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“What We Didn’t Know”
Stories of Faith in the Mission Field
by
Andrew Kooman

SYNOPSIS

In this hour-long Easter play, we see snapshots from the lives of four inspiring, historical figures: William Wilberforce, Hannah Moore, Rosalind Goforth and Eric Liddell. The frame around each of these snapshots is Christ’s story of love and sacrifice on that first Easter, which makes possible every act of Christian love, sacrifice, and faith ever since. This powerful production also features a choir.

Themes: Easter, Heroes of the Faith, Obedience, Sacrifice, Faith, Missions, Good Friday, Leadership, Passion, Choir

CAST

JESUS, A 30-something man who sings in the CHOIR throughout

MARY, the mother of Jesus and threads together the historical vignettes together. She can be in her early 20s to mid-40s.

JOHN NEWTON, the famous writer of the seminal hymn Amazing Grace and former slave ship captain, in his mid-60s

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, at 35, the right-hand man of the newly elected Prime Minister of England and a Member of Parliament for Yorkshire

HANNAH MORE, the famous playwright, educator and friend of English high society, in her late 40s to early 50s

PATTY MORE, the younger 30-something sister to HANNAH

ROSALIND GOFORTH, the missionary to China in her mid-50s

MARY GOFORTH, her spunky, teenage daughter

ERIC LIDDELL, the Flying Scotsman and Olympic champion, 43 years old in the weeks before his death

MICHAEL, a teenaged boy separated from his parents by the war and in the same internment camp as ERIC

CHOIR MEMBERS, who have short speaking parts among the various crowds throughout the drama

The **CHOIR**

Note about casting:

If acquiring actors is a challenge, roles in this play can be doubled. The playwright suggests that JOHN NEWTON and ERIC LIDDELL can be played by the same actor, as can WILLIAM WILBERFORCE and MICHAEL. HANAH MORE and ROSALIND GOFORTH can be played by the same actor, as can PATTY MORE and MARY GOFORTH be doubled. MARY and JESUS should not be doubled.

SETTING

While many of the roles are British, for the purposes of this play, the actors need not present their dialogue with British accents.

Scene 1- Mary and Jesus in their home in Israel, AD 30

Scene 2- Wilberforce in a small church in 1800s England

Scene 3- Hannah More in the British countryside, 1800s

Scene 4- Rosalind Goforth, in her small home in China, late 1800s

Scene 5- Eric Liddell, in a sparse room in a Japanese Internment camp in China during World War II

PROPS AND COSTUMES

Clothes appropriate to the time; a fabric that interconnects the scenes.

4 bright cloths used at the end of the play

Cross

Calligraphy pen and papers

An old Bible

Letter in an envelope

Candle

Table with chairs

Staging notes:

The set and props are meant to be simple to engage audience imagination. The fabric is the main prop that ties each scene together. Depending on how big your space is and your lighting capabilities, the same table and chairs can be used in the WILBERFORCE and GOFORTH scenes. You can also use the same table to double as a bed in the LIDDELL scene. Or, you can use a different table and chairs.

Props required for each scene:

WILBERFORCE SCENE: The Fabric, a table (that functions as a desk), 2 chairs, a calligraphy pen and papers, the letter, a candle

HANNAH MORE SCENE: The Fabric, the letter

ROSALIND GOFORTH SCENE: The Fabric, the letter, a table, 2 chairs, oil lamp (or the candle from WILBERFORCE scene, whatever is director prefers)

ERIC LIDDELL SCENE: The Fabric, the letter a bed (can use the table), a tunic, 4 colourful cloths

Upstage (at the furthest point) the cross is affixed in shadows. The Cross can be an actual physical cross, a digital projection, created through lighting and shadows, or made with paint or paper on a backdrop. The CHOIR shrouds the cross on both sides, dressed simply in black, where it will stand for the duration of the drama.

The cross casts a long shadow on the stage that is clearly marked on the floorboards, where the 4 historical vignettes will occur (Stage Left, Stage Right, Centre Stage, and Upstage, at the foot of the cross).

Note: the shadow can be painted on the floor, created through lighting, or with fabric.

SONG LIST

Mary Did You Know, Mark Lowry (lyrics) and Buddy Greene (melody) ©1991

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eclXyYRnoo>

Hold On (Keep Your Hand on the Plow) Traditional Spiritual; arranged by Joseph Jennings <https://youtu.be/TfvLZjofEXA>

Ain't You Gotta Right to the Tree of Life? Written by Guy Carawan ©The Bicycle Music Company Arranged by Paul Caldwell and Sean Ivory Viewable at:

<http://www.caldwellandivory.com/music/index.php?page=works>

The Hanging Tree, lyrics by Suzanne Collin, arranged for Choir by Friedeann Petter <https://youtu.be/o-bCXrqEoiA>

Chariots of Fire Theme, written by Vangelis Publisher EMI Music Publishers Ltd.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RY3XiM7oGj0>

Be Still, My Soul, Author: Kathrina von Schlegel; Translator: Jane Borthwick (Public Domain) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p92fMgMt_Zw

Let it Rain, Jesus Culture, words and lyrics: Cory Becker, Eve Berlin, Lillian Berlin, Max Martin, Bosh Berlin <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDpF43cSnM0>

SCENE ONE

The music to MARY DID YOU KNOW begins. JESUS, wearing simple black pants and a black shirt, steps from the CHOIR singing the haunting opening lyrics.

The CHOIR joins JESUS at the chorus. All CHOIR members are dressed simply in black.

