

The Gifts of Goody Grisom

(Cast enters exuberantly singing "Go, Tell It on the Mountain.")

ALL: "Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere.
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!"

EARL: "Down in a lowly manger
The humble Christ was born,
And bro't us God's salvation
That blessed Christmas morn."

ALL: "Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere.
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born."

(Repeat chorus)

EARL: Whoo wee! What a nice turnout we got tonight! Ain't this a nice turnout?

JED: It's a mighty fine turnout.

GOODY: I do declare! Looks like most of the town is here tonight!

EARL: We got our instruments. We got our lanterns. And we got plenty of Christmas cheer to go 'round. I reckon we got all we need for a genuine wingding!

JANE: We could sing some carols!

GOODY: Yeah!

JED: We could dance the "Turkey in the Straw!"

JANE: Yeah!

GOODY: Or . . . we could have Earl tell us a story!

JANE: Yeah, a story!

JED: Tell us a story, Earl!

EARL: Ah, you don't wanna hear one a my ol' stories.

GOODY: Why, sure we do!

EARL: Naw, you don't.

JED: Yes, we do. Spin us a yarn, Earl.

EARL: Ah, they're nothin' but foolishness.

JANE: No they ain't.

GOODY: You tell the best stories. Besides, all these here folk 'ave showed up and I bet they wanna hear a story. *(To audience)* Don'tcha? You wanna hear one a Earl's stories? *(Coaxes the audience to applaud and cheer for EARL)*

GOODY: They wanna hear a story, Earl.

EARL: Well, all right, I guess I could spin a yarn. But y'all are gonna have to help me.

GOODY *(looking at JED and JANE for support)*: Well, we could do that, couldn't we?

JED: Sure we could.

Jane: We'd love to help.

EARL: All right then, let's do it. Just follow my lead. *(They scurry into place.)* We got a story to tell. A story about givin'. A story about love. A story about Christmas. A long time ago, in a little mountain town not too far from these here parts, there lived a legend. A woman who was nothin' short of amazin'. A miraculous thing happened to her that made her a legendary giver of Christmas gifts. And her name was Goody Grisom.

(GOODY puts on an apron, steps forward, and presents herself.)

JANE: Goody Grisom!

JED: Goody Grisom!

GOODY: At your service!

EARL: Now, Goody wasn't her real name. Some folks speculated that it was maybe Gertrude, but Goody never did fess up to it.

GOODY: It ain't that I'm particular ashamed of it. I just enjoy the game a havin' folks try to guess it.

EARL: Fact is that Goody's papa got to callin' her that when she was just a youngin' 'cuz she was such a gentle dispositioned baby and the name sorta stuck.

JANE: Goody's mama died when she was just a little girl, so Goody had to help out around the house carin' for her brothers as best she could.

EARL: But Goody kept her gentle disposition.

JED: And she learned at an early age to trust in the Lord with all her heart an' lean not on her own understandin'.

EARL: By the time Goody was sixteen years old, she'd grown to be quite a pretty lady.

(GOODY gets a basket.)

JANE: That summer Goody went to the fair. She had packed her basket full of her most lip-smackin' specialties for the box lunch social. The biddin' was fierce for Goody's basket. Goody blushed at all the fuss the fellers was makin' over it, but in her heart she was hopin' that only one certain

young man would win the biddin'. (JED *presents himself as* MERRIT.) He was tall an' handsome an' kinda soft-spoken like her. In all the commotion, no one even heard Merrit Grisom's soft voice. Not until the very end.

EARL (*acting as the auctioneer*): I have seven twenty-five, once. Seven twenty-five, twice . . .

JED: Ten dollars! (*The others gasp.*)

(GOODY and JED *are arm-in-arm.*)

JANE: They were married the followin' spring an' settled on a small farm.

EARL: Life was hard on the farm. Merrit was a hardworkin' man, but the weather wasn't always kind to him an' he never quite got as big a crop as he'd been hopin' for.

JED: The years went by and they were blessed with four children.

JANE: Rebecca Louise.

JED: Joseph Calvin.

EARL: Thomas Harold.

JANE: Bonnie Marie.

GOODY: The influenza took Rebecca. Joseph died at birth. We never did figure out what it was that took little Thomas.

EARL: After awhile the crops failed an' they lost the farm. They swallowed their pride an' moved into a sharecropper shack.

JED: An' Goody tried not to lean on her own understandin'.

GOODY: Acknowledge the Lord in all thy ways and He will direct thy path.

EARL: Some hard an' lean years came an' went.

JANE (*becoming* BONNIE MARIE): Bonnie Marie was nine years old.

JED: An' Merrit finally had a good year. They began to talk 'bout havin' their own farm again.

EARL: It was Christmas Eve an' things was finally startin' to look up. Goody an' Merrit was able to buy Bonnie a store-bought gift.

JANE (GOODY and JED *give her a doll*): A china doll! A real china doll!

GOODY: Just as pretty as you, sweetie pie.

EARL: No one quite knew how the fire started. Maybe a stray spark from the stove. Maybe a candle left burnin'. They woke in the middle of the night with the shack full of smoke an' barely had a chance to get out the door. Merrit had no sooner put Bonnie down than she ran back to the house.

