

The Gift  
by  
Josh Hornbeck

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Originally produced by Life Center Ministries in Tacoma, WA.

THE GIFT was commissioned by Life Center Ministries as part of THE SINGING CHRISTMAS TREE. It was first performed on December 3, 2011. The piece was directed by Josh Hornbeck. The music director was Kenton Lee. The stage manager was Julie Spargo. The set designer was Colin Magnuson. The lighting designer was Brandon Stanley. The sound operator was Gary Kanz. Production oversight was by Melanie Grassi and Dean Curry. The cast was as follows:

MILAN ABERNATHY.....Tena DuBerry  
OLIVE SMITH.....Sarah J. Eagen

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**Milan Abernathy**, a rich and well-to-do older woman.  
**Olive Smith**, Milan's personal assistant.

**SETTING**

On one side of the stage, a wealthy and posh apartment. On the other side of the stage, a rescue mission. In the middle we see a park.

**TIME**

The present. Christmas.

### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

THE GIFT was designed to be part of a larger Christmas production featuring choral and solo musical numbers. Feel free to add whatever musical numbers you see fit. You can also adjust a few of the lines to make this a one-act play without musical interludes.

The nativity in Act Two is meant to be silent (except for Milan's lines at the end) and accompanied by music.

## Act One

We find ourselves caught between two worlds. On one side of the stage, we see the facade and interior of a wealthy and posh apartment. On the other side of the stage, we see a run down rescue mission.

The play begins with an energetic musical number. This first song is bustling and full of life. It's a big production number full of dancing and singing. Throughout, we see MILAN up in her room, doing a little busy-work around the house. She looks out of her window, expecting to see someone on their way. She sits to read a little out of a fashion magazine or tries on a new hat or coat. She restlessly paces. She is obviously waiting for someone.

As the song ends, OLIVE enters with an armful of groceries and fights her way through the crowd to arrive at MILAN's front door.

MILAN pulls out her cell phone and dials.

MILAN

Jeffrey. The Christmas party is tomorrow night. Where in the world are you?

(Listening-)

I needed you home two hours ago. Everything has to be perfect for this year's Christmas party. Everyone is expecting us to top last year's party and we simply cannot disappoint them, can we, dear? So please get back to the house with all of the gifts you were supposed to pick up for our guests.

(Listening-)

What? You want me to meet you at the mission? Jeffrey. I am not traveling across town when we have less than twenty-four hours to make sure everything is perfect.

(Listening-)

Jeffrey. I need you home right this instant.

She hangs up the phone.

OLIVE has arrived inside MILAN's room, leaving the groceries downstairs.

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2.

As the assistant enters and removes her coat, MILAN stands.

MILAN (cont'd)

Well. Olive. It certainly took you long enough.

OLIVE

I'm so sorry Mrs. Abernathy. They've shut down most of Main Street... The mission Christmas concert is just outside your window.

MILAN

I know. Every year it's the same thing. I've tried to get the city to shut it down, but they just go on and on about Christmas tradition or something. How am I supposed to get anything done with all this music and noise? It drives me crazy.

OLIVE

I don't know... I think it's nice... Doesn't it help put you in the Christmas spirit?

MILAN

Not really.

OLIVE

Oh...

MILAN

Well. Where are we?

OLIVE pulls out a little notebook, flipping through the pages.

OLIVE

They're putting the finishing touches on the evening dress you wanted - it should be ready by three - the caterer is ready to go and has all of your guests' "special requirements," the main floor is spotless and sparkling and I just need to finish cleaning and decorating up here.

MILAN

Olive, you have been such a life-saver these last few weeks. I do not know how I ever would have gotten through the holidays without you.

OLIVE

I'm just glad I can help out, Mrs. Abernathy.

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MILAN

At least you know how important it is for everything to be absolutely perfect during the holidays.

OLIVE

I guess...

MILAN

If only my husband had one ounce of your eagerness and can-do spirit.

OLIVE

Thanks?

MILAN

Do you want to know something, Olive? I can't trust him to take care of something as simple as picking up gifts for the guests at our Christmas party.

OLIVE

Oh. Well, if you'd like some help, I'd be more than willing to-

MILAN

I knew I could count on you.

She hands OLIVE a list. OLIVE scans the list quickly.

