# Hearts' Rebirth

## Tragedy for Christmas-time

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## Dramatis Personae:

The Bennet family:
- PETE, the father
- MEG, the mother
- CHRIS, the sister
- WILL, the brother

The Holy Family:
- MARY, Jesus' mother
- JOSEPH/JOHN, her companion

## Prologue:

"To be or not to be:"
that is the question
whose answer we seek.
But unfortunately,
to consider does not
entail an answer.
Often, only that an answer
has been sought

Christ offers himself as the answer
but, like essay questions on the
exam of life
we consider the answer's options
to be many
when in fact
the question
answers itself
once.
A child was born
in Bethlehem.

Strange thought, that
a child's birth could cause
so great a stir.
Less strange perhaps
that *the* God being born
might have had an effect.

The world's problems are many
and we seek solutions
in many just causes.
But in truth the cause
and the answer
are one.
and three.
God Spirit Man
Christ

## I. There is Sin in the World.

PETE: Do you have to keep bringing that up?

MEG: Don't yell at me! I'm not the one sleeping around, you are.

PETE: Yeah, the perfect wife. Right.

MEG: Wife? Not for too much longer if this keeps up.

PETE: I swear - the only reason you're joining that little ~~Methodist~~ church on the corner is so you can gossip about me during Ladies' social hour, or whatever they call it.

MEG: You should've thought about that before sacking up with every little…

PETE: Enough? OK? Could you just for once drop the subject? I messed up once…

MEG: Once?

PETE: Yeah, once. And…

*(Chris walks in)*

PETE: …now you've gotta bring it up every time I do the least little thing...

CHRIS: Oh, brother. Not again, you guys. I'm leaving.

PETE: No, don't go - we were just stopping. Right, Meg?

MEG: You're just going to brush it away like that, huh? Think you're perfectly justified…

CHRIS: Enough! C'mon, show some Christmas spirit, why don'cha?

MEG: Lotta Christmas spirit your father has. He cheats on me for a Christmas present.

PETE: It was over a month ago, for Pete's sake!

MEG: Oh, sure - Thanksgiving wishes, then.

CHRIS: Quit it! Will is coming home.

*(shocked silence for a moment)*

PETE: Of all the good-for-nothing…

MEG: How did you…

CHRIS: He left a message on my machine. Terse. "I'm coming home. Be there at 7. Bye."

MEG: What time is it now?

PETE: Uh…*(checks watch)*…

CHRIS: Quarter to.

MEG: Seven?

PETE: Yeah.

MEG: Great.

CHRIS: He's your son.

PETE: Yeah, I guess.

CHRIS: I suppose he deserves a Christmas welcome like everyone else.

MEG: He does not!

PETE: He's a irresponsible dead-beat who cares diddley-squat for any of us.

CHRIS: Hey, don't get angry at me. *I'm* not defending him.

MEG: He nearly destroyed everything we own.

CHRIS: Hey, chill. He's ruined my life, too.

*(Will enters)*

WILL: Well, merry Christmas, all.

*(silence. Finally broken by...)*

PETE: You're early.

WILL: Yeah.

*(cut to)*

JOSEPH: You doing all right, Mary.

MARY: I'm so tired.

JOSEPH: Just rest a bit. I can't get over our … the baby. Another entrance into God's grand story.

MARY: Mmm.

JOSEPH: Rest, Mary.

*(back to)*

MEG: It's been a long time, Will.

WILL: Yes, it has.

*(strained silence)*

CHRIS: Well, welcome home.

WILL: Thanks.

MEG: *(making the effort)* We've been worried about you. Isn't that true, Pete?

PETE: Right.

MEG: It's been four years.

WILL: A lot happens in four years.

CHRIS: Yeah.

PETE: *(gruffly)* Well, come in.

WILL: Thanks, … dad.

*(Pete is uneasy with the title)*

MEG: So what's been going on for the past couple of years?

WILL: I don't want to talk about it.

