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*The  
Match Girl's Gift:  
A Christmas Story*

*by  
Laurie Brooks*

*Dramatic Publishing*

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"Rings with a moral intensity  
that would make Dickens proud.  
Here's a holiday entertainment that trembles  
with the true, radical spirit of Christmas:  
giving when it counts the most."

—*The Tennessean*



## *The Match Girl's Gift: A Christmas Story*

**Drama.** By Laurie Brooks, based on the story by Hans Christian Andersen. Cast: 3m., 3w., optional ensemble of up to 8 children. On Christmas Eve 1898, in the heart of New York City, a gentle snowfall turns fashionable Washington Square into the very picture of a Currier and Ives holiday print, except ... huddled by the steps of an elegant brownstone is a ragged little girl. When her Gran arrives bringing her a gift of "waking dreams" that help her imagine what might be, Lizzie, the match girl, goes into the grand house and offers a unique gift to the family inside. Encouraged by Pitch, the climbing boy, and Henry, the confused young gentleman who lives in the grand house, Lizzie recognizes her own beauty and realizes that without our dreams for the future, we are without hope. This inspiring retelling of this classic story empowers Hans Christian Andersen's little match girl to triumph over despair through the power of belief and the pursuit of dreams. Commissioned and premiered by Nashville Children's Theatre. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 1 hour. Code: MF6.*

Cover photo: istock.  
Cover design: Susan Carle.

13 ISBN: 978-1-58342-553-4  
10 ISBN: 1-58342-553-5

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# THE MATCH GIRL'S GIFT: A Christmas Story

An original play inspired by  
Hans Christian Andersen's  
lyric fairy tale.

By  
LAURIE BROOKS



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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LAURIE BROOKS

Songs: "Now the Wintertime Is Nigh"  
Music and lyrics by Steve Wheaton.

"Just Four Walls"  
Music by Steve Wheaton,  
lyrics by Laurie Brooks and Steve Wheaton.  
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(THE MATCH GIRL'S GIFT: A CHRISTMAS STORY)

ISBN: 1-978-158342-553-4

For Liz, a heart that can give

\* \* \* \*

“Listen! This is the beginning. And when we get to the end, we shall know more than we do now.”

— Hans Christian Andersen

*The Match Girl's Gift: A Christmas Story* was commissioned and premiered by Nashville Children's Theatre in November 1998.

Lizzie, a little match girl . . . . . Misty Lewis  
Henry, son of Edward and Katherine . . . . . Harrison Williams\*  
Katherine, Henry's mother . . . . . Evelyn Blythe\*  
Edward, Henry's father . . . . . Ted Giles\*  
Pitch, a chimney sweep . . . . . Brandon Boyd\*  
Gran, Lizzie's grandmother . . . . . Rona Carter\*  
Understudies . . . . . Heather Corwin, Aarion Butler

Directed by Scot Copeland  
Scenic and Lighting Designs by Christa Phillips  
Costume Design and Construction by Ida  
Tracey Howard Signers for hearing impaired by Karla Kelso

"Now the Wintertime is Nigh" music and lyrics by  
Steve Wheaton  
"Just Four Walls" music by Steve Wheaton, lyrics by Laurie  
Brooks and Steve Wheaton  
Incidental score composed by Steve Wheaton

*The Match Girl's Gift: A Christmas Story* was developed and presented in a June 1998 staged reading at the Provincetown Playhouse in New York City under the auspices of New York University's Program in Educational Theatre, chaired by Lowell Swortzell. The staged reading was produced by Jeff Kennedy and directed by Scot Copeland. The cast featured Ted Giles, Alyson Cozzolina, Rebecca Deshpandé, Landon Scott Heimbach, Scott Levy, Harriet Walle and Ann McCormack.

The premier production was dedicated to Aurand Harris  
with love from Scot and Laurie.

