

HOW MISTER LURCH STOLE THE CHURCH

by Maria Feely



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How
Mister Lurch
Stole the Church

A play in rhyme for anytime

by Maria Feely

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

NARRATOR

(Who has a few choice things to say about Mr. Lurch)

MISTER LURCH

(A magician without the true magic of Christ)

WOMAN IN CURLERS

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

(Nonspeaking roles. With quick change, may double as:)

CHURCHGOERS A, B, C, D, E, F, G

(Seven sad church members)

GENIE

(The Church's Director of Christian Education)

BOOTS

(A long-time adult Sunday school teacher)

PASTOR

(The church's preacher)

CHILD

(A five year old)

PRODUCTION NOTES

SET:

Upstage Left: Narrator's stand.

Downstage Center: "Altar": nonbreakable cross, book marked "Bible", candlesticks, offering plates, etc.

Upstage Right: Window, large Genie bottle drawn on a stationary or rolling doorframe.

Suggestions: If you are in a sanctuary and not on a stage, screens will allow Mister Lurch to hide. The screen at Stage Right would need a window for the Woman in Curlers and for Mister Lurch off and on. It could also have the drawing of the genie bottle, which could be covered until needed. The fake altar may be placed directly in front of the real one. Narrator would stand at the pulpit. Mister Lurch could begin the play from the balcony. Characters would enter or exit down the aisle whenever possible.

PROPS and COSTUMES:

Mister Lurch: Clothes that contrast with church attire and a suit for later in the play. Paper and plastic bags, book marked "Hymnal," offering plates, large stuffed plastic sacks, folding chairs, pots and pans, ceiling fan (made from cardboard and hung around his neck), choir robe, small trash can full of "kid stuff," small box for magic trick.

Woman in Curlers: A robe, a wig with curlers in it.

Committee Members: Bathrobes, toothbrushes, phones with dangling cords, etc.

Churchgoers: Church dresses or suits. Wigs, hats, canes, and other accessories to show age differences.

Genie: Church clothes with hair done up in scarves like a genie (as in *I Dream of Jeannie*). Colorful scarves to throw during her first line.

Boots: Big boots that contrast with her elderly appearance, grey or silver wig, church clothes with hat, folding lawn chair, picnic basket, Sunday school teaching material, a pin-on flower or other symbol of an usher.

Pastor: Suit or robe, whichever is appropriate to your church. Tent (to wear onto set and take off in front of audience)

Child: Kindergarten attire (A really big person dressed as a child is particularly funny.), a rectangular blue cloth symbolizing a river. (Try a blue tablecloth.)

- 1 **NARRATOR:** All the Yous down in Yourville liked church-
 2 going a lot.
 3 But Mister Lurch who lived just south of Yourville did not.
 4 Down in the valley, looking up at the town,
 5 Stood old Mister Lurch with his old flinty frown.
 6 **MISTER LURCH:** Tomorrow is Sunday.
 7 **NARRATOR:** Said the last of the Lurches.
 8 **MISTER LURCH:** I am so sick and tired of the bells on those
 9 churches.
 10 **NARRATOR:** Now, no one quite knows why he hated the
 11 church. They just said,
 12 **WOMAN IN CURLERS:** (*From window*) A Lurch is a Lurch is a
 13 Lurch!
 14 **NARRATOR:** It could be due to poverty, disease or memories
 15 of war. Or it might be ...
 16 **MISTER LURCH:** It might be I just don't want to go
 17 anymore!
 18 **NARRATOR:** Whatever it was that made him such a mean
 19 Lurch,
 20 He stood there below simply hating the church.
 21 **MISTER LURCH:** I know what I'll do.
 22 **NARRATOR:** He said aloud to the air.
 23 **MISTER LURCH:** I'll use magic to take it. They'll think it's
 24 not there. (*As he sorts, he throws bags at audience.*) Paper or
 25 plastic? Paper or plastic? Don't you just hate it when
 26 they ask it? (*MISTER LURCH exits or circulates through*
 27 *audience. He approaches "church."*)
 28 **NARRATOR:** So ... he loaded some boxes, some bags, and
 29 some sacks.
 30 And the magic trick book from a box of Cracker Jacks.
 31 Then he drove to the church. All was dark and still.
 32 And the Lurch said,
 33 **MISTER LURCH:** (*Center*) Now I'll take every last thing! (*Exits*
 34 *left.*)
 35 **NARRATOR:** I know you will!