MARY emerges from the shadows. She is dressed simply, in a modest slip, a timeless outfit that could fit any woman in any age. As she speaks, the CHOIR unveils a length of colourful FABRIC and holds it outward. This will be used as a prop throughout the play.

Mary: Who's to say that when the angel came, it wasn't power that caused me to tremble with fear, but beauty?

If you'd asked me then, that young girl with her whole life ahead of her, asked me if I had even the smallest glimpse of what saying "yes" to that assignment from Heaven would mean for me, for my son, for the world, I would have simply laughed like Sarah did outside Abraham's tent.

Knowing all the details of God's plan from the outset isn't the important thing. What matters is saying "yes".

That's why I'm here today. Not as an angel and not as a strange and revered saint, but as a witness who saw what happened at the cross and knows its pain.

I watched in horror as a believer in the Son of God who gave up his life so that all people can have everlasting life. And I watched as the mother of the man who was nailed there, to the tree.

Ever since that day people all over the world have said yes to God's assignments. I want to introduce you to four people from your recent past whose actions changed history.

WILBERFORCE, HANNAH MORE, ROSALIND GOFORTH and ERIC LIDDELL enter the stage and form a semi-circle behind MARY.

A spotlight lights WILLIAM WILBERFORCE standing motionless. MARY turns to look at him, then turning to the audience, she smiles and points at him. As MARY describes him, she can approach WILBERFORCE

In 1794, as William Wilberforce rose to a prominent place in English society as an MP from Yorkshire, he underwent what he referred to as a "Great Change". This newfound, personal faith in God led him to take a detour from idle pursuits to strategically campaign in the British House of Commons for the end of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the end of Slavery itself. He also worked tirelessly to reform society so much so that he is described as "the most successful social reformer in the history of the world.

A spotlight lights HANNAH MORE, she also stands motionless. MARY walks toward her to introduce her bio to the audience.

Wilberforce's close friend Hannah More shared a similar faith and was connected to fashionable society—the who's-who of artists, academics and influencers in England. Rather than cashing in on her social capital for personal gain, More used her quick wit and wielded her pen to help re-write social norms in ways that transformed Western society. If you believe in universal education, charitable giving, the humane treatment of animals and the abolition of slavery, then you should thank Hannah More.

A spotlight on ROSALIND GOFORTH who stands motionless. MARY walks towards her.

Now travel with me across an ocean all the way to China. In 1887 Rosalind Goforth put her promising art career on hold and chose to serve God in China alongside her risk-taking preacher for a husband, Jonathan Goforth. Five of their eleven children died on the mission field and the family barely escaped the Boxer Rebellion with their lives and limbs intact. Rosalind's quick response to a brutal famine in China through a letter published in the world's major news publications saved countless lives and opened a way for her to write books that influenced countless more.

A spotlight on ERIC LIDDELL who stands motionless. MARY walks towards him.

If you love sports, you might know about Eric Liddell. In 1924 he stunned the world when he refused to participate in a Sunday heat to qualify for the 100 metre sprint finals at the Summer Olympics in Paris, where he was favoured to win the gold medal. Then he shocked the world all over again when he won gold in the 400 metre, a much longer race. Yet it was his decision to give his life to missions in China, where he died in a Japanese internment camp during World War II while separated from his wife and young girls—one who he'd never meet on this earth—that would leave the most astonishing legacy of his celebrated life.

These great individuals are just four believers who stand in the great cloud of witnesses. They stand under the long and generous shadow cast by the Cross, which towers over all history, compelling people from all ages to seek a glory and purpose greater than themselves.

I didn't know, when the angel visited me, what my yes would mean.

These four heroes of the faith also didn't know what their yes would mean in the world. But you're about to find out!

The CHOIR bursts into the CHORUS and as it sings it, MARY takes an end of the FABRIC to arrange it for the next scene. She fixes it to its mark so that the silk looks like a large sail.

She places the letter on the table, against the candle.

CHOIR sings chorus from "The blind will see" to "The praises of the Lamb" of "Mary Did You Know?"

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SCENETWO

JOHN NEWTON sits at desk stage right, he hunches over some parchment, scratching out words on the page. MARY searches among the papers and finds an opened letter, that is in its envelope, and rests it against a prominent candle on the table.

WILBERFORCE enters but stops at the fabric sail, watching JOHN write.

Newton: You must be really desperate to risk being seen with me.

Wilberforce: It’s been a long time.

Newton: Well come in and don’t be shy.

Wilberforce: I don’t want to interrupt your writing.

Newton: Is this humble man before me the same force of nature sweeping through our Parliament? Sparing no man. Raining his wit and the Prime Minister’s agenda on the righteous and on the wicked.

Wilberforce: It’s the same foolish boy you once knew in childhood, who at least means well.

Newton: I knew you had great things ahead of you, Billy. How does one refer to the Member of Parliament from Yorkshire these days?

Wilberforce: William will do.

Newton: So what brings you? There’s very few men of your fame who seek out an old Methodist preacher.

Wilberforce: Is that what they’re calling you now?

Newton: They think it’s an insult and they do sling at me. But I wear it as a badge of honour. I believe all men are sinners and need a personal saviour. If that makes me a fundamentalist radical, then so be it.

Wilberforce: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me...” People are singing your hymn all over England, John.

Newton: Is that so?

Wilberforce: I’ve been singing it.

Newton: I’m happy to hear it.

Wilberforce: That’s why I came.

Newton: To sing?

Wilberforce: Not to sing.

Newton: It’s known all over London that you have a fine signing voice.

