

Festivities

a holiday play

by Tom Rowan

OPENING SCENE ONLY

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CHARACTERS

MARK GOLDENBAUM, 47, a lawyer

ABE GOLDENBAUM, 69, an actor, Mark's father

JONAH GOLDENBAUM, 19, a college freshman, Mark's son and Abe's grandson

LESLIE GRANT, 43, Caucasian, an actress and singer, engaged to Mark

HOLLY DAVIS, 18, African-American, Leslie's daughter from her previous marriage, an aspiring ballerina

IVY DAVIS, 9, African-American, Leslie's daughter from her previous marriage and Holly's younger sister

SETTING: An elegant brownstone on the Upper West Side of Manhattan

TIME: December

SCENE ONE

(The living room of a brownstone on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. The house has been in Leslie's family since the 1930's and has recently been restored in a gracious, ornate style that evokes that era. There is a large fireplace upstage, and a piano to one side. A curving staircase leads to the second floor. Other entrances include a front door to the street, a hallway to the kitchen, and another door that leads to the study. There is a coat closet near the front door.)

LESLIE, wearing slacks and a red knit sweater with a Christmas design, is flitting around the room, placing Christmas decorations and humming "Come, O Ye Faithful." After putting some holiday candles on the mantelpiece, she gets an idea and exits up the stairs to look for something. The doorbell rings, and MARK enters from the study, casually but neatly dressed in khakis and a button-down shirt. He goes to the front door and answers it, revealing ABE, in an overcoat and scarf.)

MARK

Hi, Pop.

ABE

I need coffee.

MARK

Come on in.

ABE

Ten in the a.m. and already I'm exhausted from the day.

MARK

How long have you been up?

ABE

Four o'clock. Had to line up at Equity.

MARK

Pop! With your credits? You shouldn't be doing EPA's.

ABE

Well if Esther would get me some appointments... Aiyiyi. "It's the slow time of year," she says. And the crap she's sending me in for is the pits. *Fiddler* at a dinner theatre upstate.

MARK

(Pouring coffee) Why won't you let Leslie talk to her agent

about you? She keeps saying she'd be happy to do it.

ABE

I've been with Esther thirty years.

MARK

But are you sure she's still in the loop?

ABE

She's semi-obsolete--like me. We relics have got to stick together, or else who will?

MARK

(Affectionately) You're loyal to a fault.

(LESLIE appears at the top of the stairs with a box of ornaments; she descends buoyantly, almost dancing.)

LESLIE

(Singing) Deck the halls with boughs of holly,
Fa la la la la, La la la la.

MARK

Look who's here, honey.

LESLIE

Abe, lovely to see you as always. To what do we owe the honor so early in the day?

ABE

I'm between auditions and I needed caffeine.

LESLIE

Mark, when are you going to convince your father to move in with us? *(To ABE)* The renovation is almost finished; you could have the whole third floor to yourself. The girls would be delighted.

ABE

I've been in Hell's Kitchen since seventy-four. Lorna's spirit, may she rest in peace, is in that apartment with me to this day. And besides, it would take an excavation to dig me out.

LESLIE

We'll hire the movers. All you'd have to do is sit in a chair, sip coffee and supervise.

ABE

Would I have to listen to Christmas carols all day? No

reflection on your lovely soprano.

LESLIE

(Playfully) Yes you would. But only one month out of the year. Well maybe two.

MARK

Leslie loves Christmas.

ABE

I couldn't tell.

LESLIE

Well I've missed it! There's nothing like Christmas in New York. And after the nightmare of last year... *(Shakes her head)* Excuse me a moment, I think the cookies are done. *(She exits to the kitchen.)*

ABE

I thought Leslie was a man's name.

MARK

What are you talking about? *(Beat)* Well, sometimes, I guess.

ABE

Leslie Howard. Leslie Nielsen. I worked with him...

MARK

Leslie Stahl, Leslie Uggams... Leslie Ayvazian.

ABE

Worked with her too. Okay, I get your point.

MARK

The girls are getting in tomorrow; they're excited to meet you. Do you want to see a picture?

ABE

Sure; you got one for your wallet already?

MARK

(Opening his cell phone.) On my phone, Pop; join the new century. *(He holds out the phone to his father, who looks at the photo and seems surprised.)* Holly's eighteen, a senior in high school, and Ivy is nine.

ABE

Did you tell me they were adopted?

MARK

They're not.

ABE

I don't see the family resemblance.

MARK

Well that's because Mitchell--Leslie's first husband--was African American.

ABE

You didn't mention that either...

MARK

Why would I have? It never came up.

ABE

And he passed away when?

MARK

Right before Christmas last year.

ABE

"The funeral baked meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables."

MARK

Say what?

ABE

I do Shakespeare too, Mark. But do they remember? (*Handing back the phone*) They're beautiful girls.

MARK

So come by tomorrow and get acquainted.

ABE

You know your sister Rebecca is having me for Hanukkah. She's doing it on the Friday night as usual. Wants the whole family together for Shabbat.

MARK

I would if I could, Pop, but it falls on Christmas Eve this year. And with a brand new family to think about... I've talked to Becky; she... she understands.

ABE

So how are they already your family when you're not even

married?

MARK

We're getting married; you know that. In February.

ABE

"Saint Valentine's Day."

MARK

What can I do, she loves holidays.

ABE

We used to celebrate the Jewish ones. Together.

MARK

Pop, I know, but do we have to have this conversation every year? Jonah and I have always celebrated Christmas; when I was married to Carla--

ABE

And what thanks did you ever get from that one? After thirteen years of marriage the shiksa runs off with her personal trainer. Is it too much to ask to see my grandson raised Jewish? He didn't even get a bar mitvah.

MARK

Jonah's not sure if he's Jewish, Pop. And since they say it's inherited from the mother's side...

ABE

Aw, you're killing me, Mark.

MARK

He'll make his own choices when he's ready. I've taken him to several different churches--and to synagogue, more than a few times. He's had some Hebrew lessons... He knows when he's old enough he's free to choose any religion he feels comfortable with.

ABE

Nineteen in college is not old enough? And since when is religion supposed to be comfortable? It's something you're born with. It's in your blood and your bones; it's who you are! Maybe I do need a new agent.

MARK

Forgive me for not following the transitions...

ABE

You know what Esther sent me in to audition for yesterday?

MARK

What?

ABE

Santa Claus!

MARK

Playing Santa? Where?

ABE

You don't want to know.

MARK

Dare we hope it's a big budget movie?

ABE

You're getting colder. Toys Unlimited.

MARK

The big one? On Fifth Avenue?

ABE

(Shakes his head) Some shopping mall out in Jersey. Said they want a real actor. I'd sit there in this gingerbread house contraption, the kids line up all day to sit on my lap, get their picture taken, and tell me what computers they want delivered.

MARK

(Laughs) Well I don't know, Pop. That might not be the worst way to tide yourself over till after the holidays. And with that beard you've got going these days, you do sort of look the part.

ABE

A Jewish Santa Claus?

MARK

Well Claus is a German name, right? You're part German.

ABE

German Schmerman; I'm a Jew!

MARK

It's an acting role. Didn't you always tell me it's about putting yourself aside and becoming the character?

ABE

Yiggedy yaggedy. For that I need a script! Is that too much to ask? This is all improv with the little ones. And you know what I think of improvisation.

MARK

You detest it!

ABE

Always did and always will. Give me some lines and I'll learn 'em. I'll make it sound like I made 'em up. What more do they want from me?

(LESLIE has reentered from the kitchen with a plate of hot Christmas cookies.)

LESLIE

Ta da! The very first batch of Christmas cookies of the year! New York Christmas cookies! I'm a little out of practice with the frosting designs...

MARK

They smell great. *(Helping himself)* I want the snowman.

LESLIE

You too, Abe. I made a special one just for you; it has a menorah on it, see?

ABE

I thought that was an octopus. *(Beat)* She cooks too, Mark.

LESLIE

(As ABE and MARK chew their cookies.) I wasn't sure I'd pull it off, but I was determined to have the first batch baked by the time the girls arrive. Their flight gets into Kennedy at noon tomorrow. Provided the snow holds off, knock on wood!

MARK

I can't wait to see them. *(Explaining to ABE)* They've been staying in LA with their aunt since Leslie flew back here to finish work on the house. That way they don't have to change schools before the end of the year. Holly's a senior and she wants to graduate with her friends.

LESLIE

And they are very, very excited about meeting their soon-to-be new grandfather! *(Beat)* So how are the cookies? Be honest now.

MARK

Perfect.

ABE

(Overlapping) A little dry.

LESLIE

That's what I count on you for, Abe: an honest critique! Your son is too nice. And don't worry: the second batch is the charm. I'm just getting warmed up.

MARK

Pop's up for the role of Santa at Toys Unlimited.

LESLIE

The one on Fifth Avenue?

ABE

New Brunswick.

LESLIE

You'd be lovely, Dad. What a perfect gig for the holidays!

(ABE grumbles.)

MARK

Could be more interesting than another Tevye...

ABE

Tevye's in my bones!

LESLIE

You'll be adorable! And you love children, don't you?

ABE

Sure I do--as long as they stay away from me. I should go; I've got another audition at noon.

LESLIE

What's this one for?

ABE

(With a sheepish look at MARK) "Law and Order: SUV."

LESLIE

You mean SVU...

MARK

"SUV"... would that be the one about traffic court?

LESLIE

(To ABE) What time should we expect you tomorrow?

ABE

I'll call. It'll depend on the callback situation and yiggedy yaggedy.

MARK

Break a leg, Pop. Let me know how it goes.

ABE

Will do. (And he's out the door.)

LESLIE

Your dad's such a trouper; I love him to pieces.

MARK

He likes you too; he's just a grump sometimes.

LESLIE

Well I would be too if I were lining up for auditions at his age. It's supposed to get easier.

MARK

He's supported himself as an actor for fifty years. He and my mother both; they put me through law school.

LESLIE

He could live here rent free!

MARK

Um: about that. Can you and I make a deal that we *talk about* things like that before you go off unilaterally and--

LESLIE

I'm sorry! Oh my gosh. But you said you've invited him to live with you before, so I assumed--

MARK

(Nodding) Which is why I could have warned you not to bring it up. He's too proud even to consider it. He'd see it as taking charity from his son. And his son's gentile girlfriend.

LESLIE

"Shiksa." (She shudders) I hate that word.

MARK

You'll have to get used to the occasional Yiddish word.

LESLIE

It's not that it's Yiddish, it's... what it means. It's...

MARK

He's old school. Part of his charm. Anyway, he's independent. Thinks he's still got a few good years of acting in him and he's probably right. He knows we'll be here if he really needs us.

LESLIE

It feels so good to be back in Manhattan! And in this house! Cross your fingers that I get a show so I can settle in for a two year Broadway run. Wouldn't that be perfect?

MARK

What if your pilot gets picked up?

LESLIE

I'm not even thinking about that! They can get somebody else; I never signed anything. (*She kisses him.*) Can you stay home all day? Please?

MARK

I have to go in to the office after lunch for meetings. I've been working on the Kleinman motions all morning and I'm about finished.

LESLIE

(*Looking out the window*) I hope the weather holds off till the girls get in, and then as far as I'm concerned, "Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow." We've earned a white Christmas.

MARK

That you have.

LESLIE

We have. Promise me you'll take us on a hansom cab ride through Central Park in the snow!

MARK

(*Smiles*) You have this all planned out, don't you?

LESLIE

Absolutely. The girls have never had a white Christmas. They've never even seen the Rockefeller Center tree! Can you imagine? They've spent every Christmas of their lives in California!

MARK

LA's a great town too.

LESLIE

It was never the same, Mark. No matter how much tinsel you put on a palm tree, it's still a palm tree. I want my girls to experience Christmas Eve in Manhattan, just like the ones I remember! So here's the plan. We take them out late afternoon, right around sunset. We can get hot pretzels from one of those street vendors--they still have those, don't they?--and stroll through the Park.

MARK

The crowds can be horrendous in that part of town...

LESLIE

Oh don't be a Scrooge; crowds are part of the excitement! We'll take them by Wollman Rink to watch the skaters, and then you'll hail us a horse and carriage and we'll clippity clop across the park singing "Silent Night." I taught Holly the alto part, wait till you hear us harmonize! We can get out near Lincoln Center and make it home in time for dinner and all the festivities.

MARK

You sound like you've been planning this for a while...

LESLIE

I want it to be perfect! Christmas Eve dinner is going to be the *piece de resistance*. I just bought a new tablecloth, red with lace snowflakes, and I found Grandma's Christmas china in the closet upstairs. The turkey has been ordered, and I'm doing three kinds of pie! We'll eat at six, then sing carols together--you said Jonah plays the piano, right?

MARK

The *guitar*--

LESLIE

... and open our gifts at around nine!! You'll never in a million years guess what I got you.

MARK

Honey, I'm no authority, but aren't you supposed to wait till Christmas morning to open the gifts?

LESLIE

Oh dear; is that what you always did with Carla and Jonah? (*MARK nods.*) I don't think I'd be able to sleep! When I was little we

always did it on Christmas Eve. (*Pointing*) My dad put the tree up in that corner, and I remember changing into my nightgown and then slowly walking down those stairs; my parents would have turned out all the lights except for the tree! I remember the way the presents looked with all the colors reflecting off the shiny wrapping paper: *pure magic*. I've never felt so safe and taken care of. I want my girls to know what that feels like. You and Jonah too.

MARK

It sounds just beautiful, honey.

(*Lights fade.*)

SCENE TWO

**-CONTINUED-
END OF SAMPLE SCENE**