

The Best Christmas Play Ever



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“Stop coughing!” shouted Mr Baxter.

The row of shepherds lined up on the stage looked at him unhappily. Their eyes were pink. Their noses were red. They could not stop coughing. They coughed loudly and hoarsely all over the cardboard sheep.

The three kings joined in, sounding like a bunch of barking seals. Annie, who was dressed as Mary, sneezed so hard she nearly dropped the baby Jesus.

“Be quiet!” pleaded Mr Baxter.

“We can’t help it,” croaked Ryan, who was playing Joseph. “We’ve all got terrible colds.”

“You can’t have colds!” wailed Mr Baxter. “You’ve got to do the Nativity play in three days’ time!” He glared at the shepherds. “*Stop coughing!*”

The shepherds stopped. Then they all pulled damp handkerchiefs from underneath their robes and blew their noses like a row of trumpeting elephants. Mr Baxter groaned.

“Please can we go now?” Lucy asked. “It’s home time. I can see my Mum outside.”

Annie stood on tiptoe to peer through the window. She could see her Mum too. Annie couldn’t wait to get out of school. She wanted to go home and lie on the sofa. She felt dreadful.

“Nobody is going home,” snapped Mr Baxter, “until we’ve finished our rehearsal! Annie, it’s time for your solo.”

Annie tried to sing; but she rasped and croaked as if she had turned into a bullfrog. Her voice kept disappearing.

Meanwhile, Mums and Dads came tiptoeing into the school hall. Annie's Mum was holding baby Tom and smiling encouragement – but Annie couldn't sing a note.

“Try again!” urged Miss Flowerdew, who was playing the piano. “Like this!” She sang in a high trill.

Annie tried. She could only wheeze.

“We can't do it, Mr Baxter!” declared Ryan. “We're all too ill.” The red-nosed shepherds nodded in agreement.

“Poor dears,” said Annie's Mum. “Just look at them! Maybe you should cancel it this year.”

“Cancel the Christmas play!” gasped Mr Baxter, his eyes goggling. “We can't do that!”

“Certainly not. *We'll* put it on instead,” said Ryan's Dad.

“Who?”

“The parents and the teachers – we'll do the Christmas play! The children can be the audience for a change.”

“Ooh, goody! I can be Mary!” said Miss Flowerdew happily.

“I'll be the angel Gabriel,” said Mr Baxter, brightening up.

“I'll be a king,” said Ryan's Dad. “I've always wanted to be a king.”

“We'll show the children how it should be done,” cried Mr Baxter. “What a treat for them! We'll do the best play ever!”

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For the next three days, the teachers and parents were busy rehearsing. The teachers had plenty of time, because so many children were off sick with colds.

Annie stayed at home with Mum and baby Tom. Although she was sad about not being Mary, she just couldn't sing. She felt as if her head was full of glue.

Lucy and Ryan came round after school to see her.

"My Dad's First King," said Ryan. "He spent hours yesterday parading in front of the mirror and swishing his cloak."

"We didn't do any work in class today!" reported Lucy. "We just made Christmas cards, while Miss Flowerdew practised her songs. She wants to borrow your baby."

"Borrow Tom? Why?"

"She wants a real baby Jesus instead of a doll," said Lucy.

"Good idea," said Mum. "After all, I'll be there, in the angels' choir. I'm looking forward to wearing my wings." Mum had spent all day on the sewing machine making herself a beautiful lacy costume.

Annie felt a little comforted to think that Tom would be in the play, even if she wasn't.

But she wasn't really looking forward to watching it. She knew that Miss Flowerdew could sing much better than she could.

All the adults could probably act much better than the children. They were bound to be good at remembering their lines.

In fact, they might be so brilliant at doing the Christmas play that the children would never get the chance again...

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The play had just begun. The teachers and parents were all on stage.

Annie sat in the front row of the audience, with a handful of paper hankies and a packet of cough sweets. Her friends were sitting around her, sniffing and sneezing, and trying not to cough through the innkeeper's speech.

