

PERUSAL SCRIPT

COMING HOME

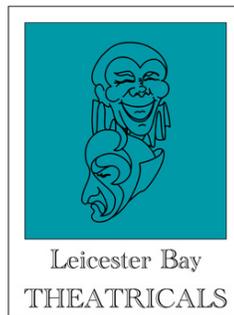
A CHRISTMAS STORY

Book and Lyrics by

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Music and Additional Lyrics by

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Newport, Maine

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Coming Home -- A Christmas Story

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COMING HOME

A CHRISTMAS STORY

a musical by George King & C. Michael Perry

PLACE & TIME:

The action takes place in a very, very small town in the middle of the winter in the middle of the Wasatch Mountains in 1953 -- the worst winter on record. It is just one day before Christmas on a very dark and cold Christmas Eve.

SCENES AND MUSICAL NUMBERS

PROLOGUE

#1 -- Down Home (CAST)

SCENE ONE – NO ROOM *Late evening one week before Christmas.*

#1 -- Down Home (continued)

SCENE TWO – A SONG OF CHRISTMAS *Shortly thereafter.*

#2 -- Christmas Time (CHOIR)

SCENE THREE - COMING HOME *Shortly thereafter.*

#2a -- Christmas Time (rep 1) (MARGARET & CHOIR)

#2b -- Christmas Time (rep 2) (MARGARET)

#3 -- To Find Love (MARGARET)

SCENE FOUR – IN LIMBO

#4 -- The Old Spinning Wheel (MYRNA)

INTERMISSION

SCENE FOUR – THE ARRIVAL *Shortly thereafter.*

#5 -- Under The Tree (BEN & JUDY)

#6 -- In Daddy's Eyes (MARGARET & HERBERT)

SCENE FIVE – WHEN HE COMES *The morning of the next day.*

#7 -- When He Comes (CHOIR & COMPANY)

#8 -- The Old Spinning Wheel (reprise) (MYRNA & HERBERT)

#8-- Room (MYRNA & HERBERT)

#9 -- Now That I've Found You (HANLEY & MARGARET)

#10 -- Coming Home (*Finale*) (COMPANY)

CAST (In order of appearance): 6W 9M + 12 ensemble

MARY ELLEN JOSEPHS – A sweet young lady from the Deep South, in her early twenties. She is expecting a baby, for the first time.

GEORGE JOSEPHS – Mary Ellen’s husband. He is near her age and a very good man, nervously becoming ready to assume the role of fatherhood.

MRS. MYRNA HERSTOLLER – A very active, attractive, outspoken, and feisty woman in her mid-fifties. She is full of spit, spunk, and determination. She and her husband Herbert are the owners of the hotel where the action takes place.

MR. HERBERT HERSTOLLER – A man who is also in his mid fifties, and who sometimes seems to be aging fast. He is slightly older than his wife, decisive, and definite, and very determined to make a go of the Herstoller Hotel business.

MRS. BERTHA BALLOOMER – A matron of impressive size and voice who sometimes serves as a soloist for the group of singers temporarily lodging at the hotel.

MARGARET HERSTOLLER - The twenty-two-year-old daughter of Myrna and Herbert Herstoller. Naïveté and gentle optimism radiate from deep within her. If this were a fairy tale, Margaret would be our eager princess whose dreams are about to come true.

HANLEY JOHNSON - A very well behaved, gentleman slightly older than Margaret and utterly captivated by her.

MR. PINCER - The titular leader of the singing and dancing group that resides at the Herstoller Hotel while the action takes place. A very nervous, very quiet, cowering little man who hates conflict and tries at all cost to avoid it. In fact, his fear of conflict has given him ulcers and any added excitement aggravates them. We can sense all this with just one quick look at him.

DOCTOR SAMUEL SMITHSON – The Doctor who is called in great urgency to the Herstoller Hotel. A man in his mid fifties, he is a practiced medical professional, solid, stately, and very sure of himself.

BARNEY BARNES – 1st Ambulance Man, a hospital aide who accompanies Doctor Smithson to the hotel.

PETEY STARR - 2nd Ambulance man, the driver who brings them both.

EZRA ESKLESON – A local farmer and shepherd whose wife makes excellent Christmas pudding.

ANGEL MARIE ESKELSON – Ezra’s wife and the best cook in the county

BEN -- husband to Judy, around 30ish, one of the 3 dancing couples

JUDY -- wife to Ben, around 30ish, one of the 3 dancing couples

3 DANCING COUPLES, 8 SINGERS A singing and dancing group that is staying at the hotel overnight often.

COMING HOME A Christmas Story Book & Lyrics by George G, King Music & Lyrics by C. Michael Perry 5W 8M plus ensemble of 14. 1 interior/exterior (***Perfect for Professional, Community, College, and Church groups.***) On the night of the great blizzard of 1953 a young couple find their way to the Herstoller Hotel, a mountain inn. She is pregnant. Their car has broken down just outside. They are looking for a room. The innkeeper’s wife is leaving; she has had it. As her husband enters they begin to air their personal laundry in front of these young strangers. But a busload of entertainers is on their way, and though the inn is all booked up—the beds aren’t made, yet! The wife leaves. The young couple is turned away. The daughter of the innkeeper, and her boyfriend, arrive. The innkeeper’s wife re-enters with the young couple in tow, and she needs a doctor— right away. What no one in the play seems to realize is that they are all in the process of coming home. **ORDER# 3204**

Coming Home

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE: *The stage is filled with darkness, lost in a blizzard. The night is so dark that as the blizzard whirls about it cannot be seen, only felt. Its sounds should be alarming: the whining of the wind, and the threatening flush of snow flurries. The cold should bite from the flurry of the tempest. Suddenly, a harsh blast from the storm is followed by calm. There is silence and in darkness. At the far right, in front of the stage, a spot of LIGHT. Within it, someone with a strong clear voice sings:*

MUSICAL #1 – DOWN HOME

LEAD SINGER:

SOMETIMES THE STORMS OF LIFE CAN TOSS YOU TO AND FRO.
YOU'RE BLINDED BY THE DARK OF NIGHT, THE HEAVY SNOW.
YOU NEED A STAR TO GUIDE YOU. YOU'VE NOWHERE TO GO,
(The spot of LIGHT grows, revealing other singers within it.)

