

FOUR FROM THE BAYOU

FOUR PLAYS FOR DINNER THEATER
OF FULL LENGTH DRAMATIC PRODUCTION

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Deacon Bob's Antique Shop

(If you do not desire to tackle this issue of AIDS, take a look at "Aunt Bobbie June's Tea Room." This is an all woman's play which is a toned down version of "Deacon Bob's Antique Shop." It explores the issue of Christian prejudice without involving AIDS.)

CAST:

DEACON BOB: Owner of the antique shop. He is a good hearted man who is also a bit of a con man.

HATTIE MAE: Local crazy woman. Peddles "antiques" to the various shops in town.

THE DOMINO BOYS: Play dominoes every day in the antique shop.

Fred
Rudy
Jeb
Doss.

JOHN: Young man from the big city of Dallas. He is very modern with an outlandish, youthful dress and hairstyle. Very trendy.

SAM: The person John is buying a gift for.

SETTING:

The play takes place in a country town, Bayou City known for its antique shops and history. The scene opens in a cluttered antique shop filled with mostly junk. Stage right contains an old battered card table and chairs. Stage center contains a display case behind which the proprietor, Deacon Bob, is working. In front of the display case is a table having various items: a box of rocks, a pedestal with a bust of Elvis Presley and others. Stage left has a door and a table of odds and ends.

PROPS:

Table center stage with a conspicuous box of rocks labeled "Apollo 13 Moon Rocks"

Statue of Elvis

Baseball

Various antiques

Red Handkerchief

SCENE 1

(Deacon Bob is whistling as he polishes an old antique brass lantern behind the display case. The door opens and four older men dressed in straw hats, caps, and overalls come in.)

DEACON BOB: Mornin', boys. You runnin' late today.

FRED: Yep. We was waitin' for the newspaper truck to run and it got slowed down by the rain over to Shreveport.

RUDY: Wasn't worth the wait. Ain't nothin' but bad news in them papers anyway.

JEB: I think we shoulda waited for the Coke truck to run by.

DOSS: You three gonna yap all day or are we gonna play dominoes?

(The four men go to table and begin to play dominoes. They will continue this throughout the play.)

DEACON BOB: Well, life in the big city of Shreveport just ain't nothin' compared to life here in this small town, boys. Laid back and quiet, just the way I like it. Sell a few antiques and sit on the porch in the evenin' while the lightning bugs fly in the summer night. Now that's life.

FRED: Antiques? You ain't got nothin' in here but junk, Deacon Bob.
(The Domino Boys laugh.)

DEACON BOB: *You* may know that, Fred. And *I* may know that some of this stuff is junk. But, them uppity, city slicker tourists that come to this here town to soak up its history and atmosphere don't know that.

(Door opens and a frumpy woman dressed in patched, multicolored clothing none of which matches comes in carrying a grocery basket under one arm. It is filled with trinkets.)

DEACON BOB: Good mornin', Hattie. *(He glances over at the four men and they smile and punch each other. Hattie is a local character thought by everyone to be a little on the crazy side.)* What wonderful treasures have you brought me today?

HATTIE MAE: Deacon Bob, you con man, I done found somethin' real special. *(She comes over to display case and stares at the domino men until they turn around. Satisfied that she has some relative privacy she digs in her small cart and retrieves a shiny piece of metal shaped strangely like the blade off of a digging spade.)* Now this here is somethin' I found out by Cooter's Crick. Last night I had a dream and there was this alien creature, looked sorta' like Elvis, and he told me to go to Cooter's Crick. You see, Deacon Bob, this here is a piece of one of them UFO's.

(Deacon Bob begins to chuckle and Hattie puts her fingers to his lips.)
Shhhh! Don't let no one else find out! You ought to be glad I brought it to you. I said to myself when I seen this here gleamin' at the bottom of the crick, I said: "Hattie, this here's somethin' out of this world. You gotta take it your special friend Deacon Bob. He'll appreciate how valuable it really is." 'Course I started to call them Enquirer people, but I didn't because of our special friendship.

(She lays the metal on the case and pulls up her sleeves to show Deacon Bob her wrists and hands.) See my hands, Deacon Bob. This mornin' they was swollen fit to bust from the rheumatism. And the minute my hands went down into them cool waters around that there piece of spaceship, why the swellin' just went clean away.
(Domino boys laugh and Deacon Bob is fighting hard to

control himself.) Listen here, Deacon Bob, you may laugh but I'm tellin' you this is special! It's got healin' properties. Just think of all them tourists out there that'll come flockin' in here to buy a thimble full of the Spaceship Healin' Water. Why you could build you some of them hot turbs so's they could soak themselves in it. We could call it, uh, ... Saturn Springs.

DEACON BOB: *(Picks up the metal and pretends to examine it.)* Well, Hattie, I'm real proud you picked me to sell this to. But, I ain't interested. I've still got your Egyptian Pyramid rock you claimed was the tip of a pyramid buried in your back yard by ancient Egyptians. Soon as I sell that, I'll take the spaceship part.

HATTIE MAE: *(Jerks the metal out of his hands and tosses it into her basket)* Shoulda' known better than to bring this here special artifact *(pronounces, Art-Tee-Fack)* to you. Coulda' got some real money from the Enquirer. You wouldn't recognize somethin' special ifin it came up and bit you on the nose. You call this an antique shop, but all I see is junk!

DEACON BOB: *(Looks over counter into Hattie Mae's basket and takes out a baseball.)* Well, looky here. A genuine World Series Baseball.

HATTIE MAE: *(Realizing he is interested, drops her UFO story and snatches the ball from his hand.)* That's right, Deacon Bob. Why just look at them signatures. They're real, all right. Musta' been signed with some of that inedible ink. And look at the date. This baseball must be forty years old. Now, this is a real antique. Tell you what I'm gonna do. I'll sell this here baseball to your for thirty five bucks.

DEACON BOB: *(Laughs out loud)* You've gotta be kiddin', Hattie Mae Wilkins. You think I was born yesterday? Give me that baseball. See here, these ain't real seams. And these here artographs, why they're stamped on there. This

ain't no antique. Probably came from the Wal-Mart down the street. You can't fool me, old woman.

HATTIE MAE: (*Appearing a bit flustered.*) Give it back, then. I'll find a kid somewhere and give it to him. Just wait'll I see Sister Teresa, again! She told me this was real and sold it to me for two dollars. You just can't trust nobody anymore. The world's full of crooks.

DEACON BOB: Yeah, Hattie Mae, I know what you mean. I just don't know what this world's comin' to. But, I tell you what I'll do. I feel sorry for you, bein' taken advantage of and all that. I'll give you a dollar for this baseball.

HATTIE MAE: (*looks at him skeptically.*) A dollar? What you doin' be nice to me alla sudden, Deacon Bob?

DEACON BOB: Let's just say, I feel like the Good Samaritan today. I'm generous. Feelin' like the good Christian deacon I got my name after. Now, you want the dollar or not?

HATTIE MAE: Yeah. Beats havin' to give the thing away. (*She takes a dollar from Deacon Bob.*) Well, let me go over across the street and see if anyone over at Aunt Bobbie June's Tea Room might be interested in my Healin' Spaceship Water. See you boys later. (*She leaves*)

FRED: You done grown soft, Deacon Bob.

RUDY: Yeah, like the time you bought that sculpture of Elvis made from old chewing gum off the bottom of the park benches.

DEACON BOB: I ain't crazy. It just so happens that this baseball is genuine (*pronounced jin-you-wine*). It *is* forty years old. Here, look. (*He crosses to them and shows them the baseball.*) See, them artographs are real. And so is the horsehide. This here baseball is worth its weight in gold, boys. Now, all I gotta do is find some rich, uppity city folk who done come out here to find a real bargain and I've got it made.

(Door opens and a man enters. He is obviously not from the country. He is wearing a very fancy, fashionable suit and his hair is decidedly modern. Deacon Bob smiles at the men at the table and shines the ball as if it were an apple. He steps over to the table center stage and removes a bust of Elvis from a pedestal and sits the ball there.)

DEACON BOB: May I help you, sir?

JOHN: I'm just browsing at the moment.

DEACON BOB: *(Glances over at the domino men and gestures.)* Well, if you are looking for some fine antique items, you have come to the right place. Welcome to Deacon Bob's Antique Shop. I'm Deacon Bob and if you need any help just ask.

JOHN: I am looking for a very special gift. It will be a surprise for Sam. Actually, I am not sure what I want but when I see it, I will know it. *(He glances around the shop in obvious distaste.)* However, I am sure I am *not* looking for junk.

DEACON BOB: Junk! Wait a minute, stranger. Now, granted, some of my items lack that special charm that other antique shops have, but I would hardly call them junk. Just look at this genuine brass train lantern. It is over one hundred years old.

JOHN: *(Picks up the lantern and studies it.)* Says here it was made in Taiwan. I don't believe Taiwan existed one hundred years ago.

DEACON BOB: *(Flustered, takes the lantern and puts it away.)* Lord have mercy, I've done been took again! You jest can't trust nobody these days. Sorry. Wait! *(As man starts to leave.)* How about this bust of Elvis. Sculptured with loving devotion out of the very clay he was buried in way up in Memphis. Surely you are an Elvis fan?

JOHN: Looks like old chewing gum to me. *(John gives him a look of disgust.)*

DEACON BOB: OK, so you're not an Elvis fan. How about rocks? Sam like rocks? This here is a genuine sample of moon rocks brought back on the Apollo *(Pronounce AY-POLL-OH)* 13 space mission. *(He picks up a large rock from a box of rocks next to the pedestal. The man shakes his head. Deacon Bob seems to notice the baseball for the first time and acts surprised.)* Now, this person you're buying the gift for, he wouldn't happen to like sports, would he?

JOHN: Why, yes, he loves sports.

DEACON BOB: *(Glances at the domino boys and rubs his hands together.)* Well, let me show you a very special item that came in just this mornin'. A genuine baseball from the World Series. But it's a very special World Series. You see, this baseball is over forty years old.

JOHN: *(Suddenly interested, crosses to the pedestal.)* Forty years old! May I see it?

DEACON BOB: Yes, please. Notice how the artographs are of genuine ink. Notice the seamwork and just smell that cover. It's real horsehide.

JOHN: Sam will love this. You know he hasn't been able to play sports for awhile, now. He's just gotten too weak. But, he loves to watch baseball on TV.

DEACON BOB: Gotten too weak? Is he sick?

JOHN: Yes. But he was able to come with me today. He's outside waiting on one of the park benches.

DEACON BOB: *(Looks man up and down and then over at domino boys. He is obviously distressed as he begins to have a dawning suspicion.)* You from Shreveport?

JOHN: No, Dallas.

DEACON BOB: *(Deacon Bob's eyebrows arch and he backs away from the man.)* Uh, just what kind of disease does Sam have?

JOHN: AIDS. *(Domino boys react by letting dominoes clack together loudly, turning in surprise to glance at John.)* I'll go get him.

DEACON BOB: Go get him? You mean bring him in here? Uh, wait. *(In the background Hattie Mae comes back into the shop and studies some of the items on Deacon Bob's shelf. Deacon Bob ignores her.)* This here baseball ain't an antique. I was just joshin' you. Uh, I don't know what came over me. I saw you was a fancy city slicker with lots of money and I tried to pull the wool over your eyes. Well, I just been stricken with a bad case of conscience. Seein' as how Sam is sick and all, I'd hate to take advantage of him.

JOHN: *(Stops on way to door and walks back to Deacon Bob.)* Well, this is a welcome change. I appreciate your candor, Mr. Deacon Bob. I was afraid I might get "snookered" as you country folk say by some fast talker. Hmm, maybe I can find a baseball somewhere else. *(Before he can stop him, the man reaches out and shakes Deacon Bob's hand. He turns to leave and Hattie Mae stops him just before he goes out the door.)*

HATTIE MAE: I just sold a piece of a UFO to Mother Angelica's across the street. It'll cure whatever ails you. Found it in Cooter's Crick. Go check it out. Might get it cheap before everybody finds out about it.

JOHN: *(Chuckles at Hattie Mae and then shakes his head as he exits.)*
You folks sure are unique, aren't you?

DEACON BOB: *(Runs behind counter, holding his hand out away from him. He grabs a disinfectant spray can and sprays his hand, wiping it on an old red rag that he gingerly drops in the trash can.)* Whew! That was close.

FRED: Can you believe the gall of that man? Comin' in here with them germs in his system.

RUDY: Yeah, he ought to keep to himself. Go back to that big city with the rest of his kind.

JEB: Maybe we oughta go back out and wait for the Coke truck. Them germs might still be circulatin' in the air in here.

DOSS: Ain't no tellin where them two have been in town, Jeb. They probably done spread them germs all over.

DEACON BOB: There oughta be a law, boys. Imagin' their kind just goin' anywhere they want. Infectin' innocent people. Spreadin' their filthy germs all over without nobody knowin'. I think they oughta just ship them out somewhere. Put them all together on some island so they can't bother us no more.

FRED: It's God's curse, I tell you.

RUDY: That's right. They payin' for their sins.

DOSS: I know Jesus wouldn't put up with their nonsense.

DEACON BOB: Well, I tell you one thing, you ain't gonna find any real Christian spreadin' them kinda germs around.

JEB: They oughta wear some kind of sign or somethin'. Let others know they comin'. Maybe some cow bells. *(All the men laugh.)*

HATTIE MAE: *(Comes over and stops in front of the counter. She seems to be struggling with something. She sits her basket on the counter and seems to straighten up,*

dignity and sincerity suddenly evident. She walks over to the domino table.)

Jeb, you hit it right on the head. Ain't safe not knowin' where their kind are. We oughta make their kind holler "*unclean*" real loud whenever they come around so people can avoid them.

(She turns to Deacon Bob.) And Deacon Bob, we oughta build em a colony somewhere way out in the woods and make 'em all live there away from their family and friends. That'd teach em.

(She now turns to Rudy.) And Rudy, you're right. We oughta call em what they are. Sinners, everyone of em. Why, it's God's punishment, right? And their kind, why they done gone way beyond God's forgiveness, don't you think?

(She walks out away from the table and speaks to all the men.) I tell you what we oughta do. Seein' as how you done decided that Jesus wouldn't have nothin' to do with them, we gotta take matters into our own hands, like good Christians should. *(She crosses to the table center stage and picks out a rock from the rock collection.)*

Here, Jeb. They still out there on that park bench. Why don't you just start off the stonin'. We'll teach them a lesson or two. *(Jeb studies the rock in her hand and then looks helplessly at the other men. Hattie Mae turns away from him and hands the rock to Rudy.)*

Rudy, you want to start? How 'bout you, Fred. No? Well I know Doss here won't pass up the opportunity. *(They all shy away from the rock and Deacon Bob suddenly reaches over and takes it from Hattie Mae.)*

HATTIE MAE: Oh, Deacon Bob, you gonna set us a good Christian example? Live up to that name of yours? Go ahead, they out there on the bench.

(Door opens and John comes back in. Deacon Bob lowers his hand with the rock in it.)

JOHN: Excuse me, I talked it over with Sam. He wants the baseball anyway.

DEACON BOB: *(Looks at Hattie Mae and then places the rock back in the box.)* Sir, it looks like I been doin' a lot of lyin' today. I told you this here baseball was not an antique and I was lyin'.

JOHN: You mean it is real? Is this some kind of con? For a man with the name of Deacon Bob, you sure are shifty.

DEACON BOB: No lies, this time. You see, I didn't want to sell you this baseball because of what you are. Havin' that friend with AIDS and all. But I realized, thanks to Hattie Mae, that havin' a disease, whether its AIDS or leprosy, don't matter to God. And as a Christian it shouldn't matter to me. Jesus forgave me of my sins. And if He can forgive my sins, why I guess He can forgive any sin. I ain't in no position to judge. So forgive me. The baseball is genuine and I'll make you a fair price.

JOHN: You've got it all wrong...*(Is interrupted by the door opening and a young boy sticks his head in.)*

SAM: Uncle John? Can I come in?

JOHN: Sure, Sam.

DEACON BOB: Sam? That's Sam?

JOHN: Sam is my nephew and he has hemophilia. He contracted AIDS a year ago from a blood transfusion.

DEACON BOB: *(Shakes his head as Hattie Mae pokes him in the side.)*
Have I messed up today! Sam, *(He reaches out and hesitantly takes the boy's hand.)* come over here.
Now, your uncle tells me you like baseball.

SAM: Yes, sir. You ought to see my baseball card collection.

