

Libretto

The long Christmas Dinner von Thornton Wilder

Scene 1

Enter Lucia, sola. Surveys table.

Lucia . . . we're ready. I reckon we're ready.

calls

Roderick! Mother Bayard! Come to dinner!

Enter Roderick, pushing Mother Bayard in wheel chair. They pause in doorway; Mother Bayard pats Lucia's hands in delighted surprise at the table.

Lucia Our first Christmas dinner in the new house, –
Look!

Mother Bayard So beautiful, Lucia!

Lucia Come, sit between, Mother Bayard. Roderick, will
You say . . .

Roderick standing, murmurs a Grace.

All Amen!

Roderick New house!

Lucia New snow! A wonderful day.

Roderick *bowing to Lucia, as he whets his knife.*

. . . New wife!

Now what will you have, Mother Bayard?
The light, or the dark?

Mother Bayard Oh, just a little, you know.

Lucia *Leaning over Mother Bayard's plate. Raising her voice, for the deaf.*

Let me cut it for you. So.
So many missed you at church.
They sent their love.

Roderick Do you remember your first Christmas Day in the
West?

Mother Bayard Yes . . . yes.

Arioso

Mother Bayard I was remembering this morning the days when I
Was a child.
The journey had taken us just one hundred days.
We crossed the river before we knew its name.
There was no city here, but there was a church. –
And everywhere – Indians, Indians and forests.
I was remembering this morning . . . my father cut
The trees
And built our house with his hands. So long ago.
We must remember their names on Christmas Days.
Faith Morrison, – that was my mother's name.

Lucia I know! She married John Wainright –

Mother Bayard They were farmers, and his father was a blacksmith,
Too.

Roderick It's all in a book upstairs,
 Where we'll have some new names soon.

Mother Bayard I hope we will.

Scene 2

Enter Cousin Brandon, briskly; he takes his place beside Lucia.

Brandon What a joy to be with you here, after those years in Alaska!

Roderick Mother and Lucia, we must drink a toast to the firm. Our cousin is now my partner: to "Bayard and Brandon,"

All To "Bayard and Brandon!" – long may it flourish!

Roderick *whetting his knives*
Mother, – the dark or the light?

Enter, left, through the Door of Birth, a Nursemaid, pushing a baby carriage.

Lucia *rising*
Look! Look! Look at my child! Nurse, –
A boy or a girl?
A boy!! Who ever saw such a child? Roderick,
What shall we call him?

Roderick We'll call him Charles, –
After your father and grandfather.

Lucia What beautiful hands he has!
Sleep well, my Charles.

She waves as the Nurse goes out into the hall.

Roderick *calls after them*
Don't drop him, nurse. We need the boy in the Firm.

Lucia It's too bad the day is so dark, – and no snow.
I saw the Major at church. He suffers, he says,
From lumbago.
But he says: "It will all be the same in a hundred Years."

Brandon Very true! – Mother Bayard, how is it that we are Related?

Mother Bayard Yes, you must remember the names. You must write Them down.
My mother was a Wainright.
She married your father's cousin.

rises and starts walking uncertainly to the Door of Death, right

Roderick *whetting his knives*
Now what will you have, – Mother? Lucia?
Brandon?

Mother Bayard We crossed the river before we knew its name, –
The Mississippi.

Lucia Roderick, Mother has not been well. –
Are you tired, dear? Do you want to lie down?

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Mother Bayard No. No. Go on with your dinner . . .
I was remembering this morning . . .
*Lucia has taken some steps to the right and stands with
outstretched arms as Mother Bayard goes out.*

Scene 3

*Mother Bayard has scarcely left the stage when the
Nursemaid appears, left, with baby carriage. Lucia turns
without lowering her arms.*

Lucia Look! Look! Look at my child! – Nurse, a boy or a
Girl?
A girl!! – We'll call her Genevieve, after your
Mother.
Who ever saw such a child? Sleep well, my child, –
Genevieve.

Exit Nurse.

Brandon What a splendid day it is! Every twig is encased in
Ice.
One never sees that.

Roderick Some cranberry sauce? Lucia?

Lucia I was thinking this morning of Mother Bayard, –
Two years ago!
It seems like yesterday, she was sitting here.

Roderick *patting her hand*
Come! Come!
She wouldn't want us to grieve.

Trio

All How long have we been in this house?
Is it four years, or five?
The time passes so fast!

