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Dramatic Publishing

THE GIFT

A Play in One Act
by
KENDALL MARLOWE



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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KENDALL MARLOWE

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THE GIFT was originally produced by Organic Theater Company, Chicago, on May 15, 1998, directed by Anna D. Shapiro, set and lighting design by Kevin Snow, costume design by Nancy Brundage, sound design by Joe Huppert, stage manager Leslie Kniskern, with the following cast:

Stephanie..... KATIE CASSIS
Nick..... CHRISTOPHER GROBE
Linda..... CYNTHIA JUDGE
Joseph..... ALAN WESTBROOK
Grandma..... LUCINA PAQUET

The play was commissioned by
Hope Cancer Care Network.

THE GIFT

A Play in One Act

For 7 Men and 6 Women (with doubling: 2m, 3w)

CHARACTERS

STEPHANIE the daughter, age 16

NICK the son, age 14

LINDA the mother, age 40

JOSEPH the father, age 42

GRANDMA Linda's mother, age 72

LIBRARIAN, NURSE, NURSE'S AIDE, ORDERLY,
DOCTOR, ADMINISTRATOR, CHAPLAIN,
MR. JOHNSON

NOTE ON DOUBLING

The play can be produced (and was originally produced) with just five actors. NICK plays the Nurse's Aide and the Doctor, JOSEPH plays the Orderly and the Chaplain, GRANDMA plays the Nurse and the Administrator. Mr. Johnson is referred to but not seen, and the Librarian's voice is recorded. In this interpretation of Stephanie's dreams, the characters assume other roles but do not lose their identity, just as, in a dream, your neighbor may seem to be your boss, but never stops being your neighbor.

SETTING

The action of the play should flow quickly from scene to scene—locations can be suggested by small pieces which may easily be moved or adjusted by the actors. The look is spare and selective, as in a dream. The family's minivan, for instance, may be five, tall wooden stools. The library may be a single bookcase. Dishes, clothing and personal items may be real, but perhaps food and drink are not. Movement of characters may be enough to suggest hallways, stairs and doors. Lighting to suggest setting, time, and mood.

THE GIFT

SCENE 1

(The parents' upstairs bedroom. Morning. A cluttered dressing table, facing upstage, with the suggestion of a large mirror. A bed nearby. Clothes, and shoes. As lights come up, we see STEPHANIE's face peer into the empty room, carefully.)

LINDA *(off)*. Stephanie!

(STEPHANIE sneaks into the room, her backpack in hand, straight toward her mother's dressing table. She is pretty in a sassy way—her clothes seem thrown on, her hair askew, but she carries an effortless chic that's the result of much effort and many adolescent hours in front of her mirror. Perhaps a designer T-shirt and tight black jeans. She moves to the dressing table, in front of the mirror, reaches for earrings, and begins to put them on.)

LINDA *(off)*. Stephanie, now! Let's move it!

(STEPHANIE looks back to check that no one's coming, then reaches for a necklace.)

STEPHANIE. Can I borrow your earrings, just once?

LINDA *(off)*. We talked about this, and what did I tell you?

(She has put on the necklace.)

STEPHANIE. I don't have anything to wear!

LINDA *(off)*. You're making the rest of the family late!

JOSEPH *(off)*. Stephanie, please!

(She reaches for a pair of shoes, throws them on, and strikes a pose in the mirror to test the shoes. Throws them off, tries another pair with higher heels, and another pose. Perfect. Rummages through her bag, mistakenly pulls out a pack of cigarettes, looks to the door to see she hasn't been discovered, and quickly sets the cigarettes down. Searches again, finds lipstick, begins to put it on— wrong color. She quickly rubs it off with the back of her hand. Rummages through things on the table, grabs another color, tests it, then carefully outlines her lips. Her lips strike a pose.)

JOSEPH *(off)*. Stephanie, let's go!

NICK *(off)*. If you make me late, Steph, I'm gonna kill you!

(She notices and picks up a framed picture. She studies it, then hurriedly reaches for three fitted jackets. Bright and sexy, they're in green, red and gold.)

STEPHANIE. Mom, can I borrow one of your jackets, just once?

LINDA *(off)*. No, Stephanie. Please, just not the gold one ...

