The House without a Christmas Tree

WORLD PREMIERE

MUSIC BY RICKY IAN GORDON
LIBRETTO BY ROYCE VAVREK

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA
BRADLEY MOORE

PENTATONE
AMERICAN OPERAS
Addie’s Dad (Daniel Belcher) relives his last Christmas with his wife, Helen (Heidi Stober).
Addie (Lauren Snouffer) sits in bewildered silence as her father, James (Daniel Belcher) demands that she get rid of the Christmas tree she won at school.
### The House without a Christmas Tree

**A Chamber Opera in One Act**

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**Total playing time:** 73.27

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### Houston Grand Opera

With its first season in 1955–56, Houston Grand Opera (HGO) set the tone for its future, staging two performances each of the still-shocking *Salome* and the repertoire staple *Madame Butterfly*. From that modest beginning, HGO has become one of the largest, most innovative, and most highly acclaimed opera companies in the United States. It is jointly led by Patrick Summers, artistic and music director, and Perryn Leech, managing director.

[The House without a Christmas Tree](#) was HGO’s 64th world premiere.

Houston Grand Opera’s ongoing mission is to advance the operatic art form to serve an ever-evolving audience. The company continues to present standard repertoire in fresh, new ways and also to produce new works that inspire future generations of opera lovers, both in the diverse city of Houston and also globally through technology.

HGO is perhaps best known as the record-holder among opera companies for commissioning and premiering new works as a means of creating a young, American voice in opera. The House without a Christmas Tree was HGO’s 64th world premiere.

The company is the recipient of a Tony Award, two Grammy Awards, and three Emmy Awards, and is the only opera company in the world to win all three honors.
Cast (in order of vocal appearance)

Adelaide Mills/Miss Thompson/Helen Mills
Heidi Stober

“Addie” Mills
Lauren Snouffer

Grandma Mills
Patricia Schuman

Carla Mae
Megan Mikailovna Samarin

Billy Wild
Maximillian Macias

Gloria Cott
Elisabeth Leone

James Addison Mills III (“Dad”)  
Daniel Belcher

Houston Grand Opera Juvenile Chorus

Karen Reeves, Juvenile Chorus Director

Solomon Alhakeem
Alina Dong
Emily Hansen
Jackie Hickman
Sean Holshouser
Aidan Leake
Elisabeth Leone
Maximillian Macias
Christian Mathews
Antonio Teodoro
Riley Vagis
Mallory Williams
Addie (Lauren Snouffer) appears as the Angel in her school Christmas pageant.
American composer Ricky Ian Gordon has composed two previous operas for HGO: A Coffin in Egypt, written for Frederica von Stade (2014, with libretto by Leonard Foglia, also performed at The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, Opera Philadelphia, Chicago Opera Theatre, and Lincoln Center), and The Tibetan Book of the Dead (1996, with Jean Claude van Itallie). Gordon’s catalog also includes Morning Star (libretto by William Hoffman) for the Cincinnati Opera, with a new version that premiered in March 2018 for On Site Opera; 27 (libretto by Royce Vavrek) for Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and also performed in a new choral version commissioned by Master Voices at City Center in New York; Rappahannock County (libretto by Mark Campbell) for the Harrison Opera House; Sycamore Trees (libretto by composer) for The Signature Theatre; The Grapes of Wrath (libretto by Michael Korie), premiered by the Minnesota Opera in 2007 and a new version premiered by Opera Theatre of Saint Louis in 2017; Green Sneakers: for Baritone, String Quartet, and Empty Chair (libretto by the composer), a theatrical song cycle premiered by the Miami String Quartet; the song cycle Orpheus and Euridice for Lincoln Center; My Life with Albertine (with Richard Nelson) for Playwright’s Horizons; Night Flight to San Francisco and Antarctica (for Renée Fleming), both set to text from Tony Kushner’s Angels in America; Dream True (with Tina Landau) for the Vineyard Theatre; States of Independence (also with Landau) for the American Music Theatre Festival; and Only Heaven for Encompass Opera.
Royce Vavrek is a Grande Prairie, Canada–born, Brooklyn-based librettist and lyricist whose opera Angel’s Bone with composer Du Yun was awarded the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Music. He made his HGO debut in 2015 with HGOco’s world premiere of O Columbia (composer Gregory Spears). He is also known for his diverse collaborations with composers Ricky Ian Gordon (27); David T. Little (Dog Days, Am I Born, JFK); Missy Mazzoli (Song from the Uproar, Breaking the Waves, Proving Up); Joshua Schmidt (Midwestern Gothic); Paola Prestini (Yoani, The Hubble Cantata); Matt Marks (A Song for Wade [This Is Not That Song], Strip Mall); Ellen Reid (Knoxville: Summer of 2015); Mikael Karlsson (Diana Vreeland); and Marisa Michelson (Naamah’s Ark). Vavrek is co-artistic director of The Coterie, an opera-theater company founded with Tony-nominated soprano Lauren Worsham. The company is currently developing a series of short films that will operatically adapt Aaron Teel’s novella-in-flash Shampoo Horns into six installments, each composed by a different composer, a project supported by the Canada Council for the Arts’ New Chapter program. He holds a BFA in filmmaking and creative writing from Concordia University, Montreal, and an MFA from the Graduate Musical Theater Writing Program at New York University. He is an alumnus of American Lyric Theater’s Composer Librettist Development Program.
Bradley Moore, conductor

