

A SECRET PLACE

A musical comedy-drama in two acts

Music by Mario Lombardo

Lyrics by John Lallis

Book by Geff Moyer

**Inspired by the 1981 Emmy Award winning teleplay
The Gift Of Love by Earl Hamner**

Peruse
Only

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CHARACTERS (In order of appearance)

DOROTHY (DOT).....thirteen-year-old tomboy
MICHAEL.....eleven-year-old brother of Dot
AMANDA.....the children’s grandmother, early seventies
SPENCER (A GHOST).....the children’s grandfather, mid-seventies
JANET.....the children’s mother, early forties
MINERVA (MIN).....the children’s aunt, late-sixties
WAYNE.....family friend, early forties

Place: A farm outside a medium-sized New England town. The farm is a scene out of Currier & Ives. Until the latest generation it was a working farm with corn, wheat, and soybeans. The economy has caused several parcels of its land to be sold off for development. A farmhouse, barn, and small chicken coop are still left, but the only animals still around are a few geese, which are usually sold off at Christmas time.

Time: Today, one week before Christmas.

Setting: Interior of a farmhouse built a decade prior to the Depression. A front doors leads outside. Next to door is a window, maybe two. An archway leads to the kitchen. There is a small second bath and laundry room off the kitchen. A staircase leads up to four bedrooms and a bath. Various photos should hang on the wall next to staircase. At the top of stairs a short hallway leads to an exit. The furniture is somewhat updated, about to the era of the seventies, but still very comfortable and inviting. There should be heavy wood wainscoting and dated wall paper. Furniture should include a sofa, a couple of easy chairs, coffee table, end tables, TV, and a fancy coat rack by the front door. Three nice quilts should be placed about – one on sofa back, other two on easy chairs. A Christmas tree with all its decorations except an angel on top stands in a corner. Presents are under the tree. All action takes place in living room.

ACT ONE SONGS:

PUT YOUR DUKES UP
NOTHING IS THE SAME
POINT OF VIEW
JUST A GHOST IN THE CORNER
A SECRET PLACE
MY SISTER AND ME
GOIN’ TO A PARTY
LOVE ISN’T LOVE
HERE BY MY SIDE
SLEIGH RIDE

ACT TWO SONGS:

NOTHING IS THE SAME, REPRISE
WHEN YOU'RE THIRTEEN
SLEIGH RIDE, REPRISE
CHRISTMASES WITH YOU
NOBODY'S GONNA COOK MY GOOSE
NOT LONG AGO
A SECRET PLACE, REPRISE
NOW THAT IT'S CHRISTMAS

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

TIME: Monday, late afternoon, one week before Christmas

(At curtain, Dorothy and Michael are sneaking into the house. EACH has a backpack with school books in it. SHE has a swollen eye, dirty face, and her coat is ripped at the shoulder. SPENCER is standing at the top of the stairs. HE is in his seventies. Just as the children creep over to the base of the stairs, a voice calls from offstage)

VOICE

DOT, MICHAEL!?! THAT YOU?

DOT

(To MICHAEL) You answer! (SHE runs upstairs past SPENCER, as if he isn't there)

VOICE

THAT YOU, GUYS?

MICHAEL

YES, OMA!

(AMANDA enters from the kitchen. SHE is in her seventies, still vital and full of life. She is wiping HER hands with a dish towel)

AMANDA

Where's your sister?

MICHAEL

Uh, oh, she had to poop, real bad.

AMANDA

You kids are later than usual. Why?

MICHAEL

We loitered.

AMANDA

You “loitered?” What’s that mean?

MICHAEL

“Loiter: To pass time idly or aimlessly.”

AMANDA

I know the definition of loitering, Michael. Just how and where were you loitering?

MICHAEL

At a loitering spot. I have to poop, too. *(HE runs upstairs, also passing SPENCER as if he isn't there)*

SPENCER

(Chuckling, descending stairs) She has another swollen eye, ripped coat again, too.

AMANDA

Third time this winter.

SPENCER

Swollen eye or ripped coat?

AMANDA

Both! DOT, GET YOUR FANNY DOWN HERE!

SPENCER

She’s just sticking up for her brother. Don’t forget about Samantha Crutcher.

AMANDA

(Grinning) I cleaned her clock, didn’t I?

SPENCER

Knocked out the last two of her baby teeth.

AMANDA

Michael’s has to learn to fight his own battles, though.

SPENCER

That boy’s smart enough to think himself out of any scuffle. He’ll figure that out soon enough.

AMANDA

Let’s hope it’s soon. I’m tired of stitching up his Dot’s clothes. DOT, COME DOWN HERE PLEASE! NOW!

SPENCER

She takes after her mother...and her grandmother. (*SPENCER chuckles and enters kitchen as DOT appears at the top of the staircase. SHE has a cold washcloth against HER right eye*)

DOT

Yeah?

AMANDA

What mother can I expect a call from this time?

DOT

Dustin Ray! He is such a little piss ant!

AMANDA

Watch your mouth, girly!

DOT

He keeps calling Michael "Webster." He says he's a "DICK..shunnary!" He's the one who better watch his mouth.

AMANDA

Come down here! Let me look at that eye.

DOT

(*Descends stairs*) It's okay! I'll live. Unfortunately so will Dustin Ray.

AMANDA

You know how your mother feels about you fighting.

DOT

Oh, she's just worried about what people think.

(*THEY sit on sofa together. AMANDA looks at DOT's eye*)

AMANDA

She worries about you getting hurt.

DOT

I'm okay.

AMANDA

I take it Dustin's left handed.

DOT

Yeah! How'd you know?

AMANDA

Usually it's your left eye that's swollen, which comes from a right handed person throwing a punch. This time you tangled with a lefty.

DOT

He went down hard, Oma. I kicked him in the jewels.

