

TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

by Rene Gutteridge

GENRE: Comedy

SYNOPSIS: Marvin, who simply wants to read the famous Christmas poem about Santa, is assaulted by family members who have their own ideas of what the night before Christmas should be like. In the end, no one quite knows the reason for the season.

TIME: Over 5 minutes

CAST BREAKDOWN: 6

TOPIC: Grace, Faithfulness

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: Matthew 20:28

CHURCH YEAR SEASON: Christmas

SUGGESTED USE: Christmas Service, Family Service, Youth Service

CHARACTERS:

MARVIN and LINDA—married couple

JOEY and STEPHANIE—the children, ages 8 and 16

MARGARET and EARL—Marvin's sister-in-law and brother

PROPS: Eggnog cups, cookies, tray, book

COSTUMES: Casual at-home clothes, possibly holiday attire

SOUND: Six cordless mics

LIGHTING: Natural lighting; Christmas lights and decorations if possible

SETTING: Family living room

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Director's Tip:

We have all been Marvin, desperately trying to get our point across while being constantly interrupted. However, although the piece centers around Marvin and his earnest desire to continue a classic family tradition, each character in the piece is just as adamant about getting his or her needs met as Marvin is. For this piece to work and to be funny, the actors must pursue their objectives as seriously as possible. It can be a temptation for an actor to get caught up in the moment and break character if a congregation laughs or applauds. This practice must be avoided at all costs because it breaks the “fourth wall” between the performers and the congregation, which will take away from the meaning of the piece. Remember, none of the characters thinks that he or she is being funny—they’re just living their lives. Actors have to remember this or the performance could tumble into chaos.

Another essential aspect of this piece is timing. This piece will fall flat if actors do not pick up their cues. Once actors have memorized their lines, make sure to do a few “speed-throughs” at the beginning of each rehearsal. Speed-throughs are when actors say their lines as quickly as possible, one right after the other. This is an exercise that can be done before a performance even without a director. The point of the speed-through is to help actors pick up their cues and not allow for any dead air between one line ending and the next one beginning. While people should never be interrupting one another, they should also not be allowing excess pauses to make a piece sluggish or indulgent.

MARVIN walks on stage, holding a book.

MARVIN: Gather around, everyone! Hurry up! It's time for the reading of The Night Before Christmas! Come on!

Everyone makes their way in.

STEPHANIE: I can't believe we have to sit and listen to this again. I'm missing the best party of the year, Dad!

LINDA: Honey, this is a family time. It's special. It's very important to your father to have all of us around.

MARVIN: This is so great! We've got the fire going. Packages under the tree. Wasn't the candlelight service great this evening? Why don't we all sing “Silent Night” again...

Everyone mumbles in disgust.

LINDA: Look, I baked some cookies and made some eggnog.