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Dramatic Publishing

FrUiTCaKeS

A Play in Two Acts

by

JULIAN WILES



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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A Note from the Playwright

Fruitcakes was first produced under the title of *Twelve Days of Christmas* in 1983. A much-revised version, now called *Fruitcakes* was produced in 1990 and published by Dramatic Publishing in 1991.

After it's publication, I thought little about the play until I attended a production of it in Greenville [South Carolina] a few years later. Although the script generated many laughs, it was obvious to me that there were far too many scene shifts. To address this problem I reduced the scenic requirements from seven sets to three in a new production here at Charleston Stage in 1995.

Following the 1995 production I have continued to revise the play; mainly to center the action on the key relationship of Jamie and Mack. At the same time, I consolidated some of the characters and added a few others. If you have more actors available they can play townspeople buying Christmas trees at Mack's Christmas tree lot, hunters in the hunting scene, and neighbors at Beebo's Grand Illumination. Additional kids can also be added to the pageant scenes. If you're really ambitious, a choir can be added to those scenes as well. (We used a children's choir in several productions.)

Though there have been many changes, *Fruitcakes* has remained a celebration of small-town life. Against this backdrop the play focuses on the drama of Jamie and Mack who, during a Christmas season of confusion, hurt, and loneliness, find in each other the strength to reach out to those they love the most. The play also touches on how chance encounters change our lives—change them as much as a visit from a mystical angel might change them. As Miss Alice notes in Act Two, "Perhaps we're all angels."

To make *Fruitcakes* work, it's important to find just the right mix of pathos, buffoonery and reality. The key, I feel, is to play most scenes straight and for real. Having grown up in a small town myself, I can attest to the fact that while many of these characters may appear "nutty as fruitcakes" to outsiders, to their friends and neighbors, they are just friends and neighbors. Every effort should be made to play these characters with affection and to resist the urge to turn them into a town of "Gomer Pyles." They are not "hicks" or "hillbillies." In their own way these characters all have grace, charm and wit.

We've had great fun in each production of *Fruitcakes* that we've mounted here at Charleston Stage, each cast and production adding its own special magic. Add your own magic and I have no doubt that your visit to McCord's Ferry will be great fun too.

* * * *

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING about *FrUiTCaKeS*...

“This is one play that I, as the director, never got bored with. I continued to laugh at the jokes and characters throughout all eight weeks of performance! I would love to see more scripts by this author.”

*Amy Deslattes,
Patterson High School,
Patterson, La.*

“This heartwarming story with a large and flexible cast was so much fun for my students to produce. The audience loved it!”

*Courtney Thomas,
Elysian Fields I.S.D.,
Elysian Fields, Texas*

“We have never had such an overwhelming audience response as we did with *FrUiTCaKeS*. A funny, heartwarming, yet thought-provoking play that had our audience laughing one minute, crying the next. Highly recommended.”

*Joan Sonnenburg,
Theatre Night in Merrickville,
Merrickville, Ontario*

FrUiTCaKeS

A Play in Two Acts

For 4 men, 4 women, 6 boys and 7 girls, extras if desired

CHARACTERS

MACK MORGAN makes whirligigs for a living.
At Christmas time he also sells Christmas trees, 60s

JAMIE a runaway boy from a nearby city, 12-14

BEEBO DANTZLER the town's only policeman

BETTY JANE Beebo's wife,
who directs the town's annual Christmas pageant

LITTLE BEEBO their son, about 12

SALLY their daughter, about 8

MISS SARAH a grouchy spinster, who, with her sister,
Alice, makes hundred of fruitcakes each Christmas, mid-80s

MISS ALICE Miss Sarah's younger sister,
more gentle and caring, early 80s

SKEETER a local fisherman and lover of poetry

MATTIE SUE a neighbor, who has been married six times

RICK MORGAN Mack's son

JAMES Rick's son, Mack's grandson*

CHILDREN IN THE PAGEANT

MEREDITH (Mary)	JOANIE (Sheep)
SAMMY (Joseph)	FRANCES (Narrator)
LAURA (Sheep)	LITTLE SKEETER (Innkeeper)
AMY (Angel)	LITTLE LARRY (Wise Man)
MARYBETH (Angel)	LITTLE BILLY (Shepherd/Wise Man)*

Additional children may be used in pageant.

You will also need 2-4 non-speaking boys to play wise men and shepherds in the pageant rehearsal (Scene Five).

*These parts could double.

NOTES

While some of the characters in this play are real “characters,” it is important that they be played realistically. To themselves and their neighbors their eccentricities are perfectly normal. If the characterizations slip into stereotypes the charm of the piece will be lost.

Although the play is divided into scenes, most of the action is continuous, that is, there should be no break for scene changes. We accomplished this in the original production by flying elements in for the kitchen, then den, etc. The flying of the scenery is not critical but the speed of scene shifts is.