AMANDA

(Cleaning DOT'S face) Now I know we'll be getting a phone call. One of these days you're gonna have to let Michael stand up for himself. Your mother used to do the same thing.

DOT

Mom got into fights?

AMANDA

All of 'em at about the same age as you, and all of 'em protecting her little brother.

DOT

Uncle Darrin?

AMANDA

He was little, too, like Michael. Kids would pick on him and your mother wouldn't stand for it. Must be something about being thirteen.

DOT

Will Uncle Darrin be home for Christmas?

AMANDA

No! The Navy's still got his submarine under some ocean somewhere.

DOT

Again!?

AMANDA

Don't change the subject, girly! Michael's got to...

DOT

Oma, Michael doesn't know the first thing about fighting.

AMANDA

From the swollen eyes you keep coming home with, neither do you. *(SHE rises)* Stand up!

DOT

Huh!?

AMANDA

Stand up! (*DOT rises*) Put your dukes up!

DOT

My “dukes?”

AMANDA

(*Taking a fighter’s stance*) Mother thumb and her four daughters. Your dukes! Get ‘em up!
SPENCER stands in the kitchen doorway, watching and grinning)

SONG – PUT YOUR DUKES UP! Amanda & dot

AMANDA

PUT YOUR DUKES UP
LET ME TEACH YOU TO FIGHT
BOBBING, WEAVING
MAKE HIM CHASE YOU ALL NIGHT

UPPERCUTS WITH
JABS AND HOOKS TO THE CHIN
HE WON’T EVEN
KNOW THE STATE HE IS IN!

DOT

I THINK I’M GETTING THE HANG OF IT
LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT, RIGHT – ONE, TWO...

AMANDA

NOBODY HERE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD
WILL STAND A CHANCE WITH YOU

BOTH

COME OUT SWINGING
AT THE SOUND OF THE BELL
SOCK IT TO HIM
MAKE HIM WINCE, MAKE HIM YELL

AMANDA

HE’LL SOON SURRENDER
BEGGING YOU NOT TO TELL

BOTH

AND WITH OUR DUKES UP
NO ONE CAN GIVE US HELL!

(*Spoken with a punch*)K – A – B – O – O M!!

DOT

Where’d you learn all that?

AMANDA

Your Opa. We used to spar a lot, until I started beating him.

SPENCER

HA! Never happened!

DOT

Was Opa a good boxer?

AMANDA

Pretty good. He boxed in the Army.

SPENCER

“Pretty good!?” I was undefeated in our battalion.

AMANDA

(Raises HER hands to spar again and brushes DOT’S forehead) Come on, let’s see if anything sunk in that hard noodle.

(As THEY begin to spar again, laughing and jumping, JANET enters from the kitchen. SHE also passes SPENCER as if he isn’t there. SHE wears a sculpture’s smock and has clay and powder on it and her face. SHE wears rubber gloves and carries a small figurine)

JANET

Oh, way to reinforce the negative, Mother.

AMANDA

I’m tired of stitching up her clothes, so I’m teaching her a few moves your dad taught me. *(Looking at item in JANET’S hand)* That the newest one?

JANET

Rosie the Riveter. Already got a dozen online orders for it. *(To DOT)* What happened this time, young lady?

DOT

Dustin Ray again.

SPENCER

(To AMANDA) Teach her the uppercut; take out some of the brat’s teeth and maybe he won’t run his mouth so much. *(AMANDA glances at SPENCER and grins)*

JANET

Dot, I know you feel like you have to protect your little brother, but one of these days...

DOT

Yeah, yeah, Mom, I know! He’s gotta stand up for himself. He will when he’s ready, but right now, well, I can’t just let that piss ant Dustin Ray pick...

Hey! AMANDA

DOT
...that CREEP Dustin Ray pick on him like that.

Where is he? JANET

Upstairs! DOT

Reading the dictionary? JANET

Duh! DOT

Go make sure he does his homework! JANET

(*Heading for the stairs*) Okay. DOT

AND DO YOURS! JANET

YEAH, YEAH! DOT

AND NO MORE FIGHTS... JANET

OKAY, OKAY... DOT

I swear, this town's going to think I raised a couple of... JANET

AMANDA
(*Gestures to the figurine*) Can I see that?

JANET
You're not helping, you know? (*Hands figurine to AMANDA*) This has got to stop!

AMANDA

(Studying figurine) Wow! Norman Rockwell would be proud, Janet.

JANET

Did you hear me?

AMANDA

(Imitating DOT) Yeah, yeah! Go get cleaned up for dinner! Aunt Min will be home soon expecting it to be ready. *(SHE starts for kitchen. SPENCER is still watching)*

JANET

What would Dad think of you teaching his granddaughter to box?

AMANDA

He'd probably help.

SPENCER

Damn straight I would.

JANET

I don't like it, mother!

AMANDA

(Entering kitchen, Spencer follows HER) Okay, okay.

(JANET crosses to kitchen archway, leans and speaks to AMANDA who is offstage)

JANET

I know it's your house, but they are my kids.

AMANDA

I got the message, dear, loud and clear.

JANET

(A moment) It'll be a year tomorrow.

AMANDA

(Offstage) I know.

JANET

Are you sick of us yet?

AMANDA

(Offstage) Not in the least.

JANET

What about aunt min?

(AUNT MIN has just entered the front door. SHE is in her late sixties but appears older than HER sister Amanda. SHE is a more serious woman than HER sister, and a bit on the cranky side. SHE carries a newspaper)

MIN

What about Aunt Min? *(SHE takes off HER winter coat and hangs it on brass coat rack)* It's colder than a well digger's butt in January out there. Now, what about Aunt Min?

JANET

I was just reminding Mom that the kids and I will have been here a year tomorrow.

MIN

(Starts crossing to easy chair) Humph! Don't I know it! WHAT'S FOR DINNER, MANDY?

