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Family Plays

A MAGIC CHRISTMAS

A Play for Children
in One Act

Drama by

Faye D. Julian



A MAGIC CHRISTMAS

Premiered by the University of Tennessee Department of Speech and Theatre: "A very successful run of the children's show has been completed. We had a total of ten performances [plus] a performance as a Christmas gift to subscribers and their families. A total of 4,846 children paid to see the production and they had approximately 650 adults chaperoning them. The performance for subscribers let an additional 550 see the show."

Drama. By Faye D. Julian. Cast: 2m., 4w. There has always been something magical about Christmas—from that very first Christmas when a new star appeared in the East to Christmases today when toys mysteriously appear in stockings and under trees, and hearts turn warm. This one-act play for children shows a very special Christmas for Miss Annie Belle, who hasn't had a truly merry Christmas in many years. Now, running out of money, this may be her worst. She keeps wishing for a white Christmas. She's really good hearted—just a bit selfish. She is so lonely that she talks to her plants and a dilapidated old doll whose head keeps falling off. A series of strange events, aided by the poinsettia, the holly plant and the doll, give Miss Annie her chance to prove the goodness of her heart.

***When it snows at Christmas
In Georgia's southern part,
It means that heaven's been touched
By the goodness of a heart.***

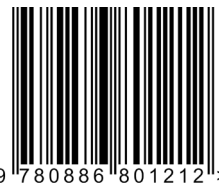
This show will amuse your audiences, and it will touch their hearts, too. The "live" holly and poinsettia plants will thrill young viewers. A touching, significant play for all ages, it is perfect for children from kindergarten through junior high. *Set: screened porch in southern Georgia on Christmas Eve. Production notes give detailed instructions. Approximate running time: 30 minutes. Code: ML2.*

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(A MAGIC CHRISTMAS)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

A MAGIC CHRISTMAS

Characters

Miss Annie Belle, an energetic, kindly, somewhat eccentric, but cheerful woman

Holly, a cowardly male holly bush

Setta, a pretty female poinsettia plant

Miz Zelda, a pretentious, conceited, selfish woman

Peggy, a pretty, young girl who talks too much

Egbert, a confused, humorous, and tired mailman

Setting: The screened porch of Miss Annie Belle's frame house
in southern Georgia

Time: About dusk of a very warm Christmas Eve



First produced (as "The Confounding Christmas") by the University of Tennessee Theatres in December, 1981, under the direction of Anne Petree, setting by Robert Mashburn, costumes by Rafael Colon, with the following cast:

Miss Annie	Dale Dickey
Setta	Belinda Beeman
Holly	Richard Swan
Miz Zelda	Missy Mashburn
Peggy Anderson	Angela Perez-Cisneros
Egbert Tillman	John E. Cherry

ABOUT THE PLAY

There has always been something magic about Christmas—from that very first Christmas when a new star appeared in the East to Christmases today when toys mysteriously appear in stockings and under trees, and hearts turn warm.

This play shows a very special Christmas for Miss Annie, who hasn't had a truly merry Christmas in many years. She is so lonely that she talks to her plants and a dilapidated old doll. It will amuse your audiences, and it will touch their hearts, too. The "live" holly and poinsettia plants will thrill young viewers.

"A Magic Christmas" is recommended for children from kindergarten through junior high.

Premiered by the University of Tennessee Department of Speech and Theatre, the play won this report from the University Theatres Ticket Office: "A very successful run of the children's show has been completed. We had a total of ten performances [plus] a performance as a Christmas gift to subscribers and their families. A total of 4,846 children paid to see the production and they had approximately 650 adults chaperoning them. The performance for subscribers let an additional 550 see the show."