Wilberforce: Used too much, I’m afraid, in the services of selfish and singular pleasures.

JOHN picks up the letter and pulls it from the envelope.

Newton: I didn’t know if you’d actually come. You tore out your signature and begged that I not mention our correspondence. As though I’m watched by spies. The letter was written by a man with an agitated hand.

Wilberforce: I’m sorry for taking such measures. I’m embarrassed by it, really.

Newton: Who would care enough to tell anyone we had a meeting?

Wilberforce: You think I overestimate my own importance?

Newton: Well you certainly overestimate mine.

Wilberforce: The same people who think you’re taking things too far with your faith—I don’t think they’d view a meeting with someone so close to the Prime Minister very favourably.

Newton: And yet here you are.

Wilberforce: Here I am...I’ve undergone a great change, John. Over the last few years. And the words of the song that you wrote...you could say they’re now the words of my life. I’m no longer a party man.

Newton: Have you left politics?

Wilberforce: Not yet.

Newton: Not yet?

Wilberforce: I’ve resigned from the social clubs though. Gambling, drink.

Newton: Oh, those parties, I see.

Wilberforce: Perhaps I should make a clean break from everything—leave politics, for a life of...for a life of meditation?

Newton: You want to write hymns, like the old man in front of you?

Wilberforce: It’s not so strange an idea, is it?

Newton: Look at the natural gifts God’s given you, Wilberforce. Do you think a pastor’s life fits your disposition?

Wilberforce: When your life changed, you left your career.

Newton: I was doing the devil’s work at sea.

At the words, the CHOIR starts to hum the Spiritual “HOLD ON”; holding the first note long, hauntingly until WILBERFORCE turns and looks back toward the sail.

When he steps toward it the CHOIR continues humming the song softly under the dialogue.

Wilberforce turns after a moment of reflection to address JOHN.

Wilberforce: I’ve read them, you know. Your famous letters. Of your life as a young man.

Newton: I had many follies.

Wilberforce: Of how before you became a slaver, you were like a slave yourself. That ship’s captain treated you so cruelly.

Newton: Not nearly as cruel as I’ve treated others myself.

Wilberforce: Locked upon the deck whenever he left the vessel, with two cups of rice for each day’s food, nearly starved.

Newton: I wrote those letters to one person, but they’ve fallen into many hands.

Wilberforce: And we thank God for it.

The CHOIR stops humming. WILBERFORCE summons his courage to get to the point of his visit.

Wilberforce: I wrote a letter as well.

Newton: To who?

Wilberforce: The Prime Minister. Telling him of the change in me.

Newton: Good, Billy. “No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar...they put it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light.”

Wilberforce: But it’s more than that. I wasn’t just telling the Prime Minister about my faith. It’s about what I hope to do with it. John, you have no vested interest in the corridors of worldly power. That’s why you came. For advice. The Prime Minister is urging me to stay at his side—

Newton: Well, Pitt is wise beyond his years—

Wilberforce: But I want to live a life for God! Don’t you see?

Newton: I do see.

Wilberforce: One that matters. I don’t want to spend my life in pursuit of the power and riches that my colleagues and my constituents are so set on. That I’ve been so set on.

Newton: Then you must change things, for them. Just as you’ve been changed.

Wilberforce: I don’t see a way for politics and my beliefs to meet. It certainly seems a...

Newton: A what?

Wilberforce: A strange marriage at best.

JOHN thinks this over. The words hang in the space between them and seem as though they might snuff out the candlelight. He rifles through the papers at his desk and finds a particular one. He holds it up to the light.

Newton: It’s been more than 30 years since I retired from the slave trade. Almost 40 since my conversion.

WILBERFORCE thinks on this, has to scratch his head.

Newton: Your math is correct. I wasn’t a Christian in the full sense of the word until I left that life behind.

He holds some writings.

Wilberforce: What’s this?

Newton: A pamphlet. I want to send it to every MP. My thoughts on the slave trade.

Wilberforce: Can I read it?

Newton: It’s for Members of Parliament, William.

WILBERFORCE considers this. He holds out his hand. NEWTON hands him the paper.

Wilberforce: *(reading from the page)* “This confession, which comes too late will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders...”

Newton: These pages describe the brutal conditions on the ships for all those slaves through the Middle Passage.

Wilberforce: But you’ve never spoken publicly about these details before.

Newton: It’s time.

WILBERFORCE scans over it.

Wilberforce: This is...shocking. John. This will be difficult for many of my colleagues to read, especially in the port cities.

WILBERFORCE steps to the table and glances over the other pages. He’s fascinated.

Newton: The abolition movement, we need an advocate in Parliament, Billy. “Slavery is a scandal of religion, of England, of human nature.”

The CHOIR resumes humming the tune of HOLD ON. The TRIO emerges from the CHOIR and walks through the sail, reaching their mark downstage, by the end of NEWTON and WILBERFORCE’s dialogue.

Newton: William, hear me. You can serve God where you are. You must.

Wilberforce: I don’t know that it can be done.

Newton: Without God it will be impossible. But with Him a world blind like I was to this injustice, will finally see their terrible wrongs.

The CHOIR sings the song. NEWTON and WILBERFORCE exit during the song.

CHOIR: Hold on
Hold on
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on.

Heard the voice of Jesus say
Come unto me, I am the way.
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on.
When my way gets dark as night,
I know the lord will be my light,
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on.

Hold on
Hold on
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on.