We used live Christmas trees for the Christmas tree lot. Not only did this add an element of realism, but it also gave the theatre a wonderful evergreen scent. If kept watered and misted, live trees can last for a month. Our trees were still in such good shape that we were able to donate them to local United Way agencies when the show closed. (Fraser firs, by the way, seem to shed the least.)

Let your imagination go wild with the decorating of Beebo’s house. With today’s microchip chasing Christmas tree lights, all sorts of great effects can be achieved.

ACT I

Scene One: “And an angel of the Lord appeared unto them”

SETTING: *We see a magical place: Mack’s barn, Christmas tree lot and Whirligig Emporium. Mack’s workshop is in the old converted barn, which has a hayloft door above, and a big sliding barn door below. A porch-like shed overhangs the entire front of the barn. Hanging on the posts and stuck on the rooftop of this shed are all sorts of whirligigs and wooden wind toys like ducks with wings which turn in the wind. Below are various primitive folk art objects, such as reindeer made from logs and branches, as well as paintings on odd pieces of tin and old, weathered boards. A sign tacked above reads “Mack’s Whirligig Emporium.” A sideline to Mack’s whirligig business each holiday season is the selling of Christmas trees, some of which stand DL and DR framing the barn. In the spirit of the season, Christmas tree lights have been attached to the roofline of the barn. DL is an old 55-gallon drum that MACK has turned into a makeshift stove. A pot of coffee sits on a metal grate MACK has fashioned across the top. The warm glow of the fire below dances along the sides of the coffee pot. Next to the “stove” is an old chair and a few old*

wooden boxes. These make a nice sitting area when MACK'S friends stop by.

AT RISE: It is about five o'clock in the evening, December 20th. MACK, a woodworker, inventor, artist and tinkerer, enters carrying his latest work of art, an old car white-wall tire made into a Christmas wreath. MACK, one of the town's many eccentrics, hangs the tire UC on barn.

FRANCES. Evening, Mr. Mack.

MACK. Evening, kids.

LITTLE SKEETER. We're looking for a Christmas tree...

MACK. Well, what kind of tree did you have in mind?

FRANCES. How about a giant sequoia...

MACK. Well, I've got a few sequoias left. How about this one?

LITTLE SKEETER. That one looks great.

FRANCES. How much, Mr. Mack?

MACK. Sequoia's are a dollar a foot...how about six dollars?

FRANCES. We've only got five.

LITTLE SKEETER. Could you cut off a foot?

MACK. Tell you what, being Christmas, I'll throw in the other foot for free.

FRANCES. Gee, thanks, Mr. Mack.

LITTLE SKEETER. Merry Christmas.

MACK. Merry Christmas.

(MISS ALICE enters.)

MACK. Why, good evening, Miss Alice.

MISS ALICE *(has a secret to tell)*. Mack, I need your help.

MACK. Why, certainly, Miss Alice...what are you doing out this time of night? I was just about to close up.

MISS ALICE (*pulls him downstage and looks around to see if anyone else is about*). I need to ask you something of a somewhat “delicate” nature.

MACK. Delicate?

MISS ALICE. Yes, I’ll need at least a half gallon.

MACK. A half gallon?

MISS ALICE. And I’d like Mr. Jack Daniels, if Seth’s got it.

MACK. A half gallon of Mr. Jack Daniels Tennessee whiskey?

MISS ALICE. Shhhhhhhhh. I have my reputation to think of, Mack!

MACK. Tennessee whiskey for a good Baptist like you, Miss Alice?

MISS ALICE. Oh, it’s not for me, Mack! It’s for our fruitcakes...

MACK. Lordy, Miss Alice, you and Miss Sara still baking fruitcakes? Y’all’ve been at it for weeks.

MISS ALICE. Well, we have to make one for everyone in town, and that takes a while.

MACK. How many you still got to make?

MISS ALICE. Only five or six dozen...but catastrophe struck this afternoon when I realized I was out of...ah...flavoring. I was wondering if you could get some for me. (*Searches in her purse for some money.*)

MACK. I’ll stop by Seth’s early in the morning and put a bottle on your front step first thing.

MISS ALICE. Oh, heavens, no. I don’t want Sister to know about this. Why don’t you hide the bottle in the tea olive bush? (*She gives him the money.*)

MACK. The one out by your mailbox?

MISS ALICE. That's the one. I can just get it when I go out for the mail in the morning. But be sure it's in a brown paper sack.

MACK. All right, brown paper sack. It'll be there.

MISS ALICE. Thanks, Mack, you're an angel.

MACK. An angel, eh?

MISS ALICE. Oh, I better hurry home. I don't want Sara to miss me. She's mad at me already for letting Tutti Fruiti out the house.