Roderick What will you have? The white meat or the dark?
What will you have?

All How long have we been in this house?
Is it eight years, or nine?
It's twelve! It's eleven!

Lucia The children are growing so! I wish they'd stay as
They are.

Roderick *rising, takes a few steps right*
No, let them grow. We want the boy in the firm.
his hand on his heart

Now, now, what's the matter with me?

Lucia *rising and looking after him in anguish*
Roderick, be reasonable, dear.

Roderick *turns and comes back to the table*
I'll live till I'm ninety!

Lucia Roderick! My dear, – what? –

Roderick Today I feel better. It's fine to be back again at the
Table.

Lucia You frightened us badly! Here! Here's your glass of Milk.

Roderick Cousin Brandon, we must think of enlarging the House.

Lucia What? You're not going to change the house?!

Roderick Oh, – a wing to the south.
It looks a hundred years old.

Trio

All How long have we been in this house?
Is it eighteen years?
It looks a hundred years old.
The time passes so fast.
Is it twenty years?

Scene 4

Enter Charles from the hall; he kisses his mother.

Charles Merry Christmas to all.

All And the same to you!

Lucia indicates the head of the table to Charles. Roderick changes his seat.

Lucia Roderick, – we'll let Charles carve. Come, sit over Here.
You were missed at church. So many sent their love.

Charles *whetting his knives*
Now, what will you have?

Lucia It was such a good sermon today.
And the Christmas hymns! – That your mother Loved, and sang the whole year through.

Enter Genevieve; she kisses her father.

Genevieve Merry Christmas to all.
What a glorious day. Every twig is encased in ice.
One never sees that.

Lucia Sh! Your father will make a toast.
The men rise, glass in hand.

Trio of the men

The three men Here's to the health, and here's to the wealth,
Of Bayard and Brandon and Bayard.
In future days they'll sing the praise
And raise their cheers in a hundred years
To Bayard and Brandon and Bayard.

bowing to the ladies

And here's to the nearest and here's to the dearest
In Bayard and Brandon and Bayard.

Quintet

All Greetings to all! – From father to son,
From cousin to cousin, from husband to wife . . .
From brother to sister, from father to daughter, –
Greetings to all! From mother to son,
From wife to husband, from son to mother!
From cousin to cousin, from sister to brother,
From son to father, from daughter to father!! –
In Bayard and Brandon and Bayard.

Roderick has risen and is advancing to the dark portal.

Roderick *insecurely*
From father to cousin, to daughter,
To son . . . to . . . wife . . .

he goes out

Lucia *a cry*
Roderick! Roderick!

Scene 5

dabbing her eyes, sits. Genevieve puts her hand on Lucia's.

Lucia I can't help but remember . . .!
But he wouldn't want us to grieve.

Charles Now, what will you have? Mother dear, – some
White?

Lucia I can remember our first Christmas Day in this
House. Twenty-five years ago! Mother Bayard sat
Here.

loud to Cousin Brandon
She could remember when Indians lived on this
Very spot.

Charles and Genevieve
No! – That can't be true?

All Ah, those were the days!

Lucia Did you enjoy yourselves at the ball, – Genevieve?
Charles?

Genevieve *teasingly*
There will be more of us soon. Charles will be
Bringing a bride.

Charles No!

Genevieve Yes!

Charles No!

Lucia Who!

Genevieve Leonora!
Mother, I'll never marry. I shall stay with you here, –
Forever.
As though life were one long happy Christmas Day.

Lucia *gently*
Don't say such things!

She covers her face with her hands, weeping.
Don't say such things!

Genevieve But that's not sad? Why is that sad?

Scene 6

Charles goes to the door to greet his bride. Leonora enters and takes his hand.

Duet

Charles Light is her step on the stair and floor;
Our hearts are full, and the door is wide.
This is the day we have waited for:
This is the kiss that greets the bride.

Leonora This is the hand that wears the ring;
These are the feet to stand at your side;
This is the loving heart I bring.
This is the kiss. This is the bride.

There are changes of places as Leonora comes to the table.

Lucia Welcome, welcome, dear Leonora.

Genevieve . . . On this wonderful day with new snow.

Charles Come, what will you have? Mother, everyone
Missed you at church.
They sent their love.

Lucia *sotto voce*
Cousin Brandon likes to make a toast.

Charles *loud*
Cousin Brandon, a toast!

Brandon *rising uncertainly*
To the ladies, – God bless them, every one.
To the ladies of Bayard and Brandon and Bayard.