You can talk about me much as you please
The more you talk, gonna stay on my knees.
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on.
When I get to heaven, gonna sing and shout

PURCHASE

Be nobody there to put me out.
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on.

I know my robe’s gonna fit me well,
I tried it on at the gates of Hell.
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on.

Hold on
Hold on
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on.

SCRIPT

As the CHOIR sings, MARY removes the fabric for the next scene, arranging it in the shadows until the song’s end. The scenes pass, seamlessly into each other.

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SCENE THREE

Patty: Hannah! Help!

Lights up on PATTY and HANNAH MORE who are trudging through mud on an open road in the countryside. HANNAH holds the fabric. PATTY is lying on the ground holding the letter in the air, out of the mud.

Note: The fabric and the letter are the only props required.

Patty: Throw me that. Get me out of this mud.

Hannah: Patience now, I don’t want to dirty my hem.

Patty: Dirty your hem? I’m covered from corset to bonnet.

Hannah: You are not. Stop being so melodramatic, Patty. You’re over the moon at our little adventure. Just think how tickled our friends at Clapham will be when we tell them of our challenges in the countryside.

Patty: It’s you who’s tickled, not me. I’m covered in muck. Now please, sister, pull me out of this mess.

Hannah: I’ll have you know this shawl was a gift from David Garrick himself.

She throws the fabric over her shoulder and strikes a dramatic pose of Garrick’s most famous role on the London stage, Hamlet.

Hannah: To this day I still pinch myself I had the fortune to see him perform Hamlet.

Patty: Please, take your time.

PATTY resigns herself to sitting in the mud while HANNAH recounts the story.

Hannah: “To be or not to be, that is the question”—

Patty: Actually, I don’t think that’s the question.

Hannah: In every part he filled the whole soul of the spectator and transcended the most finished idea of the poet. His performance was a fiction as delightful as fancy, and as touching as truth.

Patty: You know what’s even truer still?

Hannah: No, what?

Patty: This mud.

Hannah: Oh Patty dear, let’s get you out of that sink hole. I will revive your spirits.

Patty: You’re too kind.

HANNAH removes the fabric shawl and swings it back and forth, releasing it over an imagined gap to PATTY who catches it.

Hannah: Steady now, darling sister. Hannah More to the rescue.

HANNAH starts to pull her from the muck. PATTY screams as she’s dragged across the stage through it. Somehow, she manages to keep the letter out of the mud. HANNAH ends up on her knees, pulling her desperately while PATTY, very unlady-like, military crawls. They end in a pile together, laughing.

Hannah: I’ve saved you.

Patty: And I saved this.

She hands the letter to HANNAH.

Patty: No knight in shining armor could have rivalled your valiant efforts. But perhaps he would have spared me as well as my dress.

Hannah: When you think about it, it’s almost metaphoric.

Patty: What is?

Hannah: This. Us. Being dragged through the mud.

Patty: Is this your prophetic voice speaking?

Hannah: Do you remember when we first set out to start the School for Young Ladies in Bristol? You were just a child, but you know what we faced back then.

Patty: I remember you reciting that annoying treatise by that most influential writer, who was it? John...

Hannah: Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Stop pretending.

Patty: Right. Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Hannah: I love it when you imitate him. Please, Patty.

Patty: *(mimicking the man)* “The whole education of women ought to relate to men. To please men, to be useful to them, to make herself loved and honored by them...to make their lives agreeable and sweet. These are the duties of women at all times, and ought to be taught them from childhood.”

Hannah: And ought to be taught them from childhood. Yes. See what I mean? We've faced strong opposition to new ideas before, especially in regard to education.

Patty: It's true, Hannah. You did break the wisdom of the day with that school, but it was still within your own social class. We're trying to kick the door open for the poor.

Hannah: There are still barriers today that we must break down.

Patty: Agreed. And I think we have. My wrist.

Hannah: Oh darling sister, let me see.

She checks her over.

Patty: You know the attitude that prevails. The poor are meant to be ignorant.

Hannah: We're sending missionaries to distant colonies while our own villages are perishing for lack of instruction. Here, stand up now.

They stand, not without effort and start brushing themselves off.

Hannah: I was in shock to see the terrible condition of the villages, just within walking distance of our own home. I'm ashamed of my comforts when I think of their wants.

Patty: The swearing, Hannah. The eating and drinking of these half-dressed beings gave the whole village a most infernal and horrible appearance. What are you laughing at?

Hannah: The look on the church warden's face when we told him we wanted to start a school there. *(Mimicking the warden)* "The village of Nailsea is so wicked and lawless, thieving has been handed down from father to son for the last forty years."

Patty: So he sent out two nervous women because of his own personal fears. Well, we survived it.

Hannah: Thank God. So far.

Patty: But will England?

Hannah: The villagers clearly want to be educated. My ears are still ringing with the glorious sound of the church bells when we told them we came to start a school.

Patty: I’ve never seen a farmer run so fast in gumboots. And I’ve never heard a church bell ring with such joy or promise. And here we have it! Our first letter of consent for our first school!

PATTY places the letter in HANNAH’s hand like a cherished jewel. HANNAH pulls her hands away after a moment and kisses it, then tucks it into her coat.

Hannah: Let’s be cautious, though. There’s still so many detractors.

From the darkness where the CHOIR stands, voices shout out.

Choir 1: The poor are meant to be servants and slaves.

Choir 2: What do you really want to do with our children? You’ll take them into London’s factories, won’t you?

Choir 1: You’ll only cause mischief.

Choir 2: And our masters will punish us!