LEAD SINGER & CHORUS:

COME ON DOWN HOME.
YOU BELONG DOWN HOME.

AMID THE STORMS AND STRIFE OF LIFE, YOU'RE TEMPEST-TOSSED,
YOU BEAR A LOAD AND DOWN THE ROAD YOU'RE DOUBLE CROSSED,
YOU SEARCH A STAR TO STEER BY, BUT YOU'RE SCARED AND LOST.

CHORUS:

COME ON DOWN HOME,
YOU BELONG DOWN HOME.

DON'T LET YOURSELF GET STRANDED IN THE WIND AND SNOW,
AS COLD WINDS CROSS AND YOU FEEL LOST, TOSSED TO AND FRO,
DON'T YOU LOSE HOPE! FRIEND YOU CAN COPE! HERE'S WHERE TO GO:
COME ON DOWN HOME.
CAN'T GO WRONG DOWN HOME!

DOWN HOME – IT'S SAFE DOWN HOME!
DOWN HOME – YOU'RE STRONG DOWN HOME.
DOWN HOME – THERE'S NO PLACE BETTER,
CAN'T GET NO BETTER!
DOWN HOME!

SCENE ONE – NO ROOM: *Gradually — center stage — a hotel lobby appears as LIGHTS come up. The lobby has a bench and a reception desk with a telephone. Stairs near a wall inside the lobby lead upward to hotel rooms. Another door leads to the front room of the family who lives in the hotel. It is a small lobby in a small hotel in a small town. Only the sparsest decorations indicate the season. A “night light” shines above the reception desk. Otherwise the lobby is dark. It becomes lighter as the singing seems to describe it:*

LEAD SINGER: *(introducing the story)*

WITHOUT A LIGHT, ON LIFE’S DARK NIGHT, A BOY AND BRIDE,
ARE STRUGGLING THROUGH THIS HEAVY STORM, STILL SIDE BY SIDE.
THEY’RE SEARCHING FOR A FRIENDLY DOOR TO OPEN WIDE.

CHORUS:

COME ON DOWN HOME
THEY BELONG DOWN HOME.

(A young couple enters. They are snow-covered, storm shaken, and dressed in heavy coats as they push their way into the half dark lobby. The young lady, MARY ELLEN JOSEPHS, enters first. As she opens the lobby door, the storm roars about her. Her husband, GEORGE JOSEPHS, follows her and slams the door tightly behind him as if in an effort to shut out the tempest behind him.)

LEAD SINGER:

YOU NEED A PLACE OF REFUGE THAT’S ABOVE THE STORM
AS COLD WINDS BLOW YOU NEED TO KNOW YOU’RE SAFE AND WARM
SO STEP INSIDE TO KEEP YOUR YOUNG BRIDE FREE FROM HARM.

CHORUS:

COME ON DOWN HOME.
COME ON DOWN HOME.
YOU’LL GET STRONG DOWN HOME.

(MUSIC out.)

MARY ELLEN: Is this the place, George? How big is it? I can hardly see a thing with all this snow blowing in my face and I’m not even sure that I want to.

(GEORGE sets down their suitcases as MARY ELLEN, brushes the snow away from the both of them.)

GEORGE: Mary, I don’t know where we are. I couldn’t see a thing in all that blizzard!

(MARY’s cheeks are red, yet — even in cold of this winter night— she seems almost warm. As she speaks, her accent becomes more and more pleasingly evident, the warmth of a sweet Southern Belle.)

MARY ELLEN: I don’t even know where we are in this mountain wilderness George. I’m just glad I’ve got you by my side, to help us find the way. I’ve never been up so high before, in so many mountains, and such snow! I can’t see a thing. And I do most sincerely hope that our old Ford hasn’t given up the

ghost.

GEORGE: *(as he walks toward the bell on the lobby desk, which he rings, he agrees, with rather grim conviction)* Yes, I know: Ford. Found On Road Dead. Honey, I'm surprised — and very grateful — we made it here at all. I think our old Ford has flipped its last rod.

MARY ELLEN: That's not the only thing that's flipped!

(She is discouraged and very tired. But it's also obvious that she still loves him)

Honey bunch, I just can't help thinking that if only we hadn't had to stop at those three garages we would have arrived home safe in Georgia by now, this very evening. Those last two places didn't even have the right parts and they don't speak Southern. I don't even think they speak Redneck.

GEORGE: *(consoling her, also tired and irritated, but trying to keep things "cool.")* Little do I wish to pass the buck where it belongs, but if my lady love would have listened to me in the first place we'd still be sitting in front of a fire in our own warm little condo back up in Coeur d'Alene, sipping hot chocolate and watching the snowflakes fall right out our bay window and feeling the warmth and cheer of our gas log.

MARY ELLEN: *(in tears, pleading, in an outburst, as she rubs off snow.)* Georgie boy! How can you be so cold! So heartless! Especially at a time like this! You know I haven't even seen Georgia for almost three years. I've told you and told you. I just can't stand to face another White Christmas!

(She turns her back on him. He advances toward her as if to draw her gently toward him.)

I need to be home with my momma and daddy this year, now, especially. I need some Georgia sunshine! When our baby comes, I don't want it to be out there in the midst of some bitter, windy old blizzard.

(Dreamily.)

I want our son to feast his little eyes on that soft Southern sunshine right from the moment he is born.

GEORGE: *(holding her, gently)* And I want to see you in that sunshine honey. You know I do. You know how hard I try to keep my Southern belle warm.

(He now rings the lobby bell again.)

We'll get you home as soon as we can.

MARY ELLEN: *(going to him, with affection)* George, I do know you do. That's why I love you. I love you right now, in spite of everything.

(They cuddle.)

I've always said: I'd rather have my little George than all of Georgia.

(She cuddles some more.)

It's true. You may not be as big and rich—

(Settling in)

but you're every bit as warm and comfy.

GEORGE: I know it's been hard bein' away from your folks. I want you to see them this Christmas. I want to give you everything you really need. That's why I agreed to make this trip.

