

LIGHT IN THE ALLEY

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Summary: CECILIA and EARL are out for a festive evening of bowling. CECILIA is dissatisfied with spending her life in the lanes and wishes she could experience Christmas in a real way. During the course of the evening, her frustrations are magnified until a young woman looking for a place for her family to park their car for the night forces CECILIA to focus on the real meaning of Christmas.

Characters:

EARL—middle-aged man, CECILIA's husband, bowling enthusiast

CECILIA—middle-aged woman, EARL's wife, not a bowling enthusiast

GERTIE—owner and operator of the bowling alley, slightly rough character with a heart of gold

ESTELLE—MAX's wife and good friend of CECILIA

MAX—ESTELLE's husband and EARL's bowling buddy

WANDELLA—bowling gal

MAUDIE—bowling gal

LADDEAN—bowling gal

RONNIE—ROSETTA's husband and EARL's bowling buddy

ROSETTA—RONNIE's wife, flashy younger woman, slightly dim-witted

HEATHER—young homeless woman

Setting: a bowling alley during the Christmas season. There is a counter stage right with three or four stools in front of it. Tinsel is draped on the counter. A few large plastic poinsettias are stuck here and there. There is a partition stage left. Front center stage is the main entrance of the bowling alley. The aisle of the auditorium is the outside parking lot of the alley and the way that the actors enter the stage.

Costumes: identical pink shirts for WANDELLA, MAUDIE, and LADEAN;
bright-colored red wig for ROSETTA

Props: plastic poinsettias, counter (can be a table), counter stools, tinsel, partition, glasses, dish towel, magazine, bowling bags, holly, soda, fruitcake, cups, straws, plates, forks, large brown bag, spatula

SFX: bowling alley, Christmas music

Running Time: 20 minutes

GERTIE is behind the counter wiping a glass. EARL and CECILIA are stage left. CECILIA is sitting, looking through a magazine. Bowling alley sounds can be heard as well as Christmas carols playing from a CD player at the counter. As the lights come up, the alley sounds and carols stop.

EARL: Nothing says Christmas like a good day of bowling.

CECILIA: You're sick.

EARL: What did you say?

CECILIA: You are sick. Bowling has nothing to do with Christmas. I'm so tired of sitting in this bowling alley watching you throw balls at those pins that I could scream.

EARL: You must be joking. *This* is living. Can't you feel the excitement as I pick up my shiny bowling ball and stealthily move toward the line to hurtle it toward the waiting pins? It's, well, it's downright festive, that's what it is!

CECILIA: Festive? *Festive?* Do you even know what the word *festive* means?

EARL: Look around you, woman! The twinkling lights, the glittering tinsel, the crashing of pins, the whir of the ball return. Wow! Add a nice cold soda and a bag of chips and you've got so much "festive," it's practically sinful!

CECILIA: Earl, this is a bowling alley. You love to bowl. Therefore you, and only you, equate it with festivities. I, on the other hand, see nothing

festive about this place. [*sees ESTELLE and MAX walking toward the stage from center aisle*] But thank goodness, I see Estelle coming through the door with Max. I think I'll go have a visit and leave you to your unique celebration of Christmas.

EARL: Suit yourself. Max, buddy, over here! [*MAX and EARL greet each other silently, then gesture toward stage left where they "bowl" out of sight behind the partition.*]

CECILIA: Oh, Estelle, I'm so glad you came.

ESTELLE: You know Max. He loves to bowl, so here we are spending our night out together in the bowling alley . . . *again*.

CECILIA: Well, Earl was just telling me how this bowling alley really captured the meaning of Christmas for him.

ESTELLE: You are joking! What on earth does bowling have to do with Christmas?

CECILIA: For Earl, bowling has to do with *everything*.

ESTELLE: But Christmas? Just look at this place.

CECILIA: He says it's festive. There's no explaining Earl. Just forget it. I'll get him a new bowling ball for Christmas, and he'll say, "Aha, you do understand, Celie."

