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# **The Ghost of Splinter Cove**

By

STEVEN DIETZ

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

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“*The Ghost of Splinter Cove* was originally commissioned and first produced by Children’s Theatre of Charlotte in March 2019,  
Adam Burke, Artistic Director; Linda Reynolds, Managing Director.”

*The Ghost of Splinter Cove* was originally commissioned and first produced by Children’s Theatre of Charlotte on March 22, 2019.

CAST:

CORA ..... Carman Myrick  
NATE ..... Chester Shepherd  
SYDNEY ..... Kayla Simone Ferguson  
J ..... Arjun Pande  
TOBIAS ..... Mike Dooly  
BOY ..... Finn Stern

PRODUCTION:

Director ..... Courtney Sale  
Scenic Design ..... Anita J. Tripathi  
Costume Design ..... Magda Guichard  
Lighting Design ..... Fritz Bennett  
Sound Design ..... Rob Witmer  
Stage Manager ..... Katie Pohlheber

For Ruby and Abraham

AUTHOR'S NOTE  
ON THE COMPANION PLAY

This play was written as one of two stand-alone, yet interlocking plays. The events going on upstairs with the adults—in this same house, on this same night—may be found in its companion play: *The Great Beyond*.

More information on the development and collaboration of these two plays is provided in the back of the book.

# The Ghost of Splinter Cove

## CHARACTERS

CORA: 10 years old.

NATE: 8 years old, Cora's brother.

SYDNEY: 9 years old, a new friend.

J: 40s, Cora and Nate's imaginary friend.

TOBIAS: 40s, a man looking for his son.

REX'S VOICE: Prerecorded.

BOY: 8 years old, nonspeaking. (Not listed in playbill, if possible.)

TIME: The present. Evening.

PLACE: An American city.

SETTING: The unfinished basement of a modest, older home. A stairway going up to a door that we do not see. An old hot water heater, a large old fan and maybe a few old shelf units. There is an old cement wash sink filled with odds and ends: a metal watering can, an old wooden crate, some dried-out painting supplies, etc. A few hanging bulbs serve as the light source. Most importantly: there is one scene change in this play [see page 40]. It is recommended that this moment be the starting point for the scenic design.



## PRODUCTION NOTES

**CHARACTER NOTES:** All characters are written to be performed by adult actors. J is the imaginary friend of both Cora and Nate. While the audience can see him, Cora and Nate cannot. Despite Cora and Nate's descriptions of J, the person we see is a man in his 40s wearing casual, unremarkable clothes. Maybe just jeans and a blue sweatshirt. He's a nice, middle-aged guy. Like a kindly uncle. A good friend.

**SOUND:** The score from the premier production is available from composer and designer by Rob Witmer. Producers may contact Rob directly at [robertsonwitmer@gmail.com](mailto:robertsonwitmer@gmail.com).

The wilderness needs your whole attention.  
—Laura Ingalls Wilder

# The Ghost of Splinter Cove

*(Early evening.)*

*NATE, CORA and SYDNEY stand on the stairs, looking down into the mostly barren basement.*

*NATE holds a new tent, still in its box, unassembled. They all hold a collection of backpacks and sleeping bags.*

*REX'S VOICE [CORA and NATE's dad] is heard from upstairs.)*

REX'S VOICE *(calling down)*. OK—be sure to leave a few lights on when it gets dark. *(Pause.)* Cora? Nate? Do you hear me?

CORA & NATE. Yeah, OK. / Uh-huh.

REX'S VOICE. And how is Sydney doing? Sydney, are you doing OK?

SYDNEY. Yes, Mr. Banks.

REX'S VOICE. Great! OK—I'm shutting this upstairs door now—just for sound. But come on up if you need anything, all right?

*(They do not respond. NATE runs down into the basement and opens the box that holds his tent. SYDNEY joins him.)*

REX'S VOICE *(cont'd)*. All right?

