

SANTAPHOBIA

By Kamron Klitgaard

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SYNOPSIS: Alice Gruber, a wealthy widow, must cure her estranged children of their fear of Santa Claus in order to redeem her and her late husband's souls. She offers each of her grown children and their families a portion of her vast estate if they will but spend Christmas Eve with her in the Gruber mansion. But each sibling is determined to scare the others away so that they can keep the entire fortune for themselves (Scooby Doo style!) but instead of ghosts, they use the fear of Santa to do their scaring. After an action packed night of fake Santa scaring, booby traps, and a visit from the real Santa Claus, Alice must break her promise and reveal her late husband's dreadful secret so that the family can finally learn the true meaning of Christmas.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 WOMEN, 6 MEN)

ALICE GRUBER (f).....Matriarch of the Gruber family.
(150 lines)

WINSTON (m) The butler. *(52 lines)*

CHARLES GRUBER (m) The oldest Gruber sibling. *(94 lines)*

MAGGI (f).....Married to Charles. *(67 lines)*

SANDRA (f).....Snotty teenaged daughter of Charles & Maggi. *(47 lines)*

LORENA (f)..... Goofy teenaged daughter of Charles & Maggi. *(48 lines)*

GEORGE GRUBER (m)Middle Gruber sibling. *(80 lines)*

NELLIE (f).....Married to George. *(63 lines)*

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- RICKY (m) Loud pre-teen son to George & Nellie.
(31 lines)
- CINDY (f)..... Loud pre-teen daughter to George &
Nellie. (25 lines)
- MA BEE (f)..... Crusty old Grandma of Ricky & Cindy.
(22 lines)
- NANCY GRUBER (f) Youngest Gruber sibling. (111 lines)
- PAUL (m) Married to Nancy. (111 lines)
- SANTA (m) The real thing. (*non-speaking*)

PRODUCTION NOTES

Scene 1 of Act 1 could be done completely in front of the curtain, setting up the three different families in three different locations across the stage. The lighting changes from family to family when it is their turn in the scene. Their turns get shorter and shorter until the lights are on all three families at the same time, but they are respectively still in their own homes. If lighting is not available, the different families could simply freeze in position until the focus shifts to them. If scene one is in front of the curtain, then the Gruber Mansion, where the rest of the play takes place, could be set up behind the curtain ready for scene 2. However, any other creative staging could be used.

During the Christmas Eve dinner, the food items are listed in the script, but they could be substituted (except for the Twix Bar) with any silly food item that is easier to obtain as long as the item is inedible.

Scene 1 of Act 2 should have a quick rhythm, especially during the silent part. Because there is a long chunk of action without any speaking, all the movements should be clear and deliberate. There should be no pauses between exits and entrances. As soon as one character exits another one enters. Don't give the audience time to catch their breath!

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When deciding where each family will exit to their guest bedrooms in the Gruber Mansion, simply assign each family to exit to a different part of the stage. Four different hallways could be implied with curtains or in the set design if a proper set is being used. For example, Charles' family could exit Up Stage Right, George's Family could exit Down Stage Left, Paul and Nancy could exit Down Stage Right, and Winston could exit Up Stage Left. However, any other configuration would work just as well, as long as there are four different exit points.

SPECIAL COSTUMES

- 3 Makeshift Santa coats, hats and beards
- 8 Makeshift elf costumes
- Male nightgown and cap
- Real Santa suit

MINIMUM SET REQUIREMENTS

- Three Chairs
- Sofa
- Christmas Tree
- Christmas presents under the tree

SOUND & LIGHTING FX

- Thunder & Lightning
- Clock Chime
- Doorbell

PROP LIST

- Cell phone (One that can be smashed)
- Newspaper
- Book
- Snuggie (blanket)
- 3 Letters in envelopes
- Paper bag
- Toy race car

- Toy doll
- Luggage
- Bottle of pills
- Stack of mail (Five bills and a Publishers Clearing House envelope)
- Blanket
- Santa Claus hand puppet
- Walnut
- Peanut
- Coconut
- Bell pepper
- Onion
- Head of lettuce
- Potato
- Jalapeño
- Can of sauerkraut
- Salt packet
- Ketchup bottle
- Coupon for 50 cents off a jar of Miracle Whip
- Dental floss
- Ground cinnamon container
- Rat poison box
- Twix candy bar
- 13 Christmas present hats - wrapped as presents
- 13 glass pudding cups filled with spinach on a tray
- 13 spoons
- Wooden manger with hay and a swaddled baby doll
- Small box
- Large box
- Pillow
- Recording device
- Extra blankets to make lump on the sofa
- Wig that looks like Alice's hair
- Masking tape
- Santa's sack full of presents
- 3 Mouse traps
- Clothing rack with wire clothes hangers
- Rubber snake
- Bottle of oil

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- 2 wrapped cell phone boxes
- Christmas cards in envelopes

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ACT One, Scene 1

SETTING:

Three separate homes across the stage represented by minimal furniture and lighting.

AT RISE:

Lights up on CHARLES' family. He sits and reads a newspaper, MAGGI reads a book, SANDRA is on her phone and LORENA is watching her with envy.

SANDRA: So you know, I go, without even looking, "You know that new guy who usually sits up in the front of the classroom?" And he goes, "Yeah" and I go, "Well, he's not up there." And he goes, "Maybe he's sitting somewhere else." And I go, "Are you sure you know who I'm talking about? He's the guy with the cute nose?" And he goes, "You think I have a cute nose?" and I look over and he's the guy I'm talking to! And I totally feel my face getting red and then he goes, "I think you have a cute nose too." Yes, bomdigidy. (*Maggi gives a disapproving look.*) His name? (*Looks at Lorena who is listening intently.*) Hold on, someone's eavesdropping. (*Texts something.*) Well? Whataya think? (*Looks at phone and laughs.*)

LORENA: Dad, when can I get a cell phone?

