

The Picture of Christmas

By Burton Bumgarner

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STORY OF THE PLAY

During the Christmas holidays, Jack Thompson's children are fighting like badgers. Yet, the season of Christmas holds wonderful memories for Jack and his family. He relates the story of his family's "magic Christmas" to his children. We travel back to 1965 when life could not be worse. Jack is 13 years old and his dad is about to lose his job. Jack's sister Corrie has a new boyfriend that brother Billy cannot wait to torture. Grandpa has died, and Grandma is staying with the family for the holidays. She has a passion for guns and answering the advertisements in *Field and Stream* magazine. Melanie and Abbie take refuge from an abusive father in the Thompson's home. Mom's sister, Aunt Hilda, and her horrible son, Little Claude, show up for an extended visit. As Hilda tries to deal with an inevitable divorce, the Thompsons try to deal with Little Claude's smelly feet. Add an obnoxious neighbor who threatens the family with lawsuits, an evil used-car salesman, a bus load of children and a nun stranded by a winter storm on their way to a Christmas pageant and we have what should be the wildest Christmas Eve in history.

It is, of course, the season of miracles and, unlike a certain innkeeper in Bethlehem, the Thompsons find room for everyone. The results are both hilarious and poignant.

The Picture of Christmas

- 3 -

CAST OF CHARACTERS

*10 M (4 Teen, 1 Child, 5 Adult), 8 W (3 Teen, 1 Child, 4 Adult),
Extras (Children for Christmas pageant)*

JACK THOMPSON: Father.
YOUNG JACK THOMPSON: As child about 13.
JASON and JENNIFER: Adult Jack's twins 12 or 13.
CORRIE THOMPSON: Young Jack's sister, 16.
BILLY THOMPSON: Young Jack's brother, 17.
MARTHA THOMPSON: Mom.
WALTER THOMPSON: Dad.
AUNT HILDA: Martha's sister.
LITTLE CLAUDE: Hilda's son, about 10.
GRANDMA: Hilda and Martha's mother.
MELANIE COOPER: Orphan, 15.
ABBIE COOPER: Melanie's sister, 9.
DOUG: Corrie's boyfriend, 16.
MR. STEINMAR: Thompson's neighbor.
SISTER ANNE: A nun.
TRAILBOSS ED DOOLEY: Owns car dealership.
BOB: The radio man.
REBECCA: Christmas pageant narrator.
JAN: Pageant angel.
BRYAN, BEVERLY, MATT & JOEY: Children in choir.
EXTRAS: Children of St. Agnes' Choir.

The Picture of Christmas

- 4 -

SYNOPSIS OF THE SCENES

ACT I

- Scene 1: The present. House of Jack as an adult.
- Scene 2: December 1965. House of Jack as a child.
- Scene 3: That evening.
- Scene 4: A week later.
- Scene 5: That evening.
- Scene 6: The next morning.

ACT II

- Scene 1: Christmas Eve, 1965.
- Scene 2: Christmas, present. House of Jack as an adult.

SETTING

The Thompson home: The present and 1965, during the Christmas holidays. The differences must be obvious. Music between scenes may be that which was popular in 1965. The living room sofa and perhaps an end table and lamp should be placed on the apron (DS of the curtain line) to serve as the living room of the present while curtain is closed but become part of the 1965 house when the curtain is opened. The original production also had the kitchen table and chairs placed on the apron as well. Groups which do not have curtains or large aprons available can use lighting to isolate these areas during the scenes in the present.

Running time app. 1 1/2 hours.

The Picture of Christmas

- 5 -

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: ADULT JACK marches in TWINS and seats them on the sofa.)

A. JACK: I've had a really rotten day, and I'm going to tell you all about it!

JASON: Come on, Dad. It's a good night for TV.

JENNIFER: I'm expecting a phone call, and I'm NOT going to miss it!

(The CHILDREN stand to leave. From behind, JACK gently pulls them back down on the sofa.)

A. JACK: Sit down! I've got something to tell you!

JASON: *(With uncertainty.)* Is something wrong, Dad?

JENNIFER: Really wrong?

A. JACK: What's wrong...really wrong...is you two and the fact that you've been fighting since the day you laid eyes on each other.

JASON/JENNIFER: *(TOGETHER.)* It's her/his fault, Dad!

A. JACK: Don't talk...just listen. It's my rotten day, and I'm going to enjoy it. Not only am I stressed out at work, but I come home to you two. Today I got a call from my sister, your Aunt Corrie. We hadn't talked since last summer when we went out to Seattle to visit. I assume you remember the three-day war we conducted in the mini-van!

(TWINS smile and nod.)

A. JACK: Corrie said she'd had a flat tire in the rain, and it made her think of me.

(TWINS are puzzled.)

The Picture of Christmas

- 6 -

A. JACK: Actually, it reminded her of a Christmas a long time ago...when we were kids. Everything was rotten then, too. But it turned out to be one of those magic Christmases, just like in the movies.

JENNIFER: What movies?

A. JACK: Good movies! Like *A Christmas Carol*, *Miracle on 34th Street*...

A. JACK/TWINS: (*TWINS whine.*) "*It's a Wonderful Life*"!

JASON: That's a boring movie. It isn't even in color.

JENNIFER: And there's no such thing as a 'magic Christmas.' That's just all those old movies you watch.

A. JACK: Well, guys. I'm going to tell you ALL about that Christmas, and you can decide about the magic.

JASON: Another one of your endless stories, Dad?

A. JACK: You bet!

(*TWINS whine.*)

End of Scene 1

End of Freeview

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