

PERUSAL SCRIPT

ADAM'S GIFTS

by **Peter Filichia**



Newport, Maine

© 2012 by PETER FILICHIA

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

CAUTION:

Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that

ADAM'S GIFTS

being fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States Of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion Of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, is subject to royalty. Anyone presenting the play without the express written permission of the Copyright owners and/or their authorized agent will be liable to the penalties provided by law.

Script and music copies must be rented from the Publisher and Royalty must be paid to the publisher for each and every performance before an audience whether or not admission is charged. A performance license must first be obtained from the publisher prior to any performance(s).

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the author or his respective agent(s), or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of any license permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.

Federal Copyright Law -- 17 U.S.C. section 504 -- allows for a recovery of a minimum of \$250 and a maximum of \$50,000 *for each infringement*, plus attorney fees.

The professional and amateur rights to the performance of this play along with the lecturing, recitation, and public reading rights, are administered exclusively through LEICESTER BAY THEATRICALS without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be made. For all other rights, inquiries may be made to the authors through LEICESTER BAY THEATRICALS. Any adaptation or arrangement of this work without the author's written permission is an infringement of copyright. **Unauthorized duplication by any means is also an infringement.**

FOR PUBLIC PERFORMANCE RIGHTS YOU MUST APPLY TO THE PUBLISHER OR YOU ARE BREAKING THE LAW!

The possession of this PERUSAL SCRIPT, does not constitute permission to perform the work herein contained, in public or in private, for gain or charity. Proper prior application must be made, license granted and royalty paid before a performance may be given. Copies of this SCRIPT and all other rehearsal materials may be rented from:

LEICESTER BAY THEATRICALS
P.O. Box 536 Newport, ME 04953-0536
www.leicesterbaytheatricals.com
Printed in the United States Of America

THIS NOTICE MUST APPEAR IN ALL PROGRAMS, ON ALL POSTERS AND PUBLICITY MATERIALS AND INTERNET ADVERTISING/WEBPAGES FOR THE PLAY:

"Adam's Gifts' is presented through special arrangement with Première Theatrical Licensing on behalf of Leicester Bay Theatricals. All authorized materials are also supplied by LBT, www.leicesterbaytheatricals.com"

NOTE: Your contract with Leicester Bay Theatricals limits you to making copies of this document for persons directly connected with your production. Do not distribute outside of your cast and crew. Following your performance run you must destroy all photocopies, preferably by shredding them. If we sent you the document in printed format, you must return that document to us. If we provided you with an electronic PDF file, simply trash that on your computer so that it cannot be recovered. The electronic document may only be on ONE computer -- it may NOT be duplicated. This is also a part of your contract with Leicester Bay Theatricals.

ORDER #3372

CHARACTERS 2f, 2m 1boy

WILLIAM PRONT, a 60-plus slumlord

JASON ROMANO, his harried middle-aged employee
(who also plays **SAM FALCON**, a mobster)

GLYNIS, a stranger from a strange land. (also plays **CAROL**)

LISA PINEWSKI, Jason's middle-aged ex-wife
(who also plays **MARY CHALMERS**, an intellectual young miss)

ADAM ROMANO, their pre-teen son
(who also plays **YOUNG WILLIAM** at the age of 12)

Time: The present, the past, and future

Place: New York City

ADAM'S GIFTS by **Peter Filichia**. 3m, 3w, 2boys can be played by 2m, 2w, 1boy. NYC present day, past and future for settings and costumes. About 90 minutes. In a seasonal riff on Charles Dickens' '*A Christmas Carol*,' *Adam's Gifts* is a story of redemption and the heart-melting surprise of feeling needed. As our modern economy requires tightening our belts, so it is with modern ghosts — only one can be assigned per needy subject due to the vast numbers of people who need their 'help.' Our ghost, Glynis, sure has her work cut out for her with the completely illiterate William Pront, who makes Ebenezer Scrooge look like Mother Teresa. We see William as a boy (the son of an abusive father who sold him to the mob); then a visit to the only girl he ever loved, who tried to instill in William a love for the Arts. A memory-scene with his harsh father sobers him, as does one to his under-appreciated assistant, Jason's ex-wife and son, Adam, who has a rare and fatal cancer which continues to shatter William, as he sees some of himself in the bed-ridden child. As a bond develops, Adam discovers William's inability to read and write and sets about teaching him those skills. Glynis informs William of a new cancer treatment program. William writes a letter with his new-found and formerly unappreciated skills, that gets Adam admitted to that program. Glynis also shows William what would have happened had he not changed: Jason would have written a book about how miserable a man he was, and it would become so well-known that "Pront" would replace "Scrooge" as an idiom for stinginess. At the end of the play, we're not sure if Adam will beat the illness, but we are certain that William has completely turned himself around — *thanks to the arts that have taught him to appreciate the finer things in life, and one special boy*. Premiere performance at St. Johns in NYC starring William Parry, Maureen Silliman, and Phillip Hoffman, Julian Peterson and Hayden Wall, December 19th, 2013.
ORDER #3372

PETER FILICHIA — is the former New York-based theatre critic for The Star-Ledger newspaper in Newark, NJ and New Jersey's television station News 12 , as well as for The Asbury Park Press.