CHARLES: (*Without looking up.*) As soon as you get some friends to talk to.

LORENA: (*Reaching for Sandra's phone.*) Can I try texting?

SANDRA: Not a chance, spaz.

LORENA: Mom!

MAGGI: Charles.

CHARLES: (*Without looking up.*) Girls, listen to your mother.

SANDRA: (*Into phone.*) Yeah, he's the bomb. I don't know; what would you do? Bomdigidy.

MAGGI: Charles.

CHARLES: Sandra, don't say "bombiggie."

LORENA: How come Sandra gets a cell phone and I don't? (*Sandra sticks her tongue out at Lorena.*) Mom!

MAGGI: Charles!

CHARLES: Girls, listen to your mother.

LORENA: It's not fair; we're the same age! We're identical twins.

SANDRA: Mom, Lorena is being cruel. We are not identical!

LORENA: I told Ron Dune that we were identical twins.

SANDRA: You did not!

LORENA: I sure did.

SANDRA: Mom!

MAGGI: Charles.

CHARLES: Girls, listen to your mother.

MAGGI: Lorena, the reason Sandra has a cell phone is because that is what she asked for, for her birthday.

SANDRA: Yeah, this is my birthday present. You got what you asked for.

MAGGI: Yes, you received both things you asked for, Lorena.

LORENA: Oh, why did I ask for this Snuggie anyway? A blanket works just fine. (*Adjusts her Snuggie blanket.*) And the Sham-Wow looked a lot bombdigidier on T.V.

CHARLES: (*Nose still in paper.*) Dear? Did I tell you I had a relapse today?

MAGGI: (*Putting her book down.*) How much did you lose?

CHARLES: Everything.

MAGGI: What?!!!

Both MAGGI and NANCY emit a blood curdling scream. Lights down on Charles' family and up on NANCY, in a different home across the stage with one chair. NANCY holds an envelope. PAUL enters.

PAUL: What?! What is it?! (*Nancy holds out an envelope and he takes it.*) "Member of the Gruber Family" - the Gruber family? Who's the Gruber family?

NANCY: (*Breathing heavy.*) I don't know.

PAUL: Then why did you scream?

NANCY: Oh, the scream, uh, didn't you see? Stamps went up another three cents.

PAUL: Nancy, are you hiding something? I think this is for you. They just spelled your maiden name wrong.

NANCY: Alright, Paul, it is for me. Gruber is my maiden name.

PAUL: But, Nancy, your maiden name isn't Gruber with a "G," it's Kruber, with a "K."

NANCY: Oh Paul, I changed it before we met. I never told you because I didn't want you or anyone else to know of my deep dark past.

PAUL: You changed your name from Gruber to Kruber?

NANCY: *(Breathing faster.)* Yes! I didn't want anything to remind me of my dreadful secret.

PAUL: The Gruber family?

NANCY: *(Breathing out of control.)* Yes!

PAUL: Watch your breathing, Honey. Sit down and try to relax. So, you still have a living relative?

NANCY: *(Hyperventilating.)* Yes!... They... are... still... alive!... Where's... my... bag?!

PAUL: *(Offers her a paper bag.)* It's alright, Honey. Here it is. So, your siblings weren't wiped out in a huge sausage factory accident?

NANCY: *(Breathes into bag.)* No...! They live!

PAUL: Alright then, breathing better?

NANCY: *(Calmer but still into bag.)* Yes... Thank you.

PAUL: Can you breathe well enough to reveal your dreadful secret?

NANCY: I can't tell.

PAUL: You can tell me; I'm your husband.

NANCY: No, I mean, I don't know.

PAUL: You don't know your dreadful secret?

NANCY: Yes, I mean no. Oh Paul, I can't! It's too painful.

PAUL: Then how about starting with your deep dark past?

NANCY: No, thank you.

PAUL: Nancy, you either start explaining right now or I'll have to open this letter myself and contact whoever sent it.

NANCY: Alright, but it's not very pleasant. When I was kid, we were very poor, but my parents loved Christmas so they were sort of... creative. I didn't think much about it, but as I got older I realized that our Christmases were just plain weird.

PAUL: Weird? In what way?

NANCY: We had some very strange traditions.

PAUL: Strange? In what...

NANCY: *(Hyperventilating again.)* I don't... want to talk about it!

PAUL: It's okay, Honey, use the bag.

She talks into the bag but it comes out mush. He pulls the bag away and indicates to begin again.

NANCY: Alright! My siblings are still alive; all of them. It was my first year of college and I was home for Christmas break. During one of the traditions, the Spinach Toss, there was an incident.

PAUL: Spinach Toss?

NANCY: It doesn't matter! As I said, there was an incident. And my family got into a big fight.

PAUL: Well, all families fight.

NANCY: Not like this. It was brother against brother, sister against brother, and everyone against our mother.

PAUL: *(Looking at the letter.)* Nancy, you told me that your mother committed suicide after the sausage factory accident.

NANCY: I may have exaggerated.

PAUL: Your mother is alive and I've never met her? You lied to me?

NANCY: No, no, no, no, no... yes.

PAUL: I can't believe this.

NANCY: Well, what I meant to say was not that she's dead, but that she's deaf.

PAUL: Your mother is deaf?

NANCY: Not exactly; she just can't hear things in a certain frequency.

PAUL: What do you mean?

NANCY: If you talk like this... *(Recitative in a high pitch through teeth.)* You just go a little higher and stay on this note and she can't hear a thing.

PAUL: *(Singing through teeth.)* You mean like this?

NANCY: *(Singing.)* Yes, that's it, you got it.

PAUL: *(Singing.)* So, she can't hear anything in this note?

NANCY: *(Singing.)* Nope. Not a word.

PAUL: That's weird.

NANCY: That's my mother.

