

MISTLETOE
by
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Based his short story MISTLETOE

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CHARACTERS

SAM: 9 boy who plays recorder

DEREK: 17 brother who plays guitar

MOTHER: 40 works in nursing home.

Mr. Albert: 40 apple farmer

SCENE ONE:

Time: weeks before Christmas.

Scene: An apple orchard beside a trailer court. Evening twilight. Stage dimly lit. Guitar music plays.

Stage right stands an apple tree with a large clump of mistletoe hanging from a branch. A pile of cut mistletoe lies at base of tree trunk.

Stage left stands a mobile home with center of exterior wall removed, exposing inside of Derek and Sam's bedroom and short hallway. Two beds, Sam's on right and Derek's on left, line bedroom side walls. Bedroom door downstage from Sam's bed. DEREK sits on his bed playing guitar.

A single string of lit Christmas bulbs line trailer roof. Trailer entrance, unseen, is at right end. Guitar music fades.

Lights up stage right: SAM, wearing school backpack, enters stage right. He stands under tree branch and gazes up at the mistletoe cluster.

SAM

(to self)

All that mistletoe. Every tree in the apple orchard is covered with it. Big clumps. Look at it all.

(Still gazing upward, he turns a circle.)

SAM (CONT'D)

That's the same stuff they sell in stores at Christmastime. The same stuff people hang in doorways and kiss under. (makes a face and shakes head) Kissing under the mistletoe. What a dumb tradition.

(He turns another circle.)

SAM

So why couldn't I sell mistletoe, too? Fresh mistletoe with ribbon tied around it. Make some money for Christmas. I could buy Mom and my brother s nice present.

(SAM removes backpack and drops it on ground. He steps upstage and runs downstage. With outstretched arm, he leaps, trying to grab mistletoe. He misses and falls to ground.)

SAM

(standing)

Missed by a mile.

(SAM steps back, runs, and tries grabbing mistletoe again but fails. He stands, brushing off pants.)

SAM (CONT'D)

(shrugging)

So that's that. I tried. People will just have to smooch under someone else's mistletoe.

(SAM grabs backpack and starts stage left. He spots pile of mistletoe under tree and stops. He stoops to inspect it.)

SAM (CONT'D)

What's this? Mistletoe! A whole pile of it. (looks around and upward) How'd it get here? It's as though it dropped from the tree just for me.

(SAM begins filling backpack with mistletoe.)

SAM (CONT'D)

(giggling with glee)

These sprigs are perfect. Just what I need. Good and fresh. They even have the berries still on them. Thank you tree.

(Lights fade)

SCENE TWO:

Lights up stage left. Guitar music playing. DEREK sits on bed in mobile home bedroom, playing guitar. Cell phone chirps and guitar music fades. DEREK stops playing and carefully puts down guitar. He pulls phone from pants pocket.

DEREK

(into phone)

Yeah? (pauses to listen) Yeah, I can come over tonight.
Yeah, but first I gotta wait for my brother. He's late.
(pauses to listen) Yeah, that sounds good. I'll be there as
soon as I can.

(DEREK puts down phone and resumes
playing guitar. SAM enters trailer and
stops to listen to guitar music in
hallway outside bedroom door. After
pause, he pounds on door.)

SAM

Derek let me in.

DEREK

(keeps playing)

Where have you been?

SAM

(knocking on door)

Come on. Let me in. It's my room, too.

DEREK

Don't I know it.

SAM

(still pounding)

I'm going to keep knocking until you open this door.

DEREK

(quits playing)

And I'm going to knock your head in if you don't stop.

SAM

(quits knocking)

Come on, Derek. Be fair. It's my room, too.

DEREK

(shaking head)

OK. OK. Hold on.

(DEREK wraps guitar in towel. He puts on
leather jacket and stocking cap. He
opens door.)

DEREK

(to SAM)

You're late.

SAM

I'm late.

DEREK

You're suppose to come straight home after school.

SAM

I had something to do. Mom home yet?

DEREK

She's still at work.

SAM

Why's she always working late?

DEREK

For the money, stupid. To get us out of this trailer park.

SAM

(nodding)

Yes, I know.

DEREK

I had to wait around for you.

SAM

Where're you going?

DEREK

Out.

SAM

How long will you be gone?

DEREK

None of your business.

SAM

I need to do some work in here.

DEREK

So work.

SAM

Then I need to practice my recorder for school.

