"A VERY SHAKESPEARE CHRISTMAS" by P.S. Drake

# A VERY SHAKESPEARE CHRISTMAS

### SYNOPSIS

One gift can change everything.

Eleanor Thurgood is a failed Hollywood actress who's been forced to move back home after starring on a universally despised television show. Eleanor's mother, Joan, already dealing with the impending doom that is a holiday family gathering, is also hiding the secret of a failing theater that's been left in her care by her late husband. It's been one year since the passing of the patriarch of their familylegendary actor Jim Thurgood and both women are feeling the effects of his absence.

But then, a gift.

A present from Jim himself. His old volume of "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare." A book that carries with it a magical ability that leaves Eleanor, Joan, and those around them, spiraling down a rabbit hole of the Bard's most famous works. Dreams, old flames, magic spells, secrets, and illusions all collide in this holiday romantic comedy with an Elizabethan twist.

### SETTING

Joan's home in Applewood, Minnesota during the holidays, modern day.

### CHARACTERS - 3 F/2 M

Eleanor Thurgood (F, 25-35): Down on her luck Hollywood actress that receives a Christmas gift from her late father Joan Thurgood (F, 40-60): Eleanor's mother, a widow who is grappling with the stress of the holidays, as well as a failing theater Levi Donovan (M, 25-35): Eleanor's best friend from high school who must deal with old feelings when Eleanor returns to town Lydia (F, 30+): Joan's sister and Eleanor's aunt. An "alternative medicine" provider. (Or maybe just a witch.) Man/Steve (M, 25-40): Mystery man that keeps visiting Eleanor in her dreams/Steve Stevenson from Financial Solutions - a supposed debt collector harassing Joan about payments past due on the Thurgood Theater (Played by same actor)

# ACT I, Scene 1

The play opens with all the stage in darkness except for ELEANOR and a MAN. They're at a New Year's Eve party.

MAN: Cool party, right?

ELEANOR: Ha! That's a joke.

VOICES: FIFTEEN.

MAN: You look pissed.

ELEANOR: I am pissed. And drunk.

VOICES: FOURTEEN.

MAN: What's your name?

ELEANOR: What?

MAN: I said what's your name?

ELEANOR: It's Eleanor.

VOICES: TWELVE.

MAN: Well, Eleanor. I just landed a conversation with a beautiful girl. You might be pissed, but I'm not.

VOICES: NINE.

ELEANOR: Do you believe in soul mates?

MAN: Of course. Do you?

ELEANOR: Yeah. I might.

VOICES: SEVEN.

ELEANOR: I shouldn't waste this, should I?

MAN: Definitely not.

ELEANOR: What'd you say your name was?

VOICE: FIVE.

MAN: I didn't. It's-

A loud vacuum noise is heard.

ELEANOR: What?

MAN: My name is- (The vacuum noise cuts him off)

JOAN: (0.S.) Eleanor!

ELEANOR: Your name. Tell me your name!

JOAN: Eleanor! I'm coming in!

ELEANOR: No! Not yet!

ELEANOR wakes from her dream and the party disappears. Now we're in ELEANOR's room- her childhood bedroom to be exact. Her mom, JOAN, barges into her room with a vacuum cleaner.

JOAN: Rise and shine!

ELEANOR: Damnit, mom!

JOAN: That's how you thank me for doing your chores?

ELEANOR: I'm a thirty year-old woman, Ma. I don't have chores.

JOAN: Then what am I doing?

ELEANOR: (The vacuum roars) Calling in the cavalry?!

JOAN: (Turns off vacuum) Why are you being so persnickety?

ELEANOR: You woke me up.

JOAN: It's noon.

ELEANOR: I was in the middle of something.

JOAN: ...something private?

ELEANOR: No! Just forget it.

JOAN: Look, I'm happy to have you back home, Eleanor, but if you're going to be living under my roof again you need to put in a bit more effort.

ELEANOR: Hard to do when you feel like dying!

JOAN: Hey, hey now, none of that! (Sits on ELEANOR's bed, props her up) This is only a set-back.

ELEANOR: It's career ending.

JOAN: Not everyone can say they've starred on a Netflix show!