- 1 **He took every chair from the fellowship hall. (LURCH**
 2 *sneaks by with chair. Exits right.)*
- 3 **He went into the kitchen and he took it all.**
- 4 **MISTER LURCH:** *(Crosses clanging pots and pans and wearing a*
 5 *cardboard ceiling fan around his neck.)* **Pots and pans and**
 6 **ceiling fans! (Exits left.)**
- 7 **NARRATOR:** **From the classrooms he took crayons, paper,**
 8 **and glitter.**
- 9 **Why, that Lurch even took up the cans for the litter!**
- 10 **MISTER LURCH:** *(Pops up next to NARRATOR with trash can.)*
 11 **Cleanliness is next to Godliness, you know.**
- 12 **NARRATOR:** **You really are such a mean old so-and-so.**
- 13 **MISTER LURCH:** **That's how I keep this healthy glow!**
 14 *("Disappears" left, then crosses right dragging sacks.)*
- 15 **NARRATOR:** **He stole every phone, computer, and fax.**
 16 **And he stuffed them all into his big plastic sacks!**
 17 **He took every light fixture and every loose wire.**
 18 *(MISTER LURCH exits.)*
- 19 **He took chairs from the parlor and robes from the choir.**
- 20 **MISTER LURCH:** *(Enters wearing robe. Crosses Center.)* **I look**
 21 **good in white, (insert color of your choir robes) don't you**
 22 **think?**
- 23 **NARRATOR:** **Don't ask me. I think you stink! (MISTER**
 24 *LURCH smirks at NARRATOR, then exits right.)*
- 25 **Then the Lurch stole the people from each church**
 26 **committee.**
- 27 **MISTER LURCH:** *(Enters with COMMITTEE MEMBERS,*
 28 *including WOMAN IN CURLERS.)* **It's a wonder there's**
 29 **anyone left in this city!**
- 30 **WOMAN IN CURLERS:** *(Holding phone with dangling cord)* **You**
 31 **know how I really hate to keep bringing up this issue,**
 32 **But it's time to talk seriously about church toilet tissue.**
 33 *(May be replaced with: "I make a motion to paint the hall, The*
 34 *same exact shade as the nursery wall!")* **MISTER LURCH drags**
 35 **away COMMITTEE MEMBERS. Exit right.)**

- 1 **NARRATOR:** Then he sent them on a wild-goose chase.
- 2 **MISTER LURCH:** *(From window)* Have a nice life in outer
3 space! *(Exits stage and enters audience.)*
- 4 **NARRATOR:** Then he slipped through the sanctuary doors
5 And crept across the carpeted floors.
- 6 **MISTER LURCH:** *(Paces in front of the audience.)* I will pack up
7 the organ. I'll take every pew.
8 I'll take every hymnal *(Takes one and crosses to altar.)*
9 And the offering plates, too. *(Stuffs them in his bag.)*
10 I'll take every last thing that a person could want, *(Points.)*
11 From those big stained glass windows to the baptismal
12 font.
- 13 **NARRATOR:** He took all that and more, yet only once did he
14 falter. *(LURCH pauses in front of the cross.)*
15 That was when he reached for the cross from the altar.
- 16 **MISTER LURCH:** *(Grabs cross.)* But I still took it! I took it all!
- 17 **NARRATOR:** What a pity ...
- 18 **MISTER LURCH:** Now I'll do the same thing to every church
19 in the city. *(Crosses Downstage Center.)*
- 20 **NARRATOR:** The Lurch packed everything up, and with a
21 magic spell
22 He actually made the church disappear as well.
- 23 **MISTER LURCH:** *(Holds up small box.)* "Scissors beats paper.
24 Paper beats rocks. Put these buildings into my box!" *(As*
25 *he watches the church "shrink," he turns around slowly and*
26 *makes a long whistling sound that ends in a little "pop!" Closes*
27 *the box with a snap. NARRATOR should give her next line as*
28 *he performs this action to that his "pop" just precedes her "the*
29 *Lurch said.")*
- 30 **NARRATOR:** And when the church disappeared from view,
31 *("Pop!")* the Lurch said:
- 32 **MISTER LURCH:** Gotta go! I've got more churches to do!
33 *(Exits through audience. As NARRATOR reads, A, B, C, D, E,*
34 *F, and G enter and look around in disbelief and shock.)*
- 35 **NARRATOR:** The next morning came churchgoers A, B, and C.