DEREK

I'll be gone long enough so I don't have to hear you squeaking on that thing.

SAM

I don't squeak.

DEREK

You squeak like a sick puppy.

SAM

I'm the best player in my school.

DEREK

Says you.

SAM

Says my music teacher. I even have a recorder solo in the holiday concert.

DEREK

(sticks hands in pocket)

Mom told me.

SAM

And I'm the only kid who plays a cheap, plastic recorder.

DEREK

What do the other kids use?

SAM

Better recorders. The more expensive kind. Some even have wooden ones. Those sound great, those wooden recorders.

DEREK

Just don't mess up the room while I'm gone. Keep your feet off my bed and your hands off my stuff.

SAM

I never touch your stuff.

DEREK

(nods toward guitar on bed)

Especially my guitar.

SAM

I never touch your guitar.

DEREK

I don't want your snotty fingerprints on my guitar. Understand?

SAM

Right. Right. No snot on guitar. But it's pretty hard not to touch any of your stuff, since this room is so puny.

DEREK

Better than what Mom has. Remember, she sleeps on the couch.

SAM

(contrite)

I know. I know. I didn't mean it like that.

DEREK

(starting to leave)

Your dinner is in the microwave. Just push six.

(DEREK leaves trailer and exits stage right. SAM removes backpack and dumps mistletoe on his bed. He pulls box from under bed and takes out red ribbon and scissors.)

SAM

(to self, sorting through mistletoe)

Now all I need to do is tie a ribbon around each sprig and put them in a Ziplock bag. Then I'll design a fancy label.

(SAM cuts ribbon and ties it around a sprig of mistletoe. Then he holds it over his head and kisses the air.)

SAM (CONT'D)

I'll sell this mistletoe downtown tomorrow after school. A dollar apiece. Ninety-nine cents! What a bargain! There's maybe twenty good mistletoe sprigs in this pile. That's almost twenty bucks.

(SAM looks toward guitar on bed)

SAM (CONT'D)

Derek always wraps his guitar in that old towel. He needs a case, a good one.

(SAM reaches into backpack. He takes out a plastic recorder and toots on it a few times.)

SAM (CONT'D)

That's what I'll buy with the mistletoe money. A guitar case for Derek. He'd like that. (puts feet up on Derek's bed) Yeah, a guitar case would be a great Christmas present.

(SAM plays *Jingle Bells* on this recorder.)

SAM (CONT'D)

(lowering recorder)

Tomorrow after I sell the mistletoe, I'll check out guitar cases at the music store. See how much they cost. I can also check out the recorders. (holds out recorder and makes a face) Those wooden one they have in window are beautiful.

(SAM plays *Silent Night*. Lights fade.)

SCENE THREE:

Lights up stage right: Next evening.
 SAM, wearing backpack, enters stage
 right. He reaches into pocket and
 pulls out wad of bills and counts them.
 New pile of mistletoe lies under tree.

SAM

(to self)

That was easy. Every mistletoe package sold, and I could have
 sold tons more. At this rate, I'll be able to buy the guitar
 case in a few days.

(SAM stuffs money back in pocket and
 looks up in tree.)

SAM (CONT'D)

But I still don't have a way of getting that mistletoe down.

(SAM starts walking. He spots pile of
 mistletoe by tree trunk and stops.)

SAM (CONT'D)

Again! More mistletoe, all picked and ready to sell. (takes
 off backpack) How is this happening? It's like a gift from
 the trees to me.

(SAM begins loading backpack with
 mistletoe.)

SAM (CONT'D)

(to tree while he works)

Thank you, tree. Tonight I'll make twice as many mistletoe
 packages and tomorrow after school I'll sell them. In the
 music store I found the perfect guitar case for Derek. It's
 all leather-like on the outside and fuzzy red on the inside.
 He'll love that case. I just have to keep selling this
 mistletoe.

(SAM puts on backpack and starts stage
 left. Lights fade stage right. Lights up
 stage left. SAM meets DEREK coming out of
 trailer. DEREK wears leather jacket and
 stocking cap.)

SAM

Hey, Derek.

DEREK

(without stopping)

None of your business.

SAM

I didn't ask you anything.

DEREK

(stops and looks back)

Tell Mom I won't be home for supper.

SAM

Where you going?

DEREK

None of your business.

SAM

Right, so you'll be home late?

DEREK

That's what I said.

SAM

OK, good. I have to use the bedroom to practise my recorder.