ELEANOR: That was canceled after three episodes.

JOAN: Three whole episodes!

ELEANOR: That were ridiculed by every critic who watched them.

JOAN: What do critics know?

ELEANOR: And the public.

JOAN: People don't know what they want.

ELEANOR: They said the story was terrible.

JOAN: The costumes were great!

ELEANOR: The jokes weren't funny, the script was full of plot-holes.

JOAN: But those costumes! Exquisite!

ELEANOR: They said the actors were "tolerable."

JOAN: See?

ELEANOR: Except me.

JOAN: Oh.

ELEANOR: I'm giving it up, Ma. I'm done with acting.

JOAN: Eleanor!

ELEANOR: It was idiotic to think I could make it as an actress. A pipe dream that got out of hand.

JOAN: You're very talented.

ELEANOR: Nobody else seems to think so!

JOAN: Nonsense. Remember when you were growing up? You made the lead in every production you auditioned for.

ELEANOR: Because *you* were the director! My parents ran the theater. I was a shoe-in.

JOAN: We wouldn't have casted you unless you had raw, unabashed talent.

ELEANOR: Yes, you would've.

JOAN: We would've. But you are naturally gifted! Quitting now wouldn't be fair to you. Or your father.

ELEANOR: We're bringing dad into this?

JOAN: He's the one who got us into this mess. Buying that theater, using it to foster your talent, then dying and leaving me in charge of it.

ELEANOR: Yikes, mom. Tell us how you really feel.

JOAN: Sorry.

ELEANOR: You could always put it up for sale.

JOAN: Sell the Thurgood Theater? I would never abandon his dream like that! Besides, some of my best memories are doing all those shows with the two of you.

ELEANOR: Mine too. Except "Annie." I hated "Annie."

JOAN: Everyone hates "Annie."

ELEANOR: Mom? Do you really think he'd be proud of me?

JOAN: Yes. No matter what. (*Puts her hands on ELEANOR's knee*) And I've loved having you home. It can get lonely.

ELEANOR: I can't believe he's been gone a whole year.

JOAN: You and me both. But I'm reminded of Jim everyday. When I play his old CDs. When I look at you. Everytime I see those hideous, dead animals he made me decorate the living room with.

ELEANOR: You don't like Mr. Bucky?

JOAN: That beaver's the worst one! Which reminds me, he's going to need dusting... (She gets off the bed, grabs her vacuum)

ELEANOR: We're dusting beavers now? Who are we trying to impress?

JOAN: If we're hosting Christmas dinner this place needs to be spotless. Are you going to vacuum this room or should I?

ELEANOR: I'll do it, I'll do it. (She grabs the vacuum)

JOAN: Then I'll attend to the beaver.

JOAN exits into the living room. She dusts the stuffed beaver. ELEANOR sluggishly stands up.

ELEANOR: Welcome home, Eleanor. Isn't it just great? Great! It's just... great. GREAT. I'm SO GREAT! (She begins vacuuming angrily. As she vacuums she stubs her toe on a pile of books underneath her bed.) Ouch! What the hell? (She pulls out the stack of books) Of course! My scripts from high school. Back when I had hopes and dreams. (She rifles through them, her phone rings) Ugh, not my agent. (She answers the phone) Hello? Hi Tess, what's up? What? (Lying) Uh, no, I haven't

been ignoring your calls. My reception's awful out here in the country. (A pause) I told you I was moving back home. (Another pause) Well Tessa, I had no money and in your words "no shot in hell" of landing an audition. What else was I supposed to do? Ask my roommate to pay my half of the rent? She couldn't afford her own- the girl was stealing my Crest white strips! (She pauses) Okay, so just tell me.

> The doorbell rings. JOAN answers it. LEVI enters, holding a casserole dish.

JOAN: Levi?

LEVI: Joan! What's up, big J?

JOAN: I'm sorry, I didn't call you. Everything's in working order.

LEVI: I'm not here on business.

JOAN: Oh, then come on in. Where's your coat? You must be freezing.

LEVI: I've got my trusty denim.

JOAN: This is Minnesota in December. You need more than denim.

LEVI and JOAN get situated on the couch.