PETE: Hey, don't take that tone of voice with your mother! Who do you think you are?

WILL: *(anguished)* I'm your son! I've come home! Don't you care?

PETE: Sure, you're home. You disappear for four years, doing who knows what; reappear looking like trash, with no explanations, and expect things to be all pretty again just cause "you came home."

WILL: You treat me like I were a stranger or something! Some New York City bum!

PETE: In case you haven't noticed, you're not impressing me very much. And until I can get some real proof you're not going to pull some crazy stunt like four years ago, you can just go back to wherever you came from, for all I care!

WILL: What kind of father do you call yourself?

CHRIS: Don't yell.

WILL: I came home for Christmas. Is it too much to ask to get a warm welcome?

MEG: *(gently)* There's a lot of bad ground to be covered, Will…

PETE: You better believe there is. Four years ago you torched our bedroom and nearly burnt down our house. And now…

WILL: No one ever listened to me.

PETE: Oh, great. "No one listens to me, so I think I'll just burn down their house."

WILL: Will you shut up! Just shut up!

PETE: Little Willie runs away with all the cash he could find around the house, just so someone will listen to him…

MEG: Pete, please stop.

PETE: And then he goes and ruins his life, embarrasses his family, shows up on the evening news arrested, going to jail…

WILL: Shut up! *(lunges for Pete and takes a swing at him, Pete moves away just in time. Will tries again, but his mother grabs his arm)*

MEG: STOP IT! What's wrong with the two of you?!? Will, you think you can just walk into our house and start hitting your father, and you, Pete … going on about the sins of your son when you're sleeping with the next door neighbors!

CHRIS: I can't believe this.

PETE: Will you stop bringing that up!

CHRIS: Can we try to calm down?

WILL: Calm down? I come in here, a long-lost son returning, expecting some warmth, some love, something, and all I get is my father yelling at me. But guess what? I'm not leaving. I've lost all I've got in the world, including my family, but I need a place to stay and so I'm here. Just try to kick me out.

MEG: Well, you're here, aren't you?

CHRIS: You're not going to let him stay?

PETE: Uh-uh. No way. Here… *(takes out his wallet)* … here's thirty dollars, kid - get a motel room. You're not staying under this roof one second longer than you can keep a civil attitude. Out. Now. Or I'll call the police.

WILL: This is hopeless.

*(lights fade… segue …)*

## II. Christ came because of the world's sin.

*(lights up on Mary and Joseph)*

MARY: Layla, layla, haru'ach goveret
Layla, layla homa hatsameret
Layla, layla kochav mezamer
Numi, numi kabi et haner.

*(her songs ends quietly, and we sense the stillness of that night. Then:)*

MARY: It was a quiet night like this when the angel came. I still think about that night, often. I can remember it all so clearly. I sit and try to figure out what the angel's words meant -- Joseph, he said our little child will sit on David's throne. How can that be?

JOSEPH: David himself was just a shepherd boy. God brought him to a throne. Somehow, he can make our baby boy reign, as well.

MARY: Yes, but still... there are so many things I don't understand. Oh, Joseph, it frightens me, sometimes. This smelly old stable, our child born in a strange place, among strangers, laid on dirty straw instead of a nice clean cradle... all those rough men tonight, standing around staring at him... surely this isn't the way the Messiah was meant to be born?

JOSEPH: This whole world's not the way it was meant to be. Rest, Mary. It's been a hard day. There've been many things I don't understand about it all. Why would the God of Israel bring poor shepherds in from the fields to witness the Messiah's birth? I don't know. I... I just trust. Like Moses stretching his staff over the Red Sea. My brain tells me this is all impossible, incredible... but I know God's at the center of it all.

*(cut to Meg on the phone with her new-found pastor)*

MEG: Yes, Pastor, I'm calling to ask for prayer. You know my neighbor's wife? The one who Pete's been sleeping with? Well, I heard from Jo-Ann that...