Conductor, coach, and pianist Bradley Moore was HGO’s associate music director from 2015 to 2018. While at HGO, he conducted performances of La traviata (2017); HGOco’s world premiere of Some Light Emerges (2017); The Little Prince (2015); and performances of The Elixir of Love (2016), Tosca (2015–16), and The Magic Flute (2014–15). He also served as pianist for HGO’s Eleanor McCollum Competition Concert of Arias. He conducted The Cunning Little Vixen, Dead Man Walking, and The Crucible at the Miami Music Festival; he has conducted Madame Butterfly at the Castleton Festival and The Barber of Seville at Opera Colorado and has worked on the music staffs of the Metropolitan Opera, the Salzburg Festival, Paris Opera, Canadian Opera Company, and Los Angeles Opera, among others. Moore has performed with mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton at the Toronto Summer Music Festival, Carnegie Hall, Frankfurt Opera, the Kennedy Center, and other venues; they also joined Angela Meade in recital at the U.S. Supreme Court. Moore has collaborated with Renée Fleming and Susan Graham at Carnegie Hall and on several national tours, and enjoys partnerships with Christine Goerke, Alice Coote, Eric Cutler, Eric Owens, and clarinetist Julian Bliss. TV appearances include performing live on A Prairie Home Companion with Renée Fleming and Yo-Yo Ma.
SYNOPSIS

PROLOGUE

It is the holiday season. Adelaide Mills, a writer living in New York, happens upon a Christmas-themed department store window that transports her back to her hometown in Nebraska and a special Christmas 20 years before.

SCENE 1

In Adelaide’s memory, her younger self, Addie, tries on an angel costume that Grandma is making for her to wear in a Christmas pageant. After the costume has been fitted, Addie and her best friend, Carla Mae, decorate hard-boiled eggs to represent boys they “hate.” Carla Mae suddenly asks why the Mills’s Christmas tree hasn’t been put up yet. Addie makes up an excuse—she is embarrassed that her father won’t allow a Christmas tree in the house. Sensing an awkward moment, Grandma tells the girls to put on their snowsuits and play outside, where a snowball fight breaks out between the boys and the girls.

SCENE 2

Addie has decided to ask Dad one more time if they can have a Christmas tree, so at Grandma’s suggestion, she waits until after dinner. Dad replies that Addie doesn’t need a tree, but they make a bet: if Addie can drink a glass “full” of water, he’ll get a tree. When Addie does it, he told her she drank the glass “empty” and thus lost the bet. Addie is enraged and Grandma scolds him for his cruel trick. Grandma points out that it isn’t Addie’s fault he is still grieving the loss of his wife, Addie’s mother.

SCENE 3

At school, preparations for Christmas are in high gear. Miss Thompson, the
teacher, announces a gift exchange and the children practice singing carols. Later, the children come caroling at the Mills home. Grandma is touched, but Dad doesn’t react at all.

SCENE 4
Addie and Carla Mae are doing homework in Addie’s room. They fantasize about their future and discuss what they want for Christmas.

SCENE 5
In the school gift exchange, Addie is embarrassed to receive a heart pendant from Billy Wild. Miss Thompson doesn’t want to leave the class Christmas tree in the room over the vacation, so she decides to give it to someone whose family has no tree. Addie and another girl, Gloria Cott, are the only ones without a tree, so Miss Thompson devises an impromptu contest to determine a winner. Addie wins, and Carla Mae helps her get the tree home.

SCENE 6
Grandma and Addie decorate the tree. At night, when he thinks he is alone, Dad turns on the Christmas tree lights and remembers his last Christmas with his wife. Addie sneaks out of her room to watch him. When Addie comes down the stairs, Dad explodes and tells her she must get the tree out of his house. Grandma tells him again that his grief is not Addie’s fault and that he will drive her away.

SCENE 7
Grandma tries to comfort Addie, who still doesn’t understand the true reason for her father’s anger. She reaches Addie. When Grandma and Dad have gone to sleep, Addie slips out of the house and lugs the tree to Gloria Cott’s house. She rings the doorbell and runs away.

SCENE 8
In the morning, Dad asks Addie where the tree is. Addie replies that she took it to the Cotts’ front yard. Dad seems to be having second thoughts.

SCENE 9
Addie and her schoolmates get ready for the annual Christmas pageant. Gloria Cott, dressed as a cow, thanks Addie for the tree. Addie is wearing the heart pendant from Billy Wild, who notices. They wish each other good luck before going onstage for the pageant.