AMANDA

(Offstage) BEEF STEW! AND DON'T CALL ME MANDY!

MIN

DID YOU PUT IN OREGANO?

AMANDA

(Offstage) YES, MIN!

MIN

DID YOU CUT UP...

AMANDA & MIN

...THE POTATOES REAL SMALL?

AMANDA

(Offstage) YES, MIN!

MIN

(To JANET) She never does. Says she does, but never does. Big potatoes in stew soak up too much of the juices, makes 'em too soggy. *(Sees figurine)* That a new one?

JANET

Yes! Like it?

MIN

(Handling figurine) Rosie the Riveter. Good choice. Back when women were women.

JANET

What are we now?

MIN

Sculptors! (*Hands figurine back to JANET*)

JANET

Got a dozen orders for it already, and another dozen for the sailor with the tattoo.

MIN

I suppose they all want 'em before Christmas?

JANET

Of course.

MIN

You gonna be able to do that...in just a week?

JANET

The molds are all done, so getting that part finished is simple. It's the hand painting that takes the most time.

MIN

Have your boy help you. I've seen some of the things he's drawn and...

JANET

No! These have to be perfect. I have to do them.

MIN

So are you finally making some money from them?

JANET

Norman Rockwell characters seem to be popular. Guess he'll always be popular, regardless of people's feelings towards Americana.

MIN

(*Repeating*) So you're finally making some money?

JANET

Some! Hopefully it'll be more soon.

MIN

Good! Them kids need a place of their own. A brother and sister shouldn't share the same bedroom. It ain't proper. And I need some peace and quiet. (*Sits in easy chair and snaps open HER paper*)

JANET

I told you, Min, if they bother you, tell me. I'll keep them out of your hair. And you know as well as I they are not that loud.

(Suddenly MICHAEL comes running down the stairs laughing, DOT is in hot pursuit, screaming at HIM. HE carries a sheet of paper. SPENCER enters and watches action with a smile)

DOT

GIMME THAT, YA LITTLE TOADSTOOL! MOM, HE DREW ANOTHER STUPID PICTURE OF ME AGAIN!

(As MICHAEL runs past JANET SHE snatches the paper out of HIS hand and gives it to DOT)

JANET

Go in the kitchen and help Oma with dinner!

DOT

HAMSTER BUTT!

MICHAEL

BANDICOOT!

DOT

What's that!?

MICHAEL

“BANDICOOT: A VERY LARGE RAT OF INDIA.” *(Laughing)* That's what I drew.

DOT

(SHE rips up drawing) NOW I'M GONNA RIP OUT YOUR TONGUE!

(The CHILDREN run in to the kitchen. Again, they do not acknowledge SPENCER)

JANET

(To MIN) Okay, sometimes they're loud. But from the stories dad told me you and mom weren't the quietest of siblings either.

SPENCER

Holy Moses, they still aren't.

MIN

Oh, your poppa was one of the biggest liars in town.

SPENCER

(Crossing to stairs) And you had the biggest mouth. *(Begins ascending stairs)*

JANET

(SHE sits on sofa arm) How was work today?

MIN

Working behind a Wal-Mart return desk is like being the straw dummy on a bayonet course. That's how work was.

JANET

Just trying to make conversation, Min.

SPENCER

Good luck with that. *(HE exits)*

MIN

(Looking at JANET) MANDY, COME IN HERE AND TEACH YOUR DAUGHTER THE PROPER WAY TO SIT ON A SOFA!

(JANET sighs, rolls HER eyes, then slides off arm onto sofa)

AMANDA

(Offstage) WHAT?

JANET

NOTHING, MOTHER. MIN'S JUST BEING MIN.

AMANDA

(Offstage) PLAY NICE, YOU TWO!

JANET

Aunt Min, I know us being here has been a burden on you and I'm sorry. We had no other choice. When Neil left we were...

MIN

Ran off, you mean. Like a scared rabbit. Cowardly thing to do to a family.

JANET

Being ashamed is not being a coward. It wasn't all his fault. I convinced him to come here and open our shop. When it started failing he was trapped here... no options. In New York he could've found a job just like that. Back there people fail everyday but have the chance to start again. Here...here...nothing! No alternatives! No second chances! I know he should've handled it better, but we were going through hell then and...

MIN

Everybody goes through hell now and then. Only cowards run from it. He failed at his business. Instead of gettin' a backbone and trying again he skedaddled - left you and them kids high and dry.

JANET

I failed with him, Min. I failed with our shop. I'm just as much a failure as he is.

MIN

But you didn't run off now, did ya?

JANET

(Rises) I hate failing, Min! I hate it!

SONG – NOTHING IS THE SAME - Janet

THE CLAY AND DUST AND SWEAT
MELT INTO MY WORRIED FACE
THE ANGUISH IN MY SOUL
IS EASY NOW TO TRACE

IN A YEAR
SO MUCH HAS HAPPENED
AND NOW LOOK
WHAT I'VE BECOME

I'VE FALLEN FAR
FROM WHERE I WAS
TO WHERE I STARTED FROM...

NOTHING IS THE SAME
AS IT USED TO BE
EV'RYTHING HAS CHANGED
FOR THE KIDS AND ME

ONCE WE HAD THE PERFECT FAMILY
WE WOULD START EACH DAY EXCITEDLY
NOW THE LIFE WE KNEW IS GONE
IT LEFT SO SUDDENLY

VERY LONG AGO
ALL THE WORLD WAS OURS
IT SEEMED WE COULD REACH
FAR BEYOND THE STARS

I COULDN'T SAVE
OUR SHATTERED DREAMS
"YOU FAILED"

MY CONSCIENCE SCREAMS

AND I KNOW
THAT I'M TO BLAME
NOTHING IS THE SAME.

MICHAEL

(Running in from kitchen) Mom, can I go to the movie on Christmas Day?

(MIN snaps the newspaper back up in front of HER face)

JANET

On Christmas **Day**!?