(Showing genuine concern)

Now I'm almost sorry I did. I'm worried about you, darling. You shouldn't be traveling at time like this. Not in this weather.

(Making a confession)

You're right about my Ford. I'm surprised we even made it here. In fact, I'm not even sure that I know where we are anyway. These mountain folk have such strange accents and that last man kept calling me "Sister". What was up with that?

MARY ELLEN: You know you love me, Honey. That's all that matters.

(While they have been speaking, MRS. MYRNA HERSTOLLER, has entered the lobby from behind the desk. MYRNA is a feisty and yet attractive woman in her mid-fifties. She is obviously full of spit, spunk, and determination. She is also obviously dressed for departure. She wears a winter coat and carries a heavy cap and a suitcase. As she sets the suitcase upon the lobby desk and fixes her cap upon her head, she speaks to the young couple, very definitively.)

MYRNA: *(making an important announcement.)* If Herbert asks for me, tell him I've left him.

GEORGE: Excuse me, ma'am. Is this your hotel? Do you have any rooms? We're traveling through here tonight and we desperately need somewhere to stay.

MARY ELLEN: We don't live in these parts and...

MYRNA: *(announcing this again, with determined finality)* Neither do I – as of now -- my good friends!

Neither do I! When you do see Herbert you can tell him that for me. Tell him that I'm gone. Gone.

Vanished. Disappeared. Once and for all! Forevermore! Please, be sure you tell him that. I don't expect him to notice it on his own.

GEORGE: M..m..m..ma..Ma'am, I don't want to get involved in your personal family matters! I...

MYRNA: Neither do I my young friend. Neither do I.

MARY ELLEN: Ma..Ma'am, with all due respect, we don't know you folks. We've never even been here before... at all... at any time and...

MYRNA: *(with bitter finality.)* Oh yes you are my good friends. You are family. As much a part of this family as I will ever be. That's why I'm leaving.

(She walks around the desk and into the lobby, center stage. She is indeed very serious about going at once.)

You can tell Herbert that for me! Tell him I've moved out. Forever. And if he happens to take the trouble to ask you where I've gone — although I'm sure he won't — tell him it's none of his business.

GEORGE: But ma..Ma'am, please, don't be too hasty...

MARY ELLEN: Ma..Ma'am, there's a whiteout out there, a full-blown blizzard. No one should be traveling tonight.

GEORGE: It's hard and cold out there and we...

(Fortunately, Mr. HERBERT Herstoller is coming to their rescue. As they speak he descends the hotel stairs. HERBERT is in his late fifties. He will soon prove to be rather abrupt, and every bit as determined and definite as his wife. He is trying to make a success of this hotel business in this very small town and he wastes no time at all getting right down to business. At present, however, he is preoccupied. His arms are very full. He is carrying a large stack of sheets.)

GEORGE: *(to MYRNA)* Ma'am, I don't even know your name?

MYRNA: *(introducing herself)* Myrna. Myrna Herstoller.

(She extends her hand.)

GEORGE: *(taking it, politely)* Thank you. Glad to meet you. Do you think you could give us a room?

MARY ELLEN: We aren't asking for much. Any little bitty room will do. We don't want to get lost again in that big storm.

HERBERT: *(to GEORGE & MARY ELLEN as he descends the stairs with sheets, making his own announcement with finality.)* If you're looking for a place to stay, don't bother us now. There's no room for you here, no room at all. You'd better be moving on.

MYRNA: *(thinking out loud, with weary finality)* That's the way Herbert. Throw them out! You have such a talent for it!

(Purposely ignoring him, she speaks to MARY ELLEN, to GEORGE, and to the world in general.)

Pretty soon, with luck, there won't be anyone left to throw.

HERBERT: *(has finally noticed MYRNA)* Myrna, what's with the coat? Why aren't you up there getting those bedrooms ready?

MYRNA: *(totally ignoring HERBERT, she speaks directly to Mary Ellen)* Young Lady, I'm sorry, I don't know your name, dear.

MARY ELLEN: Mary, Mary Ellen.

MYRNA: Thank you, Miss Mary Ellen. It's a very becoming name dear. Would you please give my husband the message I just left with you?

MARY ELLEN: Why not tell him yourself, Ma'am? He's standing right there!

MYRNA: He wouldn't hear me. He never has. It's regrettable but true. He hardly even sees me. Mark my words. Maybe someday he might realize that no one is there to take his guff and wash his clothes and cook his breakfasts. Then he might grunt a little. But it won't really matter, not to him. So why should I care how he feels? Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll just float away to freedom.

HERBERT: *(unruffled and unimpressed, speaking directly to MYRNA with businesslike finality.)* Myrna, if this performance is intended to persuade me to change my mind about Margaret, you can stop wasting your steam.

MYRNA: Steam? Steam is it!

(So frustrated that she almost sputters, she then turns to MARY ELLEN.)

I could show you steam! But I shall rise above it. I must be about my business. It's clearly time for me to say goodbye.

HERBERT: *(stepping around MYRNA, he deposits the sheets on the desk and speaks directly to her.)*

Myrna Herstoller, our daughter is tired of living off us. She knows that and so do you. It's time for Margaret to get out on her own and find herself a man. So stop sputtering about it. Furthermore, what happens between the three of us is none of these young people's business.

(MYRNA doesn't respond so HERBERT speaks to GEORGE)

Would you please tell my wife that?

GEORGE: But sir, I don't think...

MYRNA: *(to George)* I heard him, son. You don't need to tell me anything. And you can't tell Herbert

anything, anyway. He already knows everything there is to know. Or at least he thinks he does.

(She continues announcing the state of things to HERBERT and to the world in general.)

Margaret didn't want to go anywhere, Herbert. You know that's true, but you won't admit it. You're just glad she's gone. One less person to take up rooms during the busy Holiday season! Great work, Herbert! Throwing out your own daughter one week before Christmas! Great work, indeed! Well, you don't need to worry about throwing me out! I'm leaving you, Herbert. I'm leaving you now! Good by and good riddance!

(Turning to HERBERT directly, she now drops this last tidbit directly on him.)

After I'm gone you'll have one more bed to rent! That should delight you! I can already see the dollar signs glowing in your little round eyes!

