

Christmas in Hell

The Original Stageplay



Cleveland O. McLeish

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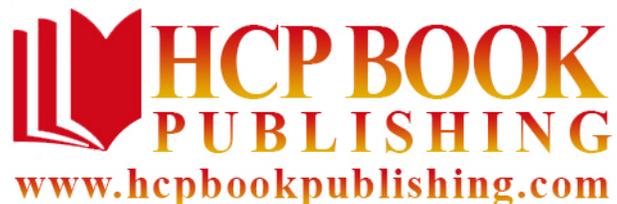


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Characters

Dives *Wealthy Entrepreneur*

Lazarus *Poor man*

Phillip *Dives Younger Brother*

Sharon *Dives Wife*

Jesus *Savior, Lord and Judge*

Abraham

Daemon

Raemon

Poet

Harold

Young Child *(Can be boy/girl. Should be a singer)*

Extras

Setting

Living room setting with adjoining kitchen (with a counter, if possible)

The Story

Dives is a wealthy entrepreneur with a bad attitude towards Christmas, Christians and the underprivileged of our society. His goal is to make more money and enjoy all the pleasures that life has to offer. His brother Phillip provides some balance in his life, though an unbeliever himself.

Dives is married but seeking a divorce from his Christian wife, Sharon. Like Solomon, he denies himself nothing. In his own eyes, he is probably the most important man on planet Earth.

Fate would have it that there are things even Dives has no control over. The night before Christmas he dies and wakes up in hell. That's when his journey really begins as he spends Christmas Day in the worst place imaginable.

Play Details

Length: 50-70 Minutes

Cast: 8 Males, 1 Female, Plus Extras

Audience: Teens & Adults

Genre: Contemporary Drama

THE SCRIPT



VOICE: I knew pleasure. I found all that was good. I laughed many days, cheered myself with wine, and embraced folly. I wanted to experience all that was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of life. I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I owned more herds and flocks than anyone before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well. I became greater by far than anyone before me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. In life, I had everything...*(pause)*....In death, I had nothing.

SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP – Party Scene.

Decorations, music, food, and drinks in abundance. Guest are scattered all over the room, dressed in elegant, upper-class suits and dresses. Everyone has a glass as they drink in a celebratory mood. Laughter, chatter, eating and drinking.

DIVES walk in. If we thought the guest was dressed in fine clothes, Dives outshines them all. Everyone turns to him and applauds. He is poured some drink into a glass. He smiles and raises the glass. This is the man of the hour.

DIVES: I have built an empire equal to none. I have earned more money than, than...what's the name of that Facebook guy?

GUEST: Mark Zuckerberg.

DIVES: Yes, Mark Zuckerberg. I have accomplished far greater things than, than...what's the name of that guy who founded Microsoft?

GUEST: Bill Gates.

DIVES: Yes, Bill Fakes. I am more popular than any performer. This month alone I have opened two new franchises. Instant profit, and who said there was no god on earth.

One of the guests steps forward with his glass. His name is Phillip.

PHILLIP: I think you have had too much to drink, brother.

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DIVES: I'm just getting started. *(Raises glass and drinks)*

PHILLIP: You promised last Christmas that you would not get drunk this time around.

DIVES: Christmas?

PHILLIP: It is Christmas. The season to be merry.

DIVES: No little brother. Christmas is for the weak and poor. Today we celebrate greater than Christmas. Today we celebrate me.

Some applaud. Others just drink.

DIVES: You all have a job because I provided. Christmas is for the underprivileged who need a crutch to lean on; some institution that will offer them bread. I provide more than bread. Meat, fine wine, and entertainment.

He raises his glass to shouts of glee.

Phillip takes the glass before he drinks.

PHILLIP: You've probably had enough.

Dives reach for a bottle of wine.

DIVES: I intend to get drunk tonight. *(He drinks)*

Phillip takes him aside to have a private discussion.

PHILLIP: It's Christmas Eve. We should send the people home to celebrate with their families.

DIVES: Do they look like they want to go home, Phillip?

PHILLIP: They probably have no idea what they want with all this liquor going around.

DIVES: Why are you such a killjoy, little brother? Learn to relax and have some fun without thinking of the minute details.

PHILLIP: You pay me to think of the little things.

DIVES: And I will pay you not to think if that will help you relax a little. Have some wine. Eat some pork. Invite one of these girls for a private session upstairs. This is our time brother. We are looking at a brand-new future.

PHILLIP: I know it's the wine talking.

DIVES: What's with the conscience all of a sudden?

PHILLIP: Just doing my job.

DIVES: In that case, when this night is over, make sure you tell every one of these people that I need them at work first thing tomorrow morning.

PHILLIP: It's Christmas Day.

DIVES: So, let them come in at ten instead of eight. Am I not generous?

PHILLIP: They should be home with their families.

DIVES: It's just another day to make money. We make our greatest profits on commercial holidays.

PHILLIP: It's not just a commercial holiday.

DIVES: You sound just like my wife.

PHILLIP: Soon to be ex-wife --- number six, if I might add.

DIVES: I know where you are going. Don't.

PHILLIP: People like to go to Church on Christmas Day.

DIVES: You think people are interested in going to a sanctuary to listen to some fairy tales of a king born in a horse pen?

PHILLIP: Sharon does it. Mom did it.

DIVES: Mom is dead. Some good that did. She was a fool and Sharon is exactly like her, which is why I moved out.

