

Sides

Side 1

Scene One

(Lights up.)

(No curtain)

(Empty stage except for a small riser upstage right. Perhaps colored Christmas tree lights framing the stage. Or tree ornaments hanging on the sides. Maybe a large, simple window-like frame, framing the proscenium.)

(A New York sidewalk)

(Upstage area is dimly lit with white lights. Downstage area is brighter with some color, as if reflecting from a store window.)

(Standing center, JOHN, 25–30, in a winter coat, scarf. Messenger bag style briefcase over his shoulder. He is talking on a cell phone, mid-conversation.)

← **Start**

JOHN: *(Pacing, upset)* ...Yeah, this is gonna go down as one of the great Christmas Eve's of all time...I couldn't believe it either... No. I am not kidding you. Do I sound like I'm kidding you? ...Sarah came in my office, said "John, can we talk for a minute?" And then she closes the door. Soon as she closed the door I knew it... She said exactly what I thought she'd say...I said, "Okay", and then she left and then I left... *(Sighs)* Just been walking around. *(Stops to look up to see where he is)* I'm in front of Bloomingdale's. *(Looks out center)* Looking at the Christmas windows. How pathetic is that? ...Good question. I don't know. Get drunk. Hit somebody. Jump off the Empire State building.

Or maybe all three at the same time...No, thanks, it's getting late, I'm just gonna go home to the apartment I can't afford anymore...I'm not exactly in a party mood...Elliot, I just got fired. I don't want to sing Joy To The World and I don't want to drink egg nog and put tinsel on a tree. I don't want Christmas. Okay?

(A woman, CHARMIAN, [pronounced KAR-mee-en], mid-twenties, enters, also dressed for cold weather; a winter coat, scarf, gloves, a knitted wool hat in the shape of a dog's face, with long ears hanging down. Purse over her shoulder. Holding a piece of paper. As she moves downstage her eyes get wider as she takes it he window.)

JOHN: *(On phone)* I'm not gonna change my mind... Yeah. Sure. Bye.

End 1

(As JOHN hangs up, CHARMIAN stops center, looks out at audience [window].)

CHARMIAN: *(To herself)* Holy shit. *(Sees JOHN, a little embarrassed)* Sorry. It's just, these are amazingly amazing.

(JOHN politely smiles at CHARMIAN.)

JOHN: Mmm hmm.

CHARMIAN: I've seen them on T V, but it doesn't compare. They're fantastic. You probably see them all the time? No big thing? Kinda boring?

(JOHN shrugs.)

CHARMIAN: They said to come late at night to avoid the crowds. *(Back at window)* I just want to eat this whole window. Doesn't it look delicious? That reindeer is totally made of candy canes. There're like a million candy canes...I picture some twenty-year-old intern on ten cups of coffee, chain smoking cigarettes and going crazy with a glue gun all night: *(Mimes using a glue gun)* "I hate my job, I hate my job, I hate my job". *(Moves to Mrs. Claus, a "new" window)* You wouldn't think

Mrs Claus would wear a mini skirt at her age, would you? But, if I had legs like that I'd wear a mini-skirt *all the time*...I bet it's totally distracting for the elves. Everything's right at their eye level. That elf looks really distracted. And kinda depressed, don'cha think?

JOHN: Maybe he had a bad day at work?

CHARMIAN: But, he's an elf. He can't have a bad day at work. His job is to delight children of all ages. And he can't do it when he looks like Mister McSour Puss. (*Looks closer and carefully*) Mrs Claus looks like she's had work. I mean, she looks *really good* for her age. Isn't she like seven hundred years old? Or *maybe* this is *not* the first Mrs Claus. Did Santa get a trophy wife? We would have heard, right? So, did you come to look at the windows?

JOHN: No. I had to work late.

CHARMIAN: Really? On Christmas Eve? Is your name Bob Cratchit?

JOHN: (*A small smile*) No. It's John.

(CHARMIAN *extends her hand, they shake hands.*)

CHARMIAN: I'm Charmian. Pronounced Charmian.

JOHN: How do you spell that?

CHARMIAN: C-h-a-r-m-i-a-n. The "h" is silent and totally useless.

JOHN: Does it mean something?

CHARMIAN: It means my parents wanted to saddle me with a weird name so people would ask annoying questions. Just kidding. They just liked the name. It's the name of the woman who played the eldest daughter in *The Sound of Music*. Charmian Carr.