MICHAEL

(Sits on sofa) That's when that new sci-fi movie starts and I wanna be one of the first to see it.

JANET

I don't know, Mikey. Christmas Day is a time for families to be together.

MICHAEL

Then let's all go to the movie.

MIN

I refuse to spend Christmas Day in a nasty ol' movie house.

MICHAEL

(Sharp) Then don't go with us.

JANET

Michael! That was not called for.

MICHAEL

Can I?

JANET

May I!

MICHAEL

Yes, you may, Mother! Now, may I?

JANET

Does Dot want to go with you?

MICHAEL

She hates sci-fi.

JANET

So who would you go with?

MICHAEL

I have three people in mind: me, myself, and I.

JANET

Well, let me think about it. We're still short on cash, you know?

MIN

I'll pay his way. Get him out of my hair for the afternoon.

MICHAEL

I've never touched your hair. I wouldn't want to.

JANET

(Sharp) Michael!

MIN

(Rises) Humph! Can't even read a paper in peace. *(SHE starts upstairs)*

JANET

You apologize to Aunt Min.

MICHAEL

(Insincere) Sorry.

MIN

Call me when supper's ready!

JANET

Mean it!

MICHAEL

Sorry, Aunt Min.

MIN

Humph! *(SHE exits upstairs)*

MICHAEL

Why is she so nefarious?

JANET

What!?

MICHAEL

“Nefarious: Wicked in the extreme.”

JANET

Aunt Min is not wicked, Michael. She’s just...just not a very happy person.

MICHAEL

Because she has a ghost after her?

JANET

Who told you that?

MICHAEL

Dot. She said a ghost haunts Aunt Min every Christmas.

JANET

She did, huh? DOT, COME IN HERE!

MICHAEL

Great! Now **she’s** gonna be mad at me, too.

JANET

I think she already is.

DOT

(Standing in kitchen archway) Yeah?

JANET

Sit down here!

DOT

HE drew the picture, mom! I didn’t do...

JANET

I want to set something straight with you two. Sit down here!

DOT

(To MICHAEL) Hamster butt!

MICHAEL

Bandicoot!

JANET

Enough! Both of you! (*DOT sits on sofa with JANET and MICHAEL*) A long time ago your Aunt Min was in love with a fellow in town. He wasn't...well, how do I put this? He was kind of a roustabout.

DOT

A **what?**

MICHAEL

“Roustabout: A deck hand or dock worker.”

JANET

Okay, wrong word. He had a bad reputation. Got into a lot of trouble, drinking, always chasing the girls...

DOT

A Player!

JANET

That works. His name was Hannibal.

MICHAEL

Cool name! Like the Carthaginian general who fought the Romans.

JANET

If you say so. Well, Aunt Min fell in love with him and as the story goes, he fell in love with her, too. Min's parents, your great grandparents, didn't like it. They felt he wasn't right for her.

DOT

How would they know that? Just because someone has a bad reputation doesn't mean they can't really be in love.

JANET

No. No, it doesn't. You're right, but it also doesn't mean that person will change his ways just because he **is** in love. Sometimes people are...what they are. Simple as that. Anyway, Min and Hannibal ran off.

DOT

No way! Aunt Min?

JANET

But her folks caught them and shipped her off to Portland to live with relatives for two years.

DOT

That's terrible. Would you ever do that? To one of us?

JANET

No! Never! But things were different back then.

(SPENCER is now standing in the kitchen archway)

MICHAEL

What does this have to do with a ghost?

JANET

I'm getting to that. Someway Hannibal found out where she was and went after her. He was hopping freight trains to get to Portland. Well, he slipped or something and fell under the train.

MICHAEL

Did it kill him?

DOT

Duh!

JANET

It happened on Christmas Eve.

MICHAEL

Oooh, and now his ghost comes back every Christmas Eve to haunt her. Cool! Can we see it?

JANET

No one's ever seen him, Michael. Well, except for Aunt Min. She claims she talks to him every Christmas Eve.

DOT

Do you believe her?

JANET

I don't believe in ghosts, Dot. I do know that every Christmas Eve a rose mysteriously appears on the Christmas tree.

DOT

I just got the shivers.

MICHAEL

I'll bet Oma puts it there.

JANET

She swears she doesn't.

DOT

Do you believe her?

JANET

Yeah! I think so. That doesn't mean I believe in Min's ghost.

MICHAEL

You know, ghosts are common at Christmas.

JANET

Michael...

MICHAEL

Really! In Germany a ghost brought presents to good kids and a lump of coal to bad ones. In Victorian England a ghost would bring nuts and candy to the good kids, and spank the bad ones with a switch. Good thing we're not in Victorian England or Dot would have one sore butt.

DOT

Oh, Michael, you're so funny. Not. So you don't think this Hannibal's ghost is real?

JANET

I think something happens on Christmas Eve that none of us can explain, and as long as it makes Aunt Min happy, then fine.

DOT

So you don't believe in ghosts.

SONG – POINT OF VIEW- Janet, Dot, Michael

JANET

IT ALL DEPENDS ON
YOUR POINT OF VIEW
BECAUSE PERSPECTIVE IS PRECISELY UP TO YOU

DOT

THERE MAY BE GHOSTS

MIKE

BUT MAYBE NOT

JANET

WHAT YOU'RE THINKING WILL BECOME JUST WHAT YOU GOT

DOT (*TO MIKE*)

YOU'RE SO CEREBRAL

MIKE (*TO DOT*)

YOU'RE SO NAÏVE

JANET

IT'S OUR DIFFERENCES THAT SHAPE WHAT WE BELIEVE

OUR MINDS WILL TAKE

THE THINGS WE SEE

AND CREATE OUR OWN DISTINCT REALITY

JANET

I LIKE TO KNOW

WHAT'S COMING NEXT

DOT

IF NOT YOU GET

MIKE

A BIT PERPLEXED

JANET

THAT'S WHO I AM

AND WHAT I DO
YOUR MOTHER MUST
LOOK AFTER YOU...