CORA, NATE & SYDNEY. We're fine. / All right! / Thank you.

REX'S VOICE. Have fun!

*(We hear the door close.)*

*CORA drops her backpack and sleeping bag to the ground.)*

CORA. This is the worst thing ever.

NATE. This is not the worst thing ever.

CORA. Yes—

NATE. The worst thing ever was Mom and Dad’s divorce because it meant we stopped going to Angelo’s for pizza.

CORA. Nate, we are camping in our dead grampa’s basement. That is so lame. *(To SYDNEY.)* This was our grampa’s house, but he just died. So our mom and dad and our aunt Emily have to go through all his stuff upstairs.

SYDNEY. Yeah, that’s what my mom told me.

CORA. Your mom is Rene, right? Aunt Emily’s girlfriend.

SYDNEY. Right.

CORA. Your mom seems cool.

SYDNEY. Yeah, I guess.

CORA. Sorry there’s nothing to do down here. Just this fake camping.

NATE. Cora, it will be even *better* than real camping! No traffic, no bugs, no getting lost—

CORA *(with a laugh)*. How would you know? We’ve never been camping.

NATE. Yes, but—

CORA. We are not a family that “goes camping.” We are a family that goes for Thai food.

NATE *(admiring the tent)*. I got this new tent for my birthday—

SYDNEY *(to NATE)*. Oh, happy birthday.

NATE. It is a *domed* tent.

CORA. Our dad had made this “big plan” to take us camping in the mountains this weekend—

NATE. Up where there's this *glacial lake*—

SYDNEY. That sounds like fun.

CORA. But this morning, Dad changed his mind.

NATE. Mom changed his mind. She didn't want us to go.

CORA. There were storms, Nate. There was bad weather.

NATE. No—

CORA. And you have a soccer game tomorrow.

NATE. It's Mom's fault.

CORA. It's not Mom's fault.

NATE (*to SYDNEY*). It's Mom's fault.

CORA (*to SYDNEY*). Anyway—our dad checked the weather report and said that “due to circumstances beyond his control,” he was not able to take us camping. So we're supposed to stay down here while they do stuff up there. Dad thinks it will be so “fun” for us.

*(The upstairs door opens and we hear REX'S VOICE.)*

REX'S VOICE. I've got snacks for you.

*(NATE immediately drops the tent pieces and disappears up the stairwell.)*

NATE. Thanks, Dad.

SYDNEY. I'm sorry about your grampa.

CORA. He was old. We didn't really know him. Mom never even brought us to visit.

SYDNEY. Why not?

CORA. We don't know.

REX'S VOICE. Enjoy yourselves. Stay dry!

SYDNEY. Stay *dry*?

*(NATE reappears, carrying a good-sized cooler. He sets it in the room and opens it.)*

CORA. Dad's the one who loves camping. He's the one who said we could go on a "pretend camping trip." He said wouldn't it be "*neat*" if we just "*set up the new tent in the basement*" and "*used our imagination.*" Why do parents SAY stuff like that?!

NATE *(looking in the cooler)*. Dad packed a lot of snacks.

*(CORA lifts an old wooden crate she's found in the room.)*

CORA. Why do they think they can give us like a *wooden box* and say, "*Hey! Look at this neat BOX! I bet you can pretend it's a CAR or a MOUNTAIN or a HIPPOPOTAMUS!*" We don't say that stuff to them—!

NATE & SYDNEY. Forget about it— / That's true—

CORA. We don't say, "Sorry you didn't get the job you wanted—but hey, Dad, why don't you just *PRETEND* you got it. Won't that be *FUN?!?*"

NATE. Can we work on the tent, please?

CORA *(ignoring NATE)*. "Oh gosh—you're all *ALONE* since the divorce—well hey, Mom, why don't you just go out with some nice man in your *IMAGINATION?!?*"

NATE. The camping will be real, Cora.

CORA. How will it be *REAL?*

NATE. I have the app!

