grandpa
My whole world came crashing to an end on
Thanksgiving Day. Maybe not your world,
but my world. My whole world! And it can
never come back!
(Turning away)
She's not gone, Martha. She's dead. Dead!
And no amount of hoping, no amount of
praying is ever going to change that.

Mom
Dad, what's...

Grandpa pulls a card from his desk.

Grandpa
Happy Thanksgiving, Mr. Meyer. A very
Merry Christmas and a happy New Year from
your friends at the Thalacker Mortuary!

Ripping the card, he throws it into her face.

Grandpa (cont'd)
My world!

Mom
Stop talking like that! I'm your world,
too. And Mark. And Melissa and Leo. Roy
and now Fern.

Grandpa
Don't say Dewey or you'll ruin the mood.

Mom and Grandpa speak the next lines simultaneously.

Mom
How dare you treat me like this! I come to
this house, put on a happy face, drag out
the decorations so that it will be nice
for you and the kids...

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Grandpa

Okay! You want me to say that you've done a great job? Martha, everything is perfect! Just plain perfect! This is the best Christmas I ever...

Mom

Now you're patronizing me!

Grandpa

I didn't ask you to...

Mom

You think I enjoy this charade? You think this is how I really feel - all Christmas cheer and smiles? You hard-hearted old...

Grandpa

What do you want from me?

Mom

I just want...

Grandpa

What do you want?

Mom

I want a Christmas that...I just want... I don't know what I want. I've been so damn busy that I've forgotten what I ... what... What am I doing all this for?

Grandpa

What?

Mom

Christmas. What are we doing it for? What is anybody doing it for?

Grandpa

No one asked you to come here.

Mom

Love asked me to come here.

Grandpa

Guilt asked you to come here.

Mom

(Too frustrated for words)

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Ahhh! OK. Yes! Love. Yes, guilt! Sometimes they're part of the same emotion.

Grandpa

I don't need your pity.

Mom

I don't have to pity you. You self-centered old ass!

Grandpa

Don't you use profanity in this house.

Mom

You've got enough for the whole family. You've locked yourself up in this big house of self-pity and now you're drawing the curtains, bolting the shutters and pushing everyone who ever loved you...

Grandpa

Leave me alone.

Mom

Is that all you see? Yourself? Can't you know I'm hurting, too? Part of me died that day, too, you know. A big part. She was your wife for 36 years. But she was my mother all my life.

Grandpa

She wasn't my wife. She was my life!

(Whispering)

My life. Can't you know how much I hate myself? I killed her.

Mom

You didn't kill her.

Grandpa

I killed her. I told her it was all in her head. I told her we couldn't afford all that running back and forth to those expensive doctors. I told her...

Mom

You didn't kill her, Dad! You didn't. I didn't. God didn't take her so he'd have another alto in the choir. The disease

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

killed her. If you want to be mad at anything, be mad at that. Strike out at that.

Grandpa
Leave me alone.

Mom
Don't push away the only ones who can help you... who love you. Your family. Your friends. Don't push God...

Grandpa
(Stunned beyond emotion)
God? Where was this God of ours when your mother lay breathing her last? 84 lbs - 84 lbs!

Mom
I don't know, but...

Grandpa
...wracked by such pain that the morphine didn't even phase her.

Mom
I've asked the same question!

Grandpa
Where was this God when my prayers were a river of tears, and not one of them was answered?

Mom
I don't know!

Grandpa
Where was this Christ...

Mom
I don't know! I don't know. Maybe he was hanging on a cross with a broken heart preparing to buy her eternity! You forgiveness. Me peace. Maybe God was there. That's what you always taught me. Maybe God was holding us as we held each other. Maybe God was reaching to her, beckoning her from her pain to that perfect peace she always taught me to pray

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

for. That's what you believed all your life. You were the one who taught this hope to me, Dad! Don't you believe it anymore? Is it all a lie? Some cruel joke to make the tragedy, the emptiness of death more palatable? Is that what Christmas is? A joke? Wishful thinking? Or is hope real? You do still have hope, don't you, Daddy? Daddy?

(Long pause)

Then you're right. You have nothing to live for. You might as well be dead.

Grandpa

Hope? That's all I have: hope.

Grandpa looks at Mom as if hearing it for the first time. Mom begins to cry.

Mom

Daddy, your little girl is hurting here and she doesn't have...

Grandpa turns away and Mom grabs his face, forcing him to look at her.

Mom (cont'd)

Daddy! Your little girl is hurting and she doesn't have a Mommy. OK, her Mommy isn't gone. She's dead. And now all she has is you. You!
He breaks away.

Mom (cont'd)

Daddy! Does she have you? Dad?

He turns away again.

