

Mel's Hanukkah Surprise

A Short Play

By Ken Crost

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Mel: An old man and the father of Jerry.

Jerry: Late forties.

Breena: Jerry's wife in her late thirties.

Setting: The living room in Jerry and Breena's home. A couple of chairs and a couch. A coat rack upstage right.

Time: Early evening, December and the first night of Hanukkah.

At Rise: Mel is asleep on the couch. Jerry and Breena enter wearing coats and carrying gifts.

JERRY

Damn, is it ever cold out there. I'm so glad that everyone is coming to our house. Pop, we're home.

(Breena and Jerry take off their coats and hang them on the rack.)

BREENA

I forgot to tell you, Paul is coming tonight with his new wife.

JERRY

Paul? He's in town?

BREENA

Yes. I got a call from aunt Edith, I forgot to tell you. It's going to be so exciting tonight. Celebrating Hanukkah, your new promotion, and Paul coming into town. What a holiday this is going to be.

JERRY

Is he nuts? Doesn't he know how cold Chicago gets? It's got to be 200 degrees colder here than LA. Pop, were home.

(Mel doesn't move as Jerry crosses to the couch.)

BREENA

Wake him up and tell him to change. Everyone will be here in less than an hour.

(Breena exits.)

JERRY

Hey pop, come on, wake up. Everyone's gonna be here soon. It's Hanukkah and I've got a little present for you.

(Jerry leans over the couch, puts the present on Mel's stomach, and shakes him. Mel doesn't move.)

JERRY

Pop, come on, quit screwing around.

(Jerry shakes Mel again and gets down on the floor so he can be close to his father.)

JERRY

Pop? (pause) Holy shit. Pop! Oh, God, he's dead. Breena! Breena hurry.

(Breena runs in and crosses to the couch.)

JERRY

He's dead.

BREENA

Oh, Jerry, no.

(Breena cautiously crosses to Mel. She sits on the couch next to him.)

BREENA

Dad, come on wake up.

(Breena shakes him, but he does not move.)

JERRY

Hurry, call an ambulance or the police.

(Breena sits there frozen.)

JERRY

Breena, hurry!

BREENA

Jerry, it's too late for that. He's dead. (pause) Oh, God, I think I'm gonna be sick.

(Breena exits.)

JERRY

What a Hanukkah present this is. Pop, did you have to die tonight? You couldn't have waited until the holidays are over? No, you have to die just when it would make the biggest problem for everyone. I'm tempted to stick you in a closet until the party's over. Why should I let you ruin our night. The first Hanukkah in our new house.

(Jerry sits on the floor next to Mel.)

JERRY

It's funny pop, they say when you die, your life flashes in front of you. You just died and now my life is flashing in front of me. And do you know what, pop? You were one lousy father. Did you ever get me a Hanukkah present that I liked? A birthday present that I liked? Never. Always what you liked. Schmuck.

(Jerry gets up, paces around a bit, and then starts making faces and noises at his father. Breena enters and sees Jerry.)

BREENA

I think I'm okay, it was... Jerry, what are you doing?

JERRY

Letting it all out, Breena. Come on, give it a try.

BREENA

I will not. He's your father and he just died. That's not right. You should respect him, now that he's gone.

JERRY

He never respected me, Breena. Come on, we'll do it together. It'll feel good.

BREENA

Oh, I don't know, Jerry.

JERRY

For all the crap, Breena. Think of it.

(Jerry once again starts making faces and noises at Mel and soon Breena joins in. The two are having a great time. Mel sits up awake. Breena and Jerry jump away. The three stare at each other for a moment.)

JERRY

You're alive? For Christ's sake. I've been shaking you for ten minutes.

BREENA

We thought you were dead.

MEL

Dead? You thought I was dead?

JERRY

Yeah.

MEL

So? Is that what I have to expect when I do meet my maker, my children will stand over me making faces?

JERRY

Well...

MEL

It looks like I put a scare into you two.

(Mel laughs.)

JERRY

Great! I'm almost having a heart attack because I think you're dead, and it turns out you're screwing around with me.

MEL

I'm not screwing around with you. Sometimes it's hard for me to wake up, okay?

JERRY

So you couldn't warn us? When I pick you up at the airport yesterday, you couldn't say, hey, I've got a little problem waking up. You know, to give us a little notice. For Christ's sake, I can't believe you're alive.

MEL

It's a disappointment? I'll give you a Hanukkah present, I'll go to the kitchen, take out a knife, and stab myself in the heart. Then I'll be dead, and all the commotion won't be over nothing.

JERRY

Finally, I get a Hanukkah present I'd like.

BREENA

(deliberately)

Okay, let's all calm down. We had a scare, but now everything is fine.

(She sits next to Mel and puts her arms around him.)

I'm glad you're alive dad and Jerry is glad you're alive. It's over now and I'm going back to the kitchen and get us some champagne to celebrate Jerry's promotion.

MEL

Jerry got a promotion?

BREENA

Yeah, dad, he did. Isn't it exciting. It's the best Hanukkah present ever.

(Breena exits.)

JERRY

You scared the hell out of me. Jesus.

