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Dramatic Publishing



**A GIFT TO
REMEMBER**



ADAPTED BY JOSEPH ROBINETTE
FROM THE BOOK *A GIFT TO LAST* BY DEBBIE MACOMBER

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A GIFT TO REMEMBER

Drama. Adapted by Joseph Robinette. From the book A Gift to Last by Debbie Macomber. Cast: 6m., 8 to 11w., extras as desired. On Christmas Eve, during a snowstorm, a group of strangers are on a train to Boston from Bangor, Maine, where the airport had been shut down due to the weather. Once they reach Boston, many of the passengers hope to make connections to various destinations across the United States. A sailor is trying to get to Texas to place an engagement ring on his girlfriend's finger. A software salesman, returning from a business trip, wants to return to Los Angeles and patch things up with his wife. A recently widowed woman wishes to spend the holidays with her daughter's family in Boston. A man and his wife are attempting to reach Maryland in time for the birth of their first grandchild. And other travelers have similar desires to reach their destinations in time for Christmas. However, the train develops engine trouble, and there are track problems ahead. The passengers are suddenly forced to disembark and take shelter in a small depot in New Hampshire. Understandably disappointed and dispirited, they try to make the best of things with little success at first. Eventually, however, they begin to bond, despite their circumstances. They even find themselves beginning to accept their fate by finding ways to celebrate the true spirit of Christmas. As the former strangers become collective friends, through patience, understanding and humor, they realize the memory of this night will be a gift to remember. *One int. set. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: GD2.*

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Debbie Macomber's
A Gift to Remember

By
JOSEPH ROBINETTE

Based on the book by
DEBBIE MACOMBER



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JOSEPH ROBINETTE

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by DEBBIE MACOMBER

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(A GIFT TO REMEMBER)

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A Gift to Remember

CHARACTERS

Train Passengers:

CATHY NORRIS: Early-50s.

MATTHEW (MATT) MCHUGH: Late-30s.

ELISE JONES: Mid- to late-20s.

KATE JONES: 5-8.

LEN DAWBER: Mid-20s.

NICK BERRY: Late-20s.

KELLY BERRY: Late-20s.

SAM LARSEN: Early-50s.

LOUISE LARSEN: Early-50s.

Telephone Call Recipients**:

AMY: Mid-20s.

MADELINE: Early-30s.

PAM: Late-30s

Others:

CLAYTON KEMPER: Station master, mid-50s.

DEAN OWEN: Choir director, late-40s.

(Also TRAIN CONDUCTOR'S VOICE)

THREE WOMEN: Choir members.

TIME: Mid-1990s.

PLACE: A train depot in New Hampshire.

**May double as church choir members in Act II. See the production notes on the following page.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Extras may be used as choir members, if desired, in Act II.

For minimum casting of women, those playing Amy, Madeline and Pam may also portray the three choir members in Act II. To change their identities from the telephone call recipients, they may be costumed in seasonal attire, such as elves, reindeer, etc.

Nick and Kelly's baby is not, of course, a real child, but what they carry should resemble, as closely as possible, a five-week old infant. Perhaps a doll, wearing a baby cap and wrapped in a blanket will give the illusion of a real child. From time to time, the parents may feed the baby from a bottle.

A Gift to Remember

PROLOGUE

(In darkness, a TRAIN CONDUCTOR'S VOICE is heard over a speaker inside an unseen train.)

TRAIN CONDUCTOR'S VOICE. Attention, passengers. We regret to inform you that we are experiencing engine difficulties. We will be stopping in a few moments at the Abbott, New Hampshire, depot. We hope to have the problem cleared up soon. If not, you will be seated on the next train from Bangor to Boston which will be along in about four hours—perhaps longer if the storm delays that train as it did this one.

(Low murmurs of discontent are heard from the unseen passengers. The train is heard slowing to a stop.)