ELEANOR: (On the phone) I see. You're dropping me. No, no, I totally get it. I mean, who would want to represent a loser, right? That's what I am! A freaking LOSER.

JOAN: (She gestures towards the casserole dish) You brought lunch?

LEVI: My old man made you some shepherd's pie.

ELEANOR: It's been a real pleasure, Tess. Talk to you never! (Hangs up) I can't believe this! You bomb one show and you're dead to them!

JOAN: Let me serve it up while it's still hot. (She gets up and walks to the kitchenette) Care for any?

LEVI: Nah, I'm good. How have things been?

JOAN: Just fine! Always busy around the holidays.

LEVI: You're doing okay... considering...?

JOAN: Considering? (*She catches on*) Ah. Jim. You can say his name, you know- he won't appear in a dark mirror to haunt you.

LEVI: Right. Jim. It's been a year since, you know... I just wanted to check-in on you.

JOAN: Oh, so this is a pity visit.

ELEANOR: (*She looks at her scripts*) *You.* You gave me purpose. You gave me hope. No! Not hope- delusion. You made me delusional!

LEVI: It's not like that, Joan, I just-

JOAN: There's more to my life than just being a lonely little widow.

ELEANOR: (She takes one script) "The Importance of Being Earnest." More like "The Importance of Being MEDIOCRE."

JOAN: I run a theater, I have hobbies. In fact, I just finished a cross-stitch of all the judges from "The Great British Baking Show." They're eating a croquembouche and smiling at each other. Wanna see?

ELEANOR: *(She picks up another script)* Sophocles. Pretty please, can I be your Antigone? And I was! And I was AWFUL!

JOAN: (Shows cross-stitch to LEVI) What do you think? A work of art, right?

ELEANOR: Then there's Shakespeare. It's all just nonsense dressed up in puffy costumes and poetry! Meaningless, highbrow trash!

LEVI: You know, it's really-

ELEANOR: To hell with you!

She throws a script through her bedroom door. It lands in the living room in front of LEVI and JOAN on the couch.

LEVI: Aah!

JOAN: Jesus God!

ELEANOR: And you! (She throws another one)

LEVI: We're under attack! (He hides behind a pillow on the couch)

JOAN: Oh, Eleanor...

LEVI: Eleanor? Eleanor's here?

ELEANOR: And you, too! (She throws another one)

JOAN: Yes, she's back. With a vengeance.

LEVI: Why didn't you tell me?

JOAN: You didn't ask. (She gets up) Ellie-bug? Sweetie?

ELEANOR: Not right now, Ma! (She throws a script, JOAN dodges it)

JOAN: Would you stop with the projectiles? You're embarrassing yourself in front of our guest.

ELEANOR: Guest? What guest?

ELEANOR walks to the door, LEVI comes out from hiding behind the pillow.

LEVI: Hey.

ELEANOR: Levi? (To JOAN) Why didn't you say anything?!

JOAN: You didn't ask.

ELEANOR: (To LEVI) What are you doing here?

LEVI: What are you doing here?

ELEANOR: This is my house.

LEVI: I thought you were out in LA, partying with the rich and famous.

ELEANOR: I wasn't partying, I was working.

JOAN: Why don't I let the two of you catch up? Childhood friends together again- how precious!

JOAN exits.

ELEANOR: You look... fine.

LEVI: Thanks. You look terrible.

ELEANOR: I just woke up!

LEVI: At noon? (He picks up a script) Spring cleaning?

ELEANOR: Give me that. (She takes the script back) You never answered my question.

LEVI: What, can't I visit my good friend?

ELEANOR: We haven't talked in years.

LEVI: I wasn't talking about you.

ELEANOR: You're friends with my mom?

LEVI: Sure. I'm her handyman.

ELEANOR: You're my mom's handyman?

LEVI: I'm everyone's handyman! Haven't you heard? Levi Donovan, the best damn handyman in all of Applewood, Minnesota!

ELEANOR: I thought you wanted to be a sculptor.

LEVI: I thought you wanted to be an astronaut?

ELEANOR: Well, yeah, in like the second grade.

LEVI: Guess we both grew up.

ELEANOR: I'm sorry, did I do something to make you angry?

LEVI: Mm, don't think so.