DEACON BOB: Well, I have a special gift for you. *(Hattie Mae and the domino boys look at each other with surprise. Jeb mouths the word "GIFT?" Deacon Bob takes the baseball down and hands it to Sam.)* A genuine baseball from the World Series. And its old, too. Why some of the greatest baseball players to ever live signed that ball. Someday, it'll be worth a fortune. And it's yours. No charge.

SAM: Wow! *(He suddenly runs up and hugs Deacon Bob. At first Deacon Bob hesitates, arms away from the boy and then he slowly embraces him and holds him tight.)*
Thanks, Mister Deacon Bob.

JOHN: And, thank you. *(He holds out his hand and Deacon Bob shakes it without hesitation.)* Well, let's go Sam.

SAM: *(Glances over at Hattie Mae and gives her a thumbs up. She smiles and returns the gesture.)* Thanks again, Mister Deacon Bob. Someday, maybe I can grow up and be a Deacon, too. *(They exit.)*

HATTIE MAE: I'm awfully proud of you, Deacon Bob.

DEACON BOB: Proud of me? You old coot. You been foolin' people for years. Ain't a crazy bone in your body.

HATTIE MAE: *(Laughs crazily)* Yeah, but you'd have a hard time provin' it. Now, Deacon Bob, what I came in here for is I found this here Grecian urn over to Mother Angelica's and she don't know it, but its got Alexander the Great's ashes in it and...

DEACON BOB: *(Laughs.) Save it for tomorrow, Hattie Mae. (He goes over to the empty pedestal and begins to put Elvis' bust back. He stops and picks up the rock instead. He places it in the middle of the pedestal.)*

JEB: What's that for?

DEACON BOB: To remind us, Jeb. He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone.

AUNT BOBBIE JUNE'S TEA ROOM

A ONE ACT PLAY

BY
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FINAL REVISION SEPTEMBER 23, 1992

APPROX. TIME 40 MINUTES

CAST:

Aunt Bobbie June-proprietor of the tea room.

Hattie Mae-local bag lady.

Madaline - a woman with a jaded past looking for a good man.

Dossie Marie - wealthy local widow.

Dixie Lou - A ditzy local woman who is an avid Elvis Presley fan.

Young Woman - Strange woman who is new in town.

SETTING:

Aunt Bobbie June's tea room is a local gathering place in a small southern city, called Bayou City, Louisiana. It is a combination antique shop and tea room. The set consists of the typical odds and ends that one might expect to find in an antique shop. Stage center should consist of Formica table with three chairs. Behind the table is a counter containing several items. Prominent and obvious among these items should be a box containing large rocks labeled "moon rocks" Apollo XIII. A second table may be necessary, stage right. The door to enter the room should be stage left. The back part of the stage should consist of a counter from which the teas and pastries are served.

SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Aunt Bobbie June is a rather stoic, good natured woman, who runs the tea room. She has the tendency to get the scoop on any one she knows about and is not adverse to spreading a little gossip. However, she is tender hearted, although she has a tough exterior, thanks to her very poor experience with her husband. Her husband, Ted, ran off with her only child, a little girl named Chrissy, years

prior to the time of this play. She has not heard from her husband nor her daughter since that time and they are apparently hiding somewhere in Canada.

Dossie Marie is a local wealthy widow. Her husband, Rudy, has been dead for approximately five years, from a heart attack. Dossie Marie is obsessed with her health and although she continues to fight the battle of the bulge, she tends to fluctuate more like a yo-yo with her weight. She dresses in extremely fluffy clothing and has a tendency to be somewhat verbose and deliberate in her speech. She is very fond of relaying quotations, which are quite often misquoted. She has a rather painful past, which she does not acknowledge. Shortly before her husband's death, her only daughter, at the age of twelve, ran off from home and has never been heard from. Dossie Marie does not even speak of her and in her own mind, the girl has died.

Madaline has lead a very colorful life. There is a very dark past to her, also. Her junior year in high school, Madaline mysteriously disappeared for a year, supposedly moving in with her grandmother, although many people believe that she had a child. Since that time, she has never found a man that she loves enough to marry and tends to go from man to man, searching for love. She supposedly had a little girl, rumor has it, but has never seen the girl since the day she was born. She dresses in very colorful, outgoing clothing.

Dixie Lou has an infatuation with Elvis Presley and collects any and everything she can find about Elvis. She claims to have actually seen Elvis after his reported death. She is driving with the parking brake on; the lights are on but no one is home; etc.

Hattie Mae is a local bag woman. Most people have no difficulty concluding that she is absolutely insane. Hattie Mae wanders the streets of the city collecting and trading, mostly junk, which she sometimes tries to pass off as antiques or special articles of often divine qualities. She is a rather frumpy woman dressed in multi-colored outfit that appears to be put together from rags. She pushes a shopping cart around town. As will be discovered in the play, Hattie Mae is not quite as insane as people make her out to be.

The Young Woman is a new woman that has come to visit in town. She is dressed very provocatively. Her eye is set on finding love in all the right places.

What happens when the young woman meets up with three prejudiced Christians is both enlightening and sobering. It seems the only loving Christians in the group are the two least likely candidates, Dixie Lou and Hattie Mae.

SCENE 1

Opens with Dossie Marie entering the shop and primly crossing to the table. She is dressed in a bright pink, crushed velvet jogging suit and matching walking shoes. A medal hangs around her neck on a red and blue ribbon. Madaline is sitting at the table, stage right sipping on coffee.

BOBBIE JUNE: Good mornin' Dossie Marie. You're early today.

DOSSIE MARIE: It is true that I am out of my normal routine, but I will adjust in time. Yesterday, those boys standing on the corner waiting for the school bus were staring at me. Again! And I was not going to subject myself to such wanton disrespect today. Therefore, I left the house a wee bit early so that I could come by an alternate route.

BOBBIE JUNE: What on earth would they have to stare at? You're old enough to be there mother!

DOSSIE MARIE: I will forgive you for that remark, Bobbie June. You obviously have not heard of my latest accomplishment. I have just won the first annual weight loss and fitness expo competition over at Sue Carol's body wrap.

(Madaline arises and goes over behind Dossie Marie.)

MADALINE: Honey, you couldn't win a dog contest. Where did you get that fancy joggin' suit? There's enough crushed velvet in there to give you heat rash. I bet when you walk too fast in the mall, you stir up a smoke cloud.

DOSSIE MARIE: *(Aghast, she confronts Madaline)* Merciful heavens, you startled me Madaline. You're just jealous because of my accomplishments and my new girlish figure. I think I will celebrate by having one of Aunt Bobbie June's famous cookies and cream extra high fat, deluxe delight doughnut with the cashews and the chocolate sprinkles on top.

(Madaline stands back as Dossie Marie takes a bite of the donut.)

MADALINE: Stand back, Bobbie June! Her girdle is liable to give and we don't want to get caught in the backlash!

DOSSIE MARIE: I suggest you watch that mouth of yours. Remember that Bible verse about the tongue. "Loose lips sink ships." Your new boyfriend might think you have a foul mouth.

BOBBIE JUNE: Boyfriend? You have a new boyfriend Madaline?

DOSSIE MARIE: That shouldn't be so surprising, Bobbie June. She has gone through most of the eligible men in town already. And quite a few of those that aren't.

MADALINE: Girl, I ought to lay one upside your head.

BOBBIE JUNE: Madaline, calm down! Dossie Marie is only giving you back a little of your own medicine. Now, just who is this new boyfriend of yours?

MADALINE: You act as if you don't already know! Bobbie June, you know everything that goes on here in Bayou City. Sometimes, I think you know it before I do.

BOBBIE JUNE: Well, I had heard some rumors, but you know how rumors are.

DOSSIE MARIE: Remember that saying: "Where there's room for a rumor, there's always room for one more." So, Madaline just go ahead and stop this verbal sparring and tell her the truth. *(To Bobbie June)* She's dating the new preacher!

BOBBIE JUNE: The new preacher? Let me sit down! For once, you've caught me by surprise.

MADALINE: Miracles never cease.

DOSSIE MARIE: It will take a miracle to keep you two together.

BOBBIE JUNE: Dossie Marie, don't say things like that about Madaline. Maybe some of the preacher's good ways will rub off on Madaline.

MADALINE: I think I've had enough abuse today. I'll just go over to Sue Carol's and get myself wrapped!

DOSSIE MARIE: Could it be you're feeling guilty? Tell me, Madaline, does your past bother our good reverend?

BOBBIE JUNE: Dossie Marie, we've been havin' some fun here. I think it's time we left the past alone.

MADALINE: No, it's OK. I'll answer that question, Bobbie June. He doesn't know about my past.

DOSSIE MARIE: Honesty is the best foundation for any relationship. My late husband always told me, "Dossie dear, don't let the sun set on your lyin' lips." Oh, Rudy! He was always so profound and so poetic.

MADALINE: (*aside*) Fruity Rudy! He was a rhyming fool alright.

DOSSIE MARIE: I just think that any man you date should know about your past indiscretions.

MADALINE: WHAT indiscretion?

DOSSIE MARIE: Convenient how your memory lapses. Let me refresh it, Madaline dear. Surely you remember the time you went off to your grandmother's house. It was your Junior year in high school. For a whole year? Tell me, why did you gain all that weight so quickly right before you left? Was it your thyroid actin' up, or just some of your other glands?

BOBBIE JUNE: Stop it Dossie Marie. Your treadin' on thin ice.

MADALINE: No just let her get it out of her system. She's been bustin' to say something about this for years. Well, I'm going to rain on your parade, sweetie. I went off to have a baby. There! It's said and done. Haven't seen that child since the day she was born. Don't even know what happened to her. It hurts to know you got a child somewhere you don't even know. YOU know what I mean, Dossie Marie.

DOSSIE MARIE: Let's talk about something else, shall we?

BOBBIE JUNE: Are we hittin' too close to home, Dossie Marie? I know what Madaline's talkin' about. I haven't seen hide nor hair of little Chrissy ever since Ted ran off and took her with him to Canada. At least you had your daughter around for twelve years before she ran off.

DOSSIE MARIE: I said, I didn't want to discuss it! As far as I am concerned, Lydia is dead! Gone! Buried! She died the day she rejected me as her parent. Do you understand?

MADALINE: No I don't understand. Why, if I could hold my little girl right now, I'd give up everything I have.

DOSSIE MARIE: And does that include the good reverend? Just what would he think if he knew that you had an illegitimate child?

MADALINE: He told me, that what I've done in the past don't matter to him.

SCENE 2

(Dixie Lou enters through the door, carrying in her arms a bust of Elvis Presley. She's wearing a bright red dress with a large pin shaped like Elvis on her right shoulder. She has on cat eye glasses, which have sequins and rhinestones in them.)

DIXIE LOU: Girls, girls, girls! My heart has just stopped! Light of my life, look what I have found. The Lord has shined down on me today.

BOBBIE JUNE: *(Bobbie June looks with a great deal of distaste in her features at the bust of Elvis Presley, as Dixie Lou sets it in the center of the table.)* Just exactly what is it?

DIXIE LOU: Why, it's a statue of the King.

DOSSIE MARIE: I do believe that you have been taken and you should demand that your money be returned to you Dixie Lou. You know how people like to take advantage of someone with such a simple mind as yours. As Rudy used to say, "A fool and his money are soon parted like the Red Sea."

DIXIE LOU: What do you mean? There's nothing wrong with this statue.

MADALINE: What's all that stuff stuck to it? Looks like chewing gum off the bottom of a park bench.

DIXIE LOU: *(Dixie Lou reaches over and embraces the bust, cradling it in her arms.)* Chewing gum? Heaven forbid! Why this bust of Elvis is made Graceland clay! This clay was dabbed on finger by finger by his mother and heated in the oven in which she cooked his strawberry pies.

BOBBIE JUNE: Let me guess, Deacon Bob over at Deacon Bob's Antique Shop sold you that crop of spinach. Right?

DIXIE LOU: Deacon Bob? Why, no. I found this gift from God over to sister Teresa's Hand-Me-Down Heaven. And she only charged me fifty seven dollars and thirty-three cents. Quite a deal, wasn't it?

DOSSIE MARIE: I'd say someone made a good deal out of this entire transaction, Dixie Lou. Are you going to leave it here on the table or are you going to take it home with you where it belongs?

DIXIE LOU: Well, I have given that a great deal of thought.

MADALINE: That must have been painful!

DIXIE LOU: Lately, I have been praying that God would show me what I can do with my talents and my gifts.

MADALINE: He has to give you some first, honey.

DIXIE LOU: And you know, when I sing, I tend to get just a little bit sharp. And last month when I tried to help with the fellowship supper, I put just a little too much rock salt in the ice cream.

BOBBIE JUNE: You were supposed to put the rock salt in the ice. Not in the ice cream.

DIXIE LOU: *(As this piece of dialogue progresses, I suggest playing "Love me Tender" quietly in the background.)* Oh, details, details! I never was good with details. So anyway, we just opened that new wedding parlor at the church, the one with the crushed velour wallpaper and the shag rug. And they put that false fireplace in there that's made out of imported marble from down at the Sam Mart? Well, there is a place right in the center of that mantle for this bust. Just think, you can be married in the wedding parlor of our church and the background music can be the King's "Love Me Tender". And his eyes will gaze down upon you as you unite yourself in holy matrimony.

DOSSIE MARIE: You cannot be serious, Dixie Lou. Do you think that the good reverend would allow this abomination to be placed in the brand new parlor?

DIXIE LOU: Embomination? Oh no, this is not his head that's been embalmed. It's just a statue.

BOBBIE JUNE: I think it would probably be a good idea for you to enjoy your very own bust of Elvis in the privacy of your own home, Dixie Lou.

DOSSIE MARIE: Yes, there are other ways in which you can provide service to your Lord other than donating the embalmed head of Elvis Presley.

DIXIE LOU: Well, I have always wanted to join that YMCU organization at the church.

MADALINE: Don't you mean the WMU?

DOSSIE MARIE: Madaline, darling, just how would you know what the WMU does? I have been chairperson of that organization for years and you have yet to come to a single meeting.

MADALINE: That's because I'm too busy doing other things. You know there are the GA's and I occasionally help with the RA's. Not to mention last year I was chairman of the flower committee.

DOSSIE MARIE: Yes, I remember you being chairman of the flower committee. I will never forget that fine spray of stink weed that you left in the church last year.

MADALINE: Well I didn't know it was stink weed. I thought it would be nice to have something more natural up there by the pulpit.

BOBBIE JUNE: That was quite a day. Old brother Pardon kept checking his armpits the whole service, thinkin' he'd forgotten to take a bath.

MADALINE: So we all make mistakes, OK. I won't bring up that last solo you tried to sing Dossie Marie.

DOSSIE MARIE: Well my voice wasn't in its finest form that day. The pollen was thick in the air.

MADALINE: Your voice never has had ANY form, Dossie Marie.

DIXIE LOU: Don't worry, Dossie Marie. *(Dixie Lou comes up to comfort her.)* You and I are in the same boat. Just remember, the good Lord always said make a joyful noise.

MADALINE: Well all Dossie Marie knows how to do is make a noise and it ain't joyful. I hope He's got a good set of earplugs!

BOBBIE JUNE: OK girls, let's calm down. We've done spent enough time talking about our fine church. We all put in many, many hours workin' for the Lord in that church. That's what counts, whether it's done in a good way or a bad way. Whether our voices are good or not, whether our flowers

stink or not, the good Lord blesses our efforts and that's what's important.

(At this point, Hattie Mae enters the tea room through the door, pushing her shopping cart ahead of her, which is filled with all types of strange and interesting objects. She has wild hair and is wearing a patched coat that appears to be sewn from several different polyester fabrics.)

HATTIE MAE: Hallelujah! Did I hear someone mention the work of the Lord?

BOBBIE JUNE: Well good morning, Hattie Mae. It's been quite a spell since you've dropped in on us.

MADALINE: Yep, that spell ain't been quite long enough.

DOSSIE MARIE: Oh dear. I do believe I have dropped off the face of the Earth into Loony Toon land.

DIXIE LOU: Oh hi, Hattie Mae. Did you find anything interesting over at Deacon Bob's Antique Shop this morning?

HATTIE MAE: Dixie Lou, sweet innocent child that you are, I sure did. Why that great man of God sold me an object of incredible worth. Would any of you like to see it? Perhaps one of you would be interested in purchasing this object from me. Please bear in mind that I will not try to profit from the deal. If you are blessed, you may become the owner of this precious gift from the heavens. *(She holds up a baseball.)* This is the very baseball that Babe Ruth knocked out of the stadium when he broke that home run record. It's been locked away in a Tibetan monastery since then and came into Deacon Bob's possession through a mysterious route. Divine intervention, I would say.

BOBBIE JUNE: I hope you're not going to take up an offering.

