

SOMETHING FOR GLADYS

A Christmas Play in One Act

Sandra de Helen

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to contact the author:

Sandra de Helen

941 NW Naito Pkwy

Apt 404

Portland, OR 97209

USA

503 734 7964

info@SandradeHelen.com

www.SandradeHelen.com

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MAGGIE 51 year old Missouri country woman

CLIFFORD a 50-ish Missouri farmer

GLADYS Maggie's 34 year-old daughter

DIANNA MAY a 7 year old who still believes in Santa Claus

LYNN a 13 year old farm girl

SETTING:

Main room of a three-room farmhouse in Missouri.

TIME:

1951

SCENE ONE

SETTING:

Living room of three-room country house. Woodstove, chairs, table, sofa. Decorated Christmas tree stands in corner, no gifts under it.

AT RISE:

MAGGIE stands looking out upstage window. CLIFFORD is seated.

MAGGIE

I wish they'd come on.

CLIFFORD

You got the presents ready?

MAGGIE

Oh, for heaven's sakes, Clifford, we got those things ready a week ago!

CLIFFORD

What about Gladys? You got something for Gladys?

MAGGIE

Gladys ain't no child. She understands that we can't do for everybody.

CLIFFORD

Still.

MAGGIE

You got any ideas?

CLIFFORD

No. But I sure wish we had a little something for Gladys, after all she's been through ...

MAGGIE

Well, we don't and that's that. There! That's them a coming, Clifford. Yep, that's Gladys and Howard's car there coming down the hill right now.

CLIFFORD

It ain't Howard's car no more.

MAGGIE

Well.

CLIFFORD

Just saying. That's all.

MAGGIE

Well, don't worry, I ain't forgot that Howard passed. Although I can't hardly reckon it.

CLIFFORD

He was a good'un.

MAGGIE

Come on now, Gladys and the girls'll be needing in the gate...

CLIFFORD

(Pulling on mackinaw and exiting upstage right) I'm going ...

(CAR HONKS)

MAGGIE

See? What'd I tell you? (Door slams) That man'll be the death of me. Always waiting till the last possible second to do what needs doing. Let's see, I got the sandwiches, the pie, coffee's on the stove, milk for the girls ... pallet fixed for the baby ... got to remember not to talk about Howard. Oh Lord, here they come ... (runs to the door, throws it open. GLADYS, DIANA MAY enter). Get on in here, come on, get out of that air, I swear it's going to snow. Did youns have any trouble getting here?

GLADYS

(Carrying bundled two year old) No, Mother, the roads are dry.

DIANA MAY

Hi Grandma!

MAGGIE

Hello, sweetheart.

GLADYS

Mother, where can I put Howdie? She's a dead weight.

MAGGIE

Over here. I made her a pallet on the floor. Ain't this late in the day for that baby to be napping?

GLADYS

She ain't slept a wink all day ...

DIANA MAY

Howdie puked in the car!

GLADYS & MAGGIE

Diana May!

DIANA MAY

I mean she throwed up.

GLADYS

So did you, young lady.

DIANA MAY

Not in the car!

MAGGIE

Don't sass your mother! Now come here (pulling DIANA MAY to her), you be Grandma's good girl – you haven't forgot this is Christmas Eve, have you?

DIANA MAY

No ma'am.

CLIFFORD

(Enters, stands at the door, holding a suitcase, a diaper bag, a sack of men's clothing, a pillowcase half-filled with wrapped packages) Margaret, where do you want these things of Gladys's?

MAGGIE

In the bedroom, Clifford, just like always. (CLIFFORD exits down right). Gladys, are you hungry?

GLADYS

No thanks, Mother, but I could use a cup of coffee.

MAGGIE

It's on the back of the stove there. Diana May, you hungry?

DIANA MAY

I could go for a piece of pie.

GLADYS

Sick as you were in the car? I don't think so. Not before supper anyway.

MAGGIE

How about a nice sandwich?

DIANA MAY

No thanks. Where's Aunt Lynn?

MAGGIE

Out in the barn, milking.

GLADYS

Already? It ain't even suppertime.

MAGGIE

Why it's near dark already. I was afraid you weren't going to get here by supper. What in the world took you so long? Why the last time you and Howard come down, you got here before dinner. I remember I didn't even have the beds made yet ...

GLADYS

Mother, please.

MAGGIE

Well, it's true.

GLADYS

Well, Howard's gone, ain't he? And now I have to do everything by myself. The baby's been sick to death with asthma, Diana May don't hardly ever stop crying, I work every night of the week at Chub & Jo's scrubbing dishes till midnight, I'm losing my house, both kids get carsick and you wonder why I don't get here by noon!

MAGGIE

Now you've got Diana May to pouting. Gladys, pull yourself together. Why don't you walk out to the barn and see how Lynn's coming along?