- 1 **Then churchgoers D and E, F, and G.**
 2 **And these churchgoers big and these churchgoers small**
 3 **Looked for the church, but couldn't find a wall.**
 4 **They stared at the place where the buildings had been**
 5 **And they asked each other:**
 6 **A: Who has committed this sin?**
 7 **B: Where is our church? It used to be here!**
 8 **C: Something terrible has happened to it, I fear!**
 9 **D: It was probably the Lurch.**
 10 **E: Only he would steal a church.**
 11 **NARRATOR: Some sat down and cried.** (*E sits and cries*
 12 *Downstage Right.*)
 13 **Others shook their heads.** (*D shakes head and consoles E.*)
 14 **And the less invested ones went back to their beds.**
 15 **F: No building means no church! Hey, that's all right!**
 16 **G: Yeah, we need some more sleep ... after last night!** (*F and*
 17 *G sit with D and E.*)
 18 **NARRATOR: The women in their dresses and the men in**
 19 **their suits**
 20 **Just didn't know what to do — until they saw Boots.**
 21 (*BOOTS enters and crosses to Center Stage. She sets up her*
 22 *chair and takes her Sunday school materials out of her picnic*
 23 *basket and gets ready to teach.*)
 24 **A: Boots has taught the adult class for years and years!**
 25 **B: She'll know what to do!**
 26 **C: She'll calm our fears!** (*A, B, C rush to stand near BOOTS.*)
 27 **NARRATOR: In the church parking lot, Boots was teaching**
 28 **Sunday school.**
 29 **BOOTS: We're having a tailgate party. Thank heavens it's cool.**
 30 **A, B, C, D, E, F, and G: No, Boots, it can't be!**
 31 **NARRATOR: The members all cried.**
 32 **A: We can't have Sunday school outside!**
 33 **Our church is missing. Or can't you see?**
 34 **B: Our church is missing! Where can it be?**
 35 **C: We can't do anything without a building.**

- 1 **NARRATOR:** The sad church members cried.
- 2 **BOOTS:** You have got a lot to learn.
- 3 **NARRATOR:** The Sunday school teacher sighed.
- 4 **BOOTS:** Haven't you been listening to what I've taught you?
- 5 **A, B, C, D, E, F, and G:** Tell us again! (*A, B, C sit at her feet. D,*
6 *E, F, G listen from their positions.*)
- 7 **NARRATOR:** They cried.
- 8 **BOOTS:** Yes, I guess I've got to. Now class ...
- 9 A church isn't chairs all lined up in a row,
10 And it isn't for talking only to those you know.
11 It isn't the color of the paint in the halls.
12 A real church reaches out beyond its four walls.
- 13
- 14 A church isn't ceilings, windows, and doors,
15 A church isn't kitchens, classrooms, or floors.
16 A church is not pews, its stairs, or its steeple.
17 A church is not its building; a church is its people.
- 18 **NARRATOR:** Then she said,
- 19 **BOOTS:** Please join us. (*Collects her things.*)
- 20 **NARRATOR:** And she added with a smile,
- 21 **BOOTS:** We'll deal with the building thing in a little while.
22 (*Exits left.*)
- 23 **NARRATOR:** The members walked away sadly. They didn't
24 know what to say.
- 25 **A:** This is not the answer we wanted.
- 26 **B:** This is just not our day.
- 27 **C:** I am so depressed. I'm going home to Mother! (*A, B, C exit*
28 *right.*)
- 29 **NARRATOR:** Not far away, D and E said to each other,
30 **D:** When I find out who did this, you know what I'll do?
31 I'll file a big lawsuit and sue, sue, sue, sue!
32 **E:** You know who was behind this — Mr. Lurch, that old meany!
33 **D:** But what do we do about it?
34 **E:** Let's ask the Genie! (*D and E remove the cloth covering the*
35 *genie bottle.*)

NARRATOR: The Director of Christian Education

Was a genie with great imagination.

She made a kids' classroom where it had been bare

And taught them the Bible with her special flair.

From deep down in her bottle, they heard her say:

GENIE: *(Off-stage behind bottle. Scarves are thrown around as she talks.)* **Where is that craft paper I bought yesterday?**

D: Help! Genie! Someone's stolen the church!

E: You must help us find that mean old Mr. Lurch.

GENIE: *(Off-stage)* **Who is it?**

NARRATOR: Said Genie.

GENIE: I have so much to do. *(Enters. Crosses to stand between D and E.)*

NARRATOR: Then she saw the members and said,

GENIE: Oh, it's you! Have you come to help?