# **THE MATCH GIRL'S GIFT: A Christmas Story**

## **CHARACTERS:**

**LIZZIE** . . . . 10 years old, ragged clothing, rags tied around her feet for shoes, apron and shawl

**PITCH** . . . . 10 years old, a chimneysweep. His clothes and skin are layered with soot from the chimneys

**GRAN** . . . . . Irish accent, a ghostlike figure

**KATHERINE** . . . . . a lady in her late 20s. Henry's mother

**EDWARD** . . . . a gentleman, Henry's father. Well-dressed, mannered, businesslike

**HENRY** . . . . . 10 years old, impulsive, energetic

**SETTING:** New York City, Washington Square. The play takes place in the street outside a grand brownstone and its interior. Christmas Eve, the turn of the century, 1898.

**NOTE:** Six to eight street children may be used in the production. Some lines are included for them in this script but if the street children are not used, the lines are reassigned, and carolers, live or taped, may be substituted.

**SONGS:** Melodies for the two songs can be found on pages 61-63.



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# THE MATCH GIRL'S GIFT: A Christmas Story

*Streetlights. Music. Early evening. Christmas Eve. Snow covers one of New York's most fashionable streets. Sounds of jingle bells, laughing voices, noisemakers. STREET CHILDREN (or carolers) are gathered in the space. At center is the facade of an elegant brownstone. Near the grand house kneels the match girl, LIZZIE. She is dressed in rags, with a threadbare shawl wrapped around her shoulders. Her feet are bare, with rags tied around them against the cold of winter. In her soiled apron she carries bundles of stick matches. Near her is a model house made entirely from matches. It is a replica of the elegant brownstone.*

SONG: "NOW THE WINTERTIME IS NIGH"

STREET CHILDREN (*sing*).

Now the wintertime is nigh,  
Frosty cheek, sparkling eye;  
Ev'rywhere the welcome cry,  
"A merry, merry Christmas!"  
Hear the city clamor swell,  
Bustling crowd, pealing bell;  
Sing we all a glad Noel,  
"A merry, merry Christmas!"

La la la la la  
la la, hum-m-m, hum-m-m—

SONG: "JUST FOUR WALLS"

LIZZIE (*sings*).

A house is really just a place,  
Just a place, ordinary space,  
It's not the answer to my ev'ry prayer.  
It's just four walls;  
Just four walls,  
Windows and doors and clean swept floors;  
For sleeping tight on a snowy night,  
A house is the place to be.  
It's just four walls,  
Just four walls;  
And though I'll never see  
What living there might be;  
But, tell the truth—  
I'll tell the truth—  
It would be all the world to me.

*(The clock strikes the hour: seven o'clock. Offstage voices, laughing at some private amusement of the season. STREET CHILDREN and carolers exit. LIZZIE hastily wraps the house up in a bundle of rags and hides it out of sight. Enter HENRY, followed by KATHERINE and EDWARD, dressed in their holiday clothes.)*

KATHERINE. Slow down, Henry. I'm quite out of breath trying to keep pace with you.

HENRY. It's Christmas Eve, Mother! I want to open my presents.

KATHERINE. Not until midnight, dear. That's when Santa Claus comes.

HENRY. I'm too old for Santa Claus, Mother.

KATHERINE. Too old for Santa Claus? Well then, perhaps you're too old for presents, too?

HENRY. Of course not. No one's too old for presents. Did you get me the toy soldiers I wanted, Mother?

EDWARD. Henry! One would think all you care about is what you'll receive. Christmas is more than that.

KATHERINE. Look at this lovely night. The snow so white and pure. Look, there's a falling star. Make a wish.

HENRY. I wish I'd get the toy soldiers for Christmas.

EDWARD. Fol-de-rol. Wishing has its place, I suppose, but better to keep your mind on practicalities in this world.

KATHERINE. Yes, but it is a lovely night for wishing.

*(EDWARD turns to the grand house.)*

EDWARD. It is a grand house, isn't it, Mother?

KATHERINE. Of course, dear. It's the finest house in New York built by the finest architect.

EDWARD. Oh, you flatter me, Mother.

KATHERINE. Not at all. No one could have done better.

*(LIZZIE sneezes.)*

HENRY. There's someone in the alley.

*(EDWARD brandishes his walking stick.)*

EDWARD. You there. Come out! *(Pause.)* Come out, I say!

*(LIZZIE comes slowly forward.)*

EDWARD. Well, well, what have we here? Whatever are you doing in this neighborhood? Speak up, child.

KATHERINE. She's ill. Poor little thing.