TRAIN CONDUCTOR'S VOICE *(cont'd)*. For those of you who wish to stay overnight in Abbott and wait for the morning train to Boston, do not go into the station. As you depart the train, take a left which leads to Platform B where shuttle vans will pick you up and bring you back tomorrow. The lodging will be compliments of the railway corporation. Please depart the train slowly, and take your luggage and all belongings with you. Kindly watch your step.

ACT I

(The lights come up on the interior of a train depot waiting room containing benches, several chairs and a few small wooden tables. A sign reading "Waiting Room A" is on the wall. Over a door leading to an unseen area is a sign reading "Waiting Room B." On a wall are four pay phones, one of which bears an "Out of Order" sign. Behind a counter is Station Master CLAYTON KEMPER. The passengers enter slowly carrying their belongings. The passengers are: CATHY NORRIS; MATTHEW MCHUGH; ELISE JONES and her daughter, KATE; LEN DAWBER, a sailor in uniform; NICK BERRY and his wife, KELLY, who carries a small, periodically crying baby wrapped in a blanket; and SAM and LOUISE LARSEN. Most murmur and complain.)

PASSENGERS *(variously)*. Can you believe this? ... Two delays in one day ... And the day's not over yet ... It's five o'clock ... The next train here won't be till nine ... Or later if the storm doesn't let up ... My plane leaves Boston in *two* hours. They've gotta get that thing repaired ... *(Etc.)*

KEMPER *(coming from behind the counter)*. Hi, folks. My name's Clayton Kemper, and I'm here to give you as much information as I can about the situation.

SAM. Based on your experience, how much longer do you think this will really take?

MATT. Yeah. When do you think we'll get out of here?

KEMPER. Now, folks, that's something I can't predict. We really won't know until they figure out what the engine problem is. *(Dissatisfied murmurs.)* I realize you're anxious to be on your way, seeing it's Christmas Eve and all. But we'll try to make you as comfortable here as we can while they're working on the problem. And if they can't fix it, the next train will be along in about four hours.

LOUISE (*a bit sarcastically*). Yes, we heard.

KEMPER. Well, there is an option that remains available. Most of the people on your train elected to stay overnight here in Abbott. There's still time to get on a shuttle bus into town.

MATT (*to NICK*). What about you two? (*The baby cries.*) It might be best for the baby.

NICK. Kelly thinks we should stay here. We need to be on a plane to Georgia tonight if possible.

LEN. I think the few of us who stayed behind all have planes to catch.

(All except CATHY agree.)

CATHY. Not me. I'm only trying to get to Boston for Christmas Eve with my daughter and her family.

KEMPER. Well, it's best that you do stay here then. When the repairs have been made, we won't have time to call all over town and round people up. If you're here, you go. If not, you'll have to wait for the first train tomorrow.

(The BABY cries.)

MATT. Could you kindly keep that baby quiet? (*He walks away.*)

NICK (*to KELLY, in a whisper*). Do something.

KELLY (*patting the baby*). I'm trying.

NICK. She cried an awful lot on the train ... I need to get away for a minute. See if you can quiet her down. (*He exits through a side door.*)

KEMPER (*to KELLY*). Why don't you go into Waiting Room B? There are only three or four people waiting in there for the train to Bangor.

KELLY (*stifling a sob*). Thank you.

(KELLY and the BABY, still crying, begin to exit into the waiting room.)

KEMPER. I'll be right behind you to put on a pot of coffee. *(To the others.)* Feel free to come and get a cup. Also, that's where the restrooms are located. Try to make yourselves as comfortable as possible.

(He watches as all, except LEN, begin to slowly spread out and sit on benches or chairs. Some read books or magazines. One or two try to nap. Another works on a crossword puzzle. Others simply try to relax. KEMPER starts to go toward the other waiting room but is stopped by LEN.)

LEN. Excuse me, Mr. Kemper. How far are we from Boston?

KEMPER. Around sixty miles.

LEN. Does this Podunk town have a car-rental agency?

KEMPER. Not right here. There's one in town. There may be a cab outside the station. Sometimes there are. But with this weather they may want to stay put for a while.