EPILOGUE
Back in New York, the grown-up Adelaide smiles as she recalls how that Christmas 20 years ago changed her family forever.
Adelaide
I’m a writer now,
I live and work in New York City.
A landscape of concrete and noise,
Far, far away from the little town—
Clear River, Nebraska,
Population: 1,500.
Clear River was surrounded by cornfields
And cattle and a wide-open sky.
The only house worth noting,
The Anderson’s house,
Stood imposing
At just three stories high...
Main Street just a handful of stores, a bank, a post office, Mr. Brady’s shop.
Trains roared through, whistling by,
but could never find an excuse to stop.
Not where I grew up—
Clear River, Nebraska,
Population: 1,500.
I often think of that little town
At this time of year...
Of the snowdrifts and the icicles,
Of the gingerbread and holiday parties.
I can still hear the carolers singing.

Carolers
Gather ’round the Christmas tree...
Gather ’round the Christmas tree...
Evergreen have its branches been,
It is king of all the woodland scene.

Adelaide
I often think of that little town,
And a Christmas there 20 years ago:
Just my grandma, my father, and me...

Scene 1
Clear River, Nebraska, 20 years ago.
Addie, a pre-teen girl, stands on an ottoman as her Grandma, a kooky-looking woman trapped in an earlier decade, works with needle and thread at the hem of her angel costume.
Addie’s best friend Carla Mae sits at the table with books out and a snack in front of her.

Addie
“I bring great news,
And great joy!
In Bethlehem, here!
A baby, wrapped in cloths,
is lying in a manger,
He is your Messiah,
He is your savior!”
I’m not convinced, Grandma!
Has anybody actually seen one?
How can we be sure this is what an angel looks like?

Grandma
Addie! Addie, are you trying to stab me with the needle?

Grandma
You’re a fidgeter, Addie.
Addie
I fidget when you poke.

Grandma
Yes you do!
And I poke because you fidget.
All done.

Addie
Carla Mae, how’s your egghead?

Carla Mae
*Showing Addie a design on her hard-boiled egg*

I’ve given mine a large forehead,
Two tiny specks for eyes,
The pudgiest cheeks,
And one little lonely, lopside dimple,
And that dot is a pimple.

Addie and Carla Mae
Delmer Doakes, Egghead!

Addie
Carla Mae,
Your talent for egg portraits amazes me!
I’m making my egg a freckle-face,
With a red runny nose,
A bum in his chin…
And this is his lazy left eye.
I hate hate hate,
I hate this guy.

Addie and Carla Mae
Billy Wild, Egghead.

Carla Mae
It’s the smirk that gives him away…

Addie
Ready?
Carla Mae
Ready.

Addie and Carla Mae
Smash!
Delmer Doakes, egghead!
Smash!
Billy Wild, egghead!
Tiny eyes,
Pudgy cheeks,
Red runny nose,
Bum chin!
Smash the eggheads!
Delmer Doakes, egghead!
Billy Wild, egghead!

Addie
You chickened out...
The point is to really smack him!
Crack him!
Him being Delmer,
Delmer being the egghead!

Carla Mae
I just thought I’d tap him!

Wrinkle him up real good...
Make him look like he’s 107!

Addie
That’s the spirit, Carla Mae!

Carla Mae
Delmer Doakes, egghead.
Delmer Doakes, old man.

Addie
Why do you love Delmer so much?

Carla Mae
I just...do!
Why do you love Billy Wild?

Addie
Billy Wild is pure evil.

Grandma
That’s not nice, Adelaide.

Addie
Sometimes the truth isn’t pretty,
Grandma.

Carla Mae
How come you haven’t got your
Christmas tree up yet?

Addie
We don’t want one.
They’re just a waste of money,
And my Uncle Paul has a tree...
That’s where we go...

Carla Mae
My dad wouldn’t dream of not having
a tree.
You’re probably the only person
without a tree.
As your best friend, I totally
understand you,
But that’s just weird.

Addie
It’s not weird!

Grandma
You girls ought to get some fresh air.

Addie
Not when they’re out there.

Grandma
Who’s out there?

Addie
Them.
Boys!
It’s a war zone.
Snowballs bring out the worst in
people.

Grandma
God created snowsuits for a reason!

Carla Mae
I’m running home to get mine! Bye.

Addie
Grandma,
Why is Dad so parsimonious?

Grandma
That’s a pretty fancy word.
Addie
It means stingy.

Grandma
Your dad’s not stingy.

Addie
There’s no one as stingy as Dad.

Grandma
I don’t know how you could say such a thing!

Addie
He always bought Mom a tree, right, Grandma? Why wasn’t he parsimonious with Mom?

Grandma
Addie, they chopped those trees down with their own two hands. Your dad is far from stingy, he’s resourceful!

