

THE UNPAINTED MASTERPIECE

A Play for Christmas by Jewell Ellen Smith

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Key Verse: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." --Luke 2:10, 11

Time: Friday before Christmas, 1976, Also: the first day of spring, 1506.

Place: Bluff City, USA, a deep South town known chiefly as the site of a State Prison and Bluff City College. These institutions are situated side by side.
Also: Florence, Italy, where Leonardo da Vinci has his studio in his residence.

Dominant Theme: There is a God, who answers the prayers of man.

When He came down to earth as the Christ Child born in Bethlehem, a host of angels told the shepherds there in the fields how to find Him. A great star guided wise kings to His side.

But, now, in this present age of turmoil and confusion, tragedy, pestilence and war, it is almost impossible for any man to find his way to Bethlehem and to God, unless another man becomes his guide.

The Characters, in the order of their appearance:

Prison Guard
Bill and Leo, prison inmates
Rev. Ditchfield, a Methodist pastor
Judge Oliver
Warden Greene
Mrs. Oliver
Miss Malory, a college instructor
Drama students: Andy, Ben, Nicole, and Katie
Mrs. Ditchfield
The Virgin Mary
Joseph
Shepherds & Angels

The Three Kings & King Herod

Church Choir

Church Congregation

Pianist

Mini-drama cast:

Leonardo da Vinci

Lorenzo, a servant

Angel Messenger

Father Moretti, the local priest

Signora Miseno, a seamstress

Clare, Lorenzo's granddaughter

Models for the mural (not listed above):

Christ Child, a small goat, two birds in a cage

Note to director: It will be obvious that at least six players in ACT I can do two roles. They are: the judge, Miss Malory, and students Andy, Ben, Nicole, and Katie. Other combinations are possible, e.g., some choir and congregation members can appear in the mural; Mrs. Oliver and Mrs. Ditchfield could be in the Church Congregation.

There are 18 speaking parts.

The Sequence of Scenes

ACT I: The State Prison yard, on Friday morning.

ACT II:

Scene 1. College drama classroom, on Friday morning.

Scene 2. Rev. Ditchfield's study, on Friday afternoon.

Scene 2A Warden Greene's office, on Friday afternoon.

Scene 3. Rev. Ditchfield's study, on Friday afternoon.

ACT III:

Scene 1. The Bluff City Methodist Church, Sunday night.

Scene 2. Leonardo da Vinci's studio, Florence, Italy, 1506

Scene 3. Leonardo da Vinci's studio, Florence, Italy, 1507

Scene 4. Rev. Ditchfield's study on Sunday night and Monday morning.

Scene 5. The State Prison yard, on Monday morning.

THE STORY TOLD

Two former students of Bluff City College, Leo and Bill-alias "Loonie Leo" and "Billy-the-Goat"-have become inmates in the state prison adjacent to the college campus. This, following their conviction for a bank robbery that was actually a foolish fraternity stunt gone awry.

On Friday morning before Christmas (1976) Leo and Bill volunteer to plant a batch of rose bushes and tulip bulbs donated to the prison by local garden club ladies.

Before the flower project gets underway, a prison gate guard becomes much interested in a how-to book on hypnotism which Leo is reading. The guard persuades Leo to try out the book's instructions on him and Bill. To Leo's surprise both fellows enter a trance-like state. And when the guard carelessly leaves all his keys where Leo can pick them up, Leo grabs the gate key, opens the gate, and runs.

Leo gets to the college, ducks inside the first building, and finds himself in the midst of a class of drama students who are doing impersonations. They are performing before a local pastor and a judge's wife. He is searching for a student to play the role of Leonardo da Vinci in a church play. She needs a student Santa Claus for a party planned for a group of orphans.

Leo is chosen to play both roles. He goes home with the minister and begins a marathon rehearsal effort to learn the Leonardo da Vinci lines in the church drama titled THE UNPAINTED MASTERPIECE.

Meantime, the prison warden and Leo's pal Bill have discovered that Leo has disappeared. Bill is distraught. He tells the warden that he has prayed day and night for God to get him and Leo out of prison, though Leo thinks there is no God.

Further, Bill reasons, if God did help Leo escape, that will cause Leo to believe in God. But, Bill tells the warden, if the warden spreads the alarm and Leo is dragged back, Leo will never believe in God. Thus, the warden will be hindering God Himself.

The warden telephones the minister to ask his advice, but he fails to mention Leo's name. The minister advises the warden to go slow on any official action.

It is not until the minister speaks with Bill that he discovers that the handsome, talented fellow in his study is the escaped convict. The minister instantly decides to take a wait-and-see approach to the situation, lest he, too, begin to "hinder God." And, lest both the party for the orphans and the church Christmas play go down the drain. The minister tells no one--especially not Leo--that he has discovered Leo's identity.

Leo plays the da Vinci role brilliantly. The fictional drama about how the great Italian artist painted the Blessed Bambino in Bethlehem--complete with angels and shepherds and Orient Kings--brings down the house.

Then comes Monday morning and reality. And with reality comes Leo's decision that there is a God, who answers prayers.

Further, Leo sees that when God came down to earth as the Christ Child born in Bethlehem, a host of angels told the shepherds there in the fields how to find Him. A great star guided wise kings to His side. But, now, in this present age of turmoil

and confusion, tragedy, pestilence and war, it is almost impossible for any man to find his way to Bethlehem and to God, unless another man becomes his guide.

SCRIPT

ACT I - Scene 1

Scene 1: It is mid-morning on the Friday before Christmas, 1976. In the exercise yard of the State Prison a gate guard walks to and fro along the fence, clapping his gloved hands together in an effort to keep warm. From his belt hangs a cumbersome key chain on which there are many keys and on his right hip he carries a revolver.

The prison gate is secured with a chain fastened with a very large YALE padlock. Beyond the gate, at some distance, is a sign reading:

BLUFF CITY COLLEGE
A Liberal Arts School
Founded in 1897

Leo and Bill, former college students, who are serving time in the State Prison, enter. They wear the required black and white striped prison uniforms. And, caps.

Bill is pushing a wheelbarrow in which there are a post-hole digger, 2 shovels, a rake, a hoe, and a sack of commercial fertilizer. Leo has a paperback book in one hand, a trowel in the other. He is absorbed in the book, and it is obvious that he couldn't care less about the flower-planting project at hand.

Bill, though, is genuinely interested in the rose bushes and tulip bulbs which the two have volunteered to plant.

GUARD: Halt!

The prisoners stop abruptly. Leo shoves the sack of fertilizer to one side, sits down in the wheelbarrow, and continues reading. Bill straightens up his back, rubs it.

BILL: Whew! That's heavy!

GUARD: What do you birds think you're doing? *Puts on his glasses.* Let me get a good look at you two! *Peers at convicts.* I know you both! You're "Loonie Leo" *Points to Leo* and they call you *Pointing to Bill* "Billy-the-Goat." Right?

LEO: That's us! You can just call us "Loon" and "Goat."

GUARD: Don't try to be a smart-alec! How come y'all ain't out with the road gang this mornin'?

BILL: We're volunteers.

GUARD: Volunteers for what?

LEO: To plant flowers. Rose bushes and tulips!

GUARD: I don't believe you!

BILL: Warden Greene said for us to do it.

LEO: I've done seen the rose bushes. And the warden is waiting in his office--this very minute--for a garden club lady and Reverend Ditchfield to bring the tulips.

GUARD: You'd better be tellin' the truth! All you convicts are pretty much alike. I can't trust none of you--especially one like you, "Loonie Leo."

LEO: How is that? Is it 'cause I'm so handsome?

GUARD: No. You're plenty ugly! But you're always readin' a book! You've been in this pen nearly a year already and I've never seen you when you didn't have some sort of book in your hand or stuffed in your pocket. What're you readin' there today?

LEO: *holding up book* Oh, this is real interesting. Title is:

"HYPNOSIS THROUGH THE AGES
How Sorcerers and Wizards of Olden Times
And Modern Practitioners
Could and Can Employ the
Ancient Art of Hypnotism"

GUARD: *showing uncommon interest* Does it tell you how to hypnotize somebody?

LEO: I haven't got that far yet. I'm still on the history part of it. It says that in the early days hypnotism was referred to as "the evil eye." Really there--

GUARD: Yeah! I've heard of "puttin' the evil eye" on somebody!

LEO: Really there is no evil in it. Some folks say there's magic in it. But that's not so. This book says it's just like going to sleep. You sort of dream and you know that you are dreaming.

GUARD: What happens after you get to sleep?

LEO: It says here that "the hypnotized person sees, hears, tastes, smells, and feels what the operator says he sees, hears, tastes, smells, and feels--nothing more. And when he wakes up he usually doesn't remember being hypnotized."

GUARD: Can just anybody hypnotize anybody else?

LEO: According to this book, they can. Listen to this: *Reads* "The hypnotic process may be set in motion by any person who possesses the necessary intelligence and will-power, quite regardless of his social, religious, ethnic, or moral status."

GUARD: That sounds good! Say, when you finish readin' that book, maybe you could learn me how to do it!

LEO: Sure. That is, I'll try.

GUARD: Maybe I'll hypnotize my wife an' make her quit spendin' all my money! Yeah man! I'd sure like to "put the evil eye" on that bossy gal!

Bill notes approach of warden, and three companions.

BILL: Yonder they come! See? They've got the flowers. Just like we told you!

GUARD: Yeah. I see. I'd better get back to my gate!

Hurries to his post. Begin Scene 2--without a break.

Scene 2-Enter Warden Greene, Mrs. Oliver, Reverend Ditchfield, and Judge Oliver. The warden and Mrs. Oliver are carrying most of the bulbs and bundles of rose bushes. The other two, lagging behind, are involved in a deep discussion of state politics and needed prison improvements. The two carry a few of the rose bushes.

Mrs. Oliver, her face almost hidden by her floppy-brimmed hat, is fluttering along trying to keep up with the warden. She is hampered by her fancy walking cane and her ornate, over-sized purse--not to mention her high-heeled shoes.

LEO: *in half whisper* Bill?

BILL: *in low tone* What?

LEO: You notice anything familiar about that man walking right behind the warden?

BILL: No, nothin' special. That's Reverend Ditchfield in the black coat.

LEO: Quick! Pull your cap down, like this. *Yanks his own cap far down over his eyes.*

Bill adjusts his cap.

BILL: What's the idea?

LEO: That man is the judge who sent us here! Let's don't let him see who we are.

