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Dramatic Publishing

ALOYSIUS and the GHOST of UNCLE HAROLD

A Family Play
By
LOUIS LIPPA



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(ALOYSIUS AND THE GHOST OF UNCLE HAROLD)

ISBN: 1-58342-238-2

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ALOYSIUS and the GHOST of UNCLE HAROLD

A Play in Two Acts
For 4m., 4w.

CHARACTERS

ALOYSIUS

His GRANDMOTHER

UNCLE HAROLD, a ghost

* BUS DRIVER/MISTER TIME

HENRIETTA

TONY

* ANNIE, a young waitress/ MADDIE

* TESSA/OLDER ANNIE

PLACE: A rural countryside.

TIME: Present, Past and Future.

* These roles may double

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

(A summer day. ALOYSIUS and his GRANDMOTHER seated on a bench waiting for a bus. His GRANDMOTHER is blind. She wears dark glasses and is dressed in black. ALOYSIUS wears a dark suit. His hair is neatly combed. Silence. The GRANDMOTHER looks up at the sky. She nods knowingly. ALOYSIUS notices. He looks up, searching the sky.)

ALOYSIUS. You hear them, don't you, Grandma?

GRANDMOTHER. Mm.

(ALOYSIUS waits. In a moment, honking Canada geese are heard. ALOYSIUS watches the birds pass across the sky. Again silence. Then, as in a TV studio, SOUNDS of a band, audience laughter and applause rise. ALOYSIUS grins. The "GHOST" OF UNCLE HAROLD, full of life, enters upstage in follow-spots. UNCLE HAROLD is wearing a straw hat, green bow tie and carries a bamboo cane. His face is pale, his eyes heavily lined and he wears a tiny earring in his left ear.)

UNCLE HAROLD *(to an audience—somewhere)*. Thank you, thank you, thank you! *(To ALOYSIUS.)* Here's one gets them every time. *(To his audience.)* An apple, an

orange and a banana were on a table. The apple and the orange rolled off. Why didn't the banana? (*ALOYSIUS silently mouths the punch line as UNCLE HAROLD delivers it.*) Because it was YELLOW! (*Cymbal and drum, big audience laugh. ALOYSIUS also laughs softly.*)

GRANDMOTHER. Stop that! (*LIGHTS on UNCLE HAROLD abruptly blackout. Audience laughter stops. ALOYSIUS wipes the grin from his face.*) He's gone, Ali. You got to accept that. Your Uncle Harold got bad sick, and he's gone.

ALOYSIUS. I miss him, Grandma.

GRANDMOTHER. I miss him too, child. But we go on living. That's the way it has to be. (*After a moment, she sings quietly.*)

“My Lord, what a mornin'!

My Lord, what a mornin'!

My Lord, what a mornin'!

When the stars begin to fall!” (*Silence.*)

That was a nice service. Everybody said nice things about him. Even the preacher had a kind word, and he didn't always see eye to eye with your Uncle Harold.

ALOYSIUS. Why not, Grandma?

GRANDMOTHER. Well for one thing, he didn't care much for the way your Uncle Harold dressed for church—struttin' down the aisle wearing that straw hat and green bow tie.

(*She laughs as LIGHTS RISE again on UNCLE HAROLD, hat tilted, leaning on his cane.*)

And those shoes! O Lord! Those tap-dancing shoes! Tap-tap-tap! Tap-a-tap-tap! (*UNCLE HAROLD taps his*

shoes.) That man's feet just couldn't keep still. Tap-tap-tap! Preacher up in his place raising his voice to be heard. *(She imitates an evangelical preacher.)* "Sinners! Listen to me!" Tap-tap-tap! "Many thousands gone! Gone! Gone to the eternal fires!" TAP-A-TAP-A- TAP-A-TAP! "Harold, is that you down there making that damnation noise while I'm up here trying to save souls?"

UNCLE HAROLD *(stops tapping)*. "No, sir, Preach! It ain't me. It's my feet!" *(He taps.)*

GRANDMOTHER. Tap-tap-TAP-A-TAP-A-TAP! "Well, take your shoes off till I'm done with my sermon!"

