

THE UNEXPECTED GIFT

A Christmas Play
In
Two Acts

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Cast of Characters

- Jack:** A widower in his late sixties. JACK, lost his wife to cancer six years ago and since has retreated into a near hermit-like lifestyle in a remote region of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. HE is often cynical and uses his cynicism to hide his loneliness. A once successful writer, JACK stopped writing when his wife died. HE dresses haphazardly in jeans, flannel shirts and boots. His face wears the lines of loneliness and age and is covered with a three-day growth of whiskers.
- Kate:** An attractive looking woman in her early forties. KATE is JACK'S daughter. SHE and her father have had little contact with each other since her mother's death. KATE, is a successful lawyer with a large corporate law firm located in Milwaukee. SHE frequently has to travel and meet with important clients throughout the country. Kate dresses in expensive business suits. SHE is divorced.
- Johnathon:** KATE'S, thirteen year old son. Johnathon is a typical thirteen year old although somewhat spoiled as a result of having never lacked for anything in his brief lifetime. HE lives in the city with his mother, his sister and their live-in housekeeper. HIS interests lie in computer games, sports and music. JOHNATHON hasn't seen his grandfather JACK since he was seven years old and has no recollection of him. HE wears jeans, with a Nike sweatshirt.
- Sarah:** KATE'S seven year old daughter. SARAH is very outgoing. SHE loves music and asking questions. SARAH is full of energy and loves adventures. SHE has never seen her grandfather JACK except in a picture that she keeps of him and her grandmother holding her when she was only a few months old. SARAH is dressed similar to her brother.

Scene

JACK'S small cabin in a remote area of Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Time

Christmas Eve and early Christmas Day, this year.

1-1-1

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING:

The setting is the main room of JACK'S small cabin in a remote area of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The walls of the interior of the cabin are aged and of natural wood. The room is dominated by a large bay-window located on the wall UCS. There is a thin floral pad on the window seat. This is the only thing feminine in the room. Under the window seat is a storage area. An old upright piano sits against the wall SL of the window. On the piano is an old black Remington typewriter, a model airplane and a number of family pictures. The wall SR of the window is filled with bookshelves loaded with old books. In the USR corner stands an old wood burning stove. On the SR wall next to the wood stove are more bookshelves with books and some old records. Down-stage of the bookshelves on the SR wall are the Dutch doors leading to the kitchen. Down-stage of the Dutch doors is an old cabinet radio and on top of the radio an old phonograph. There is a window US on the SL wall under which is a small antique dresser and downstage of that is the front door of the cabin. Down-stage of the front door, a coat rack is mounted on the wall and underneath it on a floor mat are some of JACK's boots. An old coffee table covered with magazines sits in front of the bay-window and is flanked by a sleeper sofa SR and a stuffed recliner SL. An old army blanket is draped over the recliner. There is an old rocking chair USR next to the wood stove. All of the furnishings are well worn. The place has a cluttered look.

AT RISE:

It is early afternoon on Christmas Eve Day and the stage is empty. The song White Christmas sung by

Bing Crosby can be heard coming from the old radio. JACK enters from the kitchen wearing a red flannel shirt and faded jeans. On his feet he is wearing a pair of floppy old wool hunting socks. JACK is sixty-eight but moves well for his age. HE crosses to the woodstove and tosses in another log.

(The song on the radio comes to an end.)

1-1-2

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Well folks, that was none other than the legendary Bing Crosby singing White Christmas. And what a perfect intro to our two o'clock weather update for this glorious Christmas Eve Day. Now, for those of you who didn't get mine and Bing's little hint about the weather, here it is, I hope you're ready for this... are ya ready? Do I hear a big, you betcha? All right then here goes, I'm gonna hit you right between the eyes with it. Yessir, looks like we're gonna have us a white Christmas here in this portion of the ol' Upper Peninsula of Michigan as the National Weather Service says we can expect two to four inches of new fallen snow by morning. That should make for a nice Christmas present for all us here in the ol' UP, eh.

JACK

(Muttering)

Yeah, that along with the other six inches already on the ground, eh.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

So tonight, while you're waitin' for Santa, either snuggle up with the family to a cozy fire and watch the snow fall or better yet take a sleigh ride, eh. (Singing) Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells...

(The song Jingle Bells starts playing on the radio. JACK crosses to the radio and turns it off in disgust.)

JACK

(Muttering to himself)

Sleigh rides, cozying up with the family... where did they get this guy? Sounds like an elf that got loose.

(JACK crosses to the bay-window and looks out and then goes to the piano where he takes down a framed photo and looks at it.)

JACK (con't)

(Talking to the photo)

Well Liz, according to Santa's helper on the radio, we're expecting some fresh snow for Christmas. Christmas... how many does this make now, six? Christmas just isn't Christmas anymore.

