

I HATE CHRISTMAS

A Christmas Comedy in Three Acts

by
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ACT I

SCENE I

(Mailroom at the North Pole. Played down on the thrust with several bags full of mail. DINGO and ROLLY, two elves, sit on rehearsal blocks going through the mail.)

DINGO: Mailroom duty is the pits!

ROLLY: It could be worse; we could be cleaning out the reindeer stalls.

DINGO: I guess. But, look at this. **(holds up a bunch of letters)** There's only ten days left till Christmas. We are never going to get through all this.

ROLLY: Tell me about it. There's another ten bags in the back room.

DINGO: You know, it's not the work that bothers me **(referring to himself)**; it's all this talent going to waste.

ROLLY: Research and Development... that was a sweet job.

DINGO: I was doing great in sports equipment, why did they have to transfer me to dolls? What do I know about dolls?!

ROLLY: I liked your idea.

DINGO: "Baby Head-Butt"... It could have broken into the little boy market big time. It's not like I meant to give Larry a concussion. I told him I was still tweaking it. I mean, now that I think about it, maybe a stainless steel forehead for the doll was a little over the top.

ROLLY: I hear you, Dingo. One little fire and they sent me down here.

DINGO: Well... I don't know if you would call that a little fire, Rolly.

ROLLY: Accidents will happen.

DINGO: We did almost lose the toy factory. I don't like the way things look for us right now. We're hanging on to our jobs by a thread, and once the Christmas rush is over... If we don't do something to redeem ourselves soon, I think we may end up out on the street.

ROLLY: What can we do?

DINGO: I don't know, but we better come up with something fast.

ROLLY: Come on lets get to work. **(They both open envelopes.)**

DINGO: Look at this. **(holds up a letter with writing on both sides of the pages)** This isn't a list, it's a book! It would have been easier if the kid had written down what he didn't want. No, "Thank you" for last years gifts, no "How are the elves?" or "Say Hi to Rolly and Dingo for me." No he's just got, "Dear Santa, I want"...

ROLLY: Maybe the kid was in a hurry.

DINGO: I don't think so. He included an index, cross-referenced by color and toy type. **(tosses it aside and starts opening another letter)**

ROLLY: **(has a letter)** Here's a good one. "Dear Santa, My father is very mad that he did not shoot a deer this hunting season. He says that he's going to get one before Christmas one way or another. I think you better be careful around my house." Look, he drew a picture.

DINGO: **(looks at the picture)** Holy cow, does his old man hunt with a machine gun? Look at all those bullets.

ROLLY: **(takes back letter)** I think maybe I'll add a trigger lock to this kids list. **(writes on this letter; puts it aside and starts opening the next one.)**

DINGO: Good idea. **(looking at next letter and reads)** "Dear Mr. Claus, I am sick of my mom telling me to clean up my room. Can you help me with this? Sincerely Katelyn Dugacheck." **(writing on the letter as HE speaks)** Dear Katelyn, I would be happy to help you. No toys for Christmas this year means nothing extra to clean up. Anything else I can help you with? Love Santa.

ROLLY: That was harsh.

DINGO: If you make a mess, you clean it up. That's the way life is and the sooner this kid learns that the better off she'll be.

ROLLY: Man, you are getting bitter in your old age.

DINGO: I'm not bitter.

ROLLY: "No toys for Christmas this year?" Sounds bitter to me.

DINGO: **(erases his answer and writes a new one)** All right, all right... but I'm not bitter; I'm a realist, okay? These are valuable life lessons I'm trying to teach here. A good work ethic is a very important thing to learn you know. Here, is this better? "Dear Katelyn, Good little girls listen to their mothers and clean up their rooms when they are told. Bad little girls don't get into the right colleges and usually end up with careers in the fast food industry." Better?

ROLLY: Oh yeah, much.

DINGO: Well, I like it. **(puts the letter aside)**

ROLLY: Wow, listen to this one. "Dear Santa, I hate Christmas. Why don't you do us all a favor and call the whole thing off?" It's signed, "Frankie Fine and the Misbegottens."

DINGO: Now that's bitter.
ROLLY: Who are the "Misbegottens?"
DINGO: I don't know, it kind of sounds like a rock band.
ROLLY: I wonder what could have happened to make the kid so unhappy.
DINGO: Beats me.
ROLLY: What can I say to her?
DINGO: Tell her Santa will bring her something special to cheer her up-- get her a puppy or something.
ROLLY: I don't think that's gonna do it. (**reading again**) "I hate Christmas." Nobody hates Christmas, at least no kid I ever heard of.
DINGO: What do you want to do then?
ROLLY: I don't know... something...
DINGO: Well, there's nothing we can do so... wait a minute, hold the phone... I got it! Rolly you are a genius!
ROLLY: Why? What are you thinking Dingo?
DINGO: I think I got a way to save our jobs and maybe get us into the most elite group at the North Pole.
ROLLY: What is it?
DINGO: The other guys are gonna die when they find out we're doing this.
ROLLY: Tell me what it is!
DINGO: Nothing much... just a way for you and I to become a part of the E.O.A.'s.
ROLLY: The E.O.A.'s are you kidding me?
DINGO: Nope.
ROLLY: Oh man, that would be so cool. (**a la James Bond**) The names Ringer... Rolly Ringer, "Elf On Assignment."
DINGO: I figure all we gotta do is...
ROLLY: (**sung to, "Secret Agent Man"**) "There's an elf who leads a life of danger, to everyone he meets he stays a stranger. Secret elven man, secret elven man, they've given you a number and taken 'way your name"... we do get numbers, don't we?
DINGO: Chill out, Rolly. We haven't got it yet. I figure we take this letter to the Big Guy and tell him we want to handle it ourselves. We feel a calling to help this poor child realize the joys of Christmas.
ROLLY: You think we could do it?
DINGO: All we need to do is look up this Frankie kid...
ROLLY: Frankie Fine.
DINGO: Whatever. We find some special gift she wants, Big Red drops it off on Christmas Eve and we're all set.
ROLLY: I don't know Dingo.
DINGO: She's just one little girl, how hard could it be?