GLADYS

I believe I'll do that very thing. (Grabs coat, exits)

MAGGIE

Come here and let Grandma hug you up. How come you're pouting so? You missing your daddy?

DIANA MAY

Yes, ain't you?

MAGGIE

Your daddy's up in heaven right this minute looking down on you and he wants you to stop all this carrying on and be a big girl.

DIANA MAY

I want to go to heaven too.

MAGGIE

Such talk! God don't like people to want to get to heaven in advance of their time.

DIANA MAY

But Grandma! I hate this, I do! Mama's gone to work, Dad's gone to heaven, seems like Howdie's always sick or asleep, and it's just me. Grandma, I get scared all the time.

MAGGIE

What're you scared of, darling?

DIANA MAY

I don't know. Maybe God.

MAGGIE

God?

DIANA MAY

Yes. God takes people whenever he feels like it.

MAGGIE

You mean you're afraid he's going to take you?

DIANA MAY

Not me! He don't want me. I pray every night he'll take me, but it seems like he don't listen, or else he don't like me.

MAGGIE

God loves you.

DIANA MAY

Not enough to carry me up to be with Dad.

MAGGIE

God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform.

DIANA MAY

Well, I don't think I like his mysterious ways.

MAGGIE

Hush child, that's blaspheming. God don't have to explain his self to us. He took your Dad because it was his time. It ain't your time, not by a long shot.

DIANA MAY

Why ain't it my time? How do you know it ain't my time? It could be, couldn't it? Well, couldn't it?

MAGGIE

I ... No! You're a healthy girl and it ain't your time. Period.

CLIFFORD

(Entering from bedroom) Diana May, want to come over here and read to your old Grandpa?

DIANA MAY

(Glaring at Maggie) Sure Grandpa, might as well. What do you want to hear?

CLIFFORD

I believe I'd like to hear the Christmas story, can you find it? (Hands her the Bible)

DIANA MAY

I know where that is by heart. See? Here it is, Luke 2: 1-14. "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all should be taxed ..."

(GLADYS and LYNN enter carrying buckets of milk)

GLADYS

Mother, this child's near froze.

LYNN

Oh, I ain't.

MAGGIE

I can't tell her nothing. She's got a warm coat, a hat and gloves, if she'd keep them on.

LYNN

I can't milk with gloves on.

MAGGIE

Or with a hat either, I expect.

GLADYS

Lynn, you ought to listen to Mother. You're going to make yourself sick if you don't bundle up when it's cold.

CLIFFORD

Lynn, why don't you come over here and say hi to your niece.

LYNN

Hi, Diana May.

DIANA MAY

Hi Lynn. Merry Christmas.

LYNN

Yeah. Merry Christmas. What's Santy going to bring you?

DIANA MAY

I don't know if he'll bring anything or not. He probably don't even know where I am.

CLIFFORD

Well, of course he does. Santy always knows where you are. He'll be bringing something for everybody.

GLADYS

Don't count on it.

(ALL STOP IN SHOCKED SILENCE)

MAGGIE

Gladys, I don't believe you know what you're saying.

GLADYS

Well, of course I know what I'm saying. I know my husband's gone without leaving me a cent. I know my baby's sick and needing medicine. I know you yourself don't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of! So don't tell me I don't know what I'm saying!

MAGGIE

Now Diana May, don't you start crying. Santy Claus don't pay attention to any of that stuff. You know he don't! Santy Claus is going to come just like he always does, and this year he'll find you and Howdie here at Grandma and Grandpa's house.

DIANA MAY

And Lynn too.

CLIFFORD

That's right, and Lynn too. Santy finds all the children.

LYNN

Aw, I ain't no kid.

MAGGIE

Well, you ain't grown. Not yet anyway.

DIANA MAY

What do you want for Christmas, Aunt Lynn?

LYNN

I don't know. What about you?

DIANA MAY

I don't care.

LYNN

You want a doll?

DIANA MAY

I already got a doll.

LYNN

Well. You want to go in the bedroom and play cards or something?

DIANA MAY

I guess so.

(LYNN and DIANA MAY exit to bedroom)

GLADYS

Lynn's growing up.

CLIFFORD

She'll be fourteen in a couple of months.

MAGGIE

She ain't as grown as she'd like to be.

CLIFFORD

Why don't we all have some pie?

(MAGGIE and GLADYS glare at him)

It was just an idea.

MAGGIE

Why don't you go check on the cows?

CLIFFORD

I'm going. It's obvious you two need to have some words. The cows are just fine, as we all know, but I'm going to go out to the barn and clean my gun. (Takes rifle down from gun rack on wall). Youns holler if you need me.

GLADYS

Oh, Clifford, I brought you a sack of Howard's clothes. I thought maybe you could wear them or give them to somebody.