BILL: OK. But he probably wouldn't remember us. Judges send poor wretches to jail by the dozen! Everyday! Some of 'em as innocent as me and you!

LEO: I guess you're right.

Judge Oliver and Reverend Ditchfield pause, keep talking. Audience hears snatches of their conversation.

REV. D.: Judge Oliver, you're a personal friend of the governor, aren't you?

JUDGE: Right! The governor and I go way back. Fact is, Charlie and I are a little bit of kin--on my mother's side. I'd say Charlie is a pretty decent man. Not too bright. But he has made a fairly good governor--considering everything.

REV. D.: I agree--considering.

JUDGE: I think I'll fire off a letter to the Governor and invite him to come down here and see this prison.

REV. D.: Do that, Judge. We need ... *voice trails off.*

WARDEN GREENE: *Still at Mrs. Ditchfield's side, calling* Boys?

BILL & LEO: Yes, Sir?

WARDEN: *still in calling tone* Come get some of these bulbs and rose bushes! Help the judge's wife!

Boys hurry to Mrs. Oliver and warden. Judge O. and Rev. D. pay no attention to Leo and Bill, so absorbed are they in their discussion.

JUDGE: Ditchfield, it's like I've said all along--it's a matter of getting the legislature to appropriate more funds. They know this prison is old and overcrowded. Still, they don't act.

REV. D.: Except to raise their own salaries!

Both laugh.

JUDGE: That, they do!

REV. D.: Of course I dream of one day building a fine prison chapel-right here on this very spot.

Warden approaches judge and reverend.

WARDEN. Here, Judge, let me take these bundles.

Both men hand over rose bush bundles, keep talking; warden returns to Mrs. Oliver, Leo and Bill.

JUDGE: You're doing a wonderful volunteer work here, Ditchfield. Our whole church appreciates it.

REV. D: Thank you.

JUDGE: I think I will fire off a letter to the governor and mention your idea for building a chapel here. I'll tell him ... *voice trails off*

Leo and Bill help Mrs. Oliver get her sacks of bulbs into the wheelbarrow.

MRS. OLIVER: *gushing friendliness* Oh, you dear "Zebra Boys!" Thank you, very much!

LEO: "Zebra Boys"?

MRS. O.: Yes, that's what I call all you dear young men wearing these striped suits! "Zebra Boys!" Every time the judge and I drive past this dreary old prison and we see you all out here in the exercise yard, I say:

"Oh, those poor creatures! They look just like zebras in the zoo, walking around on their hind legs!"

LEO: Yes, ma'am.

MRS. O.: Judge Ollie--that's what I call my husband--Judge Ollie just murmurs: "Yes, Molly Dear, whatever you say" and keeps on driving down the street. The only reason the judge is with me this morning is that later on he has a board meeting over at the college.

LEO: Yes, ma'am.

MRS. O.: *to Bill and Leo* Now, about these tulip bulbs and the climbing roses--are you the ones who will actually do the planting?

LEO: Yes, ma'am. Bill here, and me.

BILL: We volunteered for the job.

Warden joins three.

MRS. O.: That's fine! Warden Greene, is it all right for me to give our volunteers a little instruction on the way to plant all these tulips?

WARDEN: Yes, Ma'am, Miss Molly! You tell 'em exactly what to do. How far you want 'em from the fence. How deep. How close together. Ever'thing. 'Cause they won't know unless you do tell 'em.

Now, you fellows listen carefully and do precisely what Miss Molly says.

LEO & BILL: *mumbling* Yes, Sir.

Warden strolls over to join judge and reverend.

MRS. O.: Well, all right! First, let me explain to you that there are eight running rose bushes--all red.

They are to be planted: one on each side of the four prison gates--starting here at the side gate and going on around. If I were you, I'd pick out the best two bushes and put them here next to the college campus.

Looks at bushes, puts the two best aside.

I'd say about two feet from each side of the gate. The first one about where that guard is standing. Dig a right deep hole, put in the fertilizer, mix in some dirt. And then you really ought to have some water to pour in.

BILL: Yes, ma'am. We'll get some water. No problem.

MRS. O.: Pack the dirt down firm around the roots. And rake some leaves around each bush, as a sort of mulch. We don't want 'em to freeze.

LEO: Yes, ma'am.

MRS. O.: Now, planting these tulip bulbs is not going to be so easy! Because of the different colors and what I think was a silly vote the garden club ladies took.

LEO: How do you mean?

MRS. O.: Well, you see, the Daffodil Garden Club donated the red tulips. Then, at the last minute, they got some daffodils--straight from Holland, they said.

The Bluff City Rose Society bought the roses and the sack of yellow tulips.

The Day Lilly Alliance insisted on getting purple bulbs.

Then, there was a big misunderstanding on where to plant each color. Each club wanted its bulbs by the front entrance, and under no circumstances along the back or side fence, and especially not by the kitchen entrance. This fuss went on for weeks! It started in September, and here it is the Friday before Christmas! Finally, the ladies appointed a committee, and the committee voted to plant the bulbs "equally and by color!"

BILL: Just how, Ma'am?

MRS. O.: First, a red bulb. Then a yellow bulb. Next a purple bulb. Then, a daffodil.

Next, start all over: Red. Yellow. Purple. Then, a daffodil.

Again, Red. Yellow. Purple. Then a daffodil. And so on. Do you understand?

BILL: Yes, Ma'am. I think so.

LEO: I've got it: Red! Yellow! Purple! Then a daffodil! All in a row. Beside the fence?

MRS. O.: That's right. The sacks are labeled. Now, set the bulbs about three inches deep, and I'd say 12 inches apart.

Be sure the root end is down, the sprouting end up. We don't want the poor bulbs to have to turn a flip to keep from coming up in China!

Molly and boys laugh.

JUDGE: *calling to his wife* Molly Dear, come along now!

MRS. O.: *to boys* He's going to say: "It's getting late!"

JUDGE: It's getting late!

MRS. O.: *still to boys* What did I tell you! *Raises voice to answer her husband* I'm coming, Judge Ollie!

Turns back to Leo and Bill.

Thank you, dear "Zebra Boys!"

Starts to leave again, returns.

If you don't mind telling me, why are you two fine young men in this prison? You look like college students! You ought to be on the other side of this fence, attending classes!

BILL: It was all a mistake! *Turns to Leo.* You tell her what happened.

LEO: Well, Ma'am, we were students at Bluff City College this time last year. And we had both pledged a fraternity-dear old Delta Delta Gamma!

Then, when initiation time came, one of the stunts they told us to pull was to, quote, unquote, "rob the bank."

BILL: There were six of us.

LEO: Yes, six, and the president told me it would all be a big joke. But I wasn't to tell the others. He said his uncle was the bank president's cousin and he'd let him in on the fun.

So, we got ourselves some toy guns, some black socks to cover our faces. Even sacks to put the money in. And we marched down to the Bluff City National Bank-in broad daylight!

BILL: Don't forget the play money the tellers were to hand over!

LEO: Yes, play money! When we went sauntering into the bank, what we didn't know was that a real bank robbery was in progress! We got caught right in the middle of it!

The alarm system went off, the surveillance cameras were grinding away. Somebody called the police. And the next thing we knew the police were there!

They grabbed me and Bill! The real robbers got away. The four other pledges high-tailed it back to campus. But we got hauled off to jail. Then, at the trial--

JUDGE: *impatiently* Molly Dear! Come, come, now!

MRS. O.: I'm coming! I'm coming! Bye-bye, "Zebra Boys." I'm sorry I can't hear the rest of your story. *hesitates* Oh, I didn't even learn your names. One of you is "Bill" and that's all I know!

JUDGE: Molly!

MRS. O.: When he leaves off the "Dear," he means it! *Hurries to group of men.*

BILL: She seemed like a real nice lady.

LEO: Yeah. Oh well, names don't mean a thing here. We're just numbers. Numbers who'll never get out!

BILL: Don't say that, Leo. You know I pray to God! Ever' day! He's gon'na get us out--somehow.

LEO: You pray to God ever' day! And you're-- you're-- you're foolish! There is no God! He can't answer prayers 'cause He doesn't exist!

BILL: You're wrong! I know God is up in heaven and he answers prayers! You'll see!

LEO: Right now I see we've got a thousand of these dang tulip bulbs to plant!

Leo and Bill turn to task at hand.

JUDGE: Molly Dear, the warden wants us to have a cup of coffee with him. However--

MRS. O.: How nice! A hot cup of coffee is just what I need! Or tea. Do you have any tea, Warden Greene?

WARDEN: Oh yes, Miss Molly! We keep tea on hand.

JUDGE: *consulting his watch* Molly Dear, in five minutes I'm supposed to be over at the college for that board meeting! Now, the reverend here has an appointment with--

MRS. O.: But, Judge Ollie, I can just taste that tea! You could--

JUDGE: Let me finish what I was saying! I'll drive on over to the college, and you stay here and come later with the reverend.

REV. DITCHFIELD: Yes, Miss Molly, you wait and ride with me. Our Miss Malory--you know Miss Malory. She sings in our choir--Miss Malory has invited me to the college to sit in on one of the drama classes. I'm looking for some players to fill in on our Christmas presentation.

MRS. O.: Well, thank you, Reverend. That'll be just fine.

JUDGE: Warden, *Shakes hands with warden* I hope to see you again soon.

WARDEN: Yes, of course.

Judge exits hurriedly. Rev. D., the warden and Mrs. O. stroll off stage at a leisurely pace, talking as they go.

MRS. O.: So, you're going to visit a drama class?

REV. D.: Yes. I simply have to recruit a sharp actor for our Christmas drama at the church.

MRS. O.: Oh, the Christmas plays are always just wonderful!

REV. D.: I had high hopes this year, for the play is new and quite unusual. Then yesterday the lead actor came down with the flu!

WARDEN: I understand there's something of a flu epidemic in and around Bluff City. We've had quite an outbreak here at the prison. Ten confirmed cases, the doctor told me this morning. And two of my guards are ... *Voice trails off.*

Begin Scene 3, without a break.

Scene 3-Leo and Bill take careful stock of the bulbs and rose bushes. They stack the sacks of bulbs into the wheelbarrow, lay the shovels, etc. aside.

LEO: I'll tell you, Bill, we've got a job on our hands!

BILL: You reckon we'll ever get finished?

LEO: Oh, sure! *picks up post-hole digger* Let's plant the rose bushes first.