PHILLIP: She invited us over for Christmas.

DIVES: I have no time for that. If she wants to waste her years believing in all that God nonsense, it's up to her. I will have none of it.

PHILLIP: She asked me to convince you to come. She has something to tell us.

DIVES: Aw, the aura of mystery. It's a nice touch. Still not going. I would die first.

PHILLIP: You were so madly in love with her once.

DIVES: "Were" being the key word in that statement.

Lazarus, much older and dressed in ragged clothes walks into the room. The guest turns up their noses and puts some distance between him and them, and he walks through looking at the table.

Dives see him. He shoves Phillip out of the way and walks over to Lazarus.

DIVES: I told you never to come here.

LAZARUS: Food looks good. I could smell it from outside.

DIVES: Get out before I have you thrown out.

LAZARUS: Why you always treat me like a dog rich man?

DIVES: How else is a dog to be treated?

LAZARUS: You're not going to eat all this food. If it's even the leftovers, I'll take it.

DIVES: You will have none of this food. Go find some water in the streets to bathe yourself and stop trespassing on my property or I will have you arrested.

LAZARUS: Why so mean?

DIVES: Get out.

LAZARUS: Merry Christmas to you too, sir.

DIVES: There's nothing merry about it for you. Go find a church. Those poor jackals will take you in. Beg them for some of their manna and holy water. Beg them some soap and toothpaste. Go find that Jesus you're always talking about. Maybe he will give you some fish and bread.

Pause.

DIVES: Go. Leave. Vamoose.

LAZARUS: God bless you.

Lazarus turns and leaves.

DIVES: *(turns to Phillip)* See what I mean brother. Filth. That's the kind that goes to church. Hungry, smelly, poor and dying. Its people like us that live forever. Not them. They can't afford it. We have the best of everything in this life and any other life to come, if there is such a thing.

Dives drink some more.

DIVES: We have only just begun to build my kingdom here on earth brother. There is plenty of work to be done, but today we eat, we drink, and we celebrate.

VOICE: 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

Dives look around for the source of the voice. He looks at the bottle in his hand.

DIVES: Did you hear that?

PHILLIP: Hear what?

DIVES: I heard a voice. *(laughs)* I think the wine is talking to me.

PHILLIP: You've had too much to drink. *(Takes the bottle away from Dives)*

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DIVES: Think I'm going to lie down a bit. The smell of that beggar has somehow upset my stomach.

Dives leaves. Phillip re-joins the other guest. The party continues.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 2

LIGHTS UP

Dives is lying motionless in the middle of the room.

A POET sits on a nearby table with a notepad and pen. He speaks as he writes. He is dirty, dressed in ragged clothes that appear burnt and torn, eyes darkened from lack of sleep. This is the same room, but somehow different.

There is an undecorated Christmas Tree erected on stage.

POET: Deep in sleep I found myself flying through the air, "Where am I and what am I doing here?"

Dives stir and begins to sit up.

POET: It was from these images my body was set ablaze, lit with fire, engulfed by fear. I was greeted by strange looking creatures, with skin charred, and blackened, scorched, that produced kink and stickiness, with worms eroding from their bodies, gory and smelly, and I looked in disdain.

Dives rub his head. He looks at the Poet, who stares back from his notepad, but only for a second.

POET: Soon, I began to cry, the tear-less cry. I cried. I cried. For yet another man laid helplessly before me. What will his first question be?

DIVES: Who are you?

POET: A million unanswered questions and your first is the most irrelevant. Who am I? Who are you? Who are we? You're new here?

DIVES: Why are you in my house?

POET: It's quiet. I always find the quiet spots, though it never lasts.

DIVES: *(forcibly)* Why are you in my house?

POET: A bit possessive aren't cha.

Dives see the Tree. He is furious.

DIVES: Who put this tree in my house?

No response.

DIVES: I'm not going to ask you again. I will go to my kitchen, in my house, for a drink of water. When I get back, you and this tree better not be in my house.

Dives walk to the exit.

POET: You don't want to leave this room.

DIVES: Why not?

POET: It's the safest place you could be. But they will never allow you to stay.

DIVES: You're not making any sense.

Poet senses someone coming. He gets jittery and uneasy. He quickly exits.

DIVES: Where're you going?

Poet is gone. Dives is alone.

DIVES: Something is not right. Is this a dream?

VOICE: More like a nightmare.

DIVES: I know that voice.

Daemon enters. He wears a neat black and white suit, well groomed.

DIVES: Did you just let yourself into my house?

Daemon looks around.

DAEMON: It does look like your house doesn't it? I made every effort to incorporate even the finest details. *(Looks at a painting on the wall)* I hate that painting by the way. Too much color. I'm more into black and white.

DIVES: And you are?

DAEMON: Pardon my manners. I am known by many names, but you can call me Daemon.

Daemon extends his hand. Dives doesn't shake it.

DIVES: Do I know you, sir? Can you tell me why you are in my house?

Daemon walks over to the Christmas Tree. He touches a few branches.

DAEMON: Do you know the significance of this tree? So many people erect one in their homes without knowing its history. It's good to know the history of everything you believe in. Don't you agree?

DIVES: I'm not religious. Sorry...

DAEMON: Yes. Pity. And you have no idea what you missed.

DIVES: ...and I didn't put that tree there.

Daemon continues to admire the tree.