CLIFFORD

That's right thoughtful of you, Gladys.

MAGGIE

I thought you was leaving.

CLIFFORD

Right you are. (Exits)

MAGGIE

Gladys, you know I love you.

GLADYS

But.

MAGGIE

No buts. I love you. But ...

GLADYS

Here it comes.

MAGGIE

You've got to pull yourself together for the children's sake.

GLADYS

I'm sick of pulling myself together for the children's sake. How about them pulling themselves together for my sake?

MAGGIE

Gladys!

GLADYS

I mean it Mother. I don't know how much more I can stand. I'm working every night at the restaurant and next week I start working days at the shoe factory too. We're moving out of the house ...

MAGGIE

God never gives us more than we can bear.

GLADYS

I'm not so sure about that.

MAGGIE

Gladys, that's no way to talk, and you know it.

GLADYS

I don't care. Mother, sometimes I look at Howard's gun, and I think maybe I ought to just get rid of myself.

MAGGIE

Gladys, you're talking plumb crazy.

GLADYS

Well, I can't help it.

MAGGIE

You better help it, Gladys. Diana May is talking as crazy as you are. You're going to have to get a grip on yourself.

GLADYS

Why did he have to leave us like this?

MAGGIE

Howard had a weak heart. You knew that when you married him. And God decided to take him. That's all. Now you've got to go on.

GLADYS

But Mother, it's Christmas. I ain't got no money; I ain't got no time to make things. I couldn't even buy anything for the girls – just wrapped up some clothes I had laid back for when they grow into them. And Diana May's expecting Santa Claus, even though she's old enough to stop believing in him ...

MAGGIE

Don't you worry about that. The child needs something to believe in ... and Santy's going to come.

GLADYS

You and Cliff ain't got no money.

MAGGIE

No, but we got time on our hands. We made a few trinkets. The girls'll be fine.

GLADYS

Oh Mother, thank you. I'm sorry, you're right, I should just shake off these feelings and get over it.

MAGGIE

That's right. Now how about some supper?

GLADYS

Yeah, let's go make some supper. The baby'll be waking up in a minute and then I won't be able to help.

(BABY cries. Women look at each other. They sigh.)

(LIGHTS OUT)

SCENE TWO

The Christmas tree is lit. The rifle has been replaced in gun rack. The pallet is gone. A few wrapped packages are under the tree. GLADYS stands gazing out the upstage window. She walks downstage with a note in her hand, reads it to herself, folds it in half, places it on the table. She looks around nervously, stops, sighs. She goes to the gun rack, removes rifle. Sits in chair, places the rifle between her legs, aims it at her face. Tries to put toe on trigger, has to remove her sock. While she is bent down, struggling to remove sock, MAGGIE enters.

MAGGIE

(Dropping a sack of unwrapped gifts) Good God!

GLADYS

Mother! You scared me to death!

MAGGIE

I scared YOU to death! What're you fixing to do?

GLADYS

(Putting gun away) Nothing.

MAGGIE

(Picking up gifts and placing them on table, then picking up the note) What's this?

GLADYS

(Whirling around) Give me that!

MAGGIE

Now you don't want me to see it? Wouldn't I have been seeing it about now anyway?

GLADYS

No! Give me that!

MAGGIE

You telling me you weren't fixing to kill yourself right here in my front room? Right here in my house on Christmas?

GLADYS

I don't know.

MAGGIE

You don't know.

GLADYS

I was thinking about it, I'll admit.

MAGGIE

With a damned gun aimed right at your face.

GLADYS

I was thinking about it.

MAGGIE

Uh huh.

GLADYS

Mother please!

MAGGIE

Please what? You're fixing to make a bloody mess of yourself right in my front room, and leave me with no daughter of my own, no son-in-law, and two little children to raise!

GLADYS

I'm sorry, Mother, I should've gone outside.

MAGGIE

That's all you can say? You should've gone outside?

GLADYS

Howard's dead Mother.

MAGGIE

Now, you listen to me. Come over here. (Sits on sofa. GLADYS comes over. MAGGIE puts her arm around GLADYS.) You're not too big for me to whip, and you're not too big for me to hug neither. Come here, you're shivering.

GLADYS

I'm okay.

MAGGIE

No. You ain't okay. You're out of your head with grief for your husband. Howard was a fine man and you loved him. That's natural. And now he up and dies and leaves you with them girls and you're mad as hell.

GLADYS

What of it?

MAGGIE

Nothing. It's only natural. Now I'm not saying folks go around talking about it, but first thing you do when somebody you love dies is, you get mad at them.

GLADYS

Well, he said he was just fine!

MAGGIE

Right.

GLADYS

And the next thing I know he's dead and I'm the one who has to take care of everything.