EDWARD. What do you have in that bundle? You haven't stolen it, have you?

KATHERINE. Oh, I'm sure that can't be.

HENRY. Let me see. Can I have it?

EDWARD. Certainly not!

KATHERINE. Probably everything she owns is wrapped up in that parcel.

EDWARD. Go on home now. You don't belong in this district.

*(LIZZIE steps back, falls, her matches and bundle sprawling onto the street.)*

KATHERINE. Oh, dear.

HENRY. Why, they're bundles of matches.

EDWARD. A street seller. I might have known.

KATHERINE. I'm afraid so, dear.

HENRY *(making a face)*. They're all wet.

*(LIZZIE is frozen to the spot, staring at HENRY.)*

HENRY. Are you hurt?

*(LIZZIE is transfixed.)*

HENRY. I said, are you hurt?

EDWARD. You there, girl, my son is speaking to you.

KATHERINE. Probably not quite right in the head, poor thing. Best to leave her alone.

*(LIZZIE tries to speak, cannot.)*

EDWARD. Yes, time to be going inside.

LIZZIE *(to HENRY)*. Please, sir, buy my matches, poor little girl.

KATHERINE. Oh, she does speak!

EDWARD. Matches, indeed! Go home directly, and tell your wicked parents to lay off the drink and keep you home where you belong. You must be half frozen with cold.

KATHERINE. It is growing colder, I believe.

EDWARD. It's the damp, I fear. We should go in before we all freeze.

*(The family turns and heads for the door of the house.)*

HENRY. I feel like putting my feet right inside the fireplace and my hands, too.

EDWARD. Will there be room for two of us in there, do you think?

KATHERINE. Haven't you forgotten someone?

EDWARD. Who?

KATHERINE. Why me, of course! I shall need warming up, too.

*(EDWARD and KATHERINE move to the house. HENRY lingers for a last backward glance at LIZZIE.)*

HENRY. Mother, she hasn't any shoes on.

KATHERINE. Best not to think of it, dear. There are hundreds like her in the city.

EDWARD. Henry, come inside now. (*EDWARD enters the house.*)

KATHERINE. Time to light the lamps or Santa Claus will never find us.

HENRY. Oh, Mother, you're silly.

*(The family enters the house and the door closes. Lights go on in the house, one by one.)*

LIZZIE. Merry Christmas!

*(LIZZIE gazes in the window of the grand house. Enter PITCH, the chimneysweep, carrying his brushes and scraper. He wears a coat and cap caked with soot and grime, as are his face and hands. He wears shoes that are too large for his feet and worn through in several places. There are large holes in the knees of his trousers.)*

PITCH. Lizzie!

LIZZIE. Sshhhh. They just now gone in.

PITCH. Careful. If they catch you gawkin' in the windows you'll spend Christmas Eve in jail.

LIZZIE. Pitch, look. She's takin' off her fur muff and hat. Don't they look soft?

PITCH. Soft as the hands of them that don't know a day's work.

LIZZIE. They're gentlemen. They have servants that do the work for 'em.

PITCH. Why should they work when they got us to do it?

LIZZIE. Isn't he the handsomest boy you've ever seen?

Like a prince. (*LIZZIE retrieves her model house and unwraps it.*)

PITCH. He's not a prince. He's just rich.

(*LIZZIE works on the house.*)

PITCH. Have you finished it?

LIZZIE. Almost.

PITCH. It's a wonder, the way you fitted them matches together and all.

LIZZIE. Took me forever and a day to hide 'em so they wouldn't notice.

PITCH. It looks just like the grand house. As good as those dollhouses in the shops. We could sell it for pocketfuls of cash.

LIZZIE. God's eyeballs, Pitch. I'd never sell it.

PITCH. We could have meat pies tonight and hot soup. A Christmas Eve feast.

LIZZIE. No. Besides, I'm still working on it.

PITCH. Is that why you're still here? Everyone else's gone home.

LIZZIE. I ain't goin' home.

PITCH. You'll freeze.

LIZZIE. I'd rather freeze than get my skin flailed off. I ain't sold no matches today.

PITCH. Best not to go home at all than go home without a penny.

LIZZIE. I ain't going home ever again. I'd rather die than go home.