PAUL: I can't believe this. After five years of marriage you think you know a person; but come to find out your name is Gruber with a "G" not Kruber with a "K," your high-frequency-challenged mother is still alive, you're not an only child, and you used to toss spinach for Christmas. What about your father? I suppose he's alive too?

NANCY: No, he died last February.

PAUL: We didn't go to your father's funeral?! Is there anything else I should know before we open this letter?

NANCY: I maxed out the MasterCard today.

Lights down on Nancy and Paul and up on Charles' family.

LORENA: Mail's here! (*Sits and looks through mail.*)

Lights down on Charles' family and up on GEORGE'S family. No furniture needed. RICKY and CINDY are running around making noise. Ricky drives a toy race car through the air as Cindy dances with her dolly which is dressed just like her. MA BEE enters and tries to get the kids to settle down.

MA BEE: Shhh-Shhh-Shhh! You-Shush-Shush! You-Shush! No, no, no. Shushhhhhhhh!

GEORGE enters in a hurry, carrying three suitcases. He is followed by NELLIE who carries one small suitcase.

GEORGE: Alright kids, get in the car.

NELLIE: George, can't we talk about this?

GEORGE: We can talk about it in the car. Ma Bee, you sit in back. Kids, you sit on either side of her.

MA BEE: No! Not again! I can't take it, I tell you!

NELLIE: George, but what about you-know-what?

GEORGE: It's all packed in the trunk and some on top of the car.

MA BEE: Just leave me here to die in peace.

RICKY: But Dad, what about Santa Claus?

George cringes and shakes.

CINDY: Yeah Dad, Santa won't be able to find us.

GEORGE: You know that you're forbidden to say that name!

NELLIE: *(Baby talk.)* Don't worry, Kids; you-know-who will find us wherever we are.

GEORGE: Please, no talking about that... about him. Kids, you-know-who knows where everyone is at all times. Remember, he's got that magic crystal ball. Just get in the car!

CINDY: A crystal ball?

RICKY: He's not a gypsy, Dad.

Ricky and Cindy bother Ma Bee again.

NELLIE: *(Baby talk.)* You-know-who will find us no matter what, so don't you worry your sweet little heads. *(Normal voice.)* George, this is ridiculous! I come home from work and you have us all packed to go to Florida? We can't afford to go to Florida! What about our plans for you-know-what?

GEORGE: You don't understand! I got a letter today. Kids, get in the car!

Lights down on George's family and up on Charles' family.

MAGGI: So, what you're telling me is that we're broke again?

CHARLES: That's what I'm telling you.

LORENA: *(Examining an envelope.)* Alice Gruber? Who's Alice Gruber?

Charles lowers his newspaper, wide-eyed. Lights down on Charles' family and up on Paul and Nancy.

NANCY: Let's not open it, Paul.

PAUL: It says on the back, "Open Immediately."

NANCY: I'm sure it's not urgent.

PAUL: It's stamped with a big red "urgent."

Lights down on Nancy and Paul and up on George's family.

NELLIE: What letter?

GEORGE: No one, and I mean no one, would rather not spend... you-know-what eve with you-know-who more than me.

NELLIE: When you say you-know-who, do you mean you-know-who, or you-know-who someone else?

GEORGE: Sorry; you-know-who someone else. My fffff... my ffff... my ffffffamily! Get in the car, Ma Bee!

MA BEE: Why don't you make me, you... father of noisy children!

GEORGE: So help me, Bee, if you don't get your...

NELLIE: George, stop! Just calm down. Do you need one of your pills?

GEORGE: No. Yes. Good idea! *(Takes out a bottle and dry swallows a pill.)*

NELLIE: Good. Now, give me the letter. *(George hands her the letter.)* George, this is from your mother. We haven't heard from her for over ten years; since... that night.

GEORGE: Seventeen years, actually. But that's not quite true. She contacted me last February... when my father died.

NELLIE: Your father died and you didn't tell me? Your children's grandfather died and you didn't tell me?

GEORGE: Just open the letter.

Lights down on George's family and up on Charles' family.

CHARLES: You can just throw that one away, Lorena.

MAGGI: Oh no you don't! *(Snatches mail from Lorena and dumps each bill into Charles' lap.)* Gas bill! Electric bill! Mobile phone bill! Oh here's one: Publishers Clearing House. Maybe we just won ten million bucks. *(Rips it open.)* Nope. We lost again. Water bill! Visa bill! And how nice, on top of all these bills we can't pay, we got a letter from your mother!

LORENA: Dad, you have a mother?

CHARLES: *(Picks up the letter.)* Not really. I'm shaking. I can't open it.

LORENA: Does that mean I have a grandma?

SANDRA: You said we don't have grandparents on your side.

CHARLES: You don't! I don't have a mother and you don't have a grandmother!

LORENA: But Dad, the letter!

MAGGI: It's time we tell the kids, Charles. They deserve to know. They want to know their grandma. Just look at them.

SANDRA: Oh, for sure. Next time he does that I'm gonna go "Hey Buddy, I don't think I like your tone of..."*(Charles snatches her phone away.)...hey!*

CHARLES: Your minutes are up. I don't want to talk about it.

MAGGI: Fine; I'll tell them.

CHARLES: Alright, alright! I'll tell 'em! It was something, when some of you were, you know. Your mom and you know were just something. We you know to something and it was my you know and your you know and you-know-what eve.

SANDRA: Mom, Dad's doing it again.

MAGGI: It was before you kids were born. Your dad and I were just married and we went to your father's parents', your grandparents' home for you-know-what. *(Lorena raises her hand for a question.)* Yes, Lorena?

LORENA: But I thought we only had grandparents on your side.

CHARLES: You do. I mean, technically, you know... have them on my side as well; aunts and uncles too. But they're terrible... awful. *(Sandra raises her hand like Lorena did.)* Sandra?

SANDRA: Can I have my phone back?

