

A script from



“That Towering Cross”

by
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SYNOPSIS

Anna returns to the small-town church she grew up attending for its annual Easter production after a ten-year absence. When she meets Joshua after the performance, her view of the cross as a tired, old symbol is challenged not only by his invitation to **imagine** it differently, but her need for it to be something more.

CHARACTERS

Anna, an actress in her mid to late 20s approaching career breakthrough

Joshua, a 30-something man who she meets in the little church

Daniel, the lead in the church drama

Judy, Anna's mom (and member of the Choir)

Allan, Anna's father (and member of the Choir)

Young Anna, an idealistic teenager (and member of the Choir)

The Choir, with various members playing out action on the stage including select speaking roles

*A Note for Actors: Underlined text denotes a shared line of dialogue between actors.

SETTING

A small-town church in a small town anywhere.

PROPS

Large, Towering Cross (back drop)

Pathetic cross (a crucifixion version of Charlie Brown's pathetic Christmas tree)

Purse

Chairs (8 or more)

Flashlights/light source (for Choir)

Wheel chair

Car keys

Kleenex

Cell phone

Small black box (to fit inside a purse)

Blanket

Hot water bottle

Door

Long, red cloth/fabric

Small piece of red cloth/fabric

Small white box (to fit inside a purse)

TIME

Approximately 55 minutes

SONGS USED

The World Premiere used music arrangements from The Cross by Kimberly R. Messer (2004, Lillenas Publishing Company). Song acquisitions are at the discretion and responsibility of the Producer for each subsequent production. Please feel free to acquire and use arrangements that suit your actors and choir.

The songs referenced in the play are:

Hallelujah (*Your Love Is Amazing*), words and music by Brenton Brown and Brian Doerksen **Copyrights** 2000 Vineyard Songs (UK/Eire) CCLI#3091812

O Mighty Cross, words and music by David Baroni and John Chisum © 1984 Integrity's Hosanna! Music (ASCAP)/Integrity's Praise! Music (BMI) CCLI# 1403155

The Weight of the Cross, words and music by Christopher Machen © 1997 by Pilot Point Music (ASCAP) CCLI# 2388083

I'm Amazed, words and music by Jeremy Deibler © 2001 by New Springs Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP) CCLI# 3436927

He Has Surely Borne Our Sorrow, words and music by Mosie Lister © 1963, renewed 1991, and this arr. © 1998 by Mosie Lister Songs (BMI) CCLI# 63448

Written in Red, words and music by Anne Herring © 1974 Latter Rain Music CCLI# 12279

I Will Celebrate, words and music by Linda Duvall © 1982, 1985 Above And Beyond Music Grace Fellowship Universal Music - Brentwood Benson Publishing CCLI# 72264

The Cross, words and music by Gerald Crabb © 2003 Christian Taylor Music Remaining portion is unaffiliated CCLI# 4181257

With lights dimmed on stage, the music for HALLELUJAH (YOUR LOVE IS AMAZING) begins.

*Lights up. **Choir** is upstage, framing the fringes of the stage.*

***Daniel** is kneeling in front of a cross. The cross looks tired and dated, meant to impress, but failing: a crucifixion version of Charlie Brown's pathetic Christmas tree.*

*A row of **Choir Members** form an **Audience On Stage**, intently watching **Daniel's** drama play out, most know the song and sing along with it. **Anna** sits at the edge of this row of people, watching. She is perplexed and watches fellow members of the **Audience On Stage** as much as she watches **Daniel** and the **Choir**.*

*The **Choir** is rigid, well-meaning, but restrained and half-hearted as it sings.*

*By the second chorus of HALLELUJAH, **Daniel** turns to the **Audience On Stage** and selects two individuals, inviting them to the cross. Both are relatively quick to respond and willing, after realizing they are, in fact, invited into the on-stage dramatics. **Anna** tries to disappear in her seat and go unnoticed.*

*To her dismay, **Anna** is approached by **Daniel** as the third and final invitee to join the others. It takes him a few moments to convince her, and he's pressured to make it happen by the end of the song. He hauls **Anna** to her feet and, by the hand, leads her to the cross.*

***Anna** stands uncomfortable, awkward, not hamming it up like the others, who are also feeling uncomfortable to be part of the drama, but are committed to the act.*

*As the song ends, **Daniel** moves downstage to address the **Audience On Stage**, with a spot on him, he is the focal point, but **Anna** is lit enough to highlight her discomfort.*

Daniel: His love makes is amazing. Doesn't it make you want to sing?

FREEDOM MUSIC begins.

Daniel: (Cont'd) I want to sing because of the cross which is the greatest example of God's love. My life changed for the better because of what happened there.

***Daniel** returns to the cross and signals for **Anna** and the other two individuals to gather round him at the cross' foot.*

Daniel: See how simple it is to come to the cross? At the cross I found my Savior.
Following his lead, they all kneel.

