

*'Nderitu is his own competition.'* - A.C.T Theatre group



# **HANNAH** **AND THE** **ANGEL**

A short play by  
**Alex N Nderitu**

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## HANNAH AND THE ANGEL

‘Because you have made the Lord your refuge...He will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’

- Psalms 91: 9 – 12

*The inside of a church late on a Saturday afternoon. The pews are empty and so is the podium where the clergy normally sit. There's a microphone-topped pulpit in the middle of the stage and a grand piano<sup>1</sup> to near wall. Hannah, a musically-inclined 18-year-old school girl is playing the church piano, polishing her keyboard skills.*

*Enter the Senior Pastor.*

*He is a studious, ancient, clergyman in a white collar and black outfit. He's, lugging a well-thumbed Bible. He sees Hannah, who is something of a protégé to him, and stops.*

Pastor (*smiling*): Hello, Hannah!

Hannah (*temporarily halting and looking up*): Hi, Pastor!

Pastor: Still improving your piano skills, I see.

Hannah: Yes! I want to be on top form when I play the 'When The Saints Go Marching In.'

Pastor: Well, you know what they say: practice makes perfect. (*He walks across the stage takes his place behind the pulpit.*) Pretend I'm not here. I'm just preparing my sermon for tomorrow.

*He places the Bible on the pulpit and starts flipping through, looking for choice phrases. Occasionally, he mouths a few words, as if he's cramming for a Chemistry exam, or underlines a verse using a biro.*

Hannah (*watching him*): You know, Pastor, these days you can search for any verse in the Bible in a few minutes using the Internet. You can choose from any version you like, too.

Pastor: Yes...I heard about that. Some young Church member was proposing to build a website for the church and he told us all the wonderful things the Internet can do. Can you believe he was suggesting we download sermons from the Internet and just customize them in order to save time? Where are the new technologies taking us? The Church used to be this warm, cozy place where the whole community met on Sunday mornings to get a spiritual uplifting that would carry them through the week. Now churches are all about

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<sup>1</sup> Can be another type of piano, eg. The modern electronic keyboards, but a grand piano would be ideal.

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computer lessons and mobile phones going off during sermons. The technology we thought would bring us closer is tearing us apart. 'We have guided missiles and misguided men.' Martin Luther King, and I quote.

Hannah: But, Pastor, technology is not all bad. I mean, without the church's fancy PA system you could never give a mega sermon. Don't you agree?

Pastor: You're right, my child. I remember a time in 1979 when the church clergy were going on a tour to a remote sister church in Rift Valley. There were many of us and our convoy of vehicles stirred interest everywhere it passed. When we stopped to buy food at a shopping centre, so many villagers gathered around our vehicles that we decided to throw an impromptu crusade. We got out our speakers and microphones and generators and preached so effectively that by sundown, hundreds of people of varying ages gave their lives to Christ! (*Sighs deeply*) Those were the days...Hannah, do you remember the Great Crusade of '79?

Hannah: No. I wasn't even born yet. There are Bibles in this church that are older than me.

Pastor: Of course, of course...I keep forgetting that you're just a child. (*Sighs again and gives the impression of being in deep thought.*) Maybe I'm too old to be leading the church...Maybe I should retire and prepare for my re-union with my Maker.

Hannah: Just because you're... 'getting on in years' doesn't mean you should be contemplating death. Maybe you have many years ahead of you, only God knows.

Pastor: You don't understand, young lady: I *want* to meet my Maker, I *want* to go home. I feel that my work here is done and I long for the day when my spirit will float up that angel-lined stairway to Heaven and disappear into a place where there is no death, misery or sickness!

*As if on cue, a mysterious force suddenly grips the Pastor. He clutches his chest with one hand, staggers a little and his face twists in pain.*

*Hannah shoots up from her seat and approaches, worried.*

Hannah: Are you okay pastor?