Addie
I’d go out with him...
Tree hunting.
I’d lug the axe,
I’d drag the saw!
Think I should ask him, Grandma?

Grandma
Oh, I guess there’s no harm.
Do it at dinner.

Addie
At dinner...

Grandma
Men are always more agreeable
On a full stomach.

Addie
He’ll say yes!

INTERLUDE 1
Snowballs
Addie stands on the street between two mounds of snow bellowing for Carla Mae down the street.

Addie
Carla Mae!
Billy Wild, I can smell you hiding a mile away.

Billy Wild
Bow down to the king of the mountain, Princes of the snowmount!

Boys
Aye, aye, King Billy! Aye, aye.

Addie
You are pure arrogance, you egomaniac!

Billy Wild
Time to clobber the four-eyed nincompoop!

Boys
Aye, aye, King Billy! Aye, aye.

Addie
Oh, brother!

Billy Wild
Ready, aim, fire!

Gloria Cott
Leave her alone!

Addie
Gloria! I can fend for myself. Thank you very much.

Boys
Thank you very much!

Addie
You need the poor girl to stick up for her! Not even Addie wants to play with Gloria.
Addie
I don’t think he loves me.

Grandma
Oh, for the love of God!

Addie
He never hugs me or kisses me.

Grandma
Addie, he’s not the hugging kind.

Addie
He’d love me a lot more if I was a boy.

Grandma
Nonsense!

Addie
He treats me like one… Why else would he teach me how to box?

Grandma
Stop stalling.

Go, Addie! Go, be brave.

Addie
He’s in one of his moods.

Grandma
Ask him!

Grandma
He’s in one of his moods.

Grandma
He’s full, He’s comfy, He’s probably half asleep in the easy chair. Go!

Dad
You left the paper in a mess again.

Addie
Sorry.

Dad
I don’t mind that you read the comics, but I hate a sloppy paper. Here… Some foil for your collection.

Addie
Don’t know what I’ll use this for.

Dad
Make something shiny.

Addie
I can’t make tree decorations… Since we don’t have a tree.

Dad
Are we having this conversation again?

Addie
Won’t you please buy me a tree? Or we can chop one down? It doesn’t have to be the biggest one, Or the greenest one, It could be the most miniature tree, A tree you need binoculars to see! With one or two little branches, And all its needles fallen off… That’s all I need. I’ll cover it with homemade tinsel And popcorn garland, This house could look like Christmas. This house could feel like Christmas. A house without a Christmas tree Is a crime against the holidays, Is a crime against humanity. Is a crime against me! Won’t you please buy me a tree? How many Christmases must I beg? It doesn’t have to be the perfect one, It doesn’t have to be a healthy one.
Any tree is fine!
It just has to be mine...
Ours.
This house could look like Christmas.
This house could feel like Christmas...
Dad, I implore you!
Won’t you please buy me a tree,
Daddy?

Dad
You do not need a tree!

Addie
Everybody needs a tree!
I won’t ask for another thing for a whole year.
Will you bet me something?
If I win, you buy me a tree.
If I lose, I’ll never ask you again. Deal?

Dad
I’ll make you a bet.

Addie
What is it?

Dad
I bet you can’t drink a glass full of water.

Addie
I think you’re gonna owe me a tree.

Addie runs to the kitchen and pours herself a glass of water. She returns to the living room and stands in front of her father, drinking the water in one long series of gulps. When she finishes she smiles triumphantly.

Dad
You drank it empty.
I bet that you couldn’t drink it full.

Addie
Why do you hate me?

Grandma and Dad
Adelaide!

Addie (Lauren Snouffer) pleads her case for a Christmas tree to Dad (Daniel Belcher).
Grandma
We do not throw things!

Dad
Unacceptable!

Grandma
Watch where you step, James.

Dad
I hardly recognize her anymore. That attitude.

Grandma
That was cruel.

Dad
It was hardly cruel.

Grandma
You don’t want nothin’ to remind you. But there she is with those familiar eyes, with that familiar smile, growing up in fits and starts. Every day she blossoms just a little bit more into the image of her mother. The ache in your heart is not her fault.

Dad
Is that so?

Grandma
You don’t want nothin’ to remind you. But there she is with her familiar plea, a holiday wish for an evergreen. Growing up in fits and starts. Every day she blossoms just a little bit more into the image of her mother. The ache in your heart is not her fault.

Dad
Mother!

Grandma
Let her have a tree this year. Have you forgotten what it’s like to be a child? You’ve let your whole life turn sour, James. And you’re doing a good job of souring her, too.

Dad
I hardly recognize her anymore. She’s not the daughter I raised, Mother.

Grandma
If I had it in me, I’d go out and find her a tree myself.

Dad
You wouldn’t dare, Mother.

Grandma
Wanna bet, watch me…

Grandma
You don’t want nothin’ to remind you. But there she is with her familiar plea, a holiday wish for an evergreen. Growing up in fits and starts. Every day she blossoms just a little bit more into the image of her mother. The ache in your heart is not her fault.

