

Maria's Christmas Gift

The Original Stageplay



Cleveland O. McLeish

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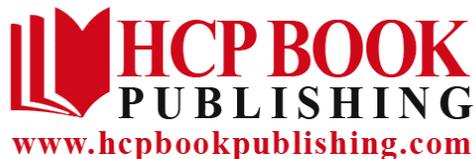


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Characters

Icyline

Charline

Maria

James

Bishop Thomas

Prince

Setting

Though a simple living room setting is required, the quality of furniture should reflect a posh lifestyle as in 'upper-class.' (The rest I leave to your imagination)

The Story

We're first introduced to the life of Icyline Williams, who is well on her way to becoming a successful author. She has a daughter that she favors, Charline, and a Step-daughter she despises, Maria.

It's one week before Christmas and Icyline has landed another contract for her latest book. Charline is also ecstatic that the most handsome guy in town is throwing a massive party on Christmas Eve with the intention of meeting his ideal mate.

As Christmas draws nearer, Icyline helps Charline to prepare for the big night; James, the father Maria thought was dead, shows up and sets off a stage of events that will eventually lead to Maria's deliverance and James return to God.

Play Details

Length: 45-60 Minutes

Cast: 3 Males, 3 Females

Audience: Children, Teens & Adult

Genre: Contemporary Drama

THE SCRIPT



SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP

Icyline is seated at center stage rummaging through a stack of papers scattered on the center table.

She looks at her watch.

ICYLINE: I'm running late again. (*Calls offstage*) Charline, honey.

CHARLINE (*offstage*): Yes, mom.

ICYLINE: I need you right now.

Charline appears almost instantly.

CHARLINE: I'm here.

ICYLINE: Come over here and help me sort through these papers.

Charline goes to her side and starts to help.

CHARLINE: Is this your new book?

ICYLINE: Yes, 'Living Within Your Means; A Guide to Proper Budgeting.'

CHARLINE: Sounds interesting.

ICYLINE: Yeah, well, I have a meeting with my publisher in forty-five minutes. If I don't get there in time ---

CHARLINE: Why not let Maria do it?

ICYLINE: And get my manuscript dirty and wrinkled, I think not. Doesn't she have enough work for today?

CHARLINE: If she did, she would not be in her den reading a Bible.

Icyline stops.

ICYLINE: What? (*calls offstage*) Maria!

No answer.

ICYLINE (*shouts*) Maria!

MARIA (*offstage*): Coming, Ma'am.

Icyline stands to challenge her as she enters dressed in a maid's uniform.

ICYLINE: Where were you?

MARIA: In the den.

ICYLINE: Excuse me!

MARIA: In the den, ma'am.

ICYLINE: Doing what?

Maria looks at Charline.

MARIA: Reading, ma'am.

ICYLINE: How can you find time to read? Uh? Don't you have enough work to do?

MARIA: Yes, ma'am.

ICYLINE: Well, I sure hope so. Please add to your list '*cleaning of the attic.*' I want to get rid of all the cobwebs and junk from that miserable place today. Also, I want a new look for my bedroom. You can reshuffle the place, and when I get back this afternoon, I'll let you know if I like it this time.

MARIA: Yes, ma'am.

ICYLINE: Why are you still standing there?

Maria shuffles away.

Charline laughs. Icyline joins her.

ICYLINE: God I hate to see her. She constantly reminds me of ---

CHARLINE: Don't get too hyped up about her, mom. If we keep pushing her, with any luck, she'll run away, and then the contract would be breached, and we wouldn't have to give her a cent.

ICYLINE: It was a stupid contract in the first place. I should never have agreed to it. I'm her step-mother. She's not my responsibility.

CHARLINE: If you hadn't agreed to it, you wouldn't have gotten the money you needed to fast-track your career.

ICYLINE: Don't remind me. The things we do to succeed in life.

CHARLINE: She's a small price to pay, but not to worry. In any case, she'll be Twenty One in one and a half years.

ICYLINE: That's way too long. But, she's a whole lot stronger than I thought. I'm starting to wonder if we'll ever be able to break her.

CHARLINE: Don't worry. Don't you have an appointment you're running late for?