ELEANOR: Okay, cause you seem mad.

LEVI: Nah, I'm chill. Just because my best friend packed up one day and left me with nothing but a text message, *abandoning* me for dead, doesn't mean I'm mad.

ELEANOR: I didn't abandon you. I saw an opportunity and I took it.

LEVI: A down payment for a crappy apartment and one meeting with a sleazebag agent?

ELEANOR: I saw the *potential* in those things! Nobody kept you in this town but yourself.

LEVI: It hardly mattered. We both ended up in the same place.

ELEANOR: You think I'm staying here? Pssh, no way! (Lying) I'm-I'm just visiting for the holidays and then I'm going straight back to LA.

LEVI: Then your mom's lucky she has me. I'll keep taking care of her while you go live your best life in sunny California.

ELEANOR: Oh, don't you dare bring her into this-

JOAN enters, holding a tea tray with some mugs.

JOAN: Who wants some peppermint hot chocolate?

ELEANOR: Not now, mom-

LEVI: Ooh! Me!

JOAN: I got the recipe from "The Great British Baking Show." Except they don't call it hot chocolate, they call it "drinking chocolate." Isn't that posh? (*They drink*)

LEVI: So posh. Mmm. This is even better than that lavender tea you made for me last week.

JOAN: Oh-ho Levi, you flatter me!

ELEANOR: He was over last week?

LEVI: I'm over all the time.

JOAN: I had him check out this strange noise coming from my refrigerator. It sounded awful.

LEVI: It was her ice maker.

JOAN: I honestly don't know what I would do without him. He's just a regular part of the family now! (*Pats LEVI's leg, ELEANOR grimaces*) Now then, what were the two of you talking about?

LEVI and ELEANOR look at each other, then answer at the same time.

ELEANOR: The weather!

LEVI: You.

JOAN: Me? Surely there's more exciting things to talk about! When was the last time you saw each other?

ELEANOR: I don't know exactly. It's been a while-

LEVI: Ten years. It's been ten years.

JOAN: Wow. You've got a lot of catching up to do! This must feel like a dream!

ELEANOR: (To herself) Dream.

Lights dim. ELEANOR's been transported to her New Year's Eve dream.

ELEANOR: (Dreamily) You.

The MAN from her dream enters.

ELEANOR: Who are you?

VOICES: FIFTEEN.

MAN: You look pissed.

ELEANOR: I'm not anymore.

VOICES: FOURTEEN.

MAN: What's your name?

ELEANOR: Does it matter?

VOICES: TWELVE.

MAN: I just landed a conversation with a beautiful girl.

VOICES: NINE.

ELEANOR: Do you believe in soul mates?

MAN: Of course. Do you?

ELEANOR: Yes.

VOICES: SEVEN.

ELEANOR: Why can't I get you out of my head?

MAN: Why would you want to?

ELEANOR: What'd you say your name was?

VOICE: FIVE.

MAN: I have to go.

ELEANOR: Wait! Don't leave me. Tell me your name.

The MAN exits.

ELEANOR: Your name! What's your name?

We're back in ELEANOR's living room. JOAN and LEVI are staring at ELEANOR.

ELEANOR: I need to know your name!

JOAN: Eleanor? Are you okay?

LEVI: What the hell was that?

ELEANOR: What just happened?

JOAN: Sweetheart, you started staring out into space and mumbling to yourself.

LEVI: You looked hypnotized.

ELEANOR: I... I need to go.

JOAN: (Picks up some scripts, offers them back to her) But your scripts-

ELEANOR runs into her bedroom.

JOAN: She just needs time. No one enjoys moving back home with their mother.

LEVI: She told me she was only staying for the holidays.

JOAN: There I go blabbering my big old mouth again.

LEVI: I had no idea.

JOAN: Just show her some grace, will you? She's a prideful little creature, that one. I know she's happy to see you.

LEVI: Yeah. I hope so. (Picks up a script) Take care, Big J.

JOAN: You're leaving?

LEVI: Got another house call I need to make. Lady says her fireplace smells like bananas.

JOAN: Bananas?

LEVI: You hear a lot of strange stuff in my line of work. Are you all good here?