Y'know: (*Half sings*)

I am sixteen,



End

JOHN: Merry Christmas.

CHARMIAN: Yeah. Merry Christmas.

(Lights fade out on them, downstage left.)

(Music: Soft, solemn version of Silent Night. Solo guitar or piano or voices.)

Start → Scene Sixteen

(Music fades out as lights fade up.)

(JOSEPH and MARY, 20s, in traditional, biblical garb. She is sitting, on a low stool, holding a baby in swaddling clothes. He stands behind her, a hand on her shoulder.)

(Possible staging: JOSEPH and MARY may be positioned upstage on a small platform. CHARMIAN and JOHN remain, in tableau, in the dark, downstage left.)

MARY: Why didst the man not kiss the woman?

JOSEPH: Did thou thinketh he should have?

MARY: Ye, I say unto thee; she desireth it with all her heart.

JOSEPH: No, wife, thou art wrong.

MARY: Joseph, that was a "I desireth to be kissed" face. The man hath been foolish.

JOSEPH: No. The man hath been wise. Trusteth me. Thou must be wary of a woman's face. They may looketh as if they desireth to be kissed—*(Reliving the experience)*—but, lo, when thou does, they may striketh ones face and cry, "Joseph! Taketh thy wretched lips from mine! Thou makest me wish to vomit in the marketplace!" *(Slightly embarrassed at his outburst, composes himself)*

MARY: My husband, thou art wrong. Thou must *not* be wary; thou must taketh the chance or thou may miss

the love of thy life. It is better to be struck and suffer curses than never knowest the truth. If I were not married to thee, I wouldst have kissed the man gladly.

JOSEPH: (*Surprised*) Thou wouldst?

MARY: (*Nods, then wistfully*) He remindeth me of the glorious angel that came unto me—

(JOSEPH rolls his eyes and shakes his head. He's heard this a million times.)

JOSEPH: (*Softly*) Oy.

MARY: —who shineth like a star, with hair of gold and eyes of fire—

JOSEPH: Yea. Thou hath told that tale. A multitude of times... Uh, Mary?

MARY: Yes, husband?

JOSEPH: That angel, thou said his name was "Gabriel"?

MARY: Yes.

JOSEPH: Art thou...*certain* he was an angel?

MARY: Yes, husband.

JOSEPH: But, verily I say unto you, could thou hath been visited, in truth, not by an angel, but by a man who *pretended* to be an angel?

(MARY turns to look up at JOSEPH, then outwards, blissfully.)

MARY: He was... (*Bites her lip*) ...an angel.

(JOSEPH sighs. Reluctantly nods, she turns to look back to the babe in arms.)

JOSEPH: Wife, what does thou wish to do with thy gifts that have been bestowed upon us?

MARY: We shalt keep the frankincense and gold and giveth the myrrh to thy mother.

← End

Scene Fourteen

(Music fades as lights come up.)

(LITTLE MARCH GIRL facing audience. Barefoot, tattered dress, long hair, holding out a box of matches.)

LITTLE MATCH GIRL: *(Tough, street-wise, a stuffed up nose)* That lady is right. Why do I have to be the one to remind people that everybody doesn't live happily ever after? I don't want to die. *(Sniffles. Wipes her nose with hand. She spots a cigarette on the ground. Picks it up.)* I know I shouldn't. I'm too young. I'm eight. I think. *(Lights cigarette and smokes.)* But, I'll be dead soon. I'm never going to be old enough to smoke. Might as well have a little experience in my short pathetic life. *(Puffs)* I bet that man wouldn't want to die a horrible death

Start

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just to remind somebody that people get run over by carriages or drown or get some disease...I'd like to see him stand in the snow, barefoot, and try and sell matches. *(Puffs)* I wish I could beg. They arrest you for that. It's illegal. You can't beg. The coppers get you. So I have to sell matches... My sister sells her lady parts. She makes a lot of money. And she doesn't have to stand outside in the snow. She gets to be inside in a nice, warm, soft bed. *(Puff)* Nobody asked me if I wanted to serve a greater purpose. It's not fair. I want a happy ending. I want a rich man to pull up in a carriage and say, "Come with me to my home and you shall be warm and dry and eat roast goose with apple and plum stuffing and all the presents under the Christmas tree are yours and you shall wear beautiful clothes and you shall never have to stand in the snow and sell matches ever again." *(She takes a puff. Coughs. Puts out cigarette)*

(Her tough persona begins to soften. She sits down on the ground. She lights a match, puts her hand over it to warm herself.)