LEN. I'm willing to take a chance. I've gotta get a plane out of Boston by tomorrow morning at least. Tonight, if possible. *(He gathers up his belongings.)*

KEMPER. Do you mind if I ask how old you are?

LEN. Old enough to be in the Navy. Twenty-four.

KEMPER. Unfortunately that's not old enough to rent a car in New Hampshire. You've gotta be twenty-five.

LEN. Oh, man. This is the nineteen-nineties for crying out loud. When is this state going to get with it?

KEMPER. Yeah, we're a little behind the times in several areas, I'm afraid. But it's a nice enough state to live in.

LEN. I'll never know. That's for sure ... I wonder how much a cab ride is to Boston.

KEMPER. Won't be cheap. That's for sure. (*Calling to the others.*) Coffee will be ready in a few minutes, folks.

(He exits into the other waiting room as LEN exits to the outside. Unnoticed by ELISE, KATE has wandered over to MATT, who is now sitting. KATE carries a small book satchel with her.)

KATE. What's your name?

MATT (*grumpily*). Scrooge.

KATE. My name's Kate.

MATT. Good for you.

KATE. It's going to be Christmas tomorrow.

MATT. So I hear.

KATE. Santa Claus is coming to my grandmother's house.

MATT (*a bit sarcastically*). Good for her.

KATE. Do you want me to read to you *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*? It's my favorite book.

MATT (*flatly*). No thanks.

KATE. Santa's going to bring me a—

MATT. Listen, kid, I don't care what Santa's bringing you. I've got work to do.

(He notices two or three passengers looking disapprovingly at him as he moves to a bench near the side of the stage. He opens his briefcase and begins to work.)

LOUISE. Come over here, little girl. You can read your book to my husband and me.

KATE (*enthusiastically*). OK!

(She goes to LOUISE and SAM, takes a book from the satchel and mimes reading as MATT's flashback begins. In a spotlight at the edge of the stage, PAM, MATT's wife, enters.)

PAM. Christmas, Matt? You're leaving three days before Christmas?

MATT *(standing slowly and moving into a spotlight)*. I didn't ask for this, Pam. You know that. When Schroeder got promoted over me, she purposely sent me across the country right before Christmas so I'd know she was in charge.

PAM. Why didn't you make a fuss? Demand that one of the junior sales reps make the trip instead of you.

MATT. Pam, do you think I want to go? If ever I needed your support, I need it now.

PAM. Christmas, Matt. You're leaving three days before Christmas.

MATT. I already said it couldn't be helped.

PAM. You're going to miss Jimmy in the school play.

MATT. I already talked to him about it. *He* understands.

PAM. You were gone when Rachel had the lead in the Sunday School program.

MATT. When was that?

PAM. Three years ago. You've already forgotten.

MATT. I've got to go.

PAM. You don't have anything else to say?

MATT. So you can shovel more guilt at me? You want me to confess I'm a rotten father? OK, fine. "Matthew McHugh is a rotten father."

PAM. You aren't a bad father. It's as a husband that you've completely failed. You're leaving me to deal with Christmas—the shopping, the dinners, everything. I can't take it anymore.

MATT. Take it? Do you know how many women would love to be able to stay home with their families?

PAM. My not working was a decision we made together. If you're saying you want me to get a job, fine, consider it done.

MATT. All I'm saying is I could use a little support.

PAM. It wouldn't hurt you to support me either.

MATT. I'll be home Christmas Eve in time for dinner. My flight gets in to LAX at four, so I'll be home by six.

PAM (*flatly*). Have a good time.

MATT. I'll call you tomorrow.

PAM. Don't bother.

(Her spot slowly fades as she exits. MATT's spotlight fades as he sits and begins working again.)

KATE closes her book as LOUISE and SAM applaud.)

LOUISE. Very nice.

SAM. Thank you, young lady.

(ELISE, who has been occupied with sorting through her luggage, sees KATE with the LARSENS and goes to them.)

ELISE. There you are. She can get away from me even in a train station. I hope she wasn't bothering you.

LOUISE. To the contrary. She was entertaining us.

SAM. She's a fine little reader.