CHARLES: No. Now, the thing is, something, you know.

LORENA: Mom?

MAGGI: Your grandparents were very poor.

SANDRA: How poor?

CHARLES: They were so poor that... something!

MAGGI: Calm down, Dear. They were so poor that when you rang their doorbell they would poke their heads out the window and say--

CHARLES: Ding--

MAGGI: Dong.

LORENA: Wow, that's poor.

MAGGI: They were poorer than us; even after your father's latest venture.

CHARLES: So something in the Gruber home was... you know.

MAGGI: Christmas in the Gruber home was somewhat strange.

Lights down on Charles' family and up on Paul and Nancy.

NANCY: Before you open it, you need to know that the Spinach Toss was not the only thing that was weird in the Gruber home.

PAUL: Hey, I understand; all families have some strangeness in them.

Lights down on Paul and Nancy and up on George's family.

NELLIE: Now kids, before we open this letter, just remember that no matter what it says, we do not mention you-know-what or you-know-who.

CINDY: Why do we have to call him "you-know-who?"

RICKY: Yeah, he's not Voldemort. This family has some really dumb you-know-what traditions.

Lights down on George's family and up on Charles' family.

LORENA: Strange in what way?

CHARLES: Let's just say... something!

MAGGI: They had a lot of peculiar customs.

LORENA: Like what?

CHARLES: Just never mind. Anyway, there was... you know... an incident during one of the "traditions" and there was a big brew ha, ha.

SANDRA: Brew ha, ha?

LORENA: What's a brew ha, ha?

MAGGI: I'm not sure. What's a brou ha, ha, dear?

CHARLES: It's a... you know... something.

SANDRA: Thanks for clearing that up, Dad.

MAGGI: Well, it must be bad because now none of his family exists to us.

SANDRA: Great. Can I have my phone now?

CHARLES: Something! You know, that's when something! You know, something.

MAGGI: We haven't seen any of your father's family since. Anyway, let's open it. It's probably just a Christmas card.

LORENA: Open it, Dad. Maybe there's money inside.

MAGGI: Not likely.

CHARLES: *(Opens but can't read and hands it to Maggi.)*
Something?

MAGGI: "Dear Gruber Family..."

Lights Up on all families but they still remain in their separate homes.

PAUL: "...I, your mother, have decided that once again, you should be part of the great tradition of what is known as the Gruber Family Christmas Eve."

NELLIE: "You are all invited to my new home which was purchased for me by your late father, may God rest his soul, and who was shunned by each of you when you failed to attend his funeral."

PAUL: Your dad's funeral? We probably should've gone to that.

NANCY: *(Puts the bag back up to her mouth.)* Sorry, I forgot to tell you.

MAGGI: "I am expecting to join your father within one year's time."

PAUL: "But before I do, I wish to leave you with one final gift which you will receive on Christmas Eve."

NELLIE: "Looking forward to seeing you at this merry time of year..."

MAGGI: "Sincerely, your mother, Alice Gruber."

LORENA: We're going to Grandma's house?!

PAUL: She's going to die within the year? How does she know?
Does she have cancer or something?

NANCY: No, she's just stubborn.

PAUL: This is great, I'll get to meet your mom.

RICKY & CINDY: We're going to Grandma's house!

GEORGE, CHARLES & NANCY: We're not going!

MAGGI: Hold on, dear, there's a post script...

NANCY: Not a post script.

NELLIE: Yes, a post script.

CHARLES: Fine. What does it say?

PAUL: "P.S. Your names have already been submitted as inheritors of the Gruber family fortune and upon my death..."

NELLIE: "...you will receive a substantial portion of this vast collection of wealth on the following condition:"

MAGGI: "...You will arrive at my residence on December 24th and fully participate in one final Gruber Family Christmas Eve."

PAUL: "May our traditions continue!" Exclamation point.

GEORGE: Vast collection of wealth. She doesn't have any money!

NELLIE: George, look at the address.

GEORGE: That's not where she lives.

NELLIE: She's moved. I think that's a ritzy part of town. George, what if there is money? Our debt! Just think what we could do with the money.

GEORGE: We could finally put your mother in a home.

MA BEE: No!

NELLIE: George!

GEORGE: And we could finally afford to get the kids that hyperactive medicine. But what about all those things your family said to us? About us! Remember?

NELLIE: I remember, I remember. And that is exactly why we're not gonna let them get our part of the inheritance. You see, if we don't show, then they'll get everything and they'll know that they got under our skin.

GEORGE: They did get under our skin.

NELLIE: And that's exactly why we're going; so we can get them out from under our skin, get the money, and then we'll be under their skin. *(Baby talk.)* Kids, get in the Car!

CINDY: Can we leave a note for you-know-who?

GEORGE: Uh... Sure... I already left one.

RICKY: Mom! Dad didn't really leave a note, did he?

MA BEE: You, shush little boy!

GEORGE: Sure I did.

NELLIE: *(Baby talk.)* Your father's just kidding, kids. *(Normal voice.)* In your condition, you couldn't even spell you-know-who.

GEORGE: Sure I could. S-A...T-A-N.

NELLIE: *(Baby talk.)* Get in the car, kids. It's three days to Grandma's house and that's where we're going.

RICKY & CINDY: Yay!

MA BEE: No! I'm not going anywhere with those little brats!

PAUL: Well, what are we waiting for? Let's get packed.

NANCY: I said we're not going. I can't! I won't! I can't face my brothers! Not after what they did, what they said to me.

PAUL: Nancy, "...a substantial portion of this vast collection of wealth." No more credit card bills. We could move out of this dingy old apartment and get a nice house in the country. You know, that one with the wrap-around porch you're always salivating over when we drive by.

NANCY: (*Hyperventilating again.*) No. It's... out... of... the...

PAUL...Question? Nancy, remember how there was something in my life, a huge something, that I had to overcome?