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

Frayed and dilapidated doll (head must come off, but not too easily)
Bag with note and large wad of paper money—inside doll
Knitting basket, containing yarn, needle, and scissors
New pair of knitted house slippers—Miss Annie
Large purse or tote bag—Miz Zelda
Handkerchief—in Zelda's purse
Small jar of preserves—in Zelda's purse
Mail pouch containing picture post card, several envelopes, and a hatchet—Egbert
Tax notice—in one of the envelopes
Extra flowers and holly branches—concealed in Setta's and Holly's pots
Shawl—Miss Annie
Trousers with one red leg, one green leg—Peggy
Pin cushion—Peggy

Costumes and Make-Up

Setta and Holly, of course, will be the hit of the show in the eyes of young audiences. In the University of Tennessee production, both "plants" wore dark green long-sleeved leotards, green cotton gloves, brown tights, and ballet slippers. Holly wore a bushy white yarn wig, and Setta wore a white yarn wig with bangs and 2 long braids tied at the bottom with big pink bows. Setta was made up to resemble a very pretty teenage doll. Holly's make-up included a bulbous red nose (like a holly berry) and a big red circle on each cheek—a sort of clown make-up. Around the waist, each wore a large terra-cotta colored flower pot made of papier mache (or any other light, shapable material). Growing out of the pot and up the performers' arms and torso were the plants—in Setta's case large red poinsettia bracts with green leaves; and in Holly's case, sharp-pointed English holly leaves with large red berries. Setta had a big blossom (or bract) on the top of her head growing out of a hood-like stem. Holly had a "hat" of holly leaves and berries. Each "plant" kneeled behind a low fence when not moving about the stage (the fence is not mandatory). The voices, antics, and movements of the "plants" should be lively and mischievous.



Setta's costume

Miss Annie may wear a plain cotton dress of a warm pastel color, and white apron. Her well-worn knitted house slippers have holes in them. Miz Zelda in the premiere production was dressed in what she considered stylish, expensive clothes, but they give the appearance of being tacky and overdressed in a comical way (in keeping with the fantasy of the play). She wore a fringed satin dress (dark colored),

a fox fur choker, red and white striped stockings, large floppy house shoes, a dainty apron, and much costume jewelry. Her make-up and hairstyle were in keeping with her costume.

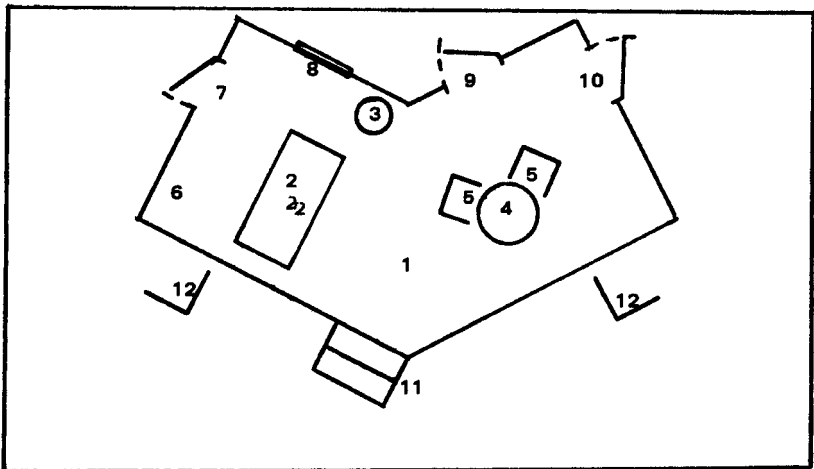
Peggy is dressed like a modern young schoolgirl. Egbert may wear a regulation Postal Service uniform, or dark trousers and white or gray shirt. He wears a pith helmet (because it is warm, even though it's winter), and he wears one bright red and one bright green sock.

Sound and Special Effects

The most frequent sound effect is the radio—Christmas music and the Announcer's voice. A barking dog is also heard.

Snow begins falling at the end of the play. Shredded styrofoam in a perforated or chicken-wire basket above the apron can be agitated to provide the snow fall. Or Miss Annie may mime the snow. Note that the porch supposedly has a roof, so the snow would fall only in the yard.