DOT I THINK YOU WORRY
MIKE A BIT TOO MUCH
MIKE AND AT TIMES YOU'RE JUST A LITTLE OUT OF TOUCH
JANET I'LL TRY TO TAKE
EACH DAY IN STRIDE
DOT AND BE OURSELVES
MIKE NO NEED TO HIDE

ALL WHO CARES ABOUT OUR POINTS OF VIEW
MIKE CAUSE YOU LOVE US
DOT AND WE LOVE YOU
ALL MICHAEL...MOM AND DOT!

MICHAEL
And all of the rest of the year Aunt Min is nefarious.

DOT
What's that?

MICHAEL
"Nefarious: Wicked..."

JANET
Difficult to get along with.

SPENCER
I got a better word. (*HE returns to the kitchen*)

DOT
Like that piss ant Dustin Ray.

JANET
That's another thing, young lady, and with that mouth I use the term loosely, this fighting has to stop. This is a small town. People talk. Think of the reputation you're getting.

DOT
I don't care what people think.

JANET
I do! We have to live here, Dot.

DOT

I won't let that creep keep picking on Michael. Oma said you did the same thing – stuck up for your brother.

AMANDA

(Offstage) SUPPER'S READY!

JANET

Michael, go tell Aunt Min supper's ready!

(MICHAEL rises and runs to stairs)

DOT

Did you?

JANET

That's beside the point.

(JANET and DOT rise and cross to kitchen archway)

MICHAEL

(Halfway up the stairs) AUNT MIN, SUPPER'S READY.

JANET

(To MICHAEL) I've could've done that.

DOT

Oh, so it was okay for you but not for me. Real fair, mother.

JANET

That's life! Deal with it!

MICHAEL

Can I play with Brunhilda after supper?

JANET

Homework first! I tell you, that goose is going to peck you good one of these days.

MICHAEL

Nah! She likes me too much.

JANET

Stay off the pond! The ice may not be safe.

DOT

You know, having a ghost is cool, mom, but also kinda spooky.

MICHAEL

‘Cause you’re an invertebrate.

DOT

What’s that?

MICHAEL

“Invertebrate: lacking a backbone.” (*MICHAEL laughs and runs into kitchen*)

DOT

(*Chasing MICHAEL*) I’M GONNA BREAK **YOUR** BACKBONE, YOU LITTLE TERD!!

JANET

STOP YELLING! (*SHE enters kitchen*)

MIN

(*At top of stairs*) No, they’re not loud.

BLACK OUT
END ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

Perusal
Only

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

TIME: Monday evening

(AMANDA is on sofa working on a large quilt. SPENCER is in HIS easy chair. DOT is on her stomach on the floor with earphones. She moves to the music)

SPENCER

How many quilts have you made since I left?

AMANDA

(Glances at DOT, sees SHE is absorbed in music, then whispers HER answer) Four.

SPENCER

You don't have to whisper. She can't hear you.

AMANDA

She'd probably think I'm crazier than I am if she heard me talking to no one.

SPENCER

I am not "no one!?"

AMANDA

You know what I mean, you old jackass!

SPENCER

Wonder what she's listening to. Kinda like to hear it.

AMANDA

No, you wouldn't! It sounds like a chicken coop with a fox in it.

SPENCER

Not Heartbreak Hotel, huh?

AMANDA

She probably doesn't even know who Elvis is.

SPENCER

What are you gonna do with that quilt?

AMANDA

If I finish it this week I'm giving it to Doc Graham's wife. He's been real patient with us paying for Min's visits.

SPENCER

How many have you made over the years?

AMANDA

Ten

SPENCER

You oughta sell some, make a little extra money.

AMANDA.

I don't need to. Your social security and the trust you set up is plenty.

SPENCER

(Rising) That stinkin' trust!

AMANDA

Stop it! You didn't know what the land was going to be used for.

SPENCER

(HE paces a little around room, stepping right over DOT, who doesn't even notice HIM) It's about killed this town, Amanda, including our own daughter's dream. Holy Moses, my grandpa, gramps, and papa are probably sittin' up their loadin' their rifles praying to get the first shot at me.

AMANDA

I wouldn't worry about your papa; I'm a better shot than he was. Besides, he had already started selling off the land before he died.

SPENCER

Not like I did. Shame on me, Mandy! Shame on me!

AMANDA

Spencer, ghosts can't feel guilt. And don't call me Mandy.

SPENCER

Hey, I'm the one who's dead. I know what I can feel. When I think about the state of our old downtown I feel pretty damn crappy. And there's not a thing I can do about it.

SONG – JUST A GHOST IN THE CORNER – Spencer

SPENCER JUST A GHOST STANDING IN THE CORNER
 YOU MIGHT THINK THERE IS NOTHING ON MY MIND
 SPIRITS COME AND SPIRITS GO
 IF MY SPIRIT'S FEELIN' LOW
 IT'S BECAUSE OF ALL THE CHANGES THAT I FIND...

 THINGS ARE NOT GOING AS THEY SHOULD BE

THERE'S NO SENSE IN THIS NEW SOCIETY
NO ONE CARES WHAT'S RIGHT OR WRONG
NO ONE SINGS A HAPPY SONG
I BELIEVE THE WHOLE DARN WORLD HAS LOST ITS WAY

AND THE MUSIC THAT THEY PLAY
LIKE HOWLING NIGHT AND DAY
I DON'T THINK THEY UNDERSTAND A WORD

WHO WILL CARRY ON
WITH DEAR OLD FRANK AND ELVIS GONE
ALL THAT NOISE IS REALLY QUITE ABSURD

THERE'S A STORE WHERE THE CORN WAS GROWING
PARKING LOT WHERE A MEADOW USED TO BE
THE DECISION THAT I CURSE
IS WHAT MAKES THIS EVEN WORSE
FOR THE PROPERTY WAS SOLD TO THEM BY ME...