ICYLINE: Right.

They both get back to work.

A knock sounds at the door.

ICYLINE: Probably my ride. Keep at it. I'll get the door.

Charline nods and continues working.

Icyline gets up, straightens herself and walks to the door.

James is standing on the other side.

Icyline frowns and closes the door in his face.

She walks away a bit but stops when the knocking resumes.

Charline looks up from the stack of papers.

CHARLINE: Who is it?

ICYLINE: An unwelcome guest.

CHARLINE: Oh, him again.

James opens the door and enters.

Icyline speaks without turning around.

ICYLINE: You're not welcome here.

JAMES: I didn't come to see you, Icyline.

Icyline turns to face him. James looks past her to Charline.

JAMES: Hi, Charline.

CHARLINE (*flat and uninterested*) Hi, dad.

James meets Icyline's eyes.

JAMES: Can I see her?

ICYLINE: No.

JAMES: You still haven't told her, have you?

ICYLINE: No.

JAMES: Look, we have our differences, but she should not have to suffer because of our disagreements.

ICYLINE: Well, someone has to suffer. I can't think of anyone more worthy than a bastard child.

JAMES: You're supposed to forgive others, Icyline. You were a Christian once.

ICYLINE: Yeah, well, that's before my so-called Christian husband ran off to get married in another country, leaving me with a bank account I couldn't access unless I signed a stupid contract that I would take care of his bastard daughter till she was Twenty One. Uhm, did I leave anything out?

JAMES: No, but your story is a bit twisted. You know it's a little more complicated than that.

ICYLINE: Yeah, whatever, so why exactly are you here again?

JAMES: I'm here for a few days, Icyline, and I'm not leaving until I talk to my daughter.

ICYLINE: Oh yes, right.

Pause.

JAMES: Where is she?

ICYLINE: I don't know. Charline, Have you seen Maria anywhere?

CHARLINE: Can't say I have.

ICYLINE: I don't know where she is, but I wish you luck in finding her.

Icyline shoves James through the exit.

ICYLINE: Thanks for stopping by.

She slams the door in his face again.

Charline puts the last few sheets of paper on the stacks.

CHARLINE: I think you're good to go.

Charline looks up when she hears no response. Icyline wipes tears from her eyes.

Charline goes to her.

CHARLINE: Don't do that, mom. He's not worth your tears.

ICYLINE: I know.

They both exit.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 2

LIGHTS UP

Maria is busy dusting and rearranging furniture.

Enter Icyline with a fresh set of papers in her hands. She ignores Maria, as usual.

Charline enters behind her.

CHARLINE: Mom, aren't you hungry?

ICYLINE: Of course, dear.

CHARLINE: There are freshly baked muffins in the kitchen and Maria can make us two glasses of ice tea.

ICYLINE: Maria.

Maria takes the cue and exits.

CHARLINE: What's that in your hand?

ICYLINE: This, my dear sweet daughter, is the new contract.

CHARLINE (*getting excited*): You mean, for your new book?

ICYLINE: Yep. Fifty Thousand dollars advance and Twenty Five Percent Royalty on the sale of each book.

They jump in each other's arms and celebrate.

CHARLINE: Have you signed it yet?

ICYLINE: What's the rush? Everybody loves my writing. They were practically drooling over the words. I'm wondering if I should ask them to double the advance.

CHARLINE: Mom.

ICYLINE: Just kidding.

Icyline takes a pen and signs the contract.

ICYLINE: There. I should be going on tour in a couple of weeks, but we're five days away from Christmas so we need to do something special this year.

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CHARLINE: How about dinner?

ICYLINE: A dinner.

CHARLINE: Yes. Hold on.

Charline exits almost bouncing the tray from Maria's hand as she enters.

Maria places the tray before Icyline at Center Stage.

MARIA: May I take a break now, ma'am?

ICYLINE: Whatever for?

MARIA: I need to get something to eat, ma'am.

ICYLINE: Finish what you were doing here, and then take your break. No more than five minutes though. I need you to clean out the garage today.

MARIA: Yes, ma'am.

Maria resumes dusting the furniture.

Charline returns with a flier in her hand.