(Blackout. DINGO & ROLLY exit carrying off all their stuff.)

SCENE II

(Set at the group home in the girl's dorm room. There are beds against the wall, a few tables and chairs. Each girl has a few things taped to the wall near her bed. There is a small Christmas tree in the room with a few ornaments and pieces of tinsel. The girls are dressed in rather drab sleeping apparel. They all have scripts in their hands and are playing parts from a movie script that FRANKIE has written.)

FRANKIE: (**SHE is standing on a table and reading from a script.**) "It was then that the Russian Princess realized that it was a trick. Thinking quickly, she jumped from the pirate ship and into the arms of the dashing young doctor that had just run onto the dock."
JENNY: You want me to catch you?
FRANKIE: "You'll never take me alive!" (**jumps off the table towards JENNY who cringes away from her**) Nice catch!
JENNY: I didn't want you to land on my toes again.
FRANKIE: Let's keep going. (**reading again**) "Doctor Stevens! How did you know I would be here?"
JENNY: (**reading in a low voice, trying to sound like a man**) "I had a hunch when the Gypsy woman gave you the violin that you would end up heading out to sea."
FRANKIE: "We must hurry, it isn't over yet."
TIA: (**reading**) "Running and waving her Samurai sword. Look out behind you..."
FRANKIE: No, you don't read that part, Tia. If it's in parentheses, it's a stage direction, not something the character says.
TIA: How can I be a Samurai Warrior anyway, I thought they all had to be men.

FRANKIE: They do. You're a Japanese maiden who pretended to be a man to learn the secret Samurai fighting style. You saved the king's son and he made you the first woman Samurai... we went over this.

TIA: But, we never read anything about it in the script.

FRANKIE: It's not in the script, that all happened before the story started.

TIA: Well, how would anyone watching know what happened then?

FRANKIE: It's understood.

TIA: I didn't understand it and I'm her.

FRANKIE: Tia?!

TIA: Okay, okay. *(reading)* "Look out behind you. The evil pirate, Captain Pincher, has not given up that easily"

ROSE: *(comes from behind the table followed by EMILY; ROSE is carrying a stuffed bear that SHE carries everywhere in one hand; reading)* "There she goes, Captain Pincher! Shall I run her through?"

EMILY: *(SHE has a piece of masking tape over her eye trying to make it look like an eye patch)* "No Mister Smedly..."

FRANKIE: *(waits for her to finish the line, but SHE does not)* Go on, Emily, you have more.

EMILY: Frankie, I don't want to be the evil pirates captain.

FRANKIE: Why not?

EMILY: I'm tired of being the bad guy. You always get to be the hero.

FRANKIE: Fine, I'll be Pincher. Okay. *(They trade scripts. FRANKIE pulls the eye patch off EMILY and puts it over her own eye.)* Can we go on now?

FRANKIE: *(reading)* "No, Mister Smedly, I want to take her alive."

EMILY: *(reading)* "We won't make it easy for you, Captain."

FRANKIE: *(reading)* "Why risk your friends getting hurt? I suggest that you and I settle this thing by ourselves."

TIA: *(reading)* "Watch out for this one Princess Tiffany, she's an evil scalpel."

FRANKIE: She's an evil scalpel?

TIA: *(pointing to script)* That's what it says.

FRANKIE: *(looks at TIA's script)* That's scoundrel. Who ever heard of an evil scalpel?

TIA: You really should work on your penmanship, Frankie.

FRANKIE: All creative geniuses have bad handwriting, it's a requirement.

TIA: Whatever.

FRANKIE: Okay take it from your line again.

TIA: *(reading)* "Watch out for this one Princess Tiffany, she's an evil scoundrel."

EMILY: *(reading)* "Don't worry Lady Sushi, I will take care of Captain Pincher."

FRANKIE: *(climbs up on the table again; her back is to the door; reading)* "To arms me hardys! Let's crush these good people and drive the hope from their souls." *(MISS PINCHER enters. SHE is unseen by FRANKIE, but the rest of the girls see her.)* "Evil will triumph over the righteous, because we are bigger and we are meaner and no one is meaner than Pincher! Don't give me that look Princess Tiffany, a black heart has no room for mercy." *(waits but does not hear the next line)* Come on Emily, it's your line. You didn't want to be Pincher, so at least do Princess Tiffany right.

PINCER: *(sarcastically)* I'm so disappointed, Emily. Didn't you want to be me?

EMILY: Hello, Miss Pincer.

ROSE, JENNY & TIA: Hello, Miss Pincer.

FRANKIE: Ah... Hi, Miss Pincer.

PINCER: Another one of your movie scripts, Frankie? *(takes a script from one of the girls)* Lets have a look... so I'm an evil pirates captain this time? Pirates... I think you've invented a new word.

FRANKIE: That's not you. Your name is Pincer and the captain's name is Pincher.

PINCER: *(reading from script)* "Captain Pincher, an evil woman pirate with black hair and a black heart to match. She has long fingernails with gross stuff growing underneath them that she never cleans and really icky breath, too. She lives to torture and maim little girls all over the world." Not a very flattering portrayal of me is it?

FRANKIE: It's not you.

PINCER: I've heard enough. Girls, give me these.

(SHE collects the scripts.)

FRANKIE: But those are mine!

PINCER: This is defamation of character, I could sue you if I wanted to. I could have you locked up.

FRANKIE: *(under her breath)* I'm already in jail.

PINCER: Pardon?!

FRANKIE: Nothing.

PINCER: Just remember, Miss Fine, you are a ward of the State. That means that the State can decide what to do with you. And, as far as you're concerned, I am the State and I get to decide what happens to you. *(to the other girls)* Go into the television room now. I don't think they've started the movie yet.

JENNY: What movie do we have tonight, Miss Pincer?

PINCER: I think its "Annie."

JENNY: Oh.

PINCER: Don't you girls like Annie?

FRANKIE: It's a horrible movie. It makes the little kids think some big rich guy might come and save them or something. And that's not going to happen.