JOAN: Yes, Levi. I'm good.

LEVI: Alright. I'm just a phone call away if you need me.

LEVI exits.

JOAN: Bananas. (*Giggles to herself*) What a fine young man. Wait, his tupperware! Levi! You're tupperware!

JOAN rushes to open back up the door. Instead of LEVI, she finds LYDIA, her sister. LYDIA is dressed in eccentric clothing and is carrying a present.

JOAN: Lydia?

LYDIA: Let me inside! I'm freezing my knockers off out here!

JOAN? Of course, of course. Come in.

LYDIA: Was that Levi? What'd you break this time?

JOAN: I didn't break anything.

LYDIA: Oh no. The big, bad ice maker scare you again?

JOAN: I should have never told you about that.

LYDIA: I'm so glad you did!

JOAN: He was just coming to check on me. Even brought me some shepherd's pie. (Gestures to LYDIA's present) You got me something too?

LYDIA: It's not for you, it's for Eleanor.

JOAN: How'd you know she was back?

LYDIA: I saw her take out the recycling bin last night. One of the perks of living next door to your sister. I know *all* your business. Listen, I know it's not my place to say these things, but *someone* in this house drinks too much wine.

> LYDIA gets up and approaches ELEANOR's bedroom door.

LYDIA: Eleanor? Eleanor dear, it's your favorite aunt!

JOAN: I wouldn't do that if I were you.

LYDIA: Why not?

ELEANOR responds to LYDIA by opening her bedroom door and throwing a script into the living room.

LYDIA: Ah. That's why.

JOAN: Eleanor's having some difficulty adjusting to her new living situation.

LYDIA: She moved back in? I thought she was doing that Netflix show! The people of Applewood can't stop talking about it, she's the talk of the town.

JOAN: Have you seen it? (LYDIA shakes her head "no") Hm. Well, the costumes were great.

LYDIA: Ah.

JOAN: They canceled it after three episodes. Left Eleanor without a job so she had to move back in with me.

LYDIA: That's terrible.

JOAN: I don't care what people say. I'm so proud of her I could burst.

LYDIA: I could... help her, you know.

JOAN: Lydia. We've been over this before.

LYDIA: Things are different now! I offer a very specific set of skills that could really help Eleanor.

JOAN: I've said it once and I'll say it again- no witchcraft under my roof!

LYDIA: You're so close-minded!

JOAN: I am not! I just don't believe in that kind of... stuff.

LYDIA: What kind of stuff?

JOAN: You! You're a witch!

LYDIA: I'm an alternative medicine provider.

JOAN: I won't have my daughter become one of your clients.

LYDIA: My clients love me, I'll have you know.

JOAN: Your clients need therapy.

LYDIA: Who doesn't?

JOAN: No. The answer is no. End of discussion. Can I get you anything? Some drinking chocolate, perhaps?

LYDIA: Isn't it called hot chocolate?

JOAN: Not in England! (Confused, LYDIA accepts a mug)

LYDIA: And how is the theater?

JOAN: (Lying) Fine! It's good. Very good. Thanks for asking.

LYDIA: You're filling the seats? Paying the bills?

JOAN: With money in the bank to spare! Hey, are you sure I can't entice you with some of that shepherd's pie?

LYDIA: I could go for a scoop.

JOAN: Wonderful!

JOAN exits to the kitchen. LYDIA grabs the present and knocks on ELEANOR's bedroom door.

LYDIA: Ho ho ho!

ELEANOR: Go away.

LYDIA: But it's Santa! You wouldn't tell 'ol St. Nick to scram, would you?

ELEANOR: I know it's you, Aunt Lydia.

LYDIA: I have a present with your name on it!

ELEANOR: The only thing I want for Christmas is peace and quiet. So please, go.

LYDIA: It's from your dad.

ELEANOR opens the door.

ELEANOR: What did you just say?

LYDIA: Hey there, Ellie. You look great.

ELEANOR: You mean it?

LYDIA: No, you look terrible.

ELEANOR: Not that- the present. Is it really from my dad?

LYDIA: Let's sit.

They sit on a couch in the living room.

LYDIA: When things got bad, with the cancer, he gave this to me. He told me to give it to you one year after his passing. Didn't want your mom to know about it.