MEL

You think it's easy for me? You think I like not waking up? Now you know, so if it happens again, it'll be fine.

JERRY

But what if you're really dead? How long are we supposed to wait, an hour, maybe two? Tomorrow I'm taking you to the doctor, find out what's wrong, this isn't normal.

MEL

I'm eight-one years old, there's not much normal left in me. Anyway, I had the doctor check me out. It's okay, there's nothing that can be done. He said it's hereditary.

JERRY

Hereditary?

MEL

Yeah, hereditary.

JERRY

Wonderful. Is this what I have to look forward to when I get old?

MEL

It started when I was fifty-five, so you don't have much longer to wait.

(Breena enters carrying three glasses of Champaign.)

BREENA

Well, we now have two things to celebrate.

MEL

What two things?

BREENA

Jerry's promotion and you not being dead.

JERRY

Lechime.

(They raise their glasses and
drink.)

MEL

So, my son, the computer genius, got a promotion.

JERRY

I wish you wouldn't call me that.

MEL

And, how much are you gonna be making after you get this
promotion, Mr. Genius?

JERRY

It should be around a hundred fifty.

MEL

A hundred fifty thousand dollars?

JERRY

Yeah, pop.

MEL

Huh ha. Do you have any idea how many cuffs I would have
had to sew, how many shirts I'd have to launder, how many
jackets to clean, to make that kind of money?

JERRY

Pop, you were in the jewelry business.

MEL

I was? Well, so what. Do you have any idea how much I made when your mother and I were just getting started?

JERRY

Five thousand dollars.

MEL

You know my life so well, I guess there's no reason for me to talk to you.

BREENA

Okay, guys, this is supposed to be a nice family visit. We have a lot to be thankful for, so no more arguing. Please.

MEL

You're just like my late wife. A placator. The minute there'd be a little tumult, bing, bang, she'd be there to smooth things over. You could never have a good fight.

JERRY

You want to fight? Is that why you came to visit, so you could take a week out of our lives and make us miserable?

MEL

Oh, so now I'm making you miserable. Okay, I've had enough. Where's the phone?

JERRY

What do want the phone for?

MEL

I'm calling the airlines, I'm going to Arizona tonight. Since I'm making you miserable, there's no sense sticking around.

BREENA

You just got here, dad.

MEL

No! I've made up my mind.

JERRY

But everyone is gonna be here soon. We're having a party or did you forget. And besides, you haven't seen Arleen yet.

MEL

Arleen, schmarleen, all she wants to see me for is so I can loan her a little money, give her some Hanukkah gelt. She should hit up her rich brother, not her poor father.

(Jerry crosses to a table and
picks up a phone.)

JERRY

Here, make your call.

MEL

Who am I calling?

BREENA

The airlines. You said you wanted to go back to Arizona tonight.

MEL

Tonight? It's Hanukkah, all the relatives will be here soon. Right?

JERRY

Right.

MEL

So how can I leave? But, I can see my presence here isn't appreciated, so I'm going to bed.

JERRY

Pop, if you go to bed, what do we say to everyone when they ask where you are?

MEL

Tell 'em I died. Have a nice Hanukkah you two.

(Mel gets up and crosses to the door.)

MEL

Good night.

JERRY

Good night, pop.

BREENA

Night, dad.

MEL

And in the morning, we'll all go for breakfast, my treat.

JERRY

Okay, pop.

(Mel exits.)

JERRY

I like it when he comes here.

BREENA

You do?

JERRY

Sure. It's like when you have a small stone in your hiking shoe. At first you don't even notice. But the longer you hike, the worse it gets, until you can't stand it anymore. But when you finally take that shoe off and dump that stupid little stone out, oh, it feels like heaven. Six more days until heaven.

BREENA

Jerry, he'll hear you. Now shut up and sit here next to me.

(Jerry crosses to Breena and sits. She puts her arms around him.)

BREENA

Now this is heaven. Just the two of us, alone, sitting all cozy in our new, little house.

JERRY

It won't be heaven when that doorbell rings. It will be like every other Hanukkah, total chaos. I'm feeling so tired, Breena, that I wish I could join my father, and go to bed. Miss the whole damn party. That guy wears me out.

BREENA

Oh, stop it. You'll be fine. You know what?

JERRY

What?

BREENA

I haven't given you a big congratulations kiss, you computer genius, you.

JERRY

No time like the present.

(Breena and Jerry lean toward each other to kiss. We hear an agonizing scream from Mel off stage. Jerry and Breena jump apart.)

JERRY

Oh, no. I don't care if he's dying. I'm not moving a muscle.

BREENA

I'll go check on him. It's probably nothing.

(Breena exits. Jerry yawns and stretches. He leans back and closes his eyes. Breena enters.)

BREENA

He got locked in the bathroom. I couldn't believe it, he was actually crying. He thought we did it.

(Breena leans over the couch and gives Jerry a kiss on the cheek. He doesn't move.)

BREENA

Jerry?

(She shakes him. He still doesn't move. The doorbell rings.)

BREENA

Jerry, no!

(The bell rings again.)

Wake up, they're all here.

(Another ring of the bell.)

Jerry!

Blackout

The End