PINCER: In your case I'm sure that's true. Now go! (**FRANKIE climbs off the table and starts to leave. The other girls exit.**) No. Not you Frankie. Since you hate the movie so much, we'll just have to find something else for you to do. Now what would be a suitable punishment for this blatant attack on me?

FRANKIE: I don't know, watching "Annie" sounds like a pretty good torture to me.

PINCER: You owe me five hundred.

FRANKIE: Five hundred?!

PINCER: That's right. On my desk tomorrow morning, before you go to eat breakfast.

FRANKIE: That will take me all night.

PINCER: Maybe you'll remember that the next time you decide to write something like this. You need to learn respect for people, Frankie. I'm only caring for your welfare.

FRANKIE: You care for me any more and I'll end up with carpel tunnel.

PINCER: It's one thousand now.

FRANKIE: What?! One thousand is ridiculous!

PINCER: If you keep pitting yourself against me, you're going to loose. Any more smart comments?

FRANKIE: No ma'am.

PINCER: You can do things the easy way or the hard way. When you pick the hard way you pay the price. And today the price is one thousand. I can come up with much worse punishments. You keep pushing me and you'll find that out. No numbers, no food. (**exits**)

FRANKIE: (**gets some paper and a pencil; SHE plops down at the table SHE was standing on; SHE talks as SHE writes**) One thousand minus one equals nine hundred and ninety-nine. Nine hundred and ninety-nine minus one equals nine hundred and ninety-eight. Nine hundred and ninety eight minus one... (**throws down the pencil and paces around**) Poor little tree. You were cut down before you had a chance to grow up at all...I think I know how you feel. Now, don't take this the wrong way, but you didn't turn out to be much of a Christmas tree. It's not your fault--we just don't have a lot of ornaments or any lights to put on you. It's not very fair is it? (**walks back to the table and sits down**) There's a lot of things that aren't fair, but there's not much you can do... but... what little you can do, you gotta. (**crinkles up the paper SHE was writing on**) It's not like the foods any good around here anyway. (**starts writing again**) "Princess Tiffany's Revenge! Princess Tiffany was not about to take the evil plotting of Captain Pincher lying down..." (**Lights slowly fade**) "She invited Lady Sushi and Doctor Stevens up to her high-rise apartment. This would be her greatest adventure ever..."

(**Blackout**)

SCENE III

(**Later that night inside the girl's dorm room. All of them are in their beds. SARA is sitting at the table with a book.**)

SARA: (**reading**) "Before Penny could pick herself up off the floor, the great shaggy dog was on top of her. His big wet tongue covering her with big dog kisses. Charlie was her dog now." And that's the end. (**closes the book**)

TIA: I wish I could have a dog.

ROSE: What kind of dog would you want?

TIA: A Golden Retriever, a big one that would run with me when I jog.

ROSE: I'd like to have one of those little dogs that look like a mop.

JENNY: Not me. I want a wolf.

EMILY: You can't keep wolves as pets.

JENNY: Why not?

EMILY: Because they eat their young, that's why.

JENNY: No they don't. Do they, Sara?

SARA: I don't know that I've ever heard of a wolf eating its own pups. I think Emily is worried that wolves would be more likely to bite you Jenny.

JENNY: I would teach him to be nice and only bite the people I didn't like.

SARA: What about you, Frankie? What kind of dog would you want?

FRANKIE: I don't want a dog. I'm gonna capture a lion cub and train her to obey hand signals. One flick of my finger and she'll be at someone's throat.

SARA: That doesn't sound like a very nice pet.

FRANKIE: Having a lion around will help to discourage my fans from mobbing me when I go out in public.

EMILY: If your lion attacks someone you could be sued. You're liable for your pet's actions you know.

FRANKIE: She won't attack unless I tell her to.

EMILY: What if you had babies, Frankie? The lion could eat them and you wouldn't even know it.

JENNY: What is it with you tonight? Wolves eating puppies, lions eating babies... you're giving me the creeps, Emily.

EMILY: I'm just being practical.

ROSE: Are you gonna get a dog, Sara?

TIA: Yeah, you're busting out of here soon. You can do whatever you want.

SARA: I think I'd be like Rose and get a little mop dog. But, I'm going to college. I don't think they let you have dogs there. And I have my night job I'll be working at to help pay for things. I wouldn't get to be with a dog very much and don't think that would be fair to him.

FRANKIE: So you wouldn't leave a dog alone, but you don't care about leaving us here alone.

SARA: The college isn't that far--I'll come back to visit. And since when did Frankie Fine need anyone else to protect her?

EMILY: But we'll miss you, Sara. Who will read stories to us at night?

JENNY: Who's gonna help me with my math homework?

ROSE: Super Bear says that you need to stay with us, Sara. He can't protect you if you leave the home.

SARA: **(taking the bear from ROSE)** Now listen up, Super Bear. I'll be just fine at the college, okay? But I need you to promise me that you will watch over Rose while I'm away. Can you do that for me? **(holds the bear up to her ear)** Good. He says that he won't let anything happen to you Rose. **(hands the bear back to her)**

ROSE: I'm not worried about me, Sara. But I think if you aren't here to stop her, Miss Pincer may kill Frankie or something. **(whispering to SARA)** Miss Pincer doesn't like Frankie too much I don't think.

JENNY: Yeah. If it weren't for you Frankie would have been in Correctional School two years ago.

FRANKIE: Don't worry about me. I can handle Pincer.

SARA: You shouldn't try to "handle" her, Frankie. You need to start doing what she tells you. And stop making her the bad guy in all your movie scripts. Jenny's right--she could send you away if she wanted to. I don't want to see you at Youth Correctional. That place isn't very nice.

JENNY: Yeah, Frankie, I've heard awful things about it. In Correctional they don't give you numbers when you're bad--they hook you up to machines.

EMILY: Yes, they call it electro-shock-therapy. I read about it. They shoot thousands of volts through your body, your hair starts to burn, and they put a stick in your mouth so you don't bite off your tongue.

ROSE: That sounds horrible.

SARA: I don't think they shock them, Emily.

EMILY: Oh yes, I read it.

TIA: I heard that they hire ex-convicts to be guards there.