Daniel: (Cont'd) The cross is where God sent his Son to die for us. To give us new life. I won't ever comprehend, I just can't fathom why He did it. But he did it, and I will be forever thankful.

The Choir sings loudly, a cappella, the last line of HALLELUJAH and lights fade on The Choir, the cross, Daniel and his stage guests, but remain on the Audience On Stage who, quickly stand to their feet and applaud the end of the play.

As the lights slowly come back up, The Choir breaks and individual members start to make small talk. The Audience On Stage starts to collect their things, then move to the choir members to congratulate them for their performance.

Anna tries to disappear, but Daniel gets to her and the two others before she can split.

Daniel: (Cont'd) Anna!

Anna: Hi, Dr. Jensen.

Daniel: Thanks, you guys, for being such good sports. It's the trickiest part of the production, getting people up on the stage with me.

Aud 1: I hope I did alright. I didn't know what to do.

Daniel: You were fantastic.

Aud 2: It was so meaningful, to join you. To go to the cross.

Daniel: Oh, good. It stirs my heart every time.

Aud 1: It was powerful.

Daniel: Thank you.

The Audience 1 and 2 meld into the Choir, greet friends.

Daniel: (Cont'd) Long time no see.

Anna: I know.

Daniel: I caught you by surprise, didn't I?

Anna: Did my mom put you up to it?

Daniel: I'm sorry, but that's patient-client privilege.

Anna: Congrats on the show.

Daniel: Thank you.

Anna: Another successful Easter production under the belt. You've been doing this for what, over a decade now?

Daniel: I'm that old. You should be back up here with us. You're probably the only trained actor in the room.

Anna: I don't know about that.

Daniel: You're used to bigger houses, I suppose. Bigger budgets.

Anna: You guys did well, with the material you had.

Daniel: Small town folk with big hearts.

Anna: It brought back a lot of memories.

Daniel: Well, it was nice to have you on stage if only for a few moments.

Anna: Hah! I've always been a disaster at improv as you could see by that... disaster right there.

*The **Choir** starts to filter out. **Anna's** mom **Judy** sees her talking to **Daniel** and makes her way toward them.*

Daniel: You were fine.

Anna: Ugh.

Judy: Anna! Dr. Jensen.

Daniel: Hi Judy. It's Daniel. You know that.

Judy: Sorry. *(To Anna)* Hi, honey.

Anna: Hey, mom. Good job!

Judy: You were part of the action!

Anna: That's what Daniel and I were just talking about.

Judy: So, what'd you think?

Anna: It was great mom!

Judy: Really?

Anna: The choir sounded...amazing.

Judy: You're not just saying that?

Anna: I could tell you all really had your hearts in it.

Judy: Wasn't Dr. Jensen fantastic? As always.

Anna: He was great.

Daniel: All these compliments are going to get to my head. Are you joining us, Anna? A big group is going out for supper.

Anna: No.

Judy: All that singing sure works up an appetite.

Anna: I can't, but thanks.

Daniel: Judy?

Judy: Well if Anna's not maybe I—

Anna: No mom, you go. Please. I'll catch up with you later. I'm in town for a few more days.

Judy: Are you sure?

Anna: Of course. Go with your friends.

Judy: Okay.

Daniel: Great to see you, Anna. God bless you. Ready Judy?

Judy: I'll be right there.

He exits.

Anna: Well. (*Playfully*) Dr. Jensen.

Judy: Stop it.

Anna: He's aging well. His wife passed away, what, three years ago now?

Judy: Yeah, and it's still just so sad.

Anna: Poor him. It's not him you should be worried about, though.

Judy: Come with us. It'd be good for you to spend some time with this group.

Anna: Mom don't.

Judy: They're good people, Anna. Good influences.

Anna: Please don't start with that.

Judy: I just want you to be—

Anna: Mom I need some time alone.

Judy: Is everything...ok?

Anna: Of course. Stop being so worried about me.

Judy: I can't help it, dear.

Anna: I need time to think...about the play.

Judy: (*Hopeful*) Oh?

Anna: Yeah. It really got me...thinking.

Judy: Thinking? Well that's...that's so good. You, well, you just take all the time you need to think about it, honey.

Judy starts to leave but stops and hugs Anna tight. Anna doesn't stop her mom, but doesn't hug back.

Anna: Okay, Mom.

Judy: It's so good to see you in church. Okay. Let's talk later.

Anna: Sure.

Anna is all smiles until Judy leaves. When she's alone, she lets out a big sigh, like the weight of the world has pushed all the air and oomph out of her.

She looks around the stage. At the empty chairs, the empty choir, at the cross. She slowly walks toward it and touches at it.

Anna: (*Cont'd*) God, what am I doing here?

She catches herself. Joshua enters, but Anna doesn't see him.

Anna: (*Cont'd*) Oh boy. I'm talking to a prop. Look at this place. You'd think after all these years they'd at least revamp the set.

Joshua: Well, that's just—

Anna is startled.