The Set



Scale 1/8" = 1'

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1—The porch (platforms) | 7—"Back" door to porch |
| 2—Swing or settee | 8—Window (does not have to be practical) |
| 3—Small table with radio | 9—Door to house interior |
| 4—Porch table | 10—Door to kitchen |
| 5—Porch chairs (or old-fashioned rocking chairs) | 11—Step unit |
| 6—Screened-in porch wall | 12—Low fences for flowers |

The porch may be represented by platforms, with a step unit leading up to the porch level. The floor plan above is similar to the University of Tennessee set. The house walls at the rear of the porch were authentic-looking exterior walls of a typical southern frame (clapboard) house. The Stage Right wall was screened, with a "back" door as indicated. Holly and Setta were "planted" behind a low picket fence. A much simpler set may be used; e.g., one rectangular platform for the porch and no fences for the plants. The simplest set, of course, is the stage floor itself as the porch (no platforms). The plants may sit at the edge of the porch in this case.

A MAGIC CHRISTMAS

By Faye D. Julian

[The setting is the screen porch of a frame house in South Georgia. Stage Left is the door into the kitchen, and Up Center is the door into the bedroom area. A swing (or outdoor settee) is at stage Right, and a round table with chairs on either side is Stage Left. In the chair left of the table there is a large tattered doll. A knitting basket sits on the table. Up Stage Right is a back entrance to the porch. A small stand holding a radio is just left of the swing. A poinsettia and a holly plant decorate the yard in front of the porch (the holly is Stage Left, and the poinsettia is Stage Right). The time is late afternoon on a warm Christmas Eve. The curtain opens, and MISS ANNIE BELLE, a cheerful, somewhat eccentric woman enters. She wears an apron over her very plain cotton dress. She has on knitted slippers with holes in them, and she is carrying a pair of newly knitted slippers. She places the slippers on the table, crosses to the radio, turns it on, and tunes it to seasonal music. She crosses Down Left and begins to talk to the holly plant]

MISS ANNIE BELLE. Well, Holly, I just finished that jam cake for tomorrow and put it in the oven. 'Fraid it's rather small; really just half a jam cake because I only had a half a jar of blackberry jam left and just a handful of walnuts, but there'll be enough if someone stops by for a little Christmas party. Wouldn't that be fun! We can have cake and boiled custard. *[The she remembers]* Oh no! I don't have any milk for the boiled custard. Well, we'll just have cake and a cup of tea. I do have a few tea bags left. *[She crosses to Stage Right and speaks to the poinsettia]* You know, Setta, I'm practically out of money. I just can't figure it out. Papa used to have a right smart of money, but I don't know what he did with it. I know he didn't put it in some bank. He was always afraid the banks would collapse. *[She crosses and sits in the chair right of the table and begins to knit]* People said Papa was strange and superstitious. Guess I'm a lot like him—at least to some folks. I'm like him about Christmas. It's the best time of the year! *[The voice of a radio announcer interrupts the music]*

ANNOUNCER. This is station WLEE, Leesburg, Georgia, reporting that our temperature this Christmas Eve is 70 degrees. *[MISS ANNIE crosses to radio and turns it off; again speaks to plants]*

MISS ANNIE BELLE. I remember when I was a little girl, on Christmas day we had mobs of people here. And it was usually about as warm as it is now; so we could come from inside and celebrate on this porch. Of course what all us children were wishing was that a big snow would fall so we could go sledding. But that just doesn't happen very often this far south. I only remember a few snows in my lifetime and none of them came on Christmas. My papa used to say that it would only snow here for a magic Christmas. He'd say:

When it snows at Christmas
 In Georgia's southern part,
 It means that heaven's been touched
 By the goodness of a heart.