*(to Will, in his motel room, on the phone with Chris)*

WILL: Chris? Look, I'm sorry for interrupting you at work... yes, I'm sorry about what happened last night… yes, I know I've made life a living… what? I'm sorry, Chris. Now, look … yes, Chris… I really need to talk to you, Chris. Yeah. It's important. Trust me, Chris. C'mon Chris. Don't trust me, then. Just come. Please? Just 5 minutes. OK. Thanks a lot, Chris. I'll see you then.

*(back to Mary and Joseph)*

JOSEPH: It seems so strange. One day I was just another carpenter in a town with too many, and now... I don't know. Visions in the night and shepherds talking of angel-songs. God reaching down from heaven to work visibly in the world. I keep going back to what the angel said to me: our son would "save his people from their sins."

MARY: That's quite a task for a new-born child.

JOSEPH: True. We've strayed so far from our God. Roman influence corrupting our religion and people... what has become of the great God of Israel, whom the nations feared because Israel was mighty?

MARY: The people have forgotten him.

JOSEPH: Mmm. "He will save us from our sins." Save the world from its sins.

## III. He came to die.

*(Will and Chris, in the motel room)*

WILL: Thanks for coming, Chris.

CHRIS: Five minutes.

WILL: Can't you spare just a ...

CHRIS: Five minutes. I've got things to do, places to go; you know.

WILL: I'm your brother.

CHRIS: You keep saying that. Listen, Will - that means nothing to me. You've wrecked my life, too, along with yours. Weren't content to drag yourself down, you had to take all of us with you, huh?

WILL: Hey, wait...

CHRIS: No. I've worked hard all my life. Doing something useful, productive. Trying to haul my own self up by the bootstraps, while you've been out wasting your life away. Every job I get, I hear, "Hey, isn't your brother this?" or "Isn't he that?" or "Didn't I see your brother on the evening news last night?"

WILL: That's <u>my</u> problem. That didn't hurt you.

CHRIS: It didn't hurt me, huh? It sure did, Mr. Low-Income. Listen, Will - in my job, image is everything, and you just plain ruined it for me, okay? Mrs. TV-anchor-woman isn't *trash* when the world finds out her brother's an ex-con pan-handling dead-beat *junkie* out on West 42nd street. I nearly took the whole show down with me until they hauled me out of my job. That's *your* fault. *You* did it. Okay? So don't give me any of this "I never hurt you" business. What did you call about?

WILL: It's about Mom and Dad. About why I ran away.

CHRIS: That's your big secret? You felt misunderstood, told yourself nobody listened to you, so you torched the bedroom and ran away to avoid the consequences. And took our lives with you. Thanks a whole lot.

WILL: Chris, you don't know anything. It wasn't like that at all. Listen... it wasn't my fault.

CHRIS: I've heard that before.

WILL: No, listen. Four years ago, when I ran away... I was really messing up in school - you know - failing some classes, getting involved in some things I shouldn't have... and this day - I was goin' to skip class and come home and tell Mom I was sick, 'cause I felt so bad -- I just found out Freddie was sleeping with my girlfriend, and if I stayed till last period I was going to fail phys. ed. - P.E. for Pete's sake! - 'cause I forgot my gym shorts for the fifth time.

CHRIS: Why am I not surprised.

WILL: No, listen, Chris. I came home, and I went upstairs - looking for Mom... and... Chris, I found Mom in bed with another guy.

CHRIS: *(whispered)* Wh--?

WILL: I don't know who. Some ... guy. She never saw me... she was involved. *(beat)* I'll never forget it, Chris; seeing her... I ran out; she never knew I saw her... I just ran and ran down the street, running and crying - like a baby, Chris - for three, four hours. I couldn't believe... later I snuck home and tried to pack some clothes... and I... I found a cigarette lighter in the front pocket of my jacket. I don't know what I was thinking, Chris... I just wanted to erase, destroy... get rid of the filth and the memories... I went into her bedroom and set fire to the bed. And I ran out of the house and never looked back.