ESTELLE: Men.

[*ESTELLE and CECILIA smile and shake their heads while walking over to the counter. They sit at the counter on stools.*]

GERTIE: What'll it be, ladies? Ya want the yuletide special?

CECILIA: What would that be, Gertie?

GERTIE: Oh, it's a Coke with a sprig a holly in it. I take the berries off cause they're poison, so don't worry about that, ladies.

ESTELLE: That's it?

GERTIE: Oh no, you get a slice of fruitcake with it.

ESTELLE: I've never liked fruitcake. Just give me a Diet Coke, hold the holly.

GERTIE: Suit yourself. What about you, Cecilia? Ya wanna live a little?

CECILIA: Who made the fruitcake?

GERTIE: How should I know? I got it in the mail. It came in this unmarked box, ya know, kinda mysterious. I don't even know what year it was baked. But that's the beauty of fruitcake. It just gets better with age. So, what do ya say? Ya want a slice?

CECILIA: Well, Gertie, that sounds, umm, festive, but I think I'll go with the Diet Coke too. [*GERTIE looks dejected.*] But . . . I'm sure Earl will be by in a minute to get the yuletide special.

GERTIE: [*brightens*] Well someone better order one pretty soon, else I'll have to wrap it up for next year.

[WANDELLA, MAUDIE, and LADEAN enter center stage. They are dressed in identical bowling shirts. They are talking and laughing boisterously. They notice CECILIA and ESTELLE at the counter and head over to greet them.]

WANDELLA: Well, if it isn't Estelle and Cecilia. Howdy, gals!

CECILIA: Hi, Wandella. Out for a little bowling practice?

WANDELLA: You bet.

[WANDELLA, MAUDIE, and LADEAN look at each other conspiratorially and break out in song, heads tilting together.]

WANDELLA, MAUDIE and LADEAN: [*to the tune of "Let It Snow!"*] "Oh, the weather outside is frightful, but the bowling alley's so delightful. So, if you've no place to go, why not bowl? Why not bowl? Why not bowl?"

[They break out in gleeful giggles.]

MAUDIE: We made that up ourselves.

ESTELLE: [*sarcastically*] No. Really?

MAUDIE: Well, it was actually Ladean's idea. She's so clever!

WANDELLA: And she can bowl!

LADEAN: It's nothing. Say, why don't you two gals bowl with us? We could use a couple more arms on our team.

MAUDIE: That would be fun!

WANDELLA: Yes. [*sings*] "Why not bowl? Why not bowl? Why not bowl?"

LADEAN: It's such fun, and you get to wear these eye-catching bowling shirts!

CECILIA: Well, there's the problem—we both look terrible in pink.

MAUDIE: Gals, I sense these two don't care to bowl.

WANDELLA: Their loss.

GERTIE: You gals want the usual?

LADEAN: Sure thing, Gert.

[*GERTIE turns her back to the audience and pretends to flip burgers.*]

WANDELLA: Well, bowling buddies, shall we get to it?

[*They look at each other conspiratorially again and break out in song as they make their way to their bowling lane behind the partition.*]

ESTELLE: They sure look like *they're* having fun.

GERTIE: [*over her shoulder*] That's 'cause they know what fun is.

[*ESTELLE and CECILIA roll their eyes and sip their Cokes. The bowling alley noise comes up along with Christmas carols playing.*]

CECILIA: Oh look, it's Rosetta and Ronnie. Looks like she's been dipping into the beauty products again. What a hair color!

[RONNIE and ROSETTA enter center stage. RONNIE is carrying a bowling bag. He smiles at the ladies, then heads for the bowling lanes behind the partition. ROSETTA sashays over to the counter and poses with a large smile on her face.]

ROSETTA: Notice anything?

ESTELLE: It looks like Ronnie got a new bowling ball.

ROSETTA: Very funny. Just look at my hair. Isn't the color divine? I mean I'm positively dripping with holiday cheer and loveliness.