(JACK replaces the photo on the piano then crosses to the coffee table and picks up a magazine and sits in the recliner.)

JACK (con't)

Get over it ol' man. Face the music, Christmas is just another day.

1-1-3

(JACK tries to read the magazine, but just can't get interested in it. Finally he tosses the magazine on the coffee table in disgust, crosses to the kitchen and exits. The sound of a car approaching and stopping comes from SL. A car door slams. A knock sounds at the front door. When no one comes to the door, the knocking gets progressively louder. Finally, JACK enters from the kitchen, crosses to the front door and opens it. JACK stands there holding the front door open.)

KATE

(From offstage)

Well, can I come in?

(There is an awkward pause)

JACK

Uh, yeah sure... come on in.

(JACK steps back and KATE enters. She is wearing an expensive winter coat and boots. KATE is an attractive woman in her early forties. JACK closes the door and stands there not sure what to say.)

JACK

Sorry about that... not inviting you right in, I was a little surprised is all.

KATE

I'm sure.

JACK

So, can I take your coat?

KATE

I'm not staying, Dad.

JACK

Oh... uh, okay... would you like to sit down, or can I get you something to drink, or maybe...

KATE

No, nothing thanks. I won't take much of your time, I just came up here to ask you a favor.

(JACK crosses to the sofa.)

1-1-4

JACK

I see.

(KATE crosses into the room)

KATE

I'm in a bind, or I never would have come here.

JACK

That's certainly refreshing to hear.

KATE

I know, that sounded terrible, didn't it?

JACK

I'm not sure terrible is the word... I prefer truthful, how about that?

KATE

Okay, truthful. Dad, I...

(KATE struggles to speak to her father.)

JACK

I'm waiting, or did you say something and I all of a sudden went deaf?

(KATE sits on the recliner.)

KATE

I need you to watch the kids for a few days.

JACK

What, kids?

KATE

My kids, Johnathon and Sarah. They're...

JACK

I know their names.

KATE

That is not what I was going to say.

JACK

(Rising and pacing)

I can't do that. I can't leave. I can't go down to Milwaukee right now.

1-1-5

KATE

I knew you'd say that, so that's why I brought them with me. They're out in the car.

JACK

They're out in the car?! You brought them with you? Why would you do that?

KATE

I told you, I was desperate. My boss is sending me to San Francisco to meet with a very important client.

JACK

What kind of boss would send someone to San Francisco over Christmas?

KATE

A very powerful boss.

JACK

It's Christmas, you should be with your kids.

KATE

I know, but I...

JACK

Kids should be with their mother at Christmas. Christmas, is for family.

(Pause)

KATE

I know, that's why I brought them here. Other than me, you're the only family they have?

JACK

What about your ex-husband, their father?

KATE

He's on a cruise with his new wife.

JACK

Convenient. Your housekeeper, Maria I think, what about her?

KATE

She's visiting *her* family.

(There is a short pause before JACK speaks.)

1-1-6

JACK

I feel sorry for them, if I'm all the family they have. No, there's no room. Where would they sleep?

KATE

The same places that we slept when you and I and Mom used to come here. Do you remember any of that?

(Pause)

JACK

(Quietly)

I remember all of it. Your mother used to sleep on the sofa-bed and you used to sleep on the window-seat.

KATE

And you used to sleep in that old recliner or pull out the sofa-bed and sleep next to Mom.

JACK

Yeah.

(KATE crosses to the window-seat.)

KATE

In the winter, I'd lie here and draw faces on the frost on the inside of the window.

(KATE crosses to the piano and picks up a photo.)

KATE (con't)

I remember when this was taken. It was in the spring and we were staying here at the cabin. We went over to Lake Superior and had a picnic on the beach. Mom wanted to go wading, but the water was ice cold. After we ate our lunch, Mom took off her shoes and socks and went running into the water. Then, she called back to us, begging us to come in, saying that the water was fine. When we didn't want to go in, she started calling us chicken and then started jumping around in the water and doing that little chicken dance she used to do, flapping her arms and going baakek, ba, bakek ba, ba kek. Finally we broke down and went in. Oh, it was so cold. Once we were in the water, she ran back onto the beach and said...

JACK

Gotcha... she said gotcha.

KATE

(Replacing the photo)

Yeah, gotcha. She was always doing things like that. (Pause) I see you still have her old piano.

1-1-7

JACK

Just as it was... I couldn't bear to part with it.

(KATE lifts the cover from the piano keys and looks as if she is going to play something on the piano.)

JACK (con't)

Don't!

KATE

What?

JACK

Please, don't play the piano.

KATE

Why?

JACK

Your mother was the last one to play it. It hasn't been played since. I'd like to keep it that way.