The Women We thank you, sirs.
Enter Nurse, with baby carriage, left.

Leonora *rising*
Oh, what an angel!
Whoever saw such a child!

Nurse goes out, right.

My heart is broken!

*Lucia puts her arm around Leonora, and whispering
consolingly, walks in a circle around the room.*

Genevieve What is there we can do? Only time – only time –

Brandon Only time, only time –

*Charles takes Leonora from Lucia and continues the
walk. Lucia returns to the table.*

Lucia . . . only the passing of time.
Don't you think we could ask Cousin Ermengarde
To come and live with us here? –

Charles *returning to the table with Leonora*
Yes, indeed. You can write her today.
Some potatoes? Some cranberry sauce, anyone?

Brandon *rises, starts right*
 It was great to be in Alaska then! Those were the
 Days!

Lucia rises, her hands on her face, and starts right.

Genevieve Those were the days. – Mother, do you feel tired?

Lucia Hush, my dear; it will pass.

Charles I saw the Major
 At church. He's not very well, but he says:
 "It will all be the same in a hundred years."

Brandon Those were the days . . .

exit

Genevieve *watching her mother with anguish*
 Mother! Mother!

Lucia *at the door, with a smile at Genevieve*
 Don't be foolish! Don't grieve!

As Lucia goes out, the Nurse enters, left, with baby carriage.

Scene 7

Leonora Oh, my darlings! Twins! Charles, twins!

Genevieve *sinking, on the table*
 But what shall I do? What's left for me to do?

Charles *over the baby carriage*
 We'll call the boy Sam.

Leonora Come, Genevieve, and see my babies' hands.

Genevieve I never told her how dear she was.
 I thought . . . I thought she would be here forever.

Leonora *softly to Genevieve*
 We shall name her after Grandmother: Lucia.

Charles *returning to the table*
 Come, what will you have?

Trio

Leonora *looking after the Nurse who goes out*
 Some day they'll come in that door and say:
 "Good morning, good morning, mother!"

Charles Time flies so fast.
 He'll come in
 And say: "Good morning, father." –

Leonora The days fly by. Time flies so fast.
 The bright and the dark
 In a moment are past.

Genevieve Time flies so fast
 There's no time to say:
 "I love you so."

Charles Time flies so fast.
 The sun and the shade
 In a moment are past.

Genevieve Time flies so fast:
We come and go.
The joy and the woe
In a moment are past.

Charles Don't you think we could ask Cousin Ermengarde
To come and live with us here?

Leonora I'll write her today.

Genevieve We only think of her on Christmas Day
With her card before us.

Leonora I'll write her today.

Enter Nurse, left, with carriage.

Nurse! A boy or a girl?
Another boy!!

Charles Roderick Brandon Bayard.

Leonora *at the carriage*
Oh, don't grow up so fast.
Stay as you are!
Oh, stay as you are.

Genevieve *with a touch of disillusion*
Stay as you are!

exit Nurse

Charles I was trying to remember this morning:
How old ist this house?
Is it twenty-nine years? It is thirty years old?

Scene 8

Charles goes to the hall door and brings in Cousin Ermengarde by the hand; she is already fifty.

Charles Welcome, dear cousin.

Ermengarde *shyly*
Merry Christmas to all.

Leonora and Genevieve
And to you!

Ermengarde It's a great pleasure to be with you here . . .
Very kind.

Charles Come now, ladies: The dark or the light?
Cousin Ermengarde, how are we related?

Duet

Ermengarde My mother's mother and your mother's mother
Were sisters.
One was grave and one was gay;
One was fair and the other was dark.
Each of them has left a mark,
And we should remember their names today.

Charles Our fathers' fathers and their fathers' fathers were
Many:
Some were short and some were tall,
Some to command and some to obey.

There is a part of them in us all.
But who can remember their names today?

Genevieve Yes – the names are hard to find, – harder to read
Through the moss on the stones.

Charles No snow today

Leonora And no sun.

Ermengarde It's an earnest Christmas Day, – with this war
Overseas.

Charles Oh, the war will be over soon. This war will be
Short.

Scene 9

Lucia II and Sam, in uniform, enter from the hall.

Charles Here are your twins!

Sam Holiday leave!

Lucia II Isn't he wonderful in it, Mother?

Sam Three days at home. Father, fill up my plate.