Dad
It’s all my fault. Having the baby is what killed her. Helen was weakened. It’s the baby that stole her.

Grandma
But it’s not your fault, James.

Dad
It’s all my fault. All mine…

Upstairs in Addie’s room we see her looking at an old photo book.

Addie
Proof my dad was happy: A box of pictures of him and my mom, a smile that took over his entire face, A picture of my mom in her wedding dress, Handmade with so much lace, Pictures from years ago, many years ago, Before me,
Before Addie.
Before all the joy inside him
Shriveled up
Like a prune.

Grandma
I, too, have loved and lost.
I tell you, Son,
That love,
That joy,
That life
We must hold onto at any cost.

Miss Thompson
We don’t want anyone left out of the
gift exchange!
And remember the rules,
Do not overspend!

Billy Wild
What if we don’t spend at all?

Miss Thompson
That wouldn’t be fair, Billy.

Billy Wild
My dad says life ain’t fair.

Addie
You’re so parsimonious.

Billy Wild
What’s that, pet?
Petpetpet
Teacher’s pet?
Addie the pet.
Miss Thompson’s pet.
Woof, woof, woof, woof, woof!

Miss Thompson
Enough, Billy.

Billy Wild
How-ooooooooo...

Miss Thompson
Everyone in caroling formation!

Addie
Miss Thompson,
I have a request!
My grandma loves the carol
“Gather ‘round the Christmas Tree”...
Can we add it to our repertoire?

Billy Wild
I vote no.
I don’t want it in our repertoire.
Not just to please her nutjob grandma.

Addie
She’s not a nutjob!
Who are you calling a nutjob, egghead?
She’s not a nutjob!
She’s got—character!

Miss Thompson
Hey!

Addie
He started it.

Miss Thompson
Billy, to the other side, please.
Let’s sing “Gather ‘round the
Christmas tree.”
I think that’s a lovely carol, Addie.

Billy Wild
Disagree!

Carolers
Gather ‘round the Christmas tree!
Gather ‘round the Christmas tree!
Evergreen have its branches been,
It is king of all the woodland scene.

The location shifts from the school to
the living room of Addie’s house.
Carolers
Gather ‘round the Christmas tree!
Gather ‘round the Christmas tree!
Once the pride of the mountain side,
Now cut down to grace our Christmas-tide.
If your branches hold
Snow or candlelight,
Birds or a star so bright,
Evoke the truest meanings,
And season’s greetings.
Gather ‘round the Christmas tree!
Gather ‘round the Christmas tree!
Ev’ry bough has a burden now,
They are gifts of love for us, we trow.
Gather ‘round the Christmas tree!

Grandma
How beautiful!
Aren’t they, James?
Beautiful...

Carolers
Silent night, holy night,
All is calm,
All is bright.

Grandma
James!

SCENE 4
Best Friends
Addie and Carla Mae do homework in Addie’s bedroom.

Carla Mae
I will live in the woods with Delmer Doakes.
He’ll plant the barley, I’ll plant the carrots.
He’ll mend the fence, I’ll mend his trousers.
And I’ll kiss his chubby little face
At breakfast, lunch, and dinner!
Delmer...

Addie
I will live in Paris,
In an apartment with three Persian cats,
And drink Peruvian coffee,
And I will write the greatest romances,
And wear a pink beret and blue galoshes.

Carla Mae
You’ll never forget me, will you?

Addie
Carla Mae, you are the most unforgettable person
I have ever met.

Carla Mae
Really?

Addie
Yes.

Carla Mae
What’s on your Christmas list?

Addie
I’m praying for cowboy boots.

Carla Mae
Cowboy boots like Billy Wild?
I knew it, you do like him!

Addie
Absolutely not!
I saw this pair in the Sears catalog,
With silver on the toes, And this design up the side.
Billy’s are just boring brown boy boots.

Carla Mae
Yeah, right.
We should go on double dates.
That’s what my Aunt Patty Jo does,
And she went to state college!

Addie
You’re gonna make me sick.

SCENE 5
School Christmas
Miss Thompson, dressed in her Christmas finest, has gathered the
class around the tree. Addie wears a red plaid circle skirt and red sweater.

**Addie**
You don’t give a heart on a chain
To a girl you hate.
You don’t.
A heart means romance.
Romance means love.
Love means...Love...
Billy Wild, egghead.
Smash the egghead.
Billy Wild
You don’t...
You’re dead!
My face is on fire,
My face is red.
Billy Wild, egghead.
Romance means love.
Billy Wild loves me.
Billy Wild loves me.
Billy Wild...

**Miss Thompson**
Show us what you received, Addie!

**Class**
Oooooh!

Addie pulls out a chain with a heart pendant on it, her excitement quickly turning to embarrassment. The lights switch and we are suddenly alone in Addie’s inner monologue.