(She turns her back to HERBERT, picks up her suitcase, and speaks directly to MARY ELLEN.)

I'll be on my way. You can tell my husband I'm just clearing out the extra baggage.

HERBERT: *(despite the fact that he is being totally ignored, he chooses to speak to MYRNA directly.)*

Myrna, it isn't a question of money. Margaret's my daughter too and I want what's best for her. The girl is twenty-two. It's time for her to spread her wings and fly.

(Seeking support, he turns to MARY ELLEN.)

Don't you agree with me?

MYRNA: *(quickly coming between them.)* Don't answer him, Mary Lady. It's none of your business.

(MARY ELLEN doesn't answer and neither does GEORGE. They are apparently both at a temporary loss for words. By contrast, MYRNA still has plenty to say and she continues saying it, with appropriate drama and finality.)

Twenty-two. Twenty-two! That's right, Herbert! Start quoting numbers! All you ever do is count!

HERBERT: Somebody has to. Somebody has to get down to business. Somebody has to make a go of this place.

MYRNA: Business is it? That's all this place is to you isn't it, Herbert? A business put together with numbers! No room for love! No place like home! Well, that may be true enough for you Herbert but not for me. For me this is not just a hotel. It's a home. And love makes a home, Herbert. Love! Not numbers.

HERBERT: Myrna, speak sensibly. This is a hotel and we have only so many rooms...

MYRNA: Herbert Herstoller, this is our home! And a home always has room. Where there's heart room there's house room.

HERBERT: Myrna, this is a business! This is not the Herstoller Home for Whomever! A Hotel! We don't even own this business. The bank does. If we don't pay the bank on time, we'll lose it. We can't ignore the numbers. We've got to face them.

MYRNA: *(totally exasperated)* Herbert Herstoller, get out of my way! You get out of my way so I can get out of yours!

(Pushing past him, she walks directly toward the outside door.)

HERBERT: Myrna, please... don't leave.

MYRNA: Goodbye, Herbert! Good, good, good, good bye and —Merry Christmas!

(She opens the main hotel door and we hear the flurry of the bitter winter storm behind her. As the snow swirls around her, she turns back inside, almost as an afterthought.)

After I'm gone, you can also throw these good people out into the snow. I know the pleasure you'll derive from it!

HERBERT: *(obviously a little taken aback, uncomfortable, hesitant and awkward)* Myrna, don't leave me now. You're my wife. I need you.

(As he speaks, MYRNA pauses to listen, almost softened by his words.)

You know how much I need you, Myrna.

MYRNA: *(stopping for a moment, interested, almost hopeful)* Do you, Herbert? Now? Tell me why.

HERBERT: *(encouraged by her acceptance, he continues)* Myrna, you already know.

MYRNA: Yes? Go on...

HERBERT: Darling, do the math. Fate just dropped a busload of sixteen people right into our laps! And they're all going to come back here after they finish their Christmas concerts. They've even signed a contract! We'll have full bookings, Myrna! All those people paid in advance for one entire week! Don't you realize what this means? What a Merry Christmas! If we tend to business we'll not only end December in the black, we'll be in the black for the entire year!

MYRNA: *(to MARY ELLEN and GEORGE, almost exploding)* In the black he says! In the black! In the black for Christmas! Is it any wonder I'm seeing red?

HERBERT: We'll be back on track Myrna!

(Almost as if reciting a cheer)

In the black and back on track! Now quit babbling about making room for more. Our rooms our full! Help me take care of the business we already have!

MYRNA: I'm leaving you, Herbert Herstoller. Don't try to stall me because it won't work. Herbert Herstoller! Hurtful Her-staller, that's what it should be.

HERBERT: Don't mock my name, Myrna! It's your name, too. I gave it to you and you should be proud of it.

MYRNA: My name indeed! Herstoller Hotel! My name and my business! Well I'm not asking for your name, now. You can have it back with my compliments! I don't want any part of it. Herstoller Hotel indeed! All A Dollar Hotel, that's what it should be! All Dollars that's what you are! We should replace Herstoller by Dollar Signs! That's all you see, Herbert! That's all you want! Dollars! And you can have them! Goodbye!

HERBERT: Myrna, don't leave me!

(He looks behind him and gestures weakly upward)

How am I ever going to make all these beds all by myself?

(MYRNA is completely aghast. This is obviously the coup de grace, the last straw. When she is finally able to speak, she does so to MARY ELLEN)

MYRNA: And I thought I wounded him in his heart!

(With definite resolve)

I should have known it was only his pocket book!

(She holds the door full open now and stands directly in it as the storm swirls around her.)

(She feels the fury of the snow.)

Goodbye, Herbert. Goodbye and good riddance.

(She glances outside and then back at HERBERT.)

You make a blizzard seem warm and comforting.

(She exits at last with finality, slamming the door behind her.)

GEORGE: Sir, did I just hear you say this place is full?

HERBERT: Son, did you see that charter bus out there? A big bunch of people on their way upstate for some big Christmas pageant! They were forced here by the storm. I've got people bedded down in hallways.

(He gestures toward the lobby sofa.)

I'm even sleeping someone there, on that couch! Sorry, buddy, but this is no night for travelers.

GEORGE: *(parenthetically)* I was well aware of that. Listen, I hate to insist, but we've got car trouble, we're stranded, and...

HERBERT: *(flatly)* Sad stories don't reach me, buddy. When she's full, she's full.

MARY ELLEN: Well, is there some other place around here with a room or something? We can't be that choosy about lodgings. We just need a little place...

HERBERT: There's motel about ten miles up the road. I don't know whether they're full up or not.

(He indicates the pay phone in the lobby.)

You can use the lobby pay phone.

GEORGE: Our car won't make that trip.

MARY ELLEN: The motor rattles like an empty thrasher!

GEORGE: I think the rod's shot, and the heater's failing, and in this weather...

MARY ELLEN: *(complaining in unison)* All the windows steam up...

GEORGE: *(complaining in unison)* Listen, buddy, please, could you...

HERBERT: *(cold and negative)* Use the phone book. The whole town's listed in it. Call somebody who might care. I can't even rent you my carpet.

GEORGE: *(beginning to wear out, he becomes abrupt)* Are you really that full?