Patty: I must say, Hannah, you were unflappable. When you talked to the town, it was like you were soliciting a vote at an election.

Hannah: And we must remain unflappable, Patty. We will continue to stroke and tame the petty tyrants and caress the flea-ridden spaniels and play with as many dirty children as we need to until we curry enough favour to establish the schools.

Patty: Now if only you could wrangle our horses as well as you’re wrangling the uneducated masses.

Hannah: They can’t have gone far.

Patty: Thank God your leg wasn’t crushed when Newton fell.

Hannah: Old John and Wilberforce will have a laugh.

Patty: What, when they hear about two respectable ladies tramping over hill and mountain every Sunday?

Hannah: And chasing after horses.

Patty: Have you told them yet we named our faithful beasts after our dear friends?

Hannah: Not yet. I want to tell them in person. But we must continue this work, Patty. We will continue to teach.

Patty: How will we teach people who’ve never had an education?

Hannah: We’ll teach as He taught, by seizing on surrounding objects to: “Find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.”

Patty: Well, if all else fails, you’ll teach with authority on the subject of late night travels without any horses. I’m turned around. Which way is North?

HANNAH points one direction while PATTY points another.

Hannah: That way.

Patty: That way?

Hannah: God help us.

Patty: Let it be noted we must recruit a geography teacher.

Hannah: Hear hear.

As the sisters exit, searching for the road in the dark, they leave behind the fabric.

The CHOIR begins to sing AIN’T YOU GOTTA RIGHT TO THE TREE OF LIFE.

MARY appears from the shadows and places the letter on the table. She gathers up the fabric and walks back into the shadows.

SCENE FOUR

A lonely table is set in centre stage. It has an oil lamp and is dimly lit.

From the darkness, the CHOIR starts to clap the beat of THE HANGING TREE. Once established, the SOPRANOS start to whistle the song’s tune. It has an ominous sound.

When the singing starts, the whistling and clapping cease.

BASS sings first verse. TENORS join in the second verse. BASS, TENORS, ALTOS sing third verse.

MARY GOFORTH appears, she stops at the table then steps toward the darkness, staying within the slim circle of light, listening.

The singing stops, but the SOPRANOS whistle four more bars of the music.

Mary G: Mother! Come quickly! They’re back.

ROSALIND staggers into the stage. She is clearly weak and ill.

Rosalind: How many Mary?

Mary G: I’m not sure. 50, no, I think more.

Rosalind: God help us.

Mary G: They’re outside the fence still.

Rosalind: Those poor, desperate people.

Mary G: What can we do to hold them off?

Rosalind: I wish your father was here. He’d have an idea.

Mary G: They look like they have a mind to tear this house down, board by board.

Rosalind: It’s the hunger that’s driving them. They’ve had enough of leaves and moss—

Mary G: Maybe they’ve come to boil our flesh.

Rosalind: Shh. You’ll scare the little ones. I just got them to sleep.

Mary G: You’ve heard the report. They expect 60 million to die in this famine. So what’s a house full of Canadian missionaries?

Rosalind: They’re just here for help, Mary.

A loud crash.

Mary G: What was that?

Another loud bang.

Rosalind: They’re throwing stones.

The CHOIR MEMBERS who voice the anger of the mob remain unseen in the dark.

Choir 1: You in there, come out!

Mary G: *(to ROSALIND)* Listen.

Choir 1: We know you’re hiding food!

Mary G: *(to ROSALIND)* They’re shouting at us.

Choir 2: We heard about the money.

Rosalind: *(to MARY G)* The silver?

Mary G: *(to ROSALIND)* It just arrived. How could they know?

Choir 2: How can you hoard it to yourself while our families starve?

ROSALIND steps toward the edge of light but MARY G restrains her.

Mary G: You can’t go out there. They’ll tear you to pieces. They’re mad with starvation.

Choir 1: Give us the money!

Rosalind: If I don’t speak to them, they’ll knock this house down.

Mary G: What will you say?

Rosalind: I’ll think of something. They don’t call me the Duchess for nothing.

Mary G: Mom, you’ve been bed ridden for days. You’re too frail.

Rosalind: I’ve got some fight in me yet.

ROSALIND composes herself. Straightens out her outfit and throws her head and shoulders back. ROSALIND steps outside the circle of light toward the audience and raises her hands, gently waving the fabric like a flag.

She stares them down. Throughout the dialogue with the unseen crowd, she paces in a circle around the stage as though addressing a mob on all sides.

Rosalind: Stop this my friends, I beseech you. We want no trouble.

Choir 2: Then why are you hiding food and money?

Rosalind: Like you we have no food.

Choir 1: Liar!

Rosalind: Believe me. Look at me. I’ve been struck with dysentery and that’s the only reason I’m not down the mountain handing out food like all the other missionaries. Your stone-throwing pulled me out of my bed where I’ve been lying for days, wondering if I will die. Wondering who will care for my children.

Choir 2: Then what about the money?

Rosalind: It’s true. Yesterday our family received some silver dollars from our friends in North America.

Choir 1: And you’d hide it from us while we die with our families?

Choir 2: Villagers are throwing their babies into the river to spare them the misery of hunger.

Rosalind: What would you have me do? We’re all desperate! My family and I are also hungry. My husband, even now, feeds your people down the mountain.

The sound of another stone crashing into a window. MARY G screams from inside.

Rosalind: Please stop! Okay? Listen. Tomorrow, in the town square, I will bring the little money that my family has, the silver dollars from Canada, and we’ll buy food—as much as it will buy, and anyone who comes will have something to eat. Now please, go to your homes. Pray that God will spare us from more famine and tuck your little ones into their beds.