Joshua: (*Cont'd*) That's the magic of theatre. Sorry. Did I startle you?

Anna: A little. I thought I was the only one here.

Joshua: I'm sorry.

Anna: It's alright. What's the magic?

Joshua: Believing that.

Anna: The magic of theatre or the magic of theology?

Joshua: The theatre.

Anna: But you gotta admit. It's all a bit farfetched.

Joshua: Some of the best stories are. There's a certain magic to all of it, isn't there?

Anna: What do you mean?

Joshua: Convincing an audience to give over their imagination. You know, to get caught up in the drama and to create the story and the setting with the players on the stage.

Anna: Are you an actor?

Joshua: (*Laughing*) No. But I design stories.

Anna: Oh, so a director.

Joshua: Of sorts. I'm Joshua. Friends call me Josh.

They shake hands.

Anna: Anna. Friends...well, people just call me Anna.

Joshua: Nice to meet you. I'm not interrupting something, am I?

Anna: No. Oh no. I was just...talking to myself as I'm bound to sometimes do. And thinking, I guess...

Joshua: About what?

Anna: The set. And the narrative they tell in this church. And this play they do every year.

Joshua: You got a lot on your mind.

Ann: I guess so. This is the same tired old cross they used when I was a kid... when I came here.

Joshua: They're trying.

Anna: Sorry. Am I interrupting you?

Joshua: No.

Anna: You look like you're here for a reason.

Joshua: I am.

Anna: I'll get out of your way.

Joshua: That's okay.

Anna: It's just that...I love this stuff. Or I should. I'm an actor.

Joshua: A trained one?

Anna: You could say so.

Joshua: Working?

Anna: Actually, yes.

Joshua: And getting paid to...

Anna: What?

Joshua: Do the work, to act?

Anna: Don't look so surprised.

Joshua: Well good for you.

Anna: I've worked hard.

Joshua: I'm sure you have.

Anna: I love stories, but I just, I just had no way into this one.

Joshua: Come on, it's the best story ever told!

Anna: Then make me believe it!

Joshua: They're trying. It's a small church, trying to share the joy of what they believe.

Anna: And what is that? The cross makes so little sense.

Joshua: True.

Anna: So they should make it make sense!

Joshua: Can you?

Anna: If it's such a life-altering thing, then yes. I mean Dr. Jensen, he said—sorry, his character said that God's love makes him sing and that he's so happy and changed.

Joshua: And you don't believe him? Or, his character?

Anna: It's not that I don't believe him, but I didn't see why. He went on about not being able to understand... about never understanding. Well I need to understand to believe! And I don't understand...this! (*Anna checks herself, embarrassed she's shared so much*) Sorry.

Joshua: About what?

Anna: For rambling.

Joshua: I don't see any "No Rambling" signs around.

Anna: I guess something about the play just struck a nerve.

Joshua: Good stories do that too.

Anna: Well, maybe, but I don't think that's what's happening here. But my problem with this story doesn't need to be your problem, Joshua.

Joshua: Well, what would you do differently?

Anna: What do you mean?

Joshua: If you could take the creative reigns and tell the story, make people believe it, what would you do?

Anna: That's a silly question.

Joshua: Why?

Anna: Because I can't.

Joshua: What, you can't use your imagination?

Anna: I didn't say that. I mean it's silly because I'm not part of the show.

Joshua: So? Why not make your own?

Anna: My own story?

Joshua: Sure. Make the Easter story your own.

Anna: What if I have trouble believing it in the first place.

Joshua: You're an actor, aren't you? You make believe. Don't actors always pride themselves on finding the truth in any story?

Anna: Touché.

Joshua: Humor me for a minute.

Anna: Okay. I mean, I don't really have anything else to do.

Joshua: How would you tell it?

Anna: Well for one thing, I'd get rid of that.

Joshua: The cross?

Anna: Yeah.

Joshua: But it's the focal point of the story.

Anna: Exactly.

She walks over to it and Joshua joins her, looking behind the prop.

Anna: (Cont'd) Look, it's barely propped up.

She uses her foot to dismantle the piece supporting the structure and it falls to the ground.

Anna: (Cont'd) Oh my goodness!

Joshua: You're serious about this.

Anna: Sorry. I hope I didn't damage anything.

Joshua: A bit sacrilegious, don't you think?

Anna: I didn't expect it to fall like that. But now that it's on the floor...let's just take a step back.

They move to where the Audience On Stage chairs are and survey the stage.

Anna: (Cont'd) It's a clean slate. Isn't it?

Joshua: You're removing the cross from the story of Easter.

Anna: No, I'm not.

Joshua: Well, I don't see it here, do you?

Anna: That's because I'm going to make you imagine it with me.

Joshua: How are you going to do that?

Anna: By telling a story worthy of it, that earns the emotion and the feeling of it.

Joshua: And so what's that story?

Anna: I don't know.

Joshua: Great.

Anna: Can you give me a minute?

Joshua: No cross and no story. This is going to be so much better.