BILL: Suits me.

LEO: How 'bout you going to get a bucket of water-like the lady said.

BILL: Sure.

Exits. Guard hurries over to Leo.

GUARD: Say, before y'all start plantin' them flowers, how would it be if you skim through your hypnotism book an' tell me a little of what it says. I sure would like to learn how to hypnotize "Lady Hazel!"

LEO: Lady Hazel?

GUARD: My wife! Remember I told you she spends my money faster than I can make it, and if I could--

LEO: Oh, yeah! I remember. You want to "put the evil eye" on your wife.

GUARD: Yeah! If I could get her into a trance, maybe she'd hand over all them credit cards to me!

LEO: That's a possibility.

Leo takes book from his pocket, starts thumbing through pages.

Well, let me see here. *Reads* "Dr. James Braid of England originated the word 'hypnotism' in 1841. He was a highly respected--"

GUARD: Never mind that part. Get on down to the how-to!

LEO: I'm coming to it. *Reads again* "Dr. Braid gave public exhibitions of hypnotism, brought on by inviting the subjects to blank their minds and gaze on a bright object. This, he moved back and forth until--"

GUARD: *with enthusiasm* A bright object? Ah, I've got the very thing! *Grabs key chain from his belt, starts jangling it around.* These keys are bright! Oh, better yet: my watch! Grandpappy's gold watch! *Tosses keys on the wheelbarrow, zips out a large gold pocket watch on a rather long chain.* See?

LEO: Yeah, that's plenty bright. *Keeps reading* Ah, here's an important detail: *Reads* "It is essential to see that the person to be hypnotized is perfectly comfortable. He should be advised to assume a completely passive attitude...."

GUARD: What's a "passive attitude?"

LEO: That means to just let yourself go. Sort of float along without any resistance, without any worry on what is going to happen.

GUARD: I see.

LEO: *reading* "The practitioner then gives a series of suggestions.... These are repeated in a monotonous voice, over and over. The suggestions are always of a concrete and vivid nature. The practitioner may--"

GUARD: That's gettin' complicated. Just who is this practitioner?

LEO: They mean the person doing the hypnotizing.

GUARD: Oh, yeah. Of course.

Enter Bill, with huge bucket of water.

BILL: Say! What are you fellows doing? Leo, I thought you'd have the first hole dug by now.

LEO: Not yet. We're trying to learn how to hypnotize people.

BILL: You sound like you mean it.

GUARD: We do! I'm the main one who wants to learn how. Say, Bill! I've got an idea! Let's me and you get Leo to see if he can hypnotize us! That way, we'll see how it's done!

BILL: Well, uh-- uh-- Ok, I'm game if you are! Leo, it won't hurt us none, will it?

LEO: Na-ah! It won't hurt you. There's not much to it. This book says two or three times that it's just sort of like going to sleep. And in a little while you'll wake up. And you won't remember a thing about sleeping--so I understand.

Y'all just come over here and sit down--so you'll be comfortable.

Leads two over to a bench not far from the gate. Guard has forgotten all about the keys. These remain in the wheelbarrow. The other two don't notice them.

GUARD: You need this gold watch? *Holds it out*

LEO: Yeah, I sure do. *Takes, admires watch* It sure is a pretty watch. I don't think my grandpa ever had a gold watch.

Leo becomes a bit uncertain of himself.

Now, fellows, I'm gon'na go right by the book. Y'all just follow along, take it easy, and slow, and relax.

Voice becomes progressively softer, soothing.

Sort of blank your mind, and float along. Close your eyes and imagine that you're beside a beautiful lake, where there are old shade trees, draped with moss. And you see the sun going down, down, down. Open your eyes now to see the Moon come up. *Shows watch* It is the harvest Moon. Big. And round. And made of gold. See how it seems to stop. *Pauses*

Then, the Moon begins to move back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. *Swings gold watch in front of their faces.* The big golden Moon never tires

of going back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. The Moon keeps on and on, back and forth, back and forth.

The two subjects begin moving their heads to and fro, following the motion of the watch with their eyes.

The Moon is like a jolly, sleepy clown. Raise your right hand and wave to the Moon clown, wave to Mister Moon clown.

To Leo's amazement his subjects raise their hands and wave. Leo gasps!

Uh-- Uh-- Uh-- Say "Helloooooo, Mister Moon! Helloooooo!"

BILL & GUARD: *in same tone as Leo used* Helloooooo, Mister Moon! Helloooooo!

LEO: *to himself, frantically* Great Scott! I've done it! Wow! Now, what'll I do? *Looks in book* It doesn't say what to do! Maybe I ought to keep going! Yeah! That's it!

Resumes soothing, singsong tone.

Mister Moon lovv-vv-v-es to see the flowers bloom. Mister Moon wants you to plant some flowers. He is saying: "Men, plant the tulips. Men, plant the tulips. Plant the tulips. And the daffodils."

Both subjects stand; each picks up a sack of bulbs.

Say to Mister Moon: "We will plant the tulips. We will plant the tulips. We will plant the tulips, and the daffodils."

BILL & GUARD: *in Leo's monotonous tone* We will plant the tulips. We will plant the tulips. We will plant the tulips, and the daffodils.

LEO: *still very soothingly, monotonously* Plant them by the kitchen fence. Plant them like the lady said: Red. Yellow. Purple. And then a daffodil. Red. Yellow. Purple. And then a daffodil. All in a row, all in a row, all in a row. Red. Yellow. Purple. And then a daffodil.

Subjects take up the chant, move slowly off stage as if in a trance.

BILL & GUARD: *in unison* By the kitchen fence. All in a row. All in a row. All in a row. Red. Yellow. Purple. And then a daffodil. Red. Yellow. Purple. And then a daffodil. Red. Yellow. Purple. And then a daffodil. Red. Yellow...*Voices fade as two disappear*

Leo is greatly shaken over what he has done.

LEO: *to himself* I can't believe it! I actually hypnotized both of 'em! I had no idea it would work! Oh man! What'll I do?

Notices guard's keys, carelessly draped over the side of the wheelbarrow.

The keys! *Grabs up keys, tosses hypnotism book aside* That dummy left all his keys! I-- I-- My stars! I can get out of here! Yeah! Escape!

But, what if-- *Pause* I'd be a fool if I didn't do it! A blitherin' idiot-fool!

Runs to gate, tries one key and quickly two or three more. Voice takes on urgent tone.

There's a dozen keys here! Surely one of 'em is gon'na fit this lock! Ah, this one does it! It works!

Grabs off lock, opens gate, darts out, runs back inside, puts gold watch in the wheelbarrow.

I'll leave the watch here. He'll find it.

Starts out again, comes back.

I won't need these keys no more!

Leaves keys beside watch in wheelbarrow, runs out the gate, closes it, and locks it behind himself, just as it had been. Exits in a fast run-toward the college sign.

End of ACT I

ACT II, Scene 1

Scene 1 - A classroom in the Drama Department of Bluff City College. It is Friday morning before Christmas, a few minutes before time for the Drama 101 class to meet. Miss Malory, a pert, vivacious young instructor is at her desk, grading and sorting papers as she awaits the arrival of her 11 o'clock students, Rev. Ditchfield, and Mrs. Oliver.

The room is sparsely furnished, with five or six student chairs, two straight chairs, and a blackboard. There are posters on the wall, traditional masks, and a portrait of Shakespeare. In the corner is a portable spotlight. A side door has a sign above it reading: COSTUMES.

A bell rings in the outside hallway. Two giggling girls and two boys enter, ease themselves into the chairs, plop their books and notebooks down. In a jolly mood, they swap small talk.

ANDY: Ben, what time does your plane take off?

BEN: At 1:00PM. And if I miss it, my mother will kill me!

NICOLE: I started to cut this class so I could get packed. But my grade in dear Drama 101 is so low I couldn't afford it!

BEN: Katie, what are you doing for the holidays? Staying on campus?

KATIE: No! Never! Christmas Eve I'm going over to my aunt's house.

ANDY: *lowering his voice* I wonder what Miss Malory is going to have us do this morning?

NICOLE: I hope to heaven she doesn't spring another pop quiz on the history of Greek Drama! I made a flat "F" Monday! How was I to know that the word "tragedy" in Greek means "cry of the goat" or "goat song?"

BEN: Why, Nicole! That's the kind of stuff we learn in Drama 101! All about Greek goats!

NICOLE: *in playful tone* Aw, Ben, you're so silly!

BEN: Not me!

Hallway bell sounds again, students get quiet, Miss Malory stands.

MISS M.: Good morning, class!

STUDENTS: *in chorus* Good morning!

MISS M.: Where is everybody? Already gone for Christmas?

BEN: That's it, Ma'am! *Other students murmur agreement.*

MISS M.: The front office notified me a new student is to audit this class, starting today. Have you seen anything of a young fellow looking for the Drama 101 classroom?

BEN: I haven't seen him, Ma'am.

ANDY: Me, neither.

NICOLE: Is he good looking?

KATIE: How old is he?

MISS M.: Now, now, girls!

All laugh.

MISS M.: Now, Class, we have an unusual situation this morning. You're going to have a chance to audition for parts in a local Christmas pageant. And, one of you might get to be Santa Claus at a party.

BEN: Did you say audition?

MISS M.: That's what I said. An unusual one, but an audition, none the less. You see, Reverend Ditchfield, who's pastor of my church, and a Mrs. Oliver, the wife of Judge Nathan Oliver--I'm sure you've heard of our famous Judge Oliver--are coming to look for one or more talented students to participate in a church presentation and in some annual party for a group of orphans. I think the party is to be in the Oliver home.

KATIE: They're coming this morning?

MISS M.: Yes. Pretty soon now, I hope. So, this is what I want you four to do. Go into the costume room and put on something-for any character you'd like to impersonate. Then--

BEN: But, Miss Malory, I won't be here! My plane leaves in exactly two hours and fifty minutes!

MISS M.: In that case, you please operate the spotlight for us. Focus it right about here. *indicates place*

BEN: That, I'll do!

MISS M.: One by one each character will enter, step into the spotlight, and do an impromptu little act.

Not too long, now. One minute or two. Three, at the most. We have all manner of costumes; so pick out something good. And remember what I've been trying to teach you the whole semester!

Three students scurry into costume room. Ben sets up spotlight, tests it. At a knock on the door, Miss Malory invites Rev. Ditchfield and Mrs. Oliver to come in.