KATE

(Slightly hurt)

Oh... I'm sorry.

JACK

It's stupid, I know, but...

KATE

No, it's okay.

(KATE recovers and changes the subject)

KATE (con't)

Look, I think it would be good for the kids to stay here, to get to know their grandfather.

JACK

How do they feel about this, you dragging them all the way up here?

KATE

I'll admit, Johnathon isn't too happy about being here. Sarah, on the other hand, looks at it as a great adventure.

1-1-8

JACK

An adventure?

KATE

She's a romantic... just like Mom was. Johnathon, is more like you.

JACK

Cynical?

KATE

Something like that.

JACK

You look good.

KATE

So do you... you could use a shave though.

JACK

What for? I ain't doing...

KATE

(Beating JACK to the line)

Any beauty contest today... yeah, I know that's what you always used to say.

JACK

Well, I guess I'm still saying it.

KATE

It's a good line.

JACK

Too bad it wasn't one of mine. Kathy Bates said it in a movie once.

KATE

You are a great writer, Dad.

JACK

Was.

KATE

You still could be, if you tried.

1-1-9

JACK

Not any more, I lost my muse.

KATE

Then maybe it's time you found a new one.

JACK

It would never be the same. There are some things, and some people, who can never be replaced. Someone, I can't remember who, maybe someone famous... I don't know, anyway, they said, "perfection can never be duplicated." Your Mom wasn't only my inspiration, she was also my toughest critic. I'd read her some dialogue I'd written, that I thought was just brilliant... your mother would look at me for a moment and then say...

KATE

(remembering)

"You're kidding right, you're not going to leave it like that?" She could be tough.

JACK

Yeah, but she was always right. And in the end, I'd change it and it would be even better.

KATE

(Interrupting his thoughts)

Dad, about the kids...

JACK

I can't Kate, I'm sorry. They'd be miserable here over Christmas and...

(A tea kettle whistles in the kitchen)

JACK (con't)

Excuse me a minute, I've got some water boiling on the stove.

KATE

You're making tea?

JACK

That's right. Your mother never could get over the fact that I preferred tea instead of coffee. She always used to tell me that...

KATE

(imitating HER mother)

You need to "Man-Up Jack, real men don't drink tea."

1-1-10

JACK

She was confused. The saying is actually, real men don't eat quiche... which I don't by the way. That was a nice imitation though, you sounded just like her.

KATE

You still miss her, don't you Dad?

JACK

Every day... I'd better go check on my tea.

(JACK exits into the kitchen. Kate sits on the edge of the sofa.
The front door opens and SARAH enters. SARAH is seven years old and is wearing a winter coat.)

KATE

Sarah, I told you to wait in the car.

(KATE crosses to SARAH as JACK appears in the kitchen doorway.)

SARAH

I got cold. Can we come in now? It's getting cold in the car.

KATE

No Honey, you can't come in now. You go wait in the car and I will be right out.

SARAH

But, it's cold in the car.

KATE

I know Sarah, but mommy will only be a minute and then we will be leaving.

SARAH

We're not going to stay here with Grandpa?

KATE

Not this time sweetheart.

SARAH

Why not? Doesn't he want us here?

KATE

It's not that, it's just that Grandpa has some things he has to do, and...

1-1-11

SARAH

But, I could help him.

KATE

I know, but...

(JACK, who has been listening, enters and crosses
To KATE and SARAH.)

JACK

Well, who have we got here?

SARAH

My name's Sarah.

JACK

And, my name is Jack.

SARAH

Are you my grandfather?

JACK

I'm afraid so.

SARAH

Why? That's nothing to be afraid of.

JACK

(Smiling slightly)

You know, I believe you're right. You'd better run out to the car and bring in your bags.

SARAH

Am I staying?

JACK

I think so.

KATE

But, I thought...

JACK

Thought what? That I didn't want my grandkids staying with me at Christmas? (To SARAH) Run and get your bags and tell your brother to bring his in too.

1-1-12

SARAH

(Excited)

I only have one backpack. (Explaining) I travel light.

(SARAH exits)

JACK

(To KATE)

She travels light.

KATE

(Pause)

Thanks, Dad. What changed your mind?

JACK

(Not really answering)

She looks a lot like you did when you were her age.

KATE

She has Mom's enthusiasm for things.

JACK

I can see that... she travels light, too.

KATE

I'll get back as soon as I can. I should be done with my business by noon the day after Christmas and I've got a return flight booked that will get me back to Milwaukee around six. I could drive right up to get them.

JACK

That's a seven or eight hour drive, you wouldn't get here until two in the morning. Just get some sleep and drive up the following day.

KATE

You, sure?