HERBERT: Up to the eardrums, buddy.

MARY ELLEN: *(indignant)* Forgive me for contradicting anybody, but didn't I just see one lady walk right out that front door? According to my calculations, that means you now have one bed empty. Now I...

HERBERT: *(very definite)* That's my bed, lady, and it's taken.

MARY ELLEN: Now, I'm not suggesting that you put yourself on the floor neither for love...

(Now a bit sarcastic.)

...nor for money, but if you're really as full up as you claim, couldn't you please help us find a neighbor? You must have some friends here! It's winter, and there's a blizzard out there and...

GEORGE: Please, have some consideration for my wife's condition.

HERBERT: *(more than a little exasperated)* Look Mister, just how many times does a guy have to tell you? I'm putting two people in every bed and at least two beds in every room and they're all standing right up those stairs waiting for me to make those beds right now. I don't have time to be your personal chaperone...

GEORGE: My wife's not well, and...

MARY ELLEN: Never mind, George.

GEORGE: Honey, I'm worried about you.

MARY ELLEN: Cain't you see? You're breaking this poor man's heart! If he has one!

GEORGE: You heard that motor rattle, Honey. That car won't make it ten more miles.

MARY ELLEN: (*pleading despite her obvious ire*) Could you please help us?

HERBERT: (*Indicating the phone booth*) The phone's right there. You know most of the folks around here as well as I do. I'm a hotel owner. Not a Good Samaritan.

MARY ELLEN: (*has clearly had enough, and is out of patience*) All right mister, you hold all the aces.
(*To George.*)

C'mon honey. Let's get out of here.

GEORGE: (*surprised*) But Honey...

MARY ELLEN: I can see why your wife just left you.

HERBERT: (*still coldly*) I offered you my telephone.

MARY ELLEN: I wouldn't want to trouble you. C'mon George. This place gives me a chill.
(*She goes straight to the door and opens it.*)

GEORGE: But Honey, there's a blizzard out there!

MARY ELLEN: (*as she exits*) It'll pass.
(*Then, to HERBERT.*)

I've already wasted too much time standing next to this iceberg.

GEORGE: (*in the door, a little dazed, following MARY ELLEN*) OK. I guess you won, Mister. But remember, there's a blizzard out there.

HERBERT: (*as GEORGE leaves, he is unmoved and speaks to him as he shuts the door.*) You heard your wife. It'll pass.

(*Alone in the lobby, HERBERT walks to the center of the room. Darkness grows around him as he stands in one glowing spotlight and speaks his mind, to everyone at once and to no one in particular.*)

Travelers! Always got to be roaming about! Nobody stays put anymore! Nobody takes the time to be home for Christmas!

(LIGHTS fade to black.)

SCENE TWO - A Song of CHRISTMAS: *In spite of the scene that we have just observed, it seems that Christmas is indeed coming to the Herstoller Hotel. Even HERBERT himself can't manage to completely shut it out. In fact, he has already let it in. On a platform to the side of the stage, we see that somewhere in the crowded hotel, the bus full of performers in practicing, and as the LIGHTS come up, they fill the stage with soft light. There is sweet music and elegant dancing. 6 DANCERS, 3 couples, now waltz gracefully around in cadence to the music. Behind them, a small group 8 SINGERS:*

MUSICAL #2 -- CHRISTMAS TIME This is a somewhat passive use of this song. Maybe the setting should

be more active -- plot centered -- character centered.

THREE SINGERS: (*variously and together*)

HOLLY SO JOLLY AND CRISP MISTLETOE,
BRIGHT CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS HUNG ALL IN A ROW
A GLASS OF HOT CIDER TO GIVE YOU A GLOW!
IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME.

GIFTS FILLED WITH GLADNESS AND TIED WITH A BOW,
GAMES IN THE PARLOR AND GAMES IN THE SNOW,
SHARING GOOD WISHES WHEREVER YOU GO.
IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME.

RED AND GREEN RIBBONS AND SONGS BY THE CHOIR
GLADNESS AND GIVING AND SONGS BY THE FIRE
MUSIC AROUND YOU TO LIFT AND INSPIRE,
IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME -- CHRISTMAS TIME.

MAYBE YOU MAY SEE A SOMEONE SO TRUE
THAT SPECIAL SOMEONE WITH LOVE JUST FOR YOU
SEARCH HARD TO FIND HIM/HER, BECAUSE WHEN YOU DO
IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME. CHRISTMAS TIME.

(MUSIC out. Slowly the SINGERS & DANCERS move away, maybe to their rooms, and the full strength of the LIGHTS return, shining directly where HERBERT is standing. If he has heard the music, he is unaware of it. In fact, he seems oblivious to anything not related with sheets and bedding for his scheduled clients. His solitude is soon disturbed however by the clamorous descent of a huge, bathrobe-clad matron. MADAME BERTHA BALLOMER is the lady's name. BERTHA's clear and booming voice, obviously the proud product of repeated lessons in diction, sounds strongly forth from her voluminous, but sturdy form.)

BERTHA: My good sir, may I venture to inquire as to whether you are the proprietor of this establishment?

HERBERT: (*turning toward her, he speaks with some indifference.*) What do you want?

BERTHA: Am I to understand that – by agreement with the troupe chaperone – one of the lovely ladies in our ensemble will be obliged to lodge herself on your lobby divan this very night?

HERBERT: (*still unimpressed*) If you mean do you have to sleep on the couch, the answer is yes.

BERTHA: It just so happens that the choice of said damsel was rather arbitrarily made by a method of random selection. We pulled at straws. And, as a curious coincidence,

(She makes a modest sigh of acceptance.)

my straw was drawn.

(BERTHA now holds the straw proudly forth. HERBERT also sighs just a little, out of increasing exasperation.)

Therefore, might I now ask you to be so kind as to indicate the exact divan on which I will be obliged to pass the duration of my evening?

HERBERT: *(indicating the couch)* This “divan”
(Slightly mimicking her jargon)

is the one in question.

BERTHA: *(with measured disdain)* What must be must be! Such are the woes of travelers.
(To HERBERT)

You will soon be making it up, I do hope?

HERBERT: I’ll put sheets and a blanket on it.