OLIVE

Um... I don't mean to be... To be honest, this list doesn't really look all that helpful.

MILAN

Why not?

OLIVE

(Reading-)

"Something sparkley for Mrs. Janus, something dark for Mr. Janus, large and purple for Cliff Richardson, petite and white for Jenny Bergman..." It's three pages of this.

MILAN

I don't know how much more specific I can be.

OLIVE

This isn't much for me to go on.

She hands the list back to MILAN.

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MILAN

My husband said the same thing...

OLIVE

Well, I was able to pick up all of the supplies for your Christmas party. I dropped them off with the cook downstairs-

MILAN

Thank you, dear. I cannot tell you how much I am ready for this Christmas party to be over and done with.

OLIVE

But don't you enjoy throwing your... "soirees?"

MILAN

Sometimes... Jeffrey seems to be getting annoyed with them. I suppose they do keep getting bigger and they are getting to be so much work. Who wants to work during the holidays?

OLIVE

Some people don't really have a choice...

MILAN

When I was a child, it used to be all about the thrill and excitement of opening presents on Christmas morning...

OLIVE

Presents aren't the-

MILAN

It used to be all about the charms of Frosty and Rudolph and a fat man in red flying around, bringing joy to the world in an oversized, magical sled.

OLIVE

Santa Claus isn't the one spreading joy to the world-

MILAN

Throughout my childhood I used to lie awake each and every Christmas Eve dying to see what Santa Claus had put under the tree for me. And my parents would just smile as I tore into the gifts... But now... Well. Now I just focus on throwing the biggest and best Christmas party this town has ever seen and try to treat Jeffrey and myself to the most extravagant Christmas presents I can find.

OLIVE

Wow. That's, uh... Wow.

MILAN

That's what Christmas is all about, right?

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OLIVE

Um... Not really...

The music starts up again.

MILAN

When will they ever stop with the music?

OLIVE

I don't know... I like it.

MILAN

Just don't hum along.

OLIVE

I'll try to hold myself back.

MILAN

I can't stand it when people hum along to the music...

OLIVE

Why don't you try to think of something a little more specific for you guests? Who knows... Maybe the music will bring inspiration?

OLIVE begins straightening the room as MILAN sits with her Christmas list, staring absently out of the window.

As MILAN continues to struggle with her Christmas list, OLIVE leaves and returns with a box of Christmas decorations. She begins decorating MILAN's room and the small tree that sits in the corner.

As the song ends, OLIVE has almost finished decorating the tree. MILAN throws her hands up in frustration.

MILAN

That's it. I give up. I'm normally so good and shopping - even for other people.

OLIVE

Oh, don't worry, Mrs. Abernathy. You'll think of something. Just give it time.

MILAN

Olive, I appreciate your faith in my ability to find the perfect Christmas gift, but this really is a losing battle.  
(MORE)

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MILAN (cont'd)

I am never going to find the perfect gift to give my guests. I wish Jeffrey was here instead of gallivanting off to who knows where.

OLIVE

Don't worry. We'll figure out the gifts. I promise.

MILAN

I suppose you have all of your Christmas shopping done?

OLIVE

Sort of...

MILAN

And you've given everyone in your life the perfect gift, haven't you?

OLIVE

Well...

MILAN

That's what I thought.

OLIVE

What do you think of the decorations so far?

MILAN

They're nice. They're "Christmas-y."

OLIVE

And is that a bad thing?

MILAN

No. No, I guess it isn't.

OLIVE

All we need now is the tree-topper to finish things off...

She pulls a tree-topper out of the box of decorations.

MILAN

Olive, where did you find that topper?

OLIVE

It was in a box of decorations in one of the closets downstairs. Why?

MILAN

I haven't seen it... I haven't seen it since my parents passed away. It's been... so many years.

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OLIVE

Oh. I'm sorry. Do you want me to-

MILAN

No. Please. Leave it. I forgot how beautiful it was...

OLIVE

It really is, isn't it?

MILAN

Even though we had so many people to do things for us, putting up and decorating the Christmas tree was always the one thing that we did as a family. Mother would make hot chocolate - it always tasted better than the cook's - and father would string the lights... Then, they'd pull out the tree-topper and father would lift me up, high above his head, so I could put the finishing touches on the tree. You know, I almost forgot all that.