Anna: It's just...

Joshua: What?

Anna: ...been a while.

Joshua: Been a while since what?

Anna: Since I've been in a church.

Joshua: Oh.

Anna: And since I've read the Bible.

Joshua: Gotcha.

Anna: Is it okay...to say that in a place like this?

Joshua: Less forgivable than rambling. Kidding. I'm sure you're not alone.

Anna: What do you mean?

Joshua: About reading the Bible.

Anna: You're saying I'm not the only actor in the audience?

Joshua: That's a good one.

She turns back to the blank stage.

Anna: Hmmm.

*The **Choir** enters and surrounds the shadowy fringes of the stage.*

Anna: (Cont'd) Creativity doesn't happen in a vacuum. What do we got?

Joshua: You got a choir.

The Choir starts to hum in harmonies, a cappella, the first bars of WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS.

Anna: True. With beautiful music! Man, if I had a choir like that, I'd let 'em rip.

The Choir moves into a cross formation in the center of the stage. Certain members of The Choir turn on flashlights or some light source that shine the pattern of a cross. The lights can be held in their hands, sown into costumes, etc.

Joshua: Rip?

Anna: Yeah, you know— change it up! Not hold back. *Unleash.*

A Soloist sings, a capella, the first portion of WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS until the line: "All my pride" The signing is mournful, clear, like a light cutting through the mist of a dreary morning.

During the solo, Joshua finds a seat in the Audience On Stage.

As the Soloist sings, Anna walks around the choir, surveying them, miming instructions for Choir Members to look somber, to hold their lights at different levels to make the pattern of the cross more consistent, like the director of a play. As the Soloist finishes the first portion of the song, she stands beside the singer, smiling, pleased. In the pause before the song continues, she encourages Another Singer to join the Soloist.

At "See from his head..." the Soloist is joined by Another Singer; their two-part harmony carries to "Compose so rich a crown?"

When they reach the note, Anna is now at the front of their formation, arms raised, calling The Choir to attention.

Silence.

She leads the entire Choir in chorus through to the final bars with an impassioned movement of her arms. The Choir sings in full voice, with gusto, ending in perfect unison, extinguishing their lights as they finish the final note. Anna's arms held high in the air.

Anna turns to Joshua and the choir quietly filters to the fringes of the stage in the shadows.

Anna: (Cont'd) Something like that.

Joshua: I think I can imagine it. I can see how the way you shape the song like that would give a certain...I don't know...power. You're good at this.

Anna: It's such a contradiction, though.

Joshua: What is?

Anna: Those words! The cross. The tree. Of life? Can the song, can the staging prove the contradiction?

Joshua: Does it have too?

Anna: I'd say.

Joshua: Can you?

Anna: No. But I'd want to be able to, for people...for my audience to buy it. I mean, how are people supposed to understand all that?

Joshua: Well, you gotta start somewhere. You know about the cross, don't you?

Anna: Yeah, but I grew up in the church so I have a reference point at least. Still, it doesn't make much sense.

Joshua: So, make it make sense.

Anna: That's the problem. How can I?

Joshua: Give a little context.

Anna: This is such an old story. I need time to do research.

Joshua: Oh, don't be lazy.

Anna: Excuse me?

Joshua: Think about it. Rely on your memory. What's a cross anyway?

Anna: It's an instrument of...

Joshua: Of what—why are you being so cautious with your words?

Anna: I'm not being cautious.

Joshua: Then what was it an instrument of?

Anna: It was an instrument of death! Okay? Of torture and horror and unthinkable pain!

Joshua: I know.

Anna: It was an ugly, brutal instrument that the government used to kill criminals.

Joshua: Thousands, every year.

Anna: And we just look at it like it's some cute little tree?

Joshua: But it's not.

Anna: No, it's not! It was the execution chamber of the 1st century. I mean, a lot of people don't even agree with the death sentence anymore, how can we even presume to imagine what the cross means?

Joshua: So, how would you imagine it then?

She walks to where the knocked-over cross is, and stares at it.

Anna: As...heavy.

She gets down onto her knees and picks up the Pathetic Cross, expending tremendous effort. She gets it onto her shoulders, her back bowed under its weight. She kneels in the place of Jesus, imagining his pain.

Joshua: What is it, Anna? What do you see?

*The **Choir** starts to emerge from the shadows and forms a semi-circle around **Joshua** and **Anna**, watching them.*

Anna: I see the crowd. Looking at me. At the Man they thought—for a brief moment—a Man they hoped could change everything. Can you see them?

Joshua: Yes.

Anna: Look, they're...they're angry.

Crowd 1: (*Dumbfounded*) You did miracles for us.

Crowd 2: (*Disappointed*) You healed my little girl!

***Anna** tries to stand up under the cross, but she can't.*

Crowd 1: (*Jaded*) We trusted you, Jesus. But you're just a lying criminal like the rest of them!

Joshua: Who was there to help him?

Anna: No one.