JACK

No, I'm not sure. But, if we all manage to survive Christmas, I imagine we can hold out another day. If not, then there isn't much you can do about it anyway... except bury the remains when you get here.

KATE

Give it a chance. I think you will like them.

1-1-13

JACK

Yeah, but will they like me?

KATE

If I didn't think they would, I wouldn't have brought them here.

JACK

I thought you were desperate, desperation calls for...

KATE

Dad...

JACK

Never mind.

(SARAH bursts in the door carrying her backpack. JOHNATHON follows hesitantly. HE is wearing CD headphones in his ears, a winter coat and is carrying two backpacks, one contains his clothes and the other an assortment of electronic gadgets, gameboy, i-pod, CD player, and a laptop computer. JOHNATHON looks cold and unhappy. KATE crosses to JOHNATHON and removes the earphones from his ears.)

KATE

Johnathon, this is your Grandpa Jack.

JOHNATHON

(hesitantly)

Hi.

(JACK puts out his hand to shake hands with JOHNATHON. JOHNATHON struggles with his two bags, finally placing one on the floor so he can shake hands with JACK.)

JACK

(Shaking hands)

Hello, John.

JOHNATHON

Johnathon.

1-1-14

JACK

Oh... okay, Johnathon. (Pointing to his bags) I see you don't travel as light as your sister.

SARAH

He has to have all his toys with him.

JACK

Toys?

JOHNATHON

(Slightly irritated)

They aren't toys.

SARAH

Electrical things.

KATE

(Explaining)

Johnathon, likes to have his computer and other things with him when he travels.

JACK

Oh, sure.... I can understand that.

SARAH

You can? I can't.

KATE

Sarah. Why don't you kids take your coats off and hang them on the coat rack, Mom's going to have to take off soon.

(SARAH and JOHNATHON struggle out of their coats and hang them on the coat rack DS of the door.)

KATE (con't)

(To JACK)

Johnathon, has my cell phone number and the number of the hotel where I will be staying, in case you need to get in touch with me.

JACK

I don't have a phone.

KATE

I know. Johnathon has his Blackberry in his bag.

1-1-15

JACK

Oh? What's he doing with berries in his bag?

KATE

It's a phone Dad... and a hand-held computer.

JACK

I knew that. I was just kidding.

KATE

(Smiling)

Sure.

SARAH

It's one of his toys.

JOHNATHON

It's not a toy.

SARAH

Is so! It takes pictures too.

JACK

What?

SARAH

Johnathon's phone, it takes pictures.

JACK

(To Kate)

His phone takes pictures?

KATE

Most of them do any more. (To kids) Come here kids and give me a hug and a kiss, I've got to be going.

(SARAH and JOHNATHON cross to KATE and give her a hug.)

KATE (con't)

Now, you two be good for grandpa, and I'll see you in a few days. (To JACK)
You going to be okay?

JACK

Who, me? Oh, sure... no problem.

1-1-16

KATE

All right. Well, I'm going to be off then, Merry Christmas.

(KATE crosses to the door.)

SARAH

Bye, Mom... Merry Christmas

JOHNATHON

Bye.

(KATE exits. There is an awkward pause after KATE leaves)

JACK

So, here we are, uh... I guess we better find someplace to put your things.

(JACK reaches for JOHNATHON'S bag, but JOHNATHON grabs it first.)

JOHNATHON

We'll find someplace for our stuff, just tell us where our rooms are.

JACK

You're standing in it.

JOHNATHON

What!?

JACK

Your *rooms*, you're standing in them.

JOHNATHON

No, way. You've got to be kidding? This is our room? This is where Sarah and I will be sleeping?

JACK

And me.

JOHNATHON

And you? Where? There aren't any beds in here.

JACK

The sofa pulls out into a bed, but I usually just sleep on it as it is, or in the recliner.

1-1-17

SARAH

Mom told me she used to sleep in the window. Can I sleep in the window, Grandpa?

JACK

Sure.

SARAH

Great!

(SARAH takes her bag and sits on the window-seat.)

JOHNATHON

This is a nightmare.

JACK

(To JOHNATHON)

You can have the sofa and I'll sleep in the recliner.

(JOHNATHON points to the kitchen)

JOHNATHON

What's out there? Why can't I have that room?

JACK

That's the kitchen. There isn't anything out there, but the kitchen table and a few chairs.

JOHNATHON

Where's the bathroom?

JACK

Out back.

JOHNATHON

(Shocked)

Out back?

JACK

In the backyard. You just go out the back door off the kitchen and it's the little building out back.

(SARAH looking out the window)

1-1-18

SARAH

(Excited)

I can see it. (Pointing) It's right out there. Wow, this is neat.

JOHNATHON

You mean we have to go outside to go to the bathroom? It's freezing out there.