BERTHA: *(looking around her somewhat stealthily)* And I can be entirely assured of my complete privacy?

HERBERT: *(coldly, after all it is still mid-winter)* I’ll lock the place up in fifteen minutes. It’ll be as private as your own bedroom, and
(Staring directly at her.)

and just as quiet.

BERTHA: *(responding to his remark with coldness, then, after a quick moment of contemplation and disdain, she ignores it, speaking with some irony)* With your kind assurance of my complete comfort in this difficult and delicate circumstance, I shall ascend
(She turns toward the stairs once again.)

and prepare to retire. Ta, and thank you.

HERBERT: Good night, lady.

BERTHA: *(almost at the top of the stairs, she pauses for an instant)* I do have one additional request that I might be sold bold as to venture.
(She turns.)

HERBERT: Go ahead. Ask it.

BERTHA: You are perhaps aware that the members of my troupe are performing extensively in the coming week?

HERBERT: Yes, I did hear that.

BERTHA: It may also interest you to know that I
(With a gesture indicating herself)
am the double bass.

HERBERT: *(trying not to smile, in spite of himself)* You don’t say? I might have guessed.

BERTHA: *(regarding him coldly and directly; she did catch on)* I’ll be more precise. I *play* the double bass, and, if it would be at all permissible, I should like to run through a few of my numbers this evening, immediately before retiring,

(With an apologetic smile)

to increase my power of retention.

(Regarding HERBERT directly, with a clear message.)

It’s a well-known psychological principle.

HERBERT: As long as your plucking and string pulling doesn't bother any body else in your group, I guess I can live through it. But keep it quiet! This is a hotel lobby, not an opera house.

BERTHA: (*haughtily*) I was already quite aware of that.

(*She adds, almost disdainfully*)

Thank you for your services.

(*She then turns and ascends the stairs.*)

HERBERT: (*as BERTHA leaves, but not speaking to anybody in particular*) Goodbye! And thank you, too!

(*His arms are already full of sheets, but he now hurries behind the hotel desk and takes two more from a cupboard. He then crosses to the "divan" and lays them on it. He then exits up the stairs, muttering to himself*)

Where in world does Myrna keep the blankets?

(*LIGHTS dim.*)

SCENE THREE - COMING HOME: *MUSIC rises as LIGHTS come back up. For just a moment the lobby is once again empty. On the platform, the song of Christmas sets the scene.*

MUSICAL #2A -- CHRISTMAS TIME (reprise 1)

CHOIR:

HOLLY SO JOLLY AND CRISP MISTLETOE,
BRIGHT CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS HUNG ALL IN A ROW
A GLASS OF HOT CIDER TO GIVE YOU A GLOW!
IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME.

(*Just before the end of the verse, MISS MARGARET HERSTOLLER enters the lobby from the outside door. MUSIC continues under. MARGARET is rather well dressed. She wears an attractive hat and carries gloves and a suitcase. Her clothes reflect a gentle feminine grace that is apparent in everything about her. As we have already been told, she is twenty-two. She is young and beautiful, and eager, and full of joy. The world has already brought many good things to Margaret and she contemplates enjoying much goodness and beauty in the future. She is filled with naïveté and gentle optimism and radiates joy and goodness. If this were a fairy tale, Margaret would be our eager princess whose dreams are about to come true.*)

(*HANLEY JOHNSON, a young man who is also very well dressed, quickly follows MARGARET. HANLEY is also very well behaved, a complete gentleman. Right now, the most important thing to know about HANLEY is that he is utterly captivated by Margaret, and he just can't help displaying that captivation in everything he says and does. MARGARET hears the music and is gladdened by it. She didn't quite expect gladness and songs of the season to greet her upon her return home, and she joins in song. She rushes over to the CHOIR and asks permission to sing with them, still taking her coat off.*)

MARGARET & CHOIR:

GIFTS FILLED WITH GLADNESS AND TIED WITH A BOW,
GAMES IN THE PARLOR AND GAMES IN THE SNOW,
SHARING GOOD WISHES WHEREVER YOU GO.
IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME.

MARGARET:

RED AND GREEN RIBBONS AND SONGS BY THE CHOIR
GLADNESS AND GIVING AND SONGS BY THE FIRE
MUSIC AROUND YOU TO LIFT AND INSPIRE,
IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME. CHRISTMAS TIME.

CHOIR:

CHRISTMAS TIME.
(MUSIC out.)

HANLEY: Well, here she is folks! Delivered safe and sound! Miss Margaret Herstoller! Clearly the most important present of this Christmas season!

MARGARET: *(blushing slightly, just a bit cautious, as though somewhat aware of the current situation between her parents)* I hope everyone here will see it that way, Hanley.

HANLEY: Everyone will! They'd be crazy not to. You're the best Christmas present a guy could give! And *(He gazes at her directly, with definite feeling)*

You're also the best Christmas present a guy could get.

MARGARET: *(still smiling, yet hesitant, she explains with some reluctance)* Certain people might not agree. In fact, they just might think they'll be doing me a favor to let me stay her, Hanley. My father was pretty insistent about my getting out into the "wide cruel world" once and for all. But a motel room would have been so expensive, and we were so close to home, and...

(Smiling at him with obvious warmth)

...I want everyone to meet you. After all, it's Christmas. Everyone comes home for Christmas.

HANLEY: Sure!

(Then, with a bit of a question)

Margaret, you were coming home for Christmas anyway, weren't you?

MARGARET: *(echoing the same questioning tone in her own voice)* Yes. I guess so.

(Convincing herself, with more conviction)

Yes! Of course I was! Where else would I want to be?

HANLEY: I should hope so. And I do hope they give you the Christmas you deserve.

MARGARET: *(blushing, and happy, and obviously in love)* You're the one who's spoiling me this Christmas, Hanley. You planned everything and made it so wonderful, the ride out here in that luxury car, the songs, the smiles, the flowers, and the chocolates...

HANLEY: *(looking directly into her eyes, and speaking with deep feeling and with some strength)* It's the least I could do in view of the way I feel about you, Margaret. Actually, candy and flowers are nothing compared to the gift I'd like to give you.

