

A CHRISTMAS IN REVERSE

(excerpt)

**by Amy Russell
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Scene 4

(Scene opens on Barb and Benny in the kitchen wiping table and cleaning up as the clock chimes midnight.)

Barb: Midnight! Whew! Christmas is a lot of work and it's not even here yet! Let's see...the pies are all made: pumpkin, apple, peach, chocolate cream, cherry and the best of all--coconut cream! The turkey is dressed. The potatoes are peeled--You'd think we were expecting an army instead of just my parents! I guess I've got as much done as I can do, so I'm calling it a night so I can have enough energy to keep up with my THREE kids in the morning!

Benny: I'll be right on your heels. I just want to add a couple more things to the kids' stockings.

Barb: I don't see how you can fit another thing in them--they're already about to burst!

Benny: They're not big things--just a couple trinkets I saw at the store today. They were only a few dollars--I couldn't resist! Remember, this is going to be the best Christmas ever!

Barb: (laughs) If you say so! Of all the kids I've got, you're definitely the biggest! Goodnight!

Benny: Goodnight! (pulls a couple of toys out of a shopping bag and takes one out of the box and starts playing with it) Wow! Did you see that? I should've got one of these for myself! (continues to play with toy)

Boy, I'm getting worse instead of better--Maybe it'll help if I rest my eyes for a couple of minutes.

(Goes to chair and sits down. Lights dim. Benny is sleeping in chair. Clock strikes one.)

Angel: Benny!

Benny: Be there in a minute--just gotta finish these stockings...(dozes back off)

Angel: (touches his arm) Benny!

Benny: (rouses) Be there in a minute! (Benny begins to rise from chair, not seeing the Angel. He suddenly sees her and falls back into the chair, startled) Whooo-o-o are you?

Angel: I'm someone God has sent to help open your eyes.

Benny: Well, I guess you've done your job! Thanks for stopping by! (waves goodbye to Angel)

Angel: My job is to open your spiritual eyes. God uses many different ways to wake people up spiritually. Sometimes, it's bad circumstances. Sometimes it's a nagging sense that all your efforts to be happy are in vain. For a very few, He uses dreams and visions. You are one of the few.

Benny: Dreams? I'm not a big believer in dreams. Are you sure you have the right address?

Angel: By the end of tonight, you will be! In your dreams tonight, I will be accompanying you to three different scenes. When the clock strikes two, we will visit a scene from a Christmas past. When the clock strikes three, we will go to a present Christmas scene, and when the clock strikes four, I will take you to a future Christmas. (Clock strikes two) Follow me, I have a lot of work to do!...

Scene 6

(Scene opens with Benny waking up coughing violently)

Benny: What's going on? Why is everything so smoky? I've got to get out of here! Angel, where are you?

(Benny staggers offstage and kneels on ground. Sirens start wailing.)

Angel, please explain to me what's happening. (Benny turns to find angel. Focuses on pastor sitting in chair at right stage. Phone rings.)

Pastor: Hello, this is Pastor Brown....Good morning, Mrs. Little...Yes, I did hear all the sirens and saw the smoke...What an awful tragedy-and on Christmas day!...You say both the children and Barb were still in bed? I hope the smoke got them before the flames did. How awful! What about Benny? Did they find him in the house, too?...Thank God, at least one of them got out! Which hospital is he in?...Oh, my. Well, I'll head over there immediately. Maybe I can get there in time. Thank you for calling!

Benny: What has happened? A fire? Angel, please tell me what's going on! I'm sure they were discussing my family.

(Angel steps out of shadows)

Benny: Oh, I never thought I'd be happy to see you! Am I right? Was it my Barb and my children that died in those flames. Am I the man in the hospital?

(Angel beckons him to follow)

Where are you taking me? Are we going to the hospital?

Angel: There's no need for that now.

Benny: But, why?

Angel: Because the man will die before the pastor ever reaches the hospital.

Benny: Then, where are we going?

Angel: I must take you to the only place I CAN take a good, moral sinner. Look ahead... (ahead lies a door with "Hell" written on it.)