Joshua: Is it heavy?

Anna: Terribly. But not just because all the blood is draining from my body cut open with wounds from the whip.

Joshua: You've got bruised ribs and a bleeding skull from so many angry Roman fists.

Anna: Yes, that too. But the weight of the cross isn't just the weight of a tree.

Joshua: What is it then?

Anna: The weight of the world's expectations. Their disappointment.

*The **Choir** starts to sing **THE WEIGHT OF THE CROSS**.*

***Anna** plays the part of Jesus shouldering the burden until the Chorus, when the words "the weight of my sin" are sung. At this point she stands up and distances herself from the act, from the cross. She drops the cross and steps away from **The Choir**, to the edge of the stage, in the fringes of shadow.*

*As the second verse continues, **Joshua** goes to the cross, picks it up and sets it back up. He is thoughtful, nostalgic even.*

*As **The Choir** finishes the song **Anna** walks past the cross to the **Audience On Stage** to grab her purse and leave. She puts on her jacket. She is flustered and trying to get out without having to say anything to **Joshua**.*

Joshua: The weight of the cross is more than just the weight of a tree, Anna.

She sands still, her back still to him.

Joshua: (Cont'd) It's more than the weight of disappointment.

Anna: Don't you think I know that?

Joshua: It's more than the weight of all the hopes and expectations of the world. The weight of the cross was the weight of *your sin*.

Anna: *My sin*. Yes, that's abundantly clear. Thank you for making the point with such subtlety!

Joshua: Where are you going?

Anna: I have things...I have things to do.

Joshua: Really? Are you going to see all your friends?

Anna: Are you mocking me?

Joshua: Where are you going, Anna?

Anna: I gotta get out of here.

Joshua: But the story's not over yet.

Anna: Finish telling it without me, then.

Joshua: This story needs you.

Anna: It *needs* me?

Joshua: Because it's for you, Anna.

Anna: What are you talking about?

Joshua: You think I came here to meet with anybody else?

Anna: I'm done with this story. How it goes. How it ends.

Joshua: What if it's not done with you?

Anna: Why are you...my mom, everyone...why are you trying to push it on me?

Joshua: Because you're a storyteller, Anna. And this is the greatest story ever told and we don't want you to miss out on all its meaning.

Anna: It's meaning? I'm into telling human stories. About characters! Real people.

Joshua: And this isn't one of them?

Anna: No. I want meaning, okay? I want emotion too! Not some inaccessible religious pantomime.

Joshua: God becoming a man? Being born into the world. Having a childhood and being an awkward teenager. Eating bread with friends and foes. Walking among the poor. Suffering in his flesh. Being nailed to a tree?

Anna: A tree that somehow deals with all the sin in the world? It sounds like a fairy tale.

Joshua: Most of the great love stories do.

Anna: Oh, so it's a love story too?

Joshua: Maybe it's the real love story that you need. The one you're looking for.

Anna: And how would you know what kind of love I'm looking for?

Joshua: Because you're not the only one who's been betrayed in life.

Anna: I'm not stupid enough to think that I am.

Joshua: Because there's love that doesn't mask itself as anything else, Anna. This is the story about a kind of love that doesn't leave someone alone. (*Joshua, impassioned, goes to the cross and grabs hold of it*) If you can't find an incredible story right here, I don't know where else you'll find one.

Anna: But I don't see all that when I look at it!

She points at the cross.

Joshua: Well, in my humble opinion, I don't think you're really looking. It means all that, Anna.

Anna: People should know that, then.

Joshua: Then help them to *know* it.

Anna: It's not my story! It's not one I even believe anymore!

Joshua: I don't believe you when you say that.

Anna: What?

Joshua: I don't. You're not convincing when you say that.

Anna: Really? Why don't you tell me, then, what I believe? I'm all ears.

Joshua: You don't believe in the delivery, maybe. You might not like the way the story is told, but your problem is with *that*, not with the truth that the story is about. And even if you don't want to accept the truth, you still know it's true.

Anna: You think that you can make that sort of judgment about me after spending a couple of minutes with me?

Joshua: I can see how much you revere the cross—

Anna: Revere?

Joshua: Yes. By how you've imagined the story of it so far.

Anna: I was trying to show you how meaningless it's become.

Joshua: Really?

Anna: You talk about it like it's this powerful symbol, like a loaded...I don't know, like a loaded twelve gauge shot gun! If that's the meaning the cross holds then people are walking around with something that could blow people away!

Joshua: Exactly.

Anna: But it hangs from the neck of sports stars and celebrities who don't embrace any of those themes!

Joshua: Do you know what's in anyone's heart?

Anna: Oh please. You know what I mean. Gangsters tattoo it onto their bodies for everyone to see when they commit crimes. I saw a singer on TV just the other night shake her body to lyrics that made me embarrassed because she said them with a cross hanging around her neck. And you're telling me that's what it means to her?

Joshua: Don't you see though? You're making my point.

