

Playing the Most Important Part

By Annie McCormick Bonner

Live theater was my passion! As a young adult, I threw myself into acting and singing on the stage. I was blessed with talent and hoped to establish a career performing professionally. I won the most challenging roles I could get and always behaved professionally in order to win the respect of my fellow thespians.

I was thrilled when the most influential director in our area told me that he would be holding auditions for an operetta and that he wanted me to try out. The show would be performed in our area's most prestigious venue, and it seemed that my director friend already had me in mind for the leading role.

The script was unavailable for perusal before the audition, but the operetta was based on a novel by

an 18th-century philosopher, which I read. I also became familiar with the show's music, which was exceptionally beautiful and challenging.

The audition went well, and I was soon informed that the leading role—the most important part—was mine! I believed that this role was a huge opportunity.

I walked on clouds of excitement—until the script arrived. As I read it, my elation rapidly floated away. While the novel and the music were worthy, the script was irreverent and contained suggestive and inappropriate stage directions. I knew that I shouldn't be involved in this production. It was a terrible disappointment.

Suddenly I had a dilemma. Theater etiquette dictates that after accepting a role, an actor does not quit, because the production schedule does not allow time for changes in cast. Backing out now would be considered very unprofessional. I feared losing the trust of the theater company, offending the

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director, and even losing the opportunity to continue performing elsewhere.

Of course, I was tempted to rationalize! A voice strutted across my mind, proclaiming, "You can't quit now. The script isn't so bad. The good in the show will make up for the naughty parts." But the Holy Spirit was always in the wings of my heart—firmly, patiently, unwaveringly cuing me that I needed to exit the operetta.

I knew what I had to do. Trembling, I picked up the phone and dialed the director.

"Hello, sir," I said when he answered. "This is Annie."

"Annie! I'm so excited about the show. Did you get the script?"

"Yes, I did, and I . . . I . . ."

I burst into tears. Talk about unprofessional!

Somehow, between sobs, I managed to explain to the director why I could not be in his show. And then I waited for the world to end.

The dear man laughed. He respected my choice. At first he tried to talk me into staying with the show, but he relented. He said he would still adore me even if I didn't want to be in his operetta. And he simply asked me to bring the script to him right away so that he could give it to somebody else. I hung up the phone, mortified at my weeping but grateful for the director's affectionate, understanding response.

I wiped away my tears and then grabbed the script and jumped into my car. As the engine started, the radio also came to life. It was preset to the local classical music station, and to my amazement, the tune playing was the overture to the very same operetta. I had never, ever heard it played on the radio before.

I felt like Heavenly Father was playing this music for me. He

wanted me to understand that He loved me and that He approved of my choice. The music coming over the airwaves was one of God's tender mercies. Through it I felt the comfort of His love.

I went on to study drama at university. More than once I found myself in similar circumstances. There were times when it became necessary to exit certain collaborative projects because of inappropriate content. These situations were never easy or pleasant, but I was able to handle them more gracefully and without tears. Perhaps my earlier experience was preparation for these occasions. Perhaps it helped me to better understand who I am and what I most want to be.

William Shakespeare wrote:

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women
merely players:
They have their exits and their
entrances;
And one man in his time plays
many parts.¹*

I'm learning that there is one part to play that is more important than any other. It is as a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Winning the applause of our peers can be exciting and satisfying, but it is God's approval

that matters. Our greatest performances come as we learn to follow the Master. ■

The author lives in Washington, USA.

NOTE

1. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, act 2, scene 7, lines 141–44.