CHARLINE: Prince is throwing a huge party this Christmas Eve, and he's inviting all the young ladies from this community. Apparently, he's trying to find his ideal mate.

ICYLINE: Prince? You mean, the Bishop's son?

CHARLINE: Oh Yeah.

Maria stops cleaning and listens.

ICYLINE: The Bishop's son?

CHARLINE: Yes, mother, and guess who his ideal mate is going to be?

Icyline looks at Charline, then starts laughing. Maria lets out a chuckle.

Icyline and Charline turn to her with a serious expression.

CHARLINE: What are you laughing at?

Maria shakes her head, but cannot contain the laugh.

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CHARLINE: Oh, so you don't think I'm worthy enough to marry a Bishop's son, eh? Well, I have news for you. Every other girl in this community is a nobody, just like you. I will be his ideal mate.

MARIA: Whatever you say, ma'am.

Charline throws her hand in the air and screams.

CHARLINE: Oh, I hate you.

ICYLINE: Maria, take that break now. Ten minutes.

MARIA: Yes, ma'am.

Maria takes her duster and bucket and whatever else and exits.

CHARLINE: You're not going to let her get away with that.

ICYLINE: She was partially right.

CHARLINE: Mother.

ICYLINE: Look, if you want the Prince that bad, I'll make sure he's yours. But you need a lot of work. Tomorrow we'll go shopping. Then you will definitely have to consider a manicure, pedicure, facial, and the works. Believe me, come this Saturday, you will stand out as a Princess, worthy of a Prince.

Charline smiles at the thought.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 3

LIGHTS UP

Maria is all alone at Center Stage reading her Bible and basking in the little freedom she has when no one else is around. She may even be playing a little worship CD on the 'forbidden' radio.

Maria closes the Bible.

MARIA: Lord, I have endured as much as I can these past years. and I'm still waiting to see the fulfillment of Your promise. I see no indication that it has begun, but I have faith in You, and I will not falter into the realms of doubt and uncertainty because then I would cripple the work of Your angels and hurt Your plan. I'm just reminding You that I'm still here waiting.

Maria jumps when a knock sounds at the door.

MARIA (*calling out*): Who, who is it?

JAMES (*offstage*): May I speak to you for a minute. It's important.

MARIA (*calling out*): Who is it?

JAMES (*offstage*) (*sighs*): I have a delivery for Miss Icyline Williams.

MARIA (*to herself*): Delivery?

Maria approaches the door.

MARIA: I'm sorry, sir, no one told me about a delivery.

JAMES: May I come in, please?

MARIA: I don't think so, sir.

James opens the door and enters, closing it behind him.

Maria jumps behind the nearest couch.

MARIA: Please, sir, I have no money and --- please don't hurt me.

JAMES: I'm not here to hurt you, Maria. I came to talk to you.

MARIA: How do you know my name?

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JAMES: I am, I am a friend of the family.

MARIA: I'm only seeing you for the first time, sir.

JAMES: My name is James.

MARIA: James?

JAMES: Yes.

Maria starts to get comfortable enough to stand.

MARIA: I knew someone once by that name.

Pause.

JAMES: I have been hoping for an opportunity to talk to you for a long time.

MARIA: Why, sir?

JAMES: Because I have something important to tell you.

Maria is uncomfortable with this line of argument.

MARIA: I think you should go. I am not allowed to talk to strangers and if Ms. Williams comes back, she'll punish me.

JAMES: You call your mother Ms. Williams?

MARIA: Step-mother.

JAMES: And why are you dressed like a maid?

MARIA: That's what I am, sir.

James sighs and rubs his forehead.

JAMES: That explains a lot. I have always wondered why every time I call either Icyline or Charline answers the phone, or no-one answers.

MARIA: I'm not allowed to touch the phone, sir.

JAMES: How, how could you have survived under these conditions?

MARIA (*smiles proudly*): I held on to God's unchanging hands.

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He drops down on the Couch.

Long silence.

JAMES: Do you have a dream, Maria?

MARIA: Yes. I dream of freedom.

JAMES: I guess that's everybody's dream, right?