**Addie**
This is the most embarrassing day
Of my entire life.

**Class**
Ooooooohhh...
Billy Wild is in love with Addie Mills!

**Tanya Smithers**
Go in the utility closet if you’re going to kiss!

**Billy Wild**
I’d rather kiss my Aunt Carmen,
And she’s got a mustache.

**Addie**
You are insufferable, Billy!

**Miss Thompson**
Is this for me?
To Miss Thompson...love, her students.

She opens the box and pulls out a blue mirror-glass jewelry box. She opens the lid and music begins to play.

**Addie**
I found it—we found it—at Mr. Brady’s shop!
He thought you’d like perfume,
But I knew it—we knew it!—we knew that this was the gift for you.

**Miss Thompson**
I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

**Kameron Sherk**
It’s just a box, Miss Thompson.

**Brian Johanson**
No need to cry over a little blue box.

**Miss Thompson**
It’s beautiful.
Now, before the final bell!
We must get to the matter of the Christmas tree!
Kristopher Blaine and Amy Rowney
What about it?

Addie
Patience, people!

Miss Thompson
Raise your hand if your family doesn’t have a tree.

Addie and Gloria Cott, a poor girl, both raise their hands.

Misty Andrews
My family has two trees!

Someone
Braggart!

Miss Thompson
As you know, we usually leave the tree up over the Christmas vacation, and then have our annual New Year’s bonfire.

out on the track field...
Due to some issues of liability...

Derek John
Lia-Billy Wild?

Miss Thompson
We’ve decided to send the tree to a home without!
Since we have two such families, We’ll have a contest.

Terri-Jan Quinn
Poorest one wins!

Cody Beck
Make ’em thumb wrestle!

Miss Thompson
Pick a number between one and ten...
The closest will win the tree!

Classmates
Most.
Boring.

Contest.
Ever.

Miss Thompson
Gloria...

Gloria Cott
Eight.

Miss Thompson
Addie?

Addie
Seven.

Miss Thompson
I chose the number five, Meaning Addie has won the tree.

Classmates
Teacher’s pet!

Addie
Shaking Gloria’s hand
Nice try!

Classmates
Rigged! It’s a rigged contest!

INTERLUDE 2
Journey of the Christmas Tree, Part 1
Addie and Carla Mae drag the tree to Addie’s house through the street.

Carla Mae
You were lucky, Addie!

Addie
It wasn’t luck.
I played the odds.
My dad taught me.
You’re drooping!
Take a break.

Carla Mae
I’ve lost my grip!

Carla Mae (Megan Mikailovna Samarin) helps Addie (Lauren Snouffer) bring home the class Christmas tree.
I need some hot chocolate to warm my insides.

Suddenly Billy Wild appears on the top of a snowbank, throwing a snowball and hitting Addie.

Addie
Not you again.
Leave me alone, Billy.

Billy Wild
Need help luggin’ that thing?

Addie
It’s a job for two girls!

PIANO INTERLUDE 1

SCENE 6
The House with a Christmas Tree
Addie stands in front of the tree, set up in the living room. Grandma comes into the house carrying shopping bags.

Grandma
Oh, boy.

Addie
I won it at school.
We guessed numbers.

Grandma
It’s a beauty.
Must be a seven- or eight-footer!
Your dad’s gonna have a heart attack.

Addie
But it didn’t cost anything...

Grandma
That’s not the point, Adelaide.

Addie
Would you place the star up top?

Grandma
You think I could get up there?
Ha!
With my rheumatism?
Ha!

Addie
Let’s go get it!

Grandma
Oh, jeez!

The house transitions into night, everyone seemingly asleep. Suddenly, the Christmas tree lights come on and we realize that Dad has plugged them in. He stands in his coat and work clothes like a deer caught in the headlights. He falls back into his chair, staring at the tree. We notice Addie sneaking out of her room and sitting at the top of the stairs where she watches her father. Out of the shadows, Addie’s mom, Helen, appears, visibly pregnant in a beautiful Christmas dress. She carries a large catalog and glasses of milk and cookies on a tray.

Helen
When I open the Sears Wish Book today, I still get as excited as I did when I was four years old. We’d sit, me and my sisters, Each with a glass of milk And a tower of store-bought cookies, And the catalog, Every page we’d circle something,
Every page something worth wishing for.
What are you lookin’ at?

**Dad**
My wife,
Glowing brighter than the tree.
My wife,
Beautiful with our child.

**Helen**
Did you forget to shovel the driveway?
You tend to compliment when avoiding an apology.

**Dad**
The driveway is immaculate.

**Helen**
Dance with me, James...

**Dad**
You know I have two left feet.
Promise me...
That we’ll dance around the Christmas tree.
Every year,
Promise me.
 Promise me,
While the fire roars its wintery melody,
We will be,
Promise me.
Waltzing here
While the ornaments shimmer.
Snow will fall,
As the mulled cider simmers.
You and me,
Endlessly,
Promise me.