UNCLE HAROLD. "Yes, sir, Preach!" *(He takes off his shoes.)*

GRANDMOTHER. And Uncle Harold took off his shoes and the preacher went on with his sermon. And he hardly preached two words about sinners and damnation when he heard— *(UNCLE HAROLD dances barefoot.)* THUMP-THUMP-THUMP! THUMP-A-THUMP-THUMP! *(GRANDMOTHER and ALI laugh. GRANDMOTHER continues her story.)* And the next thing you know—the whole congregation—including the preacher—starts tap-dancing! Thump-thump-thump! Tap-a-tap-a-tap! *(An imaginary congregation is heard tap-dancing. GRANDMOTHER and ALI are laughing. So is UNCLE HAROLD. Finally, their laughter subsides into memory. GRANDMOTHER wipes her eyes.)* Yes, sir. He had his ways, your Uncle Harold.

ALOYSIUS. He told jokes, too, Grandma.

GRANDMOTHER. Yes he did. Nobody laughed.

ALOYSIUS. *I did.*

GRANDMOTHER. That's because you loved him. *(She hums softly. She stops. Listens.)*

ALOYSIUS. You hearing something again that I don't hear, Grandma?

GRANDMOTHER. That old bus is coming. Moving slow.

(UNCLE HAROLD reappears in a "ghostly" light—perhaps in mid-air!)

ALOYSIUS. Grandma—sometimes it feels like Uncle Harold is right behind me.

GRANDMOTHER. You're just grievin'. That feeling'll go away.

ALOYSIUS. But I don't want it to go away. I always want to feel like Uncle Harold isn't gone. I always want to remember him.

GRANDMOTHER. You will. You just won't remember him the way you do now.

ALOYSIUS. Why not?

GRANDMOTHER. Well—you got to get old.

ALOYSIUS. Like you?

GRANDMOTHER. Watch your mouth! Anyway—I ain't old. I'm just old-er.

ALOYSIUS. What's the difference?

GRANDMOTHER. The difference is some people get old when they get older. But I ain't one of them. Now your granddaddy's *old*.

ALOYSIUS. How can you tell?

GRANDMOTHER. Never mind.

ALOYSIUS *(after a thought)*. Grandma, if getting old means I'm going to forget Uncle Harold, then I've decided not to get old. No, ma'am. I've decided to stay young all my life.

GRANDMOTHER. And I'm sure you will. The good Lord blessed you with a simple mind and lots of curiosity—so I'm sure your heart will always be young.

ALOYSIUS. No, I mean really—*really* young.

GRANDMOTHER. What are you talking about, child?

ALOYSIUS. I'm talking about *never* getting old.

GRANDMOTHER. Everybody's got to get old. Even you.

ALOYSIUS. Not if it means I'm going to forget Uncle Harold. No, ma'am. I'm not getting old, and that's all there is to it. You know me, Grandma. Once I decide to do something—I do it.

GRANDMOTHER. That's true. You are one stubborn child, I got to say that. But getting old is going to happen—don't matter what you do. Look at you now. You're already a young man—almost out of high school. And before you know it, you'll be graduated and going to college. No, sir. No sense fighting him. He's too powerful. He's almost as powerful as God.

ALOYSIUS. Who is, Grandma?

GRANDMOTHER. Mister Time! Mister Time is sturborner than you are. You can kick and scream all you like, Mister Time ain't going to pay you no mind. He's going to grab you by the hand and drag you along and next thing you know you ain't a child anymore.

ALOYSIUS. I don't like that.

GRANDMOTHER. It don't matter you don't like it, that's the way it is. Oh, I know it hurts now, and you miss your Uncle Harold real bad, but Mister Time'll take care of that. He takes care of all our sorrows. *And* our joys. Makes no difference to him.

ALOYSIUS. Well he won't catch me sleeping.

GRANDMOTHER. Sleeping or awake it don't matter. Mister Time don't stand still. He's always on the move—keeping an eye on you—making sure you don't always be remembering someone you love who ain't here anymore. You'll see. Little by little you'll start forgetting. That's the way it'll be when *I'm* gone—and your granddaddy's gone—and even one or two of your friends.