MISS M.: Good morning, Mrs. Oliver! Good morning, Reverend. You all come right in. You're just in time.

MRS. O.: Ah, Miss Malory, it's good to see you.

REV. D.: Hello, Miss Malory. Thank you for letting us come to your class. Where are all the students?

MISS M.: I've sent them off to put on their costumes.

MRS. O.: Oh, this is going to be a treat! I just know it!

REV. D.: The students are going to perform for us?

MISS M.: Yes, Sir. They'll just do a few impersonations. Won't you all take these chairs over here? That way, you can see and hear.

REV. D.: As I explained earlier, Miss Malory, I'm just desperate for a young man to play the role of Leonardo da Vinci in our church play Sunday evening. Sam Beauchamp was to be da Vinci, but he's in the hospital with this dreadful influenza that's going around.

MISS M.: Don't worry, Reverend. We can find--

REV. D.: It just about kills me to think of having to cancel this little Christmas drama. Its theme and the way its presented is far better than any message I could put together--especially at this late hour!

MISS M.: What is the theme?

REV. D.: It's the idea that every man can and should paint a picture of the Bethlehem Story--one way or another. Each person can show the way to Bethlehem.

MISS M.: Very interesting!

MRS. O.: My little problem is not really a problem. When Reverend Ditchfield called you from the prison, I'm sure he told you that I'm just looking for a Santa Claus!

MISS M.: Yes, Ma'am, he did.

MRS. O.: Every year just before Christmas the judge and I give a party and have a Christmas tree for the little children over at the orphanage. And this year I just decided we ought to have Santa come. I didn't even ask Judge Ollie what he thought!

REV. D.: I'm sure he will like the idea!

MISS M.: Of course he will! We all like to see Santa Claus!

Nicole pokes her head out the COSTUME ROOM door, beckons to Miss Malory.

MISS M.: *to guests* Excuse me, please. *Goes to Nicole.*

NICOLE: *in whisper to Miss M.* That new student has come. Oh, he's so cute! Do you want him to come out and do an impersonation, too? He can, he said.

MISS MALORY: Why yes, of course. Are you all about ready to get started?

NICOLE: We're ready! We drew lots, and I'm first! *Closes door.*

MISS M.: Ben, they're coming out now.

BEN: I'm ready.

Nicole enters, garbed as "The Old Woman in the Shoe," carrying as many big dolls as her arms will allow. Ben beams the spotlight on her.

NICOLE: I am the old woman who lives in a shoe.

I have so many children I don't know what to do.

There is no broth.

There is no bread.

I'll sing them a song

And put them to bed.

Exits singing.

Rock-a-bye babies, in the shoe top;

If the wind blows, we'll tell it to stop.

Rock-a-bye babies, in the shoe top;

Sweet dreams, sweet dreams! It's now ten o'clock!

Miss M., Mrs. O., and Rev D. clap their hands.

Enter Andy, wearing a modified Jolly Green Giant costume. He carries a large lighted candle. Ben follows him with spotlight.

ANDY: *with an elaborate flourish of his hat* I am JACK!

Not Jack the Ripper!

Not Jack who climbed the bean stalk!

Not the Jack-of-all-trades!

Not the Jack of Spades, or Clubs, or Hearts, or Diamonds!

I am Jack-the-Nimble! Jack-the-Quick!

Watch me jump this candlestick!

Sets candle on floor, hops over it, grabs it up, runs off stage. Miss M., Mrs. O., and Rev. D. applaud. Enter Katie, as Little-Bo-Peep. Ben turns spotlight on her.

KATIE: *in frantic, out of breath manner, as if she has been running*

I'm Little-Bo-Peep!

Of course I've lost my sheep!

If you ' see 'em, tell 'em I said to come on home,

Tails or no tails wagging behind 'em! *Exits in a run.*

Malory, Oliver and Reverend applaud.

Leo saunters in, still in his prison uniform, his face flushed, his manner that of the conquering hero. When Ben turns on the spotlight, he bows to his audience of three as if it numbered three hundred. He does not blink an eye when he sees Rev. D. and Mrs. Oliver. They do not recognize him. He speaks in a bombastic manner.

LEO: Ladies and gentleman! My warmest greetings! *Pause* To many, Truth is more delightful than Fiction. Therefore, for your pleasure I will tell you a tale. You may judge its Truth, or its Fiction, for yourself.

You see standing before you the eminent hypnotist Leonard Robert Burns, alias "Loonie Leo"--until recently a man numbered with those who wear the stripes, those inmates who spend their days behind bars, such as those poor wretches in the damp, dark state prison next door to this beautiful college campus.

"Loonie Leo" did not like the life of a man in stripes. It made him feel like a zebra! So, he sought a way to escape if not physically, then mentally.

He had a friend in prison known as "Billy the Goat," or simply "Goat." Now "Goat" longed to leave prison, too. Every day he prayed to his God in heaven to get him out. And, to get "Loonie Leo" out, too. But "Loonie" said there was no God, much less a heaven.

"Loonie" read many books. He learned much. One day he chanced upon a volume which traced the art of hypnotism from its origin among ancient wizards and sorcerers down to the present day. Another book gave explicit how-to instructions. That is, how to induce a hypnotic state.

To Loonie's delight, and I might add surprise, he was able to perfect a technique for hypnotizing any person who so desired. This skill proved to be the key to the way his prison life came to an end!

Now, Hypnotist Leonard Robert Burns gives public exhibitions of hypnotism, as well as lectures on this fascinating practice referred to in olden times as "the evil eye." This, the famous hypnotist does for a modest fee! Will you take one of his business cards, please!

Hands card to each in his audience, including Ben.

Give him a call! *bows and exits*

Miss M., Mrs. O., Rev. D. and Ben are quite taken with Leo. They are enthusiastic with their applause. Three students and Leo return and with Ben take a bow together; there is more applause.

REV. D.: Excellent! Absolutely excellent!

MRS. O.: You're all so talented! Just charming!

Rev. D. seeks out Leo; the two women are quick to go to Andy, Ben, and the two girls. They talk among themselves, laugh.

REV. D.: "Loonie Leo," or whatever your real name is, you would be ideal for the Leonardo da Vinci role!

LEO: The Leonardo da Vinci role? Really? *to himself* He doesn't recognize me!

REV: *with increased enthusiasm* Yes! I can see you now as the great Italian artist, standing on stage, before a large canvas-with a painter's palette in one hand a brush in the other-painting the masterpiece!

Executes motions he imagines a painter would use.

Do you have time to do it?

LEO: Sir, time is what I have the most of. *to himself* I don't know what I may be getting into!

REV. D.: No classes this afternoon?

LEO: No classes.

REV. D.: Good! This is what we can do: You go home with me, now, and we'll go over the script. I'll explain what I can. We'll try the costume on you. Then you can sit right down in my study and start memorizing lines.

LEO: Yes, Sir. That'll be fine.

REV. D.: There are plenty of lines. I warn you. You see, this little drama is about the masterpiece da Vinci did not paint. You'll probably have to study all day Saturday, half the night, and on through Sunday!

LEO: That's all right. I can learn lines! The performance is when?

REV. D.: Sunday evening-at the church. I forgot you weren't in here when we were talking about--

Mrs. Oliver interrupts. Leo jerks down his cap, turns his face so that she can't look directly at him.

LEO: *to himself* Oh, no! She is the tulip lady!

MRS. O.: *with exaggerated concern* Oh, Reverend! I'm so disappointed! None of the students can be my Santa Claus! They're all going home for Christmas. What'll I do?

REV. D.: Well, let me think.-- Your party for the orphans is tonight?

MRS. O.: Tonight, at seven o'clock-the same as we've had it for nineteen years! The Friday night before Christmas.

REV. D.: I have the solution. We'll let my Leonardo da Vinci here take off his artist's smock, put on the Santa Suit, and come pass out the presents for you. You could, couldn't you, Son?

LEO: *without looking at Mrs. O.* Well, uh-- I suppose so. Where will it--

REV. D.: It'll be at the Oliver residence. But that's no problem. You can ride with me and my wife. Judge and Mrs. Oliver are always gracious enough to invite us. Every year.

LEO: I won't have to say anything except a "Ho! Ho! Ho!" now and then, will I?

MRS. O.: That's all, you dear boy!

Leo backs off a pace or two.

LEO: *to himself* Whew! I thought for a minute she was going to call me "dear Zebra Boy!"

The hall-way bell rings, there is noise and stir as students grab up their books and hurry out.

REV. D.: Then your worries are over, Miss Molly. Your Santa will come with Mattie and me.

MRS. OLIVER: Oh, Reverend, you are always so thoughtful.

Miss Malory joins her guests.

REV. D.: I can't thank you enough, Miss Malory! I'm taking one of your talented students home with me! This young fellow here *Pats Leo on shoulder* is the answer to prayer! Literally! The answer to prayer!

MISS M.: I'm certainly glad.

MRS. O.: You have a very talented group of students!

Leo manages to distance himself from group.

LEO: *to himself* I don't see how I could be the answer to prayer, when I don't even believe in prayer.

REV. D.: Now, Miss Molly, as I remember, you're to meet the judge, aren't you?

MRS. O.: Yes, in the new library.

REV. D.: Then I'll be going. *Turns to Leo.* Son, come on. We'd best hurry. My wife will have lunch ready, and she gets quite upset when I'm late. And, on top of everything else, I have a two o'clock wedding to do!

The two exeunt, Ditchfield still talking.

We can stop by the church and pick up your da Vinci costume. I think--

MRS. OLIVER: Miss Malory, could I ask you to please show me the way to the new library?

MISS M.: Of course! I'll walk with you.

MRS. O.: Oh, thank you.

The two start out.

MISS M.: Let me get my purse. *Picks up small bag.*

MRS. O.: *in confidential tone* Somehow, Miss Malory, your "Loonie" student--the one who played the convict-turned-hypnotist--made me think of somebody I've seen before.

MISS M.: He's new in my 101 class. In fact, this is his first day.

MRS. O.: His costume looked so real. And there was something about the way he had his cap slanted down over ...

Voice fades as the two go out the door.

End of Scene 1, ACT II

ACT II, Scene 2

Scene 2 - Friday afternoon, in Rev. Ditchfield's combination library and study. The room is comfortably furnished with desk, a swivel chair, other chairs, a couch, and small table. Bookshelves line one wall. An encyclopedia set is conspicuous. On another wall is a picture known as "The Good Shepherd." Articles on the desk include a replica of "The Praying Hands," a phone, and a large Bible. There is a wall clock.