JENNY: And the only TV they let you watch is like the history channel or something.

TIA: And they serve oatmeal three times a day. They never let you have meat.

SARA: You're thinking of *Oliver Twist*, Tia. I don't think it would be as bad as that. But, I think it would make you wish you were back here at the home.

FRANKIE: Look, can we talk about something else besides my going to kid prison?

SARA: I think that's a good idea. Are you getting excited about Christmas, girls? It's only a week away now.

JENNY: We're still waiting to get our shopping allowance and for somebody to take us to the store. Twenty bucks each to buy presents for the four other girls. I guess I can forget about getting a Nintendo this year.

TIA: I know. I see all these great things I want to buy you guys... five dollars each doesn't leave you much to work with.

ROSE: I liked the art set you got me last year, Tia.

SARA: We always get nice gifts from the Toys-for-Tikes people. Those are exciting to open, aren't they?

JENNY: I got a "See-and-Say" last year. I'm thirteen years old! I've known what farm animals sound like for ten years.

SARA: Oh come on--it's not that bad.

JENNY: Well, that one year I got electronic battleship. That was cool.

SARA: And, Tia, you got a nice tape player. Rose, I still see you driving Barbies around in the car they gave you last year. What did you get last year, Em?

EMILY: I think my favorite gift from last year was the used dictionary that Frankie found for me.

ROSE: And there's Santa. He won't forget about us again this year.

SARA: See? There's a lot to look forward to. Come on, Frankie, there must be something that you like about Christmas.

FRANKIE: Christmas?! I think I'd rather hear more about Correctional.

SARA: Frankie, you're such a Scrooge. You gave Emily her favorite present last year. Doesn't that make you feel good?
FRANKIE: I got detention for two weeks.
SARA: Well you should have stayed with the group at Wally Mart. Going to the second hand bookstore by yourself, without telling anyone... you knew you would get in trouble for that.
FRANKIE: I hate Christmas. I'm sorry, I just do. They'll make us watch some stupid parade on TV and we'll have to see a bunch of sappy movies with happy endings. All the other kids go visit relatives or find new bikes parked in their living rooms. They get to be tucked by their parents on Christmas Eve... We get some cheap little presents and come back to this crummy room with this crummy little tree. Look at this tree... they didn't even give us a string of light to put on it. I hate it. I wish there wasn't such a thing as Christmas... **(almost in tears)**... I'm going to sleep, so just leave me alone.
ROSE: **(walks up to FRANKIE)** Frankie?
FRANKIE: What is it, Rose?
ROSE: Do you want to sleep with Super Bear tonight?
FRANKIE: Um... sure. He might get lonely without you though, Rose. Why don't you both climb in here with me?
ROSE: Okay. **(SHE climbs in FRANKIE's bed.)**
SARA: It's time we all went to sleep anyway. **(walks around checking all the girls)** Come on everybody get under the covers now. It's supposed to be cold tonight so everyone snuggle in. **(SHE is at the light switch by the door now.)** Okay, whose turn is it tonight?
JENNY: We're too old for that, Sara.
SARA: No you're not... come on...
TIA: Oh, all right, it's my turn then.
SARA: Make a wish.
TIA: I know. **(SHE sits up in bed and blows very hard at the ceiling.)**

(SARA flicks her hand on the light switch and there is a Blackout.)

SARA: Goodnight, ladies.
ALL: Goodnight, Sara.

(SARA closes the door behind her and there is a brief silence.)

EMILY: Sara's wrong. They do use electro-shock at Correctional. I read it.
JENNY: Shut up already, Emily!

SCENE IV

(MISS PINCER's office. This is played on one of the platforms. SHE has a desk, a bookcase, or file cabinet. ROLLY and DINGO sit in the two chairs opposite the desk. DINGO is now dressed in overalls and ROLLY is dressed as a woman.)

ROLLY: I really feel stupid in this dress.
DINGO: You look fine.
ROLLY: This is not what I thought being an "Elf On Assignment" would be like.
DINGO: You want to help that little girl, don't you?
ROLLY: Yeah. But why do I have to be the teacher?
DINGO: Because I need to be the new maintenance man. I'm better at fixing things.
ROLLY: I'm an elf, Dingo. I'm good at fixing things, too.
DINGO: Let's just say that I'm better at fixing things without setting them on fire.
ROLLY: At least I didn't put anyone in the hospital.
DINGO: Whatever. This Pincer lady is going to walk through the door any minute. Are you all set on your story?
ROLLY: Why couldn't I be a guy teacher?
DINGO: It's an all girl school, Rolly. They don't hire male teachers here.
ROLLY: Oh fine!
DINGO: Are we done with that now? Can we go on with this thing? This is our first case. We can't blow it. Are you ready to take this serious and start acting like a professional now? **(giggles)**
ROLLY: What?
DINGO: Man, you are one ugly woman.
ROLLY: That's it, I'm leaving. **(gets up to go)**

PINCER: **(enters)** Good morning. **(to ROLLY)** Please, take a seat. **(sits at her desk and looks over some papers)**
Now, you're Miss Rollena Ringer. Is that correct?

ROLLY: **(now trying to affect a woman's voice)** That's right.

PINCER: And you're Mr. Glitter?

DINGO: You got it.

PINCER: I hope you don't mind my talking with you both at once. I'm very busy and I thought I'd kill two birds with one stone. The only thing I hate more than wasting time is repeating myself. Don't you agree?

ROLLY: **(has been fidgeting with his clothes)** What?

PINCER: **(clears her throat)** As you are already aware, this is a group home for girls that have nowhere else to go.

DINGO: You mean it's an orphanage.

PINCER: Orphanage is an outdated term. We are a home for girls that would otherwise be homeless. We take care of all their needs, schooling included. **(to ROLLY)** All of my teachers are also counselors of sorts. They work with the girls and help prepare them for the real world. What these girls need most is discipline. I can't have teachers who allow themselves to be steamrolled or can be taken in by a sob story. And every girl in here has one, I can assure you. We have to see past that in order to give them what they need: stern, structured, lessons for life. Do you understand, Miss Ringer?