CHRIS: And now for four years we've been trying to piece our lives together, and you show up and wreck it all again.

WILL: I've messed up, Chris. A month ago I tried to end it all. I found myself curled up on the floor, choking on my own vomit, screaming that my skin was burning off, and no one came to help me. Life hurts, Chris. I need help. I can't handle it on my own.

CHRIS: Will, you've made bad choices. You've ruined four people's lives. At one time I would've felt sorry for you. But I don't. It's your fault, Will. Your fault.

WILL: All my life Mom and Dad have said, just pursue your dreams and everything will be fine. It doesn't work that way, Chris. Look what's happened. Why does God hate me, Chris?

CHRIS: Look, Will. I've gotta go. You've dug yourself a deep hole, and you've got to climb out of it yourself. There's no one else that can help you. No namby-pamby God is going to reach down and do a miracle for you. You've blown it. You messed up. So Mom was cheating on Dad. Big deal. Now Dad's cheating on Mom. A sob story just doesn't cut it anymore, Will. Your life is your fault. I gotta go.

*(she leaves)*

WILL: *(after her)* Chris. Chris! *(to walls)* Chris! *(yelling, screaming, anguished)* Don't you even care? Chris. I need you, Chris. I was alone; I didn't know what to do -- so I came home. Chris. It's Christmas - I thought .. I thought maybe things would change - I went and <u>believed</u> all that junk about Christmas spirit and family love and all that ... and NONE OF IT'S TRUE! NONE OF IT, CHRIS! NOT A SINGLE WORD! I just can't stand it any more. It's all a pack of lies! Chris! I can't fix things anymore! I'm messed up and I can't fix it. The world hurts, Chris!

*(Will knocks over bedside table, and sees bottle of pills in the debris. He holds it up, unscrews the cap, and pours the whole jar into his hand. Lights cross-fade.)*

*(sound of wailing precedes lights up on Mary. Joseph is now John.)*

MARY: *(a cry)* I don't understand! God, why have you done this?

JOHN: *(soothing)* Mary.

MARY: Oh, John, what does this mean? Why, John?

JOHN: I wish I knew.

MARY: I just don't understand. John, it hurts. They killed him like a criminal. All those people... the looks in their eyes. Why, John? A week ago, the people hailed him with palm leaves... and now they shouted for his death. Is this why he was born? Is this the reason for the angels and the singing? I just don't understand. What does it mean? Why did he come?

JOHN: I don't know. I thought I understood. Father God sends his son to save us, teach us the truth, forgive our sins. I never thought about the end. I just... figured he'd be caught up to heaven like Elisha or a great prophet of old. But his cousin John was beheaded, and Jesus was crucified.

MARY: I keep asking myself, why? I just don't know. When angels sang and God spoke with lights and visions, I thought I knew. But now heaven seems dark. God! Why did this happen!? Why didn't Jesus bring himself down off the cross?! God, what do you have in store for us.

JOHN: God answered Job out of the storm when he cried. He will answer us as well.

MARY: I know. John, it hurts. I... he was my son. He was going to give the world so much... and they killed him. I know... I know God's there. I know he's in control. But... I just don't understand.

JOHN: He was my teacher... my friend. He called God his father and performed miracles and did great things. I don't understand. Mary, He *knew* he was going to be killed. He said so, he told us. He could have saved himself, and didn't.

MARY: Why, John? Why?

JOHN: I don't know. There's got to be something that comes after, Mary.... something. I just don't know what it is...

## IV. In dying He gives life (only He).

*(fade over to Chris, alone in a stark white spot)*
*(at first, no tears, but depth of emotion nonetheless)*

CHRIS: My brother killed himself yesterday. I ... I feel bad, in a way, because it doesn't affect me like it should. I should be crying... I'm not. I guess it just hasn't sunk in, yet. I've been so used to thinking of him as dead that when it happened... not much changed. Except now he's dead. Really, truly, dead. And he can't ... I don't know. I just don't know.