I just knew you would.

Take a group! Teach a class! Help with kids!

You know you should.

D: How can you be so happy?

How can you be so glad?

E: The church is gone. Can't you see?

It's sad, sad, sad, sad.

GENIE: Now, now ...

NARRATOR: Said the genie.

GENIE: Pardon me, if my impatience seems to be growing.

But we still have a church, though the building's not showing.

A church is about loving and helping and giving.

A church is about doing and being and living.

It's many hands doing the work of the One

Who gave us new life through the gift of His Son.

A church isn't ceilings, windows, and doors,

A church isn't kitchens, classrooms, or floors.

- 1 **A church is not pews, its stairs, or its steeple.**
 2 **A church is not its building; a church is its people!**
 3 **NARRATOR:** The members shook their heads. They just
 4 walked away.
 5 **D:** This is not the answer we wanted. (*GENIE exits left.*)
 6 **E:** This is just not our day. (*D and E exit right.*)
 7 **NARRATOR:** Hearing all this, F said to G,
 8 **F:** Let's go ask the pastor! He'll get that church back!
 9 **G:** He can fix any disaster! (*PASTOR enters wearing a tent. He*
 10 *struggles with tent and then removes it.*)
 11 **NARRATOR:** The pastor was busy putting up a large tent
 12 When the members saw him and asked what it meant.
 13 **PASTOR:** Now, the way I see it, we need a good old tent
 14 revival!
 15 **F:** A what? You'd better worry about our church's survival.
 16 **G:** Why is this happening? Do you know who's to blame?
 17 Don't you know we fear change? Why can't things stay
 18 the same?
 19 **PASTOR:** (*Starts conversationally but builds up until he is really*
 20 *preaching.*)
 21 I know why you've come to me. You've got every right to
 22 complain.
 23 Yes, the buildings are missing. I'm at a loss to explain.
 24 Yes, I know something's missing ... and that something
 25 is big.
 26 But the answer's right in front of you. You don't have to dig.
 27
 28 **A church should not be rated on its hymnals, organs, or**
 29 **altars.**
 30 **A church should not be judged by liturgies, litanies, or**
 31 **Psalters.**
 32 **A church should not be just dressing up on Sunday.**
 33 **A church should still be living for Christ on Monday.**
 34 **(Let me hear Amen! Now say it again!)**
 35

- 1 A church isn't ceilings, windows, and doors,
 2 A church isn't kitchens, classrooms, or floors.
 3 A church is not pews, its stairs, or its steeple.
 4 A church is not its building; a church is its people.
 5 (Let me hear Amen! Now say it again!) (*Exits left.*)
 6 **NARRATOR:** The members walked away sadly. They didn't
 7 know what to say.
 8 **F:** This is not the answer we wanted. (*Moves Center.*)
 9 **G:** This is just not our day. (*Moves Center.*)
 10 **NARRATOR:** Some were unruly. They were losing their cool.
 11 (*A, B, C, D, E enter right and move Center to join F and G.*)
 12 **A:** I will not let this happen.
 13 **B:** I will not be made a fool.
 14 **C:** Let's search for Mister Lurch!
 15 **A, B, C, D, E, F, and G:** Search for Lurch! Search for Lurch!
 16 Search for ... (*In unison turn and walk Upstage. They cut off*
 17 *mid-phrase and freeze with their backs to the audience.*)
 18 **NARRATOR:** (*CHILD enters.*) Then the group came upon a
 19 child at play. (*Group turns around and watches CHILD.*)
 20 And they listened to her and they all heard her say:
 21 **CHILD:** (*Traditional fingerplay, starting with fingers on top.*)
 22 This is the church. This is the steeple.
 23 Open the doors. Where are the people?
 24 This is the church. This is the steeple.
 25 Open the doors. We are the people.
 26 (*A stands by CHILD and puts a hand on her shoulder. The*
 27 *others form a circle behind her.*)
 28 **NARRATOR:** Then the truth reached the group and they
 29 knew what to do.
 30 Just as you've done when you know what is true.
 31 **A, B, C, D, E, F, and G:** What?
 32 **NARRATOR:** (*Coaching*) They said a silent prayer.
 33 **A, B, C, D, E, F, and G:** (*Unison sing-song*) Oooohhhhh ... (*Bow*
 34 *heads and pray for a few seconds.*)
 35 **NARRATOR:** Then a giant ...



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