(She drops the other two on the floor and jumps into the gold one. Hands on hips, she gives the mirror a look, to test her powers. Perfect.)

JOSEPH *(off)*. Stephanie, this minute, we're going—let's go!

STEPHANIE *(running out, leaving the cigarettes on the dressing table)*. All right, what's your problem?!

(She rushes down the stairs. Movement and noise as the family piles out of the house toward the minivan. LINDA is attractive, but is harried and on edge. She tries hard to appear independent and worldly, but the burden of motherhood and career show through— she looks fractured, pulled-apart on this particular morning. JOSEPH has the kind and comfortable look of a happily married man, with an air of the well-earned fatigue that comes with parenthood. NICK wears his clothes as though they had been taped on— nothing quite fits, as each of his body parts has been growing, independently, at its own rate. Including his voice.)

NICK *(as they head toward the van)*. You've got to drop me at Dave's house.

LINDA *(to STEPHANIE)*. How did that happen? Look at your hair!

NICK. To finish our lab project.

JOSEPH. I've got to get to work, Linda, I can't be late.

LINDA. I know. Dave's house. To work. *(To STEPHANIE.)* I only hope, someday, that you'll use your head—you've got one—and even though you don't care about anyone else, you'll think—"there are other people

in this family, they have lives, too—I should think of them, too.”

STEPHANIE. I’m not talking about any of this. I’m not a kid.

(As they get in the minivan.)

NICK. It’s due fourth period. Our lab project. We mix the stuff up in Dave’s basement, then put it in the oven.

JOSEPH. Linda, you might have to drop me first. *(To NICK.)* What stuff?

NICK. Chemistry, Dad. Experiments, reactions. Duh!

LINDA. Seat belts!

(They all pile in—LINDA driving, STEPHANIE beating NICK to the front seat. NICK and JOSEPH in the back.)

STEPHANIE. Whatever with your reactions. Mom, you have to drop me first at school. It’s important.

LINDA. Stephanie—

NICK. No way!

STEPHANIE. Shut up, freshman.

LINDA. Please—just today—let’s be a family. First, we get your grandmother.

STEPHANIE. No!

LINDA. We get her, we drop your father. Drop her, then to Dave’s house, drop Nick.

STEPHANIE. I go first! Me!

LINDA. Drop Nick at Dave’s house. Nicky, can you and Dave walk to the high school from there?

NICK. Sure.

JOSEPH. He’s walking somewhere? Walking?

STEPHANIE. Never.

NICK. No. Dave has a car. He's a senior.

JOSEPH. You're taking senior chemistry?

NICK. It's easy, Dad. Whatever...

STEPHANIE. I can't believe I'll be late for all this. And what's with old Grandma, anyway?

LINDA. Stephanie.

NICK. What's your big hurry, Steph?

STEPHANIE. Shut up.

NICK. Wait a minute. (*Pause.*) I know.

STEPHANIE. Shut up.

NICK. Nice earrings, Steph. Lipstick, too.

STEPHANIE. Die.

LINDA (*looking*). Stephanie, for God's sake, I told you about the jacket...

NICK. I know the hurry. Josh Martin might ask her to Homecoming. She sees him first period. He's about her last chance. Nice necklace.

STEPHANIE. As if that had anything to do with it!

JOSEPH. Steffi, why do you have to get dolled up like that? You'll go to the dance. Someone will— Why do you do that to your hair? Look at your mother—she doesn't have to do that—her hair is long and beautiful just like the day I met her. And I'll take her to any dance. (*The van slows, stops. JOSEPH leans forward to give LINDA a kiss.*)

LINDA. Joe, not here... (*He kisses her, then she begins to turn away.*) Oh, what the heck. (*She kisses him back, holding his head tightly.*) I love you.

STEPHANIE. God, you're embarrassing. I'm leaving this family.

(GRANDMA gets in the back, with help from NICK. She is stout and round and wears a nice old lady dress with matching purse. She is lively, and speaks with an Eastern European accent she has worked hard to overcome.)

GRANDMA. Who's kissing? Can I kiss, too? Ah, my little monkey! *(She kisses NICK's head. The van pulls forward.)*

NICK. Hi, Grandma.

GRANDMA. My princess! *(She reaches forward to rub STEPHANIE's head.)*

STEPHANIE. Grandma.