Mary and Joseph had already reached the stable and had their baby. Now Miss Flowerdew, in a beautiful blue dress, held baby Tom on her knee and bounced him up and down.

Tom gurgled and laughed. He had just had his feed, so he was happy. Mum smiled at him from the glittering group of angels.

Across the stage, the shepherds were watching their flock. Their flock was a real live sheep. Mikey's Dad, who was one of the shepherds, had brought it along from his farm.

Mr Baxter stepped to the front. He was playing the Angel Gabriel in a long white robe, with a tinsel halo, and cardboard wings tied on with string. Annie had never seen a bald Angel Gabriel with glasses before.

He frowned at the shepherds. "All hail, humble shepherds!" he bellowed. "I bring great news!"

As he tried to flap his cardboard wings, his halo fell off. He bent to pick it up and his wings slid down to his waist.

“Oh, pumpernickel,” said the Angel Gabriel, although that wasn’t in the script.

The shepherds ran to help him with his wings. The sheep wanted to join in, so it bounced over to the Angel Gabriel and butted him. Gabriel sat down with a thump.

The sheep skipped happily across the stage, while the shepherds gathered up their robes to chase it.

“Get off!” shouted the Angel Gabriel.

The sheep charged twice around the stage before leaping off into the audience. The shepherds tried to catch it, missed, collided with each other, and slithered off the stage in a tangled heap.

Mikey, in the audience, grabbed the sheep by its wool. He held it tight as the Angel Gabriel staggered to his feet.

“*Kings!*” yelled the Angel Gabriel. “Where are you?”

Ryan’s Dad strode forward, adjusting his splendid crown. He swirled his gorgeous cloak several times and put one hand proudly on his hip. Gazing majestically down at the audience, he opened his mouth and said—

Nothing.

They waited. Still nothing.

Then he giggled. “Oops! Forgot my lines. Shall I tell a joke instead? There was this elephant that went into a sweet-shop—”

“No! No!” yelled the Angel Gabriel; but it was too late. Ryan’s Dad was enjoying telling his elephant joke.

“Now, how about a magic trick?” he said. “Let’s see if I can make the frankincense disappear.”

“No! *You* disappear!” cried the Angel Gabriel. “It’s time for Mary’s solo!”

This was the moment Miss Flowerdew had been waiting for. Standing up with baby Tom in her arms, she rocked him vigorously as she began to sing.

“Little Jesus, sweetly sleep!”

She sang beautifully, with lots of trills. But baby Tom did not sweetly sleep. He looked a little anxious at being rocked so hard.

He gulped. Then he hiccupped.

Then he gave an enormous burp, and was sick all over Miss Flowerdew.

“Help! My lovely dress!” screamed Miss Flowerdew, holding Tom out at arm’s length.

Annie’s Mum hurried up to take him, just before Miss Flowerdew slipped in the puddle of baby sick. With a WHOOSH, she skidded into the Second and Third Kings, bowling them over like skittles. The Kings dropped their gifts, which went tumbling across the stage.

“Stop! Stop!” cried the Angel Gabriel. He dashed towards them, tripped over the myrrh and fell into the manger. A fountain of straw flew up into the air.

Baby Tom began to cry. Annie’s Mum sat down in Mary’s chair and cuddled him. Annie thought that she made a much nicer Mary than Miss Flowerdew.

Annie's Mum began to sing "*I'm a little teapot, short and stout,*" until Tom stopped crying and started to smile.

The children joined in; and even the sheep baaed along.

The Angel Gabriel sat up. He was covered in straw. His halo dangled from one ear and his wings were round his ankles.

"I'm so sorry," he wailed. "It's a disaster!"

But the audience began to clap and cheer and whistle. Their coughs and colds were totally forgotten.

"More! More!" they cried. "It's the best play ever!"

"You've really shown us how it should be done," called Annie. "Can we do it this way every year?"

THE END

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