MAGGIE

That's right. But pretty soon you'll get over being mad and start feeling guilty.

GLADYS

Guilty! I didn't do anything wrong!

MAGGIE

Maybe not, but you'll start thinking you did. You'll remember every time you slighted him, every time he reached for you and you didn't reach back.

GLADYS

That never happened!

MAGGIE

In eleven years?

GLADYS

I gave him everything he ever wanted!

MAGGIE

Even if that's true, you'll soon find something you wish you'd done different.

GLADYS

Oh well, that.

MAGGIE

And then you'll feel guilty. It's the way of the world, Gladys. I do know; remember I've been through this myself.

GLADYS

So just because your husband ups and dies, then you got to feel guilty?

MAGGIE

I never said life was fair.

GLADYS

No, but ...

MAGGIE

Anyway, after the guilt, if you pray hard enough you'll come to see it wasn't his fault, and it wasn't your fault, it's God's will at work.

GLADYS

And then what?

MAGGIE

Well, then life will go on. In fact, life will go on even if you don't do any of them things.

GLADYS

Mother, I can't live without Howard. I can't live with him being dead.

MAGGIE

Howard will always live on in all our hearts. But the girls'll grow, me and Clifford will get old and die, you'll find someone else after awhile.

GLADYS

I don't want nobody else.

MAGGIE

Well, of course you don't ... yet ... Now come on and help me with these things, it's practically daylight.

(GLADYS walks to woodstove, opens it tosses in the note MAGGIE replaces rifle in gun rack.)

GLADYS

What's all this stuff, Mother?

MAGGIE

(Pulling gifts from sack) Well, these here are the dolls you had when you was little. I made new dresses and bonnets, and Clifford made these little cradles.

GLADYS

One for each of the girls!

MAGGIE

And here's a little something for Gladys. (Hands her a quilt)

GLADYS

Mother! Your good quilt! I can't take this! This is your quilt you put out for company!

MAGGIE

It's yours now.

GLADYS

Mother, I can't!

MAGGIE

When you've had it as long as I have, if I'm still alive you can give it back. Now I don't want to hear no more about it. (Hands the sack of men's clothing to Gladys). Here.

GLADYS

What are you giving me Howard's things back for?

MAGGIE

I want you to wrap these up and give them to Diana May, along with some scissors, some thread and a note telling her what to do with them.

GLADYS

Which would be what?

MAGGIE

Why to make herself a quilt out of her daddy's things, that's what.

GLADYS

She's too little to be making a quilt.

MAGGIE

She ain't too little to be wishing she was up in heaven with her dad.

GLADYS

What are you talking about?

MAGGIE

She's been down on her knees praying every night for God to take her.

GLADYS

That's crazy!

MAGGIE

The child is as tore up as you are.

GLADYS

Mother! Oh God. I didn't know. Are you sure?

MAGGIE

It could as easily been a note from Diana May there on that table.

GLADYS

I don't believe it!

MAGGIE

I couldn't believe my own eyes when I come in here and saw you about to ...

GLADYS

But Mother, she's a kid! A baby!

MAGGIE

And she's lost her dad, and near about lost her mother, and even Howdie ain't been well.

GLADYS

I have to go wake her up! My Diana May!

MAGGIE

No, now Gladys, come on back here ...

GLADYS

(Wrapping herself in the quilt that Maggie gave her) Well, I can't just sit here and lose my daughter.

MAGGIE

I know.

GLADYS

What can I do?

MAGGIE

Teach her to make a quilt, Gladys.

GLADYS

She's so little.

MAGGIE

You can help her... What are you crying about?

GLADYS

Oh Mother, I'm so ashamed! Look what I almost did. Mother, I'm sorry.

MAGGIE

Hush up now, it'll be all right ...

(DIANA MAY enters)

DIANA MAY

Merry Christmas Mama, Grandma.

MAGGIE

Child, it's still dark!

DIANA MAY

Huh uh, Grandma. Look out the window! Besides, you and Mama are up, and I can see Santy's been here already. Can I get everybody up? Huh? Can I?

GLADYS

Might as well let her, Mother.

MAGGIE

Well anybody can see you're wide awake. Come here and give Grandma a hug. Okay, now go – real quiet! -- and wake up Grandpa first ...

DIANA MAY

(Running from room, yelling) Lynn! Lynn! Santy's been here! Get up!

MAGGIE

... then Lynn, then the baby ...

GLADYS

Mother, I wrapped up one of my sweaters for Lynn, but I don't have a thing for you and Cliff.

MAGGIE

All I want from you is yourself.

GLADYS

Don't worry, Mother. I'll be here. I'm not gonna ... well, you know. And Diana May won't either. I'll keep her real busy learning to quilt. Like you said, life will go on.

MAGGIE

That's gift enough for me. Now give your mother a hug.

THE END