MADALINE: Here we go again. Dossie Marie don't you start singing!

DOSSIE MARIE: I think its time for me to go.

MADALINE: *(pushing Dossie Marie back into the chair)* You're not going anywhere, sister.

HATTIE MAE: Well, if you're not interested in the baseball, I'm sure you will covet what I'm going to show you. *(Hattie Mae*

reaches into her shopping cart and retrieves a piece of metal, which is shaped strangely like the metal end of a garden spade. It is bright silver in color, as if it has been spray painted, and she holds it up to the light, showing it to all three of the women.)

Last night I had a dream. And in this dream, I was visited by the King. He came into my bedroom and whispered in my ear. He said *(Hattie Mae curls her lip like Elvis.)*"Hattie Mae, you must go down to Cooters creek. Uh, huh. *(Delivered like Elvis would in a song.)*"

So, this morning I got up and first thing I did is I headed straight for Cooters creek. And I looked down through those waters and I spied this shiny object. I reached in and got it and here it is. Do you know what this is?

(All four women shake their head)

Why this is a piece of the alien space craft that kidnapped the King. Look at this metal, so shiny it is unaffected by any earthly corruption. And you know what else happened to me?

(All four women shake their head together)

The minute my hands went underneath that water, why, the joints in my wrist and my fingers just stopped achin'. My rheumatism just seemed to disappear. And I said to myself, the king has given me the secret of *(She holds object up and pronounces the next words as if over a loud speaker.)* Alien Healing Waters.

Imagine if you were to leave this piece of metal in an ordinary garden bucket full of water overnight. The next day you could take a cleansing bath and clear your body of any afflicting toxins. Now, surely one of you fine young women would like to purchase this alien artifact from me today.

MADALINE: Maybe you ought to stick your head in that bucket.

DIXIE LOU: If only I hadn't spent my savings on this statue.

DOSSIE MARIE: Let me make a suggestion, Hattie Mae. Since you are obviously such a fine business woman, I suggest you set up place where the sick and afflicted can come for healing. Get you a hot tub. Drop in your alien metal and then people could come over and be healed. You could call it

Hattie Mae's Healing Hot-tub Waters from outer space. You could make a fortune.

HATTIE MAE: Go ahead and laugh at me. One day you may regret it. It's not nice to be so unkind to a fellow Christian.

BOBBIE JUNE: Oh you know we're just pokin' fun at you Hattie Mae.

HATTIE MAE: No you're not. Just 'cause I'm a little different from most folks, don't mean you have to treat me so mean. All you girls have to do is think someone is different from you and you'll start any kind of rumor at all.

DIXIE LOU: Oh I just hate rumors. For any true believer that Elvis is not dead, rumors are just poison.

BOBBIE JUNE: I must admit, Dixie Lou, I've never heard you spread any gossip.

DIXIE LOU: My mother always taught me that if you don't have any thing nice to say about somebody, you shouldn't say anything at all. That's why I've never said any thing about you three good friends of mine.

HATTIE MAE: *(Hattie Mae glances at them with a sidelong glance and rubs her cheek as if she's deep in thought)* Have any of you met the new young lady in town?

BOBBIE JUNE: New young lady?

DOSSIE MARIE: There's someone new in town?

MADALINE: What are you talkin' about Hattie Mae?

HATTIE MAE: Why there's this new young woman that I met over to Deacon Bob's this mornin'. Pretty young thing she is, too. Probably in her early twenties. Had on this nice skin tight blouse. High heel shoes. Red skirt.

DIXIE LOU: Oh, I remember meetin' her this mornin'. Said she'd come here to town lookin' for love.

DOSSIE MARIE: Looking for love?

DIXIE LOU: Yes. And I invited her over to come to Sunday School 'cause that's what we're talkin' about Sunday. Love thy neighbor.

BOBBIE JUNE: Yeah, I bet she could LOVE her neighbor.

MADALINE: Now Bobbie June. How can you go talkin' that way about somebody you never met?

DOSSIE MARIE: Well, she did state that she was looking for affection.

MADALINE: I think we need to give her the benefit of the doubt. Believe me, I've been the object of rumors before. It can be quite painful. *(She casts an angry eye at Dossie Marie.)*

I think it's a good idea for this lady to come to church on Sunday. We can invite her to our Sunday School department. We can tell her all about our wonderful WMU and GA programs. Why, she might even can sing in the choir, so we don't have to listen to Dossie Marie beller at the moon anymore.

DIXIE LOU: She liked the idea of coming to church. In fact, she's havin' lunch today with the new preacher.

MADALINE: What? The brazen hussy!

DOSSIE MARIE: Don't say that I didn't try to warn you Madaline. You know the old saying, "All is fair in love and war" And, she's probably not carrying around quite the amount of mileage that you are.

MADALINE: That little...Jezebel! Wait till I find her and give her a piece of my mind. Come into a perfectly good city and try to corrupt us by lookin' for love. Well, she's lookin' in the wrong places when she's foolin' with my boyfriend.

BOBBIE JUNE: Let's don't jump to conclusions. Maybe we should ask her why she's here.

HATTIE MAE: *(Looking out the door)* Your chance is comin' ladies. She's coming this way.

SCENE 3

(The strange young woman dressed in the red leather skirt and the tight white sweater walks into the tea room. All five women stare at her quietly. She looks around at them with a puzzled look on her face.)

YOUNG WOMAN: Hi. I'm looking for something to eat.

MADALINE: Tryin' to spoil your lunch?

BOBBIE JUNE: Madaline. Now don't say stuff like that.

YOUNG WOMAN: Ah, no, I'm not eating lunch for a couple of hours. But, I thought I might get me a cup of coffee and a doughnut.

DOSSIE MARIE: Bobbie June, why don't you get her that cookies 'n' cream extra high fat deluxe delight doughnut with the cashew and the chocolate sprinkles on top.

YOUNG WOMAN: Actually, just one simple glazed doughnut would be enough.

BOBBIE JUNE: *(Handing her the doughnut)* So you must be new in town. I don't think any of us have met you before.

YOUNG WOMAN: No. I have come to town looking for something.

MADALINE: The good reverend ain't here. He's studying his Bible. Probably studying about Samson and Delilah.

YOUNG WOMAN: Excuse me?

BOBBIE JUNE: Oh, never mind. She was just referring to the fact that you may have chance to meet our new pastor.

YOUNG WOMAN: Why would you make that assumption?

DOSSIE MARIE: *(Emphasizing words in bold print.)* Our new reverend is a very open minded fellow. He tries to greet all the new strangers in town and invite them to our **fine church**, where they can participate in our many **Christian**

oriented activities. He's such a fine, **God fearing man**, above any **immorality** what so ever. I do believe his sermon Sunday is on **adultery and fornication**.

MADALINE: It better not be based on personal experience.

YOUNG WOMAN: It's strange that you should mention the pastor. I did run into him this morning. When I came to town, I knew that if I went to him, he could probably help me find what I'm looking for. In fact, we're going to have lunch together today. He's such a nice man.

(Madaline reaches over to pick up the Elvis bust as if she's going to throw it at the young woman who's head is turned away so that she doesn't see.)

DIXIE LOU: Madaline, what are you doin' with my statue?

BOBBIE JUNE: *(Taking the Elvis bust out of Madaline's hands.)* She's just putting it over here on the counter where everyone can admire the handiwork. Right Madaline?

MADALINE: I'd love to step on somebody's blue suede shoes right about now.

YOUNG WOMAN: May I use your restroom?

BOBBIE JUNE: Sure it's right back here.

(The young woman disappears through the doors and we hear the door shut off-stage.)

MADALINE: Why did you stop me from hittin' that brazen hussy over the head with that piece of chewin' gum garbage, Bobbie June? Did you hear how she was talkin' about MY boyfriend?

DOSSIE MARIE: Appalling as it may seem, I have to agree with Madaline. He may not be my boyfriend, but he is my pastor. Did you hear how she was leading him down the road to temptation, to evil and immorality?

BOBBIE JUNE: Let's not overreact. I'm not sure why she's here and I've got a lot of questions about her motives.

MADALINE: *(To Dixie Lou.)* You had the audacity to invite her to church.

DOSSIE MARIE: Well, it's obvious that we wouldn't want somebody like that at our church. Right Bobbie June?

BOBBIE JUNE: *(Reluctantly giving in.)* Well, I guess so.

DIXIE LOU: I thought she was rather nice.

HATTIE MAE: I disagree with you Dixie Lou. I agree with these three women over here. Fine Christian examples that they are. Why, I think that woman is nothin' but pure evil. Possessed of the devil. Somethin' outta be done about it. *(She delivers these lines as if she is preaching. Dossie Marie and Madaline begin to agree with her and say so as she continues to speak until she picks up the rock.)*

I don't think the church could get all those demons out of her. I think she's beyond salvation. Imagine, tempting a pastor with immorality! We've got to take matters into our own hands.

(Hattie Mae reaches into the box labeled Apollo XIII moon rocks and retrieves a stone.)

Here you go Dossie Marie. When she comes out of that bathroom, you be the first one to throw the stone. See if you can catch her between the eyes and it won't take us long to kill her.

(Hattie Mae reaches in for another stone and hands it to Madaline.)

Here you go Madaline. You go for the liver. They say if you can get the liver, she'll go out on you like a light.

(She reaches in for a third stone and offers it to Bobbie June who only looks at it.)

Bobbie June, you can hit her with the final blow. Go for the heart. They say if you hit the heart hard enough, why you'll just stop it cold like a stepped on pocket watch.

Why you lookin' at me that way? I'm crazy ain't I? You said she was beyond salvation. Said she wasn't good enough for good Christian folks. Well let's take matters in your own hands. Let's pass out judgment right here and right now. Won't take long. And there won't be anybody that would condemn us right? Right?

(Dossie Marie, Bobbie June, and Madaline look around at each other helplessly. Bobbie June drops her rock into the box and reaches over and takes the rock out of Dossie Marie's hand. She drops it into the box and reaches for Madaline's. Madaline is glaring at her hand angrily and refuses to release the rock.)

- BOBBIE JUNE:** Give me the rock, Madaline. You know you're not gonna throw it.
- MADALINE:** I don't know Bobbie June. I'm just so mad right now I just want to hurt somebody.
- BOBBIE JUNE:** You're just mad at yourself. Come on Madaline, give it up.
- DOSSIE MARIE:** She's right honey. I'm ashamed of the way we acted. We may be wrong or we may be right. But it is not our place to judge.
- HATTIE MAE:** Now that sounds more like it. Ya'll may think I'm crazy but I got more sense in this head bone of mine than all four of you put together. Now when that girl comes out of that bathroom, why don't you treat her like Jesus would have treated her instead of like some Saducee or Pharisee.

(The young woman walks into the room and stares at Madaline and Bobbie June holding the rock. She looks around at the other women and senses that she's missed something.)

- YOUNG WOMAN:** Is there something wrong?
- BOBBIE JUNE:** Yes. We kinda drew the wrong conclusions about you. You see, Madaline here is our new pastor's girlfriend and when she heard that you've come to town lookin' for love and you were going to lunch with him, well, we just kinda put two and two together. We're sorry.
- YOUNG WOMAN:** You've got it all wrong. I came to town lookin' for love but it's not the kind your thinkin' of. I thought that the pastor could help me find someone. Someone I love dearly that has been lost to me for years.
- DOSSIE MARIE:** Who's that?
- YOUNG WOMAN:** My mother. You see, I was in a terrible automobile accident several months ago. I was in the hospital for three months in a coma and everything in my car burned up. They never did figure out who I was and I have amnesia.

All they found in the remains of the car was this half burned letter.

(She pulls out a burned envelope and tattered piece of paper.)

I must have written just before the accident. On the envelope all that was left was Bayou City. The top half of the letter was left. It says, "Dear mother. I haven't seen you for years. I hope you still remember me. I have decided to come home..."

So that's why I'm here. To find out who my mother is. And, I have this....

DOSSIE MARIE: You're looking for your mother? Could you be my Lydia?

BOBBIE JUNE: Dossie Marie, surely you would recognize Lydia. She was twelve when she ran away.

MADALINE: Go ahead and tell her, Dossie Marie. Maybe she doesn't know what you did after Lydia left.

DOSSIE MARIE: I burned all of her pictures. There's nothing left. Not even a baby picture. I told you that when she left the house she was as good as dead to me.

(Dossie Marie steps up to the young lady and looks at her very closely.)

I can't even remember what she looked like. All those years that I've spent in anger and resentment at her for running off and rejecting my love, have erased her memory from my brain. You could be Lydia. But, I'm not sure.

YOUNG WOMAN: Oh my goodness. I don't know if I am your daughter. But, what terrible thing could I have done to make you so angry?

DOSSIE MARIE: *(She has a startled look on her face as she looks around the room)* I... I can't even remember. I don't know what we got angry about. I don't remember why you left home.

MADALINE: WHAT! You mean you've hated your daughter all these years and you can't even remember the reason why?

BOBBIE JUNE: That's right. All she remembers is the hatred and the anger. I know how she feels. I haven't been able to forget

my anger at Ted. Chrissy was only two when he took her off to Canada with him.

YOUNG WOMAN: You mean, your husband kidnapped me? I mean kidnapped your daughter?

BOBBIE JUNE: Yes! Ran off with you to Canada and I never heard from 'em.

YOUNG WOMAN: You never heard from them?

BOBBIE JUNE: That's right.

YOUNG WOMAN: Did you try to track them down?

BOBBIE JUNE: Well, ah, I did call the police. And yes, ... I tried to track them down.

YOUNG WOMAN: It seems to me you must not have tried very hard or you would have at least found something out about 'em. How many years did you look for your lost daughter?

BOBBIE JUNE: Two or three, I guess. It just seemed after a while that I lost hope. I gave up.

MADALINE: Well, I don't have a good excuse for letting my daughter go. I was young. I was scared. I didn't know how to raise a baby. It took every bit of strength that I had to let that little baby be taken from my arms and given to somebody who could care for her better than me. Seems like on that day, that love died inside of my heart and I've just been rotten inside ever sense. Been lookin' right and left for somebody to give me back that kind of love and I just haven't been able to find it.

YOUNG WOMAN: Doesn't Jesus give you that kind of love in your heart? The love that can fill up that emptiness?

MADALINE: That's what the reverend tells me. I guess that's what I find so special about him. He doesn't make any pretenses about my past. He loves me for who I am right now.

YOUNG WOMAN: Well, I'm not sure whose daughter I am. But, Dossie Marie, I can tell you that I've had no choice but to forget my past. Why don't you forget the part of the past that is destroying you and start new today. Remember, God forgives. But, He also forgets.

And, Miss Bobbie June, when I was in the coma everyone gave up on me but one nurse. She talked to me everyday and kept me alive through the long, dark nightmares of my coma. She gave me hope. I can tell you for certain there is always hope. God will never let you down.

And, Miss Madaline, you've got to stop punishing yourself for what you did in the past. You did what you thought was best at the time. Take God's love for what it is now. He loves you no matter what. And so would I.

And, now, what I was about to say when you all interrupted me was that I have a picture of me as a baby. It is right here in this purse. If I am Lydia or Chrissy, then you'll know it. If not, then I am Madaline's daughter. Here it is....

HATTIE MAE: I've Been around here long enough that I'd recognize the picture. *(Grabs picture from Young Woman, looks at it and then tears it up.)* Now, I'm the only one who knows who you are.

MADALINE: You crazy biddy! What did you do that for? She's my daughter.

DOSSIE MARIE: Forget it sister! This is Lydia and she's my daughter.

BOBBIE JUNE: You're both wrong. This is Chrissy. She's my daughter!

(The three women degenerate into a shouting match. Hattie Mae interrupts them.)

HATTIE MAE: Shut up! All of you! If I was the girl, I'd head for the hills. Losing your memory is better than having any one of you for a mother. Now I know how we can solve this problem. All three of you can be her mother. That's right! All three of you can take care of her and minister to her. All four of you need a little bit of lovin'.

And, when I have decided that the three of you have changed your ways, I might tell you who belongs to who.

(Hesitantly, the three women look at each other and then join hands to encircle the young woman in a hug.)

DIXIE LOU: *(Takes out handkerchief and blows her nose loudly.)* Oh I think I'm just gonna die. This is just like that love scene in Blue Hawaii.

HATTIE MAE: Speaking of the King. Does anybody want to buy my alien space ship artifact?

ALL: NO!

"Aunt Bobbie June's Tea Room" was first performed at a Dinner Theater at Brookwood Baptist Church by the drama team, "construction crew". It was directed by Bruce Hennigan and starred Donna Nix as Bobbie June, Debbie Oliver as Dossie, Jane McCullars as Madaline, Vicki Heflin as Dixie Lou, Annie Peevy as Hattie Mae, and Crystal Powell as the young woman. Its first appearance was on August 8, 1992. It was performed again on September 19, 1992 at Greggton First Baptist Church in Longview, Texas.