NANCY: The personal problem?

PAUL: Yes, the personal problem. Once I faced the personal problem head on, you know, confronted it directly, I was able to beat it. To conquer it! Now I am the master of my own destiny and the personal problem is all but a fleeting memory.

NANCY: Yes, but Paul, I can't...

PAUL: It's a vast collection of wealth! I don't want to work at Chuck E. Cheese anymore!

NANCY: (*Into the bag.*) But Paul...

PAUL: Now you listen to me! We're going to this Gruber Family Christmas Eve one way or another. Even if you have to wear that bag over your head, we're going! We are going to get your share of that money and we're going to get that house with the wrap around porch and I am never going to put on another giant rodent costume again and then we're going to live happily ever after! Do you understand me?

NANCY: (*Enamored by his forcefulness.*) Oh, Paul.

CHARLES: No, no, no! It's not something!

MAGGI: Yes.

CHARLES: Do you have any... I mean, do you know what... They're nuts! Especially her! No!

MAGGI: Yes.

CHARLES: Absolutely something.

LORENA: Come on, Dad. I wanna meet Grandma.

SANDRA: If she has all this money and she's gonna give it to us, I could get a new phone and Lorena could have my old one.

LORENA: I don't want your old one! I want a new one. Mom!

MAGGI: Charles.

CHARLES: Girls, listen to your... no, we're not going, I tell you!

MAGGI: What step were you on in your eight step gambling rehab program?

CHARLES: Seven.

MAGGI: Is step eight: "Go to the race track and lose all your family's money, again?" I didn't think so. Now get packed.

Each family argues. Everyone is talking until it crescendos for their last line.

EVERYONE BUT THE SIBLINGS: WE'RE GOING!

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

SETTING: *The family room of the Gruber mansion; sofa, chair and a Christmas tree.*

AT RISE:

WINSTON stands as ALICE paces.

WINSTON: Do you think they'll come, Madam?

ALICE: They've got to. They've just got to. It's my... It's our last chance.

WINSTON: But Madam, they didn't even come to their own father's funeral. Why would they come here, for one final traditional Gruber family Christmas, when this is what started all the problems in the first place?

ALICE: Let's just hope that they are greedy enough to put all that behind them.

WINSTON: You're hoping for greed?

ALICE: I'm afraid so.

WINSTON: I wish your husband was still here to help us.

ALICE: If he was still here we wouldn't be doing this. Remember, he made me promise never to reveal his... our secret. He's probably watching from above and he's giving me the look.

WINSTON: The look, Madam?

ALICE: (*Gives a disapproving glare.*) But he... we were the ones who caused this mess so we're ... I'm the one who has to clean it up.

WINSTON: Remember, Madam, you mustn't break your promise.

Doorbell.

ALICE: They're here! What do we do? Quick, hide!

WINSTON: It's not a surprise party, Madam. You must be tough, strong, and above all, do not let them see your desperation. Just stand right here and I will answer the door.

Winston opens the door. Charles and Maggi enter, followed by Sandra and Lorena with suitcases. Charles is hesitant.

WINSTON: Good evening, Sir.

CHARLES: Who are you?

WINSTON: Winston, Sir. I am your mother's butler.

CHARLES: Butler, huh? So, it's true.

WINSTON: Sir?

CHARLES: Is there... you know... anyone else... you know... here yet? (*Turns to see Alice for the first time.*)

WINSTON: No Sir, you are the first to arrive.

CHARLES: (*Ignoring Alice.*) Winston, this is my wife, Maggi, and my daughters, Sandra and Lorena.

WINSTON: Good evening.

MAGGI: (*Extending her hand.*) It's a pleasure to meet you.

Winston takes her hand to kiss it but smells it instead.

ALICE: I'm sorry, dear. He has this thing about hands, but other than that he's perfectly okay. Winston!

Winston releases her hand and then extends his hand to Sandra who gives him the same disapproving glare Alice demonstrated earlier.

CHARLES: (*Sees the tree and shudders.*) That's a right fine thing you got there.

LORENA: Wow! This place is huge! Is there a swimming pool?

WINSTON: Certainly, Miss Gruber.

Sandra lets out a blood curdling scream.

SANDRA: There are no bars! I have no signal! *(Walks around to find a signal.)* No service! What am I gonna do?! There's no service here!

CHARLES: For crying out loud, it's not the end of the world. So, you can't text your freaky friends.

SANDRA: You don't understand! I'm cut off! I can't communicate with anyone!

MAGGI: It's alright, Dear. You'll be able to text them when we leave. It's only for one night.

SANDRA: No! It's not alright! It's not alright! It's not alright!!!

WINSTON: Perhaps I can help, Miss Gruber.

Winston holds out his hand and Sandra gives him the phone. Winston lifts it as if to find a signal but then places the phone on the ground and stomps it to bits. Sandra screams.

SANDRA: Mommm!

MAGGI: Charles!

CHARLES: Girls, listen to your mother.

ALICE: You must be Sandra and you must be Lorena. I'm Grandma Alice.

LORENA: *(Hugs.)* Grandma!

WINSTON: Dinner will be served here in the living room at eight. Do not be late. And now, if you are ready I can show you to your room. This way.

Winston exits and the others follow leaving Alice alone. She sneaks over to the tree and picks up a present, opens the top of the box and speaks into it.

ALICE: Charles still hates me; completely ignored me. What if I make things worse? Is keeping his... our dreadful secret worth the souls of our children?

Doorbell. Winston enters. Alice hides behind the tree.

WINSTON: It's alright, Madam. I'll answer it.

Winston opens the door to reveal Paul with two suit cases.

PAUL: Hi! You must be Marlboro.

WINSTON: Good evening, Sir. I am Winston.

PAUL: Winston, right. Nancy's mother's letter mentioned you. Just leave the door open, she'll come in eventually.

WINSTON: Very good, Sir.