DEREK

Keep off my bed.

SAM

Right. Right. And I won't lay a finger on your precious guitar.

(SAM enters trailer and bedroom. He removes backpack and dumps mistletoe on bed. He sits on bed and takes recorder from backpack. He plays a few scales. MOTHER, wearing nursing uniform, appears in hallway and knocks on door.)

MOTHER

Sam, you're home late.

SAM

(opening door)

I didn't know you were here, Mom.

MOTHER

(arching back)

I was napping on the couch, sweetheart. My back aches.

SAM

Hard day at the nursing home, Mom?

MOTHER

(nods and sits on Derek's bed)

A million things. Gladys wanted me to push her around the block three times; Helen fell and had to be lifted into bed, and everyone was complaining about the food and new bus driver. Those old people complain just like little children.

SAM

Just like teenagers. I guess people complain their whole lives.

MOTHER

You'd think those old people would be happy just to be alive and living in a nice place. (holds back and winces) But they're always complaining, complaining.

SAM

You OK, Mom?

MOTHER

(nods)

I need to go lie down some more. Derek's not here? I thought I heard his guitar. Then I heard you playing your recorder. You sounded so good, sweetheart.

SAM

OK for this cheap recorder I'm playing. Derek went out. He said he won't be home for supper.

MOTHER

Not again. He's been out every night this week. Where does he go?

SAM

He won't tell me. He says it's none of my business.

MOTHER

I worry about my two boys being out a night. It gets dark so early.

SAM

We'll be all right, Mom.

MOTHER

And I wish we could have more of a Christmas this year. Go some where. We can't even fit a tree in this trailer.

SAM

We don't need a dumb tree.

MOTHER

Well, in a few months I hope we can move out of this trailer park and into a bigger place. We'll have an apartment where you two boys can have separate bedrooms.

SAM

Now *that* would be nice. I need a place to practice and Derek needs a place to practice. There's no place in here to practice.

MOTHER

I know it's not good having to share with your older brother.

SAM

It's not bad, Mom. It's just that Derek's always pissed at me. We never talk. He hates me.

MOTHER

(places hand on Sam's knee)

I'm sure that's not true, sweetheart. It's just that Derek's a teenager and has other things on his mind.

SAM

Like his guitar music.

MOTHER

We must move from this trailer before we all get on each other's nerves too much.

SAM

It's all working, Mom. Everything is OK. We all take care of each other.

MOTHER

(looking at mess on bed)

But what's all that stuff on your bed?

SAM

Just some weed.

MOTHER

Weed?

SAM

It's mistletoe, Mom.

MOTHER

Mistletoe? Where'd you get mistletoe, sweetheart?

SAM

From the apple orchard. All the trees are covered with it.

MOTHER

Mistletoe? It can't be. Mistletoe doesn't grow in California. It grows in England or Germany or someplace else. Not California.

SAM

It's mistletoe, Mom, the same stuff they sell in stores every Christmas. The same stuff people kiss under. Why do people kiss under mistletoe?

MOTHER

I don't know, sweetheart. But you shouldn't be going into the apple orchard. Mr. Albert doesn't like trailer park kids cutting through his property.

SAM

OK, Mom.

MOTHER

And you better clean this mess up before Derek gets home. You know how he is about messes. Your dinner is in the microwave. Just press six.

SAM

Right. All this will be cleaned up before I eat.

(MOTHER leaves. SAM picks up recorder and plays *Deck the Halls*. Lights fade.)

SCENE FOUR:

Lights up stage right: Next evening. SAM enters stage right, playing *Oh Tannenbaum* on recorder. MR. ALBERT, apple farmer, stands under tree looking up. SAM stops and lowers recorder.

SAM

(to apple farmer)

Oh, hi.

MR. ALBERT

(to SAM)

That sounded good, young man.

SAM

(waving recorder)

Oh, yeah. Thanks.

MR. ALBERT

Chilly night out.

SAM

(sticks recorder in back pocket)

That's for sure.

MR. ALBERT

So what can I do for you?

SAM

Um, I wanted to collect some mistletoe. I didn't expect to see anyone here.

MR. ALBERT

Is that right? Fact is, these are my apple trees.

SAM

Oh, I didn't know. I didn't think taking mistletoe was like stealing or anything. I'll leave it all alone.

(SAM starts toward stage left)

MR. ALBERT

(laughs)

No, hold on a bit. Fact is, I'm paying a guy to cut the mistletoe out of my trees.