AMANDA KNOCK IT OFF!
SPENCER KNOCK IT OFF?
AMANDA STOP COMPLAINING!
SPENCER I CAN'T HELP IT!
AMANDA HOLY MOSES!
SPENCER HOLY MOSES??
AMANDA THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO..
YOU'RE A GHOST
SPENCER I'M A GHOST!
BOTH JUST A GHOST!

AMANDA

(A moment as SHE watches SPENCER pace) I wish I could hug you right now.

SPENCER

(Stops HIS pacing and gazes longingly at HER. HE starts to touch HER shoulder but knows HE can't) So do I, Mandy.

AMANDA

(Goes back to quilting) Don't call me that!

SPENCER

(Grinning and leaning on back of sofa near AMANDA) But I love that fire in your eyes when I do.

AMANDA

And if we could box I'd show you some real fire.

(DOT suddenly whips off HER earphones, jumps up and hurries to AMANDA. SPENCER retreats to a corner)

DOT

Oma, listen to this song! *(SHE forces the earphones on AMANDA then pushes a button on her player. It is very loud and AMANDA yanks the earphones off)*

AMANDA

Good lord, child! You tryin' to blow my brains out!?

DOT

That's the best way to listen.

SPENCER

What was the song?

AMANDA

I can't even tell what the music's doing with it that loud.

DOT

Yeah, yeah, I'll turn it down. *(SHE turns down volume and AMANDA slips earphones back on and listens)*

AMANDA

(Listening) WELL, IT ISN'T THE KING.

DOT

WHO?

(AMANDA gives SPENCER an "I told you so" expression. JANET enters from kitchen. SHE is covered in even more sculptor debris. Exhausted, SHE plops down in a chair)

JANET

Whew! Got four more Rosies finished. My fingers are numb. *(To DOT)* What's she listening to?

DOT

It's a new group, from Australia. They are so hot.

AMANDA

(Removes earphones) Sorry, Dot! I can't understand a word they're saying. Are they foreign?

DOT

No! They're Australian!

JANET

Your homework done?

DOT

Yep!

JANET

Make sure everything is caught up! You don't want to go into Christmas break with stuff unfinished.

DOT

Tell that to Michael!

JANET

I will. Now hit the sack!

DOT

(Kissing both women) Night, Oma. Night, mom. *(Running upstairs)* SEE YA IN THE AM!

AMANDA

QUIETLY, PLEASE! MIN'S SLEEPING. *(To JANET)* You need a shower.

JANET

(Rises) No kidding!?! *(Crossing to kitchen archway)* First I'm going to relax with a beer. Want one? *(SHE exits)*

AMANDA

No thanks.

SPENCER

Holy Moses, woman, have a beer with our daughter, ya ol' prude!

AMANDA

OKAY, I'LL HAVE ONE. *(Sticks HER tongue out at SPENCER)*

SPENCER

Atta girl. *(HE exits)*

JANET

(Offstage) WHO'S THE QUILT FOR?

AMANDA

I don't know. If I get it done before Christmas I'll give it to someone.

JANET

(Returns with two beers, gives one to AMANDA) Why don't you try selling some of your quilts? I could advertise them online and...

AMANDA

I don't like selling what I make. Too much love put in 'em.

JANET

You trying to make me feel bad!?

AMANDA

Huh? Oh, no, no, no. I didn't mean anything like that. You do what you do for a living. I do what I do for fun – makes me feel good. Keeps me from thinking about things I don't want to think about. Don't be so defensive! I thought you outgrew that.

JANET

I worked in advertising too long. It does that to you.

AMANDA

New York does that to you.

JANET

If I wouldn't have gone I'd have never met Neil.

AMANDA

Well, at least you finally got wise and left that rat race.

JANET

After awhile you get used to it. Six figures help, of course.

AMANDA

You **were** livin' well.

JANET

Expenses ate most of it up - especially private school. On the positive side though, my daughter wasn't coming home with bloody noses and Michael's mind was certainly more appreciated.

AMANDA

You grew up here, dear. You know what small towns are like.

JANET

Small town, small minds. It's tough, mom, to bring kids into this world and not be able to make things right for them.

AMANDA

You're a fine mother, Janet.

JANET

I can't even give them a home.

AMANDA

Right now their home is here. Right now that's enough for them. And they have you. That's what they need most.

JANET

I've wondered how things would have been if we'd have stayed there, in New York. I'd be a creative director by now. Neil might've been head of accounts.

AMANDA

(Trying to keep JANET from going into another funk) And Michael wouldn't have a pet goose. Have you seen the picture he drew of her? It's really quite good. I think that boy has some of your talents.

JANET

Oh, I swear! I'm dreading the day he's covered in lice from that nasty bird.

AMANDA

Brunhilda is not a nasty bird. I'm just worried about what's going to happen when he finds out she's our Christmas dinner.

JANET

We could always get a turkey.

AMANDA

Shame on you! We will not break our tradition. Your father started raising those geese and selling them when you were just five. We've had one for every Christmas dinner since. Besides, they're tastier than turkey.

JANET

That they are. *(THEY clink their beer bottles and drink. A moment)* He said we were too old fashioned.

AMANDA

Huh? Who?

JANET

Neil! At first he loved the idea – capturing and recreating rural America in art before it disappeared. Pipe dream! People didn't seem to give a damn about rural America. He said that was why our shop folded. We were too old fashioned. Everything we sold was passé. "The bulldozer's coming and this way of life is going under it!" he'd tell me. Then they put in that Wal-Mart. I'd dream about that bulldozer pushing down our house and me and the kids running out the back door to keep from being crushed in the wreckage.