Choir 2: If you’re lying to us, we’ll come back tomorrow night.

Rosalind: I’ll see you in the village square in the morning.

The SOPRANOS start to whistle the tune again as ROSALIND watches the imagined crowd disperse. By the fourth bar of the song, the whistling decrescendos to a single whistler, then stops. ROSALIND is back inside with MARY G.

Mary G: Thank God they’re gone. Mamma, you’re so brave.

Rosalind: But now what?

Mary G: How much food will these few silver dollars get us?

Rosalind: By tomorrow it will all be spent. *(Aside)* Daily bread.

Mary G: What?

Rosalind: Our daily bread.

Mary G: We need it now more than ever.

ROSALIND grabs MARY G by the hand and pulls her down with her onto her knees. They kneel at the chair beside the table.

Rosalind: Oh God, what can I do to help these hungry masses? What can I do to help?

Jesus: *(from the darkness of the CHOIR)* Use your pen. Use your pen.

Rosalind: Oh!

Mary G: Oh what?

Rosalind: Did you hear that?

Mary G: No.

Rosalind: The answer just came, like a voice.

Mary G: The hunger is getting to you.

Rosalind: No dear, I know what to do.

Mary G: But we’ve not even started to pray.

ROSALIND stands up, moves the chair, so that MARY G falls forward when it’s moved from under her arms.

Rosalind: The answer was there before the petition was made.

ROSALIND sits down resolutely.

Rosalind: Mary dearest, go fetch me my ink and my paper.

Mary G: Right now?

Rosalind: Yes. I will write a letter.

Mary G: To who?

Rosalind: To the world. An SOS call. Go, now please, I must write it presently.

MARY G hurries off. ROSALIND looks to stage left. The fabric, stretched out and held on all sides by members of the CHOIR is suspended in the air. It is lit, while the CHOIR members’ faces remain in shadow.

The corner of the fabric nearest to her is free. As she starts to pray the CHOIR members move the fabric so it slowly undulates.

Rosalind: Jesus, you’ve fed the five thousand. Now I pray that you feed China’s millions. Move people from all around the world to show the love of God so that they save millions of lives from death by starvation.

By the time she is finished her prayer, ROSALIND now stands at the fabric. She grabs hold of the corner. When she does, all the CHOIR members let it free. The CHOIR members step back into the CHOIR and only MARY (Jesus’ mother) is left holding the opposite corner.

The music for the next scene begins and MARY G and ROSALIND walk the fabric to the centre of the stage and arrange it like the finishing ribbon at a sprinting competition.

MARY G and ROSALIND exit.

SCENE FIVE

The famous opening bars to the THEME SONG OF CHARIOTS OF FIRE plays as MICHAEL enters, running in slow motion to the music toward the fabric, his head thrown back, arms slowly flailing in ERIC LIDDEL’s famous and controversial running style. Michael pushes through the fabric and the music stops.

Lights up on ERIC. He lies in a bed, looking frail.

Michael: My dad told me that they call you the Flying Scotsman.

Eric: The name stuck.

Michael: He said you can outrun any man.

Eric: Well, not any more.

Michael: How did it feel at the end of the race, when you won gold?

Eric: I was exhausted.

Michael: It must be the best feeling in the world.

Eric: Wonderful, but not the best.

Michael: Did they shoot canons?

Eric: No canons. There were bagpipes though.

Michael: They must have gone crazy. The Americans were supposed to crush you. They said there was no way you could keep the pace.

Eric: There were a lot of people watching. Doubting, cheering. I just threw myself into it. Like a bird into a strong wind. I was still out front when I crossed the finish line. I couldn’t see the other sprinters the whole race from where I was in the outside lane, so you can imagine my delight when I still couldn’t see them on those final steps.

Michael: It’s because you refused to run on Sunday, isn’t it? Dad says God honoured you.

Eric: That’s part of it, I think. The first half I ran as fast as I could. The second half I ran faster with God’s help.

Michael: Don’t you ever regret not running the 100 metre race? You could have had another gold medal!

Eric: And how much good would that be doing me now?

Michael: We could sell it outside the camp. Maybe pay for a few meals at the school.

Eric: That would be a clever use for it. If you could avoid getting shot. Are you getting enough food, Michael?

Michael: No one is.

Eric: I need to talk to our friend the priest again. He found a way to sneak in food from outside for the children last year. Maybe he can do it again.

Michael: Can I put in a special request for bacon?

Eric: Only if he can bring in enough for me and the other adults. Wait! Maybe we could organize a race. The fastest runner gets bacon as a prize.

Michael: I might have a chance now that you're sick.

Eric: How are you sure this isn't all just an elaborate act so that I can win the smuggled food from the children.

ERIC starts coughing.

Michael: Well, that cough sort of gives it away.

Eric: Sorry you have to see me like this.

Michael: You know what else my dad said?

Eric: I'm sure you're about to tell me.

Michael: He said a newspaperman said that you'll be remembered by sports fans as "probably the ugliest runner who ever won an Olympic championship."

Eric: Really? *(Laughing)* That's quite funny. It's probably true.

Michael: You're not very ugly though.

Eric: Thanks. I think he was talking about my running style, though. Flailing arms and the lot.

Michael: Oh. Sorry.

Eric: Did you just come here to insult the looks of a bed-ridden, former Olympian?

Michael: Everyone's asking about it.

Eric: About my looks?