As the scene opens, Leo and Rev. Ditchfield are going through the play, with Rev. D. reading all the lines except those of Leonardo da Vinci. Both are

enthusiastic. Leo is in the da Vinci costume, with artist's palette, easel, and canvas at hand.

LEO: Reverend, this is quite a play! I've been in amateur plays before, but this one--
-Well, it's different.

REV. D.: I think the audience will like it. And, frankly, you're quite good with the da Vinci lines.

LEO: I aim to give it my best shot! Let's go back over the first scene again starting with where the angelic messenger comes in.

REV. D.: Sure. *leafs through script* Page three. Right?

LEO: Yes, Sir.

REV. D.: Lem'me see. *Begins reading.* "Leonardo is working on the "Mona Lisa" again. For four years he has toiled over the portrait, but can never get it just like he wants it. Today, he is discouraged and exhausted. He decides to take a nap."

Leo stands up, puts aside his palette and brush. Stretches, becomes da Vinci.

DA VINCI: *Reading* Oh, my weary bones, my aching head! I'll never get this portrait right! It's her eyes! Her eyes!

For the life of me I can't do her eyes! I think I'll close my own eyes and take a rest while I wait for that slow, foot-dragging Lorenzo. I ought to get me a younger servant. But, if I did, what would become of Old Lorenzo?

Lies down, sleeps.

REV. D. as ANGEL MESSENGER: *comes up to couch, gazes down at Da Vinci, reads.* Just look at him! Leonardo da Vinci, the greatest artist in all Italy! Sleeping his time away!

Walks over to look at Mona Lisa portrait.

Let's have a look at what he's working on. Hmm-mm-m, the portrait of a pretty woman. It's fine, all right. Beautiful, in fact! But an artist as gifted as--

Enter Mrs. Ditchfield, holding a Santa costume.

MRS. D.: Don't let me interrupt you all, dear, but Mrs. Oliver sent-- *Notices Leo stretched out on couch.* Did the poor boy fall asleep?

REV. D.: No, no, Mattie. We're rehearsing the play-the dream scene where the angelic messenger comes. And I'm the angel! If you can imagine such a thing!
Laughs

MRS. D.: Oh, you are an angel, Ditchie! As I was saying, Molly Oliver sent over this Santa suit. *Holds up costume.* She wants to be sure it fits. So, could-- *turns to Leo*

LEO: You want me to try it on? I will!

MRS. D.: If you don't mind.

REV. D.: Yes, do that, Son. The judge's wife, bless her heart, is a stickler on details. Just step there in the guest room.

Mrs. D. hands costume to Leo.

MRS. D.: *grabs up two pillows from couch.* You'd better take these. Mrs. Oliver wants Santa Claus to be fat!

All laugh.

LEO: Sure! *Exits*

MRS. D.: Ditchie, I've got to get to my beauty shop appointment. *Gives husband peck on the cheek. Phone rings.* Bye-bye! Now don't you forget that two o'clock wedding!

Exits.

REV. D.: I won't forget. *Phone rings again* Bye-bye.

Hello! Ditchfield speaking. How can I help you?

Begin Scene 2A without a break.

Scene 2A of ACT II (Phone conversation)

Scene 2A. On another part of the stage is a set depicting the office of Warden Greene at the State Prison. This room is small, stark. The warden has a beat-up desk. On it is a phone, numerous files, and a lamp. There are bars across the one window.

Warden Greene is seated at his desk, phone in hand. With him is inmate Bill, who is highly distraught over the strange disappearance of his friend Leo. Bill is seated in a straight chair, leaning over, head in hand. He listens as Warden Greene and Reverend Ditchfield hold their telephone conversation.

WARDEN: *into phone* Is that you, Reverend?

REV. D.: Yes. Reverend Ditchfield. Who's speaking, please?

WARDEN: It's me: Warden Greene at the State Prison.

REV. D.: *warmly* Ah, yes, Warden! At first I didn't recognize your voice. What is--

WARDEN: I've got a serious situation here, Reverend.

REV. D.: Yes? What sort of situation?

WARDEN: Well, it's like this: I don't want to interfere with the work of the Lord!

REV. D.: The work of the Lord? You? Why, I-- I don't understand.

WARDEN: You see, one of our inmates has disappeared! Just vanished, without a trace! We can't find hide nor hair of him! And Bill, here, a real good friend of this missing fellow, says the Good Lord probably helped him to escape. And if I turn in the alarm and get him back, I'll be going against the Good Lord, Himself! Hindering God!

REV. D.: I don't see how you--

WARDEN: I'm sure you remember Bill Mahony. He always attends your vesper services out here.

REV. D.: Why, yes, I know Bill Mahony.

WARDEN: Bill says that he prays day and night that God will get him and his friend out of this prison. His friend tells him there is no God to answer that or any other prayer.

REV. D.: *murmuring* Poor boys, poor boys.

WARDEN: Now Bill's reasoning is this: If his friend has escaped, it will make him realize that there is a God, who has answered a prayer.

But, if I notify the authorities, and they drag him back here to prison, he will never believe in God. And I'll be responsible! What should I do?

REV. D.: Warden, I hardly know what to say. But don't rush into any decision. Your prisoner may be hiding. Or, he could have just gone to sleep somewhere. One time--several years ago, before you came--one of the young prisoners went missing. And they found him asleep in the chapel. He was snoozing away, flat on the floor, right in front of the pulpit.

Another time, an inmate got locked up by mistake in the library on a Friday afternoon, and they didn't discover him till Monday morning. They said he sure was hungry!

Then there was the prisoner who climbed up that big sycamore tree and stayed up there 24 hours.

So, Warden, I'd say to go slow in making your decision. There is a Scripture that says "Wait on the Lord."

WARDEN: Thank you. I think I'll take your advice. *pauses* Reverend, have you got a minute? Bill Mahony is here in my office now. If you could just say a few words to him, it would help.

REV. D.: Of course. *Warden hands phone to Bill*

WARDEN: Bill, Reverend Ditchfield wants to talk to you.

BILL: Yes, Sir.

REV. D.: Hello, Bill.

BILL: Hello, Reverend Ditchfield.

REV. D.: I understand you all can't find your best friend and that you're quite worried.

BILL: Yes, Sir. I sure am worried. I've been praying ever' day for a whole year for him and me both to get out.

But I didn't mean for "Loonie" to break out. I meant for God to set us up a new trial 'cause we sure didn't rob that bank!

REV. D.: You say your friend's name is "Loonie?" "Loonie Leo?"

BILL: That's his nickname, like mine is "Billy-the-Goat," or mostly "Goat." That is, among all the fellows.

REV. D.: *slowly* Ah! I see! I see! Well, Bill, I think-- I-- I-- I don't want you to worry. God has a way of working things out. God is greater than we are. You know that, don't you, Bill?

BILL: Yes, Sir, I know it.

REV. D.: Well, you just keep on praying. Now, let me talk to Warden Greene again, please.

BILL: Yes, Sir. *Hands phone to warden*

REV. D.: Warden, I'll give some more thought to what you told me, and I'll get back with you.

WARDEN: I'd appreciate it.

REV. D.: Right now I've got to go perform a wedding ceremony. Sorry to rush off.

WARDEN: That's all right, Reverend. Bye.

REV. D.: Bye, Warden.

Both hang up. Curtain closes on Warden's office scene. Reverend D. pounds his right fist into his left palm, goes to gaze out the window, talking to himself as he moves.

REV. D.: I should have known it! "Loonie Leo!" "Eminent Hypnotist!" What on earth will I do? How the boy escaped and got over to the college this morning I don't know! But that's not the issue! If I tell him I know and turn him in, there goes the prayers, and the faith, of the poor boy they call "Goat."

And I--like the warden--will be, as the boy said, "going against the Good Lord, Himself!"

Even worse, "Loonie Leo" will never know God!

Then there's the play! It would be down the drain! The message lost! "The Unpainted Masterpiece" never painted! And Santa Claus! The poor little orphans would have no Santa tonight!

Mercy! What'll I do? Two minutes ago I was rattling off Scripture to the warden! Now I'd better think of some passage for myself!

Looks up, clasps hands together.

Oh, God in heaven, you'll have to help me!

Leo comes bounding in, resplendent-and fat-in the Santa Claus costume, including the beard.

LEO: Ho! Ho! Ho! *Pats tummy* How do I look?

REV. D.: *obviously shaken* Well, Santa-- I-- I think-- I think, Santa Claus, that you must indeed be an answer to prayer! More than one prayer.

LEO: Maybe so, Reverend. That's what you said this morning. Anyway, it sounds good when you say it. I don't know much about prayers, myself.

Rev. D. looks at his watch, grabs up his Bible.

REV. D: Son?

LEO: Yes, Sir?

REV. D.: I've got to get over to the church and do that wedding. While I'm gone, maybe you can be reading the background Scripture on the play. It will help you

get the "feel" of what the angelic messenger told da Vinci in his dream. Or, should I say, the "feel" of what the playwright tries to instill in da Vinci's mind.

LEO: Yes, Sir.

REV. D.: You see, it is doubtful that da Vinci ever had his hands on a Bible. For, as you know, the printing press was still a new thing in his day. There weren't many Bibles in circulation. That's the reason da Vinci has to send for the priest-- to find out exactly what happened in Bethlehem on the Holy Night.

LEO: Reverend, I-- I-- I'm ashamed to tell you, but, well--I never had my hands on a Bible--in my whole life! Where should I start reading?

REV. D.: Let me show you, real quick. *Takes Bible, turns to St. Luke.* First, read this second chapter of Saint Luke. Then, the second chapter of Saint Matthew. Here, I'll put these bookmarkers in for you.

Grabs up markers from desk, slips them in place, hands Bible back to Leo.

LEO: Thank you.

REV. D.: *as he exits, hurriedly* I'll be back, in a little while.

Begin Scene 3 (there is no break)

Leo, still holding Bible, pulls off heavy Santa beard, rubs his face.

LEO: *to himself* In a way, I feel like a fool! A hypocrite, besides! But I am out of that damn prison! So far, I'm safe. Nobody would look for a runaway in a preacher's study!

'Course tonight I'll have to go to that judge's house. But with this big white beard on, he won't know me! His wife won't either-- I hope! She's pretty sharp. She could recognize my voice.