Anna: No, all I'm saying is that it's lost its meaning.

Joshua: Why?

Anna: Because it never really had any!

She stops at her own words, considers them.

Anna: (*Cont'd*) It's not connected to the story. Now it's just a tired old symbol in our culture.

Joshua: It's not that way for you.

*The opening bars of I'M AMAZED begin. **The Choir** returns to their semi-circle. A **Young Anna** steps from **The Choir** and into a spotlight. She stands sweetly but confidently.*

Joshua: (*Cont'd*) At least it wasn't how you always were.

Anna: What's happening?

Joshua: Don't you recognize yourself anymore?

***Young Anna** sings the verses solo. The choir joins in on "I think about love...grace...standing in my place...amazed".*

As Young Anna sings, Anna approaches her, walks around her, amazed at her young self. She steps away from her, trying to come to terms with what is happening, understanding that somehow she is seeing a vision of the past. She looks to Joshua, afraid of him at first, but pulled from her fear as she listens to Young Anna sing.

At the end of the song, Anna joins the solo. The two finish each other's lines as follows:

Y Anna: What do I think of when I think about You

Anna: Coming back down?

Y Anna: What do I think of when I think about me

Anna: Wearing that crown?

Y Anna: What do I think of when I think about

Anna: That trumpet sound?

At the chorus, the entire Choir joins in with Young Anna, but Anna goes to the Audience On Stage and sits down, head in her hands.

At the end of the song Young Anna wants to walk over to her, to comfort her. She starts to move to Anna, but Joshua stops her, not unkindly.

Anna doesn't look up from where she is until The Choir, with Young Anna, exits.

Joshua walks over to Anna, sits nearby on the back of a chair.

Anna: (Cont'd) What is all this, Joshua? Is that even your real name?

Joshua: My friends call me Josh.

Anna: What are you doing here?

Joshua: There's belief inside of you that just wants to get out.

Anna: Then it must be buried deep, because I don't see any of it in me.

Joshua: We've come to an impasse then, haven't we?

Anna: What do you mean?

Joshua: You can't rely on your memory. You won't let yourself get lost in the wonder of the story. Your Bible knowledge is a bit spotty and your mind won't let you believe.

Anna: You've summed it all up so nice and neat.

She grabs her purse. She stands up defeated, ready to walk away. Joshua gently but firmly grabs her wrist.

Joshua: There's another way in to the story.

Anna: How? Blind belief? You want me to check all that other stuff at the door.

Joshua: Through your experience. You need it to be true.

He holds out his hand, indicating her purse. She clutches it to her chest.

Anna: What experience?

Joshua: Your life, Anna.

Anna: What's wrong with it?

Joshua: Nothing. It's in perfect order, isn't it?

Anna: Mind your own business.

Joshua: Like everybody else who walks through these doors you have it all together. Congratulations.

She sits down.

Joshua: (Cont'd) Why don't you just hand it over?

Anna: My life?

Joshua: Your purse.

Anna: Get your own handbag.

Joshua: Anna.

Anna: Fine, take it. What do you want, anyway?

She starts pulling out items.

Anna: (Cont'd) My keys?

Joshua: No.

Anna: Kleenex?

Joshua: Not really?

Anna: A phone?

Joshua: No. This.

He pulls out a black box. It's ugly. She grabs for it, but he evades her.

Anna: That's private! Leave it alone!

Joshua: What is it?

Anna: Give it back! Hey! No one's ever seen that.

She stops trying to take it back. She hugs herself. It all comes down to this.

Joshua: You haven't been in, what, ten years? Back to this little old town, this humble church. This is what brought you here, isn't it?

Anna: Yes.

Joshua: Away from the bright lights of the big stage and the even bigger city where you could leave everything you didn't want or like— leave it all in the past. Create a whole new life.

Anna: You got me. And so now what?

Joshua: Good question. Now what?

Anna: You're going to tell me that "It's all caught up with me?" What, that "the Prodigal has returned" and now she's here groveling?"

Joshua: No.

Anna: I've never pretended to be a saint.

Joshua: So very few people are.

Anna: What do you want from me?

Joshua: I just want to hear what you're doing on this stage.

Anna: I came because of that! I thought... Oh forget it.

He looks inside the box. She cowers as he does so. Only he sees it.

Joshua: Why are you carrying this around?

Anna: No one knows about it.

Joshua: No one?

Anna: No. Not my boyfriend. Or my agent— not that they'd even care. My mom would though. But we can't talk about any of it!

She takes a breath, contemplates whether she should say anymore.

Anna: (*Cont'd*) I don't want it anymore. But I don't know what to do with it.

Joshua: Well you've come to the right place.

Anna: Really? Have I? Because I feel like my world has fallen apart...that it's been that way for years! And I came here and just clapped along with the music like everything was alright. Not one person even cares.

Joshua: Not one?

Anna: Just...give that back, okay?

Joshua: Okay.

She rips it out of his hands.