**Helen**
Promise me...
That we’ll dance around the Christmas tree.
Every year,
Promise me.
We’ll be here,
Like the echoes of a wonderful memory

We will be,
Promise me.
Waltzing here
While the children play near us.
Whispering
So they see but don’t hear us.

**Helen and Dad**
I tell you
You tell me
I love you
You love me
Every year
I’ll be here.
Promise me!

**Addie**
I won it.
I played the odds like you taught me.
I beat Gloria Cott.

**Dad**
Gloria Cott?
Gloria Cott!
You think we’re like the Cotts?
Think we’re poor like them?
Do you
Think we need charity?
Addie, do you think we need charity?
I don’t accept charity, Addie.
I work, Addie,
Hard work,
On that crane 60, 70 hours a week.
Every penny earned.
Every last penny earned.
Work, Addie.

**Addie**
But it was free!
Dad
If I wanted a tree,
I’d buy—
I’d chop down a damned tree!
Addie...

Addie
Dad!

Dad
You can’t have everything you want.
Not in this life.
You’ve got to learn, Addie.
A tree is something you can’t have.
Not in this house.
Not in my house.
That’s my decision.
We can’t
Have a tree:
Not by charity,
Not chopped,
Not bought.
I don’t want a damned tree!
You know what I want?
I want a vacation from you.

A vacation from this… this… this…
This attitude you’ve developed…
Not in this house,
Not in my house, Adelaide.

Addie
You really hate me, don’t you?

Dad
I want that tree gone.
I want that tree gone!
Get it gone. Gone!

Grandma
Actually, James,
This is my house.
I say the tree stays where it is.

Dad
If you don’t want me here,
I’m happy to ship out tonight.
We’ll be gone by the morning.

Grandma
Don’t be stupid, James!

Dad
I mean it, Mother.
I’m not having you interfere
In the way I raise my daughter.

Grandma
She’s got feelings, James,
Even if you don’t.
The last person you felt anything for
was Helen.

Dad
Leave her out of this.

Grandma
You’re brokenhearted,
But you’re not the only man
Who’s lost his wife.
That kind of grief is selfish, James.
Addie deserves your love.

Dad
Don’t you tell me
I don’t love my daughter.

Grandma
Before you know it,
She’ll be full grown…
And you’ll live in this house like a
hermit.
Addie will leave you,
I’ll be long gone,
And you’ll have nothing.
Then you can really live in the darkness
you crave, James.

Piano Interlude 2

Scene 7
Gentle Wisdom
Grandma slips into bed with Addie,
who is crying.
Addie
He’s mean.

Grandma
He’s proud.

Addie
He’s mean.

Grandma
He’ll get over it, Maybe not in time for this Christmas.

Addie
It’s a tree.
It’s just a tree
That I won fair and square.
How can it be that we are so different?
How can something make me so happy
And him so furious?

Grandma
Put yourself in his shoes:
The last tree he decorated
Was with your mom.
The last tree had a pile of presents wrapped
For your mom.
The last tree was the first tree for him
And your mom...
With you in her belly.
When she died so soon after you were born
That tree became the last tree he could manage.
Its star became her light
Too quickly extinguished.
A tree is not a tree against Addie.
A tree is a broken promise.

Addie
Grandma...

Grandma
A tree is a promise...

Addie
Grandma...

Grandma
...of Christmas being a family time.

Addie
But this is no family...

Grandma
He may seem like a very strong man...

Addie
...might as well be a phantom to me,
Grandma...

Grandma
...but the truth is that in his heart is a hole where your mother once was.
A hole that feels a whole lot bigger During the holidays.

Grandma
kisses Addie’s forehead, tucking her in, then exits her room.
As the lights in the house go down, everybody falls asleep...except for Addie. She climbs out of bed and out into the hall, listening for evidence of her sleeping Grandma and Dad. When she hears snoring from both Dad and Grandma, she tiptoes downstairs, getting into her snowsuit. With great effort, she drags the tree out of her house.

INTERLUDE 3
Journey of the Christmas Tree, Part 2
Addie, slowly and with much grunting and groaning, drags the tree in the other direction.

Addie
This.
Is.
Impossible.

Suddenly Billy Wild appears on the top of the snowbank. He comes down and picks up the trunk-end of the tree.
Billy Wild
Heave-ho!

They arrive at the Cotts’ house. They prop the tree up on the front lawn.

Billy Wild
This tree has seen better days.

Addie
I’m not in the mood for you, Billy. Why did you give me that heart pendant?

Billy Wild
This tree has seen better days.

Addie
It was on sale.

Addie
Ughhh!
You could have bought chocolates... or shampoo!

Billy Wild kisses Addie on the cheek and runs away.

Addie
Billy! Wait!

Billy Wild turns around and Addie throws a giant snowball at him. He laughs and runs away.

Addie
Merry Christmas, Gloria.

She rings the doorbell, then runs away and hides. Gloria Cott opens the door.