THE MESSIAH OF MAIN STREET

A ONE ACT PLAY

BY

BRUCE HENNIGAN

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APPROX. TIME 70 MINUTES

SUMMARY: The Messiah of Main Street takes place in the small town of Bayou City. On Main Street sits The Calico Cafe, a small eating establishment. An assortment of local characters gather at this cafe every morning to enjoy an early morning walk or a cup of coffee. Today proves to be quiet different. Today a stranger will visit them, who seems to have origins in a heavenly place. As each one of the characters tries to impress this man with their life, they become more and more convinced that he is Jesus, who has returned to visit them.

SETTING: The Calico Cafe is a small eating establishment. Along the back of the stage there is a bar with stools, behind which sits a stove and refrigerator. Three small tables sit in the front of the stage. In the back right hand corner, there is a booth. A door leads off stage right, outside of the cafe. A door leads off stage left to a storage room.

CAST:

LUCY HATCHER: She is a lady in her mid forties. She is a crusty sort of character who is very cynical and burned out on life.

SLATS O'HARE: This is a local man who was raised in Bayou City. He is the janitor for the local High School. He has grown up in Bayou City and has never had any great ambition to go beyond Bayou City. He's falling in love with Lucy Hatcher.

DOMIE and VERUE MCALLISTER: These are two elderly sisters who have lived together for the past ten years. Domie is a demure, southern belle, who doesn't quite understand reality as most people see it. Verue is more idealistic and dreamy. However, she too is not running on all of her valves. Both the sisters

seem to be oblivious of everything that goes on around them. However, Domie has the singular ability to recite any verse in the Bible on demand.

SHERIFF WOODROW (WOODY) BEASON: Sheriff Beason is a war veteran who keeps a tight reign on law and order in his small community. He's a very unforgiving and hard nosed sheriff. He's very proud of his ability and his power. He doesn't forgive people and he doesn't forget.

DR. PEARL MARTIN: Dr. Martin was the first and only woman doctor to work in Bayou City. Many people wonder why she came to such a small town to practice. She's been in Bayou City for the past fifteen years and rumor has it she gave up a lucrative practice in the big city. The reason for this is unknown.

CROCKETT RICHARDS: Crockett is a local farmer who has lost all of his teeth. He graduated from the fifth grade and has a limited ability with reading. He has made a small fortune in watermelons, although you wouldn't know it by looking at him. He's gotten himself elected to the police jury, mainly so he could get a road built out to his farm. He's now president of that organization and quite proud of his political accomplishments.

CLEMMIE RUTH: One of Domie's cousins, Clemmie comes to the Calico Cafe every day to play Chicken Foot with Domie and Verue. She is an older lady who has carried on the tradition set down by her father of brewing his famous "Healing Waters" Elixir. It is good for whatever ails you.

VERA MAE: Vera Mae is Clemmie's daughter-in-law. Years ago, she went through a terrible trauma and hasn't spoken since. Clemmie watches over her like a mother hen.

JOSHUA: A young man who wanders into town. He has long hair and a beard. He is dressed in disheveled clothing and is barefoot. He has white wraps around each palm and bears scars on his forehead.

STRANGER ON THE FRONT PORCH: A man found in a coma on the front steps of the Calico Cafe.

PROPS:

Doctor's bag with stethoscope, blood pressure cuff, pen flashlight, and Ambu bag.

Woody has a gun and holster. Suggest separate sound effect for gunshot.

Clemmie Ruth has a purse with a large Mason jar filled with "Healing Water"

Small, black notebook for Woody

SCENE 1

(The scene opens in the Calico Cafe as Lucy is getting the cafe ready for her morning visitors. She busies herself around the interior, whistling a tune. As she's bent over a table, a man, Slat, enters from the open door leading to the cafe storage room and sneaks up on her. He grabs her and she screams.)

LUCY: Merciful heavens! Slat O'Hare, you nearly scared ten years off of me. When are you going to grow up and stop acting like a teenager?

SLATS: *(Tries to hug her and she pushes him away as she delivers the above lines.)* I can't help myself Lucy Hatcher. I've done been shot by cupid. I'm in love!

LUCY: *(Laughing.)* We're too old for this nonsense, Slat. Now get a grip.

SLATS: *(Tries to hug her and she pulls away, laughing.)* That's what I'm trying to do! You're slippery as a Toledo Bend catfish.

LUCY: I just got work to do, Slat. Why aren't you at work yet?

SLATS: *(Reaches over the counter and get himself a cup of coffee. He then turns a chair around at a nearby table and straddles it backwards.)* It's only 6:30, Lucy. Ain't no one at the school yet. I done swept the floors and mopped the kitchen. Waste of time I tell ya'. All those kids will have it a mess again by noon.

LUCY: *(Crosses to the front door and unlocks it, turning the open/close sign around as she talks.)* Wish you would help me clean up around here sometime.

SLATS: Marry me and I will. It's a promise.

LUCY: Oh Slats, you propose at least three times a day. *(She opens the door and a man, propped against the door falls back into the room.)* Oh my gosh! Slats come here!

SLATS: What is it?

LUCY: *(They stand back, eyeing the man's figure.)* A man. Is he dead?

SLATS: He looks dead.

LUCY: You can't tell by looking at him. See if his heart is beating.

SLATS: *(Reaches down hesitantly to touch the man's neck. He jerks his hand away.)* He's still warm.

(Domie and Verue appear at the door, deep in conversation. Without hesitation, they step over the man's body and head for the table in the center of the room, totally oblivious to the man's body lying in the middle of the floor.)

DOMIE: Dear sister, I don't recall leaving the phone off the hook.

VERUE: Domie, darlin' that's the point. Sheriff Beason showed up and scared me half to death. Said Cousin Clara had been talkin' to you and the phone just went dead. All she could hear was the dryer a goin'.

DOMIE: *(Looks around absently at her sister deep in thought.)* I must have gone to check the pot roast and laid the phone down on the dryer. Yes, that was it. And then I noticed that the daffodil's were in bloom right outside the window. You know, the church has wanted some fresh flowers every Sunday for the pulpit. So, I thought I could do a good deed for the Lord and go cut some flowers.

VERUE: Well, Clara called Woody Beason and he said you weren't there when he arrived. Back door was standin' wide open. He thought someone had kidnapped you !

DOMIE: Kidnapped me? For heaven's sake, why would anyone want to kidnap me? You don't have enough money in that sock under your mattress to pay a ransom. And as for Woody, he should have known that I needed a new pair of garden sheers. I drove down to Crockett's store to get a new pair. Only... Now that I think of it, I saw that nice piece of fabric in Doris' dress shop, you know, the one I'm using in the new quilt. Got three yards of it for five dollars.

VERUE: Five dollars? What a deal! As soon as she opens up today, why don't we go over and . . .

LUCY: Ladies, do you think you could tune into reality for just a moment and help us?

DOMIE: Oh, good morning, Lucy. Good morning...*(She looks at Slats with a very puzzled look on her face.)* I don't believe we've met.

VERUE: Yes we have, Domie. This is the new mayor. Ronald...

SLATS: Ladies, we meet every morning right here in the Calico Cafe when you come for your morning coffee. I'm Slats O'Hare. I'm the janitor over at the school.

VERUE: Oh, yes, of course. I knew you held some kind of political office. Now, Domie, what were you sayin' about your quilt?

LUCY: *(Whistles loudly to get their attention.)* Earth to space cadets. Come in space sisters. Do either of you know who this man is?

DOMIE: *(She walks over, bends over and looks at the man closely. She picks up his head by the hair to study his face and drops it loudly after the line is delivered.)* Why I do believe he looks a lot like Fred. Don't you think so Verue?

VERUE: You're right. Of course Fred didn't have quite that much hair.

DOMIE: *(Picks up the man's head again and turns it so that Verue can see it. After the line, she drops it once again. The man's head makes a loud noise as it strikes the floor.)* Well, Fred had that mole. Don't you remember? Right next to his nose.

LUCY: Who's Fred?

VERUE: Domie's first husband. Died of a heart attack. Been quite a spell.
How long, Domie?

DOMIE: Well, it was before the war. Now which one I just can't recall.

LUCY: *(Exasperated.)* Slat's, what are we gonna do?

SLAT'S: I don't think we can help 'em, Lucy. I think their minds are done gone.

LUCY: *(She slaps him.)* Not them. The man.

SLAT'S: Oh. I'd say let's call the doctor. Or, the Sheriff. Let them handle it.

(Crockett steps into the room, eyeing the man's figure. He is dressed in a stained T-shirt, overalls, and boots covered with mud. He wears a stained straw hat.)

CROCKETT: Another satisfied customer Lucy? Did you feed him some of your chicken-n-dumplin's from last night?

LUCY: *(She has crossed to her phone and is dialing a number.)* Very funny, Crockett Richards. I didn't see you refuse seconds last night.

SLAT'S: That's cause it's the only thing he can eat. When you ain't got no teeth, you can gum those dumplin's pretty good.

CROCKETT: I got some dentures on order, thank you very much Mister Slat's. I need them for the next time Lucy makes milk gravy. It's lumpier than her dumplings. Maybe this man choked on one of them lumps. Who is he?

SLAT'S: Don't know. Lucy found him on her doorstep when she opened up this morning.

CROCKETT: Probably a dope pusher from over to Shreveport. Kinda looks like he's doped out on something.

SLATS: He's a stranger alright.

(Clemmie enters the room leading Vera Mae by the hand. Vera Mae is very shy and unassuming and shuns publicity. Clemmie glances at the body. Behind her, Vera Mae tags along, eyes turned toward the ground.)

CLEMMIE RUTH: Well, well, what have we here? Another gastronomic calamity?

(Lucy hangs up the phone after talking to someone and walks across the room toward the body.)

LUCY: Don't you start it, too, Clemmie Ruth. The Sheriff and the doctor are on the way. Neither one of 'em was too happy about it either.

CROCKETT: Howdy do, Vera Mae. *(She nods shyly.)* You got some of your healing waters in that purse, Clemmie Ruth. I'd be glad to give the man a sip. After I take one myself.

SLATS: Just make sure you get rid of it before the Sheriff gets here. Remember what he did to Clemmie's last still.

CLEMMIE: Slat, it is not a still. It is a scientifically proven device for producing my father's famous Healing Waters. This modern generation just doesn't understand our old potions. I guarantee it'll cure what ails you.

CROCKETT: If it is so good, then why hasn't it healed Vera Mae.

LUCY: Crockett Richards, *(She pulls him aside.)* How can you be so mean? Leave Vera Mae alone.

CROCKETT: Well, she ain't said a word in ten years. I don't think anything is really wrong with her. She went bonkers after *(He pauses and looks at her.)* well, after that day.

LUCY: Just keep quiet. You got the tact of a bull elephant. We got more important problems.

CROCKETT: We do? Seems to me this here fella is the one with the problems.

DOMIE: I don't believe that we should stand here and ignore him.
Remember what the Bible says about strangers.

SLATS: You're right. He's blocking the door.

LUCY: Slats! *(She slaps him.)* Be serious for once in your life.

CROCKETT: I suppose Domie here is gonna start spoutin' out the good Samaritan to us.

DOMIE: I could, you know. I know the entire King James Bible by heart.

VERUE: Even the begats.

CLEMMIE: Well, I ain't here for Sunday School. Vera Mae and I are here for our morning game of Chicken Foot.

CROCKETT: And, I'm here for breakfast. Lucy, how about some scrambled eggs?

LUCY: I'm not doin' nothing until this man is taken out of my cafe.
Besides the last batch of eggs that I bought from your store was rotten.

(We hear the sound of a siren off stage and brakes squeal. Sheriff Woody hurries into the cafe, center stage.)

WOODY: Alright, everybody relax. I've got everything under control. Stand back away from the crime scene. Don't touch any of the evidence.

SLATS: Woody, I can save you some time. The butler did it.

WOODY: The butler? Lucy doesn't have a . . . *(Pauses.)* Go ahead and laugh at the law at work. Just remember I am the reason there is peace and tranquillity here in Bayou City. I am the law.

CROCKETT: That's why I sleep so well every night.

SLATS: Yeah, the criminals are trembling in their boots.

WOODY: It sure is lonely at the top, yep. You'll change your tune the next time a thief comes through Bayou City. Now, where is the deceased?

LUCY: He ain't deceased. He's just in a coma. And he's over there in the door. You like to stepped right in the middle of his belly when you hurried in here.

WOODY: I knew that. Just testing your powers of observation. *(Takes out a notebook and stands over the man.)* Now, the first question asked in any murder investigation is did anybody see any suspicious characters?

DOMIE: Suspicious characters? I did, Sheriff Woody.

WOODY: Now we're getting somewhere. *(He crosses to Domie and prepares to write in his notebook.)*

DOMIE: Let me see. There must have been three of them.

WOODY: Three? Sounds like a gang to me. I told you the gang would come to Bayou City, one day. What were they dressed in? Ski masks? Black clothes?

DOMIE: No. They had on baseball caps. Backwards. Tee shirts and shorts.

WOODY: Ah, trying to be inconspicuous. Crafty devils if you ask me. Did they carry any weapons? AK47's, 357's, shotguns?

DOMIE: One of them did have a slingshot.

WOODY: A slingshot?

CROCKETT: *(Looking at the man closely.)* Don't look like Goliath to me.

WOODY: Just where were these suspicious character?

DOMIE: In my daffodils. Just last week. Remember? I called you to come get those boys out of my daffodils. And they chased you off with the slingshot. *(Turning to Verue.)* One of them shot poor Woody right in the backside...

WOODY: That's enough information on suspicious characters for now.

VERUE: Those boys trampled the flowers pretty good, too. One of those boys was Tom Snowden. You remember him when he was a baby, don't you Domie?

DOMIE: I do believe I remember him. He was the one that we found in Fred's old earthworm farm. *(Turns to Woody.)* He'd eaten a whole quart of those worms. Found him standing knee deep in the manure. Course he was only two years old. Worms were crawling out of his nose and his mouth....

WOODY: Listen here you old dingbat, I got more important things to do than worry about your daffodils.

CROCKETT: Why didn't you shoot to kill, Woody. Those boys would have given you enough time to put your bullet in your gun.

WOODY: Go ahead and laugh at the law at work. When this town is a haven for gangs from LA, you'll wish you had listened to Sheriff Woody Beason.

(Doctor Pearl Martin steps into the room over the body and sets a black bag down.)

PEARL: Woody, shut up with you law abidin' business and help me pull this man onto that bar so I can get a look at him.

WOODY: I've been waiting. Where have you been?

PEARL: You wouldn't believe me if I told you. *(She bends over body.)*

WOODY: Wait a minute there, Pearl. You shouldn't be messin' around with evidence.

PEARL: Woody, there is no evidence. The man's in a coma. I gotta get him in the room so I can examine him.

WOODY: Well, alright, but if we can't solve this case it'll be because you messed with the evidence. That's called Obstinate Justice.

CLEMMIE: Obstruction of Justice.

WOODY: Right. I was just testing you.

(Slats and Woody move the body to the bar. Lucy eyes the man distastefully. Pearl goes behind the bar to examine the man. She removes a stethoscope from the black bag and listens to the man's heart. Everyone waits patiently in silence as she does.)

PEARL: Well, he's got a good heart beat and a good pulse. Seems to be a good blood pressure, too. I don't know why the man's in a coma. But, I think we better get him over to the hospital in Jonesboro. We'll take him in your car Woody.

WOODY: Now wait a minute here. I don't run an ambulance service. I'm the law in these parts and I don't need to be out of town.

PEARL: What's gonna happen Woody? The Dalton boy's gonna ride in here and rob the bank while you're gone?

WOODY: I just don't want this man messin' up my car. I just got that car cleaned up last week.

PEARL: We could take him in my truck, but after what I just went through, I don't trust my truck.

WOODY: What happened?

PEARL: I was about a mile from downtown when my old truck just stopped. There I was in the dark on the side of the road when up walked this man out of nowhere. Scared the living daylights out of me. Anyway, I looked under the hood and this man never spoke a single word but just reached down under the hood and touched something. My old truck started right up.

WOODY: Pearl, I have told you time and time again that you must remain eternally vigilant. Vigilant! Why, that man could have knocked you in the head.

PEARL: Just how do I remain eternally vigilant?

WOODY: You look out of the corner of your eye. We call that Periphrial Vision, Yep. Got to have Periphrial Vision to remain

eternally vigilant. They taught me that in the Police Academy.