ALICE: *(Coming out with ornament in hair.)* I'm Nancy's mother, Alice. It's so good to finally meet you.

PAUL: And I am very pleased to meet you. I'm Paul. Between you and me, Nancy is a bit apprehensive about this whole reuniting with her family thing. But I think she's blowing it all out of proportion. She won't say much about "the incident" that tore everyone apart. Tell me; was it really that bad?

WINSTON: Yes.

PAUL: Oh. And what do you think our chances are of surviving another traditional Gruber Family Christmas?

WINSTON: Slim.

ALICE: I'm so sorry that I couldn't be at your wedding, but Nancy didn't invite me.

PAUL: I understand. Between you and me, she can sometimes be a bit dramatic.

ALICE: You are such a nice young man.

NANCY'S VOICE: PAUL!

PAUL: Ah, there she is. In here my little sugar plum!

NANCY: *(Peeking in the door and breathing into a bag.)* Sugar plum? What are you saying? I'm fat?

PAUL: I meant sugar free plum. It's okay, Honey. Come on in.

NANCY: Is there anyone there?

PAUL: Yes, I've just met Salem.

WINSTON: Winston.

PAUL: Winston, sorry. You don't have a problem with him do you?

NANCY: *(Entering.)* Who's Winston?

WINSTON: Good evening, Madam. I am your mother's butler.

Winston takes Nancy's hand and sniffs it. Nancy sees Alice. Alice smiles but Nancy looks away.

ALICE: Winston, I thought we talked about this. He has this thing with hands but other than that he's perfectly alright.

PAUL: What a beautiful Christmas tree.

ALICE: Thank you, Paul.

NANCY: Winston, this is my husband, Paul.

PAUL: We've met. A very lovely home you have here, Mrs. Gruber.

ALICE: Please, call me--

NANCY: Mrs. Gruber! Call her Mrs. Gruber.

WINSTON: If you're ready, Madam, I can show you to your room.

NANCY: Is anyone else here yet?

Charles enters.

CHARLES: Just me.

NANCY: Charles!

CHARLES: Nancy!

NANCY: During all these years we've been apart, I've always wondered what I would do if I ever saw you again. Now I know. *(Puts out arms to embrace but attacks him.)* You no good, dirty, low down, half baked, cheap, lying, rotten, frog licking, inbred, lowlife, brainless, filthy, bloodsucking, bug eyed, worm headed, smelly, piece of tarantula excrement! I've got you now! Ha, ha, ha, ha!

Paul and Winston pull her off him.

PAUL: *(Holding her back.)* Honey, what are you doing?!

NANCY: That's my brother!

PAUL: Oh, nice to meet you!

CHARLES: *(Held back by Winston.)* Good to meet you, too!

ALICE: Nancy, control yourself; or I shall have no choice but to strike you from the will!

PAUL: Uh... she's calm! You're calm right, Honey? Where's your bag? (*Nancy breathes into her bag.*) There you go, calming down, good girl, calming down. You see? Perfectly calm.

NANCY: (*Through her teeth.*) Yes, I'm perfectly calm.

WINSTON: Perhaps, it would be best, Sir, if you waited with your family in your room.

CHARLES: Alright something... But if she pulls... outbursts... well, you know, something... I mean it. It won't be a... Mark my words. Something... you know. (*Charles exits.*)

PAUL: You alright, Nancy?

NANCY: Sorry. I just snapped!

PAUL: Sure, I snap like that all the time; three or four times a day. But you're okay now?

NANCY: Fine.

WINSTON: As long as you're feeling fine, dinner will be served here in the family room when the clock chimes eight. And now, if you please, follow me.

Winston exits, Nancy and Paul follow.

ALICE: (*Rushes to the present and talks into it.*) At least she didn't try to scratch my eyes out. Two out of three; so far, so good; if you can call what just happened good. At least they're here. They still seemed to have blocked out the truth of that dreadful night so long ago.

The door has been left open and in run Cindy and Ricky. They run around in circles as before, making lots of noise. Ma Bee follows them in.

MA BEE: Shush! You kids are making such a racket. Now shush! No, no, no. Shush!

ALICE: (*Putting her present down.*) Hello?

MA BEE: A racket! That's what I said! Shush this racket! No, no, no!

George and Nellie enter with suitcases.

NELLIE: *(Baby talk.)* Kids, quiet down now.

The kids turn it up a notch and Ma Bee cups her ears.

MA BEE: Shhh-Shhh-Shhh! You-Shush-Shush! You-Shush! No, no, no. Shhh-You. No, no, no!

GEORGE: Ah, let 'em play. *(George sees Alice and doesn't say anything. Winston enters and stands behind Ma Bee, looking down at the kids, intimidating. The kids notice him and stop.)*

MA BEE: Shhh-Shhh-Shush. You shush! No, no, n... Yes!... Yes! *(Turns to see Winston and falls onto sofa.)*

WINSTON: Good evening.

GEORGE: Ah! Hello, I'm George and this is my family. Is anyone else here yet or are we the first to arrive?

WINSTON: Yes. You are the last to arrive.

Winston shakes Nellie's hand and almost sniffs it but Alice stops him with a disapproving glare.

NELLIE: These are our children: Cindy and Little Ricky.

RICKY: I'm not little anymore, Mom.

NELLIE: And this is my mother. We just call her Ma Bee.

MA BEE: Shush.

NELLIE: Hello, Alice.

ALICE: Hello, Nellie. Welcome to my home.

NELLIE: *(Baby talk.)* Kids, this is your other grandmother.

Ricky & CINDY: Grandma! *(They run around Alice.)*

MA BEE: Shush!

WINSTON: I can show you to your room now, if you wish, Madam.

GEORGE: Thank you, Winston.

WINSTON: Very good, Madam.

GEORGE: What?

WINSTON: This way.

Charles enters.

GEORGE: Charles.