Oh, but Sunday night in that play, when I'm standing up on the stage--The judge and the warden will probably be there. I'm just wondering--Maybe the great Leonardo da Vinci wore a beard! Yeah! Maybe! But how will I find out?

Turns, notices set of encyclopedia on shelves.

Ah, the very thing! THE ENCYCLOPEDIA AMERICANA!

Puts Bible aside, skims fingers over reference volumes.

Should I look under L or V? Or, D? Think I'll try the V, first.

Removes book from shelf, thumbs through it.

Here he is! "Leonardo da Vinci--A Self Portrait"! A bushy beard! Lady Luck, I thank you! Wherever you are, I thank you! Lem'me see what it says.

Reads, hurriedly, almost in a mumble, but loud enough for the audience to hear.

"Leonardo da Vinci (1452 - 1519) Italian painter and sculptor; an inventor of note, one of the greatest and most successful engineers of his time and perhaps the deepest thinker and most profound investigator into all the known branches of science of his age....

"He surpassed all his predecessors in the mastery he attained in the depicting of the mystical, the poetical, the sympathetic and the attractive in the human face ..."

What a guy! I'll show this to the reverend.

Turns volume face down on Ditchfield's desk, picks up Bible.

I guess I'd better read this Bible stuff and get it over with!

Leo reads slowly, thoughtfully. He becomes profoundly impressed. In his mind's eye, Leo sees the three groups of people about whom he reads. One after another they come on stage in pantomime-and then slowly fade from view. The order of entry and exit follows the Biblical lines Leo is reading. This, as follows:

(1) A weary Mary ("great with child") and Joseph, walking toward Bethlehem.

(2) Shepherds gathered beside a campfire, suddenly surrounded by angels.

(3) Three Wise Men, richly robed, appearing before wicked King Herod, who is seated on a magnificent throne.

LEO: *reading* "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city."

Enter Mary and Joseph.

"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; because he was of the house and lineage of David;

"To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. ..."

Leo pauses Hmmm-mm-m, This is right interesting! *Leo reads again*

Mary and Joseph exeunt.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night."

Enter shepherds.

"And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them."

Enter angels.

"And they were sore afraid." *Leo pauses* This is fantastic! *Leo reads again* ... "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.... Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger ..."

Leo stops reading I didn't know all this was in the Bible!

Shepherds, angels exeunt.

And here's more! This Matthew part! Let me read it!

Reads again. Enter Wise Men, Herod.

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem,

"Saying, 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.'

"... Herod ... was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

"... And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, 'Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.'...

"When they had heard the king, they departed ..."

Exeunt Wise Men and Herod. Leo reads on and on. Gradually his voice fades.

"... Lo, the star which they saw in the east went before them.... When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy...." *In normal tone* Never, never have I read anything to compare with this! No wonder Bill-the-Goat believes there is a God! *Reads*

"... They ... opened their treasures ... and presented him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh...."

Curtain

End of Act II

ACT III, Scene 1

Scene 1 - It is the Sunday evening before Christmas, at the Bluff City Methodist Church. The congregation has assembled, the choir is in place. A pianist is playing a medley of Christmas hymns. Rev. Ditchfield is seated near the pulpit. Behind him, screens conceal the set for the mini-drama, "The Unpainted Masterpiece," which the church members, and Leo, are to present.

The mini-drama set is the ample and cluttered studio of Leonardo da Vinci, in Florence, Italy, in the year 1506, when da Vinci was already highly acclaimed, and when he had spent some four years working on the now-famous "Mona Lisa" portrait. The studio is filled with sketches, half-finished works, a table, a couch, and the easel on which the "Mona Lisa" rests. Da Vinci is seated on a stool, looking at the portrait and ready to give it a light touch or two when the curtain opens.

The pianist ends his medley of Christmas selections and Rev. Ditchfield goes to the pulpit.

REV. D.: Let us begin our Christmas service this evening with that wonderful old hymn "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!" In my opinion, this is one of the finest, most stirring songs Charles Wesley ever wrote. And he wrote plenty of them--6,500, if you please! Surely this hymn, set to the music of Mendelssohn, will put us in the mood to enjoy the unique one-act play which is to follow.

Choir and congregation sing three verses and refrain of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing."

REV. D: Because of the influenza epidemic in our city, and because of other factors beyond our control, we were unable to print a program for the little anonymous drama. So, perhaps a word of introduction is in order.

The title is: "The Unpainted Masterpiece."

The time is the year 1506, on the first day of spring.

The place is Florence, Italy.

The characters are:

The renowned artist Leonardo da Vinci,

Lorenzo, an aged servant,

An Angelic Messenger,

Father Moretti, a local priest,

Signora Miseno, a seamstress,

Clare, Lorenzo's granddaughter, and

Leonardo's students.

As you know, Leonardo da Vinci was a versatile genius of the Renaissance. Today he is best remembered for two paintings: "The Last Supper," which he painted in a convent in Milan, Italy, and the world famous portrait called "The Mona Lisa," which hangs now in the Louvre, in Paris. It is said that Leonardo worked on "The Mona Lisa" portrait some four years, but he was never satisfied with it.

This play, tonight, is a fictional account of a mural he could have painted.

It is a pleasure to present "THE UNPAINTED MASTERPIECE!"

Begin Scene 2, without a break. Curtain opens on Leonardo's studio. He is working on "The Mona Lisa."

DA VINCI: *calling, without looking up* Lorenzo!

There's no response.

Lo-REN-zo! Where are you? You creeping snail!

Enter Lorenzo, in a dragging-of-the-feet slow shuffle.

LORENZO: *somewhat out of breath* I'm here, Master da Vinci. Right here.

DA VINCI: *without looking around* Father Moretti is forever telling me that "man does not live by bread alone." No doubt he is right. But I am one man who cannot work when his guts are growling!

LORENZO: No, Sir.

DA VINCI: Go buy me some bread. Some cheese. And some wine.

LORENZO: Yes, Sir.

DA VINCI: *as he hands coins to Lorenzo* Be sure you tell that scoundrel wine merchant I don't want something he strained up last week.

LORENZO: Yes, Sir. Which scoundrel?

DA VINCI: Signore Lomazzo, of course. He claims he gets his wine from Milan. You do remember how glorious the wine of Milan tastes, don't you?

LORENZO: Yes, Sir.

Exits, slowly. Da Vinci stands up, lays aside palette and brush, stretches.

DA VINCI: Ah, my weary bones! I'll never get this portrait right. It's her eyes! Yes, that's it. Her eyes! For the life of me I can't do her eyes!

I think I'll close my own eyes and take a rest, while I wait for that foot-dragging old Lorenzo. *Lies down on couch.*

I ought to get me a younger servant. But, if I hired a young fellow, what would become of old Lorenzo? He's been with me since I learned to walk.

Yawns

Fact is, he probably taught me to walk ...

Voice fades, sleeps. Enter Angel Messenger.

ANGEL MESSENGER: I hope this is the right place! Gabriel was not very specific. He just said to go down to Florence, Italy and visit the famous Leonardo da Vinci. He didn't even tell me what to say. He just said that down here on Earth it would be the first day of spring.

Looks carefully at the sleeping da Vinci.

Yes! That's the man. Just look at him! Leonardo da Vinci, the greatest artist in all Italy, sleeping his time away!

Examines portrait on easel.

Let's have a look at what he's working on. Hmm-mm-m, the portrait of a pretty woman. Oh, yes! It is beautiful! Hmm-mm-- there's an aura of mystery about it. It's in her eyes.

Ah, think what such a gifted artist could paint for the Divine One. I'll tell him so! Yes! I'll tell him, in no uncertain terms. I'll propose a masterpiece, as yet unpainted.

Returns to Leonardo's couch.

Leonardo, it is my duty to remind you of your responsibility. There is an unpainted masterpiece that you should paint for God and for your fellow man!

Of course you did that magnificent scene of THE LAST SUPPER, and you've painted the Madonna at least twice.

Now, you must undertake a new work: The Holy Child in Bethlehem! Paint the Blessed Bambino wrapped in swaddling, lying in the manger, with the Virgin Mother bending over Him, Joseph at her side, the shepherds and Orient Kings offering gifts on bended knee. Perhaps even the animals of the stable, bowing down.

You can do it, Leonardo! It is an unpainted masterpiece just waiting for your brush! Then, through the ages, all who see this work will--in the mind's eye and in the heart--see the Holy Christ Child.

Before you say no, consider this:

Angels told the shepherds of Bethlehem how to find the Newborn Saviour. A great star guided Wise Men to His side. Now, though, it is almost impossible for any man to find his way to Bethlehem and to God, unless another man becomes his guide.

Be a guide, Leonardo! Do not delay. You are a man of 54 years, already. So, do not delay. I repeat: do not delay!

Angel exits, Leonardo wakes with a start. Enter Lorenzo.

DA VINCI: *crying out* I'll do it! I'll do it! I won't delay! No! No! I won't delay!

Lorenzo, much alarmed, dumps his parcels, starts shaking da Vinci.

LORENZO: Master! You're not yourself! You--You must be dreaming!

DA VINCI: *muttering* No delay! No! There'll be no delay! I'll begin-- *recognizes Lorenzo.* Oh! It's you! Yes, it's you, Lorenzo!

LORENZO: Sure, Master! It is me. You were having a bad dream!

DA VINCI: *quietly* No. Not a dream. It was a vision!

LORENZO: A vision?

DA VINCI: Yes, a vision. Go get Father Moretti.

LORENZO: *wide-eyed* You're going to die? *Crosses himself.*

DA VINCI: No, I'm not going to die. Not for some time, that is.--God forbid!--You just step up the street to the church and tell Father Moretti that I need to see him, right away.

Lorenzo picks up bread, fingers cheese.

LORENZO: But this is a little loaf of bread and not much cheese. There won't be enough! You know how Father Moretti likes to eat! If he comes--

DA VINCI: This is no time to think of eating. Go get Father, and on the way back stop at Signora Miseno's shop and bring her, too. I'm going to do this painting up right!

LORENZO: Master, Signora Miseno is just a seamstress! You're going to paint the portrait of a seamstress?

DA VINCI: *as he gently pushes Lorenzo out the door* Just go do what I told you.

Lorenzo, completely bewildered, exits slowly. Da Vinci begins pacing to and fro. As he talks to himself, a reflective mood comes upon him.

DA VINCI: This will be a challenge. Every detail must be authentic. That's why I have to ask Father Moretti's advice.

The colors of the costumes--very important! If only I can make Signora Miseno understand that. Of course the Virgin Mary must be in blue--to represent innocence, purity.