Anna: I'm on the doorstep, Joshua. About to step into everything I've worked so hard for. About to reach the top of my career. But this (*indicates the box*) it,

She stuffs it in her purse.

(*Cont'd*) makes me feel so hollow, like I'm stepping onto an empty stage. But join the club, right? What am I supposed to do? I walked away. It's my problem.

Joshua sings *HE HAS SURELY BORN OUR SORROW* with *WRITTEN IN RED*. He sings it raw, personal, not moving from where he sits.

While he is singing, a door appears Stage Left.

*As he finishes the song, **Judy** appears through the door, pushing **Anna's Dad** in a wheel chair. He is in the late stages of cancer.*

Judy: There. I think it will help to get a little fresh air in your lungs. You've been cooped up too long in the house. How's that?

Dad: Wonderful.

Judy: I'll be right back.

***Judy** fusses over him, feels his forehead. Exits to retrieve something.*

***Dad** revels in the sun, soaking it into every exposed cell.*

Anna: What's this?

Joshua: Some context.

Young Anna enters Stage Right. She watches him. After a moment, he realizes she's there.

Dad: Annabelle. Come here and sit with me.

She coughs a bit.

Y Anna: I should keep my distance, daddy. I don't want to make you sick.

He chuckles.

Dad: You're fine. Come here.

Young Anna approaches cautiously. She puts her hand on his shoulder. He looks weak. He pulls her into his lap, surprising her with his energy. She hugs him close.

Anna walks over to the two of them and watches. She misses her dad. Wants to touch him.

Dad: (Cont'd) I love you.

Y Anna: I know you do.

Dad: So much, it hurts. Here, help me stand up.

Y Anna: Dad, you gotta be careful.

Dad: I'm tired of being careful.

She helps him up.

Dad: (Cont'd) I want to walk around the yard with my favorite daughter.

Y Anna: I'm your only daughter.

Dad: Lucky for you. It was an easy decision to like you so much.

Y Anna: Well, you're my favorite dad. You always will be. No matter what happens.

Dad: What an awful and touching thing to say.

Y Anna: I'm sorry.

Dad: Don't be.

Y Anna: I didn't think before I said it.

Dad: I love that about you, Anna. You say what needs to be said. You're courageous.

Y Anna: You're gonna get better, Dad.

Dad: I'll do my best.

She holds his hand. He pulls her into a hug.

Anna: This is when I started pretending, isn't it?

Joshua: Yes.

Judy enters the stage carrying a blanket and a hot water bottle.

Anna: All of us, we start pretending.

Joshua: Yes.

Judy: Anna! What are you doing?

Dad: It's fine, Judy.

Y Anna: I was just giving him a hug.

Judy: You'll make him sick.

Dad: No, she's fine.

Judy: You'll give him your cold!

Young Anna steps away.

Y Anna: I'm sorry.

Judy: Stop being so thoughtless, Anna, so stupid!

Dad: It's alright I—

But he can't finish. He's wracked with a terrible coughing fit. Judy drops the blanket and the hot water bottle and runs to him.

Judy: Allan? Oh God. Allan. (*To both Anna's*) What have you done?

She helps him to his wheelchair. She quickly wheels him off stage.

Y Anna: (*Calling after her mom*) I'm sorry. Mom!

Anna looks at her young self with compassion.

Anna: I'm so sorry.

Y Anna: I really, really am.

Joshua goes and picks up the blanket and water bottle. He wraps the blanket around Young Anna and gives her a hug. He hands her the hot water bottle.

Joshua: Here. He's going to need this.

Young Anna exits through the door, before closing it, she turns, looks up at the sky, defiant. She slams the door behind her.

Anna: It doesn't help!

Joshua: It wasn't your fault.

Anna: Dad doesn't get better!

Joshua: Not on this side of heaven.

Anna: Are you trying to comfort or torment me?

Joshua: I'm trying to show you something.

Anna: What? That life is painful? Then? Now! Thanks, but I don't need the reminder.

Joshua: Your needs. Are there. They're real. And it's okay.

Anna: No, it's not!

Joshua: It's okay to have them. But you don't need to keep them. And you know better than anyone that you can't just run away. Let your experience be the door back into this story, Anna. You need rescue. That's why you go to the cross.

There is a bitter taste to these words in Anna's mouth. She's not sure whether to swallow them or spit them out.

(Cont'd) Can I show you something?

Anna: I guess.

He walks to the door, opens it. He turns, holds out his hand.

Joshua: Follow me.

She takes his hand, hesitantly, and walks through the door with him.

*As they exit, music for EASTER SONG begins and **The Choir** appears with LADIES signing the opening "Hear the bells ringing..." softly.*

*During the song, members of **The Choir** remove the Pathetic Cross from the stage as well as the door.*

The Magnificent Cross structure (just a base that thrusts from floor to ceiling of the stage to give the impression of a towering, endless object, like Jack's bean stalk that reaches beyond the sky) is revealed at Upstage Right.