JANE: My china doll! (*Runs US through the door*)

GOODY: Bonnie!

JED: Bonnie, come back here! (*He follows her.*)

EARL: The little girl an' her father had just disappeared through the door when the blazin' roof of the little shack gave way.

GOODY: Merrit! Bonnie! No! Lord in heaven, no! No . . . no . . . (*She collapses.*)

JANE (*singing*): "When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say
'It is well, it is well with my soul . . .'"

EARL (*after a pause*): Well, the years came an' went for Goody Grison an' the cracks an' lines began to sneak their way onto her face. They stretched an' deepened when she screwed her face up in a smile. An' it seemed that Goody nearly always had a smile for each person she came across. There wasn't no one in these parts that didn't brighten a little inside when they saw her a comin' their way. (*GOODY grabs a salesman's case.*) She traveled up an' down the valley sellin' her wares as the official representative of the Bartleson Soap an' Cures Mail Order Company. She carried samples of her own home remedies too—salve, liniments, ointments, an' the like. An' they were good too.

JED: Take the itch outta skeeter bites.

JANE: Take the tarnish off of copper pots.

GOODY: An' generally fix whatever's ailin' you.

EARL: Sometimes folks paid for her wares with real money, but more often than not, they paid with chickens or apples or just plain put it on credit. Goody never wrote nothin' down. She just kept track right up here. (*Points to his head*) An' everywhere she went, she spread love an' encouragement—free of charge.

GOODY (*to JANE who portrays a neighbor*): Rub it on every night before you hit the sack. Oh, an' don't you fret about that man of yours. He'll come around, you'll see. You just leave it in the Lord's hands. He knows what He's doing.

EARL: Goody always had just the right words to say an' a smile for everyone.

JANE: But there was one time of year when Goody's smile would fade.

JED: Her face would cloud over and her eyes threatened rain.

EARL: Christmas. Christmas was a time of painful memory. If the fire had happened on any other day of the year she might have been able to let it slip by, but as the holiday season approached—the reminders were everywhere.

JANE: Merry Christmas!

EARL: Merry Christmas!

JED: Merry Christmas!

EARL: Now there was one Christmas in particular when Goody was feelin' especially down in the mouth. It started around the beginnin' of December when all the youngins (*JED and JANE portray*

children having a snowball fight) was throwin' snowballs an' havin' conniptions 'bout how Christmas was a comin' an' gooses gettin' fat an' all. Goody was bracin' herself for the loneliness that lay in store for her.

JANE: Goody, we's gonna have lotsa room here at Christmastime. We'd be tickled pink to have you spend it with us.

GOODY: I'm much obliged to you, Melva, but I got other plans.

EARL: But everyone knew that Goody always spent Christmas alone. No one knew how to cheer her up. So they did the best thing anybody can do when they don't know what else to do. They all prayed for her—each in their own way.

JED (*as a child*): Bless Momma, an' Daddy, an' Betsy, an' Elmer, an' Sparky, an' . . . Jesus, please bless Aunt Goody. She's horrible lonesome an' she oughta be happy at Christmas.

JANE: Our Lord, we thank Thee for Thy bounteous blessings an' Thy tender mercies. We ask that you might make us truly thankful. We pray for those in need at this time of year, an' especially for dear Goody Grisom. Hold her in Thy loving bosom, dear Lord.

EARL (*hands in his pockets*): Uh, Lord? It's me. Bart Mavery. I know I ain't talked to you much for a spell. I don't want nothin' fer myself. I just thought I'd ask you to bless Goody Grisom, Lord. She's a fine woman, an' it just ain't right that Christmas should make her so miserable. I know you hear me, Lord. Goody said you would.

JANE: An' Goody prayed the same prayer she always prayed.

GOODY (*kneels beside the hay bale as if it were a bed*): Dear Lord, just give me the strength to see it through one more time.

(GOODY *lies on the hay bale and covers herself with a blanket.*)

EARL: What happened next ain't so easy to explain. Who can explain the ways of God? The Spirit moves in mysterious ways, they say. It seems like Goody's prayers an' the prayers of everyone up an' down the valley all mingled on their way upward an' I guess they made quite a racket up in heaven, 'cuz God saw fit to answer those prayers in a mighty peculiar fashion. It was the middle of the night an' Goody was woke up by a powerful bright light floodin' her cabin. (*A bright light hits GOODY as wind chimes ring.*) There, in the middle of the light, was a beautiful creature that Goody figured musta been an angel. It wore a gleamin' garment of white an' its face was almost too beautiful to look at.

(JED and JANE *stand US, profile to the audience.*)

JED/JANE: Fear not!

GOODY: Glory be!

JED/JANE: Behold, I bring good tidings of great joy.

GOODY: I can't believe my own eyes!

JED/JANE: Goody Grisom, your prayers have not gone unheard by the Lord of Hosts. This Christmas Eve you shall behold the Christ child so that the hope of His incarnation might fill your heart and drive away your dread of the day.