CORA. You have the *what?*

NATE. Dad felt really bad that he had to cancel the trip, so he got me the Sim Camp app. *(Takes out his dad's smartphone.)* He put the app on his phone—and we get to use it all night!

SYDNEY. Wait—I'm spending the night?

CORA. I can't believe Dad gave you his phone.

NATE (*holding up the phone*). Simulated camping! This app won awards!

CORA. That's hilarious. Right, Sydney?

SYDNEY. I didn't know I was spending the night.

NATE (*showing SYDNEY*). Look, it's got Bluetooth technology and it uses Wi-Fi to interface with your home power grid, and also with any other smart technology you sync it up with. Dad said he hooked it up to work with his old stereo speakers, which are back there by the furnace— (*Shows her.*) he set it up to run the lights—and also this big fan—

SYDNEY. Why the fan?

NATE. In case we want wind!

*(NATE holds out his phone to SYDNEY. She presses a button on the phone, and the fan begins to spin.)*

*NATE and SYDNEY stand in front of it happily.)*

CORA (*flatly*). Wow. Wind.

SYDNEY. That's pretty cool.

CORA. I'm going upstairs. I want ice cream.

NATE. Cora, they need to talk about stuff.

CORA. So?

NATE. We're supposed to give them "adult time."

*(NATE turns off the fan.)*

CORA. It's been twenty minutes. How much "adult time" do they need?!

NATE. Plus there's no ice cream anyway.

CORA. I saw Mom buy ice cream.

NATE. J ate it.

CORA. No, he did not—

NATE (*turning somewhere in the room*). J, did you eat the ice cream?

*(From a direction other than where NATE turned, J appears. He is finishing off a bowl of ice cream. None of the characters can see J.)*

J (*to audience, friendly*). Hi, there.

NATE. Yep, he ate it! Good job, J!

*(NATE gives an “air high-five” in the wrong direction, while J, bemused, gives an “air high-five” from across the room.)*

SYDNEY. Who’s J?

CORA. He’s our friend.

SYDNEY. Where is he?

CORA & NATE (*pointing to two completely different parts of the room—neither of which is where J is standing*). There.

J (*to audience, helpfully*). I’m right here.

SYDNEY. I don’t see him.

J & NATE. That’s OK.

J (*to the audience*). They don’t really see me either.

SYDNEY. Does he talk?

J. Of course I talk.

NATE & CORA. Not really. / Not so much.

J (*to audience*). But not to them. (*As he eats ice cream.*) I would rather talk to you.

SYDNEY. How long have you had him?

*(J laughs.)*

CORA. Had him? He’s not like a pet.

SYDNEY. Oh, right—I know, but—

NATE. I have always had J. For a long time I thought he was all mine, but then one night Cora said, “I have an imaginary friend.” And she described him. And I said, “Hey, that’s J!”

CORA. We have to share. Even when we don’t want to.

*(NATE is holding two pieces of the tent in frustration.)*

NATE *(indicating what he holds)*. Wait—how is *this thing* supposed to go into *that thing*?

*(During the following, J fits together the two pieces of the tent and sets them back where he found them.)*

SYDNEY. What does he look like?

CORA. Oh, J wears these big red overalls with yellow stripes down the side—

NATE. Like racing stripes.

J *(bemused, looking at his actual clothes)*. That’s not true.

CORA. He has a bright purple sweatshirt with the letter “J” on it—

NATE. And bright green rubber boots—

CORA. And he wears a floppy pink hat.

NATE. We disagree about the hat.

CORA. It is floppy, and it is pink.

NATE. It’s a cowboy hat with a real eagle feather in it.

CORA. J’s the greatest. Especially the floppy hat.

*(NATE turns and sees that the two tent pieces are now put together.)*

NATE. Hey, I did it!

CORA *(speaking to where J is not)*. Hey J, come meet Sydney.