LITTLE MATCH GIRL: I don't want to be The Little Match Girl. *(She lies down on the ground, still holding the match, looking at the flame as it illuminates her face.)* I want to be Cinderella...or Snow White...or Sleeping Beauty...I want to live happily ever after.

(LITTLE MARCH GIRL stares at the match flame. It goes out. Darkness)

(Music: Same as intro to Scene.)

End

CHARMIAN: And watch out for that creepy elf.

(Music: Jolly Old Saint Nicholas. [Note: All music can be recorded or a live piano or off-stage actors singing])

(Lights fade)

Start Scene Two

(Music continues.)

(A short moment of darkness. These transitions should be as quick as possible.)

(Lights up; very colorful and bright.)

(Music slowly fades as scene begins.)

(Standing center are MRS CLAUS, 20s-30s, but with white hair, wire-rimmed glasses, red mini-skirt, with white fur lining, wide black belt, boots and a Santa hat.)

(Next to her is an ELF [actor on his knees], pointed ears, rosy cheeks, wearing elf costume; tights, short top, belt, hat, shoes with curled up tips; holding a toy train and a screw driver.)

(They are both posing as if mannequins.)

(Beat)

(They relax. ELF looks off to where CHARMIAN and JOHN exited.)

ELF: Hey? Mrs C? You hear what that girl said?

MRS CLAUS: Yes. And I have not had any "work" done. It's the egg nog. It's wonderful for the skin.

ELF: No, no, I meant "Watch out for that creepy elf". She better watch out for that creepy guy. Y'know, I bet he takes innocent young women to look at Christmas windows and then strangles them with tinsel... Which would not be easy. *(Getting into it)* Or-or maybe he stabs them with a sharpened candy cane. Then he eats the candy cane and there's no evidence!

MRS CLAUS: You are so silly! He looked like a nice young man to me. He was cute.

ELF: Yeah? I bet Hitler looked cute some times. When he got his moustache and his hair just right.

MRS CLAUS: Maybe he just wants to look at the windows? Maybe there's a romance in store?

ELF: Okay, okay, let's say he's not Ted Bundy. Who, incidentally, I made a jack in the box for when he was five. Cute kid. Who knew? Anyway, I don't think there's any romance in the future for those two.

MRS CLAUS: There's always a chance they could fall in love and live happily ever after.

ELF: Mrs. C, I think you put a little too much nutmeg in your egg nog. *Nobody* lives happily ever after.

MRS CLAUS: Oh, really? What about Santa and me? We've been happily married for six hundred and twenty-nine years.

ELF: It could still fall apart. And may I be honest? I don't think Mister Ho Ho Ho is good enough for you.

MRS CLAUS: What? He's the epitome of "good". He's brought joy to millions of people for hundreds of years.

ELF: Yeah, yeah, so have lots of people: Shakespeare, Beethoven, Cher. Look, let me get right down to it. Does Santa...satisfy you as a woman? I know he has some weight issues.

MRS CLAUS: That's none of your business!

ELF: Well, I'd like to make it my business. You need someone younger. And shorter. And y'know what they say; "Once you go elf, you never go back on the shelf".

MRS CLAUS: ...That makes absolutely no sense.

ELF: I know. "Elf" is a hard rhyme.

MRS CLAUS: Why are you interested in me? There are hundreds of lovely female elves up here.

ELF: Short women don't do it for me. It's a problem. I tried. I was dating Trixie, the tallest elf I could find; a strapping three feet two inches. Everything was terrific until I found out she was also "dating" Jack Frost, The Grinch, Rudolph, The Sugar Plum Fairy—

MRS CLAUS: Wait a minute, everyone knows the Sugar Plum Fairy is—

ELF: I know! Trixie likes a challenge. The point is, Mrs. C, I'm only attracted to beautiful, tall, pre-maturely grey haired women who wear wire-rimmed glasses.

MRS CLAUS: Well, you need to find a new type. Nothing's ever going to happen. Period.

ELF: Is it the pointy ears? The curly shoes? The rosacea?

MRS CLAUS: Get back to work. And if you bring this up again I will call security.

(ELF sighs. Fiddles with toy train. Looks out window)

ELF: Well, I hope nothing horrible happens to that girl when she's out with the Christmas Candy Cane Killer.

