

EMMANUEL – God Is With Us
Finding our Hope in the midst of Chaos

by Sara D Boepple

CAST:

3 women, one man

SCENE ONE – at the mall

Hillary wearing store shirt, or pin with her name on it, folding and organizing a pile of tee-shirts
Susan, merchandise in hand, approaches from behind Hillary.

Susan Excuse me, could you help me with something?

Hillary (Over her shoulder without turning) Sure thing, ma'am. (puts down last garment, turns) Yes?
(Sees who it is) Susan?

Susan (Nods, startled) Hillary?

Hillary Hi Susan! Welcome to Marshalls!

Susan Hillary, it is you! I didn't know you worked here!

Hillary Yeah, isn't it great? I got this job just in time for Christmas!

Susan Congratulations – I think!

Hillary Oh, it's wonderful. I love it here.

Susan (finds that hard to believe) Working retail for Christmas?

Hillary (Cheerful) Yeppers! Although I'm hoping they'll keep me past the Christmas rush.

Susan (A little uncomfortable) It's a job, anyway. And so I'm happy for you.

Hillary Oh, it's more than a job. It's my way to help others celebrate Christmas.

Susan (Trying, but not succeeding, to find the silver lining) That's a nice way to look at it.

Hillary No, really. Christmas is all about giving. The gifts the wise men brought from afar, and the gift God gave us when He gave us Jesus. So, I look at my job as helping others experience that too!

EMMANUEL – GOD IS WITH US

Susan Yeah, but—all this? (Waves her hand at the busy commercialized store)

Hillary (Grins) I love tinsel. The tackier, and more glittery, the better.

Susan And all that Christmas muzak?

Hillary Joy never gets old, Susan. And the music, Christmas carols, never lose their message of hope.

Susan (Disbelieving) Really?

Hillary Even Jingle Bells. The other day, I watched a toddler dance up and down and sing along with the song on the speakers. And it was an instrumental version! (Smiles broadly) Too cute for words.

Susan (Smiles back at her, genuine) I'm happy for you, Hillary.

Hillary (Simply) I'm blessed.

Susan I don't want to keep you from other customers, but it's so good to see you!

Hillary It's fine. There's no line behind you. And I agree, it's a blessing to run into you here. I've missed you and everyone else in the neighborhood.

Susan We've missed you too. A new family moved in, of course, but it's not the same.

Hillary I hated to move, but with Brandon and Paige both in college, and John's mom in the assisted living center, it was just too much house. And too much mortgage.

Susan How is John?

Hillary (Shrugs) Doing okay. He qualified for a grant for computer training. God willing, that will lead to a job offer soon.

Susan Where'd you end up moving to?

Hillary The Lord led us to a really nice rental just over the county line.

Susan That's not too far at all.

Hillary The school district is so much better, which is a blessing in itself.

Susan How'd your daughter Patty take the move?

Hillary (Shakes her head) She was pretty upset all summer.

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- Susan I can imagine. Changing schools is tough.
- Hillary That's the best part! She loves her new school. One of her favorite teachers from Junior High just got hired as the Music Teacher there. That was a God-thing. And she made varsity Drill team!
- Susan Good for her! (Looks around) I can't believe we've had this much time to talk. I expected you'd be swamped with customers by now.
- Hillary The Lord provides, Susan. Do you know, we never missed a payment, never missed a meal, and even the kids' college tuition was taken care of, all though the period of time when John and I were out of work?
- Susan Huh, how about that.
- Hillary And even today, He gave me just what I needed – time to catch up with an (fingers make quote marks) "old" friend.
- Susan (Checks her watch) Speaking of time, this really was great. But, I do have one customer-question, if you don't mind.
- Hillary Sure. I'll be glad to help—that's my job! And we'll have to get together some other time for coffee. What's your question?
- Susan (They start off stage together, voices dropping to a murmur and then they are out of sight) I found this item over there, and I was wondering—do you have it in...