ALOYSIUS. Grandma—I have to tell you—you're making me feel real sad.

GRANDMOTHER. I'm sorry it has to be that way, Ali, but if we sit around grieving day and night—*nothin'll* get done. Nobody'll want to wake up in the morning to have breakfast—or go to work—or go to school. We got to do some forgettin' so's we can go on living. So let him go, child. Let your Uncle Harold go. Don't be remembering him all the time. You get yourself ready to meet new people. You get ready to go on living.

ALOYSIUS. Grandma—I told you, Mister Time's not going to get me. No matter what happens—no matter what new people I meet—I'm not going to get old and forget Uncle Harold. Case closed. (*UNCLE HAROLD does a dance step and disappears.*)

GRANDMOTHER. We'll see. (*She sniffs, then rises.*) I smell smoke. Must be that old bus. Here it comes. Moving slower every year. Someday it won't be moving at all.

(SOUND of an old bus in need of repairs arriving. Three actors—as two passengers and a bus driver enter— carrying chairs as bus seats. The two passengers are elderly. HENRIETTA wears a straw hat with berries and

daisies on top. TONY has on a T-shirt with a picture of a stone angel, of the type seen in graveyards. An inscription reads, "Angels Watching Over Me." The BUS DRIVER is also up in years and has white hair. He opens the bus door.)

GRANDMOTHER. Driver, would you let this child off at the Paradise stop?

BUS DRIVER *(from habit)*. Sure thing, lady.

GRANDMOTHER *(kissing ALI)*. Give me a kiss, Ali.

BUS DRIVER. Before I forget to tell you—I won't be making this stop anymore.

GRANDMOTHER. Why not?

BUS DRIVER. The Methuselah Bus Company's losing money on this route. Not enough passengers. And I'm being retired.

GRANDMOTHER. Well how's this child expected to get back home every Sunday?

BUS DRIVER. Don't ask me. I don't make the rules.

ALOYSIUS. Don't worry, Grandma. I'll walk home.

GRANDMOTHER. You can't do that, child. It's ten miles. What if you get lost?

BUS DRIVER. What's it going to be, ma'am. I gotta get moving.

GRANDMOTHER. I'll talk to your daddy, Ali. He'll pick you up whenever you come to visit. Goodbye, child. You get yourself straight home. *(ALI gets on the bus. The BUS DRIVER closes the door.)*

ALOYSIUS *(to the BUS DRIVER)*. Are you old?

BUS DRIVER. Take a seat.

GRANDMOTHER (*sings triumphantly as she leaves*).
Sittin' at the Lord's right hand,
When the stars begin to fall."

(With a lot of cranking and spitting, the old bus starts up, turns a corner and is on its way. ALI finds a seat. Suddenly, UNCLE HAROLD appears and leaps onto the bus.)

UNCLE HAROLD. Hee-rrre's UNCLE HAROLD! (*He sits beside ALOYSIUS.*) How's it going, kid? You OK?

ALOYSIUS. Oh, sure. I'm fine, Uncle Harold. How are you?

UNCLE HAROLD. That's a good question. I don't really know *how* I am. I think I'm a ghost.

ALOYSIUS. How do you know?

UNCLE HAROLD. I've been losing weight. Every day I get lighter and lighter. Maybe after a while, I'll just disappear. (*He steps into the aisle and practices some dance steps.*)

ALOYSIUS. Grandma said I'm not really seeing you.

UNCLE HAROLD. You're not.

ALOYSIUS. I'm not?

UNCLE HAROLD. You're seeing me—but not with your *outdoor eyes*.

ALOYSIUS. My *outdoor eyes*?

UNCLE HAROLD (*missteps—then to the woman*). That's a tough step, Henrietta. (*HENRIETTA thinks she heard something—looks about. UNCLE HAROLD stops dancing. He whispers to ALOYSIUS.*) Watch this.

HENRIETTA (*to the man*). Excuse me. Have we met before?

UNCLE HAROLD. They have.

TONY (*not friendly*). You talking to me?

HENRIETTA. You said my name. I thought maybe we met before.

TONY. You're dreaming, lady.

HENRIETTA (*insisting*). You spoke to me. I heard you.