In addition, Filichia has two weekly columns at Masterworks Broadway and Kritzerland, and also writes regular entries for Music Theatre International's Marquee blog. He wrote a regular column, "Peter Filichia's Diary," for the website TheaterMania.com from November 2001 until October 2011, and previously for the website BroadwayOnLine.

He is the author of the books *Let's Put on a Musical!: How to Choose the Right Show for Your School, Community or Professional Theater*; *Broadway Musicals: the Biggest Hit and the Biggest Flop of the Season, 1959 to 2009*; *Broadway MVPs 1960-2010: The Most Valuable Players of the Past 50 Seasons*; *Strippers, Showgirls and Sharks: A Very Opinionated History of the Broadway Musicals that Did Not Win the Tony Award*; and *The Great Parade: Broadway's Astonishing, Never-to-Be-Forgotten 1963-1964 Season*. At the beginning of his career, Filichia was a columnist for Seventeen Magazine and wrote books for teenagers.

He served four terms as president and chairman of the nominating committee of the Drama Desk, and has also been a member of the nominating committee for the Lucille Lortel Awards. He is currently head of the selection committee of the Theatre World Awards and has hosted the annual award ceremony for a number of years.

Filichia has become a playwright with the work *Adam's Gifts*, a loose contemporary adaptation of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Productions include Theatre at St. John's in Manhattan, Spotlight Vermont, and the Clinton Area Showboat Theater in Clinton, Iowa. He has also written "God Shows Up", a satire of televangelism, which had a limited run at Playroom Theater in New York. Filichia's adaptation of Molière's *The Bourgeois Gentleman* was presented in the 1972 New Jersey Shakespeare Festival.

He has also written the liner notes for many Broadway cast albums, especially reissues of such recordings as *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Fade Out-Fade In*, *Subways are for Sleeping*, *Ankles Aweigh*, *Redhead*, *Parade* (Jerry Herman), *Sweet Charity* (Film Soundtrack), *Prettybelle*, *Wish You Were Here* and the Roundabout Theatre revival cast recording of *110 In The Shade*. Filichia is also the critic-in-residence for the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. He has served on an assessment panel for the NEA and is the musical theater judge for the ASCAP Awards program. He has appeared on television with Sally Jessy Raphaël, Phil Donahue, and on *Saturday Night Live*.

Since March 2009, he has been on the panel of reviewers heard on the podcast "This Week on Broadway" produced and hosted by James Marino from BroadwayRadio.com.

FULL SYNOPSIS:

Those Ghosts who came down to visit Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas Eve? That wasn't a once-in-a-lifetime event. They still work six days a week, visiting people who need to be as rehabilitated as ol' Ebenezer.

Trouble is, there are so many terrible people in the world, these days that only one Ghost can be assigned to each case. There just aren't enough ghosts to go around.

But our Ghost Glynis sure has her work cut out for her with William Pront, who makes Ebenezer Scrooge look like Mother Teresa.

Glynis does point out, though, that Pront's misanthropy isn't his fault. When William was a little boy, his uncaring father sold him to the Mob. Sam "The Elbows" August kept William out of school simply so the boy could run numbers for him and keep an eye out for enemies. He does it so well that Sam dubs him "Pront" for "pronto."

As a result, *Pront never spent a day in school – and never learned to read*. Sam taught him how to count money and compute interest; he was pleased that the lad had an extraordinary head for figures. Sam also taught him to scribble and let that pass for his signature.

So now Pront, in his sixties, has never learned to read or write. He's kept this from people by pretending his eyesight is bad.

Sam's untimely fatal heart attack scared Pront into going straight. With the cash from Sam's safe, he bought the building in which he lives – and has bribed housing inspectors so he hasn't had to make expensive repairs for all his tenants.

His employee Jason reads and writes what needs to be written and read. The miser has no life outside of counting his money, and has no idea why Jason occasionally mutters “Scrooge!” in response to his miserly actions.

Glynis returns Pront to when he was 12 years old and ignorant of so much of the world. He doesn't even know when his birthday is, and asks Sam, who has no idea.