*The pastor recovers beautifully from the attack and composes himself.*

Pastor: Yes, yes, I'm okay now...Just a bit of chest pain...Maybe I should go and lie down...Just go back to you piano practice and don't worry about an old dinosaur like me.

*Enter Jack.*

*He is Hannah's age and they have been friends 'forever'. He is dressed in what appears to be sportswear (sneakers, tracksuit top etc), although it isn't. His T-shirt says 'G-UNIT' and his walk suggests that he has springs in one leg. His accessories include an MP3 (with earphone cords snaking their way into both ears), a baseball cap, a mobile phone and, for some mysterious reason, sun glasses.*

Jack (*Walking towards Hannah*): Yo! What up, H?

Pastor: H?

Jack: Yeah, it's short for Hannah. The way Jay-Z calls Beyoncé, 'B'.

Pastor: Have you heard of 'C'?

Jack: C?

Pastor: It's short for 'Church'. And you need to discover 'JC' – that's what the youth here call Jesus Christ, you feel me?

Jack: Oh, man! Why does everyone try force me to do things I don't want to do?

Pastor: Because they care...They don't want you to end up doing drugs or killing people...And don't think I don't know you, young man...I baptized you and Hannah in this church. But Hannah is the only one I see here every Sunday. Son, you need to join God's Army.

Jack: I'm already in God's Army.

Pastor: How come you don't come to church?

Jack: I'm in Special Operations.

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Pastor: Very funny. But on Judgment Day, there will be no jokes, only ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’. Luke 13:28, and I quote.

Jack: ‘Only God can judge me’. Tupac Shakur, and I quote.

Pastor: Fine, young man. I will not judge you any longer. I have done my part, now I will let the Holy Spirit do his...I have forgotten where I was going...Hannah, where was I going before this Eminem (*points accusingly at Jack*) interrupted me?

Hannah: Going to rest due to chest pains.

Pastor: Oh, yes! Okay, goodbye kids. Make the right choices.

*Exit Pastor.*

*Jack ‘bounces’ over to Hannah and puts his arm around her as if to declare that she belongs to him.*

Hannah (*fighting him off*): What do you think you’re doing? This is a church!

Jack: But I missed you, baby! You know you’re my Beyoncé, my Alicia Keys, my boo... (*As he talks, he keeps trying to stroke Hannah’s hair, hold her hand etc but she keeps resisting.*)

Hannah: Stop it! And after what we did behind the house on yesterday I’m feeling like the Whore of Babylon. I’m afraid to pray because I don’t want God to pin-point my position!

Jack: But all we did was kiss!

Hannah: Well, it was my first kiss with tongue and I’m still thinking about it. For some reason, I feel guilty, as if I sinned.

Jack: That’s why I don’t come to church. Pastors make me feel guilty about everything.

Hannah: I like church. People are polite in church maybe it’s because they feel that God is watching.

Jack: It's like this, H. Bryo is having a bash at his digs today and I wanted to go with you.

Hannah: Can't. Too busy practicing piano.

Jack: Oh, come on...

Hannah: Hey, I never like going to a place where there's boys and booze...It's a lethal combination.

Jack: Ok...H. You're breaking my heart but it's cool...I'll see you *kesho* after church, okay?

Hannah: Okay.

*Jack gives her a quick hug and exits.*

*In the stillness that follows, Hannah softly plays 'Oh, When the Saints Go Marching In<sup>2</sup>' on the keyboard. This goes on for a minute or two.*

*A bright light FLASHES from somewhere off stage, briefly illuminating the door to the stage. It's as if the sun outside brightened for a short while and then faded back to normal. Hannah is too engrossed on the black-and-white keys to notice.*

*Enter an Angel.*

*He's as tall as a tree. Not literally - that would be ridiculous! – but tall enough to have an imposing presence. He is dressed in a flowing white robe<sup>3</sup> that touches the floor. He has a pair of long swan-white wings attached to his shoulder blades and reaching all the way down to the back of his knees. He glides in placidly and quietly listens to Hannah for a moment or two.*

Angel: The accuracy has increased but you need to loosen up and play more smoothly. It's all in the wrist.