CHARLES: George.

GEORGE: During all these years we've been apart, I've always wondered what I would do if I ever saw you again. Now I still don't know.

NELLIE: I do. (*Attacks Charles.*) You no good, dirty, low-down, half-baked, cheap, lying, rotten, frog-licking, inbred, lowlife, brainless, filthy, bloodsucking, bug-eyed, worm-headed, smelly, piece of tarantula excrement! I've got you now! Ha, ha, ha, ha!

Cindy and Ricky scream and run around. Ma Bee shushes them. George and Winston pull Nellie off Charles. When they are all pulled apart and quiet, Winston is sniffing Nellie's hand. They all stare.

ALICE: I'm sorry, he has this hand sniffing thing. But other than that he's perfectly normal.

Nellie lunges at Charles again but George holds her back.

GEORGE: Honey, what are you doing?! Calm down!

ALICE: Yes, Nellie, any more outbursts and I will be forced to strike you from the will!

WINSTON: Sir, I believe it would be for the best if you would stay in your room until dinner.

CHARLES: Alright! But something! You better keep.. I shouldn't have to... You know what I mean?! I'm something! And it's not gonna get... Mark my words!

Charles exits.

GEORGE: Nellie, you must keep calm. You're like your own can of pepper spray.

NELLIE: I'm sorry. I'm okay now. I don't know what came over me. Just seeing Charles after all these years brought back all the terrible memories of that dreadful night.

WINSTON: Perhaps it would be best if you took the time to compose yourself in your room until dinner.

NELLIE: Yes, yes. I think I need to lie down.

WINSTON: Very good. Please join us here in the family room when you hear the clock strike eight.

CINDY: Mom, can you teach me how to scratch someone's eyes out?

NELLIE: *(Baby talk.)* Sure, my little angel drawers.

The family exits with Winston.

ALICE: *(Alone again, she talks into the present.)* Things are worse than ever. Maybe if we had used broccoli or cabbage or some other leafy vegetable... Oh, who am I kidding? I can't blame the spinach. It's our dreadful secret's fault. But I promised my husband I would never tell. If only there was a way to convey the truth without breaking my promise? What a mess.

BLACKOUT.

ACT 1, SCENE 3

SETTING:

The living room of the Gruber Mansion.

AT RISE:

Eight clock chimes. Lights up. Sandra and Lorena enter. Sandra is trying to put her phone back together. They sit on the floor.

LORENA: If you can't fix it, can I have it?

SANDRA: Why would you want a broken phone?

LORENA: Maybe I could fix it.

SANDRA: You? Are you kidding? You couldn't fix a neutered dog.

Ma Bee enters.

MA BEE: Problem with your phone?

SANDRA: Yeah, the butler did it.

Ricky and Cindy enter screaming, startling Ma Bee who screams and stumbles onto the sofa. Ricky and Cindy sit on the floor, playing. Ma Bee shushes them.

LORENA: Hi, I'm Lorena. This is my sister. We're twins... identical.

SANDRA: Lorena, no one is gonna believe we're identical. I'm cute.

Paul and Nancy enter.

NANCY: Hello, I'm Nancy, this is Paul.

LORENA: Hi, I'm Lorena. This is my sister, Sandra. We're identical twins.

SANDRA: Give it up, Lorena. We look nothing alike!

PAUL: I don't know... *(Sandra gives him a dirty look and Lorena smiles big.)* What I mean to say is... I don't know what I mean to say.

Charles and Maggi enter. George and Nellie enter. They all lock eyes.

CHARLES: So, you both decided to show up. If you think you're gonna be put back into the will I'm afraid...

NANCY: How dare you speak to us!

GEORGE: Don't talk to him that way!

CHARLES: She'll talk to me any way she likes!

NANCY: Don't tell me how I like to talk to you!

They erupt into a huge argument. Ricky and Cindy run around, Ma Bee shushes. Alice and Winston enter unnoticed. The argument crescendos until...

ALICE: NEIN!!! *(Silence.)* You vill sit! *(Everyone sits.)* Vinston. *(Winston brings her a chair and lays a blanket over her lap.)* Now, as your mudder, mudder-in-law, undt grandmudder, I velcome you to my home.

PAUL: Did she just develop an accent?

NANCY: It comes out when she's angry. She's from Austria. The angrier she gets the stronger her accent becomes.

PAUL: Oh, like The Incredible Hulk.

ALICE: Tonight you vill all participate in a traditional Gruber Family Christmas Eve.

Thunder & Lightning FX.

NANCY: (*Hyperventilating.*) Mother, please -- don't make me do this -- I can't take it.

GEORGE: (*Popping a pill.*) For once, I completely agree with Nancy. It maybe you-know-what eve but there's no reason to put us through all the you- know-what stuff that will just remind us of you-know-who.

CHARLES: Mother -- I mean -- there's something very something about you know.

NANCY: Don't agree with me, George, it makes me look bad!

GEORGE: You don't need me to make you look bad!

CHARLES: Both of you are something!

They argue again until...

ALICE: Shut uuuuup!!! You are all just sniveling buckets of pus! I know dat da only reason you have all come here is da possibility of getting your hands on da Gruber Fortune. In dis ting you should not vorry, if money is all you care about, zen money is all you shall receive. (*All sigh in relief.*) But! -- Not a cent shall you receive unless you comply with da following stipulations: Vun! You fully participate... joyfully! Two! You follow all da rules without complaint. Untd finally, and probably da most difficult requirement, you must spend dee entire night here in da Gruber family mansion.

RICKY: (*Raising his hand.*) Grandma?

ALICE: Yes, little girl?

RICKY: I'm a boy.

ALICE: Sorry, when I am angry I get confused dat vay. Yes, Little Ricky?

RICKY: Why should staying here be difficult?