OLIVE

Well, if you'd like, there are plenty of decorations left here in the box. You could still put on the finishing touches.

MILAN

I do think I'd like that.

They begin to put more decorations on the tree as music begins to play.

MILAN and OLIVE used up the last of the decorations. There isn't a spot in the room that isn't covered in Christmas razzle and dazzle. The music ends.

OLIVE

Well, I think that about does it for the decorations. What do you think, Mrs. Abernathy?

MILAN

It actually feels like Christmas. You know, I don't think it has actually felt like Christmas since the first few years that Jeffrey and I were married...

OLIVE

It must be nice to get that feeling back again.

MILAN

Yes. It is.

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OLIVE

Are you any closer to figuring out your Christmas gifts?

MILAN

Oh, no. I almost forgot. I have absolutely no clue what to do.

OLIVE

Well, you know, it isn't like there's a formula or something - there's no secret to giving gifts - just try to think about what it is that makes each person special and unique. Try not to think about what they want, but who they are.

MILAN

Why would I do that?

OLIVE

Well, it would help you actually get to know your friends and family.

MILAN

I guess a lot of my relationships must seem pretty shallow to you, hm?

OLIVE

I didn't say that... but the gift of real friendship is so much better than any dress or watch or set of earrings you can buy.

MILAN looks out of the window,  
thinking.

OLIVE (cont'd)

You know, I have an idea.

MILAN

What?

OLIVE

I happen to be hosting a Christmas party myself.

MILAN

You?

OLIVE

It's certainly not as extravagant as yours - and there won't be as many high profile guests... But why don't you come?

MILAN

I really don't know if I-

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OLIVE

Who knows? Maybe if you spend some time around people who love Christmas and love celebrating the true meaning of season... Maybe you'll find some inspiration for your gifts.

MILAN

Maybe...

OLIVE

Great! Here's your coat. Let's go!

MILAN

Wait... Where are we-

OLIVE

We've got to get going. The party's tonight. No time to waste.

MILAN

But-

OLIVE

Well. Are you coming or not?

MILAN stares at the Christmas tree for a moment.

MILAN

Very well. Let's be off.

OLIVE

You won't regret this.

MILAN

I think I already do.

They exit as the music begins to play.

As the music ends, we see MILAN and OLIVE enter from the opposite side of the stage. There are next to the rescue mission.

OLIVE

Well, here we are.

MILAN

The mission, Olive? You're dragging me to the mission? I thought we were going to your home.

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OLIVE

This is my home.

MILAN

But... You're homeless?

The music begins as OLIVE leads MILAN  
offstage.

End of Act.

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Act Two

Another song opens and brings us back from intermission. As the music ends, MILAN and OLIVE enter on the stage level.

MILAN (cont'd)

Olive... You're homeless? I just... I can't believe it.

OLIVE

You know, when I first moved into the mission, I couldn't believe it myself.

MILAN

What happened?

OLIVE

I had a great job. I sold expensive home to rich businessmen and, well, people a lot like yourself and your husband, Mrs. Abernathy. But once the housing bubble burst, I lost everything. No one was hiring. Times were bad, I didn't have anywhere to turn. And so, this was my last option. You know, until it happens, you don't think you would ever be able to swallow your pride enough to... But the people, the community here has helped me so much. Funny as it sounds, moving in to the mission was the best thing that ever happened to me.

MILAN

Olive, I am so sorry. I didn't know.

OLIVE

That's all right, Mrs. Abernathy-

MILAN

Please, Olive. Stop with the Mrs. Abernathy. I feel like we know each other so well now. Please, just call me Milan.

OLIVE

All right. Well, Milan... When you brought me on as your assistant... Let me just say that was such a blessing - it was the first time in years that someone took a chance on me. Thank you.

MILAN

Well. You mentioned a Christmas party. What can I do to help?

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OLIVE

Why don't you just watch? Some residents from the mission are about to sing for us.

MILAN

Oh. All right.

She settles in to watch as the music starts and several homeless men and women begin to sit on the sides of the stage.

As the song ends, MILAN applauds enthusiastically.

MILAN (cont'd)

Oh, Olive, that was wonderful.

OLIVE

Yeah. We have some really talented people.