He messed himself up in so many ways. His whole life just seems like ... a waste. What kind of stunt was he trying to pull? He couldn't save himself by dying. He's not *God*...he was just such a ... such a *coward*... he just couldn't deal with life. If he had just... just *reached out,* just looked around him. I guess he started to. I know I wasn't very ... sympathetic -- but all his hopeless whining... what right did he have to complain?! He aimed at nothing, and got exactly what he wanted. I've been trying to make my way somewhere in the world for my whole life and still haven't gotten a single inch further than when I started. I just... I don't know...

The funeral was ... bleak. I guess that's the right word. The preacher is supposed to offer consoling words—tempt us with hope for the afterlife as if it were a carrot and we were mules... but what could he say? Will messed up. He had potential, and wasted it. He could have accomplished some good or *something* and ... but then I started thinking, and I just started getting more and more... you know, I haven't done a single thing with my life, either. I started thinking about death and ... it frightened me. Scared me like ... I have no idea what's going to happen; no idea what's life supposed to be about, or *anything*. I'm dead already. And I looked up at the altar, and above the cross it said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Somehow... the minister led a prayer at the end of the service, and I looked at him.. and I just *knew* that God heard him. You know, I've tried talking to God sometimes, but I never seem to get through. I feel trapped in the world... my words just don't reach heaven. I believe in God. I know He's there... but I wonder - does He believe in me? Does He know me?

Willie, Willie. Couldn't you see where your life was leading? Didn't you ever wonder if there was anyone who could... rescue you from yourself? Will, that's what *I'm* wondering now. God! I'm looking for you! Does anyone out there hear me? Is there anyone out there?

*(fade to Mary and John)*

MARY: In the past three days, I've thought of the story of Job more than once -- of the man tested by God to show his faith. I've been tested... I'm not sure I've always done well, but now at the end, I think I am finally beginning to understand, and to trust again. The disciples have come to me talking of angels and visions on the road, just like it was back when Jesus was born. Like then, I'm not sure that I understand everything, yet... but I see God working, and I know that He's behind it all. I don't know why my son had to die... but I will.

## V. Our lives are worthy only because of Him.

*(Pete, and Meg. Chris enters)*

CHRIS: Take a look at this. I was going through Will's stuff...

MEG: Please don't talk about him, Chris.

CHRIS: He kept a picture of us... in his wallet. Look. Five years ago. We were all so happy then. I ... I wish we could have been like that for him when he came home.

PETE: It wouldn't have changed anything, Chris. Will would just have ruined it again, like he tried to last time.

MEG: The mess was all his fault, anyway. If he'd just thought about consquences sometimes...

CHRIS: He's been dead three days and you still can't forgive him for *anything*...

MEG: He *ruined* our lives - he ruined your life, too. I'm not just going to forget that.

CHRIS: Why is everything Will's fault? He complained that nobody listened, because nobody ever took the time and did.

PETE: I never gave him anything but what he deserved. He was just an ungrateful, inconsiderate...

CHRIS: Can't you see anything? All he wanted was some love and compassion... and we couldn't spare him anything. Every single thing that's gone wrong in this family for the past four years we've pinned on him.

MEG: That's not true. I blame your father for his affairs.

CHRIS: What about yours?

MEG: My what? I've never ...

CHRIS: You have! Don't you know ... on the day Will ran away? He *caught* you. he came home from school and *caught* you... in bed with another man.

PETE: Meg! After all the grief you gave me for *my* affairs...

MEG: Affairs! There were more than one!?!

PETE: You hypocritical...

CHRIS: Mom! Dad! STOP IT!!!

PETE: Meg, I'm through with you. I'm sick and tired of all this. Your son ruined my life...

CHRIS: Can't you see? No one's responsible for ruining your lives except you! Where is this family going to?