DAEMON: There is no evidence that the modern custom of a Christmas tree originated in paganism, but many believe it did. The Romans decorated their houses with green trees and lights and exchanged gifts. Late in the Middle Ages, the Germans and Scandinavians placed evergreen trees in their homes or outside their doors to show their hope in the forthcoming spring. The modern-day Christmas tree evolved from these early German traditions. There is more, but I don't wish to bore you with the details.

Daemon turns to Dives.

DAEMON: We love the controversy surrounding it. Helps us in our attempts to switch focus off the birth of Christ to a more --- commercialized point of view. It works for most, but not for others --- like your wife for instance.

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DIVES: Soon to be ex-wife.

DAEMON: Actually, she is now a widow.

Pause.

DIVES: Am I dead?

DAEMON: Is there another way your wife could become a widow?

DIVES: Listen, I don't know how you know so much, but you should also know that I have money. If that's what you want. Just name your price.

Daemon laughs.

DAEMON: Show me your money, and the value it possesses?

DIVES: Take me to a bank.

DAEMON: Eternity has no financial institutions.

DIVES: Eternity?

DAEMON: Yes.

DIVES: Can I borrow your cell phone?

DAEMON: A pointless luxury afforded to you only during your brief time on earth.

DIVES: How can I access my accounts? Do you have a laptop?

DAEMON: No.

DIVES: Kindle? iPod?

DAEMON: Nope.

DIVES: Something a little more primitive, like a desktop.

DAEMON: There are only two things you can take from your earthly life into eternity. Your body and your soul. Everything else you leave behind.

Dives beat his head with the palms of his hands.

DIVES: Stop telling me rubbish. Do you even know who you are talking to? I am a very important man. The kind you don't want to mess with.

DAEMON: This time of the year we get a lot of drunks, over-dosed drug addicts, and old people. You're special. Rich, healthy, vibrant ---

DIVES: What do you mean this time of the year?

DAEMON: --- Clueless. This is the day the world celebrates the birth of God's Son. Oh, but you're not a believer, right? That's why you're here.

DIVES: This is not my house?

DAEMON: More like front row seats.

DIVES: For what?

Daemon pulls out a WANTED Poster. On it is the face of Dives' Wife, Sharon. He hands the poster to Dives.

DAEMON: Recognize that face?

DIVES: My ex-wife.

DAEMON: Widow.

DIVES: What is this?

DAEMON: She has been on *Hell's Most Wanted* list now for 15 years. Today is a very special day for her, and you get to watch.

DIVES: *Hell's Most Wanted* list? Are you telling me that this is hell?

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DAEMON: Not quite yet, but you'll know when you get to that part, which is soon. I really enjoyed our little chat.

Daemon leaves.

DIVES: *(calls offstage)* Wait...

Dives fall to the ground holding the poster in his hand.

DIVES: I'm in hell!? This can't be real.

Dives look at the poster. He crushes it up and throws it away jumping to his feet.

DIVES: This is ridiculous.

He heads to the exit but walks into RAEMON, a large man carrying a whip in his hand.

RAEMON: Going somewhere, Rich Man?

DIVES: Step aside and let me pass.

RAEMON: I see you're not very familiar with the rules that govern this place, *(He unrolls the whip)* which is understandable being your first day. You must know though that you have no authority here.

Dives back up.

DIVES: Who are you?

RAEMON: I am Raemon. I break in the new guys.

Raemon pulls the whip back.

LIGHTS FADE

The sound of whiplashes and tortured screams permeates the darkness.

SCENE 3

LIGHTS UP

Dives is lying in the middle of the room. The cloths on his back are torn from the lashes of the whip. He winces in pain. Blood stains his shirt.

The Poet sits close by; watching, speaking, writing.

POET: Tormented, by the long snakes that danced in and out of his nostrils, then evaded the holes that were embedded in his face, then through his ears then back through his nostrils again. His body was filled with maggots; I watched as they oozed through his pores that were now enlarged by their scrawny slimy bodies, I cried the tear-less cry. For my body was without water- dehydrated, without substance, without purpose. And the fire got hotter and hotter, ferociously redder and redder, more than the fire in the Blast Furnace, with insects biting me like when I once laid in an ant's nest, and my blood began to boil-literally, and I suffered --- we suffered endlessly.

DIVES: Why do you torture me with your words?

POET: There are worst things here than my words.

DIVES: I am so thirsty.

POET: There is nothing here to satisfy your thirst.

Dives sit up painfully.

DIVES: I need water.

POET: There is no water.

DIVES: What kind of place is this that has no water?

POET: A place no human was ever meant to be.

Dives is frustrated.

DIVES: I need to get out of here.

POET: The guilty must be punished. We are guilty.

DIVES: What am I guilty of?

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POET: Denying Jesus Christ.

DIVES: Denying Je --- You know what. You're crazy, and I'm getting out of here.

Dives find an exit and leaves.

POET: Five, four, three ---

Dives run back in wheezing and short of breath.

POET: A new record.

DIVES: What?

POET: Five seconds is all it usually takes for someone to step outside this room and come back.

DIVES: What is this place?

POET: What did you see?

DIVES: There are no words to describe it.

POET: Two reptile looking beast, demons about thirteen feet tall with bumps and scales.

DIVES: Not just two.

POET: Ferocious and vicious. Pacing the area. Blaspheming and cursing God. And I cried. I cried the tearless cry.

DIVES: *(very afraid)* Why am I here??

POET: Why are we here?