CECILIA: Only you, Rosetta, would have the courage to make a declaration like that.

ROSETTA: Thank you, Cecilia. I take that as a compliment.

CECILIA: You take everything as a compliment, Rosetta. That's your one truly endearing characteristic.

ROSETTA: You know, Cecilia, if you keep up these delightful sentiments, I may just have to bake you one of my special fruitcakes.

ESTELLE: Oh dear.

GERTIE: Fruitcake? Rosie, you wanna slice of fruitcake?

ROSETTA: Gertie, you look positively glowing.

GERTIE: Thanks, I just fried up a burger, and I always sweat when I'm over the grill.

ESTELLE: Now we know your secret ingredient.

GERTIE: *[glares at ESTELLE; smiles at ROSETTA]* So, Rosie, how 'bout that fruitcake?

ROSETTA: Sounds delicious. Cut me a nice thick slice, Gert. Nothing says Merry Christmas like fruitcake.

GERTIE: Now you're talking. At least somebody around here has some Christmas spirit.

[GERTIE plops a huge slice of fruitcake down in front of ROSETTA, along with the holly and Coke. As ROSETTA eats and sips, she goes through several poses to show

off her hands, her hair, her dress, her wrists, and so on. ESTELLE and CECILIA look at each other and roll their eyes.]

ROSETTA: Isn't this nice?

ESTELLE: Isn't what nice?

ROSETTA: Why being here together during the holidays. The snow is falling outside, the men are happy, the fruitcake is, well, fruity, and I had the pleasure of getting all dolled up.

ESTELLE: Wow, that is nice.

CECILIA: *[flat]* Picture perfect.

ESTELLE: We could all be in one of those Norman Rockwell Christmas cards.

ROSETTA: Do you think so? *[pauses; scrunches brow in concentration.]* Who is Norman Rockwell anyway? Does he do a daytime talk show or something? I'm sure I've heard that name.

ESTELLE: Forget it, Rosetta.

CECILIA: But this isn't picture perfect. It isn't even fun. If this is what Christmas is all about, then why do we even bother with the holiday?

ESTELLE: Yeah, here we sit with all these expectations about a season of joy and giving and what do we get but last year's fruitcake mixed with the smell of bowling shoes?

ROSETTA: Maybe if we lit a candle or two you gals would feel more festive. Candles add such a glow to everything. In the magazines I subscribe to, everyone lights candles for the holidays, and in absolutely every ad and article, every single person is just aglow with holiday cheer.

CECILIA: But that isn't real, Rosetta. I want to feel Christmas in a *real* way.

[HEATHER walks in center stage, looking tentative. She glances around the room, then walks up to the counter. HEATHER speaks to GERTIE.]

€ **HEATHER:** Um, excuse me. I was wondering, um, would it be OK if my husband and I parked our car in your lot overnight?

GERTIE: Can if you wanna, but there ain't no motels close by.

HEATHER: Oh, that's OK. Thank you.

[HEATHER exits quickly and from the door turns and says "thank you" one more time.]

d **ROSETTA:** Well, what do you make of that?

CECILIA: I think, maybe, they're going to sleep in their car.

[GERTIE walks to the front of the stage, peeks outside through the "window" located opposite to where the counter is positioned.]

GERTIE: Yup, they're out there in their car.

ROSETTA: *[goes and peeks out]* It looks like they're lighting a candle.

ESTELLE: Are they aglow with holiday cheer?

ROSETTA: *[ignores ESTELLE]* Well, I'll be. There's a baby in that car. Do you think they mean to sleep out there on a night like this with a baby?

[CECILIA and ESTELLE hop up and peak out window stage left.]

CECILIA: There *is* a baby.

ESTELLE: Oh dear. I think we need to do something.

CECILIA: We don't even know them. They could be criminals.

GERTIE: Or they could be a young family that's having a rough time and could use a little helping hand.

[GERTIE fills the large brown paper bag with food and heads outside. Everyone continues to watch as GERTIE gives HEATHER the food.]