Benny: (falls to his knees) No! There's been some mistake! I'm not really a sinner! I've done a few things that weren't exactly right, but I have never stolen or killed or anything like that. I went to church almost every Sunday and even put some money in the offering plate. I was as good or better than most of the people I went to church with! Surely, this isn't where I belong!

Angel: Unfortunately, you'll find a lot of people like yourself here. On earth, people judge themselves by others around them or by what they feel is right and wrong. In eternity, they are judged by the Word of God that never changes. 'To whom much has been given, much will be required.'

Let me quote just a few passages by which you have been judged:

"To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

And, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death!"

Things that seem so important on earth will seem so trivial in eternity. And, things that seemed so trivial during the earthly life may seem so enormous in eternity. Hell is full of good people who just weren't good enough.

Once that door is opened, you'll hear the cries of millions begging for mercy. But, in Hell, there is no mercy. (steps toward door with hand outstretched)

Benny: No, Angel! Please don't open it yet! I can't bear it!

Angel: If I don't open the door, then you must look through the peephole to see the other side. I think you will see some faces you recognize. Those are the souls who followed you here. (Benny pulls back. Angel gives him a push) Go!

Benny: (steps cautiously to the door and peers in) It's so hard to see anything through all the smoke. Wait, I see a dark-faced man--who is he?

Angel: That is the chief that died without meeting the white man's God. Many will be responsible for this soul, including you, because they did not do their part to see him saved. Do you see anyone else you know?

Benny:(stares in and then falls at the angel's feet, weeping) No! No! Not my children! Please, Angel, tell me that wasn't Jenny and Nathan's faces I saw in there!

Angel: I cannot. They are only a couple of the people that have watched your life and followed in your footsteps. No man lives to himself and no man dies to himself. Eternity will be filled with hateful words and screaming accusations from those you called your friends. In Hell, there will be no friends!

Benny:Please, Angel. Just give me one more chance to save myself and my family!

Angel: It is appointed to man ONCE to die, and after that the judgment. In Hell, there will be no second chances. And Benny, once you step through that door, it will shut behind you forever, because in Hell, there will be no end. I have fulfilled my duties and must return now. Goodbye, Benny. May the Lord help your eyes to be opened while there is time.

Benny:No! No! Angel, don't leave me! Please don't leave me! Please, God, give me one more chance!

(Lights dim and Benny returns to living room scene while song is being sung. Lights come up on Benny sleeping in chair with toy in his hand.)

Scene 7

Benny:Don't leave me here alone! Please... (opens eyes and looks around and gasps) She's gone. And I'm HERE!! Right here in my own dear chair and my own dear house! No smoke, no fire! I'm right here in my own living room looking at a beautiful Christmas tree loaded with presents...why, would you look at those presents! There's enough here for an entire orphanage of children!! It would be a shame to waste them all on just two! Let's see here... (Benny quickly goes through the presents and chooses several out and places them in a pile beside the chair.) There-that's much better. Now, what should I do with them?...Oh, what a great idea! Where's that phone?

(Benny finds phone and dials number)

Mrs. L:(tired, groggy) Hello...

Benny:Merry Christmas, Mrs. Little!! Isn't it wonderful to be alive? (laughs out loud with glee)

(Dial tone as Mrs. Little hangs up)

Benny:Hmmm...she didn't sound too good. Hope nothing's wrong. Better call back... (dials again)

Mrs. L:(sigh) Hello?

Benny: Good, you're there! I say, Merry Christmas to you, Mrs. Little! This IS going to be the best one ever! (laughs again)

(Dial tone again as she hangs up)

Benny: I'm beginning to think she's doing this on purpose. Well, Mrs. Little, don't think I'm going to let you spend Christmas in the duldrums! (dials again)

Mrs. L: Young man, I don't know who you are or how you got my number, but I feel I should tell you that God loves you and He'll turn your life around if you'll let Him!