DIVES: How long have you been here?

POET: Longer than I lived before my first death.

DIVES: How many times do we die?

POET: Depends. Christians die twice. Spiritually & Physically. Sinners die twice. Physically & Eternally. Were you a Christian or sinner? Wait, don't answer that.

DIVES: Why are we here?

POET: Now we're back to that question.

DIVES: Give me a sensible answer.

POET: I heard a voice from above answered. I trembled like a leaf, "I called you, and you ignored me. You lived according to your sinful nature, and you denied my son, Jesus Christ. He that was wounded for your transgressions, YOU denied!! The one in humility carried your sorrows, YOU denied!! You were given one life to live and you lived it in sin."

DIVES: I don't believe in Jesus.

POET: Duh!

DIVES: I don't belong here.

POET: Oh, wretched man. Where else would we go? There is only one other place, and our sin could not enter there. Here is the only alternative.

DIVES: There must be a way out.

POET: There was. We missed it. Denied it. Cursed it ---

DIVES: Shut up. Just, stop speaking. Please.

Pause. Poet laughs.

POET: You have no authority here. Oh, how the rich have fallen.

Dives fall to his knees, dejected, hopeless.

POET: You frolicked in your sexual immorality. Committed fornication. Adultery! Homosexual acts.

DIVES: Shut up!

POET: Joined orgies. Destroyed my temple with strong drink; rum, vodka and narcotics, and stimulants, turned to male and female prostitution. Gone off in drunkenness, uttering pure profanity.

Dives grab the Poet and shake him.

DIVES: I will shut that mouth for you.

POET: YOU failed to trust Me. So, you stole from your neighbors, your own brothers, and sisters, YOU worshipped your cars, your houses, your children, your job, and your money,

everything – except me. YOU instead of spending time in prayer and fasting, chattered in idle talk, in people’s business. You failed to believe.

Dives shove him aside; covers his ears to hide from the words piercing deep into his soul.

POET: I warned you many times that I would deliver my people out of Egypt, but I would destroy those who do not believe. Many, like you, are here because of their unbelief. Many for their perverted ways; who raped and molested and abused; taking the innocence of my people physically and mentally. Instead of protecting the young boys and girls, they took away their sexual purity and corrupted their minds; scarred their bodies.

DIVES: I can bear this no longer.

POET: Now you will pay.

DIVES: *(Shouts to the Heavens)* Kill me then. Kill me now or give me something to do it myself.

POET: Another tried to kill herself but to no avail. Stabbing herself mercilessly with the spear. She looked sickening. Creepy and pail. Her flesh was torn to pieces and hung like red ribbons hanging from a tray. Just like the others who were trapped in the dungeon, with the demons to play.

DIVES: I will not survive in a place like this.

POET: Then you should not have chosen here to be your eternal home.

DIVES: I did not make any such choice.

POET: Oh, but you did. The records will show that you did. No one else could have made this choice for you.

DIVES: What records?

POET: All that you have said and done has been recorded. You will see when you stand before Jesus.

DIVES: I don’t believe in Jesus.

POET: Ah, but now you get to tell Him personally.

DIVES: *(fall to his knees, defeated)* This can’t be real.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 4

LIGHTS UP

Dives lay motionless. Daemon stoops over him, holding a large cup. He shakes Dives a few times. Dives wakes up.

DIVES: Water --- thirsty. Please.

DAEMON: I thought you might be, so I brought you something to drink.

Daemon gives him the cup and he drinks. He spews out what looks like ash.

DIVES: This is not water.

DAEMON: *(laughs)* I didn't say it was.

DIVES: Give me water.

DAEMON: Stand up.

DIVES: I don't have the strength to stand.

Daemon pulls him to his feet. He begins to strip him of his expensive robe. Dives try to fight, but his strength has waned.

DAEMON: I knew you in the former life Dives. I was assigned to you from birth. I am the reason you are here. You are one of my success stories. Arrogant. Selfish. Cruel. Used to boss people around. You enjoyed that, didn't you?

DIVES: I did what I had to do.

DAEMON: Yes, you did, and you amassed great wealth.

DIVES: Greater than any man on earth.

DAEMON: You should be able to buy your freedom from this place, huh?

DIVES: Yes. Please. Just name your price.

DAEMON: I would rather show you what has become of your accumulated wealth.

Sharon enters. She is drying tears with a handkerchief. Her LAWYER, HAROLD, enters behind her, followed by PHILLIP.

DIVES: Sharon.

DAEMON: Shhh! She can't see you.

DIVES: *(shouts)* Sharon. Help me.

DAEMON: I'm afraid she can't hear you either.

DIVES: Sharon!

SHARON: I missed this house.

PHILLIP: You still love him.

SHARON: I never stopped. Never stopped praying for him. Hoping every day he would one day return. Now I may never see him again.

They sit around a table. Harold pulls some files from his briefcase and lays them on the table.

SHARON: I miss him. I should have tried harder.

PHILLIP: You haven't seen him in five years.

SHARON: He is still my husband.

PHILLIP: Was. Past tense. He's dead.

SHARON: He was your brother. I know you cared for him so drop the cold-hearted act.

Sharon cries some more.

SHARON: I can't do this.

HAROLD: We need to get it out of the way ma'am. The longer we delay is the more we risk the government seizing all his assets and money.

DIVES: Whose assets and money?

DAEMON: Shhh! We'll get to that in a minute.

Harold looks over the document.