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<sup>2</sup> The actress playing 'Hanna' doesn't need to know how to play piano. The piano can be placed in such a way that the audience can't see 'Hanna's' hands and a recording can be played whenever Hanna's supposed to be playing.

<sup>3</sup> The Angel will pull several items 'the folds' his robe. To allow for this, it would be best if the actor wore trousers with large external pockets (Called 'cargo pants' in the US) and stuffed his props (scrolls, mobile phone, a small bible etc) into the pockets. He would then wear a loose-fitting white robe with bottomless pockets that would allow him to slip his hand into the trouser pockets and remove items seemingly from the robe.



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*Hannah stops playing and looks up at the strange intruder.*

Hannah: Who are you?

Angel: You have to ask? (*Indicates his outlandish wings*) Hello, I'm an *angel*! You know, one of the winged messengers of God.

Hannah: Is this some kind of joke? Did Jack pay you to play a trick on me?

Angel: No. I'm the real deal. An angel from Heaven.

Hannah: You expect me to believe that you've come from Heaven and those wings are not fake?

Angel: Yes. You can come over and check them yourself.

*Hannah rises from the chair and goes to the angel. She cautiously circles him like a cat trying to see if its intended prey is safe to approach. She fingers a few milk-white feathers and decides they are real enough so she now goes for the joints, tagging and stroking. The angel starts to giggle and wiggle his shoulders.*

That tickles! What are you doing?

Hannah: Just checking.

*She probes some more and the angel continues to giggle like a school girl.*

Hmmm...Well the wings seem real enough. But I still need more proof. I know! Jack and I were at the back of my house alone yesterday. If you're a real angel, then tell me what we were doing.

Angel: You mean the time you were kissing?

Hannah (*shocked*): Oh, my God! You're for real!

Angel: That's what I've been trying to tell you since I came in.

Hannah (*anxiety rising*): Wait a minute...That's not why you're here, right? You've not been sent to punish me, have you?

Angel: For kissing a boy? Nah! It was a bit surprising – I almost spat out the holy water I was drinking when I saw it – but it shouldn't make you feel guilty. Besides, you're young. You have enough raging hormones to melt a glacier.

Hannah: If you could see what I was doing yesterday, does that mean you always see what I'm doing?

Angel: I can see you even when you're indoors, if I want to. And the images are much clearer than Google Earth.

Hannah: That means when I'm in the shower...

Angel: Hey, hey, hey - don't get so self-conscious. I'm not always watching – that would be like staying in front of the TV 24/7. I have messages to deliver and souls to guide. I'm hoping to be an arch-angel some day.

*A mobile phone rings. 'Nearer My God to Thee' is the ring tone. Hannah looks around (even at the audience) – it's obviously not hers. The angel frantically reaches into the folds of his robe.*

*(to Hannah)* Hold on, that's my phone...*(He fishes out a purely white expensive-looking phone)*...*(Into phone)* For Pete's Sake, Peter...I'm coming, just hold on...I'm on my way...Just a few more minutes, I'm talking to an earthling...*(He rings off and faces Hannah again)*.

That was Saint Peter calling from the Pearly Gates. He can be so impatient!

Hannah: That's a nice phone. Is it a Blackberry?

Angel: No, it's a Whiteberry, we call it a Jesus Phone.

Hannah: You're *allowed* to have phones?

Angel: Why should humans have all the fun? We spiritual beings can communicate telepathically but where's the fun in that? It's just like talking. I like ring tones and sending SMS jokes.

Hannah: Why was Saint Peter telling you to hurry up?

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Angel: I shouldn't be telling you this, but I've come to guide your pastor's soul to heaven.

Hannah: You mean he's going to *die*? That's so sad!