ROLLY: Me? Oh, sure I do. "Spare the rod and spoil the child," I always say. A "tough love" kind of thing is what you're talking about. Right?

PINCER: Close enough I suppose... **(checking ROLLY over)**...I guess you'll do. Now, Mr. Glitter, I'm rather surprised to see you actually. I've had a request into the City for a very long time trying to get a full time maintenance person on staff.

DINGO: I guess they were just waiting for the right guy to fill the job.

PINCER: I hope you're right. This is a very old building and we have lots of things that need your attention. The boiler sounds like it's about to explode and the pipes make so much noise when it is running that you can hardly hear yourself in the classrooms. The noise wouldn't be so bad if the thing actually produced a decent amount of heat. Which it doesn't. Beyond that, half the florescent lights in the building need to be replaced, the water coming out of the faucets is orange, and we haven't had a paint job around here in twenty years. Do you think you can handle it? Any questions?

DINGO: What do you want me to do after lunch?

PINCER: Was that a joke?

DINGO: I thought it was when I said it... now I'm not so sure.

PINCER: I don't like jokes. I find them silly and a waste of time.

ROLLY: Don't you like to laugh? Everyone likes to laugh.

PINCER: I don't.

ROLLY: Oh come on... **(getting up and going behind PINCER)**

DINGO: Rollena...

ROLLY: I'll bet you're ticklish and you don't want anyone to know it.

PINCER: What are you doing, Miss... **(starts to laugh as ROLLY tickles her)** Stop... **(still laughing)**.

ROLLY: Now, doesn't that feel good?

PINCER: **(pushing him away)** Enough! Don't ever do that again.

ROLLY: I just wanted to show you...

PINCER: I don't care what you wanted, doing... that to another person is not acceptable behavior. Is that clear?

ROLLY: Yes, Sir.

PINCER: I'm going to keep my eye on you.

ROLLY: **(sitting back down)** Sorry.

PINCER: Now... **(takes a moment to compose herself and look at the papers one more time)** I see that you're fully qualified on all the general subjects. You will be taking over the math class starting tomorrow.

ROLLY: Math?

PINCER: That's right. Do you have a problem with teaching math?

ROLLY: No, Sir.

PINCER: Good. You... **(points to DINGO)**

DINGO: I'm really lousy at math...

PINCER: That's a shame, but it's hardly a necessity to get the boiler working. I expect to wake up to a nice toasty room in the morning.

DINGO: Not a problem. Do you smoke in bed?

PINCER: Is that another joke?!

DINGO: Yes, Sir, sorry.

PINCER: Now, Mr. Glitter. You will be the only man that we have living on the premises. As such, you will be the sole male role model these girls have. They must learn from you what to expect from men in the outside world. Therefore I expect you to ignore them.

ROLLY: Now that's bitter.

PINCER: What was that?

ROLLY: Nothing.

PINCER: I hope you're not going to be trouble.

ROLLY: No, Sir.

PINCER: Are you clear on how to act around the girls now, Mr. Glitter?

DINGO: Yes, Sir.

PINCER: **(standing up)** Good. I have some forms for you both to sign. I'll get those and be right back. **(exits)**

DINGO: That is one hard woman.

ROLLY: She scares me.

DINGO: I have a feeling this isn't going to be as easy as we thought.

ROLLY: I can't believe I'm the math teacher. I can't even balance my own checkbook.

DINGO: You don't have a checkbook.

ROLLY: See?

DINGO: We won't be here that long; just teach them what you know.

ROLLY: That'll take about five minutes.

DINGO: Would you stop complaining? **(imitating ROLLY)** "I don't want to be the teacher, I don't want to be a woman, I don't know anything about math." You don't see me crying over here, do you? Come on, we're here to help the little girl, right? Remember the Elf credo, "When it snows, make a snowman."

ROLLY: I don't even know what the heck that means!

DINGO: Nobody does, that's the point.

PINCER: **(enters with papers)** Mr. Glitter, you can come back and sign these later. I just found out that the toilets are backing up in the bathroom. You can start your new job by taking care of that. Come along I'll show you where they are. **(exits)**

DINGO: Toilets?! I get to what?!

ROLLY: You get to go make a snowman.

DINGO: Shut up, Rolly.

(Blackout)

SCENE V

(In the girls' room; they are spread out working on various things.)

TIA: Why do they make us read all this junk? All these stories are the same. Either some kid is lost in the wilderness or they want to buy a dog.

EMILY: Those books are classics, Tia. I read them all years ago.

TIA: So what have they got you studying in the advanced reading class?

EMILY: We got to pick our own books this time. I'm reading *A Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens. What are you reading Jenny?

JENNY: *Peanuts*, by Charles Schulz.

SARA: **(looking over ROSE's paper)** Okay, Rose, you did pretty well on your spelling words, but there's a couple we need to work on. First of all knife is spelled with a "k."

ROSE: Are you sure? It doesn't sound like there's a "k" in it.

SARA: Yes, I'm sure. It's right in the beginning. K-N-I-F-E, spells knife. The "k" is silent.

ROSE: If it's silent, why put it in?

SARA: That's a good question. I wish I had a good answer. There are just some words that have extra letters thrown into them and we need to remember what they are. You have a couple of words like that here, knife, and knee, and phone starts with a "ph."

FRANKIE: **(who has been working on a paper)** That just kills me. **(picks up the dictionary and looks at the cover)** Was this Webster guy drunk or something? Dumb spelled with a "b." Was he trying to be funny?

(knock at the door)

JENNY: Who could that be?

FRANKIE: Nobody we know knocks. **(opens the door)**

ROLLY: **(enters followed by DINGO)** Hello everyone. My name is Miss Ringer, and I'm going to be your new teacher. I thought I would come around to meet you all before I started teaching my classes.

FRANKIE: (**offers her hand and they shake**) Frankie Fine's the name. And these are the Misbegottens. That's Rose, Jenny, Tia, Emily's the one with her nose in the book, and this is Sara. Say "hi" to the new boss, girls.

JENNY/ROSE/TIA: Hi... Hello... Hey.