END SCENE

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SCENE TWO at the grocery store

Michelle has a shopping cart or basket with some basic food items. Susan enters, and nearly bumps into her before recognizing her.

Michelle Hi, Susan!

Susan Michelle, hi! What a surprise to see you here!

Michelle (Smiles) Nice coincidence. Although sometimes it surprises me I don't see a familiar face every time I go to the neighborhood grocery store.

Susan I guess I'm surprised to see you here. (Carefully) Considering what happened and all.

Michelle (A tight smile) Milk butter and eggs, mostly. We still need to eat.

Susan How is she? If it's all right to ask.

Michelle Holding her own, the doctors say. (A gentle smile) Actually they won't say it, but she's going to be okay. It was touch and go for a while, and it will be a long recovery, but I just know she'll be all right.

Susan (Curious) Do you really believe that? Really down inside?

Michelle Oh, yes. It was a horrific accident. When I first got that phone call, my daughter--my precious baby--on a Careflight, I thought I would die myself from sheer shock.

Susan I can imagine.

Michelle But God helped me through. Helped all of us through, one day at a time, one step at a time. Is still helping, even now.

Susan How? I'm sorry. I just don't understand how you can even believe in a God that would let this happen.

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Michelle (A deep breath) It wasn't God's fault, Susan. And He has been answering prayer, giving His strength, ever since.

Susan (Stubborn) Seems to me if there really was a God there wouldn't have been an accident. He could have prevented it. Or kept your daughter from getting hurt. Or healed her. It says He did all those miracles in the Bible, right? So why not do a miracle now?

Michelle He has, Susan. He is.

Susan I don't see it.

Michelle (Not meant to be flip, but trying for a light tone) I'm shopping for groceries?

Susan C'mon!

Michelle No, really. (More serious). He answered prayers from the very beginning. She could have died at the scene. The Careflight might have been out at another emergency, or the weather might have grounded them, or the crash could have been some place where there was no room for them to land.

Susan So she was lucky.

Michelle Not lucky--protected. Then at the hospital, a surgeon and a team with all the right equipment, all the right training and experience, was ready and able to operate.

Susan Well of course.

Michelle No "of course" about it. God's providential mercy. And it goes on from there. Her dad and I made it safely to the hospital--a three hour drive--in record time. I hardly remember the drive. We were there by the time she came out of surgery. She could hear our voices as soon as the anesthesia wore off. And we were able to stay nearby because of God's people--members from our sister church in that city took us in.

Susan (Surprised) Perfect strangers let you stay in their house?

Michelle Perfect strangers--Christian brothers and sister.

Susan That was nice of them, but still doesn't convince me that was something God--or whatever--did.

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Michelle (Bites her lip) Maybe not, but--I know it. I feel His presence (taps her heart) here. And (taps her head) here. I feel His strength fill me when I'm exhausted. I feel His peace wash over me whenever I start to feel terrified, anxious. I know He's with me, with us, every step of the way.

Susan You really believe that, don't you.

Michelle I really know it, Susan. Just like I know He's here right now in this grocery store aisle.

Susan Then why the accident?

Michelle I don't know, Susan. But I do know--He knows how I feel, as a parent, watching my daughter in that hospital bed, hearing her scream and cry at the rehab session, seeing the tubes feeding her and breathing for her. Because He watched His son on the cross, twisting and turning in pain. He watches His son come to earth as a baby, born in a manger. He came--that first Christmas--and ever since then He's promised we are never alone, no matter what happens.

Susan (Reflectively) No matter what happens, huh. (Change) Look, I've got to get going. It was good to see you, Michelle, and talk to you. Let me know if you need anything, ok?

Michelle (Smiles) You too, Susan. If--when--you need anything, let me know.

Susan (Nods) I'll call you. Soon. I think I do need something. (Exits)

Michelle Milk, butter, and eggs. (Looks at her shopping list) And bread. (Smiles) Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Bread of Life.