HAROLD: Are you sure you want to donate all this money to charity?

DIVES: Nooooo! No. That's my money.

Dives jump before them trying to get their attention.

DIVES: Don't you dare touch my money. Don't any of you dare touch my money. Phillip *(goes in front of Phillip, who is unable to see him)* Tell this woman to leave my money alone.

SHARON: Yes, every last dime. I also want to auction this house and split the money between the orphanage and the church.

DIVES: No. No. No. Not my house. *(Grabs Daemon)* You must stop them.

DAEMON: *(pushes Dives off)* It's not my money or my house.

Harold puts a few loose sheets in front of Sharon with a pen.

HAROLD: You sign here and here, and it's done.

DIVES: Sharon --- don't you dare sign that. It's my money, not yours. If you do this, I'm done with you Sharon. Done!

SHARON: It's as if I can still hear his voice.

DIVES: *(shouts)* That's because I'm telling you to leave my money alone.

SHARON: He would want me to do this.

DIVES: No, I wouldn't.

PHILLIP: He probably wouldn't.

SHARON: I know my husband.

DIVES: Ex-husband.

DAEMON: Deceased husband.

SHARON: This is exactly what he would want me to do.

DIVES: If you knew me, you would know this is not what I want.

Sharon signs the papers.

DIVES: *(throws his hands up)* She signed it. She really signed it. All my life's worth, gone with a stupid signature. *(paces the room)* I can't believe this. All my hard-earned money.

Harold checks it and nods.

HAROLD: Again, my deepest condolences on your loss. Dives was a very --- uhm, well, he was --- *(looks at his watch)* Oh, will you look at the time.

Harold packs up his briefcase.

HAROLD: I will take it from here. Go home and get some rest ma'am.

Harold exits. Phillip tries to console her.

PHILLIP: It will be fine. You did the right thing.

SHARON: You really think so?

PHILLIP: *(considers)* No. We should have kept the money.

SHARON: I know you're not like him. Wherever he is, I hope he sees now that I never wanted his money. I only wanted him.

PHILLIP: I'm sure he knows.

SHARON: I want to come back later and decorate this house in his honor. He would want me to.

DIVES: No, I wouldn't.

PHILLIP: We're selling the house, Sharon.

SHARON: The decorations will be down before the house goes on auction. It's the least we can do to bring a little Christmas cheer back into this family. We should have a family reunion here. Invite all those people Dives hasn't seen in a long time. A Christmas celebration.

DIVES: Oh no!

PHILLIP: You do know that if what you believe is true, Dives is probably in hell right.

Sharon hits Phillip on his shoulders.

SHARON: Don't say that. We don't know that for sure.

PHILLIP: Until we're sure, maybe we should put a hold on that celebration.

SHARON: He just gave billions to orphans, widows, churches, homeless and the less fortunate. I say we celebrate his life. If it were you, I would do the same.

PHILLIP: If it was up to me, you would not have married him.

SHARON: This is not about you Phillip.

PHILLIP: It never is, Sharon.

SHARON: You're so selfish. Your brother, my husband, died last night. I am a grieving widow.

PHILLIP: With a lawyer who works on public holidays and plenty of tears for a husband who did not care about you. Now he's dead, and you want to celebrate. I have always been there for you. I have always loved you. What do I get? Or do I have to die first?

Dives is in shock.

SHARON: I'm not having this conversation with you.

Sharon exits. Phillip sighs.

PHILLIP: I hate you brother. You were always everybody's favorite. A real merry season this turned out to be.

Phillip exits. Dives is lost in thought.

DIVES: My own brother hates me. I didn't know that.

DAEMON: Don't you just love Christmas.

Daemon exits.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 5

LIGHTS UP

There is a half-decorated Christmas Tree at Stage Right; some boxes of decorations scattered on the stage; one large gift under the tree.

Dives sit with legs crossed. His muscles are sore, lips cracked from dehydration, strength slowly leaving his body, skin scarred, lacking moisture.

Poet stands a little way from him speaking to the audience from his little notepad.

POET: Angrily the pit spew loads of larva on our bodies, and our flesh yelled in pain, groans and mourns, painful agonies, screams and ear-splitting yells burst my eardrums. More and more larva fell from above. Brimstone, burning Coals also fell too, "O Lord! Have mercy; let me start over, a life brand new for this I can't take --- a terrible adversity, the raging heat so real, my scary reality."

DIVES: These things you speak about --- have you experienced them?

POET: Not yet.

DIVES: I thought this was the hell you're talking about.

POET: This is hell, but not what you are thinking. Eventually, Hell and all its occupants will be cast into a lake of fire. I can see it. Clear as day.

DIVES: Are you some kind of prophet?

POET: On earth, I was many things. Poet. Prophet. I even preached.

DIVES: Why are you here?

POET: I loved telling lies. I was good at it. Loved sleeping around. I was very popular with the girls, especially the vulnerable ones just coming into the church. It felt good to sin. Never wanted to stop. One day, like you, I woke up here.

DIVES: How did you die?

POET: I don't remember dying.

DIVES: Death seemed so cruel. Hard to think I would not remember dying.

POET: Death is just like going to your bed only to wake up somewhere else.

DIVES: Why should we be punished so severely for enjoying ourselves?

POET: I used to ask that question too. But now I know the answer.

DIVES: Indulge me.

