

"A VERY SHAKESPEARE CHRISTMAS"

A Play in Two Acts

by P.S. Drake

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"A VERY SHAKESPEARE CHRISTMAS"

Characters:

- ELEANOR THURGOOD: Female-presenting, any race, 25-35
Down-on-her-luck actress who moves back home and receives a mysterious Christmas gift from her late father
- JOAN THURGOOD: Female-presenting, any race, 40-60
Eleanor's mother, a widow who is grappling with the stress of the holidays and a failing theater
- LEVI DONOVAN: Male-presenting, any race, 25-35
Eleanor's best friend from high school who must deal with old feelings when Eleanor returns to town
- LYDIA SMITH: Female-presenting, any race, 30+
Joan's sister and Eleanor's aunt. An "alternative medicine provider." (Or maybe just a witch.)
- MAN/STEVE STEVENSON: Male-presenting, any race, 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 (Same actor)

Place:

Joan's home in Applewood, Minnesota.

Time:

Modern day, days before Christmas to New Year's Eve.

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.

ELEANOR
Do you believe in soul mates?

MAN
Believe in what?

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VOICES

NINE.

ELEANOR

Soul mates!

MAN

Sure. 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?

VOICES

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

(O.S.) Eleanor! I'm coming in!

ELEANOR

No! Not yet! Your name. Tell me your name!

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

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

Calling in the cavalry?! (*JOAN turns off the vacuum*) You woke me up.

JOAN

It's noon. I'm happy you're back home, Eleanor, but if you'll be living under my roof again you need to put in some effort.

ELEANOR

Hard to do when you feel like dying!

JOAN

Hey, hey now, none of that! This is only a setback.

ELEANOR

It's career ending.

JOAN

How many people can say they've starred in their own show on Netflix?

ELEANOR

That was canceled after three episodes.

JOAN

Three whole episodes!

ELEANOR

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

JOAN

The costumes were beautiful!

ELEANOR

The acting was "tolerable."

JOAN

See?

ELEANOR

Except me! I'm giving it up, Ma. I'm done with acting. It was so stupid to think I could make it as an actress.

JOAN

Nonsense! You're very talented. 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. You would've casted me no matter how terrible I was.

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

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

ELEANOR

Yikes, mom. Tell us how you really feel. You could always put it up for sale.

JOAN

I would never abandon the Thurgood Theater. Some of my best memories are all those shows we did together.

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.

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 put up in the living room.

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 our beavers now? Who are we trying to impress?

JOAN

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

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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? *(She begins vacuuming angrily. She stubs her toe on a pile of books)* Ouch! *(She pulls out the stack of books)* My scripts from high school. Back when I had hopes and dreams. *(Her phone rings)* Ugh, not my agent. *(She answers it)* Hi Tess, what's up? What? I can't hear you. My reception's awful in Minnesota. *(A pause)* I told you I was moving back home. *(Another pause)* Well Tessa, I had no money and in your words "not a shot in hell" of landing an audition. What else was I supposed to do? Ask my roommate to pay my half of the rent, too? 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? Where's your coat? This is Minnesota in December. You need more than denim.

ELEANOR

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(On the phone) I see. You're dropping me. No, no, I totally get it. Who would want to represent a loser, right? Go ahead. Say it! I'm a freaking LOSER!

JOAN

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)*

JOAN

Let me serve it up while it's still hot. Care for any?

ELEANOR

(To her scripts) You. You gave me purpose. You gave me hope. No! *Delusion.* You made me delusional!

LEVI

(To JOAN) You're doing okay... considering...?

JOAN

Considering? Ah. Jim. You can say his name, you know- he won't appear in a dark mirror to haunt you.

LEVI

It's been a year now. I wanted to check on you.

JOAN

There's more to my life than being a lonely little widow. I run a theater, I have hobbies. I just finished a cross-stitch of all the judges from "The Great British Baking Show." Want to see?

ELEANOR

Wilde, Sophocles, oh and the worst of all- Shakespeare.

LEVI

C'mon, Joan. I didn't mean it like that.