JACK

There's a heater in the outhouse. When you know you are going to have to use it, you just flip the switch by the back kitchen door and this turns on the heater. Then you wait about fifteen minutes before you go out and it will be nice and warm inside.

SARAH

Cool.

JOHNATHON

Unbelievable. What if I have to go real bad.

JACK

You'll need to plan ahead.

SARAH

I can do that.

JOHNATHON

Talk about the Stone Age.

JACK

No, then we'd be sleeping in a cave, and there wouldn't be a heater in the john. I think you will find this much more civilized.

JOHNATHON

I doubt it.

(JACK crosses to the storage beneath the window-seat.)

JACK

Well, let's see if we can find a place for you kids to store your stuff.

(JACK opens one of the doors to the under-seat storage. SARAH follows JACK and quickly stuffs her bag in the storage space.)

SARAH

My bag will fit in here. See, Grandpa... it fits.

1-1-19

JACK

So it does. Lucky for me that you travel light.

SARAH

There is still a little room. (to Johnathon) Johnathon, I still have a little room, you can put one of your bags in here.

JOHNATHON

No thanks, I'll just keep them with me.

(JOHNATHON tosses his bags on the sofa and sulks on the sofa next to his bags.)

JACK

(to JOHNATHON)

I'm sure there is more space behind one of the other doors if you'd like your own space.

JOHNATHON

No, that's okay. (with sarcasm) This will be fine.

JACK

Suit yourself.

(JACK grabs a magazine off the coffee table, crosses to the recliner and sits. JOHNATHON places his earphones back in his ears and listens to his music. SARAH walks around the room looking at everything. There is a long uncomfortable pause. SARAH picks a picture off of the piano looks at it a long time and then crosses to JACK carrying the picture.)

SARAH

This is Grandma, isn't it?

JACK

Yes, that's your grandmother.

She was beautiful. SARAH

Yes, she was. JACK

She looks like my mom. SARAH

1-1-20

And a little bit like you, too. JACK

Do you think? SARAH

JACK
(Pointing to the picture)
Certainly. Look at the way her nose turns up just a little on the end, just like yours. And the eyes, that twinkle... that's you right there.

I'm glad that I look like her. SARAH

Me, too. JACK

What was she like? SARAH

Well... wow, that's a hard one. JACK

Why? SARAH

I don't know. I guess, because I just never talk to anyone about her. JACK

Maybe you should. You can talk to me, I'm family. SARAH

How old did you say you were? JACK

SARAH

Seven... almost eight.

JACK

That's all? I think you may possess wisdom far beyond your years.

SARAH

I'm smart for my age.

1-1-21

JACK

You are that. So, about your grandmother... what was she like? Well, she was... smart, like you... and what you call a free-spirit. She liked to try new things, new adventures. She was mischievous, but never in a mean way. She was very kind. She loved the outdoors and being up here at the cabin.

SARAH

Is that why you live here all the time, because it reminds you of her?

(JACK looks at SARAH in wonderment)

SARAH (con't)

I told you I'm really smart.

JACK

Yes, you definitely are... and I suppose I do stay here in part because it reminds me of her and the good times we had here. Your mother used to like it here too.

SARAH

I know, she told me. She used to tell me stories about coming up here and about what fun she had. Do you miss her?

JACK

I miss your grandmother very much. I miss her every day.

SARAH

What about my mom?

JACK

Your, mom?

SARAH

Do you miss her too?

JACK

(pause)

Yes, I do. I miss your mom, too.

SARAH
Then, why don't you do something about it?

JACK
I...

1-1-22

SARAH
You could come and visit us in Milwaukee.

JACK
Well, I...

SARAH
Or you could invite us up here, and we could do all the things you used to do when you and grandma and my mom used to come here.

JACK
I don't know Sarah... your mother is awful busy with her job and I never was much for the big city, I...

(JOHNATHON, who has been pretending to be involved with HIS music but actually has been listening in on the conversation between SARAH and JACK, finally speaks.)

JOHNATHON
Are you a hermit?

JACK
A what?

JOHNATHON
A hermit. Mom says that after grandma died you gave up. You just decided to shun everyone and everything and hole up here in your cabin like a hermit.

JACK
Well, that's pretty blunt.

JOHNATHON
That's just the way I am.

SARAH
He's right. That's just the way he is. You'll get used to it.

JOHNATHON

I just don't believe in beating around the bush. I think it's best to just let people know how you feel about things up-front so there is no confusion later.

JACK

I see... well in that case, I guess maybe I am a hermit. But, I don't shun anyone... I'm just not very good company.

1-1-23

JOHNATHON

Probably not, but maybe you should let someone else be the judge of that.

JACK

For instance?

JOHNATHON

Mom.