SAM

(stops)

You are? How come? What's wrong with mistletoe?

MR. ALBERT

(shaking head)

The plant is a parasite.

SAM

A parasite?

MR. ALBERT

Fact is, that very plant people kiss under at Christmastime can do my apple trees harm.

SAM

How can a plant harm a tree?

MR. ALBERT

This mistletoe attaches itself to the tree branches and sucks out the nutrients. If it spreads, it can kill my entire apple grove.

SAM

But people sure like buying it. I've been selling this mistletoe downtown, and business is booming.

MR. ALBERT

(laughing)

You're welcome to take all you want. Fact is, what you don't take I'll have to haul away in my pickup. And there's loads of mistletoe in my trees this winter. Big bundles of it.

SAM

Thanks. I just need one more backpack full. Tomorrow I should have enough money for the Christmas present I want to buy.

MR. ALBERT

Good for you. You sound like an enterprising young man. You live in the trailer park?

SAM

(nodding)

In one of the single-wide trailers with my mom and brother.

MR. ALBERT

That right?

SAM

Right. It's pretty cramped in there. I have to share a bedroom with my brother. He's seventeen, and we don't have much in common.

MR. ALBERT

So you don't get along?

SAM

(shaking head)

Hardly.

(SAM starts gathering mistletoe from base of tree.)

SAM

(to apple farmer)

So do you know about mistletoe? Do you know why people kiss under it? That seems like a weird thing to do under a plant that kills things.

MR. ALBERT

(starts wandering about looking up in tree branches)

Fact is, many cultures have legends about kissing under the mistletoe. The ancient Romans. The Celts. The Greeks.

SAM

So mistletoe must grow all over Europe.

MR. ALBERT

(stops before SAM)

My favorite mistletoe story is the Norse myth about Frigga, the goddess of love.

SAM

(turns and sits on ground
facing MR. ALBERT)

I like myths. Will you tell it to me?

MR. ALBERT

You see, Frigga's son, Balder, dreamed that he was going to die. That sent Frigga rushing about the land, seeking promises from the other gods that her son wouldn't be killed. Nevertheless, Balder's enemy, Loki, tipped an arrow with juice from a mistletoe. Fact is, that mistletoe you're collecting is quite toxic.

SAM

(holding up a mistletoe sprig)

You mean poisonous?

MR. ALBERT

Sure thing. So don't go eating any of those berries or leaves.

SAM

I wasn't planning on it.

MR. ALBERT

Anyway, this Norse god Loki gave the poisoned arrow to Hoder, the blind god of winter, and Hoder shot Frigga's son, Balder, with it. Balder, as his dream foretold, died. Frigga, however, brought Balder back to life by shedding tears that turned into mistletoe berries. After that, Frigga kissed everyone who passed under the tree on which mistletoe grew. From that time on, anyone who stood under the mistletoe would receive a kiss and no harm could come to him or her.

SAM

(standing)

But lots of harm still comes to the tree it grows on.

MR. ALBERT

(laughing)

That's the way it is, young man. Now I better go find the boy who's helping me, before he gets harmed on this cold night. (looks up) He's up on one of these branches.

SAM

(starts toward stage left)

OK, well, thanks for the mistletoe. It's just what I needed.

MR. ALBERT

And I hope you and your family have a Merry Christmas.

SAM

Merry Christmas, to you.

(MR. ALBERT strolls upstage looking upward. SAM, in shadows, stops and crouches down to watch him. Two legs dangle from tree branch. DEREK drops to ground.)

DEREK

(to apple farmer.)

That tree's all clear.

MR. ALBERT

Good. A few more nights ought to take care of this whole grove.

DEREK

(rubbing hands together for the cold)

Yeah, a few more nights.

MR. ALBERT

So did you say you lived over in the trailer park?

DEREK

That's right. In one of the single-wides.

MR. ALBERT

And what are you going to do with all the money I'm paying you to clear my trees of this pesky mistletoe.

DEREK

(shuffling feet)

I'm saving up to buy my kid brother something for Christmas.

MR. ALBERT

Is that right?

DEREK

Yeah, he's been wanting a wooden recorder. He can play pretty well.

MR. ALBERT

A recorder, huh? Interesting.

DEREK

(shrugging)

You know how it is. He's my brother.

(DEREK heads stage right. SAM stands and holds up backpack. Lights fade)

End of play