MARIA: No, sir. Others dream of fame, fortune, meeting their soul mate, they think these are the sources of contentment, but they are not.

JAMES: Do you know the source?

MARIA: My source is God. The value of everything else dims in His presence.

JAMES: I believed that once.

MARIA: Look, sir, please, I really don't want to get in trouble. Can you leave?

JAMES: I'm wondering if you would still ask me to leave, if you knew who I am.

MARIA: I don't know you, sir.

JAMES: How would you feel if I told you your father was alive?

MARIA: Ms Williams says he's dead.

JAMES: Do you believe her?

MARIA: What choice do I have?

JAMES: Have you ever visited his grave?

Pause.

MARIA: I asked about it once, but I was just shouted at, so there are certain questions I learned not to ask.

JAMES: What if your father is alive, but he's too ashamed to tell you.

MARIA: I wouldn't blame him. Why are we talking about my father?

Long Pause.

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JAMES: Because, I am your father, Maria.

Maria starts to back away.

MARIA: No. I know my father. I remember his face.

JAMES: The last time you saw me was when you were eight. That was eleven years ago.

MARIA: No. I remember his face.

JAMES: It was Christmas Day. I gave you a gift remember. A Barbie doll, low cut hair with a little tiny ring on one of her finger. Anytime you squeezed her tummy she would say ---

JAMES & MARIA: --- I will always love you.

Maria is now in tears.

James tries to approach her.

MARIA: Don't.

JAMES: I'm sorry, Maria, I will do anything to make it up to you.

MARIA: Why did you leave me here?

JAMES: I had no choice. I had borrowed money from the wrong people and --- I couldn't pay them back. I had to run. I had to protect my family.

MARIA: Why did you leave me here!

JAMES: I had no choice, Maria.

Maria is now in tears. She exits leaving James alone on stage.

JAMES: Maria, Maria!

James drops on the Couch.

JAMES: Oh God, You said everything would be alright. Why are You making this so difficult for me?

James buries his face in his hands.

He stays there for a beat, and then opens his eyes to see the flier on the center table. He takes it up and reads it.

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He considers, then gets up and exit.

Moments later, Maria walks back out. She looks around and runs to the door. She looks out, but James is gone.

MARIA: Lord, help me to do the right thing. I'm feeling emotions right now I didn't even know I still have. Please help me!

Pause.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 4

LIGHTS UP

Maria is sweeping like crazy. Icyline and Charline are in and out apparently getting themselves ready: change of clothes, makeup, fixing their hair.

Icyline is now fully dressed as she fixes her hair.

Charline comes out with two dresses. Icyline quickly makes a choice and Charline exits again.

There's a gentle knock at the door.

ICYLINE: Be there in a minute. *(to Maria)* You may excuse yourself now, dear.

Maria quickly exits, leaving everything behind. Icyline is too pre-occupied to see the broom and duster that Maria forgot to carry with her.

Icyline goes to the door, straightens herself, assumes a poignant poise and opens the door.

Bishop and his Son, Prince, is standing on the other side.

ICYLINE: Hi there, Bishop. Do come in.

Icyline step aside to allow the Bishop and son to enter.

ICYLINE: This is indeed a surprise. We didn't expect a visit, so you'll have to forgive me. This place is a mess.

Bishop looks around and obviously disagrees with her.

BISHOP: I don't practice dropping in unannounced like this, but considering the circumstances, I'm quite impressed.

ICYLINE: Thank you, sir. Please have a seat.

Icyline fetches a tray with two glasses of ice tea.

BISHOP: I haven't seen you by the church in a while, Sister Williams. I'm here partly because I'm concerned. Are you having any difficulty that I may be able to help you with?

ICYLINE: No sir. I've been working on a new book, and the deadline was fast approaching, so I had to borrow some of the good Lord's time.

BISHOP: Borrow is a very strong word, my sister.

ICYLINE: I will make it up to Him. We've already discussed the matter.

BISHOP: I'm happy to hear that. It makes my job a whole lot easier when members recognize how important it is to have a personal relationship with the Lord.

ICYLINE: Hallelujah.

Icyline eyes the Prince. Bishop follows her gaze.

BISHOP: Oh, where are my manners. This is my son, Prince. He's visiting with me for a few weeks, then he'll be off again to college.

Prince stands, and Icyline follows suit. They shake hands.

PRINCE: Nice to meet you, ma'am.

ICYLINE: The pleasure is all mine.

BISHOP: My son here thinks he's getting old fast and he hasn't been able to 'connect' with the kind of woman he would like to spend the rest of his life with, so ---

ICYLINE: --- he's throwing a party with the intention of meeting his ideal mate.

BISHOP: Right. Well, I guess by now everyone has seen that flyer.

ICYLINE: It's a strange gesture, but the young ladies are all excited, so I guess we needed the excitement.

BISHOP: Yes indeed. *(pause)* You have a daughter, right?

ICYLINE: Yes, I have one daughter that I'm very proud of *(calling offstage)* Charline!

BISHOP: Is she a Christian?

ICYLINE: Oh yes. She is a firm believer in the Christ-teachings.

PRINCE *(to himself)*: Christ-teachings?!?

Charline slowly enters, swinging her hips a little too much.

CHARLINE: Well, hello there, Bishop.

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She takes his hand and shakes it, then stand waiting to be introduced to Prince, who forces a fake smile, unimpressed.

BISHOP: This is my son ---

CHARLINE: Prince. I know.

Charline extends her hand and waits for Prince to take it and kiss it.

Prince takes her hand and pulls it down into a handshake.

PRINCE: Nice to meet you.

He lets go quickly, hardly impressed. Charline is a little disappointed.

BISHOP: We have a few more stops to make, so we'll be moving on right about now.

Maria peeks in. When she thinks no one is looking, she quickly dashes for the broom and duster, but Prince catches sight of her before she leaves.

Prince jumps to his feet.

PRINCE: Hello.

Maria disappears just as everyone looks around to see who Prince is talking to.

PRINCE: Who is she?

ICYLINE: Who? There is nobody there.

Charline grabs Prince's arm.

CHARLINE: Let me walk you to the door.

PRINCE: The maid? Who is she?

ICYLINE: I don't know who you're talking about. You must be hallucinating.

PRINCE: She had the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen.

Charline pulls Prince to the door. Bishop follows behind.

BISHOP: Forgive my son. He has a peculiar interest in women of low standard.

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ICYLINE: I see.

Bishop and his son exits. Charline closes the door gently, her expression changes to pure wrath.

CHARLINE: Mother!

ICYLINE: I will deal with it.

They both exit.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 5

LIGHTS UP

Maria is seated on the couch and Icyline, and Charline paces back and forth; stopping occasionally for emphasis.

ICYLINE: You've been trying really hard to bring this family to shame.

CHARLINE: Shame on you.

ICYLINE: We have had just as much as we can take. As of this moment, the rules have changed.

Icyline reels out three sheets of paper glued together.

ICYLINE: If you plan to stay under this roof, you will abide by all the old rules and these new ones. Also ---

Icyline reels out four sheets of paper glued together.

ICYLINE: This is your to-do list for today and try to complete everything, because if anything is left undone, it will be added to your to-do list for tomorrow. We'll see just how strong you are.

MARIA: Ma'am ---

ICYLINE: Uh, Uh. Rule number twenty-six. You're allowed to speak only when granted the permission to speak.

Charline checks her watch.

CHARLINE: Mom.

ICYLINE: I know. Oh, Maria, I forgot to mention. We'll be out today doing manicure, pedicure and facial for tomorrow's big dinner.

CHARLINE: I wish you could come too, but seeing that you'll be so busy for the next twenty-four hours, we'll just have to go without you.

ICYLINE: Sorry (*serious note*) Make sure dinner is ready before we get back, which will be about four-ish, five-ish.

CHARLINE: Bye-Bye now.

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ICYLINE: And please remember to take our dresses to the dry-cleaners.

They exit.

Maria sighs (what else can she do)

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 6

LIGHTS UP

Maria is fast asleep on the couch with the broom in her hand.

She jumps to her feet when someone starts knocking at the door.

It takes a while for her to focus. She is obviously extremely exhausted.

More knocking.

MARIA: Who is it?

JAMES (*offstage*): Maria, It's me.

MARIA (*sighs*): It's open.

James enters with a huge bag in his hand. He places it on the floor and gently closes the door behind him.

JAMES: Are they here?

MARIA: No. They'll be gone for a while.

JAMES: Oh, they have gone to that dinner?

MARIA: Yeah, that stupid dinner.

JAMES: I thought maybe you would want to go.

MARIA: Why would I want to go?

JAMES: Your dream, remember.

Maria gets lost in thought.

JAMES: You gave me something the other day, Maria, something I thought I had lost. You gave me hope in a God that I thought had turned his back on me.

MARIA: Can I have it back, please? I seem to have misplaced mine.

James laughs at this comment. Maria smiles too.

JAMES: Life seems so unfair. One moment you think you're in control and the next ---

MARIA: I know exactly what you mean. Tell me what happened eleven years ago. Weren't you happy?

JAMES: How could I be happy married to the ice-queen?

They laugh again.

JAMES: She always insisted on the type of lifestyle no ordinary man could afford. Made it difficult to stay financial stable and if I didn't meet her needs, well she usually finds some way to hurt me. If it wasn't for you, I would have left long before then. I had to make sure you were okay.

MARIA: What about Charline? She is yours too.

JAMES: Icyline always favored her. She poisoned her mind against me, because of you. She was never very good at being a step-parent.

MARIA: And you thought I would be okay with her?

JAMES: There was no one else.

Pause.

MARIA: Where have you been all this time?

JAMES: Well, first I went to the Cayman Islands. Spent about two years there, and then moved on to Jamaica where I got remarried to a beautiful African princess.

MARIA: You have been to Jamaica?

JAMES: Yeah.

MARIA: Say something Jamaican.

JAMES: Fi Wah?

They laugh again.

JAMES: That's Jamaican for 'What For?'

MARIA: Cool.

JAMES: You also have two little brothers.

James takes a photo from his wallet and hands it to Maria. Maria starts to cry.

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JAMES: I'm not leaving you again, Maria.

Maria jumps in his arms, and they hug for a while.

James pulls away and fetches the bag close to the door.

JAMES: I brought you a gift.

Maria hesitates at first, then takes the bag and pull out one of the most beautiful dresses she has ever seen.

MARIA: Oh, thank you.

JAMES: Hurry up and get dressed. We wouldn't want you to miss the whole dinner.

MARIA: You mean, I'm going?

JAMES: Yep.

Maria hugs him again and quickly exits.

James can't stop smiling, even when tears fill his eyes.

JAMES: Lord, I thank you.

Pause.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 7

LIGHTS UP

Charline paces back and forth as Icyline watches her.

CHARLINE: I can't believe he would ignore me like that. After all I went through for him.

ICYLINE: Charline, dear, you weren't the only girl at that party you know.

CHARLINE: Maybe not, but I was the only somebody there. You could see the fakeness in the others, hiding behind make-up and rent-a-clothes. And who on earth was that girl who walked in late? She is the one to blame. She took away every ounce of Prince's attention.

ICYLINE: I don't know who she is, but her dress was smashing.

CHARLINE: Mom!

ICYLINE: She reminded me of how I used to dress when I was still married to ---

CHARLINE: Mom, can you focus here? We're talking about me, remember.

ICYLINE: You should calm down, dear. There are bigger fishes in the sea.

CHARLINE: Yes, but none as handsome as Prince. Oh, did you see his eyes, his smile--
-

ICYLINE: Girl, get a grip. I've survived eleven years without a man, so can you.

CHARLINE: I never want to be like you, mom.

Charline claps her hand over her mouth. Icyline can hardly believe what she heard.

ICYLINE: What did you just say?

CHARLINE: Nothing.

ICYLINE: Charline!

CHARLINE: Everybody hates you, mom. They talk all sort of stuff behind your back, and they call you the ice-queen.

ICYLINE: Ice-queen? Oh, those hypocrites. Why didn't you say something?

CHARLINE: That's not something I wanted to say, mom.

ICYLINE: Well, thanks for saying something you didn't want to say on Christmas Day.

CHARLINE: Oh, Merry Christmas.

ICYLINE: Yeah. Where's Maria?

CHARLINE: In her den, probably reading that stupid book of hers.

ICYLINE (*calling offstage*): Maria!

No answer.

ICYLINE: (*shouts*) MARIA!

Still no answer.

ICYLINE: Go get that good for nothing maid of yours.

CHARLINE: I ain't going down there. There are spiders and cobwebs and, oh, you go. Yew!!

Knock, Knock, Knock.

ICYLINE: Now, who on earth is that?

CHARLINE: It's Christmas, mom. Maybe the neighbors are bringing cake or something. I could eat a big slice of cake right about now.

ICYLINE: It could be those hypocrites from church. Charline, get rid of them. Tell them I'm not home.

CHARLINE: Okay.

Charline goes to the door and opens it. She almost faint at the sight of Prince standing in her doorway.

CHARLINE: Ah, ah, Ahi ---

Prince laughs.

PRINCE: You didn't seem so shy the last time I was here.

CHARLINE: I *(ahem)* I expected you then. Come in. *(ahem)*

The door closes.

ICYLINE: Was it those back-biting hypoc...*(sees Prince)* Hello.

PRINCE: Hi, Miss Williams.

ICYLINE: And to what do we owe this pleasure?

PRINCE: I'm here for your daughter, Miss Williams. I want to take her out.

Charline faints on the couch.

ICYLINE: Oh dear.

Icyline fans her until she recovers.

ICYLINE: Would you like some ice-tea, Prince?

PRINCE: No thanks, ma'am.

Charline stands to her feet and straightens herself.

CHARLINE: Just give me a moment to get dressed.

PRINCE: Get dressed?

CHARLINE: I simply cannot wear this house dress on our date.

PRINCE: Our Date? *(realizes)* Oh, no, I didn't mean this daughter.

ICYLINE & CHARLINE: What?

Maria comes out with a large suitcase. She wears an elegant outfit that stops the very breathe of Prince.

PRINCE: Hey.

MARIA: Hi.

ICYLINE: Maria!?

MARIA: Seeing that I'm not allowed to speak unless permission is granted, mom, I wrote you a letter. It's on the counter in the kitchen.

Maria's Christmas Gift by Cleveland O. McLeish

James enters.

JAMES: Hey, oh.

He turns back through the door and knocks.

Maria lets him in.

JAMES: Hey, again.

ICYLINE: What are you doing, James?

JAMES: I'm taking my daughter.

ICYLINE: I am responsible for her until she's twenty-one.

JAMES: Yes, I agree. You were supposed to be taking care of her like your own daughter, not as a hired maid.

ICYLINE: What do you care? You left her remember. Maria, put your suitcase away. Your father here is not worth the trip. Believe me.

MARIA: I can make my own decisions, mom, and anything is better than this.

ICYLINE: You would choose him over me?

MARIA: Actually, I choose God over the both of you. I am finally getting promoted by my Heavenly Father, ma'am, and I am not about to turn Him down. I thought you would be happy that I was leaving.

JAMES: She wanted you to leave, but not for a better life.

CHARLINE: Maria (*eyes her keenly*), you were the girl at the party.

MARIA: Yeah, thanks to my dad.

Maria smiles at James, and he returns it.

MARIA: I have to go.

Prince takes her bag and exits.

CHARLINE: Bye, Prince.

No response.

Maria's Christmas Gift by Cleveland O. McLeish

Charline exits crying.

Icyline drops on the couch, totally defeated.

MARIA: Bye, mom.

Maria exits without waiting for a response.

JAMES: Why, Icyline, why did you treat your daughter like a slave?

ICYLINE: I was angry, and bitter. You hurt me terribly when you left.

JAMES: You forced me to leave. You know I couldn't afford the kind of lifestyle you wanted.

ICYLINE: I know, James. I know.

JAMES: We all have some adjusting to do in our lives. Maybe its time you started as well.

Pause.

ICYLINE: Maybe.

JAMES: Merry Christmas.

ICYLINE: Merry Christmas, James.

James remains for a beat, then exits closing the door silently behind him.

BLACKOUT