Wonder what kind of goodness he was talking about? I guess I always thought I was a pretty good person. I don't steal or anything like that. I don't lie . . . well, at least not *big* lies. Sometimes I may have to fib a little, but that's not really being bad. Doesn't hurt at all, unless maybe your conscience sorta bothers you. That can be a problem. But maybe there's just not enough goodness in any of us to cause a magic Christmas. [*She moves to table and puts down knitting*] Anyway it's silly to think about snow in this warm climate. We ought to be happy to have this nice weather. [*She picks up doll*] And you, dear Tina, were given to me one Christmas many years ago. Papa used to say there was something special about you, and he made me promise to keep you always. What was that riddle he'd say? Oh, yes.

Christmas Tina holds the clue
 To all the things I wish for you.

I don't know if I really understood what it meant, but I think he must have been wishing me to have a good companion that never complains or asks for anything but a little attention. I know he would have wanted us to have a better Christmas than this one's going to be. I guess we've seen a lot happier ones. But just listen to me! I've lived alone so long I've taken to talking to an old doll and my plants. Well, they say it makes the plants grow. I'd better go see about that cake. [*She leaves the doll on the table and exits, Left. The plants begin to move*]

SETTA. Say, Holly, does talking to us really make us grow?

HOLLY. Sure. [*He gets up and crosses to Setta*] Just look at the new branches and berries I have. And you have a lot of new leaves this season.

SETTA. [*As she gets up*] Well, I sure do.

HOLLY. [*He struts and preens*] Why Miss Annie talks to us and feeds us and waters us—treats us as if we were human. And since we're cared for, we thrive. I feel great! [*Looks at doll. Crosses to steps (or stage apron) and sits*] But I don't understand why Miss Annie treats that old doll the way she does. It certainly doesn't thrive. It's just a nasty old toy that ought to be thrown away. In fact, [*getting up*] I think I'll take it out and bury it somewhere.

SETTA. Why, Holly, I do believe you're jealous of Tina.

HOLLY. Me, jealous? What ever gave you that idea? Why should I be jealous of that old doll? She's not even real.

SETTA. Well, you shouldn't be jealous. Miss Annie's got enough love to go around. And jealousy isn't good for you anyway. Just think how well taken care of we are. And all that talking we get from Miss Annie must have something to do with our growth. I used to be about two feet tall. Now just look at me. Did you hear that story Miss Annie told Miz Zelda about how children need so many hugs each day to make them grow? Miz Zelda didn't believe her, of course.

HOLLY. [*As he crosses to Setta*] Miz Zelda doesn't believe much of anything. She just likes to repeat gossip and talk about how much better she is than anybody else. I'd love to tell her—no show her—what I think of her. [*Acts as if he's about to fight*]

SETTA. Look who's coming! [*Hurries back to original position at Stage Right*]

HOLLY. [*Sees Miz Zelda and jumps back to his original spot*] Whoops! I hope she didn't hear me.

ZELDA. [*Entering*] Yoo-hoo! Are you here? It's me, Zelda. Oh, Annie Belle! [*To herself*] Just look at that silly doll of Annie's. A grown woman and still attached to an old thing like that. No telling how many germs on that thing. If it was mine, I'd burn it. [*She crosses to doll, takes a handkerchief from purse and dusts it. Pauses*] I think I will burn it. [*PLANTS gasp. She rushes downstage*] What was that noise? [*Pause*] Must have been the wind. [*She puts doll in her over-sized purse*] Annie will never know.

SETTA. Oh, yes she will!

ZELDA. Who said that? [*She moves downstage again and looks around. The holly catches her attention*] Believe I'll ask Annie to pull off a bunch of this holly to put on my door tomorrow. [*HOLLY begins to shake*] She won't miss it. It's certainly not going to be seen here. Wonder why her plants always look so much better than mine? [*She*

moves to poinsettia] And this plant really ought to be in my nice living room. Poinsettia's are only meant to last through Christmas anyway. They're just for decoration—not for keeping. Where is that Annie? Annie Belle! Where are you? *[She goes into the house through Up Center door]*

HOLLY. *[Getting up]* Did you hear that? She wants to pull off some of me. That's worse than cutting! Pull me out by the roots, destroy me, kill me!