END SCENE

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SCENE THREE – At the “Tornado” house, about 8 months after the storm came through

Setting: living room, sofa, easy chairs, coffee table, with a platter of Christmas cookies and a Bible nearby. Tom sits in the easy chair, reading or doing a crossword. It’s a casual Saturday afternoon

Knock on door – Tom gets up, goes to the door, opens it.

Tom Hi Susan! Come on in! Welcome to the new and improved Casa del Richardson.

Susan Thanks, Tom. I brought you a present. Not exactly a house warming, but not quite Christmas either. (Hands him a gift bag)

Tom Gee, that's nice, but you didn't have to.

Susan (Stops him firmly) I wanted to. After what you and your family have been through, it was the least I could do.

Tom (Grin) I want to peek, but I'll leave it till Gina gets home. (Sets it on the coffee table)

Susan (Looks around) The house looks great, Tom. New furniture, new carpeting—

Tom Yup. New roof, and upstairs is all new furniture and carpeting too.

Susan Insurance didn't cover all of this did they?

Tom Surprisingly, yes. When the tornado came through, they had their adjusters out here the next day. FEMA too.

Susan I understand the roof and upstairs. But the furniture and carpeting down here?

Tom They considered the room a total loss because of the windows. Broken glass all over.

Susan I remember. (Shudders) What a storm.

Tom They said the broken glass was a hazard, no matter how many times we vacuumed, so—new carpet. (Confidentially) Gina likes this better anyway.

Susan (Grins) I bet she does. (Changes) So—how are you—really—now that it's all over?

Tom Funny you should ask. I was just thinking about that the other day.

Susan Are things back to normal?

Tom Better than normal! I have never felt so blessed, so thankful, so—grateful.

Susan Still full of turkey and pumpkin pie? That was two weeks ago, Tom. It's Jingle Bells and Shop-till-you-drop season now.

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- Tom (Smiles) Now, Susan, an attitude of gratitude is not just for one day in November.
- Susan (Waves it off) I didn't mean it like that. Of course you have a lot to appreciate. A set of Ethan Allen and plush Berber flooring, for a start.
- Tom Much more than that, Susan. I am—how to put this. So incredibly grateful for God's hand of protection over this entire situation, over my family and me.
- Susan (Scoffs) God's protection! Your house, your whole block, was totally wrecked by an F-3 tornado! You've been living out of suitcases at the Embassy Suites for months. Everything you owned practically destroyed. Your little shop out back and all your beautiful hand-carved woodworking. Gina's teacup collection she inherited from her grandmother. Even your wedding album. You lost all that in the storm, didn't you?
- Tom Well, yes, but—
- Susan Don't tell me that you believe some invisible Person, God, Way out there in outer space cares anything about that?
- Tom (Stares) You seem upset, Susan.
- Susan I just don't understand! (Then realizes she's out of control, breathes deeply. Embarrassed) I'm sorry, Tom. I'd better go.
- Tom No, wait, Susan. I get what you're saying. I felt that way too, when all this happened. Please, don't go, have a seat.
- Susan (Susan sits down gingerly) Well, okay.
- Tom The day the tornado hit, I was stunned. To come home and see so much destruction. Our neighbor's roof was in their front lawn. Wood pieces, chunks of furniture, tree limbs, shards of metal, shingles, all over. Rain had soaked everything. The police wouldn't even let us drive up our street for two days.
- Susan Just watching the news reports looked awful.
- Tom And I kept thinking of how much worse it might have been. My son was at the high school—they went into lockdown right before last period and they weren't released until nearly 5 PM. My wife said they could see the funnel cloud from her office high-rise across town—she and her boss and a couple of others couldn't get into the stairwell because it was so crowded, so they took a chance and rode the elevator down to their vault in the basement. Right before power went out.