SARAH

Mom misses you. She talks about you all the time.

JOHNATHON

Why else would she drag us all the way up here in the middle of a snowstorm?

JACK

Because she couldn't find any place else for you to stay.

JOHNATHON

That's lame, she could have taken us with her.

SARAH

(explaining)

She's done that before.

JACK

Maybe she couldn't get airline tickets for all of you.

JOHNATHON

Get real... on Christmas Day?

SARAH

She just wanted to see you at Christmas.

JACK

She told me she wanted you kids and me to get to know each other better.

JOHNATHON

That, too.

JACK

So, how is *that* working out for you?

1-1-24

JOHNATHON

Not so well, so far.

(JOHNATHON puts his headphones back on his ears.)

JACK

I see, well...

SARAH

(happily)

We know that grandpa's a hermit.

JACK

Yes, we do. We've established that... so, I guess that's a start. Now that we know that I spend most of my time being a hermit, what do you kids like to do?

SARAH

I like music, and I'm taking dance lessons.

JACK

Dance lessons?

SARAH

Yep. Ballet, see.

(SARAH performs some ballet moves across the room.)

JACK

(clapping)

Bravo! That was pretty impressive.

SARAH

(bowing)

Thank, you.

JACK

(to JOHNATHON)
What about you Johnathon? What do you do to keep busy?

(JOHNATHON ignores JACK and pretends to be listening to HIS music through the earphones.)

1-1-25

SARAH
He likes to listen to his music and play video games... and draw things, Johnathon's a real good artist.

JACK
Really?

(JACK crosses to JOHNATHON who ignores HIM.)

JACK (con't)
You like to draw, huh?

(JACK removes one of JOHNATHON'S earphones.)

JACK (con't)
I'd like to see some of your artwork sometime.

JOHNATHON
What?

JACK
I said, I'd like to see some of your artwork. Sarah tells me you are quite an artist.

JOHNATHON
I'm all right, I guess.

SARAH
No, he's really good.

JACK
What do you say, can I see some of your drawings?

JOHNATHON
Why?

JACK

What do you mean, why? I just want to...

JOHNATHON

Look, you don't have to pretend that you're interested in what we do.

JACK

But, I am interested in what you do.

1-1-26

JOHNATHON

If you are so interested then how come we haven't seen you in five years?

JACK

You come right to the point, don't you.

JOHNATHON

I told you, that's just...

JACK

The way you are... I understand.

SARAH

(to JOHNATHON)

Maybe, Grandpa was busy.

JOHNATHON

Busy? For five years? What could he be busy with for five years, out here in the boonies? This place is the end of the earth.

SARAH

I don't know.

JACK

I wouldn't say this is the end of the earth, but you might be able to see it from here.

SARAH

That's funny.

JACK

Look, Johnathon... I know you don't want to be here, and I'm sorry for that, and I'm sorry I never made it down to visit. Like I said, I'm not very good company. I figured you kids had settled into your own lives and didn't need a bitter old man around to spoil things. I didn't think anyone would miss me.

JOHNATHON

I didn't miss you. It's hard to miss someone that you've never known.

JACK

Hmmm... I'd say you were probably right about that, so why don't we call a truce and try to get to know one another better over the next couple of days.

1-1-27

(JACK holds out his hand to shake with JOHNATHON.
JOHNATHON hesitates.)

SARAH

Go on Johnathon, shake Grandpa's hand.

(JOHNATHON reaches out and shakes hands.)

JOHNATHON

(less than enthusiastic)

Okay, I suppose since we're stuck here, I may as well get used to the idea.

JACK

Good... now, what would you kids like to do?

(JOHNATHON rises and looks around the room.)

JOHNATHON

Where's your TV? Is it out in the kitchen?

(JOHNATHON heads toward the kitchen door.)

JACK

Uhhh...

(JOHNATHON stops in his tracks short of the kitchen door.)

JOHNATHON

Ohhh! Oh no, let me guess... you don't have a TV, right?

JACK

That, would be right.

JOHNATHON

You're living in the Stone Age, you realize that, don't you?

JACK

Not the Stone Age, but the early nineteen hundreds, maybe.

JOHNATHON

That *was* the Stone Age.

SARAH

No, it wasn't. The Stone Age was way before that.

1-1-28

JOHNATHON

Not much.

JACK

I have to see to a few things in the kitchen, you two get comfortable and think about what you'd like to do, okay?

SARAH

Okay.

JACK

Great.

(JACK exits into the kitchen)

JOHNATHON

Yeah, great. I'd like to go home, but I guess that's not gonna happen.

(SARAH crosses to the piano.)

SARAH

This must have been Grandma's piano... the one she taught Mom to play on.

(JOHNATHON crosses to SARAH.)