EMILY: (**does a curtsy**) How do you do, Miss Ringer.

ROLLY: (**attempts a curtsy back**) Please don't call me Miss Ringer. It makes me sound like a broken phone or something. My name is Rollena.

SARA: What subject will you be teaching, Rollena?

ROLLY: (**painfully**) Math.

FRANKIE: Good luck.

ROLLY: I'll need it.

FRANKIE: Who's the smelly guy next to you?

DINGO: (**to ROLLY**) I told you I should have washed up first. (**to the girls**) I just finished fixing some backed up toilets. I'm Dingo, the new maintenance man.

FRANKIE: Remind me to cross maintenance man of my list of career choices.

SARA: Dingo... I don't think I've ever heard that name before.

DINGO: Really? It's very popular where I come from.

TIA: Where's that?

ROLLY: The North...

DINGO: North... Australia actually.

EMILY: Oh, I see. Dingo, like the wild dogs that live in Australia.

ROLLY: You're named after a dog?

DINGO: (**gives ROLLY "the look"**) Anywho, I'm the new fix-it-man around here, so if you need something fixed I'm the guy to see.

FRANKIE: How about fixing the English language?

SARA: I was just trying to help Rose learn her spelling words. We're having some trouble with a few of them.

DINGO: Oh Yeah? Lemme take a look. (**looks at ROSE's paper**)

ROSE: Did you know that "knife" had a "k" in it?

DINGO: I see you've got a couple of Cremlockian words in here.

ROSE: Cremlockian?

DINGO: You mean you've never heard of the Cremlocks? What do they teach you around here? You see, the Cremlocks moved to this country a long time ago and they had a heck of a time trying to spell the words right... words like these on your paper. It was really embarrassing for them. So what they decided to do was to pronounce every word exactly how it was spelled. You can't hardly understand what they're saying half the time, but man can they spell. Whenever I have hard words like this I always say them in Cremlockian so I can spell them right. Like this word here, (**points to the paper**) Knife, would be k-nif-e. You see? Now, how would you say this one?

ROSE: K-nee?

DINGO: Right! Knee is pronounced k-nee.

ROSE: How would you say phone?

DINGO: Phone becomes p-hon-e. Try it.

ROSE: Phone... p-hon-e... P-H-O-N-E. Did I get it right?

DINGO: Yep.

SARA: That's a nice trick.

ROSE: Thank you, Mr. Dingo.

DINGO: You're welcome, Rosey.

ROSE: (**Super Bear whispers in her ear.**) Super Bear says he thinks you're smart.

DINGO: Oh yeah? Can I see him for a second? (**looks over the bear**) You've had him a long time, haven't you, Rosey?

EMILY: Yes and she's been talking to him forever too. I keep telling her that she's too old to be talking to stuffed animals. But she just goes right on doing it.

DINGO: You just keep talking to him, Rosey. This isn't just a stuffed animal, Emily; he's real now. Look at how worn down he is with the love that got rubbed in. He's real all right.

EMILY: Well if he's real, how come only Rose can talk to him?

DINGO: I can talk to him. (**puts the bear up to his ear**) He says that Rose loves him very much and that she is the one who made him real.

EMILY: You made that up. He didn't say anything.

ROSE: He does too talk!

DINGO: Okay, hold on... Super Bear, tell me something about Emily. (**puts bear up to his ear**) He says you read a lot.

EMILY: You saw me reading when you came in here. That doesn't mean anything.

DINGO: He says your favorite book is *The Wizard of Oz*, he says you hate peas, that up until about a year ago you had a lisp, your favorite color is pink, that you won the school spelling bee three years in a row, and that you snore sometimes.

EMILY: How did you know all that?

DINGO: I didn't - he did. **(gives the bear back to ROSE)**

ROSE: I told you he could talk.

SARA: How did you do that?

DINGO: All Elv... Australians can talk to toys. It's a gift.

SARA: Really, I never heard that before.

DINGO: Why are you in here, Sara? You seem a little old to be living with these girls.

SARA: Each room has an older girl assigned to it, to kind of look after the younger ones. I help them with their homework and tuck them in.

DINGO: You seem pretty good at it. They like you.

SARA: I like them, too. It doesn't make it very easy when it's time to leave though. I'll be going to college in a few days. I worry what will happen to them.

DINGO: I think they're going to be fine.

ROLLY: So, Frankie, what do you want for Christmas?

DINGO: **(pulls ROLLY aside)** Subtle, Rolly, really smooth...

FRANKIE: What do I want? I want it to be over.

SARA: Frankie is the self-appointed Grinch of the room.

FRANKIE: Why ask for stuff that you're never going to get? Christmas is for real kids with real families.

ROLLY: Christmas is for everyone. It's magic. Anything can happen, and Christmas Eve is the most magical night of all.

FRANKIE: You think so? When I was three years old, my mother took me for a drive on Christmas Eve. She told me we were going to see Santa Claus. She left me on the steps of this place and drove away. I never saw her again. What do I want for Christmas? I want a mother that thinks I'm more important than her bad habits. I want all of us to wake up in real beds with real presents to open.

(SARA goes over and hugs FRANKIE. DINGO takes ROLLY downstage.)

DINGO: This is not gonna be easy.

(Blackout, End Act I)

ACT II

SCENE I

(The girls pull chairs that were spread around in their room downstage facing stage right. A blackboard is rolled in upstage of the chairs facing the audience. The girls sit in the chairs, and ROLLY is at the blackboard. There are books open on a stool next to the board.)

ROLLY: Hi everybody, um... welcome to math class. Now, from what I understand you're starting a unit on fractions today. Is that right?

EMILY: Yes. Before Mrs. Luebeck left, we were going to begin on fractions.

ROLLY: Great. Now, who can tell me what a fraction is? Any ideas? **(waits)** Look, the book says that the first thing we do in this lesson is discuss what you think a fraction is, so somebody has to say something. **(waits)** Fine. **(picks up the book and reads)** I think that a fraction is... "A part or an increment of a whole number. It is a designation of a number or quantity that is less than one." Do you understand what a fraction is now?

TIA: No.

ROLLY: Okay... well at least you're speaking. What part don't you understand?

TIA: All of it.

ROLLY: Can anyone help Tia out?

JENNY: Isn't that your job.

ROLLY: Yes but... **(switches to a different book and reads)** ..."A classroom should be run like a team with all the players helping each other to win the game of knowledge." **(waits)** Look, I'm striking out here and I need someone to pinch hit for me. Does anybody know what the heck this thing I just read about fractions means?

ROSE: I had a fracture on my arm when I fell off the swing set last year.

FRANKIE: That was a fracture, Rose.

ROLLY: **(puts down the books and goes to the blackboard)** Okay lets try this. **(draws a circle on the board)** Let's say we have a chocolate pie.

TIA: I'm allergic to chocolate.

ROLLY: Okay, then it's a cherry pie.

JENNY: I don't like cherry pie.

ROLLY: Everybody likes cherry pie.

JENNY: I don't.

ROLLY: Okay fine. It's a fruitcake-flavored pie. Does everybody hate fruitcake? **(They all nod.)** Good. It's a fruitcake pie, and we need to cut it up and eat it or Aunt Betsy's feelings are going to be hurt. So... **(draws a line through the middle of the pie)** If we cut the pie like this, what do we have?

FRANKIE: Two pieces.

ROLLY: That's one way to look at it. Another way is that we had a whole pie and now we have two...? Fine. **(draws H-L-F on the board)** Does anybody want to buy a vowel?

EMILY: Half?

ROLLY: Yes!! We have two halves. Now if we cut the pie again... **(draws a horizontal line through the middle of the circle)** ...Now what do we have?

FRANKIE: Four pieces?

ROLLY: No.

EMILY: Four halves?

ROLLY: No. See, we've cut the pie into four equal parts. Now, if I give this piece to Frankie. **(colors in one of the quarters)**

FRANKIE: I don't like fruitcake.

ROLLY: Nobody likes fruitcake. Anyway, Aunt Bobby is going to become hysterical if no one eats the desert she brought.

JENNY: I thought you said it was Aunt Betsy's pie.

ROLLY: Aunt Betsy and Aunt Bobby both made the pie. They're the weird sisters on your father's side that live together and everybody is a little afraid of. And the last time they brought something to Christmas dinner that didn't get eaten... your cat mysteriously disappeared... Now where was I?

TIA: Frankie's got a piece of pie.

ROLLY: Right. So, if Frankie has one piece of the pie that we cut into fourths she has...

EMILY: One fourth?

ROLLY: Yes!! **(colors in two more quarters)** And if I give two pieces to Jenny...

JENNY: Why do I have to eat...

ROLLY: Remember the cat! If I give you two pieces, Jenny, how much do you have?

JENNY: Two fourths.

ROLLY: Great! So how much of the pie is gone now?

EMILY: Three fourths is gone.

ROLLY: And how much is left?

TIA: One fourth is left.

ROLLY: Excellent! Frankie, are you getting this so far? **(gets no response)** Frankie?

FRANKIE: Yeah, whatever, I'm fine.

ROLLY: **(draws another circle with three lines cutting it into six parts)** Now let's say we have another pie.

ROSE: What flavor is this one?

ROLLY: We don't know; it's covered with whip cream. How many pieces have we cut it into?

ROSE: Six pieces.

ROLLY: And if we give a piece to Tia, **(colors one in)** how much have you eaten?

TIA: Um... one sixth?

ROLLY: That's right! And do you know what?

TIA: What?

ROLLY: You're breaking out in hives because it was a chocolate cream pie. So Tia's scratching away and she's a little miffed at me for giving it to her, **(colors in another section)**, so she takes one of the pieces and throws it at me. Now we've taken...?

JENNY: Two sixths.

ROLLY: Right and Jenny takes out two more slices, **(colors two more in)** and she throws one at Frankie and one at Emily.

EMILY: Now you've taken four sixths.

ROLLY: And Rose, **(colors in the fifth piece)**, who loves chocolate cream pie, takes one of the pieces back to her chair and gobbles it up. Now how much have we used?

ROSE: Five sixths?

ROLLY: Exact-a-mundo! And how much of the pie is left Frankie?

FRANKIE: I hate math.

ROLLY: Everybody hates math; it's like fruitcake. But you need to learn this. Am I going too fast?

FRANKIE: Just go ahead, okay?

ROLLY: Okay... now it gets a little trickier... **(writes on board)** ...we write one quarter of a pie like this. One over four, so if we add $1/4 + 1/4$ we get...?

EMILY: Two fourths.

ROLLY: **(writes the problem on the board)** And if we add $2/6 + 2/6$ we get...?

JENNY: Four sixths.

PINCER: **(enters)** Good morning, girls.

ALL: Good morning, Miss Pincer.

PINCER: Working on fractions, I see. How's Miss Ringer doing?

ROSE: We're having fun. We had a pie fight and everything.

PINCER: A pie fight? **(to ROLLY)** I hope you've done more than play with the girls this morning, Miss Ringer.

ROLLY: Oh, sure we have. I think they've got it.

PINCER: Really? Mind if I check for myself? **(writes 2/5 + 1/5 on the board)** Now, who can tell me the answer to this?
(They all raise their hands but FRANKIE.) Frankie, can you tell me the answer?

FRANKIE: It's... it's... three fifths?

ROLLY: Yes!!

PINCER: **(dusts the chalk from her hands)** That's right. Well, I guess you are managing to teach them something.
(hands ROLLY an envelope) Here. The girls get a special allowance to buy each other Christmas presents. I need you to take this group shopping when you are through with your lesson. Mrs. Gerber was supposed to take them today, but she's out sick for the rest of the week. They get twenty dollars each. That's five dollars to spend on each girl in the room. Make sure none of them pockets it. Wally Mart is a two-block walk. Be back by lunch time. **(exits)**

ROLLY: Thank you Miss Pincer... Is she always like that? **(shakes like HE got a cold chill)** Okay! Lesson's over. Let's go Christmas shopping!

FRANKIE: Five bucks a piece... you can't buy anything for that.