*(SYDNEY looks in the direction CORA mentions, while—  
from behind her—J extends his hand in her direction.)*

CORA (*cont'd*). You can shake his hand.

*(SYDNEY looks around.)*

CORA (*cont'd*). He's right in front of you.

SYDNEY (*shakes hands slowly with the air*). This feels really weird.

CORA. Why?

SYDNEY. Because there's no one there.

NATE. Sure there is. J is going to come camping with us!

J (*to audience*). That's not true.

NATE. Right, J?

J (*to audience*). I don't like camping.

NATE (*"big" impersonation*). He says, "Of course I am!"

J (*to audience, smiling*). And I don't talk like that.

SYDNEY. But how do you know for sure? If you can't see him—

NATE. We know because we know J! (*Points to a place in the room where J is not.*) I know that right now he's lacing up his hiking boots, getting ready to head off down the trail.

*(J does the opposite. He sits and removes his loafers. He rubs his feet.)*

NATE (*cont'd*). And he has like a *huge walking stick* to clear the brush in front of him as we hike.

*(J takes out a toothpick and picks at his teeth happily.)*

CORA. And also—right now—J is birdwatching with some very fancy binoculars.

*(J takes out some reading glasses and puts them on. Perhaps he reads the instructions for the tent.)*

SYDNEY *(to CORA)*. But how can you know for sure he's *doing that?*

CORA. Sydney, do you understand how imaginary friends *work?*

REX'S VOICE *(calling down)*. How's it going down there?

CORA, NATE & SYDNEY. We're fine. / Great! / Good.

REX'S VOICE. How are the snacks?

CORA, NATE & SYDNEY. Good. / Great. / Thank you, Mr. Banks.

REX'S VOICE. Happy camping!

*(We hear the upstairs door close.)*

CORA. He really thinks we are camping.

NATE. We are!

CORA. I hope I don't have a "pretend" birthday.

NATE. You didn't even get me a present, Cora.

CORA. Sure, I did. *(Pulls a wooden paint stick out of an old, dry can of paint.)* Here.

NATE. A paint stick?

CORA. *Not if you use your imagination.* It's actually a *magic wand*—

NATE. Oh, come on—

*(NATE goes back to work on the tent.)*

CORA. And this magic wand can turn this tent into a spaceship—

NATE. That's not a gift—

CORA. And turn this basement into an alien planet that is ruled by— *(Finds an empty, old, metal watering can and animates*

*it.*) the great and terrible CAN! Do not be SPRINKLED UPON by the GREAT CAN. You will NOT SURVIVE YOUR BIRTHDAY.

NATE. Can we finish the tent, please?!

CORA. Aye aye, captain!

SYDNEY (*with a laugh*). I think my mom has imaginary friends. She's always talking to people who aren't really there.

NATE. I think all parents do that.

SYDNEY. Maybe. But my mom does *séances*.

CORA. *Séances*?!

NATE. What is that?

SYDNEY. She helps people "connect" with people who are gone.

CORA (*loves this*). You mean dead-like-gone?

SYDNEY. They all sit around a table ... they take hands ... and they close their eyes. Mom says sometimes you have to close your eyes to really see something. Mom touches the table real lightly with her fingers ... until she makes "contact."

CORA. With a real live dead person?!

SYDNEY. That's what she says.

NATE. No way—

CORA. I love that. I want to do that! Is that her job?

SYDNEY. She tells people she's an office manager.

CORA. Maybe that's what they're doing tonight!

NATE. Who?

CORA (*to NATE*). Upstairs. Maybe Sydney's mom is doing a *séance* with Mom and Dad and Aunt Emily.

NATE. No, they wouldn't do that—

CORA (*to SYDNEY*). *Our grampa died in this house, you know.*

SYDNEY & NATE. He did?

CORA. Maybe your mom is going to *bring him back here tonight.*

SYDNEY. I'm pretty sure all that stuff is just made up.

CORA. Maybe it is ...