Mom (cont'd)

I love you, Dad. But if you can't let me love you, would you at least let me love the part of Mom I see in you? Daddy. Dad?

Grandpa begins to shake.

Grandpa

Hope. Yes, But it still hurts.
(Breaking down)

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

You can't know how much it hurts...

Mom

Shhhh. Shhhh.

(Holding him)

It's OK. It's OK.

Grandpa

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I know she's with God. I know I'll see her again someday. But it's hard. So hard.

Mom

It's hard for me, too.

Grandpa

(Pause, catching his breath)

I've been such a fool. Such an old fool.

Mom

Yes, Dad.

Grandpa

An idiot. A complete idiot.

Mom

An idiot.

Grandpa

A blind...

Mom

...stubborn...

Grandpa

...stubborn...

Mom

...mean...

Grandpa

...mean...

Mom

...and nasty...

Grandpa

...mean and nasty old fool.

Mom

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Yup.

Grandpa

You don't have to agree with me. You've never been so agreeable before.

Mom

You've never been so right before.

They hold each other, half laughing, half crying.

Mom

Dad, before when you said all you had left was hope? I've felt that way before. But it's not true. We have each other. You have me and Mark and Roy. And Leo and Melissa...

Grandpa

(Sniff) Ariel.

Mom

What?

Grandpa

(Sniff) Her name is Ariel. You know, like what you break off a car?

Mom

Right. Ariel. Ariel. And now Fern.

(Smiling)

And Dewey.

Grandpa

Dewey?

Mom

Dewey.

Grandpa

I was starting to feel so much better before you mentioned that name.

She hits him gently on the chest.

Mom

Dad!

Grandpa

All right. All right. And Dewey.

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

Mom

He's part of our family now. You might as well accept it.

Grandpa

I don't have to like him, do I?

Mom

No. But you have to love him.

Grandpa

I suppose if I don't you're going to make me feel guilty.

Mom

Hey, love... guilt...

Mom and Grandpa speak in unison.

Mom

Sometimes part of the same emotion.

Grandpa

Sometimes part of the same emotion.

Mom

I love you Dad.

Grandpa

(Long pause)

I... know.

Mom

(Hitting him again)

Dad!

Grandpa

I said I know!

Mom

I said 'I love you'.

(Hitting him with each syllable)

'I... love... you.' Say it! Why is it so hard for you to say it?

(Grabbing his jaw and opening it for the words)

I love you. I love you.

Grandpa

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

OK! I love you. I love you! There! Are you happy?

A broad smile spreads over her face.

Mom

Yeah. I'm happy. I'm happy. Merry Christmas, Dad.

Grandpa

Yeah. Merry Christmas.

They embrace for ten glorious seconds of peace.

Grandpa (cont'd)

I hate to spoil all this Christmas cheer and all. But I gotta pee.

Mom hugs him again, then lets go and walks over to the music box. She opens it and the music "Peace, Perfect Peace" melts into the song "This Christmas Morning".

SONG: This Christmas Morning

Following the song, music for Reprise begins, the bedroom door slams open and Dewey rushes in. He yells at the top of his lungs, a la his first entrance.

Dewey

Where's my presents?

SONG: REPRISE

Family scatters in behind Dewey, kids tear into the gifts and sing the Reprise. Paper and bows fly everywhere. Leo and Ariel fight over a sweater. Dad opens a cellular phone and starts calling Bob. Fern and Roy open gifts while attempting to keep Dewey from knocking over lamps and the tree as he tears open present after present. Grandpa disappears for a moment into the closet and returns with a shopping bag tied roughly in a frayed bow. He gives it to Mom and she opens it to find the quilt her mother made. It is unfinished, done in reds and greens with a

This Christmas Morning Stage Play

cross inside a heart. Grandpa and Mom embrace again. Music hits a bridge and suddenly cuts out. Over this WE HEAR the sound of the cat choking. Everyones' attention focuses to the cat. They scream and chase it around the room for ten seconds, yelling:

Everyone
The cat! Get her out! Outside! She's
choking on the tinsel again. Etc.

Finally as Leo catches the cat, opens he door and
...

Everyone
Ooooooh!

Ariel
Gross.

Dewey
Neat.

Leo
Uh, Grandpa. I think I found your other
cufflink.

Music returns for final chorus of the REPRISE.
Carolers and all other characters enter the front
door.

Final Line: And this Christmas morning, dear Jesus
belongs to you!

(Lights)



*Listen to the author read this story, enjoy the song that
inspired the book, "This Christmas Morning" by Robin Cain
and read the novelette at www.faithink.com/TXM*

Copyright © 2010 Rich Melheim

For performance rights enquiries email rich@faithink.com