MRS CLAUS: Y'know, Mr. Gloomy Doomy, maybe something good will actually happen? It is Christmas Eve. Surprising things have been known to occur.

ELF: *(Thinks, smiles)* You mean like virile, handsome elves and gorgeous, statuesque women having a deep, meaningful relationship and doing the nasty behind the defective teddy bears?

MRS CLAUS: *(Yells off)* Security!

(The ELF raises his hands, afraid, and then frantically works on the train.)

(Black out)

(Music: Deck The Halls)



End

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Scene Seven

(Music fades as lights come up.)

(Another sidewalk)

(CHARMIAN and JOHN sit upstage on small platform.)

CHARMIAN: —Oh my god. That rest room was bigger than my apartment. And cleaner. I'd rather live in that rest room.

JOHN: Where do you live?

CHARMIAN: Washington Heights, in the world's smallest, darkest, ugliest, coldest, noisiest apartment in New York that I pay way too much for.

JOHN: Yeah, for what I pay here for a 600 square foot studio, back home, in Bethesda, I could rent a two-story house. With a pool.

CHARMIAN: But, wouldn't you rather be a struggling novelist in New York than Bethesda?

JOHN: I don't want to be a struggling novelist anywhere anymore.

CHARMIAN: How long did it take Fitzgerald to make it?

JOHN: His first novel was a best-seller when he was twenty-four.

By the time he was my age he'd had five best sellers.

CHARMIAN: Show off.

JOHN: Later, when he was older, kind of forgotten, not making any money, he said, "There are no second acts in American lives". That's totally fine with me. I just wanted my first act to happen.

CHARMIAN: Maybe you just have a really long first act and it's not over yet.

JOHN: Or maybe this is intermission and it's gonna get worse?

← Start

CHARMIAN: My teacher, at college, used to say, "Life is a badly written play, with a horrible ending, but there are some good scenes along the way." Maybe your really good scenes are coming up?

JOHN: (*Ending conversation*) Yeah.

(CHARMIAN and JOHN walk down to look at window.)

CHARMIAN: Hey, it's I Sold My Watch Guy and I Cut My Hair Woman. What's that story called?

JOHN: *The Gift of the Magi*. O Henry.

CHARMIAN: Right. The only story written by a candy bar. Okay, this has always bothered me. She sells her hair to get a watch fob for her husband. Fine. He sells his watch to get her some fancy combs. Her hair is going to grow back. But his watch is not going to grow back. It's gone! He got screwed.

JOHN: Well, I think the point is they were willing to give up some thing they treasured to make the person they loved happy.

CHARMIAN: (*Sighs, mock bored*) Yeah. If you go in for that kind of thing. Love. Making people happy.

JOHN: Would you sell your most prized possession for somebody?

CHARMIAN: I did. I sold my soul to the devil so I could be a big, famous actor. (*Looks down at ground*) And I'm still waiting...I knew it wasn't going to be easy, but I didn't think it would be this hard. Getting rejected all the time, people saying "No, we don't want you."

JOHN: Ever want to quit?

CHARMIAN: Three or four times. A day.

JOHN: Well, I bet Meryl Streep had a tough time when she first came to New York.

CHARMIAN: No, she didn't. The day she arrived in New York she got cast in fifty plays. And she won fifty Tony's. And they gave her a solid gold crown and said, "Behold! You are Queen of Actors!"

JOHN: Really? I didn't know that.

CHARMIAN: Okay. I made some of it up. Except the part about the crown.

JOHN: I bet you'll get your crown someday.

CHARMIAN: I better.

End

JOHN: Well, I can sympathize. I did a little acting once. Some Shakespeare.

CHARMIAN: Really? John does The Big Bad Bard?

JOHN: Mmm-hmm. I was in a fifteen minute version of Romeo & Juliet at Jefferson Elementary School, 6th grade. I played Romeo, because I was the only boy willing to wear tights. And I got to kiss this girl, Cathy Troller, who was the reason I was willing to put on tights. And so I kissed her. Maybe a little too enthusiastically—

CHARMIAN: Tongues?

JOHN: There's still some controversy about that. Anyway, she punched me in the nose.

CHARMIAN: What'd you do?

JOHN: I got a bloody nose. I bled all over my tights.

CHARMIAN: Must've been some kiss.

JOHN: My only line that I remember is: "If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully".

CHARMIAN: Actually, that's Juliet's line.

JOHN: It is?

CHARMIAN: O gentle Romeo,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully.