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Dramatic Publishing





A CHRISTMAS PLAY IN ONE ACT

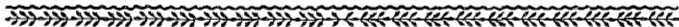
Gift of a Star

by

LEONARD WIBBERLEY



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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(GIFT OF A STAR)

GIFT OF A STAR

A Christmas Play in One Act
For Eight Boys and Five Girls, Extras

CHARACTERS

MRS. NEWMAN
MR. NEWMAN
JANE
CHRISTOPHER
JOHN
SANTA CLAUS
PURPLE DRAGON
THREE ANGELS
THREE WISE MEN

Shoppers, Children, Saleswoman, Man, Floor-walker, animals.

PLACE: The Newman home, and in a store.

TIME: A few days before Christmas.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Scene Two, in Wixter's Department Store:

The playwright uses the scene with the animals to show the way the children react to Christmas, in contrast with the way the adults react. If possible, it would be effective to have children in cute animal costume who lie on or about the counters, apparently mere toys when the adults are looking at them, but who come to life when the children appear and dance with them. In this case there should also be a pile of regular stuffed toys for Mrs. Newman to pick up and handle.

If a simpler presentation is desired, the animals need not be children in animal costume, but merely a miscellany of stuffed toys which the children lift up and dance with.

If a more elaborate production is desired, not only may there be the children costumed as animals but also projections on a screen; e. g., a child may handle a pair of skis in the store and, projected on the screen, one sees a ski jumper making a fantastic leap on a mountain ski slide. When the adults look at the skis, one sees on the screen a child with his leg in a cast and/or a montage of doctors' and hospital bills. Or a child may look at an electric train and the projection would show the Santa Fe Superchief rounding a curve; while with the adult, one sees a projection of a broken toy engine being swept up.

PROPERTIES

Living room. Scene One: Sofa, coffee table, easy chair, telephone, table with television set on it, two bookcases with knickknacks (no books). Scene Three: Decorated Christmas tree in place of the television set, wrapped and unwrapped presents at foot of tree.

Store: Balloons, Christmas decorations, sign which reads WIXTER'S BARGAIN STORES WISH YOU A HAPPY CHRISTMAS, counters, toys, large stuffed animals including a purple dragon with a tag on it, chair for Santa Claus.

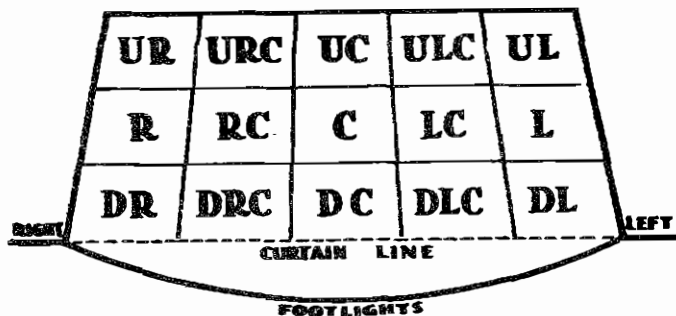
MRS. NEWMAN: Newspaper, mug of coffee, another mug of coffee and plate with cookie on it; Christmas cards and pen.

NEWMAN: Coat, hat, suitcases; box and Christmas wrapping paper.

ANGELS: Lyres.

CHRISTOPHER: Purple dragon (stuffed toy).

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

Gift of a Star

Scene 1

SCENE: The living room of the Newman home. It is a comfortably furnished middle-income American living room, with coffee tables, easy chairs, a sofa and a television set. There is a door DR leading to the street and another door UL leading to the interior of the house. The sofa is placed along the wall at the rear, the coffee table before it and a couple of easy chairs grouped around. The television is on its own table on the wall L, with a couple of bookcases on each side which contain, alas, only ornaments.)

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: MRS. NEWMAN is sitting on the sofa, an open newspaper on her lap. She is telephoning. She is a woman in her late thirties and is a little exasperated because she has been on the telephone for some time now without result. On the table in front of her is a mug of hot coffee from which she sips from time to time.)

MRS. NEWMAN (exasperated). Yes. I'll wait -- what else can I do? If I hang up it will take me a day and a half to get through to you again. . . . I know it's not your fault, but I have to complain to someone. . . . Yes--the toy department, please. . . . Hello! Wixter's toy de-

partment? . . . Oh, dear, I wanted toys. How ever did I get musical instruments? . . . Yes, I'll hold on. . . . Toy department? Have you any more of those big purple dragon things that work? . . . hello . . . hello . . . TOY DEPARTMENT? Look, I'm trying to find out about those big purple dragon things you have advertised in today's paper. . . . You have? (Jubilant.) Oh, good. Can you put one aside for me? I'm Mrs. Newman of thirty-five Chestnut---you can't hold them? But I've been a customer of yours for fifteen years. . . . Can I talk to the manager, please? . . . I'll hold on. . . . (But she doesn't. She looks at the telephone, at the advertisement in the paper, hangs up and throws the paper onto sofa in disgust.)

America must be the only place in the world where people line up to be snubbed. That's the last penny of my hard-saved money that those Wixter people are going to get. I'll show them. (She grabs the telephone with great determination and dials a number.)

Safchild toys? . . . Do you have any of those big purple dragons . . . You don't? . . . No---- I don't think a space costume would do. . . . Only at Wixter's? Thank you. (She hangs up, stares at the telephone, and dials again. She speaks very sweetly.)

Wixter's? . . . This is Mrs. Newman. . . . We were cut off. I was talking to the Toy Department--the manager of the Toy Department. . . . His line is busy? . . . Yes, I'll hold on. (She covers the mouth of the telephone with her hand

and, talking to herself, says:) Whatever became of me? Centuries ago I was a young and quite attractive girl with a neat figure and the smile voted most likely to succeed, studying economics at the state university. Economics and music. So intellectual. And now, I'm battling people on the phone, and looking forward to Christmas as if it were a prison sentence. What happened? How did I get like this? How did a nice, good-humored . . .

(She is cut off by the opening of the front door, R. Her husband comes in, carrying two heavy grips. NEWMAN is in his early forties, is muffled against winter weather, and is tired. He dumps his bags inside the room, takes off his hat, and throws it to one of the easy chairs. His wife hurries to welcome him and embrace him.)

MRS. NEWMAN. Darling. You're early. What a wonderful surprise. How was the trip? (He gives her a fifteen-years-married kiss.)

NEWMAN. Horrible, sweetheart. I worked like a dog and I didn't sell half my quota. Either sales resistance is rising or I'm losing my grip. Honest. Even in Chicago -- and you know I always did well in Chicago -- well, in Chicago my figures are down around about ten grand. Well. Let's talk about something cheerful. . . .

MRS. NEWMAN. Sit down, darling, and I'll get you some hot coffee. (He takes off his coat, which she carries away with her. She goes out by the interior door.) Are you hungry?

NEWMAN. Well, if you've got a cookie. I missed lunch. . . . (He goes to the sofa and sits on it, picking up the discarded newspaper.) Do you know, I've been so busy that I haven't even had a chance to look at a newspaper. (He's looking through the paper now.) And I've got so many reports to write. Three distinct reports plus all kinds of memoranda. (Reading from paper.) "Yule Bloodbath, Father Slays Wife and Five Kids". . . . (Turns page, reads again.) "Stores Lose Half Million to Christmas Thieves." (Turns page.) "Xmas Blizzard Kills Twelve in Kansas." (He throws the paper down.)

(MRS. NEWMAN enters, carrying a mug of hot coffee and a cookie on a plate.)

NEWMAN (to wife as she enters). Do you know, I think as a loyal American I ought to petition Congress to abolish Christmas. It seems to bring out the worst in everybody, including the weather. People pushing and pulling and robbing and stealing and selling and buying. It's a kind of a madness. Commercial? Man, it's a great fat auction of everything that is decent in the whole nation.

(Unknown to NEWMAN his three children -- JANE, CHRISTOPHER, and JOHN -- have entered the room. They are standing by the interior doorway but hidden from his sight.)

NEWMAN. At Christmas time the worst in humanity rises to the top and is given full license to do what it wants. Greed is encouraged among the children, avarice among merchants,

and miserliness among parents. I have been telling half lies and saying polite things for six weeks now on that sales trip and I am now about to tell the truth -- I hate Christmas.

MRS. NEWMAN. You're just tired, darling. You've had a terrible time of it. And Christmas is just for the children. We have to do -- well, the best we can. It won't last forever.

NEWMAN. Thank God. (He sips the coffee moodily. His wife eyes him, somewhat disturbed. She has something on her mind and is quite sure that this is the wrong time to mention it. On the other hand, she can't select the time.)

MRS. NEWMAN. Darling. I'm going to have to leave you for just a little while. And then I'll be right back.

NEWMAN. But I just got home.

MRS. NEWMAN. I know. But it's something that won't wait. Something for the children.

NEWMAN (irritated). What's so important that it can't wait? I mean, I just got home.

MRS. NEWMAN. I know, darling. But you see Chris wants that purple dragon. He -- just wants it. And the only place they have them is at Wixter's. And if I don't get one today right away---- Well, he'll be terribly disappointed. Really, terribly disappointed. I'll be right back. I promise. Just sit there and enjoy your coffee and I'll be back in half an hour.

NEWMAN (hastily finishing the cookie and coffee).
Oh, no, you won't. Attila the Hun couldn't get in and out of Wixter's in half an hour at this time of the year. As a matter of fact he probably wouldn't even try. He'd just take one look and high-tail for Germany or wherever he came from. (Pause.) Do you really have to go now -- today?

MRS. NEWMAN. Yes. Otherwise they may all be gone, and it would just ruin things for Chris.

NEWMAN (resigned). Okay. But I haven't seen you in so long I'll -- I'll come with you. I'll hate it but I'll come.

MRS. NEWMAN. Do you think the children ----

NEWMAN. They're home?

MRS. NEWMAN. Yes. They got the afternoon off-- to shop.

NEWMAN. Okay. Bring 'em along. But let's get it clear. They can go where they want in the store, but they are to be back in the car in the parking lot at five o'clock. And as soon as I get home I'm going to write that letter.

MRS. NEWMAN. What letter?

NEWMAN. The one about amending the Constitution to abolish Christmas as part of every American's right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

CURTAIN