ELISE. I don't think she was reading. She has this book *memorized*.

(They laugh.)

SAM. We're the Larsens. I'm Sam.

LOUISE. I'm Louise.

ELISE. Please to meet you. I'm Elise. And this is Kate.

KATE. Mommy, your name almost rhymes with hers. Elise and Louise.

SAM. She's a bright one, all right.

ELISE. Too bright sometimes.

(They laugh as ELISE leads KATE back to their seats.)

KATE. Mommy, that man over there said his name is Scrooge.

ELISE. I think he was just teasing, dear.

KATE. Maybe so. I think his name should be The Grinch. He's not green, but he's just as mean.

ELISE. Shhh. Mr. Scrooge might hear you.

(They sit. ELISE opens KATE's satchel, takes out a book and mimes reading it to her as KEMPER enters.)

KEMPER. Coffee's nearly ready, folks. Hope you're OK with sugar cubes and powdered cream.

(Two or three people get up to go into the other waiting room.)

KEMPER *(cont'd)*. I'll be inside the little room behind the counter. My pager gets better reception in there, and I hope to have some word about the engine trouble before long.

(All wearily agree as he exits through the door behind the counter. LEN enters with his belongings and sits near CATHY, who has begun knitting.)

CATHY. Hello.

LEN. Hi.

CATHY. I overheard your conversation with Mr. Kemper. Did you have any luck?

LEN. There was a cab all right, but he was afraid to drive to Boston in this weather. Doesn't matter though. The fare is prohibitive. More money than I make in a month.

CATHY. That's too bad.

LEN. I'm Len Dawber, by the way.

CATHY. I'm Cathy Morris.

LEN. Hi. Are you catching a flight in Boston?

CATHY. Oh, no. It's actually my destination. My daughter and her family live in Boston. I'm joining them for Christmas—assuming we get there by tomorrow. Where are you headed?

LEN. Rawhide, Texas.

CATHY. Texas ... Ron and I visited Texas once. Ron wanted to see the Alamo. He's my husband ... *was* my husband. He died this October.

LEN. I'm sorry.

CATHY (*sadly*). So am I.

(A pause. LEN shakes his head in sympathy as CATHY pulls herself together.)

CATHY (*cont'd*). It's mind-boggling, isn't it, that people can fly across this country in only a few hours.

LEN. Yes, that still impresses me, too. And I'm grateful for it. I just hope I'm *on* a plane tomorrow.

CATHY. Do you have someone at home waiting for you?

LEN. My family. Even though I belong to the Navy now, I'm still a Texas boy through and through. We have cattle ranches bigger than New Hampshire. (*They laugh.*) And I have someone else waiting for me. My fiancée.

CATHY. How nice.

LEN. Well ... I may have spoken a little too soon there. She *will* be my fiancée if she accepts this.

(He takes a ring box from his pocket, opens it and shows it to CATHY.)

CATHY. Oh, my, it's ... gorgeous.

LEN. Thanks, but I wouldn't say "gorgeous." The gorgeous ones were way out of my price range.

CATHY. It's very nice. I'm sure she'll say "yes."

LEN. I hope so.

CATHY. If you get married, would you be living back in Texas?

LEN. I always thought so, but now I'm not so sure. I've kinda gotten used to this area. I enlisted right out of high school and trained in London, Connecticut. Then I was sent to the submarine base in Bangor. By the way, I was supposed to fly out of the Bangor airport today.

CATHY. I think several people were.

LEN. Anyway, I've really enjoyed the east coast. It's so different from Texas ... I wonder if Amy would like it, too. I'm seriously considering making the Navy my career. But that depends on a number of things. Amy's answer for one. *(Looking at his watch.)* I'll be calling her in a few minutes when she's back home from work.

CATHY. Where does she work?

LEN. A nursing home. She'll be at her house around six our time. She was lucky to get off this early. That's when I was supposed to be there. Christmas Eve.

CATHY. Wouldn't it be nice if we had phones with us all the time? That way you could call her whenever you wanted to.