JOHNATHON

Probably.

(JOHNATHON reaches for the model airplane and takes it from its place on the piano and walks over to the sofa. SARAH lifts the dust cover from over keys of the piano and begins plunking out a few notes. JACK bursts in from the kitchen.)

JACK

Stop!

(Startled, JOHNATHON drops the model airplane that lands on the sofa and SARAH slams down the dust cover on the piano.)

JOHNATHON

What?

1-1-29

SARAH

(frightened)

I'm sorry.

(JACK struggles to compose himself realizing that his outburst has frightened his grandchildren.)

JACK

I mean, uh... no, it's okay.

(SARAH stands by the piano, HER head down. SHE is on the verge of tears. JOHNATHON reaches down and picks up the airplane and holds it up to JACK.)

JOHNATHON

It's not hurt, see. I'll put it back.

(JOHNATHON starts to cross to the piano.)

JACK

No, it's all right, Johnathon. You can look at it if you want to, you don't have to put it back.

(JOHNATHON sits on the sofa with the airplane as JACK crosses to SARAH.)

JOHNATHON

(explaining)

You told us to make ourselves comfortable.

JACK

Yes, I did, didn't I.

(JACK kneels down by SARAH and places his hand on her shoulder.)

SARAH

(sobbing)
I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make so much noise.

JACK
You have nothing to be sorry about, Sarah. It's Grandpa who's sorry. You didn't do anything wrong, either of you. I'm sorry I frightened you. (to SARAH) Come here, sit up here.

1-1-30

(JACK lifts SARAH and sits her on the piano bench.)

SARAH
I know I'm not very good.

JACK
It's not that... you see, this piano reminds me of Grandma and...

SARAH
That's a good thing, isn't it?

(JACK pauses and thinks for a second.)

JACK
Yes, that's a very good thing. It's just that... your grandmother was the last person to play this piano, and, and, well...

SARAH
You don't want anyone else to play it.

JACK
(surprised)
Amazing. You're amazing, do you know that?

SARAH
It's okay, I won't play grandma's piano if you don't want me to.

(SARAH starts to get off the piano bench.)

JACK
No! No... you stay right there. Do you know what I think?

SARAH
What?

JACK

I think if your grandmother were here, she would want you to play her piano. In fact, I can picture her sitting right next to you playing along.

SARAH

Do you think she would have taught me how to play, like she did my mom?

JACK

I'm sure of it. I'm also sure it's time for me to quit being a silly old fool and...

1-1-31

SARAH

Fools are supposed to be silly.

JACK

You're right, but they should also be sensible, and in the eyes of this ol' fool, it only makes sense that if there is one person in the whole world who should play that piano, it should be you.

SARAH

Really?

JACK

Really.

SARAH

Thanks, Grandpa.

(SARAH gives JACK a big hug)

JACK

(softly)

No, thank you.

(JACK raises the dust cover from the piano keys.)

JACK

Go ahead, knock yourself out.

(SARAH begins softly playing notes on the piano.)
JOHNATHON has been sitting on the sofa examining
the model airplane.)

JOHNATHON

What kind of airplane is this?

(JACK crosses to JOHNATHON and sits on the sofa.)

It's a Wright Flyer.

JACK

What's a right flyer?

JOHNATHON

1-1-32

It's named after the Wright Brothers. It's a model of their original airplane, the one used for the first manned airplane flight.

JACK

This isn't anything like those plastic models they sell in stores. Did you make this?

JOHNATHON

Yes, I did. I made it a long time ago. It's the first one I ever made in fact.

JACK

It's sweet.

JOHNATHON

Sweet?

JACK

(still at the piano)
He means he likes it. It's cool.

SARAH

Ohh.

JACK

How do you make something like this?

JOHNATHON

Well, first I found a picture of the Wright Brother's plane, and then I made a drawing of it. I figured out what pieces I would need to make the framework and then I drew the individual pieces on a heavy piece of paper and cut them out. Then I traced the outline of each piece on some thin pieces of balsa wood.

JACK

Balsa wood?

JOHNATHON

JACK

It is a real light wood that a lot of people who do crafts use. Then I cut the balsa wood pieces out with a razor blade and glued them all together to make the framework of the plane.

(JOHNATHON continues to examine the model plane closely.)

1-1-33

JACK (con't)

The covering for the frame is muslin, just like they used on some of the first airplanes.

JOHNATHON

Muslin?

JACK

It's cotton cloth, I cut and placed over the frame. Then I sized it so it would be nice and tight. Sizing is done by taking boiling hot water and adding some glue and something called whiting powder, mixing it all up and then taking a brush and spreading it all over the cloth. The boiling mixture causes the muslin to shrink to fit tightly around the framework. When it dries, it's tight as a drum-head and you can paint right over it.