Benny: You know, if you'd said that yesterday, I'd have hung up on you! But today, I say, "Thank God! He has!" Say, Mrs. Little, I was thinking...well, I was just wondering...Have you already gotten someone to drop your gifts off to the Richards? If you haven't, I was just thinking that I could just pick the gifts up at your house and then pick up Mrs. Richards and the children and bring them here for a real Christmas dinner! But, I don't want to steal a blessing from somebody else if they've already volunteered....Hello, are you there?... Mrs. Little?

Mrs. L: Is this...? No, surely not. Ummm....may I ask who this is?

Benny: Why I got so excited, I didn't even introduce myself! This is Benny! Now...what do you say? Maybe you could let Mrs. Richards know I'll be there around 11:00 to get them?

Mrs. L: That would be wonderful, Benny! But, would you mind if I waited until the sun comes up? And, should I tell her to bring anything--a jar of peanut butter, maybe?

Benny: (laughs again) No, no! We've got so much stuff ready, my wife says we could feed an army! In fact, if you don't mind, I'll just pick you up along with the presents and you can join us, as well! No one should spend Christmas alone!

Mrs. L: Thank you, Benny and Merry Christmas to you! I'll look forward to seeing you! Goodbye!

Benny: Ha! That was great! Now watch this! (picks up phone)

Pastor: (tired) Hello?...

Benny: Merry Christmas, Pastor Brown! This is Benny and I just wanted to call to let you know that the house is still standing and we're all fine! In fact, I'm having the time of my life!

Pastor: Okay...Benny, do you have any idea what time it is?

Benny: (looks at clock) Sure, it's 5:05. I'm sorry, were you busy?

Pastor: (sighs) No, not at all. Benny, are you okay? I mean--do you need a ride home or is there something else I can do for you?

Benny: As a matter of fact, there is! You see, I just remembered that I have a CD that's been sitting in the bank collecting interest for a few years. What I'd really like to do is to cash that in and give the entire amount towards the missions truck project. I know it's a little late and it's not a ton,

but can I still give it? I think with the interest, it's about \$5300....Hello...Pastor, are you there?

Pastor: Benny, I'm speechless! I was just tallying up the totals last night and figured we needed roughly \$5300 to reach our goal! That's incredible. I say, Praise the Lord, Benny!

Benny:(excited) Praise the Lord!

Pastor: I say, Thank God!

Benny: Thank God!

Pastor: It just hit me that this would be a perfect time to call the missionary--it's still daylight there! Just let me know if there's anything you need for taxes or whatever! This is absolutely wonderful!! God bless you, Benny! Have a merry, merry Christmas!

Benny: I will--the best Christmas ever!

(Benny hangs up the phone, then dances a little jig.) Whew! I haven't had this much fun since I put that big bullfrog in Susie Kline's lunchbox!

(Nathan walks in with a baseball ball raised. Jenny walks cautiously behind him.)

Nathan: Dad, is everything okay? What was all that racket?

Benny: Nathan! Jenny! Look at you! I didn't think I'd ever see you again! You look wonderful! Merry Christmas, kids! (rushes over and gives them a bear hug)

Jenny: I think we need to call for Mom. This is REALLY weird! Mom, come quick!!

(Barb rushes in.)

Barb: Benny, what's happened?! Has there been a burglary? Oh, no! What happened to all of our presents? Did they hurt you? Are you okay?

Benny: Oh, Barb! I've never been better! God has been so good to me! He's opened my eyes to see how mixed up my priorities have been. I'm so sorry for the miserable example I've given you all to follow. Last night, God gave me a new lease on life and has given me a chance to change the direction we've been going!

By the way, you won't need to worry about all that good food going to waste! We're going to have some very special guests for dinner! And, I've taken the liberty to designate a few of the gifts for our special friends. Don't worry~there will still be plenty for all of you. Christmas never should have been about all the gifts and festivities. Those are just a reminder of the gift Jesus already gave to us when He came to earth! Also, I've made arrangements with the pastor, and the church has met the goal for the mission truck! Isn't that wonderful!! I can't remember feeling so much joy, so much peace, so much contentment!! It's like I never really lived! This really is going to be the best Christmas ever! Merry Christmas, everyone!!