The models? I'll have to get models somehow, somewhere. My pupils! Of course! They can pose for me. I do enough for that crew. Now they can do something for me!

But there's the Blessed Virgin--I don't know where on earth I'll find her model.

Stops beside table.

This is a skimpy slice of cheese and a pitiful loaf of bread. Lorenzo was right.

Moves food and wine out of the way, moves Mona Lisa and easel.

Mona Lisa, my lovely lady, you'll have to move aside for the time being. One of these days I will capture the very depth of your secret soul on this piece of canvas. But not now.

Carefully drapes cloth over portrait.

Enter Father Moretti, Signora Miseno-trailed by Lorenzo.

FR. MORETTI: Leonardo! What goes, my Son? You're not ill, I hope.

SIGNORA MISENO: *whispering* We couldn't understand old Lorenzo! Is there some emergency?

DA VINCI: No, no. I'm not ill, and there's no emergency.

FR. MORETTI: Then what--

DA VINCI: I have decided to undertake--without delay--what I hope will be a glorious work.

FR. M.: I see.

SIGNORA M.: That will be good.

DA VINCI: But now I'm going to do this new painting in strictest secrecy, for it could turn out to be a failure of the first magnitude!

FR. M.: *laughing* Listen to him talk! He never had a failure in his life!

DA VINCI: I'm serious, Father. And I need your advice.

Turns to seamstress

Signora, you must sew the costumes for the models. How many depends on what Father Moretti tells us.

SIGNORA M.: Ah, costumes!

FR. M.: You want my advice on doing a painting? My Son, you flatter me! I know absolutely nothing about artwork. Nothing!

DA VINCI: Ah, but you know things I need to know in order to make this new work authentic, down to the smallest detail.

You see, this will be the Blessed Bambino in Bethlehem, asleep in the manger, with many--

FR. MORETTI: *with surprise and delight* Oh! I had no idea! God bless you!

SIGNORA M.: *ecstatically, hands clasped together* Ohh-hh-h-- The Bam-bee-no!

You're going to paint Him!

FR. M.: This will be fantastic!

DA VINCI: What I want you to do, Father, is to tell me all you can about the birth of the Holy Child--such as how many angels came down from heaven that night, and about the shepherds, what was said, what was done. And, something about the great star in the sky. All such as that.

FR. M.: Goodness! This will require some thought!

DA VINCI: Here, sit down. Both of you. Make yourselves comfortable. Lorenzo, bring another chair. And a cushion for Signora Miseno.

Guests settle down.

Lorenzo, you come listen. No, on second thought, you'd better go round up my pupils and tell them to assemble at Signora Miseno's shop--That'll be all right, won't it?--immediately after the noon hour.

Seamstress nods.

LORENZO: You want all your pupils? From everywhere?

DA VINCI: No, no. Just the ones living here in Florence. Tell them they're to be fitted for costumes so they can model for me.

LORENZO: Yes, Sir. *Starts shuffling toward door, returns to Leonardo.* Master, my Granddaughter, my Clare-- She is very beautiful. Maybe my little Clare could be the Blessed Virgin for you!

DA VINCI: Maybe so. We'll see, Lorenzo. Hurry on, now.

Lorenzo exits, murmuring,

LORENZO: Little Clare is so beautiful. Named for a saint too.

Da Vinci sits down with his guests.

DA VINCI: Now, Father. Start with the Bethlehem stable. What kind of stable was it, do you suppose?

FR. M.: It was probably a cave on the outskirts of the village, where shepherds and others could shelter their animals in bad weather.

The Scriptures indicate that Bethlehem was crowded when Joseph and the Virgin arrived. It actually says that the Blessed Virgin brought forth her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger "because there was no room for them in the inn."

DA VINCI: Swaddling clothes? What kind of clothes was that?

FR. M.: Signora Miseno, you can tell Leonardo that better than I can.

SIGNORA M.: Swaddling bands were strips of soft, white cloth wrapped round and round a newborn baby's legs and arms, and his body--to make his bones straight and strong. I've heard that in olden times it was the custom to rub an infant's skin with a little bit of oil and salt, and then wrap on the swaddling bands.

DA VINCI: Now that's the kind of thing I need to know. I'd better take down some notes. *gets writing material* Now, Father, let's talk about the angels and the shepherds.

FR. M.: The Scriptures record that on that Holy Night the shepherds of Judaea were out in the field with their flock when an "angel of the Lord" came to them and "the glory of the Lord shone round about them."

The shepherds were frightened half to death, but the angel reassured them and told them that Christ the Lord was born! The angel even explained how to find the Holy Infant!

DA VINCI: Then I'll need to paint in one angel?

FR. M.: No, no! A host of angels came down. A multitude!

DA VINCI: Ah, that makes a difference. Signora, get plenty of white cloth for the angels.

SIGNORA M.: I will.

FR. M.: Those angels sang "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

That's one reason we believe that peace is possible in this old world!

DA VINCI: You mentioned that the shepherds saw "the glory of the Lord," that it "shone round about them." What was the "glory of the Lord?"

FR. M.: *seriously* Ah, Leonardo, son, I must confess I don't know. In my heart I've always assumed that the shepherds saw a great light. A light so bright, so dazzling, so brilliant, that they were overwhelmed!

DA VINCI: I wonder if it will be possible for me to portray that glory? I may try it. I'm not afraid to try anything!

FR. M.: That's the spirit!

DA VINCI: Let's talk a bit more about the shepherds. When they went to find the Christ Child, did they carry Him gifts?

FR. M.: I'm almost sure they did. Perhaps a lamb, or a basket of fruit. Maybe a pair of turtledoves. Whatever they had.

DA VINCI: *writing notes* A lamb, fruit, and turtledoves.

FR. M.: Of course all Christendom knows what the Orient Kings brought: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

DA VINCI: Yes. Now, Signora, in regard to the three kings-when you get to making their robes, spare no expense. I envision them as being rich, regal, proud. Am I right, Father?

FR. M.: They were no peasants! I can tell you that. Through the centuries many conflicting stories and traditions have swirled around them.

Some have called them learned magi, who studied the stars.

Others say they were wise men, the advisers of kings. Still others, that they were kings in their own right. Where they came from we don't know. Perhaps it was, as one legend goes, from "The Land-Between-Two-Rivers." We don't even know, for sure, that there were three of them. The important thing is that they

followed the star of the Divine King, and they found Him. Some men live out their lives and never find God.

DA VINCI: Both of you have been a big help to me, and I know I'll have to call on you again.

Priest, seamstress rise to go; da Vinci stands.

FR. M.: Any time, my Son, any time.

SIGNORA M.: What color do you want the Blessed Virgin to wear?

DA VINCI: A sky blue.

SIGNORA M.: I've got the very piece for her! I'll be back to tell you about my grandbaby! *Exits*

FR. M.: Leonardo, I must commend you. This could become your greatest work.

DA VINCI: Don't forget it's a secret! I'm not even going to let old Lorenzo watch me work on it. But I promise that you will be the first to see the finished product!

Sees priest to the door.

FR. M.: I suppose it will take you several weeks.

DA VINCI: Not weeks. Months! It took me three years to complete THE LAST SUPPER, that mural in Milan. I'm sure you've seen it.

FR. M.: Yes. It is remarkable! Well, Good Day, my fortunate, gifted Friend!

DA VINCI: Good Day, Father.

Priest exits.

I can't wait to get started! It will be a mural. A mural that can be moved.

Should it be life size? Yes, yes! I'll make it life size!

There's no need to fool around! I'll go buy the canvas! Now! That angel said: "Do not delay!" She said it three times!

As Da Vinci starts toward the door, he almost bumps into Lorenzo, who is ushering in his granddaughter Clare. She is shy, ill at ease; Lorenzo is much excited.

LORENZO: Here she is! See? I told you she's beautiful!

DA VINCI: Lorenzo? What are you--

LORENZO: It's Clare! She's my granddaughter!

DA VINCI: All right, but--

LORENZO: She can be the Virgin! For your new painting! Remember? Clare will pose for you! Won't you, Darling?

CLARE: *twisting her hands, nervously* Yes, Grandfather.

DA VINCI: *looking girl up and down, with critical eye* Well, you do seem about the right age. Your features are-- Well, let's say your grandfather is right, mainly, that is. I think--

LORENZO: *eagerly* She was named for a saint! Tell him, Darling! Tell Signore da Vinci how we named you for Saint Clare! Saint Clare of Assisi!

CLARE: I can't remember what she--

DA VINCI: That's all right, Child. Never you mind. I know all about the little nun who founded the order of the "Poor Clares."

Now, the seamstress next door will fit you in a costume. And your grandfather will tell you when I'm ready for you to come to pose. All right?

CLARE: Oh, thank you, thank you, Signore!

LORENZO: Thank you forever!

DA VINCI: I'm in a hurry right now. I'll talk to you both later. *Exits*

Lorenzo grabs granddaughter, gives her a bear hug. Arm in arm, the two dance round and round with glee.

LORENZO: You'll be the Blessed Mary! My granddaughter will be the Virgin in a masterpiece!

Two exit.

End of Scene 2

Begin Scene 3, without a break

Scene 3. It is exactly, to the day, one year later, March 21, 1507. In da Vinci's studio little has changed. His Bethlehem mural is hidden from view by an improvised curtain. Da Vinci is working behind the curtain; his feet are visible. Lorenzo is puttering around--putting fruit in a large wooden bowl.

The hidden mural is composed of some dozen or more Biblical characters, each brightly costumed and posed in a traditional Bethlehem stable scene, as was common on Christmas cards a few decades ago. These characters are:

Mary and Joseph (beside the manger)

Christ Child (wrapped in swaddling, in manger)

First Shepherd (holding basket of fruit)

Second Shepherd (holding cage with two live doves)

Shepherd Boy (holding small goat)

Three Angels

Two Cherubs

Three Kings (bearing gifts)

These "painted people" should become motionless when Da Vinci unveils his work and remain so until the outer curtain is drawn. They have no lines. Lights may be used to advantage to portray "the glory of the Lord" which Da Vinci wanted to portray.

DA VINCI: *calling from behind protective curtain* Lorenzo?

LORENZO: Yes, Master?

DA VINCI: Today is the day!

LORENZO: So it is! The first day of spring! I'm glad, for we've had a hard winter!

Da Vinci comes from behind curtain.