SLATS: I thought you got your badge through a correspondence course.

WOODY: I graduated in the top third of my class at the Academy.

CROCKETT: How many were in your class? Three?

WOODY: I'll have you know there were twelve of us! And I was number one on the shooting range.

LUCY: Would you please let Pearl finish her story.

PEARL: That's all that happened. He started my truck and when I turned around, he was gone.

WOODY: He just disappeared? Sounds fishy to me. I wonder if he is with the mob. Or worse, the CIA.

SLATS: Maybe he was picked up by a flying saucer.

DOMIE: Flying saucer? I saw one of them one time. Right after Fred and I married....

VERUE: Sister, you never told me about seeing a flying saucer! I saw one, too. Last year at the town picnic.

SLATS: That was just a paper plate blown by the wind, Verue.

CROCKETT: *(To Lucy.)* Maybe that's what happened on that day to Vera Mae. Maybe some aliens swooped down on her and scooped out her brain!

PEARL: Would ya'll stop the nonsense and help me put this man in my truck so we can get him over to Jonesboro.

CROCKETT: Pearl, you know how bad my back is. I can't be liftin' no heavy loads. I got one of them there ruptured discs.

PEARL: Ain't nothin' wrong with your back but what's in your head, Crockett.

CLEMMIE: I wonder who he is?

CROCKETT: Told you he was some dope pusher come through here. Probably took an overdose of some of that there broken cocaine.

SLATS: You mean crack cocaine.

(Domie stands up from her table and walks over and looks Crockett in the eye.)

DOMIE: Crockett, I think that you had be very careful what you're sayin'. You're talkin bad about that man and you don't even know who he is. Don't you remember that verse in the Bible?

VERUE: *(She stands up and walks over beside her sister.)* Yes. What is that special verse, Domie? The one about the angels.

DOMIE: Hebrews 13:2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

(Crockett begins laughing hysterically and slapping the table.)

CROCKETT: You tellin' me that man in a coma is an angel?

DOMIE: The Lord works in mysterious ways, Crockett. He's lookin' down on you right now. He may have sent an angel in the form of that fella, to test your good intentions. Now I know that you're supposed to be a Christian 'cause you're a deacon in the church. Seems to me you would have wanted to help that fella.

SLATS: That's right Crockett. Where's your good Samaritan attitude?

CROCKETT: Well, I didn't see you fallin' all over yourselves to help the man. And Lucy over there wouldn't even touch him.

CLEMMIE: I'd touch him if I knew he could play Chicken Foot!

DOMIE: Well, you two fellas better hope and pray that he isn't an angel, cause if he is, then you just flunked the test.

WOODY: He ain't no angel. Besides, I'm more worried about this stranger Pearl met than this man. Maybe the two of them are connected in some way.

CROCKETT: Yeah, maybe this fella is Lazarus and that other fella is Jesus.

WOODY: Go ahead and laugh. You'll be sorry next time some serial killer climbs in your window and Woodrow Beason isn't around to protect you.

SLATS: I don't have to worry. My cereal is already dead.

LUCY: *(Lucy primps her hair.)* Tell me more about this stranger, Pearl.

PEARL: He was a nice lookin' young man. Long hair and a beard. Had these bandages on his hands. He was carrying around some kind of gunny sac. He was wearin' blue jeans and a T-shirt and he was barefoot. I never seen his kind in these parts before.

WOODY: Well I'm keeping an eye out for him...

SLATS: Your Perphrial Vision, right?

WOODY: Yep. He can't be anything but trouble, with a capital T. Yep, *(Woody stands and strikes a commanding pose.)* if he were to walk in here right now, I'd have a question or two for him. The safety of this community depends on me. And I will nip any crime in the bid. Just nip it, nip it, nip it.

(There is a sound at the door and the door opens and in walks the young man to whom Woody is referring.)

CROCKETT: *(He nudges Woody and points over his shoulder.)* Better put your bullet in your gun. Here comes your hardened criminal.

SLATS: Lucy, better hide the cereal.

LUCY: *(She looks hesitantly at the young man and then steps out from behind the counter.)* Good mornin' sir. Welcome to the Calico Cafe. What can I do for you?

JOSHUA: I'm rather hungry. I thought that maybe I could find something to eat.

LUCY: Well, we seem to have a slight problem this morning. I don't ordinarily have bodies lying around on the tables.

(The man pauses as he sees the other man lying on the table. He glances at Pearl.)

JOSHUA: Is this why you were in such a hurry this morning?

PEARL: Yeah. They found this man in a coma and I was trying to get here in a hurry. Thanks for helping me with my truck.

JOSHUA: What's wrong with him?

PEARL: I'm not sure. I think we're going to take him into the hospital over to Jonesboro.

JOSHUA: Mind if I have a look?

PEARL: No. Are you a doctor?

JOSHUA: *(Bending over the man with his back to the audience.)* No. But I have had some training in healing. *(The man suddenly sits up on the table and looks around groggily.)*

MAN: Where am I?

LUCY: *(In amazement.)* You are at the Calico Cafe. We found you on the doorstep in a coma.

MAN: *(Looks at Pearl's black bag and the stethoscope around her neck.)* You the doctor in these parts?

PEARL: Yes, I am. But I can't take credit for you waking up. This young man worked a miracle. How did you do that?

JOSHUA: Oh, it wasn't hard. I know some stuff about those kind of things.

MAN: Oh, my head. Last thing I remember was walking down the street looking for a pay phone. My family's probably worried out

of their mind. Mind if I use your phone? I can call my cousin over on the lake and he can come pick me up.

PEARL: Are you sure you're up to it?

MAN: Except for my headache, I've never felt better. *(Lucy shows him to the phone and he talks in the background.)*

WOODY: Where you from, stranger?

JOSHUA: Oh, I'm from just about everywhere there is to be from I guess.

WOODY: Yeah and where you headed?

JOSHUA: Just wherever I may be needed.

WOODY: Just what does that mean, young fella?

DOMIE: *(Trying to off-set the harsh question that Crockett has asked.)*
Now Woody, that may not be any of our business. Just let the young man sit there in peace.

WOODY: Now look here Domie. I represent the law in this here town, and the safety of the people of Bayou City is my responsibility.

JOSHUA: I assure you sir that I'm not here to harm anyone. I'm just passing through.

(Domie gets up from her table after whispering to Verue and walks over and sits at the table with the young man.)

DOMIE: Don't you listen to the sheriff here. He's nothing but a whole bunch of hot air.

WOODY: Domie, you stay out of this. Your head's full of nothin' but hot air.

DOMIE: It is not. I know who this man is. What's your first name, honey?

JOSHUA: Joshua.

DOMIE: *(Domie's eyes grown very wide and she nods. She reaches over and touches the bandages on his hands.)* I see you hurt your hands.

JOSHUA: Yeah, I got open wounds in both my hands.

DOMIE: *(She reaches up and pushes the hair back away from his forehead.)* Looks like you got some scars up here, too.

JOSHUA: Yeah, they were caused by thorns.

DOMIE: Woody, I don't think this man's here to do us any harm. I think you should just leave him alone.

(Verue has walked up behind Domie and puts her hands on her shoulders.)

VERUE: Domie, you don't mean that this is who I think it is?

(Domie nods, stands up and takes Verue by the arm.)

DOMIE: It's him, all right. I'd recognize those eyes anywhere.

CLEMMIE: Can HE play Chicken Foot?

CROCKETT: Who is he? The boy who ate the worms?

VERUE: I'd suggest you not say things like that about our visitor. You may regret it later.

DOMIE: Verue, let's go back to our table and start our game of Chicken Foot and let this young man eat in peace. I think he can handle himself.

SLATS: *(Walking past Joshua to Domie and Verue)* Wait a minute. If you know who this fella is, why don't you tell us?

DOMIE: Cause I don't want to. You are a deacon in the church. You of all people should recognize him.

(Lucy comes around the counter with a plate full of food and sets it in front of Joshua. She treats him very courteously.)

LUCY: I don't know what you want for breakfast but I'll just give you a little bit of everything and you can have it on the house, Mr. Joshua.

WOODY: *(He grabs Lucy by the arm and pulls her to the side.)* You shouldn't go encouraging loafers, Lucy. Don't give him breakfast for free.

MAN: *(The man comes back from the phone.)* My cousin will pick me up outside. Thanks again for all your help.

JOSHUA: I'll walk you outside, sir. I want to make sure you're OK.

(They exit through front door.)

SCENE 2

CROCKETT: Alright you two airheads, just who is this man?

SLATS: Yeah, Lucy seems to be quite taken with him. I'd like to know who he is too, so I could feel out my competition.

PEARL: Well I must admit I'd like to know who he is. I want to know how he worked that miracle.

WOODY: I told ya'll who he was. A hardened criminal on the lam. I think we should kick him out of this cafe and run him out of this town.

VERUE: You all remember how Domie referred to that first fella as an angel unawares? Well tell 'em Domie.

DOMIE: It was back when I was thirty-two. Back in the summer when Fred and I had just been married. Fred took me down to Mill Creek before they turned it into a lake and we decided to go swimming. (*Domie puts her hands to her mouth and grins.*) I guess I should tell you that we skinny dipped.

CROCKETT: That must have been a sight!

SLATS: Now I know why the fishing's been bad in that part of the creek.

DOMIE: Anyway, we were just swimming in the water and Fred was showing off how he could do some somersaults and flips off one of the logs. He was in the circus when he was a boy.

VERUE: Domie, you never told me that!

DOMIE: Sister, you knew Fred was in the circus! He brought that Strong Man home that summer and you fell in love with him.

VERUE: Oh, of course! How could I ever forget him? His name was Tiny.

DOMIE: You almost married him, Sister. Think what your children would have looked like. All those muscles!

CLEMMIE: I remember him. Took twelve pints of the Healing Waters as a liniment for his sore muscles.

SLATS: Can we get back to the swimming?

DOMIE: Swimming? Oh, yes. I decided that I would show Fred that I could do a somersault better than he could. Only I slipped and I hit my head. Slid down underneath that cold water. As I sank, time seemed to stop.
I was laying down of the bottom of Mill Creek lookin' up through those clear waters and I could see Fred on the shore with this horrible look on his face. Well, next thing I knowed, I was goin' down this bright tunnel and in the distance I could see this man standin' there. He had his arms open wide and when I got closer he had this big smile on his face. He looked just like Joshua.
I felt all warm and cozy and I just wanted to reach out and grab him and all of the sudden he said, "STOP. You can't come now, Domie. You gotta go back and take care of Fred. He's waitin' for you."
I turned around and next thing I knowed I was layin' on the creek bank, coughin' and sputterin' and Fred was pumpin' on my chest. He broke one of my ribs, you know.

VERUE: Oh, how romantic.

DOMIE: Anyway, I almost died that day. But I got a little glimpse of glory. And you know who I saw standin' there waitin' for me? It was that fella that was sittin' at that table.

VERUE: You should have seen her face. When she come walkin' in the house with Fred it was just glowin' She's never been the same since.

CROCKETT: Probably spend a little too much time under the water.

SLATS: Are you trying to tell us this man is well, you know.

DOMIE: He did say his name was Joshua.

WOODY: So.

VERUE: Domie knows so much about the Bible. Tell 'em about the name Joshua.

DOMIE: Well, actually, in the Hebrew language, the name Joshua would be pronounced as Yeshua.

WOODY: Bless You!

DOMIE: Anyway, today, we say that name as Jesus.

LUCY: This is just a little bit too much for me, folks.

SLATS: You can't honestly stand there and expect us to believe that man is Jesus.

PEARL: Well, it would explain how he was able to heal the man .

CROCKETT: You been driving with the parking breaks on, Dr. Pearl. You don't believe this garbage do you?

WOODY: Whoever he is, he has everybody snookered. Maybe he is in the KGB.

DOMIE: Remember what the Bible says. No man could know the hour of his return. Did you notice the bandages on his hands?

(All eyes turn towards the front door and then back to Domie)

DOMIE: And he said those scars on his forehead had come from thorns.

(All eyes turn back towards the front door and then back to Domie.)

CROCKETT: Listen to me, Domie. You're as crazy as a Bessie bug. So don't start spoutin' this garbage to everybody.

SLATS: Be fine with me if he was Jesus. At least I know that way Lucy wouldn't be interested in him.

LUCY: *(Slapping him on the shoulder.)* Slat's O'Hare. I don't believe some of the things you say sometimes. I don't see nothin' in that young man but the fact that he's hungry and he needs somebody to care about him.

DOMIE: Verue, do you think He could answer my question?

VERUE: Domie, I bet He would. Ain't no need to wait until you get to heaven now.

CROCKETT: What question? Let me guess, Domie would ask, "Where was I when you passed out the brains, Lord?"

LUCY: Crockett Richards, hush your mouth.

CROCKETT: This is a bunch of hogwash, Lucy. I suppose Clemmie could find out how to change water into wine so she could make her Healing Waters easier.

LUCY: You can't tell me there isn't something you would like to ask Jesus? Why just think what it would be like to sit down at the breakfast table with Jesus and ask Him anything you wanted to.

(Doorway opens and Joshua walks back into the room. He stops as he notices that everyone is looking at him expectantly.)

JOSHUA: Did I do something wrong?

LUCY: Uh, no, no, no. Please have a seat. Go ahead and eat your breakfast. It's still on the house.

SCENE 3

(The characters then scatter around the stage. Slats comes over to the table.)

SLATS: Like to talk to you Mr. Joshua. *(Joshua tries to take a bite and Slats interrupts him. Joshua lays the fork down.)*

JOSHUA: Have a seat.

SLATS: The name's Slats O'Hare. I'm the school janitor here in town. Look, I got a bone to pick with you.

JOSHUA: Oh, really?

SLATS: You see, Ms. Lucy seems to be quite taken with you. I mean, you are kinda' handsome and you're an exotic stranger come wanderin' through town. I'm sure you've lived a life much more exciting than that of a janitor.

JOSHUA: Actually, I've lived a fairly simple life Mr. Slats.

SLATS: How did you hurt your hands?

JOSHUA: Metal spikes.

SLATS: I see. Anyway, I just want to be reassured that you're not going to encourage Ms. Lucy's interest in you.

JOSHUA: I can assure you Mr. Slats that I have no romantic interest in Ms. Lucy.

SLATS: *(Leaning closer.)* Look, ah, you being the person that you are and all. You know, you could act like that genie in the lamp and grant me a wish. You think you could influence Ms. Lucy to love me?

JOSHUA: That's a tall order Mr. Slats. I don't have any special powers over the human heart. If someone's gonna fall in love with you, it's gotta come from them. Maybe if you let her know that you love her first, she might find some love in her heart for you.

SLATS: I tell her I love her everyday.

JOSHUA: Maybe that's your problem. Maybe you need to stop tellin' her and start showin' her.

SLATS: I do try to show her. But, she's slippery and fast. Can't seem to get a good grip.

JOSHUA: Love is more than just a physical feeling. Sometimes, a person just wants someone to listen to them, to care about them.

SLATS: I listen all the time. Except for when my lips are flapping. Maybe I do talk too much. Maybe we could just sit together sometime. I'll try listening instead of grabbing and see if it works.

SCENE 4

(Crockett motions for Slats to go away and sits down as Slats leaves the table.)

CROCKETT: The name's Crockett Richards. I'm the president of the police jury of this parish. Local elected official. I'd like to welcome you to Bayou City.

JOSHUA: So you're a politician?

CROCKETT: Among many things. You see, I wear all sorts of hats. Raised myself up from nothin'. Why I took those forty acres of sandy hills out there and I built one of the largest watermelon empires in this part of the state. Got me a store down the street here, where I sell everything from diapers to a garden hose.

JOSHUA: I'm supposed to be impressed.

CROCKETT: Yeah. You know something? You and I could do things together.

JOSHUA: Do things together? What do you mean?

CROCKETT: Interested in sales? Like, religious artifacts?

JOSHUA: The only religious artifact I own is this cross. *(He pulls a large, metal cross out of his shirt. It hangs on a metal chain.)*

CROCKETT: That's a start. Imagine, purchase a cross that hung from the neck of the Carpenter. You are a carpenter, aren't you?

JOSHUA: *(He tucks the cross back into his shirt.)* Yes, I have some carpentry skills.

CROCKETT: *(He slaps the table with his open palm.)* Then those two old air-head sisters over there are right. You are who they say you are. Man, just think what we can do.

JOSHUA: What are you talking about?

CROCKETT: Mill Creek reservoir. Nice fishin' lake. Got water that's smooth as glass. There's a park on one side that I own. I can clear out all of the trees right at the edge of the lake. We could put up a huge tent. We'll have a tent revival like you haven't seen. Or we can have a healin' service. Boy, the offerings we can take up. And for the climax of the day, you know what you can do?