AMANDA

Where was Neil?

JANET

Huh?

AMANDA

You said you and the kids were running out of the house; where was Neil in your dream?

JANET

I don't know. (*Chuckles*) Maybe driving the bulldozer! He's a lousy driver. Everything became money, money, money. We were so used to having it, and never realized how much we'd miss it. I'd suggest we buy some ad space and do some special sales, or create a web page and advertise on line and he'd say we don't have the money to do it and "No one wants this crap anyway." He just...just gave up...on everything.

AMANDA

(*Still trying to get JANET out of her funk*) Speaking of money, I have a little put aside and was thinking about renting a horse and sleigh on Christmas Eve, like your dad used to.

JANET

Oh, mom, the kids would love that, especially Michael. He's asked me about that every year since we moved back here. He remembers when he was little and we'd come to visit and Opa would pull that horse drawn sleigh up in front of the house – he'd get so excited. Never seen a kid who loves animals the way he does. That's what made it easier for him to move here – the thought of being around animals. Now Dot...Dot was a harder sell.

AMANDA

How well I remember.

JANET

Oh my god, she hated Neil and me for months - took her away from her friends and the big city. You'd think it was Armageddon. Took a good year for her to finally accept it, to like us again. But even after three years back here, I don't think she's completely sold. I think the fights are her way of still rebelling, you know what I mean?

AMANDA

You mean like her mother used to do? Maybe they're just part of being thirteen.

JANET

I hope so.

AMANDA

So you like my idea – of the sleigh ride?

JANET

Absolutely! I just wish I could help you pay for it.

AMANDA

I've got it covered.

JANET

(Smiling) I remember you'd drop off Darrin and me and then you and dad would ride off to your "Secret place." Where was that again?

AMANDA

Nice try! But I'm still not gonna tell you. It's a secret.

JANET

One of these days I'll find out.

AMANDA

No you won't. It's our secret place. You have to find your own.

JANET

I thought I had. I really did.

AMANDA

If Neil showed up on our doorstep right this minute what would you do?

JANET

Kick him square in his business! *(The WOMEN laugh)*

AMANDA

Merry Christmas, Neil. WHAM! *(THEY laugh louder. The laughter subsides)*

JANET

Truthfully, I don't know what I'd do. Guess it would depend on what he said to me...what reason he gave. I just...just never imagined him being capable of leaving like that, leaving the kids...leaving me.

AMANDA

Some people are stronger than others. Fortunately you're one of them, but that still didn't scare me to death the day you left for New York.

JANET

You called me every night for the first year.

AMANDA

But you did it. You said you wanted to be a "big Madison Avenue advertising artist" and you did it...in just ten years, too. Then gave it all up to come back here and open that shop.

JANET

No accounting for stupidity, huh?

AMANDA

No accounting for being gutsy! You're a survivor, Janet, and right now, you're everything those kids need. You're their strength.

JANET

Who's mine, mom?

AMANDA

Honey, you've never needed anyone's.

JANET

I hate failing, mom. I really hate it.

AMANDA

When I was catching for Min in that fast pitch league, my gosh, if we lost a game I'd mope in my room for days. I'd pound my head tryin' to figure out what I could've done to not lose that game. Min would just let it slide off and move on...go out and party somewhere. Whether you like it or not, Janet, you're like me! You hate losing. You blame and hate yourself for things that are out of your control, honey. Don't let that happen now. Not now! Those kids need you at your best.

JANET

How have you done it the past six years, mom, since dad died? Where do you get your strength? And don't give me that "Your father's ghost" crap!

AMANDA

Quilting!

JANET

Oh, come on! That's a diversion.

AMANDA

Sometimes I get it in our Secret Place.

JANET

You still go there?

AMANDA

Of course I still go there.

JANET

Alone?

AMANDA

I'm never alone in our Secret Place.

JANET

Here we go! (*Taunting*) So why won't you tell me where it is, mother, so I can go there and talk to "daddy's ghost," too?

AMANDA

Because it's mine, and Spencer's! Like I said, you have to find your own.

JANET

What if I never do?

SONG – THE SECRET PLACE – Amanda & Janet

JANET

TELL ME WHERE
TO FIND THAT SECRET PLACE
I'VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR
MY WHOLE LIFE THROUGH

IS IT DEEP IN THE WOODS
BY THE STREAM?
IS IT SOMETHING THAT'S REAL..
OR A DREAM?

FOR I'M TERRIBLY LOST
ALL BY MYSELF SO ALONE
I NEED HELP TO FIND
A SECRET PLACE OF MY OWN
MOTHER PLEASE
WHY DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND
WON'T YOU TAKE MY HAND
SHOW ME THE WAY

ALL MY DOUBTS AND FEARS
WOULD SOON BE ERASED
IF I COULD ONLY FIND THE SECRET PLACE

AMANDA

ONLY YOU
CAN FIND THE SECRET PLACE
BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE
WILL KNOW THE WAY

PICTURE MEMORIES
THAT YOU LOVE

THE TOMORROWS YOU'VE BEEN
DREAMING OF

LIKE A QUICK FLOWING STREAM
THAT TWISTS AND TURNS COLD AND CLEAR
THE REFUGE YOU SEEK
AROUND THE BEND WILL APPEAR

DON'T DESPAIR
IT ISN'T FAR AWAY
YOU WILL FIND IT ON
ONE FATEFUL DAY

ALL THE PEACE AND JOY
YOUR HEART CAN EMBRACE
WILL HELP GUIDE YOU TO
YOUR SECRET PLACE

MIN

(Standing at top of stairs in nightgown) Some of us are trying to sleep.

AMANDA

Oh, quit griping and come down and have a beer with us!

MIN

Why the hell not? *(SHE descends stairs)*

JANET

(Rises and exits to kitchen) I'll get it.

AMANDA

You probably weren't asleep anyway.