MACK. She loves that cat of hers, doesn't she?

MISS ALICE. More than me, I think.

MACK. That old tomcat likes to prowl, doesn't he?

MISS ALICE. Oh yes, Tutti Fruitti's quite a man about town, Mack.

MACK. Yes, seems like Miss Sara's always out looking for him.

MISS ALICE. Lord, isn't she. She goes on the warpath when he's missing, so send him home if you see him.

MACK. That I will, Miss Alice, that I will.

(She exits. MACK goes back to work nailing wooden stands on the bottom of his Christmas trees. SALLY enters. She is wearing an angel costume. MACK doesn't see her.)

SALLY. Behold! I bring you great tidings of much joy.

MACK *(straightens up and discovers her)*. Oh, do you?

SALLY *(discouraged that she has not frightened him)*.

You're supposed to be sore afraid.

MACK *(rubbing his back)*. Well, I *am* pretty sore...

SALLY *(disappointed)*. But you're not afraid?

MACK. Well... Here, try me again. (*He bends over and goes back to work on one of his Christmas tree stands and pretends not to notice her.*)

SALLY. Okay... (*This time she tries to sneak up on him and shouts:*) BEHOLD!

MACK (*with mock terror, stands up straight, turns to face SALLY and quivers in mock fright.*) Ahhhh!

SALLY. FEAR NOT! (*Breaking character, whispering under her breath.*) Good. That's more like it.

MACK (*taking a bow*). Thanks...how was play practice?

(Several WISE MEN pass by on bicycles.)

SALLY. Great. I play the angel Gabriella.

MACK. Gabriella?

SALLY. It was supposed to be Gabriel, but Ricky Roberts got the chicken pox, and then none of the boys wanted to be an angel, so Mama changed it to a girl, Gabriella.

MACK. Well, Gabriella, aren't you a few days early?

SALLY (*matter-of-factly*). Yeah, well, I was just out for a test flight. Got to be sure things are ready for Christmas Eve, you know. (*She exercises her wings a bit.*)

MACK. Of course...

SALLY. Mama says that being an angel is one of the most important parts because angels bring messages from heaven.

MACK. Messages from heaven, huh? How about that.

SALLY (*ignoring his last remark, she flies over to look at some of MACK's trees*). Sure got some pretty Christmas trees this year, Mr. Mack.

MACK. Why thank you, Sally. Cut them just this afternoon.

SALLY. Mama says every Christmas tree in McCord's Ferry comes from your lot.

MACK. Well, I'm not sure about that.

SALLY. I want a real tall one this year.

MACK. I'll save you the tallest one on the lot.

SALLY (*angelically*). Bless you, my son.

MACK. Good night, Sally.

SALLY. 'Night, Mr. Mack.

(She exits R. MACK goes back to his work. After a moment, BEEBO and his son, LITTLE BEEBO, enter from L. LITTLE BEEBO is wearing a sheep costume, and he carries two plywood reindeer with gunshots in them.)

LITTLE BEEBO. Pa, you got to talk to Mom. She's making me be a sheep.

BEEBO. I thought you were a sheep last year.

LITTLE BEEBO. I was. That's what I'm saying. She doesn't want to give me one of the big parts because she's afraid it'll look like she's showing partiality. Talk to her, won't you?

BEEBO. Sure...I'll talk to her.

LITTLE BEEBO. Thanks, Pa.

BEEBO. 'Course it won't do any good...

LITTLE BEEBO (*groaning*). Paaaaaaa.

BEEBO. You know your mama doesn't listen to me, Little Beebo.

MACK. Betty Jane directing the Christmas pageant this year, Beebo?

BEEBO. Oh, yeah. She's McCord's Ferry's Stephen Spielberg, you know.

MACK. What you got there, Little Beebo?

LITTLE BEEBO. Prancer and Dancer. Pa wanted to see if you could repair them for the Grand Illumination...

MACK. What happened to 'em?

BEEBO. Oh, you remember, Mack. That crazy Benny Robert sent those two rapscaillon sons a shotgun last Christmas, and you remember, the day after Christmas they shot up half the town, including poor ol' Prancer and Dancer.

MACK. Those boys are going to end up in the penitentiary.

BEEBO. At least the whole family will be together...

MACK. I suppose you're right. Speaking of the whole family, Sally was just here and asked me to save the biggest tree on the lot for her.

BEEBO. Lord, I'll have to cut a hole in the ceiling.

MACK. Want me to loan you my saw?

BEEBO. You may have to.

LITTLE BEEBO. You comin' home now, Pa?

BEEBO. Nope. You run on, son. I'm on duty till ten. Tell Mama to put my plate in the oven. I'll be home directly.