ELEANOR: I-I can't believe this. Should I open it?

LYDIA: What are you waiting for?

ELEANOR unwraps the present. She takes out a book and reads the cover.

ELEANOR: "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare."

LYDIA: It's his copy from acting school. He was in most of them, filled the whole thing up with notes, doodles, funny stories from rehearsals.

ELEANOR: Wow. I don't know what to say.

LYDIA: Jim Thurgood was a star! And Shakespeare, oh, Shakespeare was his favorite! Your dad was a legend on the stage! He'd be so proud to know you're carrying on the Thurgood family name.

ELEANOR: Right. (Dejected) Thank you, Lydia. I'll cherish this always.

She rests the book on the coffee table.

LYDIA: What's the matter? You don't like it?

ELEANOR: I love it. Really, I do. I'm just tired.

LYDIA: Sleeping problems?

ELEANOR: Actually, yes.

LYDIA: Really? Explain.

ELEANOR: I can't... It's embarrassing.

LYDIA: You're still wetting the bed.

ELEANOR: No! No, I'm having these strange dreams. Just one, actually. About a guy I met at a New Year's Eve party a long time ago. But the dream ends before I can get his name.

LYDIA: Why do you need to know his name?

ELEANOR: Because something happened to me that night we met! It was like lightning, like my soul was set on fire.

LYDIA: Sounds painful.

ELEANOR: I've never experienced anything like it. Love, blooming in my chest. Magic in my veins. But then in typical Eleanor fashion I got too drunk and forgot everything.

LYDIA: Maybe it's time to move on.

ELEANOR: But this dream must mean I'm in love with him! Like we're soulmates!

LYDIA: Hmm. I see. I could... help you, you know.

ELEANOR: Help me? Like, with a potion?

LYDIA: Shh! I don't want your mother to hear us. Yes, with a potion. *(She reaches into her purse and pulls out a vial)* This should do the trick.

ELEANOR: (She takes the vial) What is it?

LYDIA: It's a dream potion. Drink this and you'll have nothing but the most beautiful, vivid dreams. You'll sleep like a baby.

ELEANOR: Does it actually work?

LYDIA: Of course! Do you think I could run a business hawking snake oil?

ELEANOR: Mom thinks so.

JOAN enters carrying a plate of shepherd's pie.

JOAN: What are we being all hush-hush about?

ELEANOR: Nothing! (She sets the potion down near the book) Not a thing. Nothing at all.

JOAN: I'm glad you've come out of your cave, Ellie. Shepherd's pie?

JOAN goes to offer ELEANOR a plate but accidentally knocks the vial down. The dream potion gets all over Jim's book.

ELEANOR: Mom!

JOAN: Oh, gads. What a mess!

ELEANOR: Not the book! Oh no, oh no, oh no. It's ruined!

JOAN: What book? Sweetie, I can fix it, just let me see it-

ELEANOR: No! No, it's fine. I'll do it. I just… I have to… go. I need to go.

ELEANOR grabs the book and runs to her bedroom. She lies on her bed and cradles the book.

JOAN: I can't seem to do anything right today.

LYDIA: Don't be so hard on yourself. Things will turn around, you'll see.

JOAN'S landline rings.

LYDIA: Only you, Joan. Would have a landline this far into the 21st century. I'll let you take that.

JOAN: Thanks for stopping by.

LYDIA: Almost forgot my pie!

LYDIA grabs the pie and exits. JOAN lets the call go to the answering machine. She listens to the message while looking at the empty gift box.

ANSWERING MACHINE: (Jim's voice) "You've reached the Thurgood residence!" (JOAN's voice) "Residence? Jim, who says residence anymore?" (Jim) "You're right, let me try again- You've reached the Thurgoods!" (Joan) "That's better, but what if we tried it a different way-" (Jim) "Joan! We're running out of time!" BEEP.

MAN'S VOICE: Hello, Mrs. Thurgood. This is Steve from Financial Solutions. You're several payments past due on an account linked to the Thurgood Theater. Action will be taken if these debts aren't paid off in the next seven days. I look forward to your call. (Hangs up)

JOAN: Merry Christmas.