Angel: No, no, no. It's not sad. He was an excellent servant of God. He's going home. He lived on earth for less than seventy years but he will reap his reward for eternity.

Hannah: Do you guide everyone's soul to heaven?

Angel: Just the special ones. I'm like a sort of VIP bodyguard. My work is to fend off any evil spirits. And not everyone goes to heaven, anyhow. Most go the other way.

Hannah: Will I go to heaven when I die?

Angel: I'd have to check my list.

Hannah: Do you have the list now?

Angel: I'm like a boy scout – always prepared.

Hannah: Let's see if my name is there.

Angel: No - Humans are not allowed to see their future. Given even a little power, humans become so arrogant that they make the angels weep.

Hannah: Oh, please!...I won't brag to anyone if I'm there – I won't even write it in my diary, and my diary knows everything about me.

Angel (*crossing his arms over his chest*): No.

*Hannah starts making childish faces – pouting her lips, leaning her head on one side, blinking her eyes flirtatiously (yes, there's such a word!) etc*

Hannah: Please...please...please....

Angel: No.

Hannah: If you don't tell me, I'll wrap my arms around your ankle and refuse to let go and you'll be unable to fly because you'll be a hundred pounds heavier.

Angel: Other angels will swoop down to rescue me and they'll probably spank you for being naughty.

Hannah: Okay, you've pushed me to the limit. I'll tickle you until you tell me my destiny!

*Without delay, Hannah zips round to the back of the angel and furiously starts tickling the inside of his wings. The angel once falls into a paroxysm of giggles.*

Angel: Ha, ha....Stop! You know I'm ticklish!...Ha, ha...He, he...Stop! Stop!...Ha, Ha...

Hannah: Tell me if I'm in the book!

Angel: Which book? The telephone directory?

*Hannah continues ticking.*

Ha, ha...Okay, okay, I'll check...He, he...Stop tickling...

*Hannah stops.*

*Laughter subsiding, the angel reaches into another of his pockets and pull out a small white scroll. He rolls it open and holds it up in both hands.*

*(reading)* 'I have a dream: That one day all people, Black or White, will mix freely in Heaven'...*(realizing he is reading the wrong scroll)* Oops, sorry, that's the speech Martin Luther King Jr gave on passing through the Pearly Gates. He was very excited. *(He pockets the scroll<sup>4</sup> and pulls out another. He frowns.)* That's a map of New York City, it's easy to get lost in the concrete jungle. *(Returns the scroll and fishes out another one.)*

*(studying the scroll)* No, those are just lyrics to a song by Cece Winans. Angels love music, see...

*He fishes out another scroll and studies it.*

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<sup>4</sup> Instead of multiple scrolls, the actor can have just one or two which he pockets and later removes.

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*(lightening up)* Ah, here we go: The list of good boys and girls...

Hannah *(bursting with excitement)*: Is my name there?

Angel *(eyes going down the list, lips moving)*: Hannah Wairimu, Hannah Wairimu...Ah, here it is: Hannah Wairimu, daughter of George and Milkah, pillars of the church.

Hannah *(looking towards Heaven with two clenched fists)*: Yes! I made it! Thank you, JC! Can't wait to see you!

Angel *(still reading the scroll)* ...And here's your classmate, Hassan.

Hannah: But he's a Muslim.

Angel: It wouldn't matter if he was Buddhist. As long as you are a blessing to other people, as Christ was to His neighbours, then you will earn points in heaven's account book.

*The angel's phone rings again. He picks it up.*

Angel *(into phone)*: I said I'm on the way! *(To the audience)* I really have to change this number! *(To Hannah)* Hannah, I have to go. I'll see you again. Maybe here, maybe in the spiritual realm. Until then *(he gently places a hand on her head)*: live like Christ.

*Exit the angel. As soon as he is out of sight. The bright light flashes again.*

*Enter Sister Mary, the church secretary.*

*She is a plump spinster in her twenties and easily given to panic. She comes rushing in like a bat out of hell (or heaven, in this case). She is throwing her arms around and wailing loudly, as if it's Judgment Day.*

Sister Mary: The Pastor! The Pastor! Someone call an ambulance!