MILAN

How did they all end up here?

OLIVE

You know, most of the people at the mission have stories a lot like mine. Times are tough. You can go from riches to rags in no time at all.

MILAN

I am just so sorry for you, Olive.

OLIVE

You keep saying that, but you really shouldn't be. I feel so blessed, so fortunate. When I had everything, I was so concerned with keeping everything that I never really took the time to connect with others, to have real and lasting friendships. When I lost everything, I had to take a hard look at my life and see what really mattered.

A couple of homeless men and women bring out a table, some pots of soup, and a few bowls.

MILAN

What's this?

OLIVE

We always share a Christmas dinner together before we finish our singing and celebration.

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MILAN  
Can I help?

OLIVE  
Sure, if you'd like.

MILAN  
I really would.

OLIVE  
Then why don't you help me serve the soup.

MILAN  
All right.

MILAN and OLIVE get behind the table as the music begins. Throughout this song, homeless men and women form a line and begin receiving soup from MILAN and OLIVE.

By the end of the song, everyone has been fed and OLIVE serves MILAN a bowl of soup and MILAN serves OLIVE a bowl of soup. They eat with the others.

As the music ends, Olive steps out from behind the table.

OLIVE  
Hey everyone! It's time to set up the Nativity.

Everyone cheers and ad libs about how excited they are. A few people remove the table and bowls.

OLIVE (cont'd)  
(To MILAN-)  
This is our favorite part of the Christmas celebration.

A person enters with costume pieces and stands by OLIVE.

OLIVE  
All right, let's get into costume, everyone! Shepherds?

The actors playing the shepherds come up and get their costumes and exit.

OLIVE (cont'd)  
Wise men?

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The wise men come up and get their costumes.

Angels?

OLIVE (cont'd)

The angels come up and get their costumes.

And... Oh, that's right. We don't have a Mary, do we?

MILAN

Well, what about you? Couldn't you play Mary?

OLIVE

No, I played Mary last year. We try not to have people play the same part year after year. Besides, I'm coordinating everything.

MILAN

Oh.

OLIVE

But you could play Mary.

MILAN

What? No. No, I couldn't play-

OLIVE

Sure you could.

MILAN

But I don't know-

OLIVE

It's easy. Really. Our Joseph will show you what to do.

MILAN

But-

OLIVE

Here's your costume. Off you go.

MILAN

But I-

OLIVE's helper leads MILAN off to get her into costume.

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OLIVE

Are we ready to start? Great! Let's begin.

She exits as music for the Nativity begins to play.

The Nativity begins. MILAN should start off looking very uncomfortable, but as she looks down at the baby, she should slowly begin to get more and more comfortable.

As MILAN holds the baby and looks at him, she begins to have a realization.

MILAN

It's Jesus. Jesus is the perfect gift of Christmas.

As the Nativity song ends and another song begins, the stage is cleared.

As the music ends, MILAN, now in her street clothes, enters with OLIVE from the shelter once again.

MILAN (cont'd)

Olive, thank you so much. Thank you for sharing your home with me. Thank you for reminding me that Christmas is about more than all of the things I can buy, it's all about Jesus - the real gift of Christmas.

OLIVE

He really is the gift of Christmas, Milan. So, have you figured out what you'll be getting the guests at your party?

MILAN

You know, it really doesn't matter, does it?

OLIVE

I suppose it doesn't.

MILAN

This Christmas, I really want to focus on the perfect gift of Christ.

OLIVE

That sounds like a wonderful idea.

MILAN

Olive, I need you to let all of our guests know that we're changing the venue for the party.

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OLIVE

We are?

MILAN

I think we'll be having our Christmas celebration right here at the mission. What do you think?

OLIVE

That sounds fantastic.

MILAN

Jeffrey and I have so many wonderful blessings... I think it's time we gave something back.

(MILAN pulls out her cell phone  
and dials. A beat.)

Jeffrey, you'll never guess where I am. Come down to the mission. I have so much to tell you!

(She hangs up the phone.)

Merry Christmas, Olive.

OLIVE

Merry Christmas, Milan.

The music begins.

Throughout this final song, we see MILAN and OLIVE serving and talking with the residents of the shelter. The music ends.

End of Act.

End of Play.