Michael: No, how come you refereed the hockey game on Sunday?

ERIC laughs at this.

Eric: I’ll never forget the looks of astonishment on their faces when I said yes.

Michael: One of the older boys said the war finally got to you, that you’ve finally lost all your convictions.

Eric: That’s nonsense. Don’t listen to him.

Michael: Then what for?

Eric: I wanted to prevent mayhem.

Michael: You gave up a gold medal because of the Sabbath but refereed a hockey game to stop a fight?

Eric: You saw how they brawled last week.

Michael: Yeah. I wish I could’ve got in on it.

Eric: You don’t mean that.

Michael: What if I do?

Eric: The Japanese are getting more and more impatient with us, Michael. We need to remain calm.

Michael: Calm? It’s almost been two years of just sitting here, with nothing to do!

Eric: Nothing to do? What about the cricket games and the tennis matches? What about the square dances and the chess tournaments?

Michael: Since you got sick, they don’t happen much anymore. You’re the heart of this place, Eric.

Eric: I’m but one man. Maybe you’re the one to take my place. Organize a tournament. Help the other children find positive ways to occupy themselves. You’re getting old enough now.

Michael: No way. I can’t do any of that.

Eric: That’s what I used to say.

Michael: To who?

Eric: Myself. Here. Hand me my Bible.

MICHAEL walks to the little table beside the bed and picks up the big, worn book. He hands it to ERIC who has trouble with its weight.

ERIC places it in his lap. He flips through the pages until he gets to the place where an envelope is tucked away. He holds up the same letter used in the other scenes.

Michael: What’s that?

Eric: Take it.

Michael: A letter? From who?

Eric: From my sister Jenny. We were both born in China like you, to missionaries. I was sent, just like you, to a boarding school to study in safety while my parents were out in the field. And like you I started to show promise both in athletics and in academics when I was a boy. They started calling me the Flying Scotsman when I was at school, you know. Go on, read it, the last sentence in the quotation marks at the end.

Michael: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

Eric: They wanted me to speak about my faith to a group of 80 coal miners who lived outside of Edinburgh. The men in the town wanted nothing to do with church, so the Glasgow Students’ Evangelistic Union invited me as a guest speaker. They reasoned that even though the rough and tumble coal miners wouldn’t listen to a minister, they might listen to the fastest man in Scotland.

Michael: Of course, they’d want to listen to you. Everyone does!

Eric: But what you don’t know is that I was terrified to speak. And then came Jenny’s letter, just in time. Those words that you just read helped me make my decision, and since then, I have endeavored to do the work of the Master. In everything.

Michael: You? Nervous to speak? I don’t believe it.

Eric: It’s true. Maybe now’s the time for you to decide how you’ll serve God with your life.

Michael: Serve? In an internment camp? Serve who, the Japanese who’d rather we were dead?

Eric: At least it won’t be boring. Since the Japanese invaded China, I’ve been attacked by armed thieves and shot at. We rescued a man who was about to be decapitated by soldiers. And we dodged German U-boats on our last crossing for furlough in ‘39. We did a baptism service under

artillery fire. It’s an adventure to be in God’s service, Michael. Think of all the stories of God’s deliverance you’ll have to tell your friends living their boring lives back home in America.

Michael: I don’t want to live that kind of excitement. I’d prefer the cheers of a thousand people as I run for my country at the Olympics. Can we please just talk about your racing days?

Eric: I think there’s more important things at hand. Why did you want to fight those boys, Michael?

MICHAEL steps away from the bed. He fingers the fabric, thinking.

Eric: You’re not yourself. What’s troubling you?

MICHAEL looks at ERIC.

Michael: How come they left me here? I’m old enough to understand that I’ll never see them again.

A wave of pain overcomes ERIC. He grabs at his temples. MICHAEL gathers up the fabric and rushes to his bedside. He covers him with it, as though it’s a warm blanket.

Michael: Where does it hurt?

Eric: Here.

Michael: The headaches?

Eric: Yes.

Michael: What can I do?

Eric: Sing to me.

Michael: What song?

Eric: My favourite hymn. Be Still, My Soul. Do you know it?

Michael: Yeah.

Eric: It always calms me.

Michael: Okay.

Eric: Ah!

Michael: *(Singing)* Be still, my soul—

Eric: My girls love it—

Michael: *(singing)* the Lord is on thy side...

Eric: The little one, I know she’ll love it too—

Michael: *(singing)* Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.

Eric: Yes, keep singing.

Michael: *(singing)* Leave to thy God...to order and provide. *(Grasping for the lyrics)* Um, who...

Eric: Through all changes faithful will remain

Michael: Right— *(singing)* Will remain.

ERIC hums sporadically as MICHAEL finishes the verse.

Michael: Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heavenly Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Choir: Be still, my soul: thy God doth undertake
To guide the future surely as the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.

Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know
His voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.

ERIC is now composed, he sits up again, singing with MICHAEL and the CHOIR.

Choir: Be still, my soul: the hour is hastening on
When we shall be forever with the Lord;
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgot, love’s purest joys restored.

It is only ERIC singing now.

Eric: Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

A sweet moment passes, gone too quickly under MICHAEL’s cloud of agitation.

Michael: Did you know?

Eric: Did I know what?

Michael: That you’d be left here alone like me without your family?

Eric: No.

Michael: Did my parents know? When they went up North for their mission work and left me at the school?

Eric: None of us knew what would happen.

Michael: The adults all had a chance to leave the country with their families.

Eric: But the war changed quickly.

Michael: They don’t love me.