POET: All the sinful desires I had on earth are still lodged within my being. But there is nothing here to satisfy those desires. No rum. No Las Vegas. No girls. No money. In eternity, the only desire that can be met is a desire for more of God.

DIVES: Can we, start over?

POET: No! But we get to ask that question every day for all eternity. Do you know how long eternity is?

No response.

POET: It can't be measured. Endless. Just like God. And there is no more death. First, you count the seconds, then the minutes, then the hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades, centuries, then, you just stop counting. No end.

Sharon and Phillip enter. They begin to unpack the decorations and finish up the tree.

DIVES: Why can't I interact with those still living?

POET: Sin. It separated the spiritual world from the physical. Both run parallel to each other, but never come into sync. Only when the Son of God is fully revealed will both worlds become one again.

DIVES: You are saying that everything I didn't think was real, is real?

POET: I'm saying that the only reason you could even have the option of not believing is because it exists.

DIVES: Can you rephrase that!

POET: If God didn't exist, you would have absolutely no reason to doubt His existence.

DIVES: I'm not buying any of this foolishness. I am a wealthy man. This is somebody's idea of a joke and *(shouts offstage)* I demand some answers. Is it ransom you want?

POET: I pity the man who sees the truth but denies it.

DIVES: I pity you. I will be free from this place, and I won't even give you a second glance. You will rot in this prison.

POET: If only that were possible in this place where even worms don't die.

DIVES: Go find someone else to annoy with your fiction.

POET: Nice talking to you, loser.

Poet takes his notepad and finds a corner to sit. He writes.

Dives watch as Sharon and Phillip decorate the tree.

Sharon looks over at Phillip momentarily.

SHARON: I know you are upset, Phillip.

PHILLIP: Let's not talk about it.

SHARON: I appreciate you coming year after year to spend Christmas with me, even though you don't believe in it.

PHILLIP: It's just another commercial holiday. The only people who benefit from Christmas are toy manufacturers, baking suppliers, those who make decorations and the fools who market this stuff.

SHARON: Christmas is about the birth of Christ.

PHILLIP: Really. Every year you spend time putting up and decorating this tree. What does this have to do with a Christ child being born?

No response.

PHILLIP: These decorations. How are they significant to that birth? The gifts we share with family and friends. How is all that relevant to the birth of a so-called King?

No response.

PHILLIP: Christmas is just another pagan holiday that Church people have ignorantly embraced as a Christian tradition.

SHARON: For some, that may be true. But the fact is, Jesus was born, and I love celebrating that birth.

PHILLIP: You prove to me that Christmas is about Christ, and I will believe.

DIVES: Fairytales. Bedtime stories for mindless children. There is no Christ.

Daemon enters.

DAEMON: I wish we could get everyone to believe that. Especially your wife.

DIVES: Ex-wife, and it's still a liberal country. People are free to believe whatever they want to believe.

DAEMON: True. Sharon is very, influential. She has converted many and will continue if we can't derail her.

DIVES: She never converted me.

DAEMON: You have been here a few hours, and you still say it like it's a good thing. We must be losing our touch.

Daemon sees Poet sitting in the corner.

DAEMON: I guess you've met our scribe.

DIVES: Yes, if you're talking about that lunatic in the corner.

DAEMON: He could have been writing for Heaven. He chose to write for hell instead.

DIVES: Listen, fellow. I can see why you would call this hell. I can't figure out how I'm able to be in the same room with my ex-wife and brother and not being able to interact with them, but you are stretching this out too far. I'm hungry, thirsty, tormented and in dire need of a bath. Please. Just tell me what I need to do to escape from this place.

Daemon stares at Dives for a moment.

DAEMON: You still think somehow you are being held for ransom.

DIVES: Am I?

DAEMON: No, fellow, you have chosen this place to be your eternal home.

DIVES: (*forcibly*) I made no such choice. I can't stay here any longer.

DAEMON: Oh, but we're just getting to the best part of the show. (*Points to Sharon*)

SHARON: Phillip, I need to tell you something.

PHILLIP: What is it?

Sharon is struggling to get the words out. Phillip sits her down.

PHILLIP: If you're thinking about getting married again, I was thinking the same thing.

DIVES: Very smooth, brother. Make a move on my ex-wife the day after I die.

SHARON: I wasn't thinking about that.

PHILLIP: Maybe you should ---

SHARON: I have cancer.

Pause.

DIVES: *(disbelief)* What?

PHILLIP: What are you talking about? You're as healthy as you have ever been.

SHARON: I have stage four cancer.

PHILLIP: Sharon, why didn't you tell me?

SHARON: I tried.

Phillip stands. Paces the room a bit. Dives paces too.

PHILLIP: How serious?

SHARON: We caught it too late. Doctor said I had four months maximum to live. That was eight months ago. I believe God kept me alive for a reason. I could die anytime now.

PHILLIP: Please don't say that. You can't leave me.

SHARON: God promised me full healing.

PHILLIP: That's good. I've waited a long time for this moment. I need you to stick around for a while.

SHARON: Partial healing would give me a few more years Phillip, maybe months, but I would still die. Full healing would take me to heaven. I long for that peace.

PHILLIP: How long do you have?

SHARON: Maybe another month.

DAEMON: Try a few hours.

DIVES: Don't say that.

DAEMON: See what God does to His children. He lets them suffer.

PHILLIP: Is this how the loving all-powerful God you have been talking about treats His children? And you tell me this now. On Christmas Day.