JOSHUA: What?

CROCKETT: You can walk on the water. It's only about a hundred yards from the park to the dam. Just walk right on over there to the dam, climb up there and the evenin' sun will be settin' right behind you. We'll make a fortune.

JOSHUA: Let me ask you something, Mr. Crockett. What's the most important thing in your life?

CROCKETT: The most important thing? Gosh, there's just so many things. My house, my watermelon patch, my position on the police jury, my store. You see, Mr. Joshua. I am quite a success.

JOSHUA: Somehow I thought you might answer your soul. But I can see that you didn't disappoint me.

CROCKETT: My soul? Now don't go throwin' none of that spiritual stuff at me. We're livin' in the twentieth century now. Things are different. You can make money and you can become famous on spiritual matters if you know how to market 'em right. You trust me and I'll make you the biggest star in the South. Why, in no time I'll have you the biggest star since Elvis.

JOSHUA: Mr. Crockett, I don't think I want to take you up on your offer. I don't think I want to go where you're headed.

CROCKETT: Very well. Just give it some thought. I'm sure you'll change you mind.

SCENE 5

(Woody comes over to the table and motions Crockett away. Crockett nods and stands up and walks away from the table.)

WOODY: Mr. Joshua, I want you to know that I'm the sheriff here in town. We don't want any trouble.

JOSHUA: What makes you think that I'm here to cause trouble Sheriff Beason?

WOODY: Well, look at you. Long hair, a beard, barefoot. You don't dress like decent folk. You're different. We're a small, country town. A lot of good solid values here. We don't need any outside influences. We don't need any new ideas, new fangled notions, to upset things..

JOSHUA: You don't want me to upset the status-quo? I don't plan on changin' this town, Sheriff. Change usually comes from the inside.

WOODY: What do ya' mean from the inside?

JOSHUA: Well, when the human heart gets kinda restless and tired of injustice and unhappiness and lack of peace, it wants to change. It wants to find situations that are better and happier. Makes a man look outside of himself for somethin' to live by, a new idea, a new set of standards.

No, Sheriff Beason, if there is any change that comes in this town it will be because the people want to change and they'll do it in spite of you.

WOODY: In spite of me? See, you're nothing but a rabble rouser.
Everything you just said shows you have no respect for the
me. If you don't respect me, you don't respect the law.

JOSHUA: I have the highest respect for the law. Sometimes, I don't have
much respect for those who get too legalistic. Laws are
given to serve as guides. But, remember a man died on a
cross to do away with the death sentence of the law.

WOODY: Just get one thing straight Mr. Joshua. I'm the power and the law
in this town and don't you forget it.

SCENE 6

(Woody stands up and walks off and Pearl walks over to the table.)

- PEARL: I'm Dr. Martin. Thanks for helping me with my truck. Why did you disappear like that?
- JOSHUA: I figured my work was done so I just wandered on down the road.
- PEARL: That was quite a touch you had with that person, just wakin' him up like that. I never did figure out what was wrong with him. I guess I'm not a very good physician.
- JOSHUA: Shouldn't say that about yourself.
- PEARL: How would you know why I shouldn't say that about myself? Or do you claim to have some special knowledge about my past?
- JOSHUA: What is there about your past that is so disturbing, Dr. Martin?
- PEARL: Has it ever occurred to you to wonder why a doctor would spend her life in a small town of less than 800 people?
- JOSHUA: You're committed to healing the sick?
- PEARL: Yes, I'm committed to healing. But, I barely get by in this small town. People can't afford medical bills. They trade me food, or farming, or fixin' up or gasoline, so I can get by. I could have made a whole lot more money if I had stayed in the big city of Shreveport.
- JOSHUA: Why didn't you?
- PEARL: I guess that's what I needed to talk you about. Do you think I really did wrong?
- JOSHUA: Just what did you do?

PEARL: Well, you know. That time in the hospital.

JOSHUA: Refresh my memory.

PEARL: You remember that woman who died while I was....

JOSHUA: I don't who you're talking about.

PEARL: Why must I bring it up again? Her name was Fannie. She came in on a Friday afternoon. I was so tired from being on call and I desperately wanted an afternoon off. So, I asked my senior medical student to take care of her until Monday morning. I never should have abandoned that medical student like that. He never knew what to do. Fannie died Sunday morning from causes we never figured out. I was at home lying in bed reading a book. I should have been there. If I had, Fannie probably would still be alive.

JOSHUA: So, why did you run away to this small town?

PEARL: I knew if I came out here I wouldn't be faced with too many challenges and maybe I wouldn't hurt anybody. I'm just not a very good doctor.

JOSHUA: Dr. Martin, have you ever really healed anyone?

PEARL: Why, sure I have.

JOSHUA: No, you don't understand my question. Have YOU ever healed anyone?

PEARL: I think I see your meaning. The body heals itself. God heals. But I was in charge. I was her doctor. I abandoned a most sacred duty so I could lie in bed and read a book.

JOSHUA: *(He reaches over and turns her so that he can see her back.)* That's funny, I don't see a big red 'S' on your back.

PEARL: What?

JOSHUA: You're SuperDoctor, right? Able to heal all ills. Able to go seven days without sleep. Able to leap over guilt in a single jump. Imagine what it would be like if you could heal anyone with just a touch of the hand. Imagine hordes of sick and afflicted gathered at your

feet, begging for relief. And you know, that no matter how hard you try, it is impossible to heal everyone before someone dies. It only takes one failure to offset all the good you think you have done. Just remember, you're only human.

PEARL: I think I understand your meaning.

JOSHUA: A lot of people spend their lives in misery feeling guilty over something they have no reason to feel guilty about. Guilt is a terrible thing. It destroys you from within. Let go of the guilt. It is a cancer eating away your life.

PEARL: Maybe you're right.

JOSHUA: Have you done any good in this town?

PEARL: Of course. I've delivered dozens of babies. Brought old man Driggers back when he choked on a hush puppy last spring. Why, we had two boys that drowned over at the lake and I had CPR going on both of them at the same time. They both pulled through.

JOSHUA: Then why are you dwelling on the failures of the past. Put your failures behind you and focus on the successes.

PEARL: Good advice from the great physician. I forgot you were human once. You do understand what it's like. Thanks.

SCENE 7

(Pearl leaves and Lucy walks over.)

LUCY: How's your breakfast?

JOSHUA: It probably would be real good if I had a chance to eat it.

LUCY: *(She laughs.)* I'm sorry. That's just the way it is here in these small towns. We never meet a stranger.

JOSHUA: Well, you didn't treat me that way when I first walked in here.

LUCY: Mr. Joshua, you gotta forgive us. A total stranger in town scares people now days. You can't trust people anymore. There's just so much evil in the world.

JOSHUA: Ain't no more evil in the world now than there has been forever, Ms. Lucy.

LUCY: Maybe your right. Look, I saw Slats over here talkin' to you while ago. I'm kinda worried about him. Seems to think that I got some kind of romantic interest in you.

JOSHUA: Well, I hate to tell you what Mr. Slats and I talked about. I kinda think of that as confidential.

LUCY: I'm pretty sure of what he told you. The trouble is I really do love him. I'd marry him in a heart beat.

JOSHUA: But?

LUCY: *(Laughing.)* **But.** There's always an exception isn't there? I don't necessarily have such a sterling past. Slats is a good man. He's lived in this town all of his life. He's a deacon in the church, sings in the choir, good Christian man. I don't think he'd want a woman with my past.

JOSHUA: What's wrong with your past?

LUCY: I've been here in this town only about fifteen years. Nobody knows what I did in my past. You see, I'm originally from New Orleans. Down on Bourbon Street. I think you know what kind of life I led. It wasn't exactly the kind of work you would find here in Bayou City. I came here to start over. If these good folk knew what I used to do before I came here, they'd run me out of here on a rail.

JOSHUA: Ms. Lucy, I think your past is forgotten by most people. Maybe you should forget it, too.

LUCY: I can't do that. I know that I'm forgiven but it's hard for me to believe that God has forgotten what I've done.

JOSHUA: Let me see your hand, Lucy.

(Lucy hesitantly places her hand in his.)

JOSHUA: You have good strong hands, Lucy. There was a time when hands like yours would hold stones. And there were people who couldn't wait to throw those stones at a sinful woman. But when they realized the sin in their own lives, they had to drop the rocks.

It's time you dropped your rock, Lucy. Stop punishing yourself for your past. There's nobody sittin' in this room that's done anything more sinful than you, because in the eyes of God, sin is sin, no matter what it is.

LUCY: Thank you Mr. Joshua. I think you're right. I just hope Slats doesn't hold my past against me.

JOSHUA: True love doesn't really care anything about the past. It only cares about the present and the future.

(Slats sees Lucy holding hands with Joshua and rushes across the room.)

SLATS: I thought you told me that you have no interest in Lucy. *(He grabs Lucy's hands and pulls them away from Joshua.)*

LUCY: Slat's, you don't understand.

SLAT'S: *(Pushing Lucy behind him.)* Come on man, let's fight.

JOSHUA: This is all a misunderstanding, Mr. O'Hare. I have no desire to fight you.

LUCY: Calm down, Slat's. It's not what you think.

CROCKETT: I don't know about that, Lucy. This fella's pretty devious if you ask me. I don't think I'd believe a thing that he says.

WOODY: I tried to tell you that he was a trouble maker and none of you would believe me.

SLAT'S: Come on. Stand up and fight like a man.

(Joshua goes to stand up. When he does so, Slat's takes a swing at him and he ducks out of the way. Slat's falls across the table and Joshua goes to pick him up. Slat's tackles Joshua and they struggle.)

WOODY: *(Pulling out his gun.)* Ok, let's cut this stuff out. It's time we got this fella out of town. Slat's, get out of the way.

DOMIE: *(Rushing over and grabbing the sheriff's gun.)* Woody, I think you're over reacting.

PEARL: Woody, put the gun away.

(In the struggle, the gun discharges. Joshua falls back, arms outstretched into Lucy's arms. She lowers him to the ground.)

LUCY: What have you done?

WOODY: It was an accident. Honest.

CROCKETT: No it wasn't. You wanted to shoot him. You did it on purpose. And maybe it's for the best.

CLEMMIE: Stand back and give him some air.

PEARL: *(Kneeling beside the body.)* He didn't even get wounded. Look, the bullet hit this cross. But I can't get a heart beat. The blow must have stopped his heart.

(Pearl begins CPR . She hands Lucy a respirator bag and Lucy begins to breath for Joshua. Pearl stops Lucy and listens to Joshua's heart. She hears no heart beat and encourages Lucy to continue. Pearl stops Lucy a third time to listen for a heartbeat and hears nothing. Lucy refuses to help Pearl this time, dropping the bag and backing away uncertainly. Frustrated, Pearl continues CPR alone while everyone else backs slowly away.)

SLATS: Pearl, it's no use. You've got to stop trying.

PEARL: *(Pearl glances around at them and refuses to stop.)* No, I won't give up! I did that once before and I won't do it again. I know he can make it.

(Pearl continues CPR and begins to tire. She looks around at the rest of the people with a growing sense of helplessness.)

Why are ya'll just standing there? Everyone of us took something from him. He helped us straighten out our live. Isn't it time we gave something back to him? He's got to make it! He just has to! Do something to help me.

CROCKETT: Pearl, you've done the best you could. Give it up.

LUCY: *(Lucy reaches out and pulls Pearl gently away from Joshua.)* Pearl, it's time to stop.

PEARL: *(Pearl stops and looks around at everyone. She is tired and frustrated and seems to have given up. Then, she looks at Joshua one more time and regains her energy.)* Well, you may be ready to give up on him, but I'm not. He didn't give up on me.

(Vera Mae stands up from the table, stage left, and comes over to help Pearl. Their eyes meet for a second and then Vera Mae begins mouth to mouth resuscitation. As each of the cast sees this, they kneel down to help. Suddenly we see Joshua begin to move and awaken. He sits up shakily and looks around him. Vera Mae pulls away to the side of the stage alone.)

SLATS: You did it, Pearl.

PEARL: No, God did it. I was just a tool.

WOODY: Looks like I shot you by mistake, young man. But, I suggest you get on outta town before something worse happens.

LUCY: I can't believe that you're doing this. He's done nothing wrong to us and you almost killed him.

WOODY: Well, somethin' weird is goin' on here. The man fixed the truck and he healed the guy and then he comes in here pretending to be Jesus.

JOSHUA: Oh, my chest is so sore. I've never been hurt in the chest before. Except for the time my heart broke in two. *(Stands shakily to his feet and looks around.)* So you think I'm Jesus?

SLATS: I don't know who you are but stay away from Lucy.

LUCY: Slats, if you would just listen to me. Joshua told me I needed to forget my past and love you for who I am now.

SLATS: *(Turning to her.)* Oh Lucy, does that mean that you might consider marrying me?

LUCY: If you'll have me. *(They embrace.)*

SLATS: I caught her!

WOODY: Well, I don't understand. If you're not Jesus, then what did you do to the truck?

JOSHUA: Well, I looked underneath the hood and there was one of those distributor lines loose. I hooked it back up to one of your spark plugs.

PEARL: What about the man in the coma?

JOSHUA: I could tell he was probably in a diabetic coma. I had a piece of candy in my pocket. I stuck it in his mouth and he woke right up. He told me later that he had taken a little bit too much insulin the evening before.

PEARL: All this time I thought you worked a miracle.

LUCY: Why, I think he has worked a miracle. I don't care who you are. He helped me straighten out the way I felt about my past. And, he helped Slat and I get together.

PEARL: Well, I guess I owe you some thanks, too. You helped me clear up some things about my past. You told me that I didn't need to live under the umbrella of guilt anymore.

(All eyes turn to Woody and Crockett.)

CROCKETT: Don't go lookin' at me. I didn't learn anything here today.

WOODY: Me, either. All I've learned is that it pays to remain eternally vigilant where the safety of this town is concerned. And now, I suggest you clear on out of here before anymore trouble happens.

VERA MAE: I have something to say. *(Everyone reacts in surprise as Vera Mae crosses to Joshua. She reaches out and takes his hands.)* Ever since that horrible day ten years ago, I've been afraid of life. I thought if I kept my mouth shut, nothing bad would ever happen to anyone again.

LUCY: What are you talking about, honey?

VERA MAE: Ten years ago, my husband died in a car wreck. We had a fight cause he said he was leaving me. I was so mad at him, I told him I hoped he died because I didn't love him anymore. I never should have said something like that cause it wasn't twenty minutes later he ran into that culvert. But, Joshua gave me a chance to give a life back. I've repaid for my sins. Thank you.

JOSHUA: No, thank you. I think I've stayed long enough. I think I will be moving on. *(He stops beside Domie and Verue and whispers in Domie's ear.)* Oh, about that question you wanted to ask me? Fred is doing just fine and he misses you. And, he wanted me to remind you not to do somersaults when you go swimming.

(Joshua heads for the door rubbing his chest and stops and looks back toward them all.)

Let me tell you somethin', a broken heart hurts pretty bad. *(He disappears through the door.)*

CROCKETT: I can't believe that you three actually believed that he was Jesus.

LUCY: You're not foolin' me Crockett. I heard that plan about walkin' on water that you threw in front of him a while ago. You believed it, too.

WOODY: We shoulda' known that Jesus wouldn't come back to see us. Maybe an angel like Domie said. But not the real Jesus.

DOMIE: Well listen here now, Woody. You may think I'm crazy but there's a verse in the Bible about that.

VERUE: That's right. You better listen to it good.

DOMIE: In as much as you have done it unto the least of my brethren, you have done it unto me. It don't matter whether or not he was really Jesus. Look at the difference in the way you acted around him when you thought he was Jesus. We should treat all strangers like they might be an angel or Jesus himself.

VERA MAE: *(Stands up and looks at everyone impatiently. She puts her hands on her hips and speaks in a loud, raucous voice.)* We going to play Chicken Foot or not?

The Messiah of Main Street was performed on January 12,13, 1993 at a dinner theater at Brookwood Baptist Church directed by Bruce Hennigan and starring Jean Brown, Rhonda Berry, Rodney Milliken, Charlotte Lyle, Jimmy Fitzgerald, Richard DeShong, Kathy Wilson, Cathy Lyle, Rosalyn Milliken, and Beauchamp Powers.