ALICE: I'm glad you asked. Because of dis! (*Alice pulls her hand out from under the blanket; it bears a Santa Claus hand puppet.* *Thunder & lightning FX. .*)

GEORGE: (*Pops a pill.*) No! Not that!

NANCY: (*Into bag.*) Please mother!

CHARLES: Put it away!

ALICE: Yes! Yes, Gruber family! Dare is a Santa Claus hand puppet!

CINDY: I like him. He's cute.

RICKY: Make him talk!

ALICE: Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas!

GEORGE: No! Please!

NANCY: Enough! I beg you!

CHARLES: Mother, stop!

PAUL: I don't understand. What's the big deal?

NELLIE: Yeah, it's just a puppet.

MAGGI: Charles, why are you freaking out?

ALICE: I'll tell you why they are, as you so perfectly put it, freaking out. Your husbands and fathers, and your wife are... afraid of Santa Claus! (*Thunder & Lightning FX.*)

CHARLES: Ha! Don't be something, Mother.

NANCY: Yeah, that's preposterous.

GEORGE: How could anyone be afraid of a lovable you-know-who like that?

ALICE: (*Lunges with the puppet.*) Rrrrrrrgh! Rrrrrroar!
Muhahahahahahaha!

GEORGE: (*Pops a bunch of pills.*) Aaaaah!

NANCY: No! Please!

CHARLES: Alright, alright! Please stop! I admit it!

NANCY: Yes! Yes! We're afraid of him!

GEORGE: Please, no more!

ALICE: (*Hiding the puppet.*) Very vell; but remember, he's right here.

LORENA: Dad how could you be afraid of Santa?

SANDRA: That's why he never goes to the mall in December!

PAUL: Come to think of it, Nancy never goes to a department store for her Christmas shopping. She does it all online.

RICKY: Mom always takes us to see Santa. So, this is why Dad never comes.

CINDY: He never even looks at our pictures with Santa.

MA BEE: You wimp!

SANDRA: This is really embarrassing.

ALICE: Yes, embarrassing indeed. But, I'm afraid that it's all my fault, and you deserve an explanation.

WINSTON: Careful, Madam.

ALICE: Vhen dey ver just young children I took dem to a department store. Dere vas a big line to see Santa. So I told dem to go stand in it and I'd be back vhen I finished shopping.

CHARLES: Mother, please. Do we have to re-live all this?

ALICE: Dey are your family! Dey deserve to know! Vell, dere vas an incident. I wanted to get a Big Vheel for George; it's like a low rider tricycle with dat big vheel in the front and a hand brake so you can spin out.

PAUL: I loved Big Wheels.

RICKY: They make 'em so they can do three-sixties now!

ALICE: (*Losing the accent.*) I thought so. You know, I saw a commercial for those the other day and it looks like the same thing but vhen it did a three-sixty I vas like "whoa!"

MAGGI: So, what happened?

ALICE: Vell, dey ver on sale for an incredible price and der vas only one left and der vas dis lady who tried to grab it before me. So I grabbed her. And a whole brou ha ha broke out.

SANDRA: Brou ha ha? What?

ALICE: Security escorted me out of da store. I vas so upset dat I didn't realize dat I'd forgotten dee children until I got home. I left my own kids at a department store.

CINDY: I got left at Chuck E. Cheese once.

PAUL: I knew you looked familiar!

ALICE: By dee time I got back, dee store vas closed. It vas all locked up undt dark. I ran to dee door undt dere vere our children, crying undt pounding on dee glass trying to get out. Behind dem... Santa Claus vas lying in pool of blood.

MAGGI: Was he dead?

ALICE: No. It turns out he vas just unconscious and vhen he came to he had no memory of de incident.

NELLIE: How awful!

ALICE: Yes. And dee children vere too terrified to talk about it. Is dat how you still remember it, Children?

GEORGE, CHARLES & NANCY: Yes, Mother. Uh-huh. Pretty much. [*etc.*]

LORENA: Well, that proves it wasn't the real Santa because that could never happen to him.

CINDY: Yeah, the really real Santa would have used his magic.

RICKY: It was probably just one of his helpers.

ALICE: Dat's vhat I figured. But on Christmas morning der father decided to dress up as Santa for vhen they came down da stairs to see their presents. After dee screaming stopped dey ver catatonic for dee rest of dee day.

MAGGI: So that's why we're forbidden to use you-know-who's name for all these years. You told me it was for religious reasons.

NELLIE: And that's why your favorite holiday is Halloween.

PAUL: You think you know a person.

SANDRA: I can't believe my Dad is afraid of Santa Claus.

LORENA: He's a Santaphobe.

MA BEE: Santaphobia; that's a new one.

PAUL: Nancy, you do see how ridiculous this is, don't you?

NANCY: As ridiculous as this is, need I remind you that I'm not the only one that has a "personal problem?"

PAUL: No, no need to mention the... uh... personal problem. Santaphobia is a perfectly understandable fear. So, is this whole Santa Claus thing the source of all the animosity between you?

ALICE: Partly. You see, because of dee children's fear of Santa Claus, ve always avoided him undt everything dat has to do vith him. So our Christmases evolved into some different, Santa-free traditions.

PAUL: Like the Spinach Toss!

ALICE: Yes. But several years ago, ve had our last Gruber Family Christmas, in our old home. Their father thought that perhaps ve could cure dem of their Santaphobia vonce undt for all. So during dee Spinach Toss he dressed up as Santa Clause undt...

NELLIE: Undt what?

ALICE: Der vas a brou ha, ha.

SANDRA: Wait, what?

CINDY: What's a brou ha, ha?

ALICE: It vas a fight, little boy.

CINDY: I'm a girl.

ALICE: And it vas nasty. So, now every vun knows your secret; undt every vun is still mad at each other? (*The siblings avoid eye contact.*) Den it is time for a traditional Gruber Family Christmas Eve dinner. Vinston.

BY KAMRON KLITGAARD

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