*(Saying this, CORA casually tosses the watering can over her shoulder; as SYDNEY flinches and covers her ears, awaiting the crash of the can in the room, but—  
J catches it before it hits the ground.)*

CORA (*cont'd*). Or maybe it's *not*.

*(Only SYDNEY looks at where the can should have fallen in amazement.)*

SYDNEY. Wait ...

CORA (*with a new enthusiasm*). Let's work on the tent!

*(NATE, CORA and SYDNEY work on the tent, as J speaks to the audience.)*

J. When I was Nate's age, my dad took me camping. We packed up our gear and went off deep into the woods. So deep that when we called out our names ... we would hear nothing but an *echo*.

I had brought three things with me: A pocket knife, given to me by my dad.

*(From somewhere in the basement, he produces a pocket knife.)*

J (*cont'd*). A magnifying glass, given to me by my mom.

*(He produces a small magnifying glass.)*

J (*cont'd*). And this ...

*(He produces a small, hand-carved, wooden toy plane.)*

J (*cont'd*). I loved this little plane. It couldn't really fly. I hadn't carved it right. But in my mind, this plane could go anywhere.

NATE (*indicating the tent*). Just one more tug on this ... and ...

*(NATE, CORA and SYDNEY complete a final move and the tent is ready.)*

NATE, CORA & SYDNEY. Yes. / Sweet. / Nice.

CORA. It's a pretty nice tent.

SYDNEY (*with a look at NATE*). Domed tent.

*(NATE smiles.)*

CORA. But there's no fire.

NATE. Just a sec—

*(NATE immediately heads for another part of the basement.)*

CORA. The only reason to go camping is to build a fire and sit under the stars and eat s'mores.

NATE. Ha! I found something!

CORA (*razzing him*). I hope it's a campfire.

*(NATE emerges holding two items: A large hollow cylinder of some kind [maybe a rusted-out wash tub] and a 1950's era Christmas tree color wheel.)*

NATE. It will be!

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

### ON THE SECOND STORY PROJECT

How many times in my childhood—as I played with friends in the basement—did I wonder: “What on earth are the adults doing upstairs?” How many times as a parent—as we busied ourselves upstairs—did I wonder: “What on earth are the kids doing in the basement?”

Childhood and adulthood are different continents, separated by a sea of time. And so, too, our fields of plays for the “grown” and the “young” have long been separated by a similar, seemingly intractable gulf.

In an attempt to bridge this gulf, two artistic directors—Adam Burke (Children’s Theatre of Charlotte) and Chip Decker (Actor’s Theatre of Charlotte)—approached me about creating what we came to call The Second Story Project. The goal was for me to write two plays that would *stand on their own* individually—but that could *also be seen in tandem*, as a way to tell the stories of the children and the adults in a unified way. We took it as a point of faith that the story of a family is the story of *all* its members, and that these stories can and should be shared across generations.

Family is the ultimate mystery: a strange and shimmering construct of choice and chance, held together by the narrative it tells itself. And, inevitably, there are gaps in what we tell ourselves about our own family, uneven knowledge between siblings and parents, events lost to history or covered by silence over time.

The adults upstairs in *The Great Beyond* are dealing with a loss. This loss has led to a reunion, and this reunion will lead them on a quest. The children at the heart of *The Ghost of Splinter Cove* are dealing with an age-old conundrum: find something to do in the basement until the adults are “done” upstairs. And—

of course—being children (the legislators of the imagination), they turn a barren basement into an adventure.

Both the adults and the children in these two plays gain an insight on the story of their own family. But—fittingly, I think—this knowledge is different in each play. And like the story of any family, it is beautifully incomplete. Only *you*, as the possible audience to *both plays*, are given the full picture of what has transpired on this night.

It has been my honor and delight to write and premiere this intergenerational story. I wish to thank the commissioning theatres for their embrace of radical collaboration.

Let's keep talking about families.

—Steven Dietz  
March 2019