THE ATTIC TREE

**A THREE ACT PLAY
FOR THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY**

**BY
BRUCE HENNIGAN
© SEPTEMBER, 1992
REVISED AUGUST, 1996**

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I sincerely hope you enjoy producing this play. It has brought warmth to the hearts of many people at Christmas time since its first production in 1992. The enduring theme of a troubled family at Christmastime is a perennial favorite, but I hope I have not provided the audience with a saccharin solution to those problems.

Rather, my intent is to convey the realization that commitment and relationships, like an attic tree, take work to keep them alive.

God Bless You.

Bruce Hennigan

SUMMARY

The Attic Tree concerns the ordeal of an elderly man facing eviction from his home by his troubled daughter on Christmas Eve. Taking refuge in his attic, the old man teaches his grandchildren an important lesson about commitment and unconditional love that ultimately leads his family back to God.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Props:

Various items found in an attic.

Old Recliner

Quilt

Trunk

Picture frame with picture of young baby

Large Family Bible (covered with “dust”)

Christmas decorations including lights

A small (4-5 foot) live Christmas tree

Curtain to hide the tree

Old toys as noted in script to place in trunk

SET DESCRIPTION

The set consists of an attic. In our first production, we turned out flats around so that the bare wood faced the audience and it resembled the inside of an unfinished attic. We also angled flats out over the stage to give the feeling of a closed in space.

The recliner sits stage right. The trunk is stage left. Exit down stairs is stage left. The tree can be upstage center in a “dormer” window. The interlude scenes can be performed in front of closed curtains or to the side and require no stage dressing.

The stage should have a cluttered feel with boxes and old “stuff” scattered about. The Bible should sit next to the recliner and be covered with “dust”. The picture frame should have safety glass or broken plastic so when it is thrown down, the glass appears to break.

THE ATTIC TREE

A THREE ACT PLAY

BY

BRUCE HENNIGAN

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APPROX. TIME 40 MINUTES

SUMMARY: This play takes place on Christmas Eve in an old, cluttered attic. The grandfather is about to be put in a nursing home by his daughter. Her marriage is on the verge of collapse. The grandfather confronts his daughter and teaches her a poignant lesson about love when he shows her a tree he has grown in his attic. The family is reunited when a surprise visitor arrives at the house.

CAST:

PAPAW: Oldest member of the family and owner of the home in whose attic the scenes take place. His name is Brandon Riley.

MARY MILSTEAD: Papaw's daughter.

DAVID MILSTEAD: Mary's husband.

CRYSTAL: Eleven year old daughter of Mary and David.

BOBBY: Seven year old son of Mary and David.

YOUNG MAN: A young man trying to find his way home in a snow storm.

OLD MAN: Helps the young man out.

YOUNG WOMAN: The young man's wife.

SETTING:

The play takes place in an old attic. Center stage is a large trunk. Stage right has an old recliner. Stage left has a large, curtained off window. Scattered about the attic are boxes and other things from the past. Behind the curtain is a living Christmas tree. In a nearby box are old Christmas ornaments, a large lighted star, and icicles. In the trunk is a framed picture of a baby and an old quilt.

ACT 1

(A young boy about seven years old runs into the attic and begins to look around. He plays with some old toys scattered around the room.)

BOBBY: Wow! Just look at all this old stuff! *(A voice is heard off stage.)*

CRYSTAL: Bobby! *(Crystal runs onto stage. She is a girl about ten years of age.)* There you are! You know you're not supposed to be up here in Papaw's attic. Mother will kill you!

BOBBY: Chill out, sis! I'm just looking at all of Papaw's old stuff. Some of this is really old and I know he doesn't mind.

CRYSTAL: Yeah, but mother is the one with the paddle, not Papaw. Now let's go!

BOBBY: Aw, Crystal. Let's look around for just a few minutes. *(He opens the trunk and rummages around inside. He removes several strange objects, a slop jar that he puts on his head like a helmet.*

Crystal takes it away and lays it aside. He finally withdraws a picture in a wooden frame.)

BOBBY: Who is this, Crystal? I hope it's not me. He's naked as a jay bird.

CRYSTAL: *(Laughs as she takes the picture.)* Why this is a picture of our brother, Richard, when he was a baby. This must be real old.

BOBBY: I don't remember Richard very well, Crystal. How long has he been gone?

CRYSTAL: Well, he left when I had that Barbie birthday where Philip Barlow threw up all over the cake. I was eight, so it's been three years.

BOBBY: Do you miss him?

CRYSTAL: *(Puts the picture back in the trunk.)* Yeah, I do. He used to play his guitar and sing to me. And you would dance around.

BOBBY: I remember some of that. Gosh, I wish I could remember more of him so I could miss him, like you do.

CRYSTAL: Come on. Mom's wants us to help decorate the Christmas tree.

BOBBY: That's no real Christmas tree, Crystal. That thing Mom bought is all shiny and made out of foil. I want a real Christmas tree.

(The sound of heavy footsteps coming up the stairs is heard.)

CRYSTAL: Now, we're really going to get it! We need to hide! *(They run and hide behind the recliner. Papaw comes into attic and is rather agitated. A young woman follows him into the room)*

MARY: Dad, you can't get away from me by coming up into this old attic. You can't run away from this problem.

PAPAW: There's no problem to run away from, daughter. I've solved it! I'm not going to a nursing home.

MARY: Dad, it's not a nursing home. It's a retirement center. It's different from what you're thinking.

PAPAW: I don't care what you call it. It still isn't home. This house is my home. Your mother and I lived here for years and I'm not leaving those memories behind.

MARY: Dad, money's getting hard to come by. Your check will barely pay the utilities now. And David and I can't afford to help you pay for your setters, Betty and Jean to stay with you twenty four hours a day.

PAPAW: Well, listen up daughter. That Jeanie May is worthless anyway. All she does is sit in the living room and watch soaps all day long. I have to cook my own lunch, wash my own clothes, and clean up the kitchen. I say get rid of her and keep Betty. Now, she's a gem, that girl. Tucks me in at night and brings me warm milk. Wakes me up in the morning and has grits on the table. Seems if I kept her and got rid of the other parasite I might be able to get by.

MARY: No, Dad, it isn't that simple. There just isn't enough money. Now, David and I have it all figured out. If you sold the house and moved into the center...

PAPAW: Sell the house? Never! I'm giving this house to Richard, my oldest grandson. No stranger will ever own Riley mansion.

MARY: Dad, Richard's gone. We haven't heard from him in three years. And, I don't expect him to come back. *(Pauses as she thinks of her son.)* He probably has his own life by now. I hope he's happy, wherever he is. *(Suddenly turns and grabs her father's hands.)* I pray for him every day. I pray that God will watch over him, and keep him safe. I know he's in God's hands. But, still, I miss him so...*(She begins to cry.)*

PAPAW: Now, daughter, don't cry over Richard. *(Papaw comforts her.)* Didn't you just say God's taking care of him wherever he is. I'm not worried a lick about him. And as for me and this house, God will take care of us, too. I just know something will work out.

MARY: But, David is convinced you've got to sell this house. We just don't have the money.

PAPAW: Well, I know time's are hard. And especially hard for a single mother, even if David does pay you alimony.

MARY: *(Stops crying and looks up at her father.)* What are you talking about?

PAPAW: I may be old, but I'm not stupid, Mary. I can read between the lines. You can't hide your problems from your own father.

MARY: Oh, Dad, I just don't know what to do! We've tried so hard to patch up our differences but it just seems hopeless.

PAPAW: There's always hope, dear. Do you want me to talk to David?

MARY: No! He didn't want you to know. We're just trying to get through Christmas and then we'll deal with the kids. He was hoping you would listen to reason and ...

PAPAW: Allow myself to be shipped off to the home, right? Get one more person out of the way. Well, it's not going to happen. I'm staying.

MARY: *(In tears, now.)* Fine then! Just stay in this old house until they turn out the lights and turn off the gas and you rot! *(She storms out of attic.)*

(Bobby runs out from behind box as his mother disappears stage right.)

CRYSTAL: Stop, Bobby!

BOBBY: Momma, you can't make Papaw leave! *(Crystal runs up and grabs his arm.)*

CRYSTAL: Be quiet! If Mom finds out we're up here we're dead meat. She told us never to come up and play.

PAPAW: Well, two little snoopers, aye? How long have you two been up here?

BOBBY: Long enough, Papaw. Please don't let Mom make you leave this house. We like to play in it.

PAPAW: Bobby, I'm not going anywhere. The Lord will see to that. So don't you worry, you hear.

CRYSTAL: But what about Mom and Dad's problem? What were you two talking about?

BOBBY: If it's a problem like we have at school, I can help. Just so long as it's addition or subtraction. I don't know much about division, yet.

PAPAW: Well, your Mom and Dad seem to be having a problem with division, too. But I'm afraid they need the kind of help that is higher than any of us can give. Crystal, look in that old wooden box over there.

CRYSTAL: *(Lifts an old book out of it and blows off the dust.)* What is it?

PAPAW: Well, Bobby here is talking about school work and I think it's time we pulled out the textbook for handling family problems. That's the Family Bible your Mamaw and I gave to your mother when she and your dad got married.

BOBBY: Wow, they must have been saving it for a rainy day.

PAPAW: They haven't used it much, have they?

BOBBY: Mom and Dad must know their arithmetic real good. They haven't looked in here in a long time.

PAPAW: The kind of lessons you learn from this textbook can be forgotten real easy unless you read it constantly.

CRYSTAL: Mom and Dad don't like to read. They probably just watched the movie.

PAPAW: You've got to do more than that, Crystal. Well, let's see here.....Yes, here it is. "Pray without ceasing." Now that's what you two can do for your mom and dad. Pray.

CRYSTAL: Just what are we praying for?

BOBBY: When I say my prayers at the supper table, I pray that God will make the green beans disappear. I don't think He hears me too well.

PAPAW: We got something here more important than green beans. You need to ask God to help your Mom and dad with their problem. He knows what it is.

MARY: *(From downstairs we hear Mary's voice.)* Crystal, Bobby? Where are you? Come on to supper.

BOBBY: Papaw, how can we eat if we're praying without ceasing?

CRYSTAL: Silly, pray inside your head.

BOBBY: *(Pauses, deep in thought.)* Since He didn't hear me about them green beans, maybe I better scream real loud inside me head to make sure He hears me. *(He points up to the sky.)*

PAPAW: No, son, all you've got to do is just whisper.

(Lights down and the Interlude is illuminated stage right. A young man is standing at a phone booth in a heavy jacket talking on telephone.)

INTERLUDE #1

YOUNG MAN: What do you mean all the lines are down? ... A blizzard? In Louisiana? Lady, I've been in Canada for the last two years and I know what a blizzard is and this isn't a blizzard..... OK, so it's a bad snowstorm. Any snowstorm in Louisiana is a blizzard. So, how can I get through? OK. I suppose I'll just have to try and get my old car through this storm. She don't have much oomph left. Well, thank you. And Merry Christmas. *(He hangs up the phone and looks out at the sky.)* Well, Lord, looks like I might need a small miracle if that old car will make it.

ACT 2

(Mary comes into attic from stage right and discovers Papaw asleep in his old recliner.)

MARY: Dad, we've all eaten and you better come on down before your food gets cold.... *(She pauses as she sees he is asleep.)*

Oh, Dad! This is what I was talking about when I said you couldn't take care of yourself anymore. *(She lifts an old blanket from the open trunk and drapes it across his sleeping figure.)*

What if there had been a fire while you were asleep up here? Oh, just what are we going to do with you? *(She turns back to trunk and spies the picture of Richard. She clutches her chest and slowly reaches out to pick it up.)*

Oh, Richard. You were such a pretty child. I always did say your eyelashes were wasted on a boy. How I miss you. Wherever you are, you know I still love you. *(She holds the picture against her chest. David enters from stage right.)*

DAVID: Mary! What's going on up here? I...*(He pauses as he sees the old man asleep. Mary turns suddenly and hides the picture behind her back)*

MARY: Dad is asleep, David. I'll just warm up his food later.

DAVID: See what I mean. He's irresponsible, Mary. Probably got Alzheimer's. Now, how can a man like that take care of this big old house all by himself? *(He pauses as he notices Mary is hiding something.)* What have you got behind your back?

MARY: *(Drops picture into trunk and closes the lid.)* Just some old pictures. Let's go have dessert.

DAVID: *(Notices she has been crying. He reaches out and grabs her arm as she passes by. With free hand opens trunk and lifts out the picture.)* I should have known it! *(Angrily.)* I thought we had gotten rid of all these pictures! You know how I feel about this!

MARY: David, please. You'll wake up Dad. I was just remembering...

DAVID: There's nothing to remember. He's dead as far as I am concerned. Do you understand that! I don't want to see this face again! And you can just shut off the tears because it won't change anything!

MARY: David, please don't do this. Richard is our son. You can't just write him off like he is some stranger that wandered out of our lives.

DAVID: He was the one that wandered away, Mary. He made his choices. He's gone. And good riddance!

MARY: What has happened to you in the last three years? You're not the man I married.

DAVID: Life has changed me, Mary. I'm tired of it all. Tired of the never ending responsibilities, tired of the griping and nagging, tired of ungrateful kids who throw everything you've done for them right back in your face.

MARY: David, won't you ever change your mind?

DAVID: NO!

MARY: Lord knows I have tried to reason with you. *(She reacts angrily.)* But, I can see that nothing is going to change where you are concerned! I guess after you leave us, the kids and I will dead to you, too. *(She runs off stage right. David reacts angrily by smashing the picture against the corner of the trunk. Papaw awakens at this sound.)*

PAPAW: Hey, what's going on here? Too early for the Fourth of July.

DAVID: *(Drops picture into trunk and tries to calm down.)* Sorry, Mister Riley. I dropped something.

PAPAW: *(Comes over to his son-in-law and stoops over painfully to pick up the picture frame.)* Why, look here. If it isn't that picture of Richard you had made for his second birthday. I remember them days. Lord, he was a pistol, wasn't he, David.

DAVID: I, uh, don't remember, Dad. Excuse me, I have to go.

PAPAW: Now, wait a minute son. Don't go off in such a hurry. I need talk to you for a minute. *(He stands picture of Richard on nearby table where audience can see it.)*

DAVID: Look, I know what you're going to say, Mister Riley. And, it won't do any good. My mind is made up. We can't go on putting out money on this old house. You know as well as I that you'd be better off in a retirement center.

PAPAW: Well, since your mind is made up why don't you let Mary and the kids come live with me. Seems to me you ought to be able to pay enough alimony to keep this house going and it would be a whole lot cheaper than Mary finding a new apartment.

DAVID: What are you talking about?

PAPAW: Can't fool this old man, David. I know what's going on. Of course, I know you think you're doing what's right. Let me guess, you're tired of all the responsibility, right? Tired of always giving and never getting anything in return, right? Tired of not getting to do anything for yourself, right?

DAVID: *(Looks at the old man with surprise on his face and then suddenly becomes angry.)* Right! I am tired, old man! Tired of working my hands to the bone in that rat's race out there and never getting anything for me! I'm burned out, man! It's time I did something for David R. Milstead! You know what I'm going to do? Scuba dive.... in the Caribbean. And then, uh,... go to Australia. Maybe New Zealand. Who knows, I might find a job down under. But I'm not going to stay here in this dump of a town and pine away the rest of my life supporting you and this family.

PAPAW: Sounds like you got your priorities all figured out.

DAVID: Yeah, I do. And my number one priority right now is me!

PAPAW: Have you talked to anybody about this? Somebody that could help you, like Pastor Brown?

DAVID: What good would that do? He'd tell me to pray away my problems.

PAPAW: Well, taking your problems to God might not be such a bad idea. Why don't you take a look at this Bible . . . *(Papaw hands him the family Bible from earlier and David slaps it out of his hands. It falls to the floor. During the next line of dialogue, Papaw picks it up and hugs it to his chest.)*

DAVID: Don't talk to me about God. He'll still be around when I need him. And, I think he understands what kind of sacrifices I've been making these last few years. He'll understand.

PAPAW: He understands sacrifices, all right. But, I don't think He agrees with what you think of as a sacrifice. What you call a sacrifice, God calls a duty. You're a father, David. And a husband. You got Mary to care for. And those three children.

DAVID: Three? Where did caring get me with Richard? Huh? Did it cause him to love me? No! Did it cause him to sacrifice his silly dreams of a rock and roll band to stay at home and finish school? No! Forget the guilt trip, old man! I'm not staying around here and end up a burned out old fossil like you. *(He storms out of attic.)*

PAPAW: *(Papaw shakes his head wearily and begins picking up blanket and broken glass from the floor. The two children peep in from the stage right.)* Looks like the only thing you're good at is running.

CRYSTAL: Boy, is Dad mad at something! Can we come up here where it's safer?