SETTA. What about me? She wants to take me home and just let me wither after Christmas. What's worse—a quick or slow death! What'll we do?

HOLLY. Well, I don't know about you, but I'm leaving! *[Starts around the side of house, Stage Left. He stops when SETTA speaks and runs to him]*

SETTA. But where would you go? And what would become of you without Miss Annie to look after you?

HOLLY. Somebody would take pity on me and adopt me.

SETTA. Yeah, adopt you for a Christmas wreath, and then toss you out after Christmas.

HOLLY. Are people really that cruel?

SETTA. Not cruel. Most people just don't realize that we have feelings.

HOLLY. *[Yelling to audience]* Hello, people!!! My name is Holly, and I have feelings!!! I do not—I repeat—do not—like to be pulled or cut. IT HURTS!!! *[He breaks down and cries]*

SETTA. *[Comforts Holly]* Now, stop worrying. Miss Annie would never allow anything to happen to us. *[Offstage voices]* Here they come! *[PLANTS run back to places, nearly colliding in their hurry]*

ZELDA. Well, that jam cake does smell good. It's got more aroma than size. But you should see the huge fruit cake I made and the fresh coconut cake, and I glazed a ham and I've the stuffing all ready for my turkey. My Christmas dinner is going to be perfectly delicious. By the way, what are you having, Annie? *[She sits at table]*

MISS ANNIE. Well—besides the cake, I have a—a—small—a small . . .

ZELDA. A small what, Annie? A small turkey. Why, you only need a small turkey since there's just the one of you . . .

MISS ANNIE. Well, actually, it's not a small turkey. It's a little . . .

ZELDA. A little ham? You only need a little ham. It's so fattening.

MISS ANNIE. Well, what it is—is—a little—small—can of chili. And

I've got some crackers. I don't really need a lot, you know. And you can feast on almost anything, if you're happy.

ZELDA. Yuck! That sounds pathetic for a Christmas dinner. *[Stands]* You know, dear, I'd love to ask you over to eat with us tomorrow, but I have a full table already; and with my daughter coming in from Chicago, I'm afraid I just wouldn't have much time for you. I'm so excited about seeing that girl I don't know what to do. Just having her here will be the best Christmas present of all.

MISS ANNIE. I'm happy for you, Zelda. And I'll be happy right here with my friends—the plants and Tina. *[Looks around]* Where is Tina? I left her right here on the table. She was here when I went in the kitchen.

ZELDA. Well, I really have to go now. *[Starts to exit]*

SETTA. LOOK IN HER PURSE!

ZELDA. Who said look in my purse?

MISS ANNIE. *[Confused]* Look in your purse?

ZELDA. There's that strange noise again.

HOLLY. *[To Setta]* Let her take the old thing. Get rid of her.

ZELDA. Annie, some strange sounds are coming from the front yard. What do you think it is?

MISS ANNIE. I don't know, but I do know that Tina was here when I went inside and now she's gone. I want to know where in the world she could be. Was there a burglar here? *[She is looking frantically on the porch for Tina]* Zelda, do you know anything about Tina?

ZELDA. Whatever do you mean? How would I know where that old doll is? *[She opens purse to take handkerchief to wipe her face, and MISS ANNIE sees the doll]*

MISS ANNIE. Zelda! Tina's in your purse! *[Tries to retrieve Tina. The two of them struggle. Tina's head comes off]* Now look. She's losing her head. *[MISS ANNIE puts head on, holds doll close to her]*

ZELDA. Well, I was just taking her home to wash her dress and surprise you on Christmas.

PLANTS. HISS!!!! BOO!!!!

ZELDA. Well, I was!

MISS ANNIE. It doesn't matter. As long as I got her back. I appreciate your thoughtfulness, Zelda, but I'd feel much better if I have Tina here with me. She's some comfort to me. Now my Christmas will be bearable. Of course, it **would** be better if it would snow.

ZELDA. Annie Belle! How ridiculous! It hardly ever snows here, and the temperature must be in the high 60's today. There's no way it could snow.