ELEANOR

It's all just nonsense dressed up in puffy costumes and poetry! Meaningless, highbrow trash! To hell with you!

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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?

JOAN
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
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.

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

JOAN

You didn't ask. Nobody asks.

ELEANOR

(To LEVI) What are you doing here?

LEVI

What are *you* doing here? I thought you were out in LA, partying with the rich and famous.

ELEANOR

I wasn't partying, I was working.

JOAN

I'll let the two of you catch up. Childhood friends together again-how precious!

JOAN exits.

ELEANOR

You're looking... 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*) You didn't answer my question.

LEVI

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?

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LEVI

I'm her handyman. 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. Guess we both grew up.

ELEANOR

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

LEVI

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 saw an opportunity and I took it. Nobody kept you in this town but yourself.

LEVI

Yet we both ended up in the same place.

ELEANOR

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

LEVI

Then I'll keep taking care of your mom 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!

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JOAN

I got the recipe from "The Great British Baking Show." They don't call it hot chocolate, they call it "drinking chocolate." Isn't that posh?

LEVI

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

ELEANOR

He was over last week?

LEVI

I'm over all the time.

JOAN

I had him check out this scary noise coming from my refrigerator.

LEVI

It was her ice maker.

JOAN

I don't know what I would do without him. He's just a part of the family now! Now then, what were the two of you talking about?

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. Ten years? Why so long?

LEVI

Yeah, Eleanor. Why so long?

ELEANOR

I'm done with this. I... I need to go.

JOAN

Here, clean up some of your scripts-

ELEANOR exits into her bedroom.

JOAN

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

LEVI

She told me she's here for the holidays.

JOAN

Oops. There I go blabbering my big old mouth again. Just show her some grace, will you? I know she's happy to see you.

LEVI

Yeah. I hope so. Take care, Big J.

JOAN

You're leaving?

LEVI

Got another house call. Lady says her fireplace smells like bananas. I'm a phone call away if you need me.

LEVI exits.

JOAN

Bananas. *(Giggles to herself)* 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.

LYDIA

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

JOAN

Lydia? What on earth? Come in!

LYDIA

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Was that Levi? Did the big, bad ice maker scare you again?

JOAN

Ha-ha. He 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. 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.

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.

JOAN

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

LYDIA

She moved back home? I thought she was doing that Netflix show!

JOAN

It got canceled. Left Eleanor without a job so she had to move back in with me.

LYDIA

That's terrible. I could.. help her, you know.

JOAN

Lydia. We've been over this before.

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LYDIA

Things are different now! I offer a very specific set of skills that could really help the poor girl.

JOAN

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

LYDIA

I am not a witch! I'm an alternative medicine provider. My clients love me.

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, let me get you some of that shepherd's pie Levi brought over. It's very good! Wait right here.

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

LYDIA

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Ho ho ho! Santa, here. And I have a present with your name on it!

ELEANOR

I know it's you, Aunt Lydia. And the only thing I want for Christmas is the sweet release of death.

LYDIA

It's from your dad.

ELEANOR opens the door.

LYDIA

Hey there, kid. Let's sit. When things got bad, with the cancer, he gave this to me. He told me to give it to you on your first Christmas without him. It's a little early, I couldn't wait any longer.

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. If only you could've seen him in his prime. Jim Thurgood was a star! And Shakespeare, oh, Shakespeare was his favorite! He was a legend on the stage!

ELEANOR

I don't know what to say.

LYDIA

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.

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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

Night terrors? Sleep paralysis? Oh, you're still wetting the bed.

ELEANOR

No! No, since I've been home I've been having these strange dreams. Just one, actually. About a guy I met at a New Year's Eve party years 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

Love bloomed in my chest. Magic flowed in my veins. But then I got too drunk and forgot everything. 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! Don't let your mother 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

Will it really work?

LYDIA

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

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.

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.

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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.

LYDIA grabs her 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.

ACT I, Scene 2

Later that night. JOAN is sitting on the couch, wearing a robe. She checks her watch and closes her book. ELEANOR is laying on her bed, flipping through her dad's book.