PETE: This family is ceasing to exist. Now. I'm leaving, Meg.

CHRIS: You're destroying your own lives! Just like Will!

MEG: I don't love you anymore, Pete. There's no need for you to stay. Leave.

CHRIS: Just like Will! Running away...

*(Pete storms out)*

MEG: You're better off without your father, Chris.

CHRIS: I can't believe you just said that! Don't you care?

MEG: Get off my back, Chris! IT'S NOT MY FAULT!!

CHRIS: So you're just going blame it on someone else?

MEG: I'm not about to go crawling after your father.

CHRIS: Can't you give up your pride for once? This is your family we're talking about. My family. The only one I've got.

MEG: Don't you start yelling at me, too. I can take care of myself. I'm doing what's right for me. *(leaves)*

CHRIS: Mom! Can't you see? Can't you see at all?

*(Chris, alone in the family kitchen, slumps onto the counter.)*

CHRIS: We're running away like Willie did. Running straight to our deaths.

*(She sees a piece of paper with a phone number on it. Beat.)*

You were looking for someone to help you, Willie, and you didn't find anyone. Willie... everyone thinks I've got it all together. I've always been the one in control, successful. But inside I'm still lonely - I'm still out of control and lost. I've got this empty spot inside me... Willie - I told you there wasn't any God to help you - no God to work a miracle for you. I hope that's not true. I need a miracle, Willie. The guy who preached at your funeral, he - he talked about Jesus. He said Jesus came to put us right with God. Willie, I think God hates me. I know I haven't done things to make him happy. If Jesus can make that right... Willie, Mom and Dad are busy destroying their own lives because they can't admit they're wrong and don't want to work to make things right. I know I'm wrong. I'm not going to make the same mistake.

*(Picks up phone and starts to dial)*

## VI. The Answer is Jesus.

MARY: It's taken me a long time to understand, John. I... I thought it was the end of everything when I saw ... when I saw my Son nailed to a cross, beaten, bleeding, dying. But it wasn't. I understand. It wasn't the end -- it was just the beginning. Jesus rose from the tomb -- he finished what he had come to do. The whole reason He was born was so that He could die on that cross -- he had to satisfy a just God by suffering our sins' punishment for us. I couldn't see that before. I thought he was to be a king, a great conqueror. Instead, he conquered death, and showed us God's love. You know, all my life I'd been taught that God was angry at me, because I was a sinner. And I knew it was true. But now Jesus has made things right again. I understand.

*(back to Chris, on phone)*

CHRIS: Hello... uh, this is Chris. Chris Bennet. I... I don't know how to start. Should I call you Reverend, or ... OK. Pastor. Pastor, I need your help. You... you preached the sermon for my brother's funeral on Sunday. Yes, Will. Willie. You seemed like... I don't know. Somehow you talked about Jesus and he seemed real to you. I... I guess... I just don't know, Pastor. My life's a mess and I can't keep running away from God. I don't want to wreck my life. I'm wandering through the world without any idea of what I'm doing here, and now everything I've ever counted on is gone. My family's destroying itself and they can't see that they need help. I can. I need help, Pastor. Everyone thinks I'm in control, but my life is so messed up. I don't want to end up like Willie. I think... I think I need your Jesus.

JOHN: During the reign of Caesar Augustus, a child was born... in a hay-trough, in Bethlehem. Wise men came, led by a star, and shepherds sought him out after angel-serenades. But that wasn't the end of the story. The baby was born according to the deliberate and well-thought-out plan of God. The bloody events that happened 33 years later - when the child anounced by angel choir was beaten bloody, lashed near death with a Roman whip, had nails driven into his hands and feet, and then was left to die - these were part of the plan, as well. They were necessary so that God could show his love for us. That is love - true love: not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son, as a sacrifice, to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God. That is why Jesus was born. We don't have to struggle any more. Jesus died on the cross to fix our lives. He is the Answer.