PAPAW: *(Looks up and sees his grandchildren standing in the door.)* Sure, honey. Let me get the last of this broken glass up. Come on in. Did you have a good supper?

BOBBY: I don't remember. I was praying too hard and I knocked over the milk. Man, was Dad mad! I thought he was going to wipe the floor up with me again.

CRYSTAL: Well, you spilled it in his lap, silly.

PAPAW: *(Begins to put the blanket in the trunk.)* You children didn't want to stay downstairs and play?

CRYSTAL: No. Mom wants to decorate that old tree she bought.

BOBBY: Yeah, and it looks like something out of Star Wars. I wish we had a real tree.

PAPAW: *(He looks up at the children as if coming to a decision.)* Do you want to help me decorate a Christmas tree?

CRYSTAL: Sure, Papaw. Do you have some kind of decorations up here that will make that shiny thing downstairs look better?

PAPAW: I'm not talking about that tree. *(He walks over to a curtain covering one of the dormers. He pulls it back to reveal a fir tree over six feet tall in a wooden tub.)* I'm talking about this tree.

BOBBY: Wow! A real tree!

CRYSTAL: How did you get a tree up here in the attic, Papaw?

PAPAW: Well, now that's a long story. Come sit here at my feet. *(Papaw sits in his old recliner.)*

You see ten years ago when your Mamaw died, I had just brought home a small living Christmas tree. We didn't need a big one. You two weren't born yet although your Mom was fixing to give birth to you, Crystal. All we had for grandchildren was Richard and he was only nine. Anyway, I walked through that back door down there and said, "Look, Maw. I got us a live Christmas tree. We'll plant it outside for Mary's new baby and when she's all grown up, it'll be there to remind us of the day she was born. *(He pauses obviously fighting to control his emotions.)*

Maw was sitting in her rocker. It wasn't rocking. When I kissed her on the forehead I knew she had gone to be with the Lord.

BOBBY: It's all right, Papaw. We know Mamaw is in heaven singing with the angels.

CRYSTAL: *(Reaches over and pats her brother.)* That's right, Bobby. Let Papaw finish.

PAPAW: It wasn't ten minutes after that the phone rang. It was your Dad telling us that Crystal had been born. *(He stops and draws a deep breath.)*

When I came back from the funeral, I just took all that old Christmas stuff, *(He says this angrily.)* and shoved it up here in the attic. I was so mad. *(He stops, realizing that he is talking about something the children may not comprehend.)* I know that's hard for you to understand how I could be mad at your Mamaw. It was hard for me to understand, too.

Must've been along about Easter I decided to come back up here and put all her things away. I opened that curtain over there and, lo and behold, there sat that tree. It was barely alive. I had set it on the window sill that Christmas morning and forgot all about it. I stood there with my mouth open in amazement. Something just seem to come over me. I guess because it reminded me of your Mamaw. So I watered it with a glass of ice tea I was drinking and went on about my business.

Well, the months passed. And I kept slipping it a little water and fertilizer every now and then. And it kept growing. Been up here ever since.

BOBBY: Wait'll I tell Mom!

PAPAW: Oh, no, Bobby. This has to be our secret. Your Mom would have it out of this house in no time. You know, parents don't always understand things like this. I want it to stay right here with your Mamaw's things. I like it here.

CRYSTAL: So what are we going to decorate it with?

PAPAW: *(Crosses to the trunk)* With some of the oldest decorations you ever seen. Come on over here....

MARY: *(Offstage.)* Bobby, Crys...

(Papaw stops rummaging in the trunk and hurries back to tree. He draws the curtain over the tree just as Mary comes into attic.)

MARY: I should have know you two were up here. Come on let's get a bath and then you can help decorate the tree.

BOBBY: *(Looking back at Papaw.)* But, Mom!

PAPAW: *(Puts his finger to his lips to quiet the boy.)* You two go on. After your bath, I'll read you a Christmas story before you decorate the tree. That'll be OK, won't it Mary?

MARY: Yes. That'll be fine.

ALL exit

INTERLUDE #2:

Young man is standing stage left talking to an older man in overalls and heavy coat

YOUNG MAN: So, it can't be fixed?

OLD MAN: 'Fraid not. You're lucky I seen you stranded on the side of the road in this snow storm. Real unusual for these parts. Might of froze to death.

YOUNG MAN: What am I going to do? Can you lend me your truck?

OLD MAN: Look, son, I got some Santa Clausing to do. And much as I'd like to help you some more, I can't give you my truck.

YOUNG MAN: Looks like walking is the only option, then.

OLD MAN: In this weather?

YOUNG MAN: I've hiked for hours in blizzards much worse than this. Thanks for all your help. I know you went out of your way to help and I appreciate it. If there is ever anything I can do for you, just let me know.

OLD MAN: Sure. You be careful now. *(exits)*

YOUNG MAN: Hey, God. I hope you got at least one more miracle in your Santa's sack. Cause, I'm going to need it more than ever.

(exit)

ACT 3

BOBBY: *(Holds up an old string of light bulbs.)* Papaw, what is this?

PAPAW: That's a string of lights, Bobby. An old one.

BOBBY: They're so big! Won't they burn down the tree?

PAPAW: Naw. You're just used to those little bitty twinkle lights. You've never lived until you've lit up a tree with these. *(They drape lights on tree as Crystal digs in trunk.)*

CRYSTAL: Oh, how pretty. *(She gets an assortment of old glittering glass balls from the trunk.)*

PAPAW: Now, be careful with those, honey. They'll break real easy. Made out of real glass. They made them in the days before everything turned to plastic. These are real Christmas balls. *(They hang them carefully on tree)*

BOBBY: What's this stuff, Papaw?

PAPAW: Icicles. Real icicles. Feel how heavy they are. They're not made out of plastic either.

CRYSTAL: Is all this stuff going to break the tree limbs, Papaw?

PAPAW: No, honey. A real tree is strong enough to handle any load. Now, a plastic tree would break.

(They continue to decorate.)

BOBBY: What are we going to put on the top, Papaw? I don't see an angel in here.

PAPAW: *(Looks around the room and spies an old star.)* This star made your Mamaw squeal when she first saw it. Said it was way too big for a tree. Puts out enough light you can see it for miles. *(He carefully places it at the top of the tree. and pauses to think.)* Your brother, Richard, always had the honor of putting that star on the tree. He came up here and helped me decorate it every year until he left.

BOBBY: Let's put Richard's picture on the tree. *(He takes the picture of Richard and nestles it in the lower branches.)* I prayed for more than just Mom and Dad's division problems. I prayed Richard would come home for Christmas.

CRYSTAL: *(Looks at Papaw and frowns.)* Well, you may not have prayed loud enough, Bobby, so don't be surprised if God didn't hear you.

BOBBY: Sis, don't say that! Papaw said God could hear me even if I whisper. Richard will come home. Won't he Papaw?

PAPAW: *(Glances at Crystal and smiles.)* Son, if you have faith enough in that prayer, Richard will be here. Now, let's pray real hard that the lights still shine. If one light is burned out, the whole string will be dead. *(He bends over and plugs in the lights which glow brightly. The children cheer.)*

MARY: *(Comes into room followed by David. Papaw and the children try to hide the tree.)* There you are. What is that?

DAVID: You got a tree up here? How did you get a tree up those stairs?

BOBBY: He grew it up here, Dad. Ever since Mamaw died.

CRYSTAL: Yeah. He took care of it every day. Watered it and fed it and kept it alive. Isn't it pretty?

MARY: I don't believe it. You've been caring for a tree in your attic for ten years?

DAVID: See, I told you he's gone off the deep end. *(He notices Richard's picture.)* What's that picture doing on the tree? *(He walks over and snatches picture from the treetop.)* I thought I told you *(to Mary)* to throw this away! He's not coming back! Understand me! He's gone!

BOBBY: But he's coming home, Daddy.

DAVID: Where did you get a crazy idea like that?

BOBBY: Papaw told us if we prayed real hard that you and mom would do better with your division. And, I prayed for Richard to come home.

DAVID: *(Looks down at Bobby and then up at Papaw.)* What are you doing putting these foolish ideas in their heads, old man? And what makes you think Mary and I can't handle our own problems?

PAPAW: Don't hurt to have someone pray for you, David.

DAVID: I can't believe you told them!

PAPAW: The only thing I told them was to pray. Everything else they figured out for themselves. Kids aren't stupid, David. They pick up on what is going on. Sometimes, better than you do!

MARY: We weren't going to ruin their Christmas. And now look what you've done. Ruined the whole thing.

PAPAW: Now wait a dag snatchit minute! *(Getting angry.)* First off don't go blaming all your problems on me. And don't start belittling the power of prayer! If these children believe God Almighty is going to answer their prayer, then you don't discourage them. Just because you done gone and lost your faith, don't mean they have. And as for foolish ideas, David, what about this tree? Would you have thought that a tree would grow in an attic? Huh?

DAVID: You're crazy! I'm calling the nursing home, right now!

PAPAW: *(Reaches out and grabs David as he turns to leave the attic and takes the picture of Richard out of his hand.)* You're not going

anywhere! You're going to stand right here and let me have my say!

(He crosses to the tree glowing brightly with lights and puts Richard's picture back on) You know what it takes to grow an attic tree? Huh? Do you?

DAVID: Senility?

PAPAW: It takes commitment. Course you may not know what that word means.

I had to come up here everyday and water this tree. Needed fertilizer, too. Somedays I had to bring your mother-in-law's old electric heater so it wouldn't freeze. And I had to turn it so that the sun would get to all sides and it wouldn't grow crooked. I had to care for it. I had to make sacrifices. I had to get my priorities straight.

You see, I love this tree, David. It reminds me of the love your mother-in-law had for me. And Mary. It reminds me of all she sacrificed to be a good wife and a good mother. That is what love is all about. Commitment, priorities, sacrifice. Love is a decision, David. It don't just happen.

DAVID: Through with your lecture, Papaw? *(sarcastically.)* Cause if not, you can just finish it in the retirement home. And you can take your tree with you. Because, I don't believe in love anymore. And I don't believe in prayer. And if God is still out there, he isn't listening to me, anymore.

PAPAW: Plastic trees, twinkle lights, plastic decorations! You're just like that, David. All plastic and disposable. If your life becomes difficult, you just throw it away and start all over. Why don't you fight for your family, David? It isn't recyclable.

MARY: David, maybe he's right. Maybe we should try to work out our differences.

DAVID: Are you buying this garbage, too? We've been down that road, Mary. It's not going to work out.

(Children begin to cry and Mary starts to run from room and stops when she hears voice off stage.)

YOUNG MAN: Hello, is anybody home? *(Walks into attic.)*

MARY: *(Stops a yard away from the young man. Her face shows her obvious surprise and she suddenly runs up and hugs him.)*
Richard! You've come home.

RICHARD: Hey, Mom. Yes, I finally came home.

MARY: All those prayers weren't wasted after all. God did hear me.

RICHARD: I wish my hearing had been that good. I could have saved us a whole lot of misery. *(They embrace.)* Is this Bobby and Crystal? Come give me a hug.

BOBBY: *(Over Richard's shoulder.)* See, Dad, God did hear my prayer. Even though I spilled the milk.

RICHARD: Papaw. *(They embrace and Richard looks at the tree.)* You still got your tree, I see. Man, it's really grown since you showed it to me three years ago. I haven't been able to get it off my mind ever since. Guess if I had realized then that people were going to be as persistent in praying for me as you were in raising this

tree, I could have saved us all a lot of misery. I'm glad the old star still works. I was able to see it from the road. If it hadn't have been for that star, I would have been lost in the snow.

(Richard slowly walks across the room and stops just in front of his father.)

RICHARD: Hello, Dad. It's been a long time.

DAVID: Hi, ...uh, son. *(He whispers.)*

RICHARD: I had a speech all prepared but I can't remember it. So, let me get this out before I start crying. I just want to say I'm sorry for all the pain and suffering I put you through. I know you probably worried yourself half to death over me.

DAVID: *(Angrily.)* Well, that's the problem. I didn't worry. I wiped you out of my mind. As far as I was concerned, you died.

RICHARD: I see. You can't find it in your heart to forgive me?

DAVID: I don't know.

RICHARD: Daddy, what's happened to you? You're different. You forgave me for spraying all of your shaving cream in the sink that time. And, then there was the window I somersaulted through. And the time I burned down the washhouse. And...

DAVID: Shut up! I don't want to think about....

RICHARD: *(Suddenly angry.)* What have I done to you? I'm not the one who died. The father I knew has died. *(Turns his back on his father and then slowly regains his composure. Turns back to his father.)* If I did this to you, please forgive me.

MARY: *(Goes to Richard and takes his arm.)* David, it's your son. He came home. Remember how badly you wanted him to come home. Remember the night after he left? We knelt beside the bed to pray. Remember what you told God? Can you remember the prayer, David?

DAVID: Yes, I remember it. I don't want to, but I remember it. I told God that I would forgive Richard of whatever he had done if he would only come home.

MARY: *(Goes to David and cradles his face in her hands.)* Oh, David, where did we go wrong? We used to pray about everything. God has kept his side of this bargain, now you must keep yours.

DAVID: You're right. It just means if I forgive Richard, then I have to start believing in prayer again. And, if I start believing in prayer again, then I've got to believe that Bobby's prayers for us might be answered.

MARY: David, look at the star on the tree. See the light. It gave Richard hope that he could find his way out of the snowstorm and back to his family. We've got to look for our own beacon. Bobby and Crystal have prayed for us. We've got to give prayer a chance.

DAVID: So much for Australia!

MARY: We'll go there for our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary.

DAVID: *(Finally smiling.)* I don't know how I can go on fighting this old man *(He points to Papaw.)* and that old man *(He points up to the heavens.)* If prayer brought Richard home, it might still work a miracle in our marriage.

MARY: Let's try to make it work one more time. This time let's start out on our knees.

DAVID: *(Gently takes his hands off of her arms and walks over to Richard.)* I can't forgive you, son. *(He pauses and then reaches out to take his son by the shoulders.)* Unless you forgive me first. *(They embrace.)*

RICHARD: We forgive you, Dad.

MARY: Did you say, we?

RICHARD: *(Looks around him.)* Yeah. I was afraid there might be fireworks so I warned her. Lilly, come on in here. *(A young woman comes into the attic and crosses to Richard.)*

Mom and Dad, meet my wife, Lilly. We just got married.

MARY: Just got married? *(Obviously flustered.)* Welcome, Lilly.

RICHARD: We met in Canada. I was working with handicapped children as part of my college work and Lilly was their school teacher.

DAVID: You've been going to college?

RICHARD: Yeah, Dad. Paid my way through with the band. Only we're not heavy metal anymore. We're contemporary Gospel.

Papaw, I was wondering. Do you think Lilly and I could stay here in this old house with you? Lilly can cook and clean while I'm going to school.

PAPAW: Only if she can do one thing? Can you cook grits?

LILLY: Sure.

RICHARD: I'll work in the yard and fix up the house. We'll even pitch in on the utilities and groceries. That way, I can afford to go to Seminary.

DAVID: *(Shocked)* Seminary?

PAPAW: Oh, I forgot to tell you. God has called me into full time ministry.

DAVID: I think I better sit down. *(Sits in the recliner.)*

PAPAW: *(Looks over at Mary and David.)* Why, son, I'd love to have you.

RICHARD: Thanks, papaw. My prayers have been answered.

PAPAW: So have mine. God grew a tree in an attic and I'd say he can do just about anything He puts his mind to.

MARY: You two look hungry. Let's go down to the kitchen. *(Mary, Richard, and Lilly exit.)*

DAVID: *(Gets up out of recliner and goes over to the picture of Richard. He takes it off the tree and turns to Papaw.)* You know how much I hate it when you're right.

PAPAW: I have that effect on people.

DAVID: *(He puts his arm around Papaw.)* Let me buy you a cup of coffee.

(They exit and Crystal pauses on the steps looking back at Bobby who is staying in the room.)

CRYSTAL: Are you coming, Bobby?

BOBBY: In just a minute, Sis. *(Crystal exits and Bobby runs over to look down the stairs. He runs back to the tree and turns to look up at the heavens.)* Thanks, God for bringing Richard home. And, thanks for helping Mom and Dad with their division.

Now, about those green beans.....

Production Note: This play was performed at a Dinner Theater on November 13, 1992 at Brookwood Baptist Church by the drama team, "construction crew" under the direction of Robbin Cassity. Larry Robison as Papaw, Marilyn Ramsey as Mary, Robbin Cassity as David, Daniel Gordy as Bobby, Alison Thibodeaux as Crystal, Chad Wilson as Richard, Rachel Sullivan as Lilly, and Bruce Hennigan as the Old Man.