PITCH. Wish I ain't gone home tonight.



LIZZIE. Oh, Pitch. (*She looks at the raw flesh at his knees.*) They're bleedin' bad.

PITCH. Dickie rubbed in the salt brine. Says we got to toughen 'em up for climbin' the chimneys.

LIZZIE. That Dickie's a mean one.

PITCH. He was starin' at me the whole time he was rubbin', waitin' for me to cry.

LIZZIE. He could wait all day and all night, too.

PITCH. I ain't never cried in all my life and never will. He called me a crybaby, anyway. Said he'd sell me to the ratcatcher!

LIZZIE. He'll do no such thing.

PITCH. I'm braver than Dickie. He cries in his sleep. (*Conspiratorially.*) He's scared of the dark.

LIZZIE. You're not scared of the dark.

PITCH. I ain't scared of nothin'.

LIZZIE. Nothin'?

PITCH. Nothin' in this wide world. (*PITCH tries not to smile and almost succeeds.*)

LIZZIE. Pitch...remember what Gran said about the truth?

PITCH (*reciting from memory*). Telling the truth is best. It's easiest to remember.

LIZZIE. Pitch. You've got on your lying smile.

PITCH. I do not.

LIZZIE. You always smile when you don't tell the truth. You can't fool me.

PITCH. Well, I ain't scared of almost nothin'.

LIZZIE. You're the bravest climbing boy in all New York.

PITCH. Well, climbin' boys got to be brave. That's the truth.

LIZZIE. And match girls, too.

PITCH. Here. I brung you a bit of bread.

LIZZIE. I can't take your bread. You're hungry.

PITCH. No, I'm not. A nice lady give me supper for sweeping her chimneys. Sat me right down at the diningroom table, fine as can be. (*PITCH is smiling his lying smile.*)

LIZZIE. Pitch...

PITCH. What?

LIZZIE. You're smiling again. Tell the truth.

PITCH. No.

LIZZIE. Tell.

PITCH. I ain't had nothin' to eat since yesterday.

LIZZIE. You have the bread.

PITCH. No, I brung it for you.

LIZZIE. But you're hungry and I'm not.

PITCH. Now who's lyin'?

LIZZIE. I ain't lyin'.

PITCH. I'll lay the table. Then you'll eat. (*PITCH takes an old rag out of his pocket and, with a grand gesture, spreads it on the ground. He reaches in his pocket for the bread. It has completely dissolved into crumbs that fall onto the snow.*) Crushed.

LIZZIE. Scramblin' up the chimneys.

PITCH. Well then. We'll eat the crumbles.

LIZZIE. You eat them. Don't let them go to waste.

*(PITCH eats the crumbs. The following lines are a litany the children have repeated many times before.)*

PITCH. Tell me about grandmas, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. A grandma is someone who loves you.

PITCH. My grandma would bring me sweets.

LIZZIE. She wouldn't have sweets. But, oh, the stories she'd tell. She'd hold you close and tell your favorite stories over and over again. Even stories about us. Those are the best stories. Because we're in them.

PITCH. I wish I had a grandma, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. If you did, you'd keep her close to you. Never let her out of your sight.

PITCH. Never let her out of my sight.

LIZZIE. Or they'll take her away and you'll never see her again.

PITCH. If they try to take my grandma away, I'll bash 'em, that's what.

LIZZIE. So cold. I'm so cold.

*(PITCH takes off his coat and puts it around LIZZIE's shoulders.)*

PITCH. Will you be my grandma, Lizzie?

LIZZIE. Oh, Pitch, I can't be your grandma. I ain't gonna get big. I'll die before I get big.

PITCH. Lizzie! Don't say that.

LIZZIE. It's true. I know that now.

PITCH. I'll make you a home with a warm fire. Then you'll get well.

LIZZIE. I ain't gonna get well. And when I die, you must be your own brave self. I ain't afraid.

PITCH. Remember what Gran said? What you taught me? Never give up. I'm growin' every day, Lizzie. Soon I'll be too big to climb the chimneys and Dickie'll never see me again. *(He takes his brush and sweeps the snow aside.)* I'll be a crossing sweeper on Fifth Avenue. *(He pretends.)* "Here, miss, step light, there's a bit of wet