When the lad asks Sam “What's your birthday?” – and is told November 9 – he asks Sam if that can be his birthday, too. Sam is all too willing to say yes to get the kid off his back.

Glynis then returns Pront to age 18 when he met Mary, the only girl he ever loved. However, she eventually rejected him because she just couldn't be interested in anyone who didn't read the books she recommended or go to foreign films with subtitles.

Pront couldn't read them, of course, and for the first time uses the excuse that he'd forgotten his glasses. Still, Mary decides not to see him again.

Glynis also shows Pront how he's taken advantage of Jason, who had planned to be a writer. But Jason's fielding all the complaints from Pront's tenants as well as waiting hand and foot on him morning, noon, *afternoon* and night took Jason away from his science fantasy young adult novel about teens in a dystopic society. By the time Jason finally did finish, another book about teens in a dystopic society -- one called *The Hunger Games* -- was just coming out.

Jason's failure and his wife Lisa's ever-increasing success with her own catering company caused a rift in their marriage. Divorce soon followed, despite their having a son, Adam – now a pre-teen who loves to read.

Glynis takes Pront to where Lisa and Adam live, and Pront is mighty impressed that the kid is also savvy about money and can deal with figures as well as he. *That's what makes him like him.*

So Pront is devastated when Glynis takes him to the time when Lisa and Jason learn that Adam has a rare and fatal cancer. Glynis then arranges to have Pront visit and bring a couple of books that the bed-ridden Adam would like.

The next day, Adam asks Pront to get a certain book from the shelf, but Pront cannot, because he can't read the title. His inability confuses the child, so Pront finally he confesses that he's illiterate. Adam offers to teach Pront to both read and write.

That opens a whole new world to Pront. *His reading the great works of literature makes him a better person.* For example, reading *A Raisin in the Sun* makes him want to become a better landlord to his tenants.

Once Glynis tells Pront about a new cancer research project, Pront manages to write the doctors with his newfound skill. His fervent plea gets Adam into their program.

Glynis shows him what would have happened had he not changed: Jason would have written a book about how miserable a man he was, and it would become so well-known that “Pront” would replace “Scrooge” as an idiom for stinginess.

At the end of the play, we're not sure if Adam will beat the illness, but we are certain that Pront has completely turned himself around -- *thanks to the arts that have taught him to appreciate the finer things in life.*

Pront, in turn, has become so important to Adam that the lad announces that since November 9 really isn't his birthday, that he'll share his own on February 16 with him. The play ends with Pront's making a toast, borrowing a phrase from a book he'd recently read: “God bless us, everyone!”

ADAM'S GIFTS

(Before the lights come up, we hear a moan of frustration.)

(It continues even as the lights DO come up, when we see JASON ROMANO, a haggard-looking 40-year-old whose hairline is fast receding.)

(He ends his moan with a solid slam of the phone receiver he'd been holding onto the cradle. During the two long breaths that he endeavors to take, we get a look at where he is: a shabby New York City basement office with two doors: One leads to the outside, the other to the bathroom.)

(The two desks are as woebegone as the '50s roll-of-paper adding machine atop one and the rotary-dial phone atop another.)

(There are no windows to take advantage of this nice April day.)

(The front door of the office opens and WILLIAM PRONT — mid-60's, overweight and crude — enters. He's got a McDonald's bag in one hand and a large McDonald's drink in the other.)

PRONT: What are they complaining about today?

JASON: *(after another deep breath)* William!

(after yet another deep breath)

Mr. Marillac, the new tenant on East 5th? Those two mice in his kitchen are now the proud parents of six. Mice *do* reproduce every —

PRONT: — 21 days, yeah, I know, you tole me a million times. Them mice are —

JASON: — more scared of him that he is of them. Yes, I know — you've told me *that* a million times.

(PRONT hasn't shut the door, for his hands are full with the bag and the drink that he wants to get onto his desk. That allows a woman who's dressed very ethereally to enter. She is GLYNIS.)

(But neither JASON nor PRONT can see that she's there, for she's a ghost.)

(Once she's in, PRONT says as he goes to close the door:)

PRONT: Tell her to call an exterminator.

JASON: So you'll actually pay for one?

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

PRONT: Course not. Just have the exterminator tell him —

PRONT and **JASON:** — that mice and rats won't live together.

PRONT: (feet on desk, starting to eat) They won't! *So* if you got mice, you don't got rats. *That* should make him happy. And ain't he a day late with the rent?

JASON: He's threatening to call the Housing Commissioner.

PRONT: *(with a dismissive wave)* Yeah, like she's gonna do something.