EMMANUEL – GOD IS WITH US

- Susan The tornado went right up to the high school, didn't it?
- Tom Passed right through the church next door and left a trail all the way to the edge of the football field. I kept thinking, it could have been like Joplin a couple of years ago, and demolished the school. Or, if the sirens were just a few minutes later, my son would have been out of school. He's a senior, so he has early release. If he'd been driving home when it hit, he'd have been killed for sure.
- Susan (shudders) What a ghastly thing. Such a close call.
- Tom I obsessed over how close it was. And for weeks, storms terrified me. I watched the tv forecasts and the radar apps on my phone. I didn't go out if there was a 30% chance or more. And whenever it actually stormed, our cat would hide under the bed in the hotel room, and I'd barricade myself in the bathroom with all the bedding between me and the tile tub, with a mattress on top.
- Susan I can imagine.
- Tom Gina finally couldn't stand it any more. Fear had taken over my life. She called our pastor and he came over.
- Susan (Rolls her eyes) What did he do? Pray for you?
- Tom Yes. And more. He gave me this to read. (takes out his wallet, unfolds a well worn/creased piece of paper)
- Susan (reads) "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you.
I have called you by name; you are mine.
When you go through deep waters,
I will be with you.
When you go through rivers of difficulty,
you will not drown.
When you walk through the fire of oppression,
you will not be burned up;
the flames will not consume you.
For I am the LORD, your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
You are precious to me.
You are honored, and I love you.
"Do not be afraid, for I am with you.
- I don't get it. (hands it back)
- Tom The thing was, I was anxious, afraid, because I'd been trusting the wrong things. I trusted the four walls of my house to keep me safe. I trusted my job to keep us financially secure. I trusted my reflexes and my driving record to keep me out of an accident on the highway. I even trusted the government to keep the economy on track.

EMMANUEL – GOD IS WITH US

- Susan (Snorts) The government? That's a good one, Tom!
- Tom (Grins) The point is, our hope—our refuge – our security – can never come from earthly things. I'm not powerful enough, the house isn't sturdy enough.
- Susan And the Republicans and Democrats aren't smart enough.
- Tom (Smiles) Something like that. Anyway, reading that—(gestures with the paper) made me realize something. I believed IN God—but I didn't BELIEVE God. If you understand the difference.
- Susan (Shakes her head) I'm not even sure I believe in A God. What do you mean, believe God?
- Tom Well, to believe His promises. The Bible is full of them. He promises to be our shelter, our fortress, our deliverer. Our Provider.
- Susan I've heard that, I guess.
- Tom He also promises that He is with us, will never leave us or abandon us.
- Susan Uh-huh.
- Tom He says that He loves us—unconditionally—and only wants us to love Him in return.
- Susan You really believe He loves you? And is with you, right here, right now? That He—God—is real?
- Tom Susan, He is as real as you and I. He is as PRESENT as you and I are right now. And his love—it's real, too.
- Susan (Softly) but how do you know?
- Tom (Deep breath) Susan, that's the miracle of Christmas. God came to earth that first Christmas morning, to be born as a human being, Jesus. To prove, once and for all, that He is real.
- Susan Ok.... I'm with you so far.
- Tom Later, on what we call Good Friday, He died—on a cross—to demonstrate His love for us. And three days later, on Easter, He rose again—came back to life—to show us His incredible power, that because of Him we have nothing to fear. Absolutely nothing. Not even death itself.
- Susan I've never heard it explained like this before.

EMMANUEL – GOD IS WITH US

Tom Come with me to church tomorrow, Susan. We'll have Communion. It's a reminder so we don't forget. It's something you can see, touch, taste, to remember. To know His presence IN us. That He loves us, provides for us, shelters us through the storms and the struggles and the chaos of life. That he is always, ever, our God – with us.

Susan (Susan nods, reaches out to take/shake Tom's hand, and the lights dim.

IF THE CONGREGATION IS HAVING COMMUNION NEXT, Tom leads her off the front of the stage to the communion rail where the servers are already waiting, and kneel. The pastor or worship leader then comes up to pronounce the words of institution and invite the congregation to partake communion as well.

Otherwise, END PLAY

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