SHARON: God allowed me extra time, so you could have a chance. It may be too late for your brother, but not you.

PHILLIP: So, you would tell me about Jesus while He destroys your body?

SHARON: He is not destroying my body. The cancer is. And yes, with my dying breath I will tell you about Jesus.

PHILLIP: That's not what I want to talk about right now.

Phillip goes for a gift.

PHILLIP: I bought you something.

SHARON: I don't need another gift, Phillip. If you want to really make me happy this Christmas, give Jesus a chance in your life.

PHILLIP: Why?

SHARON: He deserves it.

PHILLIP: I don't agree.

SHARON: If you don't, you will never see me again.

PHILLIP: Doesn't matter. There is nothing beyond the grave.

DAEMON: How easy it is to convince people of that.

Dives is beginning to see the truth of his present reality.

PHILLIP: I am sick and tired of having this same conversation with you every single time I visit. It's getting late. We need to go.

Sharon is close to tears.

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SHARON: Can you give me a minute?

PHILLIP: Just a minute, Sharon.

Phillip takes his gift and leave.

Sharon finds some pictures. She begins looking through them.

SHARON: How many have come to Jesus through my testimony. Yet, I can't save my own. Dives, I failed you. I'm sorry. I would give anything to have another chance to love you as Jesus loves you. One more chance to tell you the truth. One more dance. I was afraid. I am no longer afraid. But it's too late.

Sharon cries.

Dives wipes a tear. He quickly recomposes himself.

SHARON: *(Sings "All I Want for Christmas, Is You")*

Sharon hugs a photo of her standing with her husband. She takes one last look at the Christmas tree.

SHARON: Goodbye, my love. Unfortunately, we will never see each other again.

She leaves.

DAEMON: So sweet.

DIVES: When I get out of here, I will make her better.

DAEMON: What part of you being here for all eternity don't you understand?

Pause.

DAEMON: I guess it takes some getting used to. Stay sharp, Rich Man. Your finest hour approaches.

Daemon moves to the exit.

DIVES: What do you mean by that?

DAEMON: You'll see.

Daemon is gone.

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Dives sighs, dejected and weak.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 6

LIGHTS UP

Poet sits on the edge of the stage. Dives sit with legs cross. His body is almost devoid of strength, lips cracked, expression hopeless.

Poet looks back at Dives.

POET: You don't look so good, loser.

Dives doesn't respond.

POET: It gets bearable with time, somewhat. Well, no. Not really. I guess it would be better if we had no memory of all those times we walked past a church and spoke harshly to Christians. How ironic. They seemed so annoying but was only trying to save us. Like your wife.

DIVES: Ex-wife.

POET: Glad you have some strength left.

DIVES: What did that other guy mean by my finest hour approaches?

POET: This is it. I love this part, just as much as I hate it.

Jesus enters, just outside the stage area.

Another Character, bearing a resemblance to Abraham enters. He carries a chair which he allows Jesus to sit on.

Dives drag himself a little closer.

A Young child enters. He/She stands before Jesus.

YOUNG CHILD: *(Sings "Happy Birthday, Jesus")*

At the end of the Song, Jesus cheers gleefully. He goes to the young child and embraces him/her.

Young child exit.

ABRAHAM: Such a delight.

JESUS: If only we could convince her mother she's in a better place.

ABRAHAM: It's hard to come to terms with the death of a loved one, especially when we don't understand death.

JESUS: Let's not dwell too much on the negative.

ABRAHAM: We have guests.

JESUS: Well, don't keep me waiting.

Abraham motions to someone coming up through the audience. Lazarus humbly approaches, wearing clean white clothes.

Dives recognize him.

DIVES: It can't be.

Lazarus bows before Jesus, who pulls him from his feet into an embrace.

JESUS: Well done.

Jesus takes His coat and puts it on Lazarus.

JESUS: All I have, now belongs to you.

Abraham greets Lazarus, who is ecstatic beyond words.

DIVES: (calls out) Lazarus, my friend.

Jesus, Abraham, and Lazarus look in his direction.

Dives look at the Poet confused.

DIVES: They can hear me?

POET: Duh.

Abraham escorts Lazarus a little closer to the edge of the stage.

ABRAHAM: I am Abraham.

DIVES: The Abraham of the Bible?

ABRAHAM: Yes.

DIVES: Have mercy on me. I am tormented in this place. I need food and water.

ABRAHAM: I cannot cross over to you.

DIVES: Send my friend, Lazarus. He knows me. Let him dip his finger in some water and touch my tongue.

ABRAHAM: Son, remember in your lifetime you received many good gifts that you never shared with anyone, and Lazarus received evil things. He was treated badly, and you were glorified. Now he is glorified, and you are in torment.

DIVES: I have done some good.

ABRAHAM: (*gestures towards Jesus*) Do you know this Man, sitting in this chair?

DIVES: I assume it's Jesus.

ABRAHAM: You never put your faith in Him.

DIVES: I wouldn't quite say that.

ABRAHAM: What did you say only a few hours ago?

DIVES: I don't recall.

POET: He said he didn't believe in Jesus.

DIVES: Shut up!

ABRAHAM: Without a relationship with Jesus, your good works count for nothing.

DIVES: Send Lazarus to give me water.

ABRAHAM: I can't. There's a fix chasm between you and us. We cannot cross over to you nor can you cross over to us.

Dives breaks down.