(JASON picks up his notepad to detail other complaints. GLYNIS looks over his shoulder and reads, but — again — neither JASON nor PRONT sees her.)

JASON: Mr. Turner's toilet still isn't flushing.

PRONT: He lives above a Wendy's. They got a toilet *and* they're open 24 hours.

(before JASON can give him his standard rebuttal)

If he *buys* something, they'll give him the key. And he's gotta eat, don't he?

(GLYNIS moans and slaps her forehead.)

JASON: And *then* —

(offering him a piece of paper)

—there's this class action suit. You can't ignore this forever.

(PRONT doesn't take the paper.)

PRONT: What tenant's causin' all the trouble?

JASON: (after a beat, asking a question to which he knows the answer) Didn't you read to see who it was?

PRONT: No. I don't got my glasses.

(GLYNIS laughs, not that they hear her.)

JASON: *(he's heard this excuse before)* Ohhhhhhh, you've lost them *again*?

PRONT: No, wise guy, I *broke* 'em.

JASON: Maybe I can *fix* them.

PRONT: I already —

PRONT, JASON and **GLYNIS** —threw them away —

JASON: — I assumed as much. Considering how much trouble you have reading, you really

should go to an eye doctor —

(*GLYNIS gives a little point that says “He’s got you there.”*)

PRONT: — There ain’t nothin’ wrong with me! I’m just too busy to read them things. That’s *your* job! You *take* care of this! What am I payin’ you for? So who’s them papers from again?

JASON: (*giving the name for the umpteenth time*) Carol. Abbott.

PRONT: Her again!?

JASON: She’s not the only one! Ms. Abbott is the nominee on behalf of *all* your tenants at 440 Avenue C. They’re complaining about the lead-based paint that’s peeling off the walls.

PRONT: Tell them how you get rid of peelin’ paint. You go to the wall, you peel it off. Pretty soon, none’s left.

JASON: I’ve already told them your “solution” but it didn’t assuage them.

PRONT: Talk English, will ya!

JASON: Fine! Mrs. Garcia has bedbugs.

PRONT: Sleeping on the floor is better for your back, anyway ...

JASON : All right, what about this one? Mrs. Tomkins just saw a *rat* go under her stove. Guess her mice have moved to a better apartment.

PRONT: How do we know it ain’t a mouse and she don’t know one from the other?

JASON and GLYNIS: *William!*

PRONT: Besides, rats are squirrels that don’t got bushy tails. When I was a kid —

JASON: — “I used to go down to our basement and even *played* with them.” Are you sure your name is William and not *Willard*?

PRONT: And whaddaya mean by that?

JASON: Funny ... as many years as I was away from this job, I still haven’t forgotten your more memorable answers to problems.

PRONT: Never mind! Just tell them tenants what I’m tellin’ you. It’s my way or the highway.

JASON: ... No, your way certainly isn’t “the *high* way,” is it?

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

PRONT: You don't like it, big shot? Quit again! How ya gonna pay all your child support?

JASON: What do you think brought me back after all these years?

PRONT: Right! You ain't goin' nowhere.

JASON: You'd better hope that I don't. You need me to do everything you *can't* do — including all those times when you *break* your glasses or *lose* your glasses or *can't find* your glasses -

PRONT : So go! You ain't gonna be hard to replace. Remember how I got you the first time? All I hadda do was —

(picks up the McDonald's bag)

—walk into McDonald's and yell “Who wants a job?” It had to be forty people come runnin' at me. You was first, so I was good enough to pick you. You want me to go back there right now and do it again and see how long it takes to get someone new?

JASON: *(a long resigned sigh; then)* Look, I haven't wanted to say anything ...

GLYNIS: ... Listen to him, William ...

JASON: ... The reason I even came back is that my son —

PRONT: — Don't tell me none of your personal problems!

GLYNIS: *(a moan of frustration)* Ohhhhh!

Both JASON and GLYNIS count off on their fingers the reasons:

JASON: I shouldn't have come back. I should have remembered all the times making excuses and lying for you. The lunch hours I gave up. The overtime you didn't pay me for.

PRONT: — So quit again! Then you can finish that book you're always talkin' about.

JASON: *(a painful memory)* That I *used* to talk about.

SFX: *phone rings.*

(quick to answer)

William Pront Real Estate.

(disappointed — but with a pointed look to PRONT)

Ms. Abbott ...

(PRONT mouths the words “I'm not here.”)

No, I'm sorry. He's not here. Shall I have him call you when he gets in? ... *I see ... Well, I don't know what time he'll — all right ...*

(sincerely)

I'm sorry. Goodbye.

(now off the phone and back to PRONT)

She says she's coming over right now and if you're not here, she'll wait until you show up.