DA VINCI: I'm not talking about spring or winter! It's the painting! Today it is finished! Go tell Father Moretti and Signora Miseno!

LORENZO: Can I see it? Can I see my little Clare?

DA VINCI: Not yet, not yet! Not till Father and the seamstress get here. We'll have a private unveiling! That's when you can look at it.

LORENZO: Whatever you say.

Lorenzo exits. Da Vinci sits down, as if exhausted.

DA VINCI: Ah, me. It has taken me one year-to the day. I remember it was on the first day of spring, last year, that I dipped my brush in paint and made the first stroke. Sometimes, it was difficult. At other times, I felt as if that angel were guiding my hand if such a thing could be possible. And on the days Lorenzo's Clare posed for me, it was as if the Virgin herself were there. When she cradled the Miseno babe in her arms and laid him on the hay, I was so overcome I couldn't-- I couldn't-- I just couldn't paint. Even now, the tears roll down my cheeks.

Wipes eyes. Enter Father Moretti.

FR. M.: Morning, Leonardo! I was just coming over here when I met old Lorenzo.

He was so excited he was red in the face! Said you've finished the mural!

DA VINCI: Morning, Father. Yes. It's finished. And, like I promised, you'll be the first to see it--that is, along with our faithful seamstress and old Lorenzo.

Seamstress enters hurriedly, much aflutter. Lorenzo shuffles in.

SIGNORA M.: Is it true? Is it ready?

DA VINCI: Yes, Signora!

SIGNORA M.: I can't wait! *Turns to priest* Morning, Father.

FR. M.: Good morning, Signora Miseno. You seem as anxious as I am to see what our renowned friend has accomplished.

DA VINCI: Here it is! *Starts moving curtain.* Give me a hand, Lorenzo.

Two remove curtain, quickly turn toward mural.

Priest and seamstress are so amazed as to be almost overwhelmed. Both cross themselves as they gaze in awe at the mural. Both sink to their knees as they express disbelief, admiration.

FR. M.: Oh, my God! My God! Look at that! I can't believe it!

SIGNORA M.: The Bambino! The angels! And the shepherds! The kings! Oh, how beautiful! Beautiful!

LORENZO: *kneeling, crossing himself* There's my Clare! No! It's the Virgin! It's not my Clare! She's the Blessed Virgin! She is both!

FR. M.: *shaking his head* Never have I seen the like! It is a masterpiece!

SIGNORA M: *murmuring* Beautiful! Beautiful!

Da Vinci kneels, bows his head. He says nothing.

Church Curtain

There is no break. As soon as the Da Vinci mural is unveiled, Rev. Ditchfield's church audience applauds loudly. Rev. D. stands to speak.

REV. D.: Ah, friends, what can I say? I hardly know what to say. Except--that this little play has blessed our hearts. Let me invite all of you to come down to the recreation hall to meet the cast and to congratulate each of them. The benediction will come later. Thank you.

Audience disbands, Ditchfield exits with group.

End of Scene 3, ACT III

Scene 4

Scene 4. Later Sunday evening, in Rev. Ditchfield's study. The wall clock reads 11:45. Mrs. Ditchfield is alone, busy spreading sheets and blankets on the couch so that Leo can use it as a bed. She puts the pillow in place, steps back to admire her work.

MRS. D.: There! That ought to do it! I imagine that boy is so exhausted after the play that he could sleep on a foot-log!

Enter Rev. Ditchfield and Leo. Leo is still in his da Vinci costume. Rev. D. is talking.

REV. D.: The play was just great! And I want to tell you again that you were a perfect Leonardo da Vinci!

LEO: You're kind to say so. I dropped two lines, but maybe it wasn't noticed.

MRS. D.: Oh, you were good! The other players were, too, of course.

REV. D.: The congregation was just carried away.

LEO: I'm glad.

REV. D.: *glancing at clock* Well! It's late. It'll soon be midnight. So we'd better all get off to sleep. Tomorrow will be another day.

MRS. D.: Da Vinci, I mean Leo! I have spread two blankets on here for you. I'm sorry we have to put you on the couch; but we didn't know our son and his wife and their eight kids were coming! Not tonight, that is. We were expecting them Wednesday.

LEO: That's all right, Ma'am. I can sleep anywhere! And thank you very much.

MRS. D.: Well, Good Night!

REV. D.: Good Night, Son. I'll stop this clock for you. It strikes terribly loud. *Exits with Mrs. D.*

LEO: Good Night!

Leo sits down on the couch, takes off his shoes.

LEO: Ah, me! What a day, what a night! But, like the reverend said, "Tomorrow will be another day." Maybe it will be a good day for me. -- I don't know what to do tomorrow! If I had some clothes and some money, it would be a different matter.

Gets into bed.

I can't stay here, but I can't leave! Not in my "zebra" stripes, or in the Santa Claus rig, or in this da Vinci outfit! Ah, me! Tomorrow I'll think of something. Maybe.

Drifts off to sleep. Enter the Angel Messenger who appeared in Leonardo da Vinci's dream.

MESSENGER: Leonardo da Vinci, you should be working on that painting that Warden Greene wanted you to do. Remember? There are to be two prisoners planting tulip bulbs beside the Prison Yard fence. The guard at the gate should look as if he is in a trance. And you must be careful of the colors. The judge's wife said to plant the bulbs in such a way that they'll bloom out as: "Red. Yellow. Purple. And then a daffodil."

Leo flounces about, groans, sits upright, cries out, as in a nightmare.

LEO: Red! Yellow! Purple! And then a daffodil!

Angel Messenger soothes Leo back to sleep.

MESSENGER: No, no, poor fellow! Don't be upset. I was only teasing!

Tonight you are Leonardo da Vinci, the artist!

Tomorrow you will be Loonie Leo, the escaped prisoner. That is all right. You must face life as it is. So, this is what you must do: tell the reverend who you are.

Do not delay! Do not delay! Do not delay!

Angel Messenger exits. Leo sleeps on, fitfully. Enter Rev. D., carrying a cup of coffee.

REV. D.: *cheerfully* Time to wake up! Breakfast is ready. Here, my wife sent you this coffee.

Leo rouses himself.

LEO: Well, thank you very much. *Takes cup.*

REV. D.: Did you sleep any on that old couch?

LEO: Yes, Sir. Some. Reverend, there's something I have to tell you.

REV. D.: Yes?

LEO: Well, it's sort of hard to tell you. Part of it's a dream I had last night. In the dream I saw the same angel messenger that da Vinci saw, and she said to tell you right away!

REV.: Yes?

LEO: Reverend Ditchfield, I am a prisoner from the State Prison!

REV. D.: I know, Son.

LEO: You know who I am?

REV. D.: I've been knowing since Friday that a prisoner disappeared. And I knew it had to be you.

Somehow, something told me to be quiet. To wait.

Now, I know it must have been that line in Psalm 46 which says "Be still and know that I am God."

So, Friday I didn't tell anybody where you came from.

Saturday I didn't tell.

Sunday I didn't tell. Not Warden Greene, not Judge Oliver or Mrs. Oliver, not even my wife!

The result is: you and I are the only people who know where you are!

LEO: *much amazed* We are?

REV. D. I honestly believe it was God who helped you escape. He let you play the "eminent hypnotist" and then Santa Claus, and then the famous da Vinci!

LEO: Is that the way God does things?

REV. D.: Sometimes.

LEO: My friend Bill--over at the prison we call him Billy-the-Goat--Bill is always praying to God to get him and me out of that rotten place. And every time Bill mentions it, I tell him there is no God. But now I'm not so sure. Maybe there is a God, and He has answered half of Bill's prayer. My half. What do you think?

REV. D.: Leo, there is a God. He answers whole prayers and halves of prayers. Don't ever underestimate God!

Come on, let's go eat breakfast. Then, go by the church and get you some clothes from our Helping Hand Wardrobe. And--

LEO: And then?

REV. D.: Then, I think you should turn yourself in so that I can get the ball rolling for a new trial for you and Bill. God needs help in these matters. And that's the only way we can help Him.

LEO: Turn myself in? All right! I'll do it!

REV. D.: Great!

LEO: It seems the only way. Besides, there's Bill. I have to talk to Bill.

Rev. D. and Leo exit, arm in arm. End of Scene 4.

Scene 5 (denouement)

Scene 5. Later Monday morning in the exercise yard at the State Prison. Bill and Leo are in the yard, near the side gate, with wheelbarrow and one sack of bulbs. Bill is in his uniform; Leo wears a civilian outfit. They are planting bulbs.

At the same time--in the background--Rev. Ditchfield and Warden Greene are walking across the corner of the yard, well out of earshot of the boys. The guard at the gate takes no notice.

REV. D.: Warden, do you think there'll be any problem?

WARDEN: None, whatsoever. I've already talked to Judge Oliver. He's going to handle the whole thing.

REV. D.: Then both of the boys will be released?

WARDEN: Released, into your custody.

REV. D.: Right away?

WARDEN: Before the sun goes down.

REV. D.: Great!

Men exit.

BILL: Now, Leo, don't you get these tulip bulbs mixed up! Remember that lady said to plant 'em "Red. Yellow. Purple. And then a daffodil!"

LEO: How could I ever forget!

BILL: Tell me, Leo, did you come back just to help me plant the rest of these things?

LEO: No. I came back to tell you that you're right!

BILL: Right? Right about what?

LEO: About God. There is a God!

BILL: Yeah, of course! Remember I kept telling you?

LEO: You told me, but I didn't pay any attention. It's just since Friday that I've found out about God. He does answer folks' prayers.

BILL: Sure! I've been knowing that all my life.

LEO: I learned something else--from that play I told you about.

BILL: What was that?

LEO: I found out that every man ought to paint a picture--or do something--to show the way to God.

BILL: Everybody ought to paint a picture? What're you talking about?

LEO: In the play, the great artist Leonardo da Vinci had a dream. And an angel came to him and told him he should paint a great masterpiece showing the Christ Child in the manger, in Bethlehem.

Then the angel explained to da Vinci that it's nearly impossible for a person to find God, unless somebody shows him the way.

BILL: Did he paint the picture?

LEO: He sure did.

BILL: That was nice.

LEO: Bill, you and the reverend painted the picture for me.

BILL: I'm real glad. Hand me four more bulbs.

Leo starts to pass the bulbs, one at a time.

No, Loonie! The red comes first! It's supposed to be:

"Red. Yellow. Purple. Then a daffodil!"

CURTAIN

The End

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