MARGARET: (*almost wistful*) It is a beautiful ring, Hanley, just beautiful, and I'm very touched that you think so much of me.

HANLEY: (*approaching her gently, but speaking with confidence*) It would be even more beautiful on your finger, Margaret. And it will be -- the moment you feel strongly enough about me to wear it.

MARGARET: (*turning away, confused, almost troubled*) It doesn't have anything to do with the way I feel about you, Hanley.

(With real tenderness)

I've never felt quite this way about anyone before.

(Then the confusion comes back to her, and she turns away a little.)

I'm just not sure, right now, that I'm ready to take the plunge.

HANLEY: You mean you don't feel it already, darling, this uncontrollable "urge to merge" the poets sing of? This sublime emotion that makes you all sappy, and happy and dizzy and eager to just jump in? What a pity! Stick around! And count on me to do everything I can to make you feel the way I do. I couldn't love you more.

MARGARET: (*looking at him very sincerely, and with love*) Oh, I do feel strongly about you Hanley, so strongly that you almost make me hear music, sometimes. Can you hear it?

MUSICAL #2b -- CHRISTMAS TIME (reprise 2)

MARGARET:

RED AND GREEN RIBBONS AND SONGS BY THE CHOIR
GLADNESS AND GIVING AND SONGS BY THE FIRE
MUSIC AROUND YOU TO LIFT AND INSPIRE,
IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME. CHRISTMAS TIME!

(Now she sings directly toward HANLEY, with deep tenderness.)

MAYBE YOU MAY SEE A SOMEONE SO TRUE
THAT SPECIAL SOMEONE WITH LOVE JUST FOR YOU
SEARCH HARD TO FIND HIM, BECAUSE WHEN YOU DO
IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME.

(MUSIC out.)

HANLEY: (*carefree*) Watch out, or I'll start singing with you.

MARGARET: Please do. I like duets and love songs. I think I am falling in love with you, Hanley, deeply in love.

(She decides to be completely honest.)

I just don't want to spoil it all by getting married.

HANLEY: (*totally perplexed and more than a little befuddled, but then after all he is dealing with a woman.*) Why not?

(He's so befuddled that he doesn't quite realize what he has said.)

MARGARET: (*she realizes what Hanley has said, and chuckles, amused.*) Why not spoil it all?

HANLEY: *(even more flustered)* No. Certainly not! I don't want to spoil anything. I just want to get married, soon, and to you. Marriage and love go together, like the horse and buggy. Lots of people fall in love get married every day.

MARGARET: But do they *stay* in love, Hanley?

HANLEY: Of course they do, quite often. They stay in love and they stay married. Look at your parents. They're married and they're in love. Aren't they?

MARGARET: *(bothered by the question, rather tired.)* They're together.
(She rises and walks away.)

I don't want it to ever be that way, Hanley, not for me. In twenty years when the kids are gone and we've nothing left but each other, I don't want to be just *together*. I want to be still in love.

HANLEY: *(rises, walks toward her and draws her close to him. He speaks tenderly, in an effort to convince her)* You *can* be. We *will* be, darling. Love doesn't end with marriage. That's just the start. If we start out right and work at it, it'll just get better and better with every passing day.

MARGARET: *(Still not convinced.)* I wish I were sure of that, Hanley.
(She thinks about it, sighs, and announces her latest resolve.)

When I am sure, then I'll make the plunge.

HANLEY: Sure of me, you mean?

MARGARET: Maybe.
(Tenderly, trying to explain.)

Oh, maybe I just mean that I need to be sure of myself.
(HERBERT descends the stairs, carrying two blankets.)

HANLEY: In the meantime, if there's anything I can do to convince you...

MARGARET: *(regarding him tenderly)* Just stay the way you are Hanley, and stay around.
(HERBERT has noticed HANLEY and MARGARET and they now notice him. He is obviously surprised and a little taken back.)

HERBERT: I don't know what you've come for, Margaret, but I suppose you'll be leaving soon.
(Both HANLEY and MARGARET try not to be stunned by his candid statement.)

MARGARET: *(with a nervous smile, she speaks in an attempt to smooth things over.)* Dad, I'm glad to see you.

HERBERT: If you mean that, you're the only person in this family who thinks so.
(He crosses between HANLEY & MARGARET, toward the sofa.)

Don't let me disturb you, but I've got to make up this bed. A lady will be coming down those stairs before long to sleep in it.
(As he begins doing so, he regards them clearly and speaks with clear meaning)

It's the only bed I have left.

MARGARET: *(speaking quickly, fully recognizing the awkwardness of the situation)* Father, Dad... Hanley brought me here so we could stay the night.

HANLEY: *(smiling, also awkward)* I though you'd like a special present for Christmas, and...
(Announcing with a smile)

...Here she is!

HERBERT: *(regarding them both matter of factly, not smiling)* I've already got more "presents" than I need: eighteen to be exact. There's no room for any more.

(With increased finality)

I'm full to capacity.

MARGARET: *(weakly)* You are?

HERBERT: This weather just dropped a bogged-down bus of performers on my doorstep. I've even got people bedded down in the hallways. I had to take them all in. What else could I do?

MARGARET: That was downright Christian of you, Dad!

HERBERT: *(matter-of-factly.)* They paid in advance -- for more than a week's lodging. They even threw in a little extra.

MARGARET: *(knows her father)* I'm sure they did.

HANLEY: And you haven't got a single bed left?

HERBERT: *(thinks it over and decides to be completely honest)* There's mine.

(Then, after a pause.)

But it's not for the both of you.

HANLEY: *(starting to feel more and more awkward, definitely doesn't like the way this is heading)* I could take you back home with me, Margaret. It might mean driving all night, but I'm sure they'll have room at my place.

MARGARET: *(with real meaning.)* I'm already home, and I like it here.

(To her father, asking with a definite tenderness.)

You sure you can't squeeze us in, Dad?

HERBERT: *(actually considering this)* There's always the kitchen floor and some cots,

(Re-thinking it)

but it might get a little cold in there.

MARGARET: *(something has just occurred to her)* Where did you say mother is?

HERBERT: *(somewhat vaguely)* She went out for a ride.

MARGARET: In this weather?