DIVES: Please, at least send word to my brother. Warn him, so he doesn't come to this place of torment.

ABRAHAM: Your brother has been spoken to several times by your wife.

DIVES: My ex-wife.

ABRAHAM: Her faith cannot save you. If your brother heeds her words and respond, he will be saved. If he doubts, then even if someone came back from the dead, he would still not believe.

Jesus touches Abraham's shoulder.

JESUS: Abraham, take Lazarus to his new home.

ABRAHAM: Yes Lord.

Abraham leaves with Lazarus.

DIVES: Aren't you supposed to be a just and loving God?

JESUS: You talk as if I did not try to save you from this fate.

DIVES: You didn't try hard enough.

POET: Many were wicked, Killers, warmongers, thieves, hypocrites, liars, grumblers, faultfinders, following their own ungodly desires. Divided the church. Following their natural instincts instead of my Spirit. Some pretenders, bench warmers, having a form of godliness and denied my power!

DIVES: I didn't think this was real.

JESUS: You grieved me, Dives. Denied Me. As if dying for you on that cross was not enough.

DIVES: Lord please, I beg you, have mercy I pray. Give me another chance.

JESUS: I gave you many chances and what did you do? Do you remember what you said?

DIVES: No.

POET: He said, Christians are fools --- Christmas is a time to make money --- No King could have been born in a horse pen.

DIVES: This is unbearable. I need water.....Ple—e---e---ease I need water! Have pity on me. I can't live much longer --- even a tip of water just to cool my parched tongue. Please, I am begging you to have mercy on me. Take me to a place I belong.

JESUS: You will stay here in eternal torment. There is no place for amendment. I'm truly sorry.

Sharon walks through the audience also wearing clean white clothes. She comes up to Jesus who hugs her. She looks at Dives.

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DIVES: My wife.

SHARON: I'm sorry I could not save you Dives. I thought we had more time.

Jesus leads Sharon offstage.

SHARON: *(looks back at Dives, one final time)* Goodbye, my love.

Poet gets to his feet.

POET: I guess the show is over.

DIVES: What's going to happen to me?

POET: This is just day one of your eternity, loser. I wouldn't worry about it though. It only gets worse.

Poet exits.

Daemon drags a beaten and weak body onto the stage. He drops him and leaves.

Dives crawl over to him and turn him over. It's his brother Phillip.

DIVES: No. Phillip. My brother. What have I done?

Dives breaks down crying.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 7

LIGHTS UP

Dives is laying on the couch wearing the same clothes from the party. The room is a mess. Food, plates, and cups all over. Music still playing.

Phillip enters carrying a cup of tea. He turns the radio off.

Dives jumps out of his sleep. He looks around. Looks at his clothes. Feels his face. Sees Phillip and goes to embrace him, spilling hot tea on them both.

PHILLIP: What is the matter with you?

DIVES: Sorry. Oh my God. It was a dream. Thank God. Oh, Jesus.

Dives looks around.

DIVES: Where's everybody?

PHILLIP: They left hours ago. Are you feeling okay?

DIVES: I am glad to see you. You have no idea. Where's the Christmas Tree?

PHILLIP: The what?

DIVES: Christmas tree. We need to have one set up right here.

Phillip checks his brother's forehead for a fever. Dives pushes his hand away.

DIVES: I'm fine. Just get me a tree, please. What day is it?

PHILLIP: Christmas Day.

DIVES: Call everyone and tell them no work. They are to take the next four days off.

Pause.

PHILLIP: I'm genuinely concerned about you right now. Maybe you are having a stroke.

DIVES: Just do it, Phillip. Please. And call my wife.

PHILLIP: I didn't realize you hit your head so hard when you fell.

DIVES: Why are you still standing there looking at me?

PHILLIP: Are you by any chance related to Ebenezer Scrooge?

DIVES: Who?

PHILLIP: Okay, but just so you know, your wife is already here.

DIVES: What?

PHILLIP: Who do you think made that tea? You know I can't even cook water.

DIVES: She is here?

PHILLIP: Yes. Just maybe, maybe she still cares about you.

Sharon enters holding a gift.

DIVES: You are here!

SHARON: What did you expect?

DIVES: Anything but you.

Dives just stands there staring at his wife. Phillip looks on a bit awkwardly.

DIVES: Phillip, can you give us a moment.

PHILLIP: Sure.

Phillip quickly exits.

SHARON: I know I'm the last person you expected to see, but when Phillip called I just could not stay away. And it's Christmas Day, so I brought you a gift --- *(Dives comes close enough to put his finger to her lips. He takes the gift, and put it aside)*

DIVES: *(Sings "All I Want for Christmas, Is You")*

After the song, there is a long, awkward pause.

SHARON: Okay, I did not expect that. How hard did you hit your head?

DIVES: if I did, it's the best thing that ever happened to me. Merry Christmas.

SHARON: Merry Christmas to you.

Dives turns the radio back on. A love song is playing. He extends his hand.

DIVES: May I have this dance.

Sharon is at a loss for words. She takes his hands amidst flowing tears.

They dance.

VOICE: I knew pleasure. I found all that was good. I laughed many days, cheered myself with wine, and embraced folly. I wanted to experience all that was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of life. I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I owned more herds and flocks than anyone before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well. I became greater by far than anyone before me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. *(pause)* I found it all to be vanity of vanities. All was vanity. Hear the conclusion of the matter. Fear God and keep His commandments. This is the whole duty of man.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK