

ONE TOY FOR CHRISTMAS

by Geff Moyer



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ONE TOY FOR CHRISTMAS

A ONE ACT PLAY

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SYNOPSIS: This fast-paced, witty play blends zany animal characters, with a boy who is fearful that Santa will not be able to find him. The laughs will keep rolling as we join the very hungry forest animals in a desperate search for food on Christmas Eve. In the midst of their search, distant bells are heard and a wind-up soldier (mime role) plummets from the sky. Albert, the wise owl, concludes the strange object is a human toy and should be taken to the human burrow. Only the bravest (and perhaps most foolhardy) of the animals are willing to take the risk of a very dangerous trek to the human's burrow. Meanwhile, A city family is spending a couple of nights in an old, rustic cabin built by Father's great grandfather. There is no T V, no Play Station, and no neighbors, Young Joey is very discontent. Furthermore, he is concerned that Santa Claus will not be able to find him in this snow-covered wilderness. Join the adventure as the forest animals, and Joey learn a lesson about giving, the comforts of tradition and what Christmas is really all about.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 females, 2 males, 2 either)

HARRIET (f)An energetic rabbit. *(111 lines)*
 SELMA (f)A squirrelly squirrel. *(66 lines)*
 BERNARD (m/f)(Bernice) An overweight, grumpy beaver.
(126 lines)
 JOEY (m)8-10 year old boy. *(54 lines)*
 FATHER (m)Mid-thirties male. *(52 lines)*
 MOTHER (f)Mid-thirties female. *(18 lines)*
 DEERDRA (f)A narcissistic deer. *(112 lines)*
 TOY SOLDIER (m)Classic Napoleonic wind-up type. Mime
 role. *(Non-Speaking.)*
 ALBERT (m/f)(Alberta) A wise owl. *(89 lines)*

EXTRAS

FOREST ANIMALS (m/f)rabbits, mice, and skunks

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PROPS

- Small Christmas tree
- Pocketknife
- One round green thing
- One fake cow patty
- 1 pair of cracked spectacles
- 1 pair of large new spectacles
- Bundle of carrots
- Ice pick
- Small book
- String of Christmas bells with note
- 6 large tags
- 1 colorfully gift wrapped box with removable lid

NOTES

Obviously, the more elaborate the costumes the funnier the characters, but it can also be done with animal masks or facial make-up and socks covering the actor's feet and hands. Regardless of how detailed you make the set, there must be places for the animals to hide. The SOLDIER'S rifle must make a loud noise – either from the prop itself or from a sound cue.

AT RISE:

Today, Christmas Eve, just before sunset. Most of stage is snow covered banks and forest. Far to one side of stage is the front of an old cabin with a working door. Lights up. Various animals are scurrying about the stage in search of food. HARRIET and SELMA are searching around the front of the cabin. They are rapidly scurrying about, snooping, sniffing, yet always taking quick, cautious glances toward the old cabin. BERNARD stands in one place shivering. Suddenly, HARRIET and SELMA come face-to-face.

HARRIET: Find anything?

SELMA: Not a hair! (*Laughs and continues scurrying.*)

HARRIET: That's not funny! (*Muttering.*) She is such a squirrel! (*Scurrying with nose towards the ground, searching for food, SHE bumps head first into BERNARD'S rather large posterior.*). Oops! Sorry, Bernard.

BERNARD: Didn't feel a thing; my butt's frozen.

HARRIET: Don't just stand there, help us find some food!

BERNARD: My feet are frozen.

SELMA: Well, can you smell any food?

BERNARD: My nose is frozen.

HARRIET: Then listen for the humans and warn us.

BERNARD: My ears are frozen.

HARRIET: Can you at least WATCH for the humans?

BERNARD: That I can do. My eyelids are frozen open anyway.

HARRIET: (*Looking around and stomping HER foot.*) This is so flustering! I'm so hungry I could eat a squirrel.

SELMA: (*Popping HER head above a snow drift.*) HEY!

HARRIET: Just a figure of speech, Selma! (*Begins HER hunt again.*)

There has to be something – a morsel, a tidbit, a crumb...

BERNARD: I hate winter...

HARRIET: ...a bite, a nibble, a swallow...

BERNARD: ...and snow...

HARRIET: ...a gnash, a munch, a grain...

BERNARD: ...and cold...

HARRIET: ...a scrappyocious, a nip, a dash...

BERNARD: ...and ice...

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HARRIET: Stop griping and help us find some food!

BERNARD: Where, Harriet? Huh? Where? Nowhere, that's where!
Never seen such a bunch of dumb bunnies!

SELMA: (*Pops head up again.*) I beg your pardon! Learn your animals, Bernard!

BERNARD: I DO know my animals, and I'm smart enough to also know there is no food in the winter. Eat a snowball, Selma!

SELMA: Had one for breakfast, thank you. (*Back to scurrying.*)

HARRIET: Oooh, what I'd give for one, juicealuscious orange carrot. (*Smacks HER lips.*) Yessiree, just one scrumptallyicious carrot...

BERNARD: Stop drooling. You'll freeze your mouth shut. On second thought, drool!

SELMA: (*Pops up holding a round item.*) Hey, hey, I found a round, green thing.

HARRIET hurries over to SELMA to observe object.

HARRIET: Horse poop. (*Returns to scurrying.*)

SELMA: Oh. (*Drops item and continues scurrying.*)

BERNARD: There are no carrots, Harriet. Carrots are smart. They're like bears. They hibernate in the winter, which is what we should be doing. But noooo, we're out here freezing our tails off.

HARRIET: I can't sleep on an empty stomach!

BERNARD: Then sleep on your back!

SELMA: (*Pops up.*) What was that?

HARRIET: What was what?

SELMA: I think I heard dogs.

HARRIET: (*Listens.*) I don't hear anything.

SELMA: (*Turning in circles.*) It's dogs, I know it's dogs...

HARRIET: Selma, I don't hear anything.

SELMA: Then listen harder!

HARRIET: Okay, okay! I'm all ears.

BERNARD: I'll say.

ALL ANIMALS listen.

JOEY: (*Offstage.*) It's kind of short.

FATHER: (*Offstage.*) It's taller than you.

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SELMA: Oh no, talking dogs!

HARRIET: It's the humans! They're back!

JOEY: *(Offstage.)* Kinda scraggly, too.

BERNARD: Hide!

The animals scurry and hide behind snow banks and trees as JOEY and his FATHER enter. FATHER carries a small Christmas tree.

FATHER: We'll fill it out with decorations, like we always do.

JOEY: Come on, dad, we've never had a tree this small. Back home our tree would almost touch the ceiling. This thing's a runt!

FATHER: Back home we couldn't walk out our front door and cut down our own tree though, now could we?

JOEY: Then why didn't we cut down a bigger one?

FATHER: Couldn't fit it in the cabin. When your great, great grandpa built this place he didn't plan on having a giant Christmas tree right in the middle of its main room.

JOEY: "Main room!?" That's all it is – one room – a couple of bunks, and a kitchen the size of my closet. No TV, no Xbox, no phone, no nothin'! And I can't believe we have to walk outside to some tiny, cold shack to go to the bathroom.

FATHER: *(Chuckling.)* It's called an outhouse.

JOEY: I froze my butt off, dad, sitting on that thing – thought I was going to stick to it.

FATHER: Aw, don't worry about that. Your mom brought a spatula – I'll just pry your butt off that toilet seat like a stuck pancake *(Chuckles and begins trimming tree with pocket knife.)*

JOEY: Not funny!

FATHER: The first and only time I visited here, I was your age, I thought the same thing: boring, nothing to do. Why am I here on Christmas Eve? Then your great grandpa showed me this collection of little tin soldiers. They had belonged to his dad, your great, great grandpa. He and I sat them up and had little battles, rolling marbles at each other's armies. They were so cool - all about three inches tall and every single one of them was hand painted with bright red coats and tall black hats. He had, oh, probably thirty or forty of them, kept them in an old shoebox.

JOEY: Are they still here? Can we play with them?

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FATHER: Sorry, kid, they're long gone.

JOEY: What happened to them?

FATHER: No one knows. Besides this cabin, they were both the only things his dad left him.

JOEY: If my great grandpa built this...why didn't he build the bathroom inside?

FATHER: Then it couldn't be called an "outhouse." (*Looks at JOEY for a brief moment, stops trimming, rises and crosses to tree nearest cabin.*) Come here, I want to show you something.

JOEY: What? (*Crosses to FATHER.*)

FATHER: (*Pointing to tree.*) See this?

JOEY: It's a tree, dad, like the hundred others around here.

FATHER: Look closer, right here! See the carvings?

JOEY: (*Squinting.*) Yeah, kind of.

FATHER: What's it say?

JOEY: (*Straining to see carving clearly.*) It's hard to read.

FATHER: 'Cause it's very old.

JOEY: Uh, it says, "I belong here." And then there's some letters under it.

FATHER: Those letters are his initials, along with my grandpa's, my father's, and mine. You're next.

JOEY: Me!?! Why?

FATHER: Tradition, Joey. All those initials were carved on Christmas Eve, going back, well, seventy, eighty or so years. Yours belong right under mine. Then when your sister gets old enough we'll come back and...

JOEY: We have to come back!?

FATHER: Oh, come on, Joey, it's just for a couple of days, then you'll appreciate all you have even more when we get back...(*lightly swatting JOEY'S fanny.*)... especially a warm toilet seat. (*Crossing back to little tree.*) This is our heritage, son. Not many folks nowadays can say they actually still own a cabin in the woods built by their great, great grandparents. (*HE returns to trimming and shaping the little tree.*)

JOEY: Lucky them.

FATHER: I don't hear your little sister complaining.

JOEY: She's not born yet!

FATHER: (*Chuckles.*) Guess that's why I don't hear her.

JOEY: What if mom goes into...into...what was that word? You know, when she's going to have the baby.

FATHER: Labor?

JOEY: Yeah! Labor! What if that happens and we're stuck out here in the middle of nowhere?

FATHER: The baby isn't due until February. We leave here the day after Christmas.

JOEY: Not if we get snowed in. What if a blizzard hits and we're stuck here until spring?

FATHER: Why do you think I rented a Land Rover? Lighten up, kid! This is an adventure. Make the best of it. Someday you'll want to bring your kids here. Let them carve their initials in that tree on Christmas Eve, too.

JOEY: Why does it have to be Christmas Eve? Why couldn't we come here when the weather's nicer?

FATHER: I told you: Tradition. At eight years old a name is carved. They'll be here forever, Joey.

JOEY: Unless someone cuts down the tree.

FATHER: Now why would anyone do that?

JOEY: So Santa Claus can see this place.

FATHER: What!?

JOEY: How's he ever going to find us with all these trees? And the roof is covered with snow. Everything is snow, snow, snow and trees, trees, trees! He's gonna miss this place, I just know it. He'll fly right over us, dad. I know he will. Plus, he can't get many presents under that little tree.

FATHER: No, you can't, but you getting gifts isn't the only thing about Christmas, Joey. It's also a time for giving – and not just giving gifts – but giving love and understanding, and...and being with those you love. This night, the Christmas Eve when you're eight, is very important to our whole family. Christmas is not just your day, Joey, and I think you're being a little selfish to think it is.

JOEY: I'm sorry.

FATHER: Hey, you know the chances are pretty high that tricky ol' Santa leaves you more gifts back at our house.

JOEY: Ya think?

FATHER: Depends on if you've been good enough to earn them.

JOEY: I have. I think.

MOTHER opens the cabin door, SHE is pregnant.

FATHER: Would your mom agree with that?

MOTHER: Agree with what?

FATHER: That our grumpy, grumbling offspring hasn't been "naughty" this year.

MOTHER: Well, I'd appreciate a cleaner room.

JOEY: I'm a guy, mom. Guys have messy rooms.

FATHER: He's got a point there.

MOTHER: You're both full of baloney. Get on in here, we have popcorn to string.

JOEY: To what!?

MOTHER: String! That's what they used to do in the olden days: string popcorn for decorations. We're also going to paint some pine cones.

JOEY: Why are we painting pine cones?

MOTHER: For tree decorations, silly. We didn't bring our stuff.

JOEY: We didn't bring our decorations!?

MOTHER: They're all on the tree at home, and food took up most of the room in the Rover. Besides, making our own will be fun. Come on now! Hurry up! Get that...that cute *little* tree in here. *(SHE chuckles and closes door.)*

JOEY: See? Even mom thinks it's little.

FATHER: She's gettin' with the program: stringin' popcorn, paintin' pine cones...it's like...it's like we're pioneers, Joey...out on the frontier. *(Stops trimming little tree.)* Okay, this is ready to decorate. How about you? You ready?

JOEY: For what?

FATHER: *(Holds pocket knife out to JOEY.)* To carve your initials in that tree.

JOEY: Do I have to?

FATHER: Tradition, Joey. *(Crossing to tree.)* Come on.

JOEY: What if I cut off my finger?

FATHER: Now you're just being silly.

JOEY: I'll do it later.

FATHER: It's gotta be done tonight, on Christmas Eve. That's the...

FATHER/JOEY: Tradition.

JOEY: Yeah, yeah, I know.

FATHER: Do you? Do you really know, Joey?

JOEY: What'd ya mean?

FATHER: Your great, great grandfather carved those words in that tree to let the world know that this place was his, that he belonged here and all of his family that followed him belonged here, too. Keeping a tradition alive is very important, Joey. I hope someday you'll realize that. I'm gonna take this tree inside. *(Crosses to cabin door with tree.)* You coming?

JOEY: I'll be there in a minute.

FATHER: Don't roam off and get eaten by a bear.

JOEY: There's bears!?

FATHER: It was a joke, Joey! A joke! They're hibernating. Jeez! Relax, boy. You're acting like a city kid.

JOEY: I am a city kid!

FATHER: Well, try not to act like it in front of the bears. They like to chew on soft city meat.

JOEY: Ha-Ha! Very funny, dad!

FATHER: And you think about what I said, Joey: Tradition. *(HE exits into cabin with small tree.)*

JOEY: "Tradition!" What about the "tradition" of Santa coming on Christmas Eve? *(Wandering and moping and kicking snow.)* That "tradition" is bonkers 'cause he'll never find me out here! *(HE looks at tree carving.)* How lame. *(HE looks at cabin.)* At least the chimney's big enough for him to get down – *(shouting into air.)* If he can even see it! I know, I'll make sure the fire is burning real hot tonight so it'll make plenty of smoke so he can see the cabin. Yeah! No! Wait! If the fire's too hot, how will he get down the chimney? *(Looks around and sighs.)* This sucks. BORING!! *(Listens.)* And it's too quiet. No cars, no buses, no airplanes, no sirens, not even a noisy neighbor. *(Looks up.)* If you can hear me, Santa, just one new toy...that's all I want... something that...something that'll make this place suck less. Please! Deal? *(Pause.)* Oh, what's the use! He'll never spot this dump. *(HE exits into cabin.)*

A few moments after cabin door closes, HARRIET pops HER head up out of a snow bank.

- HARRIET:** Psssstt, Bernard! All clear. (*Looks around for BERNARD.*)
 PSSSST! Bernard! Where are you? PSSSSTTTT!
- BERNARD:** (*Coming out of hiding.*) What? You spring a leak?
 (*Mockingly.*) "PSSSTTT! PSSST!"
- HARRIET:** (*Scurries towards cabin door.*) Did they leave any food?
 Carrots, corn, artichokeyociouses...?
- BERNARD:** Get away from there, hair brain! Freezing's bad enough
 without you getting us caught.
- SELMA:** (*Emerging from hiding and holding an item.*) Hey, hey, I found
 something, I found something.
- HARRIET:** (*Scurries over to SELMA and looks at item.*) Cow patty.
 (*Continues search.*)
- SELMA:** Oh. (*Drops item.*)
- HARRIET:** Somewhere out there is one carrot...one lonely carrot that
 did not hibernate...just waiting for me to find it. Yessiree, just
 waiting!
- BERNARD:** There are no carrots in winter, Harriet!
- HARRIET:** Oh, you ol' grump! Why don't you just go home?
- BERNARD:** Can't get in; the ice froze my door shut. Look at this! I
 chipped a tooth trying to gnaw through it. I hate ice!
- Far off in distance we hear the jingling of bells. The animals quickly
 become alert.*
- HARRIET:** Did you hear that?
- SELMA:** I did! Is it dogs?
- BERNARD:** All I hear are my teeth chattering.
- Suddenly DEERDRA bounds out of the woods.*
- DEERDRA:** Surprise!! (*The animals shriek and hide; DEERDRA has
 a southern accent.*) Oh, for heaven's sake, it's just little ol' me, the
 prettiest animal in the woods. Come out, my pets!
- HARRIET:** (*Emerging.*) I hate it when she calls us that.
- SELMA:** (*Emerging.*) Me, too! Makes me feel like a hamster.
- DEERDRA:** Oh, please! It's merely a term of...endeement.
 (*Chuckles.*) Oh my, beauty and wit.
- BERNARD:** Why do you always have to sneak up like that all the time?

DEERDRA: Can't help it. I am just naturally light on my hooves. Unlike SOME animals. (*SHE holds up a hoof.*) Do y'all like this color of polish? I think its..."adeerable" (*Chuckles.*)...I am just full of them today.

BERNARD: I agree. You are certainly full of it.

DEERDRA: Why, thank you, Bernard...because I know you were referring to my beauty within, as well as my beauty without.

BERNARD: Not exactly. (*HE shivers from the cold.*)

DEERDRA: Bernard, you are shivering like a bowl of...excuse me...make that a VAT of jelly.

BERNARD: That happens when one is freezing, hat rack ears.

DEERDRA: Then go home and get warm, you rotund rodent!

BERNARD: The ice froze my door shut. I hate ice!

DEERDRA: Oh contraire, ice is the best part of winter. (*She frames HER face and smiles.*) It reflects this.

BERNARD: Then reflect it in the ice covering my door. That would crack it.

DEERDRA: Bernard, Bernard, my pet, you must learn to appreciate what others have and you lack. Take your tail, for example...too big...too flat. Mine? Perfectly fluffy and white. And your feet? My gracious, fat, clumsy...you could walk on water. Mine? Dainty...light...petite...and look at your squinty eyes, Bernard. Like two tiny slits in a massive ball of brown fur. Now look at mine. Why, when I flick these lashes, the buck stops here.

BERNARD: (*Aside.*) If I had anything in my tummy I'd puke.

Suddenly the bells are heard again in the distance.

HARRIET: There's that sound again.

BERNARD: I heard it that time.

DEERDRA: (*Panicking.*) Hunters!!!!

SELMA: Dogs...

THEY all run about, bumping into each other, trying to find hiding places.

HARRIET: They'll hang my feet on a keychain...

DEERDRA: They'll put my beautiful head on their wall...

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BERNARD: ...This is my winter coat, my winter coat...

SELMA: ...It's dogs, it's dogs...

HARRIET: *(Suddenly stops scurrying.)* Wait! Stop! Listen! *(Pause.)* It's gone again. Very strange, yessiree, very strange indeed.

DEERDRA: Ssshhh!

ALL ANIMALS: WHAT!?

DEERDRA: I hear something else.

SELMA: Is it dogs, is it? It's dogs, I know it's dogs...

HARRIET: SSHH, Selma! *(Listens.)* I hear it too. It's very...very...

THEY ALL listen. A distant whistling sound is heard from above, similar to a bomb dropping. It grows louder as they stare up and begin to become even more frightened.

BERNARD: It's getting louder...and that means...it's getting...

ALL ANIMALS: *(Looking at each other.)* Closer!!!

Once again they panic, scatter, and seek hiding places. BERNARD gets behind a skinny tree that in no way conceals him. DEERDRA kicks HIM in the fanny and he moves to a better place. DEERDRA takes his former hiding spot. As the whistling reaches its peak, a TOY SOLDIER comes sliding onto stage, as if dropped from high above. This effect can be created by incorporating a child's sliding board in a wing with its base guiding the sliding soldier into or behind a snow bank. It should land slightly US in a seated position far on the opposite side of the stage from the cabin, and facing audience and animals. There should be a span of snow and trees between the cabin and the SOLDIER's landing site. It is a classic Napoleonic wind-up soldier with a key in its back and a rifle resting on its soldier. After a moment, all is quiet and the animals begin to emerge.

HARRIET: What...what...what is that?

DEERDRA: Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear, oh...

BERNARD: Is it a hunter?

DEERDRA: Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear...

SELMA: It's some kind of new dog...I know it is...

DEERDRA: Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear...

HARRIET: It's not a fox – no bushyocious tail.

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BERNARD: Not a wolf – no fangs.

DEERDRA: Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear...

SELMA: Is it slobbering? Dogs slobber you know....

DEERDRA: Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear...

BERNARD: Will you stop repeating your name!?

HARRIET: (*Moving closer to SOLDIER.*) It's...it's not moving. Nosiree, not moving at all.

SELMA: Maybe it's...it's dead.

BERNARD: After a fall like that!?! You think!?

DEERDRA: Maybe it's playing coyote.

BERNARD: Possum.

DEERDRA: Don't be silly, Bernard. That is not a possum. It looks nothing like a possum.

BERNARD: I meant...

DEERDRA: You need to get to know your animals!

SELMA: That's what I told him!

BERNARD: I know my animals.

DEERDRA: Okay, smarty fur, then what kind of animal is that?

BERNARD: I don't know that one!

SELMA: Aha! I knew it. Every Tuesday night the otters offer a class in animal recognition. You should attend.

BERNARD: I know my animals!!

DEERDRA: Harriet, go ask it what it is!

HARRIET: ME!?! Why me!?!

DEERDRA: You're the luckiest. You have four rabbit's feet.

HARRIET: And want to keep them!

BERNARD: (*With a taunting smirk to DEERDRA.*) Why don't you go ask it?

DEERDRA: Oh no, not me, I'm shaking like a rock.

BERNARD: Leaf!

DEERDRA: Good idea. (*Turns to go.*) Think I will!

BERNARD: (*Grabbing DEERDRA.*) No, you don't, spindle brain. We're all in this together. We're gonna find out what that thing is together.

SELMA: The only thing I'm going to find is a tall tree. (*SHE runs off.*)

BERNARD: Get back here, you chicken!

SELMA: Squirrel! Learn your animals! (*SHE is gone.*)

BERNARD: I do know my animals, now get back...

HARRIET: Oh, let her go! Jeez! She is such a squirrel! Look, whatever this is, it's here, right here in our forest...and we don't know what it wants, what it does, or what it eats. One of us, yessiree, one of us has to find out.

BERNARD: I want to keep my winter coat.

DEERDRA: I will not endanger my natural beauty.

SELMA: (*Calling from offstage and up high.*) And I'm up a tree.

HARRIET: Fine! I'll do it. Jeezalyocious! Yessiree, I'll do it. (*SHE puffs up HER chest, stomps HER foot and reluctantly moves towards SOLDIER.*) Yessiree...yes...sir...ree...

DEERDRA: (*Aside to BERNARD.*) Makes sense. She is the quickest of the three of us, now that SELMA roostered out.

BERNARD: Chickened!

DEERDRA: Chicken, rooster, tomato, potato...

BERNARD: Do you ever listen to yourself?

HARRIET: (*Sniffing at SOLDIER.*) Funny, it...it looks human...but doesn't smell human. Nosirree, not human at all.

DEERDRA: That's a relief. Humans stink, especially the little ones.

HARRIET: Uh...hello. Hello? (*Pause.*) Are you...are you an...an animal?

DEERDRA: Careful, Harriet. Curiosity killed the frog.

BERNARD: Cat! Curiosity killed the Cat!

DEERDRA: Cats, too, huh?

HARRIET: Uh, would you...would you like to tell us your name? (*Pause.*) Would you?

BERNARD: Humpf! Not very sociable, is it?

HARRIET: We're just trying to be neighborly. My name's Harriet. (*SHE is closer to SOLDIER.*) That's Deerdra.

DEERDRA: (*SHE curtsies.*) Charmed, I'm sure.

HARRIET: That's Bernard.

BERNARD: Pleasure...I hope.

HARRIET: (*SHE is now right up next to SOLDIER.*) You see, we were looking for some food, mainly carrots. You haven't seen any, have you? I mean, from up there, you might've spotted a roaming carrot or two and maybe you could tell us...(*SHE nonchalantly leans on SOLDIER'S shoulder.*)...exactly where those carrots...

The SOLDIER'S arm moves. It rises and assumes a classic military attention stance. HARRIET, DEERDRA, SELMA, and BERNARD shriek and hide. ALL OTHER ANIMALS shriek, panic, and exit and do not return until end of show.

HARRIET: *(After a moment SHE sticks HER head out of hiding.)* Did you see that? Did you see that?! It tried to grab and eat me. Yessirreebob, grab and eat me!

DEERDRA: Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear...

HARRIET: I escaped by a hair.

DEERDRA: Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear...

SELMA: *(Offstage and up high.)* Can it climb trees? I'll bet it can. With my luck it can climb...

BERNARD: It's not moving now. See!? Maybe...maybe it's frozen.

DEERDRA: Maybe it's playing coyote again.

BERNARD: Possum!

DEERDRA: Possums hang by their tails. Is that thing hanging by its tail, Bernard? Huh? Is it?

BERNARD: Well it's not howlin' at the moon either!

HARRIET: Stop it! Deerdra, you try to talk to it.

DEERDRA: Me!?

HARRIET: I thought...maybe...maybe it'll respond better to...to beauty.

DEERDRA: Huh?

HARRIET: Nothing can resist your beauty, right?

BERNARD: So she says.

DEERDRA: That is true.

HARRIET: So...so...just...just flap those lashyciouses.

BERNARD: Yeah, strut your stuff, wiggle your tail.

DEERDRA: *(Offended.)* What kind of an animal do you think I am?

HARRIET: Just give it one of your buck-stopping winks...and smile big. Yessiree, real big.

DEERDRA: I do have a peach of a smile, don't I? I floss, you know.

BERNARD: Give it your Bambi look.

DEERDRA: Well...I suppose I could try. *(SHE cautiously approaches SOLDIER.)* Uh, excuse me...

BERNARD: *(Backing away with HARRIET in tow.)* That's it! We're right behind you.

HARRIET: We're the only ones. All the others skedadddled.

BERNARD: Bunch of chickens!

SELMA: (*Offstage, up high.*) They are not chickens! Will you ever learn...?

BERNARD: Stuff a nut in your mouth, Selma!

DEERDRA: What should I ask it?

HARRIET: What it is...!

BERNARD: ...Why it's here...!

HARRIET: ...its name!

SELMA: (*Offstage, up high.*)...if it's a dog...

HARRIET: Go on, go on....

DEERDRA: Okay, okay. (*Flirting.*) Uh, what's your name, big boy?
(*Pause.*) In town long, sailor? (*Pause, turns back to others and shrugs.*)

HARRIET: Keep talking.

DEERDRA: I don't know what to say.

BERNARD: That's a first.

HARRIET: Say anything!

DEERDRA: Uh, come here often? New in town, soldier? It, uh, it was...uh, nice of you to drop in.

ALL animals are circling the SOLDIER, studying it.

SELMA: (*Offstage and up high.*) Maybe it doesn't speak animal.

DEERDRA: (*Loud and slow with exaggerated enunciation and silly signs with HER hooves.*) Do...you...speak...Animal?

Pause.

HARRIET: Not a word.

DEERDRA: Not a peep.

BERNARD: Not a squeak.

DEERDRA: Not a grunt.

SELMA: (*Offstage, up high.*) Not even a bark.

BERNARD: When someone speaks to you it's only polite to respond.
Do you hear me? Are you deaf? (*Pause.*) You are just plain rude!

BERNARD pushes on the SOLDIER'S shoulder which causes it suddenly march in a small circle, stop, un-shoulder HIS rifle and fire it. It should be loud and frightening. HE shoulders HIS rifle and returns to a stance of frozen attention. ALL ANIMALS shriek and hide, of course.

DEERDRA: See what you did, Bernard? See what you did? You fat-tailed swimming squirrel!

SELMA: *(Offstage, up high.)* I resent that!

BERNARD: Me!? *(Mocking.)* "In town long, sailor? New in town, Soldier?"

DEERDRA: Hey, that's my best line!

A knothole in a tree flies open and an irritated ALBERT shouts.

ALBERT: Whoooo is making that ruckus?

ALL ANIMALS: Albert!!! *(THEY run to HIS tree.)*

HARRIET: Oh, Albert, are we glad to see you.

ALBERT: Is that the sun I see?

HARRIET: We have a serious problem, here, Albert. Seriousious, indeed, yessiree, yesirree!

ALBERT: And you think I give a hoot? I am nocturnal. Hear me? Nocturnal! Kindly do your yelling and screaming after the sun goes down. *(HE slams knothole.)*

ALL ANIMALS look at each other for a moment then begin pounding on the knothole.

HARRIET: Albert!

DEERDRA: Come out!

BERNARD: We need you!

ALL ANIMALS: AAALLLBBBEEERRRTTT!

ALBERT: *(Knothole opens.)* SILENCE! *(Pause.)* Alright, alright! Now...please calmly elucidate the essence of the emergency.

ALL ANIMALS: Huh?

ALBERT: Paraphrase the perplexing problem.

ALL ANIMALS: Huh?

ALBERT: What's the fuss!?

ALL ANIMALS: Ohhh!

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HARRIET: That's the fuss! (*Pointing to SOLDIER.*)

ALBERT: What? (*HE leans out of knothole to observe and sees SOLDIER.*) Oh my! Oh my! Fascinating! (*HE comes out of tree, dons a pair of cracked spectacles, and approaches SOLDIER.*) Fascinating!

HARRIET: What is it, Albert?

ALBERT: Simply fascinating!

HARRIET: It tried to eat me.

BERNARD: And its stick makes thunder.

ALBERT: Utterly fascinating! (*HE circles and observes the SOLDIER.*)

DEERDRA: (*Aside to BERNARD.*) What's a fascinating?

ALBERT: It resembles a human, but is not a human. I wish my spectacles weren't broken.

HARRIET: Careful, Albert, it tried to grab me.

BERNARD: And it plays coyote...possum!

ALBERT: Fascinating!

DEERDRA: Would someone please tell me what the heck is a fascinating?

BERNARD: Why doesn't it move now?

HARRIET: Is it...is it...dead?

SELMA: (*Offstage and up high.*) Is it a dog?

ALBERT: It isn't dead because...Wait! (*Looks offstage.*) Did I just hear Selma?

HARRIET: Yes.

ALBERT: Up a tree again?

HARRIET: She's such a squirrel.

ALBERT: As I was saying...It isn't dead because it was never alive.

A confused pause.

BERNARD: (*Aside.*) And they call him wise?

ALBERT: What was that, Bernard?

BERNARD: I said...that's very wise.

ALBERT: This, my friends, is a toy.

ALL ANIMALS: A what? A toy? What's a toy? A new kind of dog?

ALBERT: No, no, no, nothing of the sort. It is simply something small humans play with, and sometimes big ones. It's completely harmless.

HARRIET: Harmless?

ALBERT: Absolutely.

BERNARD: It's not alive?

ALBERT: Not at all.

DEERDRA: Well, I'll be a kangaroo's uncle.

BERNARD: Monkey's!

DEERDRA: Oh, please! That is NOT a monkey, Bernard! I know monkeys! (*SHE is behind SOLDIER.*) Monkeys have long tails. Look at this! No tail! Just two round bumps!

DEERDRA smacks SOLDIER on the fanny and it goes into its marching routine, culminating with the loud bang of its rifle and returning to stand of attention. ALL but ALBERT shriek, scatter, and hide. ALBERT watches with humorous fascination.

ALBERT: (*Chuckling.*) Come, come, abandon your asylums!

ALL ANIMALS: Huh?

ALBERT: Hasten from your havens!

ALL ANIMALS: Huh?

ALBERT: Get out here!

ALL ANIMALS: Oohh!

ALBERT: (*Holds out HIS wings and turns in a circle.*) See! No harm done.

Animals are examining ALBERT for damage.

BERNARD: He's right.

DEERDRA: Not a mussed feather.

HARRIET: Not one hole in him. Yessiree, not one holyocious. But where did it come from, Albert?

BERNARD: We saw it fall out of the sky.

DEERDRA: Yeah! How'd it get up there in the first place? Does it fly?

SELMA: (*Offstage and high up.*) Maybe a birddog dropped it.

BERNARD: Birddogs can't fly, Selma!

SELMA: Oh yeah, as if you'd know, Mister Don't Know My Animals!

ALBERT: Rather than where it came from, the more important question is – what shall we do with it?

ALL ANIMALS: Huh? Do with it? What'd you mean?

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- ALBERT:** Obviously we can't leave it here, in the middle of the forest.
It would frighten our friends.
- DEERDRA:** It did! They all ran off and left us.
- HARRIET:** So what'd we do with this...this...
- ALBERT:** Toy.
- HARRIET:** Toy. Can't bury it, (*Stomps HER foot.*) grounds too hard.
- BERNARD:** Can't throw it in the river, it's frozen over.
- DEERDRA:** Stick it in a cave?
- ALBERT:** What about the bears?
- DEERDRA:** Maybe they'd eat it. Bears eat anything.
- ALBERT:** Allow me to repeat: this toy is not alive. It's made of stuff that isn't alive. Even a bear won't eat that. It would be like you eating tree bark, Deerdra.
- DEERDRA:** Yuk!
- BERNARD:** What's wrong with tree bark?
- ALBERT:** The only place for a human toy is with a human.
- BERNARD:** I don't think I like where this is going.
- ALBERT:** We have to take it to the human's burrow.
- BERNARD:** I knew I wouldn't like it.
- HARRIET:** Oh no, nosirree, nosirree indeediocious!
- DEERDRA:** (*To ALBERT.*) Have you gone apples?
- BERNARD:** Bananas!
- ALBERT:** Fate has selected you animals to make the forest safe again.
- DEERDRA:** Who's Fate? And who gave her the right to select us?
- BERNARD:** Yeah, who does she think she is?
- HARRIET:** You heard the thunder it makes, Albert. The humans would hear it...
- DEERDRA:** ...And put my head on their wall...
- SELMA:** (*Offstage and up high.*) ...And sick their dogs on me...
- BERNARD:** ...And use my fur for a dozen hats.
- DEERDRA:** ...Oh, you're being modest, Bernard – more like ten dozen hats...
- HARRIET:** ...we may be animals but we're not dumb. (*Glancing offstage and up high.*) Well, most of us.
- SELMA:** (*Offstage and up high.*) I heard that!
- BERNARD:** We could all end up being a banquet!
- DEERDRA:** Or worse – a buffet!

ALL ANIMALS: No, no, bad idea, bad idea, bad, bad, bad idea...

ALBERT: Calm down, please! Watch this! (*ALBERT removes the key from the SOLDIER'S back.*) This is its heart. When it's out, the toy can't move...or make thunder. (*HE nudges SOLDIER'S shoulder.*) See, no moving, no thunder. We simply carry it to the human's burrow and scurry away. Easy. There is really no other solution. (*THEY ALL look at each other for a moment.*) Well...are you game?

BERNARD: We will be if we're not careful.

ALBERT: Well?

Pause as animals look at each other and fret and ponder the dilemma.

HARRIET: (*Deciding, SHE stomps HER feet.*) Well, they've been lucky so far.

ALBERT: Good show, Harriet! We must be careful and quiet. Very, very quiet. What say you, Bernard?

BERNARD: Well, I'm not very eager...but...okay.

ALBERT: Deerdra, can you be quiet?

DEERDRA: Me!? Of course I can be quiet. I'm one of the quietest animals in the forest. Why, I'm known for being quiet. Just ask any other animal who the quietest is, they'll say, "Deerdra, of course!" I find it very offensive that you'd even suggest I couldn't be quiet. I can be as quiet as a church lion.

BERNARD: Mouse!

DEERDRA: EEEKK! Where?! (*SHE leaps into BERNARD'S arms.*)

ALBERT: (*Dryly.*) And we're off to a positive start.

DEERDRA: Put me down, you oversized gerbil.

BERNARD: Gladly. (*HE drops HER on HER fanny.*)

ALBERT: Well, shall we proceed with our precarious pilgrimage?

ALL ANIMALS: Huh?

ALBERT: Shall we traverse our tricky trek?

ALL ANIMALS: Huh?

ALBERT: Hit the road!

ALL ANIMALS: Oohh!

ALBERT: Bernard, you grab up here...(*Meaning SOLDIER'S arms.*)...Deerdra and Harriet the bottom.

HARRIET: Wait! (*Calling offstage.*) Selma, get down here and help us!

SELMA: (*Offstage and high up.*) Oh, you'll be fine without me.

HARRIET: Come on, Selma!

SELMA: (*Offstage and high up.*) I'm busy right now.

DEERDRA: We need your help, Selma!

SELMA: (*Offstage and high up.*) I'll keep lookout from up here.

BERNARD: Selma, get down here and help us or I'll tell all the other squirrels where you hide your nuts!

HARRIET: We're out here looking for food and she's had nuts stored away all the time? She is such a squirrel!

SELMA: (*Entering.*) You are evil, Bernard, plain evil. I should've known not to trust a dam builder.

BERNARD: (*Gesturing to SOLDIER'S other arm.*) You take that one.

ALBERT: All together now...LIFT!

The ANIMALS grunt and groan as THEY lift SOLDIER.

DEERDRA: Ugh! This is going to destroy my nails.

ALBERT: I shall lead the way.

BERNARD: I thought your spectacles were broken.

ALBERT: But not my keen sense of direction.

BERNARD: (*Mumbling.*) Blind leading the blind.

ALBERT: What was that, Bernard?

BERNARD: I said that's fine.

With ALBERT in the lead, stumbling and maybe bumping into a tree or two, THEY start their trek to the cabin.

DEERDRA: (*Straining.*) This toy needs to diet, like some beavers I know.

BERNARD: I swear, we make it through this alive and I'm using your horns to crack the ice on my door!

DEERDRA: Yeah, that'll be cold day in...

HARRIET: Quiet, you two!

SELMA: What if they have a dog? Humans and dogs work together, you know! They have some kind of unnatural truce.

BERNARD: (*To DEERDRA.*) Ouch! You stepped on my tail.

DEERDRA: Well, if it wasn't so big I...

HARRIET: Quiet! I'm not in the mood to be rabbit stew.

DEERDRA: (*Stops and gasps.*) They'd do that to you?

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ALBERT: Deerdra, ever heard of roasted venison?

DEERDRA: No.

ALBERT: If you're not quiet, you will.

DEERDRA: (*Aside to HARRIET.*) What's roasted venison?

HARRIET: You, well done!

DEERDRA: Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear...

THEY arrive at the front of the cabin.

ALBERT: (*Slipping HIS glasses down and squinting, HE gropes for the cabin wall.*) Put it down here.

ALL ANIMALS stand the SOLDIER in front of the cabin.

ALBERT: (*ALBERT goes to SOLDIER'S back with key.*) Now, we just put this back in here and...

Sure enough, the moment ALBERT inserts the key the SOLDIER goes into its routine, culminating with its usual loud bang from the rifle. ALL ANIMALS panic and hide.

MOTHER: (*From inside cabin.*) That sounded like a gunshot.

FATHER: (*Slowly opening door.*) Maybe it was just thunder.

MOTHER: Thunder!? In December!?

JOEY: (*From inside cabin.*) Or a car backfiring.

MOTHER: (*Inside cabin.*) Way out here?

FATHER: You two stay back! I'll take a look.

MOTHER: Be careful!

FATHER: (*Sticking head out of door.*) Anyone out there? Anyone out...(*Sees SOLDIER.*) What the devil...? (*HE steps out of cabin.*)

JOEY: (*Sticks head out door.*) What is it, dad?

MOTHER: (*Looking out of cabin.*) What's going on? You guys be careful!

FATHER: Where did this come...?

JOEY: (*Spotting SOLDIER.*) A giant toy soldier! Wow! (*HE runs to it.*)

MOTHER: Joey, Don't go near that thing!

JOEY: It's okay, mom. It's just a toy...a giant toy soldier. Just like the ones dad told me about, but bigger! This is so cool! *(HE walks around it, examining.)*

MOTHER: Where did it come from?

JOEY: It was Santa, mom. Don't you see? Santa found me, way out here in the middle of nowhere, he found me! I asked for one toy, something new to play with while we're here and he brought it. It's just like he took all those little soldiers, dad, and put them into one giant one. *(HE twists the key and the SOLDIER goes through its routine.)* That is awesome! *(HE removes the key and begins to lead the SOLDIER into the cabin.)* I'm taking it inside. What a great Christmas present. Wait until my buddies see this. *(HE and the SOLDIER are inside, then JOEY pokes HIS head back out of door.)* Hey, dad, don't forget we still have to carve my initials tonight. Like you said, "I belong here." *(HE exits.)*

FATHER: *(Quietly to MOTHER.)* Okay, how'd you pull this off?

MOTHER: Me!? I thought it was you. And what toy soldiers?

FATHER: I just told him about the toy soldiers my great grandpa had here and...*(Realizing.)* Dad! He couldn't be here so he must've arranged this.

MOTHER: Wouldn't we have heard a delivery truck? And how in the world could they have found us out here? There's nothing around for miles. Honey, I'm scared. This is too weird.

A loud bang comes from within cabin, startling MOTHER and FATHER. It is followed by Joey's laughter.

JOEY: *(Inside cabin.)* Awesome!!

MOTHER: We can't have that going on all night. *(Looking around, concerned.)* Even though I don't think we'll get much sleep anyway.

FATHER: *(Putting arm around HER shoulder.)* It had to have been dad. You know how he likes to surprise Joey with something different every Christ....

BELLS ARE HEARD OVERHEAD. Both PARENTS look up, then at each other.

MOTHER: No. It couldn't be.

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FATHER: You know what they say: Strange things happen in the woods.

MOTHER: I think we should go inside.

FATHER: Good idea. (*THEY quickly exit into cabin.*)

There is a long pause before ALBERT and BERNARD raise THEIR heads above the SAME snow bank. ALBERT is facing away from the cabin.

ALBERT: Did they go? I don't see them. (*BERNARD turns ALBERT towards cabin.*) Good, they've gone.

DEERDRA: (*Emerging.*) That was close. I was almost a wall hanging.

HARRIET: I had visions of my feet hanging from their belts!

SELMA: Do you really think they'd have eaten us? Even me!?

BERNARD: If they'd eat roasted venison they'd eat anything.

DEERDRA: Are you saying I have no taste, you bucktoothed water rat?

BERNARD: If the hoof fits....!

DEERDRA: I'll have you know I am just as beautiful inside as out, thus, I must taste delicious.

BERNARD: We could very easily find out!

HARRIET: Quiet! Albert, what's a "Santa Claus?"

SELMA: Is it a dog? I heard bells. Sometimes dog wear bells.

DEERDRA: (*Nervously looking around.*) Is there something else in our woods?

SELMA: It's a dog, I know it's a dog...

ALBERT: No, no! Calm down! Santa Claus is just a curious human legend. Supposedly he's a jolly, chubby human who dresses in red and brings them gifts.

DEERDRA: "Red!?" Yuk! Horrible to accessorize!

SELMA: Why does he bring them gifts? Did they do something for him?

ALBERT: The legend says if humans are good, then this Santa Claus will bring them a gift in appreciation of them being good.

DEERDRA: Good at what? Certainly isn't beauty because humans are uuugggly! Especially the little ones – all wrinkly.

ALBERT: I believe what they mean by being good is to be thoughtful of others.

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HARRIET: So just for thinking of others they get a gift?

ALBERT: Sort of.

BERNARD: I've never received a gift for just thinking of another animal.

ALBERT: Because it's the human way, not the animal way.

DEERDRA: Well, it's a strange way, if you ask me. I don't expect any animal to give me a gift for just thinking of them.

HARRIET: Or for just being nice to them!

SELMA: Yeah, that's just part of living in the forest.

ALBERT: Have you ever encountered a human that is anything like an animal? No! They are very different. They have very different ways. Odd ways. Strange ways. They are a curious sort, those humans. Very, very curious.

BERNARD: I'll say! Anything that believes the weather will change just because my cousin Gary sees his shadow isn't all there upstairs, know what I mean?

ALBERT: (*Chuckling.*) Oh yes, one other thing: this "Santa Claus?" His sled is pulled by... (*Tickled.*)...flying reindeer.

ALL ANIMALS explode with laughter.

HARRIET: (*Laughing.*) What's next? Rabbits laying painted eggs?

BERNARD: (*Laughing.*) And beavers brushing their teeth?

ALL except ALBERT are laughing hysterically.

ALBERT: (*Glances back at cabin.*) Uh, your joviality is a bit jeopardous at this juncture.

ALL ANIMALS: Huh?

ALBERT: Vacating the vicinity would be vigilant.

ALL ANIMALS: Huh?

ALBERT: Scram!

ALL ANIMALS: Oohh!

THEY begin their journey back into the woods.

ALBERT: So tell me, my furry friends...how does it feel to do a good deed?



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