HERBERT: *(still vague)* She said she felt like it. She won't be long. She's felt like it before.

MARGARET: *(has already put down her suitcase, she places her hat on it. She has made her decision.)*

We'll wait for her.

HERBERT: *(not miffed at this)* You'll do what you decide. But you can't wait in here. We've got a visitor coming down those stairs at any minute, and she wants to be alone.

MARGARET: We'll make ourselves at home. I could even make some beds for you Dad, just to help out.

HERBERT: If you really want to help...

MARGARET: Yes, Dad?

HERBERT: There's a whole bunch of beds waiting for you upstairs. Sheets and blankets are all over, and people. They'll probably even help you.

MARGARET: What do you say, Hanley? Are you ready for a little bed making?

HANLEY: *(eager and a little relieved, glad to finally be wanted for something)* Sure am! Sounds like good exercise for a former Boy Scout. I haven't done a good turn in weeks.

HERBERT: *(starts up the stairs, with MARGARET & HANLEY following)* I'll show you both what needs to be done.

(He then adds with a knowing glance.)

I'll also see if I can get that double bass player to postpone her performance.

(As HERBERT and HANLEY exit up stairs, MARGARET lags behind.)

MARGARET: I think I'd better get this night bag out of the lobby.

(She picks it up and strolls about the lobby. When she reaches the windowseat, the lights dim around her. She remains pensive, looking through the window.)

MUSICAL #3 -- TO FIND LOVE

WAS IT LIKE THIS IN BETHLEHEM ON THAT FIRST CHRISTMAS NIGHT?
SO CROWDED AND CONFUSED THAT A COUPLE WAS REFUSED?
JUST LIKE NOW!
HOW CAN I HOPE TO GET THINGS RIGHT?

SO HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN SOMETHING IS GOOD?
AND HOW TO DECIDE BETWEEN SHOULDN'T AND SHOULD?
AND WHEN WILL I SEE THINGS THAT I HAVE NOT KNOWN?
CAN I FIND THEM ON MY OWN?

I WANT TO FIND LOVE, BUT WHAT DO I KNOW?
WHY AM I AFRAID? ALSO, WHY IS IT SO?
IS THERE SOMETHING MISSING THAT'S DEEP DOWN INSIDE?
WHY DO I FEEL I MUST HIDE?

HEAVEN LOVES US; ALL OUR MANY FACES.
HEAVEN LOVES US ALL IN MANY PLACES.
IF I HEARD A VOICE, HOW WOULD I KNOW?
IS THERE A CHOICE? WHERE DO I GO TO FIND LOVE?

MY FATHER LOVES ME. THAT'S SOMETHING I FEEL.
THE WORDS THAT COME OUT SOMETIMES CUT YOU LIKE STEEL!
SO WHAT MAKES THE DIFF'RENCE? THE HEART OR THE HEAD?
SHOULD I CHOOSE THE HEART INSTEAD?

IF I OPEN MY HEART TO SOMEONE WHO CARES,
WILL I OPEN MY LIFE TO MORE SORROWS AND SNARES?

SO, LOVE ISN'T EASY! AND WHY SHOULD IT BE?
CAN I TRY TO FIND THE LOVE INSIDE OF ME?
(MUSIC out as LIGHTS fade.)

SCENE 4 – THE OLD SPINNING WHEEL: *As the LIGHTS fade on MARGARET center stage, at the front right of the stage in the semi-darkness we see MYRNA sitting in the driver's seat of her 1952 Chevrolet. She is clutching tightly to her gigantic steering wheel and driving somewhat bumpily – if not clumsily -- through the snow. We see the car jolt.*

MYRNA: Steady there, old girl!

(She stares intently forward through the snow.)

Wasting my steam! Wasting my steam indeed! I'll show you what steam is Mr. Herbert Herstoller! After almost thirty years of living together, you better bet I know what steam is Herbert! What steamy times we've had!

(She becomes pensive, and starts singing in an obvious attempt to console herself.)

MUSICAL #4 -- THE OLD SPINNING WHEEL

THERE'S AN OLD SPINNING WHEEL IN THE PARLOR,
SPINNING SONGS OF THE LONG AGO,
SPINNING TALES OF A TIME HALF REMEMBERED,
A TIME LOST, A TIME WHEN YOU NEEDED ME SO.
EVERY BEAT OF MY HEART SAYS, "I LOVE YOU,
LOVE YOU NOW AS I DID EVEN THEN,
AND AS SURE AS THE STARS SHINE ABOVE YOU,
I KNOW YOU CAN LOVE ME AGAIN.

(MYRNA speaks as the car jolts a bit.)

Steady old girl! Stay on the road! Can't afford to get stuck on a night like this.

(She swerves slightly with the movement of the vehicle and stares forward into the darkness. To build her confidence, she continues singing because self-therapizing is helping.)

AND THE OLD SPINNING WHEEL KEEPS ON TURNING,
SPINNING DREAMS OF THE DAYS WE KNEW.
AND THE SOUND FILLS MY HEART WITH A SILENCE, A YEARNING,
FOR LOVE THAT FIRST BROUGHT ME TO YOU.
WON'T YOU TELL ME THAT YOU STILL REMEMBER
ALL THE PROMISES THAT WE MADE THEN?
TELL ME LOVE LIVES IN YOU LIKE AN EMBER,
THAT WE CAN REVIVE IT AGAIN.

PERUSAL SCRIPT - Coming Home: A Christmas Story by George King & C. Michael Perry

(Now, in the darkness behind her, we see a pinpoint of light growing slowly larger on the spinning wheel in the corner of the lobby hotel. MYRNA is still being jolted and driving very slowly as she sings.)

COME AND SIT IN THE TWILIGHT BY MY SIDE.

REKINDLE THE LOVE WE USED TO FEEL.

LET THE TIES OF MY LOVE BIND ME TO YOU

LIKE THE THREADS OF THE OLD SPINNING WHEEL.

(MUSIC lingers as MYRNA sees something at the side of the road, she slows and stops. LIGHTS fade on MYRNA until all we can see onstage is the spotlight on the spinning wheel in the lobby hotel.)

INTERMISSION (if desired)

19 pages in Act Two complete the script