

THE GIFT: A NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

By Megan Orr

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THE GIFT: A NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

A One-Act Christmas Play

By Megan Orr

SYNOPSIS: Like most kids on Christmas Eve, Jessie Robinson cannot wait for presents! He is so excited, he's even listening for sounds on the roof. That is, until Jessie's dad comes in to share a story with Jessie about the greatest gift anyone has ever received. And it's not a PlayStation.

DURATION: 15-20 minutes

TIME: Christmas Eve, present and past

SETTING: Robinsons' house, Jessie's bedroom; Bethlehem

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female, 2 males, 8 either; doubling possible; extras)

DAD (m).....A man with a good sense of humor who understands the real meaning of Christmas. *(27 lines)*

JESSIE (m/f).....A spunky kid eagerly awaiting Christmas morning and the presents that come with it. *(25 lines)*

NARRATOR (m/f).....A mature, melodious voice that can read poetry with ease. *(19 lines)*

TOWNSPERSON 1 (m/f).....A loud braggart. *(1 line)*

JOSEPH (m).....A concerned new husband. *(7 lines)*

MARY (f).....A pregnant, weary wife. *(2 lines)*

INNKEEPER (m/f).....Matter-of-fact, blunt at times, but ultimately kind. *(3 lines)*

SHEPHERD 1 (m/f).....A simple country kid. *(2 lines)*

SHEPHERD 2 (m/f).....A simple country kid. *(2 lines)*

SHEPHERD 3 (m/f).....A simple country kid. *(2 lines)*

ANGEL (m/f).....A heavenly being with a commanding voice and presence. *(2 lines)*

EXTRAS: BETHLEHEM TOWNSPEOPLE in Bethlehem, CHOIR

OPTIONAL DOUBLING

DAD and NARRATOR can be played by the same actor or by separate actors.

COSTUMES

DAD – khaki pants and a button-down shirt or polo

JESSIE – pajamas

NARRATOR – khaki pants and a button-down shirt or polo

TOWNSPERSON 1 – Middle Eastern-style robes; head scarf, optional

JOSEPH – Middle Eastern-style robes; head scarf, optional

MARY – Middle Eastern-style robes with a pregnant belly; head scarf, optional

INNKEEPER – Middle Eastern-style robes; head scarf, optional

SHEPHERD 1 – Middle Eastern-style robes; head scarf, optional

SHEPHERD 2 – Middle Eastern-style robes; head scarf, optional

SHEPHERD 3 – Middle Eastern-style robes; head scarf, optional

ANGEL – white robes, wings, halo

TOWNSPEOPLE / CHOIR – neutral robes; head scarves, optional; add halos as angels

SET

All scenes can occur with or without sets. In the script, a few key props are used to suggest the set. Suggestions for each have been included below:

SCENE 1: Robinsons' House, Jessie's Bedroom; Christmas Eve, a rocking chair next to a colorful rug

SCENE 2: Bethlehem; The Night of Jesus's Birth, Middle Eastern-style props: woven baskets, water jugs, lanterns, walking staff, stuffed sheep

SCENE 3: Robinsons' House, Jessie's Bedroom; Christmas Eve, a rocking chair next to a colorful rug

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

In lieu of backdrops, we projected two different images for Scene 2 on a large screen: the town of Bethlehem at night and the inside of a cave/stable.

Another staging option: Jessie's Bedroom scenes can take place on a stage right wing, the scene with the shepherds can take place on a stage left wing, and the Bethlehem scene can take place at center stage.

PROPS

SCENE 1:

- Colorful rug
- Rocking chair
- Large paper cone
- Large storybook

SCENE 2:

- Townspeople props: woven baskets, water jugs, lanterns
- Walking stick
- Scroll
- Manger
- Baby doll as baby Jesus
- Shepherd's staffs
- Stuffed sheep

SCENE 3:

- Colorful rug
- Rocking chair
- Large storybook

SCENE 1

ROBINSONS' HOUSE, JESSIE'S BEDROOM; CHRISTMAS EVE

AT START: *Lights rise. JESSIE stands on a colorful rug at center stage, holding an oversized paper cone to his/her ear. The large opening of the cone is pointed toward the ceiling. He/she seems to be listening intently. DAD enters, stage right, carrying a book.*

DAD: Okay, Jessie. It's that magical time. Time to go to bed!

JESSIE: Shhh!

JESSIE returns to listening intently.

DAD: Oh. Didn't realize we were in the middle of a mission. What's going on here?

JESSIE: I'm listening.

DAD: I can see that. That's a pretty unique listening device you got there. Where did you get that idea?

JESSIE: I saw an old guy do it on a commercial. I don't think it worked too well, though. His family was still yelling at him to turn up his hearing aid.

JESSIE lowers the paper cone.

DAD: So what are you listening for?

JESSIE: For sounds.