He does not come to the table, but stands (right) with his back to the dark door. He looks at the table as though he were taking a photograph.

I'll be back before long. This war will be short.
Let me look at you – to remember you.
Do what you do on Christmas Day.

Sextet

Sam I shall hold this tight!
I shall remember you so!
I shall remember you so!
I shall hold this tight!

The Others We talk of the weather, we talk of the snow.
The day is cloudy, or the day is bright.
We talk of the children and how they grow.
A little more dark meat, a little more white.
We remember our elders and the days gone by.
We talk from the greetings from those we know.
We talk from the seasons and how they fly.

Sam And so, – good bye.
Sam goes quickly through the dark door.

Leonora a cry
He was only a boy, – a mere boy!

Charles encircles the room comforting her.

Genevieve low
What can we do? . . .

Ermengarde Nothing. Only time . . . only time . . . can
Help.

Scene 10

Roderick II enters; finding Leonora by the door he links his arm with hers and draws her to the table.

Roderick II Why are you all so gloomy? It's a wonderful day!

Charles Sit down, young man. I have something to say to You.

Roderick II You should have been at the ball last night!
What a time!
Lucia danced all night with o n e partner.
She'll be leaving us soon to be married.

Charles Be quiet a moment! I have something to say to you.
I can scarcely believe it. Is it true
That you were in everyone's way at the ball?
That you played the fool and the clown?
You were drunk?

Leonora Not now, Charles, – not on Christmas Day.
Not today. I beg you.

Lucia II Really, he didn't, father.
It was the others.

Charles Now answer me, son.

Roderick II *rising and overturning his chair*
You've got to get drunk in this town to endure it.
I hate this town. It's so dead. It's so dull.
You've got to get drunk to forget how dull it is.
Time passes so slowly, you'd think it stood still.

Charles Your family made this town. We have always
Served it.
Let others behave as they will.
You carry your ancestors with you, – and the name.
Tomorrow you'll enter the firm
Of Bayard and Brandon and Bayard.

Roderick II *at the door*
I'm going away to a town where something happens.
You can have your silly old town. And Bayard and
Brandon and Bayard.
He goes out quickly into the hall.

Leonora Roderick, Roderick, – come back!

Lucia II *rising*
He'll be back before long. Mother, now
I must pack for my journey. – You'll see me often.
And soon, I hope, I shall bring . . . my children to
See you.
exit into the hall

Charles It's a dark day. A little more white meat, Cousin?

Leonora How long the days are – when there are no children
Here.

Genevieve *with gathering force*
All the days are dark. All the days are long.
The city has grown about us, with its noise and

Its soot.
They come through the walls – these walls already
Grey with thoughts, with what they have seen,
With the years that are gone.
The years that grind away. My mother died
Yesterday, –
Or was it thirty years ago?
Forgive me!
I'm going away, I must.
I shall die in Florence, or Munich.

She hurries into the hall

Ermengarde She will be back, I think.
starting for the dark door
It's a beautiful day.

Charles *starting after her*
I used to go skating with father on mornings like
This.
I wish I felt better.

Leonora Cousin, you can't both be ill.
You must help me nurse Charles.

Ermengarde *returning to the table*
I'll do my best.

Charles *at the dark door*
I wrote the boy a letter. I forgave him.
I'll send a cable, on Christmas Day.

He goes out.

Scene 11

Ermengarde I was trying to think this morning: how old is the
House?
Eighty? . . . Ninety, almost? . . . You were missed
At church; everyone sent their love.

Leonora What will you have?
A little of the white? . . . Eighty . . . or ninety,
Almost.

she rises

The children have asked me to come and stay with
Them for a while.
This house is yours, you know, – for long as you
Want it.

at the hall door, she turns and looks at the room
Almost ninety, I think.
How many generations . . .

Ermengarde Almost ninety, I think.
How many Bayards . . .

Leonora *counting on her fingers*
One . . . two . . . three . . . so many!

Ermengarde *counting on her fingers*
Seven . . . eight . . . ten . . . so many!

Leonora I won't be long.
She goes into the hall.

Scene 12

Ermengarde

Such beautiful snow . . .
And she's written this letter for my Christmas Day.
She writes . . .
And here are their pictures.
A little new Roderick. And a little new Lucia, too.
The Bayard eyes . . . and the chin . . .
She writes . . .

She rises and starts to the dark door.

And they're building a new house.
She writes . . .
Fancy that!

She goes out.

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