MACK. Just leave Prancer and Dancer over by the barn and I'll get to them directly.

LITTLE BEEBO. All right. 'Night, Mr. Mack. *(Exits.)*

MACK. 'Night, Little Beebo...

BEEBO. Well, I'm going to head on down to the station, Mack.

MACK. See you later then.

BEEBO. Take it easy. *(Exits.)*

MACK. I will.

(After a moment, from the other direction, MISS SARA enters in her bathrobe.)

MISS SARA. Oh, Mack, have you seen Alice? I'm put out with Sister? We've got fruitcakes to bake and she just disappeared on me.

MACK. She's on her way home, Miss Sara. She dropped by a little while ago, she was— (*Realizing he can't tell her about the Jack Daniels.*) —just looking for ol' Tutti Fruitti...

MISS SARA. Well, she ought to be. She let him get out tonight. She pretended he just slipped out when she cracked the door but I think she did it on purpose...

MACK. Now, Miss Sara—

MISS SARA. She did, you don't know her like I do, Mack. She encourages Tutti Fruitti to go out and misbehave and it doesn't take much encouragement. Why he has the morals of an alley cat.

MACK. He *is* an alley cat, isn't he, Miss Sara?

MISS SARA. Yes, but that's no excuse. Anyone can rise above their raisings if they work at it. I've told Mr. Tutti Fruitti that a hundred times. I'm just going to have to give that cat another good talking to.

MACK. That's a good idea, Miss Sara.

MISS SARA. Oh, Mack, while I have you alone, I wonder if you could do a little favor for me.

MACK. What's that, Miss Sara?

MISS SARA. I want you to slip by Seth's tomorrow and pick me up a half gallon of... (*Whispers.*) Mr. Jack Daniels. (*Looks around to see if anyone has heard her.*)

MACK (*aside*). Mr. Daniels is a popular fellow tonight.

MISS SARA. Now, it's just for cooking, Mack, but you won't tell anyone? I wouldn't want to start any idle gossip, you know.

MACK. Oh, no.

MISS SARA. Fruitcake season, you know.

MACK. Oh, it wouldn't be Christmas around here if everyone didn't get one of your fruitcakes.

MISS SARA. And you can't make fruitcakes without Mr. Jack Daniels.

MACK. Don't worry. I'll get it for you, Miss Sara.

MISS SARA. I thought maybe you could hide it in the tea olive bush out by the mailbox.

MACK. The tea olive bush... You know, Miss Sara, someone might see it there. Why don't I hide it in the pomegranate bush 'round back?

MISS SARA. The pomegranate bush it is. Thanks, Mack.

MACK. Want me to walk you home, Miss Sara?

MISS SARA (*suddenly feisty*). Mack Morgan! You know I'm not that kind of girl.

(She exits R. A gaggle of giggling ANGELS enters from L with BETTY JANE in pursuit.)

AMY. Give me back my wings, you nitwit.

MARYBETH. They're my wings and I'm not a nitwit. Mama says I'm a little darling.

AMY. Then your mom's a nitwit.

MARYBETH. She is not!

BETTY JANE. Girls, girls, remember your manners. And remember to bring your coat hangers for halos, girls. Remember you're angels. *(The angels exit without paying her any attention. She sighs with a Sunday School director's resignation and turning, discovers MACK at work.)* Oh, Mack...Mack, I tell you, Mack, my patience and my deodorant have both been tried tonight. The whole pageant is going to be a disaster!

MACK. Oh, it'll all come together.

BETTY JANE. I don't know how. Just about all the kids have chicken pox and today I found out Willie Sikes, who was going to build our scenery, ran off with that girl at the Dairy Dream.

MACK (*he's heard all about this, word travels fast in McCord's Ferry*). No one saw it coming, did they?

BETTY JANE. Not a clue, no one even knew Willie liked ice cream. But it puts me in a pickle. What am I going to do about the scenery?

MACK. I thought you used the same scenery year after year.

BETTY JANE. Well, I was determined not to use that old cardboard monstrosity one more year, so after last year's pageant I had Beebo cart it off to the dump. Besides this year I wanted something a little more realistic...but now— (*She turns and suddenly realizes that MACK'S barn looks like a stable. She gasps, as if she has discovered the Holy Grail.*) Mack!

MACK. What? Are you all right?

BETTY JANE. This would be perfect.

MACK. For what?

BETTY JANE. We could put the angels up there in the hayloft and the baby Jesus down below. Can we use it? Your barn...for our set?

MACK. Well, I don't know how you're going to fit it into the parish house.

BETTY JANE (*with growing enthusiasm*). No, we'll do the pageant out here!

MACK. Out here?

BETTY JANE (*really excited now*). Sure! Why not? The real manger wasn't in a parish house, was it?

MACK. Well, no, but...