GRANDMA *(pulling back her hand)*. What did you do to your hair?

JOSEPH. She's looking for a boy. For Homecoming Dance.

STEPHANIE. Please!

JOSEPH. Which reminds me... *(Pulling a piece of paper from his briefcase.)* Any boy who wants to ask you to the dance... *(Showing STEPHANIE the paper.)* Any boy must first fill out this brief application.

GRANDMA. Now, Joseph...

STEPHANIE. God!

NICK. Ha-HA! *(He and JOSEPH laugh.)*

GRANDMA. When Joseph here asked your grandpa for Linda's hand, we didn't need any application. Your grandpa, God rest his soul, he asked Joseph some questions, and Joseph here was very nice. He was always nice to Grandpa.

JOSEPH. I was twenty-two. His wrists were bigger than my thighs. I wanted to stay alive. *(The van slows.)*

LINDA. Here we are, Joe. Love you.

GRANDMA. Goodbye, Joseph. (*She gives him a peck on the cheek.*)

NICK. Bye, Dad.

JOSEPH. Which reminds me, Stephanie—no football players.

STEPHANIE. Dad.

LINDA (*stopping him*). Honey—I love you.

JOSEPH. Bye, sweetheart. (*Kisses her.*) You all right?

LINDA. Sure. Fine.

JOSEPH. Say hi to your kids for me.

LINDA. No, actually... not today. It's one of those... teachers' in-service days. Meetings, I think. No blackboard, no second-grade kids, just... meetings. You know.

JOSEPH. Then see you at home.

STEPHANIE. Come on!

JOSEPH (*stops, looking at STEPHANIE, chuckling*). Hey, you know—you know who she looks like—even with the clothes, the hair. It's just the look on her face...

LINDA. No...

JOSEPH. Yes. That October we met. Dead ringer.

STEPHANIE. As *if*!

JOSEPH. It's a compliment, Steffi—she swept me off my feet.

LINDA. Oh, please...

STEPHANIE. As *if*! We are so *different*!

JOSEPH. Goodbye. (*He goes off. The van pulls away.*)

NICK. Hey, you should teach Mom's class someday, Steph.

GRANDMA. He's such a nice man.

STEPHANIE. Enough.

NICK. Second grade—just your speed. You might pick up some guys.

LINDA. Nicholas, stop it with your sister. She has a hard day ahead.

GRANDMA (to LINDA). Joseph. A nice man. He was always nice to your father. When your father asked me, what do you think, I said— What do I know? I'm just saying—he's a nice man. (*The van slows.*)

LINDA. Here we are, Mom. Take care. And give my best to Berta.

GRANDMA. Oh, I will. (*Getting out.*) Goodbye, my little monkey. Princess!

LINDA. Mother ... You know I love you.

GRANDMA. Of course you do—don't be silly! Goodbye, now. (*Waving.*) Bingo! Bingo! (*The van pulls away.*)

NICK. Mom.

LINDA. Yes, Nicholas, what. What now?

NICK. Mom, where's Grandma going?

LINDA. Where do you think? You know perfectly well where she's going.

STEPHANIE. I'm going to be late. Faster!

NICK. Mom, where do they have bingo at seven-thirty on a Monday morning?

LINDA. They don't.

STEPHANIE. I can't believe this. I'm running away from home.

LINDA. Grandma meets her friend Berta at that diner for coffee and a sweet roll. Then they go to the beauty shop—not to get their hair done, just to talk. Bingo starts at nine.

NICK. Too weird, Mom. (*The van slows.*)

LINDA. Here you go. (*NICK gets out. She stops him.*) Sweetheart, Nicky. You know don't you, if anything ever happened... I love you.

NICK (*backing away*). Sure, Mom, whatever. You OK? (*He steps away, as LINDA reaches out toward him. As he walks away:*) Hey, Steph, if nobody wants you, there's always the convent! They get free clothes! (*The van pulls away.*)

STEPHANIE. Why is everyone so mean to me? Always to me.

LINDA. Stephanie, please ...

STEPHANIE. Quick, Mom, faster. Let's go.

(They drive for a moment, then LINDA takes a deep breath, pulling herself up. She looks behind, then slows the van and steers it to the side, stopping. Pause.)