TONY. I'd never speak to anybody wearing a hat like that.

HENRIETTA. What's wrong with my hat?

TONY. It needs pruning.

HENRIETTA. You're very rude.

TONY. Are you flirting with me?

HENRIETTA. Wouldn't think of it.

TONY. Well don't get any ideas. I'm a married man. I mean I *used* to be. My wife passed away. But I'm still faithful to her memory.

HENRIETTA. Are you bragging or complaining?

UNCLE HAROLD. They met fifty years ago. At an amusement park. They were teenagers.

HENRIETTA. I thought I heard a voice. A *pleasant* voice. Obviously it wasn't you.

UNCLE HAROLD. It was love at first sight. But he was too shy to ask for a date. Then she moved away, so they never saw each other again—until now. (*Practices dance steps.*) What were we talking about?

ALOYSIUS. My "outdoor" eyes.

UNCLE HAROLD. Oh yes. Your outdoor eyes are the eyes above your nose. You're not seeing me with those eyes. You're seeing me with your *indoor* eyes.

ALOYSIUS. I have *indoor* eyes?

UNCLE HAROLD (*does a turn*). Got it! Whew! I could never do that step in the old days. Thanks.

ALOYSIUS. Why are you thanking me?

UNCLE HAROLD (*sits beside ALOYSIUS*). I used to miss that step, remember? And you kept telling me with practice I could do it. You always believed in me, kid. You laughed at my jokes—sang my songs—thanks for the confidence.

ALOYSIUS. Uncle Harold, are you really here?

UNCLE HAROLD. I don't know if I am or not. All I know is that you're seeing me with your *indoor* eyes—those are the eyes inside your mind.

ALOYSIUS. You mean I'm imagining you?

UNCLE HAROLD. Who knows? Let's just say I'm here because you *want* me to be here.

ALOYSIUS. But Grandma wants you to be here—so does Granddaddy—and they don't see you the way I do.

UNCLE HAROLD. That's right. They see me in a different way. That's because they remember me in a different way. You understand?

ALOYSIUS. No. But that's all right. As long as you're here, that's all that counts. Uncle Harold—do you want to know something?

UNCLE HAROLD. What's that?

ALOYSIUS. I've decided never to get old.

UNCLE HAROLD. You may want to think that over.

ALOYSIUS. And you know what else?

UNCLE HAROLD. What else?

ALOYSIUS. I'm never going to forget you.

UNCLE HAROLD. Well that's sweet of you, kid, but maybe—

ALOYSIUS. I'm going to remember every single Sunday when I came to Grandma's house to visit and we sang songs and you told jokes and we went to the park and played ball—even when you got bad sick. I'm always

going to remember the good times we had. Do you know why?

UNCLE HAROLD. Why?

ALOYSIUS. Because I don't want you to be dead.
(SOUND of the bus engine sputtering.)

BUS DRIVER. Uh-oh. We got a problem.

UNCLE HAROLD. I'll let you in on a secret, Ali. There are some things—not all things—some things I know *before* they happen.

ALOYSIUS. Like Grandma does?

UNCLE HAROLD. That's right. Your grandma is my mama, so maybe I got the gift from her. I'm not as good as she is, but I can predict some things. Take this bus. It's an old-timer. It isn't going to make it. *(The bus gasps, chokes and finally gives up the ghost. The BUS DRIVER tries starting her up again. It's useless.)*

BUS DRIVER. That's it. She's gone. End of the line. I'll call the station for a backup to pick us up.

HENRIETTA. Take your time, bus driver. I'm in no hurry to get home.

UNCLE HAROLD. Do you know why she's in no hurry to get home? There's nobody there. She lives alone— except for her cats.

HENRIETTA *(brightly)*. Why don't we all talk to each other? *(BUS DRIVER picks up the bus phone.)*

UNCLE HAROLD. That phone doesn't work.

BUS DRIVER. This phone doesn't work.

HENRIETTA *(to the man)*. Can we start over again? My name is Henrietta. What's yours?

TONY *(reluctantly)*. Tony.

BUS DRIVER. Yep. She's gone.

HENRIETTA. Nice to meet you, Anthony.