ROLLY: Frankie. Isn't Miss Pincer enough of an iceberg around here without you making us go cold, too? Now, do you girls want to buy presents for everyone or would you like to do a Secret Santa?

EMILY: Secret Santa?

ROLLY: Sure. Instead of buying for four people we put all your names in a hat and then you can spend the whole twenty dollars on one of the girls. What do you think?

TIA: That sounds kind of cool.

EMILY: Yeah, I like that idea.

ROLLY: Frankie?

FRANKIE: Sure... But we still won't get much at Wally Mart for that.

ROLLY: Who says we're going to Wally Mart?

JENNY: Where are we going then?

ROLLY: I saw a flea market down the street.

EMILY: A flea market?! That would be wonderful.

ROSE: But won't Miss Pincer be mad if we don't go to Wally Mart?

ROLLY: She won't know if we don't tell her.

(Blackout)

SCENE II

(The scene takes place in the girls' room later that night. ROLLY and EMILY are working on a dollhouse that is in bad shape. DINGO and FRANKIE are up in the broom closet set which will be lit when noted later in the scene.)

ROLLY: It's not too bad.

EMILY: It's a wreck. I just thought how much Rose would love to have a dollhouse. I thought if I could glue it or something.

ROLLY: It's going to be great, Emily. **(HE has some small tools out and is working on some pieces of it.)** Take this piece and sand some off on this side.

EMILY: **(takes the piece and starts sanding)** You really think it will be okay?

ROLLY: This is going to be the best dollhouse you've ever seen. Once we paint it and fix some of the broken parts, it's going to be beautiful. A gift like this, that you work on yourself, is what Christmas is all about. You just wait! When Rose opens this up she's gonna to be thrilled.

EMILY: Do you think so?

ROLLY: Absolutely. It's nice that it matters so much to you.

EMILY: We all kind of keep an eye out for Rose. It can be pretty hard for a girl her age to be around here.

ROLLY: I think it can be pretty hard for all of you.

EMILY: We all handle it differently I suppose. Tia has her sports, Frankie has her movie scripts, and Jenny has Frankie...

ROLLY: And you have your books.

EMILY: Yeah.

ROLLY: I think all you guys are turning out to be pretty good kids and you'll probably end up being good-hearted grownups.

EMILY: I guess. I worry about Frankie though. She's so angry all the time. There are a lot of girls in here who let it get the best of them. They start out angry and they end up being mean.

ROLLY: You're a smart little girl, Emily. "Old beyond your years," my mom would say... not about me of course. I worry about Frankie, too. What do you think we should do?

EMILY: I don't know. You're not like the other teachers, Rollena. You're nice and you care about us... and your math class was like nothing I've ever done before.

ROLLY: Me neither...

EMILY: What?

ROLLY: Nothing. Don't worry about Frankie, Emily. Dingo and I are on the case.

EMILY: I've been meaning to ask you about Mr. Dingo. Is he your boyfriend or something?

(Blackout on ROLLY & EMILY; lights up on the broom closet; DINGO & FRANKIE are working on an old kidzie-type computer)

FRANKIE: **(sarcastically)** Nice office you've got here.

DINGO: You take what you can get. I've had worse.

FRANKIE: Do you think you can do anything with it? Rollena thought you might be able to fix it.

DINGO: Well, it's already working, but this is more of a toy than a computer, Frankie. It was never meant to do the things you want it to. This is for math and spelling games; it's not like a real computer.

FRANKIE: But Emily needs a computer. She's so smart and she always wants to look things up. The guy at the flea market gave me these, too. **(shows DINGO some CDs)** It's a complete set of encyclopedias. And this one has all the plays of Shakespeare on it. I know she would love these.

DINGO: There's no place to put CDs into this. There's no port for them, and I'm pretty sure the hardware on this was never meant to carry programs like that.

FRANKIE: But you gotta make it work, Dingo. Rollena said she thought you could make anything work. She acted like you were some kind of genius or something.

DINGO: Genius? Well, I guess I am genius of sorts... **(looking the computer over again)** way ahead of my time actually...

FRANKIE: Can you do it, Mr. Dingo? There's gotta be a way.

DINGO: I suppose... yes, maybe if I... of course, I don't have any of that here... different chips could carry it... but the way this is made... well, maybe...

FRANKIE: Will it work?

DINGO: Not with what I have here, but I have some friends that I think could handle it, if I drew up the schematic the way I'm thinking... we'll give it a shot. You leave it with me and I'll try and get it off to them tonight.

FRANKIE: Get it off to them? But, I need it back by Christmas, Mr. Dingo!

DINGO: Don't you worry about that. Getting things done by Christmas, that's a specialty of ours.

FRANKIE: Thank you, Mr. Dingo. But I hardly have any money left over to pay for the stuff you're talking about.

DINGO: How much have you got?

FRANKIE: Two dollars and seventy-three cents.

DINGO: Here. **(SHE gives him the money.)** I'm a careful shopper. I think I can stretch this to cover the parts.

FRANKIE: Thanks.

DINGO: I'm almost afraid to ask this, but what do you think you'd like to see under the tree on Christmas morning?

FRANKIE: I guess I did go a little nuts the last time someone asked me that. It's just hard when what you want doesn't come in a box.

DINGO: Yeah, I'm starting to see that. If you had a magic wand and you could wave it at anything, what would you change? What would you wave it at?

FRANKIE: I don't know. Maybe wave it at Pincher to make her disappear. Change things so that Sara could stay with us. Make Steven Spielberg call me up about making one of my movies. Maybe hit my mother over the head with it so she would want me again. Lots of things. I don't suppose you've got a magic wand on you somewhere?

DINGO: I wish I did.

FRANKIE: What would you wave it at, Mr. Dingo?

DINGO: What would I wave it at? A week ago I would have had a lot of things I wanted to change. A lot of those things don't seem important any more. Don't worry about the computer; I'll take care of it.

FRANKIE: Thanks, Mr. Dingo. Um, Mr. Dingo? A couple of the girls and I have been wondering... is Miss Rollena your girl friend or something?

End of free preview