Eric: Don’t say that, Michael. Of course they do.

Michael: Everyone speaks about what good Christians they are, how devoted to their call—

Eric: It’s true.

Michael: But they left me here. For what? To do their mission?

Eric: They’re being obedient to God.

Michael: It’s a monstrous space they’ve left me in.

Eric: They’re meant to be where they are. Just as I’m meant to be here. Just as you’re meant to be here too.

Michael: What about your kids? Your wife...the daughter that was born in Canada? Did you even think about them when you decided to stay here?

Eric: Every moment of every day.

Michael: What does it even matter?

Eric: It matters very much. They’re in Toronto now. They’ll visit their grandparents for Christmas.

The girls will open presents early in the morning after listening to the King’s address on the radio. Then they’ll eat a big, beautiful breakfast, with as much food on their grandfather’s polished oak table as there is in the internment camp right now.

I wonder, Michael, like you, if we’ll get out of here alive. It’s not looking so good for me right now. The doctor says it’s a tumor.

I wonder about the women my daughters will become. What they’ll do with their lives, their time. They’ll be so beautiful.

Will they become nurses like their mom? Will they excel at athletics?

I picture their weddings. The handsome men at their sides. Will Patricia’s husband steal her veil after the ceremony and plant it on his head just in time for the photograph like I did on my wedding day? Will their homes be filled with laughter and fun like ours was?

Grandchildren. What will be their names?

Will they live good lives, Michael? Will they remember me? Will they forgive me for my absence?

Every day I think about the feeling of their little arms around my neck when we had not a care in the world. When this world itself seemed good enough to be eternity.

Michael: Then why didn’t you just go with them?

Eric: Because I’m needed here, Michael.

ERIC experiences great pain again but doesn’t cry out. He slips back in the bed.

Michael: Eric? Uncle Eric? We need you here. The camp needs you here!

Eric: The camp needs all of us. The world does. It needs you.

Michael: I hate this place.

The CHOIR starts to create the sounds of rain. The ALTOS begin by rubbing their palms together lightly, followed by the TENORS and the rest of the CHOIR.

Eric: Do you hear that?

The ALTOS, TENORS and BASS continue to rub their palms together. The SOPRANOS start to snap their fingers, as the raindrops outside start to fall lightly.

Michael: Rain.

Eric: I love that sound.

The rain leaves almost as soon as it has come. The SOPRANOS stop snapping. The BASS singers, then the TENORS stop rubbing their palms.

Eric: *(weakly)* All will be well, Michael. All will be well.

MARY appears in a spot on the opposite side of the stage, watching the two. Finally, the ALTOS stop rubbing their palms. The rain stops. As MARY begins her solo, the lights fade on MICHAEL and ERIC.

MARY sings the chorus to “Let It Rain” twice.

The CHOIR takes up the chorus, MARY takes up the fabric and lays it in a long line on the stage and folds it neatly from all sides so that she can hold it easily in her hands.

She walks downstage with the fabric in her hand as the CHOIR fades into silence. JESUS steps from the CHOIR into the shadow of the cross and walks downstage to meet MARY. She doesn’t see him arrive.

Jesus: Mom?

Mary: *(she’s startled)* Son!

Jesus: Sorry to startle you. I thought I saw you out here. Are you alright?

Mary: That’s a loaded question.

Jesus: I know.

Mary: Here, I made you something.

Jesus: What is it?

Mary: A tunic.

Jesus: For me?

Mary: For your trip, once you arrive in Jerusalem.

Jesus: It’s beautiful.

Mary: Look here, do you see? It’s from a single piece of cloth woven from top to bottom, without a seam.

Jesus: You’re too good to me. And so skilled. It’s beautiful.

Mary: Well, I’ve had practice. You know how as a young girl, before I was betrothed to your father that I was sent to Jerusalem from among all the tribes to join the young seamstresses in sewing the new curtain for the temple, for the holy of holies. A once in a lifetime opportunity.

Jesus: I remember. That was a significant journey.

Mary: The most significant of my young life. At least, until that point.

Jesus: As will this trip be for me.

Mary: For both of us.

Jesus: What is it?

Mary: Something I never told you was that when I returned home from the temple, after the angel came, after everything changed... forever, it was put in my heart also to make this garment.

Jesus: Mom?

Mary: Yes Jesus?

Jesus: Did you know, all these years of our life, did you know what was ahead of us?

Mary: It came in pieces. My son. I still don’t see it all. I don’t want to imagine it.

JESUS pulls MARY into his arms.

Jesus: I love you mom.

After a moment, MARY holds her hand to his cheek.

Mary: My little boy. My king of kings. You must go now and complete the thing that God has asked of you. Go in peace.

JESUS looks to the cross, fully lit now, towering over the stage. He starts to walk toward it, not looking back. MARY watches him as he walks. The CHOIR begins to sing an abridged version of MARY DID YOU KNOW.

JESUS arrives at a platform that has so far been unseen and is set in front of the cross. ROSALIND, WILBERFORCE, HANNAH and ERIC appear from the shadows, each carrying a different colour fabric.

JESUS takes an end of fabric from the four actors, two in each hand. The four actors walk downstage, spreading out across it so that the fabric stretches from front to back.

CHOIR sings verse one and two of Mary Did You Know? ending with “Kiss the face of God?”

As the CHOIR sings the final six lines (from “The blind will see to “The praises of the Lamb”) of the Chorus, JESUS raises his arms with the fabric stretching from his hands, as if in triumph.

Lights fade to end the play.