*By the song's end, **The Choir** is lined behind and around the structure in organized rows like an endless cloud of witnesses. **The Choir** ends in full force singing. On the final note, they turn, profoundly and in unison to look at the Magnificent Cross, backs to the audience, faces lifted but not visible to the audience.*

*Enter **Joshua** and **Anna**. She stops, looks at the structure.*

Joshua: (Cont'd) Do you see it then, Anna?

Anna: Yes, but...but what is it?

*She walks closer, astonished. She walks into **The Choir**. She gets close to the base. She starts to reach out to touch it then stops. She looks up, following it as far as her eye can see to where it disappears in the sky.*

Anna: (Cont'd) It's so...endless. So massive.

Joshua: I know.

Anna: It's like it goes on forever!

Joshua: It does.

Anna: Look! There. Why...there are people up there!

Joshua: Thousands.

Anna: Upon thousands!

Joshua: Entire cities.

Anna: They're so massive.

Joshua: Nations, whole generations.

Anna: And look, up further, there's...there's buildings too. And trees!

Joshua: All types.

Anna: And a river.

Joshua: There's even animals. Of every kind.

Anna: But how? The engineering, the sheer weight. It's impossible.

Joshua: It was. It is. And yet.

Anna: Joshua, it's magnificent. I've never seen something tower so spectacularly. What is it, where have you brought me?

Joshua: This, Anna, is the cross. The most magnificent structure in history. Look how it towers. Over all things.

*Anna is startled, as if opening her eyes for the first time. She also now notices **The Choir** members looking at the cross. Walks among them, looks at them.*

Anna: And these people here?

She walks as far as she can Upstage and peers far into the distance.

Anna: (Cont'd) There's so many people. In every direction. It's strange. They look so familiar. I see myself in their faces. How curious. It's like they're from here, wherever this is. That they belong here.

Joshua: They're people, just like you, Anna. Just like you.

Anna: But they look so peaceful.

She walks toward Joshua. She is still Upstage.

Anna: (Cont'd) Where have you brought me?

When she walks to the other side of the Magnificent Cross, she notices something on the floor.

*She picks up what she's found, a red cloth, holding it by one end, she walks to Joshua. It unravels, rich and beautiful, a long fabric that unfurls through **The Choir** as she moves Downstage.*

Joshua: It's not a place.

Anna: I don't understand.

Joshua: That's okay. The meaning will unfold. Just like this fabric here.

Anna: And this? (Indicating the fabric) What is it?

Joshua: Call it what you will. Your story. Your belief or your unbelief. Your heart.

Anna: But it's...it's beautiful.

Joshua: I know. It always has been.

Anna: How is that possible?

Joshua: It's impossible too. But here it is.

Anna: Here it is.

She holds it to herself, delighted and for the first time in a long time, relenting to the mystery.

Anna: (Cont'd) But that's not all there is to it. Right?

Joshua: Right.

Anna: I don't know how to...I don't know how to bring it back.

Joshua: That's alright. Just bring it back.

*She looks down at the cloth, then to the Magnificent Cross. She steps toward it then stops. She looks back at **Joshua** who assures her.*

*As she walks to the Magnificent Cross. The **Choir** starts to sing I WILL CELEBRATE. As it sings, The **Choir** melts to the fringes of the stage.*

***Anna** is self-conscious at first, deciding what to do. She reaches with the cloth and attaches it as high as she can to the structure. She starts to let the music take over her, moves to it, wraps length after length of the fabric around the structure, moving truthfully and purposefully, as her will and the music overpower her, all self-consciousness gone.*

***Joshua** exits and returns with the Pathetic Cross, putting it back to its place on the stage. He takes one last look at **Anna**, then exits again.*

*By the song's end, **Anna** is Center Stage again. The **Choir** quietly exits.*

***Anna**'s whole demeanor has changed. She still looks to the Magnificent Cross as the lights on it fade.*

*In the quietness, **Anna** comes to, as if waking from a dream. She turns and sees the Pathetic Cross. She sighs deeply.*

Anna: The mighty cross.

*Anna goes to collect her things at the **Audience On Stage**. She picks up her purse to grab her keys and stops, startled. She puts the purse down on the chair and digs inside, pulling out a piece of red cloth. She looks around expecting **Joshua**, but doesn't see anyone.*

Anna: (Cont'd) Josh?

She unravels the cloth and finds the box inside. It is white, beautiful. She holds both to her heart.

She picks up her purse to leave, walking past the Pathetic Cross as she goes. She stops, looks at it, touches it reverently. Then looks beyond to where the Magnificent Cross once stood.

*The opening bars of THE CROSS begin. **Anna** exits.*

*Lights up on the Magnificent Cross. **The Choir** enters in formation, the long red fabric still tied to one end of the Magnificent Cross is held amongst **The Choir** members as they sing.*

*On the last note, lights go out on the **Choir** leaving only the Magnificent Cross in a spotlight.*

End of play.

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