JOHNATHON

(impressed)

Wow. That's...

JACK

Sweet?

JOHNATHON

Yeah, sweet.

JACK

If you want, I can show you how to do it sometime.

JOHNATHON

You could?

JACK

Sure.

JOHNATHON

Yeah, okay... I mean, that'd be... cool.

JACK

Don't you mean, sweet?

(SARAH giggles.)

JOHNATHON

Right, sweet.

1-1-34

(JOHNATHON holds up the backpack containing his clothes.)

JOHNATHON

Where do you want me to put this?

JACK

So, you're staying then?

JOHNATHON

I guess.

JACK

Sweet. There should be some room under the window-seat.

(JOHNATHON crosses to the window-seat, opens one of the doors under the window-seat and puts his backpack inside.)

SARAH

Grandpa, where's your Christmas tree? Is it in the kitchen?

JACK

I don't have one.

JOHNATHON

You don't have a Christmas tree?

JACK

Nope, haven't had for one for years.

JOHNATHON

I guess it shouldn't be a surprise that someone who doesn't have a bathroom in his house, wouldn't have a Christmas tree.

SARAH

How come you don't have a Christmas tree, Grandpa?

JACK

Well... after your grandmother died, it was just me, and... well, I...

SARAH

You thought having a Christmas tree would make you think of Grandma and you would be sad, cause she wasn't here and you were all alone.

1-1-35

JACK

(astonished)

I...

JOHNATHON

She told you she was smart for her age.

SARAH

You're not alone this Christmas, you've got me and Johnathon. So, can we get a tree Grandpa? Mom said when she was little she used to go with you and Grandma out in the woods and cut one. Can we do that?

JOHNATHON

Aren't there bears out in the woods?

JACK

Some, but...

SARAH

Bears sleep in the winter. Don't they, Grandpa?

JACK

That's right, they hibernate.

JOHNATHON

What if they wake up?

JACK

(joking)

Well, then I suppose... they'd gobble us all up.

SARAH

Oh, Grandpa...

JACK

The bears around here are black bears and they are probably more afraid of you than you are of them.

JOHNATHON

I doubt that.

SARAH

They wouldn't be more afraid than Johnathon. He'd be *really* afraid.

1-1-36

JOHNATHON

Sarah...

SARAH

It's okay Johnathon... it's okay to be afraid of the bears.

JOHNATHON

I'm not afraid of the bears!

SARAH

Good, if you're not afraid we can go cut a Christmas tree. Can we Grandpa?

JACK

Where would we put it?

SARAH

The same place you and Grandma used to put one.

JACK

And where might that be?

JOHNATHON

Mom said you guys used to have your Christmas tree on the coffee table.

JACK

That's right but, I don't have any decorations, I sent them all to your mother after your Grandmother died.

SARAH

We can make some, or find things around the cabin to hang on the tree.

JACK

(giving in)

You're not going to let me get out of this are you?

SARAH

Nope. Please Grandpa, can we cut a Christmas tree? I want to do everything like Mom used to do when she came here.

JACK

All right, I guess we can go out in the woods and cut a *small* Christmas tree.

1-1-37

JOHNATHON

(unenthused)

Do I have to go?

JACK

I think so, don't you Sarah?

SARAH

Sure, c'mon Johnathon it will be fun... (kidding) just make sure the wolves don't get you.

JOHNATHON

Wolves?!

SARAH

(making a face)

Yeah, with big yellow teeth.

JOHNATHON

There aren't any wolves up here.

SARAH

Sure there are, I read about them and Mom said she used to listen to them howling at night.

JOHNATHON

You've got to be kidding?

SARAH

No, I'm not kidding.

JACK

The wolves won't bother us. You kids get your coats on and meet me in the kitchen. I'll have to find my saw.

(JACK exits into the kitchen.)

SARAH

Yea! We're going to get a Christmas tree.

JOHNATHON

(less than enthusiastic)

Yeah, yea.

1-1-38

(SARAH and JOHNATHON cross to the coat rack and get their coats. SARAH runs towards the kitchen.)

SARAH

Hurry, Johnathon!

(SARAH exits into the kitchen.)

JOHNATHON

Why? The trees aren't going anywhere. (muttering) Bears, wolves with yellow teeth, toilets outside...why would anyone live here?

SARAH

(From the kitchen)

Grandpa, can I turn on the heater to the outhouse so it warms up?

JACK

(From the kitchen)

Sure.

SARAH

(From the kitchen)

Sweet!

JOHNATHON

(grumbling)

Oh yeah, sweet. I guess we might as well take care of that too while we're out there. Merry Christmas, Johnathon.

(JOHNATHON exits into the kitchen as the lights fade to black.)

END OF ACT 1