MIN

How do you know what I was or wasn't? Who's the quilt for?

AMANDA

Doc Graham's wife.

MIN

In exchange for my bills?

AMANDA

In exchange for being nice.

MIN

(Nods HER head towards kitchen) Does she know?

AMANDA

Not unless you've told her. I did tell Darrin in my last letter to him. I thought maybe the Navy would let him come home this Christmas.

MIN

See the ol' aunt before she croaks, huh?

AMANDA

I hate it when you talk like that.

JANET

(Enters carrying three fresh beers) These are the last of them. I'll pick up some more tomorrow.
(SHE gives each WOMAN a beer)

AMANDA

I haven't finished the first one yet.

JANET

Get busy! *(JANET guzzles the remainder of HER first beer and belches)* Top that, mother dear!

AMANDA

Shoot! Call that a belch? *(SHE guzzles the rest of HER first beer and lets out a belch)* Your turn, Min!

MIN

Ladies do not belch.

JANET

Mother, your sister just indirectly called us trollops.

AMANDA

Consider the source, dear! *(Shakes HER head)* Whew! Not only have I not had a beer in months, I don't think I've downed one like that since my wedding night.

MIN

You downed more than beer on your wedding night. Red wine, Scotch, Schnapps...

JANET

Mother!! Really!?

AMANDA

I was scared.

JANET
Of what?

MIN
Don't you know?

AMANDA
Minerva, don't get nasty!

MIN
She wasn't...how can I put this...experienced.

AMANDA
Back then who was, besides you, ya hussy?

MIN
At least I would've tried on the shoe before I wore it.

AMANDA
And you'd have a closetful of them by now.

MIN
Wear a different pair every day of the week. *(The SISTERS laugh)*

JANET
I don't think I want to hear what I'm hearing. *(Crossing to stairs)* I'm gonna take a shower and go to bed. Good night, you horny ol' hens. *(Ascends stairs and exits)*

AMANDA/MIN
Night, dear. Night, Janet.

MIN
(A moment as SHE glances around the room) Is he here?

AMANDA
No! Not right now. Are you anxious for Christmas Eve?

MIN
You have yours around any time you want; I have mine once a year. Of course I'm anxious. At least I've got some good news for him this year.

AMANDA
"Good!?" For him maybe!

MIN
You'll be fine, Mandy.

AMANDA

Don't call me that or I won't let you ride in the sleigh Christmas Eve.

MIN

We're doing that?

AMANDA

Bringin' back the tradition!

MIN

Of freezin' our butts off. Least it'll be the last damn time.

AMANDA

Love your holiday spirit, Min.

MIN

I suppose I could muster up a little for a few days.

AMANDA

That would be nice.

MIN

I'll just focus on how good it's going to be to finally get outta this town.

AMANDA

Stop it! Stop it right now!

MIN

Damn it, if I wanna talk about it I'm gonna!

AMANDA

Why do you have to be so...so callous about it?

MIN

It's my death! I'll be anyway I wanna be!

AMANDA

But some of the things you say...they...they hurt.

MIN

Don't you go folding up on me like a soggy card table! Not now! You promised.

AMANDA

(Choking up) You're my little sister.

MIN

And you're my strength. You catch for me, Amanda. You catch me.

AMANDA

We were quite the duo.

MIN

What'd ya mean "were?"

SONG – ME AND MY SISTER– Amanda & Min

MIN WHENEVER A BULLY WOULDN'T LEAVE US ALONE
AMANDA A PUSHY YOUNG FELLOW WHO MIGHT CALL ON THE PHONE
MIN WE'D TEAM UP TOGETHER
AMANDA WE WERE BAD TO THE BONE
BOTH ME AND MY SISTER

AMANDA IT'S FUN TO REMEMBER ALL THE HAVOC WE WROUGHT
MIN THE EYES THAT WERE BLACKENED FROM THE BATTLES
 WE FOUGHT

AMANDA WE HAD SUCH ADVENTURES BUT WE RARELY GOT CAUGHT
BOTH ME AND MY SISTER

MIN SUCH CONSTERNATION
 THE DAYS WE CUT SCHOOL
AMANDA HOW MAD OUR MOTHER COULD GET
MIN DADDY WOULD THREATEN TO PADDLE OUR RUMPS
BOTH WE'D MAKE EXCUSES THAT WOULD FIT
 AND MAYBE EVEN CRY A BIT...

AMANDA WE SEEMED TO GET TOUGHER WITH OUR BACKS TO
 THE WALL
MIN WITH LOTS OF RAW POWER LIKE A BAT ON A BALL(*swings*)
BOTH WE LEANED ON EACH OTHER SO WE NEVER WOULD FALL
 AND JUST A BIT BETTER THAN THE BEST OF THEM ALL
 THERE NEVER WAS NOR WILL THERE BE A PAIR LIKE
 ME AND MY SISTER!

MIN I'D CALL YOU MANDY
 AND YOU'D GET SO MAD"
AMANDA ALL YOU KEPT SAYING WAS "HUMPF"
MIN TRY TO REMEMBER..
AMANDA HOW COULD I FORGET..??
MIN THAT YOU WOULD CATCH AND I WOULD PITCH
BOTH SOMETIMES YOU COULD BE SUCH A... WITCH!

AMANDA WE SEEMED TO GET TOUGHER WITH OUR BACKS TO
THE WALL
MIN WITH LOTS OF RAW POWER LIKE A BAT ON A BALL (*swings*)
BOTH WE LEANED ON EACH OTHER SO WE NEVER WOULD
FALL
THERE NEVER WAS NOR WILL THERE BE A PAIR LIKE
ME AND MY SISTER!!

(They embrace at end of song)

AMANDA
We need to make this Christmas special.

MIN
Then renting that sleigh is a damn good idea - go out in style...freezin' my butt off.

BLACK OUT
END ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

Perusal
Only