STEPHANIE. What are you doing?

LINDA (*beat*). Stephanie, you have your license with you, don't you?

STEPHANIE. Sure I do. Always.

LINDA. Good, I thought you would. Drive for me.

STEPHANIE. Awesome!

(STEPHANIE bounds out of the van, and skips around the front to the driver's side, as LINDA slides slowly over to the passenger seat. STEPHANIE jumps in. As STEPHANIE reaches to put the van in gear, LINDA extends her arm first, blocking STEPHANIE. STEPHANIE looks at LINDA.)

LINDA. Please understand, Stephanie. I've been so awful this morning— I didn't mean to be— I wanted to be so good, and now this. I'm so sorry.

STEPHANIE. Mom, what's the—

LINDA. You can't go to school today, Stephanie. I'm so sorry. I want more than anything for the nicest boy in the world to ask you to that dance today. Some boy that will make your daddy so proud.

STEPHANIE. Mom, I have to—

LINDA. But you can't. You can't go. Please...forgive me. I called the school and excused the absence. They won't expect you.

STEPHANIE. Mother, what do you think you're doing? I have to go!

LINDA. And whatever you do, don't tell your father. Please don't. I couldn't tell him— I couldn't do that to him. It will be nothing, and he won't have to know.

STEPHANIE. Mother...

LINDA. Remember when I went to the doctor last week? My regular visit, once a year.

STEPHANIE. Yeah, so—what does that have to do with anything?

LINDA. A week after you went, right?

STEPHANIE. I suppose. Now—

LINDA. Only I'm forty now. They gave me a mammo-gram. My first.

STEPHANIE (*beat*). Mother, what are you telling me—

LINDA. So today I'm going back. To a different doctor. By the hospital. (*Beat.*) And you're taking me. (*Pause.*) Please.

(*Pause. STEPHANIE puts the van into gear, and it pulls away.*)

Take a left at the light.

(She does. Pause. Turning to STEPHANIE.)

I'm so sorry. *(Lights fade.)*

SCENE 2

(The school library. Late afternoon. As lights come up, STEPHANIE is alone by a bookcase, surrounded by books—they're spread around her on the floor, and in her arms. She looks scattered and dazed. She's frantically searching.)

NOTE: The librarian's announcements on the loudspeaker may be read live, or may be recorded.

LIBRARIAN'S VOICE ON LOUDSPEAKER This library will close in five minutes. We will reopen tomorrow, first period. Please return all books to the circulation desk at this time. Please note that boys basketball tryouts scheduled for tonight have been moved from the field house to the main gym. Basketball tryouts at six o'clock in the main gym for all boys. This library is about to close.

(As STEPHANIE faces away, NICK enters, backing in, waving to someone. STEPHANIE's face is in the book.)

NICK. Yo, Dave—tomorrow! *(He collides with STEPHANIE, who is startled and drops her book.)*

STEPHANIE. Oh—

NICK. Yo, Sister. What are you doing here?

STEPHANIE. Nothing, I—

NICK. They said that you were sick, that you weren't in class.

STEPHANIE. Yeah, that's right. Sick. I was—

NICK. What happened? You're a mess.

STEPHANIE. What's a biopsy?

NICK. What?

STEPHANIE. A... biopsy. People, like, get one. What does it do?

NICK. I don't know. What are you doing? (*He sees books.*)

STEPHANIE. Research, I'm... writing a paper. It's overdue.

NICK. What about? (*He moves toward books, as she tries to hide them.*) Whoa. Disease central. Terminal. What are you doing—trying to find a cure for your personality?

STEPHANIE (*grabbing him by the collar*). Listen. You know about this stuff.

NICK. I took bio. I don't know— I aced it. Whatever.

STEPHANIE (*still holding him by the collar*). Then tell me. Biopsy.

NICK. It's like... a test. They take it out, they look at it, see what you've got. You sick or something?

STEPHANIE. People... when they get that... do they live? Is there any chance? Why would they do that if there wasn't any chance?

NICK. I don't know. (*Backing away.*) Hey, if you want me to write your paper, I'll do it. Twenty dollars a page.

STEPHANIE. No. Do they live?

NICK. I should get Dave to help you. He's a senior, gonna be pre-med. But he thinks you're cute, so he can't be that smart.