DAD: Sounds?

JESSIE: Yeah. On the roof!

DAD: Sounds on the roof?

JESSIE: C'mon, Dad. Everyone knows that when Santa gets here, he's going to land on the roof!

DAD: Ah. I see. And why exactly are you listening for Santa to land on the roof?

JESSIE: Because! I have to make sure he leaves me the right presents!

DAD: The "right presents"?

JESSIE: Yeah! I've got a long list this year. Legos, a PlayStation, a new bike—

DAD: Whoa! That's a lot of big gifts!

JESSIE: I know! I don't want him to bring me the wrong presents.

DAD: Are there "wrong presents"?

JESSIE: (*A beat.*) Yes.

DAD: You know, you seem awfully focused on the presents you're getting tomorrow morning.

JESSIE: Of course! Who doesn't love presents?

DAD: What if I told you we've already gotten the best present that ever was?

JESSIE: (*Skeptically.*) It's not a sweater, is it?

DAD: No, not at all. I've got a story I'm going to read to you.

JESSIE: (*Unimpressed.*) Is the story the present?

DAD: No. It's a story called "The Night Before Christmas." Maybe you've heard of it.

JESSIE: "The Night Before Christmas"? My teacher read that to us at school. That's not a story, that's a poem. Bo-ring!

DAD: I doubt your teacher read you this version. It's the extra-special version my dad would read to me every Christmas Eve. Give it a chance?

JESSIE: (*With a big sigh.*) Okay. I guess it's better than going to bed.

JESSIE sits cross-legged on the rug. DAD sits down in the rocking chair next to the rug. DAD opens the book and begins to read.

DAD: 'Twas the night before Christmas in Bethlehem town...

Lights fade.

SCENE 2***BETHLEHEM; THE NIGHT OF JESUS' BIRTH***

AT START: *Lights rise. BETHLEHEM TOWNSPEOPLE begin crossing the stage. Some stop to chat, some exit. The NARRATOR narrates from an unseen location.*

NARRATOR:

'Twas the night before Christmas in Bethlehem town
The beds were all taken, not a room to be found.

TOWNSPERSON 1 stops another BETHLEHEM TOWNSPERSON to brag.

TOWNSPERSON 1: Phew! Looks like my family and I got the last room in the inn! That was lucky!

The BETHLEHEM TOWNSPEOPLE exit the stage as JOSEPH and MARY enter, crossing to center stage.

NARRATOR:

For Caesar Augustus the king had decreed
A count to be taken, and money the need.

JOSEPH is reading a scroll, frowning.

NARRATOR:

For Joseph, the journey would not be so easy.
His hometown was far and his wife feeling queasy.

JOSEPH: Mary, I just don't see how we can possibly make it all the way to Bethlehem. In your condition? The baby could arrive any day!

MARY: We will make it to Bethlehem, Joseph. You will see. God has a plan.

JOSEPH: I just hope His plan doesn't include you giving birth on a donkey.

NARRATOR:

Though Joseph would do anything just to please her,
They had no other choice; who can question a Caesar?
So Joseph took Mary, his soon-to-be bride,
And they journeyed to Bethlehem side-by-side.

JOSEPH links his arm through MARY'S and together, they walk toward stage left. While NARRATOR speaks, they loop back around and move toward center stage again, silently marveling as they look over the city of Bethlehem from afar.

NARRATOR:

The town from afar sparkled in the dim night
But the streets were by far a much murkier sight.
Not a room to be had, not a bed to be found.
Poor Joseph feared they might have to sleep on the ground.

JOSEPH: Let's try this one.

MARY: Oh, Joseph. I don't think I can walk much farther.

JOSEPH: Wait right here.

JOSEPH knocks at stage right. The INNKEEPER enters, stage right.

JOSEPH: Excuse me, sir/ma'am. My wife is with child and we've come from very far away. Could you tell me if there's a place to stay?

INNKEEPER:

A place to stay? You must be dreaming.
Caesar's decree has the whole town teeming.
There's no room here.

NARRATOR:

He/She moved to shut the door without contrition
But then noticed Mary's delicate condition.

INNKEEPER: Whoa. You weren't kidding. She's about ready to pop!

NARRATOR:

He/She spoke without thinking, but because he/she was kind
A place for the pair soon came to his/her mind.
It wasn't a room or a home or a bed
But a place where the animals slept and were fed.

INNKEEPER:

Perhaps since all the inns are full

You could make do with a bed of wool.

JOSEPH: This will not be good for my back.

The INNKEEPER leads JOSEPH back to MARY and motions them to follow off stage left. Lights fade.

NARRATOR:

No room for a king? Shut out? Could this be?

The One who had come to set us all free?

And yet even now during this Christmas season

How often have I forgot Christ is the reason?

Lights rise. MARY and JOSEPH sit on either side of a manger at center stage.

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