Hannah *(calm as an angel)*: What's the problem, Sister Mary?

Sister Mary: The pastor came to the office and told me to buy him some pain killers

and then he suddenly got a heart attack and fell. I think he's dead – he's not moving or breathing!

Hannah (*happily*): Praise God!

Sister Mary: Did you hear what I said? I said the pastor is dead!

Hannah: And I said 'Praise God!' Pastor has gone where he always wanted to go. It's a celebration, not a cause for mourning.

*She skips back to the piano and happily starts to play 'Oh, When the Saints Go Marching In.'*

Sister Mary: Hannah, have you lost your mind?

Hannah (*still playing*): No, I just talked to an angel and he assured me that pastor was going to heaven, so there's really no cause for grief.

Sister Mary: You *talked to an angel*?

Hannah: Yes. Incidentally, you might want to start showering with your clothes on from today.

Sister Mary (*to the audience*): Has she gone mad?

*Enter Jack.*

Jack (*walking towards*) I've been thinking about what you said and –

Hannah: Ah, Jack! Just the person I need to get this party started. Give me a beat, ma brotha!

*Jack looks quizzically at the audience, shrugs and starts beatboxing<sup>5</sup>.*

Jack : Tu-tu! Tu-tu! Tu-tu-tu! Boom! Yo, check out the melody!

Hannah (*singing loudly, as if in a choir*): Oh, when the saints....

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<sup>5</sup> Beatboxing – One of the four pillars of hip-hop. One imitates drum sounds using one's mouth, usually by kicking air around inside a closed mouth or cupping one's hands over one's mouth and kicking around the trapped air to create a rhythm.

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Jack (*interjecting between Hannah's lines*): Uh-huh?

Hannah: Go marching in...

Jack: Say what?

Hannah: Oh, when the saints go marching in...

Jack: Break it down for them sister: What happens when them saints be marching in?

Hannah: Oh, Lord I want to be among the number!

Sister Mary: This is madness! What are you two doing?

Jack (*still in hip-hop mode*): This is the remix... We are praising the big man upstairs hip-hop style. I'm your boy, Jack. And I'm on the one's and two's<sup>6</sup> (*Playing an imaginary turntable, he makes scratching noises with his mouth as his hands perform the accompanying motion.*). And on the vocals is my home girl, Hannah (*winks at her*) What up, H?...Hit 'em with those rhymes one mo' time for the old times...

Hannah: Oh, when the saints....

Jack: Yo, yo! Check out the melody!

Hannah: Go marching in...

Jack: Uh-huh?

Hannah: Oh, when the saints go marching in...

*Jack makes scratching noises on his imaginary turntable and beatboxes.*

Oh, Lord I want to be among the number!

Jack: I also want to be in God's posse. Don't get it twisted – just because I don't live

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<sup>6</sup> One's and two's –hip-hop slang for a turntable. The turntable, and electronic deck with multiple controls is used by DJ's to mix songs and alter their quality.

in church doesn't mean I don't want my life to have meaning and purpose...Sister Hannah, hit 'em with the rhymes, it's re-mix time...

Hannah (*playing the keyboard and singing jubilantly, like Ray Charles*) Oh, when the saints go marching in!

*Suspecting that the kids are possessed by demons rather than angels, Sister Mary falls down on her knees, faces heavenwards, and starts praying.*

Sister Mary: Heavenly Father, forgive them for they know not what they do...

*Sister Mary prays frantically and Hannah and Jack continue their duet<sup>7</sup> as...*

## **THE CURTAIN FALLS**

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<sup>7</sup> As the show goes off air, allow for improvisation eg. Hannah can sing more lines from 'When the Saints Go Marching In' and Jack can start dancing and Sister Mary can ask for more mercy in her urgent prayers!