Gloria Cott
Mom! It’s a...
It’s a tree... from “Santa Claus”!
You said Santa couldn’t visit this year, We weren’t on his list.
But I was good, Mama, At least Santa thought so... Must be a miracle, Mama!

Addie
Promise me...

Dad
Addie!
Get out here!

Grandma
It’s gotta be Addie!

Addie comes out of her room.

Dad
Where’s the tree?

Addie
You wanted it gone. So last night, when I heard you snoring, I took it to Gloria’s house, Left a note saying “From Santa Claus” So they’d know it’s a gift. So they’d know it’s not charity.

Adelaide
Promise me...
Grandma
Oh, boy.
Your girl is full of surprises.

Addie
You wanted it gone, Dad.

Addie turns around and goes back into her room.

Grandma
You’ve raised a generous daughter, James.
She’s got the spirit of her mother, she does.
And she’s just as stubborn as you.

Dad
…it’s just…

Grandma
I know, James.
That’s your Addie.

SCENE 9
Nativity
Addie and her classmates get ready for the annual Christmas pageant. Addie is dressed in her angel costume, Carla Mae is dressed up as a lamb, and Gloria Cott is dressed up as a cow. There is a stable-full of animal costumes behind them as well as shepherds, a Mary and Joseph, Wise Men, etc. Gloria Cott sidles up to Addie.

Gloria Cott
Moo.
Thank you.

Addie
Gloria, is that you?

Gloria Cott
It’s moo.
Thank you, Addie.

Addie
For what?

Gloria Cott
I know you’re Santa Claus.

Addie
News to me.

Gloria Cott
Thank you, Addie.
You shoulda seen my brothers’ eyes light up
When we plugged the tree in!

Addie
Everyone should have a Christmas tree.

Miss Thompson
I need my cow…
My horse, my lamb, my donkey!
Angel, you’re on deck!
Line up, shepherds, kings…
Mary and Joseph, you’re on!

Billy Wild
You’re wearing my necklace.

Miss Thompson
Places in the stable!

Addie
My necklace.

Billy Wild
It looks nice.

Miss Thompson
Places in the stable!

Addie
Good luck out there.

Billy Wild
You, too.

Miss Thompson
Places in the stable!

Addie
“T’I bring great news,
And great joy!
In Bethlehem, here,
A baby, wrapped in cloths,
is lying in a manger,
He is your Messiah, He is your savior!

**Full Company**

Gather 'round the Christmas tree!
Gather 'round the Christmas tree!
Evergreen have its branches been,
It is king of all the woodland scene.
Gather 'round the Christmas tree!
Gather 'round the Christmas tree!
Once the pride of the mountainside,
Now cut down to grace our Christmas-tide.
If your branches hold
Snow or candlelight,
Birds or a star so bright,
Forever may your sight
Evoke the truest meanings,
And season’s greetings.
Gather 'round the Christmas tree!
Gather 'round the Christmas tree!
Ev’ry bough has a burden now,
They are gifts of love for us, we trow.
Gather 'round the Christmas tree!

**SCENE 10**

**A Surprise for Addie**

Grandma, Dad, and Addie return home from the pageant. When Dad turns on the light, Addie notices the biggest, most beautiful undecorated pine tree she has ever seen.

**Dad**

What do you think?
Well, if you don’t like it—

**Addie**

I love it.
It’s beautiful.
It’s ours.
I’ll cover it with homemade tinsel
And popcorn garland...
This house now looks like Christmas.
This house now feels like Christmas.

Grandma and Addie (Patricia Schuman and Lauren Snouffer) are overjoyed when Dad (Daniel Belcher) brings out the star made by Addie’s mom.
Grandma
I found all the ornaments,
From when your dad was a boy.

Addie
Do we have a star
For the top of the tree?
The one I made of foils that you gave me
Is sitting on the top of Gloria’s tree.

Dad
It’s gotta be in here somewhere.
Aha!
Look here, Addie...
This is a star your mom made.
Pretty, ain’t she?
Your mom loved stars,
Just like you.

Addie
Put it on the tree.
Do you think I look like her?
Like my mom?

Dad
Let’s take a look at you...
Yes, I dare say...
...when you smile.
Dance with me...

EPILOGUE
New York City
Basking in the warm glow of her memories, Adelaide begins to reflect.

Adelaide
That’s where I grew up—
Clear River, Nebraska,
Population: 1,500.
I won’t pretend that the tree solved everything,
At that Christmas 20 years ago.
But I still return to a tree waiting,
Ready for our decorating.
My father unwraps the star.
And I place it on the top.
The tree is lit.
We stand back and admire it.
Just my grandma, my father, and me...
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Album Cover
Addie (Lauren Snouffer) and her father (Daniel Belcher) share a warm moment next to the Christmas tree.

CD Sleeve
Addie (Lauren Snouffer, third from left) reacts to teasing from Billy Wild (Maximillian Macias).

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