ROSETTA: It sure looks cold out there.

[GERTIE comes back in shivering.]

ESTELLE: Are they planning on sleeping in their car?

GERTIE: I didn't really ask, but it looks like it. Man, oh man, is it cold out there.

CECILIA: Well, were they nice?

GERTIE: What kind of question is that? I knocked on the window and handed them some soup. I didn't interview 'em.

ESTELLE: Isn't there anywhere they could go? I mean a shelter or something? I hate to see them sleep in a car all night.

CECILIA: Yes, it must be so awful to have a little baby and no place to go.

ROSETTA: *[sits down on stool]* What a terrible thing for them . . . and at Christmas time.

CECILIA: Yes, at Christmas . . . *[pauses, thinking]* . . . but . . . doesn't this seem a little familiar?

ESTELLE: Familiar? I can't remember one single holiday I've ever spent singing carols over a candle in my car.

CECILIA: I know, but still . . . a young family with no place to go—

ROSETTA: *[interrupting]* Stops by a bowling alley and asks to spend the night in the parking lot. You know what, I think you're right. I think I saw a TV special last year with this same story line. I just can't remember what happened in the end.

CECILIA: *[moves center stage]* No, I was thinking of another story. A young couple looking for shelter ends up in a stable. A baby is born.

GERTIE: He is Christ the Lord. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

ESTELLE: *[moves toward CECILIA]* Yes, of course, *the* Christmas story. Do you think people looked at Mary and Joseph the way we're looking at that young couple?

CECILIA: Maybe. It's an interesting thought. They must have been tired and dirty.

ROSETTA: That young woman was sure enough dirty.

CECILIA: Do you think that maybe *this* is our chance to have a real Christmas?

ESTELLE: You mean by looking at a little impromptu nativity scene in the parking lot?

CECILIA: Think about it, Estelle. There they are sitting in a car, grateful for some hot soup and a place to park for the night. Here we sit in a warm bowling alley complaining about our husbands. Christmas just can't be about fruitcake, holly, and a new bowling ball. There isn't anything real or lasting about those things.

ESTELLE: So what's your point?

CECILIA: Christmas *is* lasting. It's eternal. Remember what the Bible says? "For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given." [Isaiah 9:6] God sent Jesus, the Son of God—the light of the world—the light shines in the darkness. [John 1:5] [getting excited] Oh, I know! Remember John 3:16! "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

ESTELLE: Yes, when I was a child I memorized that verse and my Sunday school teacher gave me a pencil that said "Jesus loves you."

CECILIA: Exactly. Jesus loves you. That's Christmas. That light is love. You and I know that Jesus loves us and here we sit complaining about what *festive* means.

GERTIE: So whadda ya gonna do about it?

CECILIA: I'm going to go out there and invite that family in. I'm going to light a candle, share some fruitcake—

ESTELLE: [interrupting] You're going to eat the fruitcake?

CECILIA: I am going to shine the light that Jesus gave me.

[EARL, MAX, and RONNIE enter stage left and move to center stage. WANDELLA, MAUDIE, and LADEAN appear a moment later and join the group center stage. RONNIE stands by ROSETTA and puts his arm around her.]

EARL: Did I hear something about fruitcake?

CECILIA: Earl, there's a young couple with a baby out there in a car.

They're going to spend the night out there unless we invite them in.

EARL: So what's the holdup? Let's get them in here out of the cold. We'll take 'em home with us after we're done bowling.

CECILIA: Really, Earl?

EARL: Sure thing. No use having a big warm house sitting empty—might just as well give a little.

CECILIA: You're right, Earl. And there's no use having the love of Jesus inside us unless we shine it. "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine *[breaks out in song]*, shine all over the bowling alley. I'm gonna let it shine!" Earl! This really is Christmas!

EARL: Told you, Celie. Nothing says Christmas like a good day of bowling.

[Everyone laughs as the lights dim.]