PRONT: *(pats his jacket's breast pocket)* Good thing I'm armed.

GLYNIS: Oh, *wonderful!*

PRONT: It'll take her about ten minutes to get here, so leave in five and go over and change her locks.

JASON: She has a really sick kid.

PRONT: So get the kid outta there before he infects everybody.

(SFX: phone rings. Although JASON reaches for it, PRONT answers.)

Call back later.

JASON: *(grabbing the phone from him)* That might be for me!

PRONT: No personal calls on the job!

JASON: *(on the phone)* Yes? Yes, Mr. Weingarten!

PRONT: We ain't got no tenants named Weingarten. This better not be no personal call.

JASON: *(anticipation builds before his face falls)* Yes ... yes ... I understand ... It was nice of you to call instead of just e-mailing. Thank you ...

(PRONT smiles, aware that JASON didn't get the job he was hoping to get. JASON hangs up quietly and gloomily as GLYNIS walks over as if to console him.)

I don't care — I'm quitting, anyway.

PRONT: Then get the f —!

PRONT can't finish the word because GLYNIS makes a gesture with both hands that stops PRONT from speaking. PRONT raises his hands to his throat, as if to pull away the rope that is strangling him.

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

JASON: My God! Are you all right?!

(GLYNIS makes a casual gesture and PRONT is suddenly not in pain.)

Can I get you a —

PRONT: *(very unnerved at not understanding what had just happened)* **NO! JUST GET OUT!!** Get out if you're quittin'! You better be gone by the time I get out of the can!

JASON: And don't forget what you have to do by April 15th!

(PRONT storms into the bathroom and slams the door. For a second, JASON has second thoughts about leaving. But his self-respect takes over. He purses his lips and without a word just marches to the door, opens it, walks out, and slams it hard behind him.)

(The second he does, PRONT — who didn't need the bathroom at all — opens the door slowly and pokes his head out. GLYNIS allows him to see her.)

GLYNIS: Well, you weren't very nice, were you, William?

PRONT: *(after blinking in surprise)* How'd you get in here?

GLYNIS: Allow me to introduce myself. My name is —

PRONT: — Carol Abbott, yeah, I know. Call my assistant and make an appointment.

GLYNIS: But Jason just quit, didn't he, William?

PRONT: Who said you could call me William?!

GLYNIS: Well, I feel I know you very well. I'm just like Santa Claus.

(not singing)

I see you when you're sleeping. I know when you're awake. I know when you've been bad or good —

(stops to chuckle)

You don't even recognize that song, do you?

PRONT: I don't know no songs!

GLYNIS: *(a sad smile)* I know. There's no music in your life, even if we count the whirring sounds from that ancient adding machine. And isn't it funny how you don't

(air quotation marks)

“need your glasses” to see the numbers on that adding machine?

PRONT picks his telephone receiver and dials.

PRONT: I can see numbers on a phone, too. And I know where nine, one and one are! And nine-one-one is all I need to get rid of you!

GLYNIS: (leaning against JASON's desk) No one will answer.

PRONT: You wanna bet?

(But when PRONT puts the phone to his ear, he hears no dial tone.)

You cut the wires.

GLYNIS: I didn't have to. Let me try again: My name is Glynis, and I'm —

(PRONT slams the phone down in frustration.)

PRONT: *SHUT UP AND GET THE F* —

(GLYNIS again gestures with both hands and once again, PRONT cannot get the word out of his mouth and grabs his throat in pain. Now he's genuinely scared, and realizes that this person had caused him to choke earlier.)

Ffffffffffffffff! FFFFFFFF! FFFFFFFF!

GLYNIS: William, if there's one thing I can't stand, it's profanity. I know you have a *very* limited vocabulary, but let's keep the filthy words out of the conversation, shall we?

(GLYNIS makes another gesture and PRONT finds he can speak again. He immediately reaches into his inside breast pocket and just before he takes out his gun:)

And *please* put the gun away.

(But the gun is out.)

PRONT: All right you, wise guy — gal — now listen: I'm gonna to count to three, and if you ain't gone, I'm shootin'.

GLYNIS: Three, always three.

PRONT: One!

GLYNIS: Just once for a change, I'd like to hear "I'm going to count to *four*."

PRONT: Two!

GLYNIS: Or better still, "I'm going to count to *two*." That way, things would happen faster.

PRONT: Three!

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

(But PRONT never really did want to shoot and doesn't. GLYNIS makes a mocking "Oh, I'm so scared!" gesture.)

GLYNIS: See? You're not such a bad guy.

PRONT: Oh, yeah?

PRONT cocks the gun and points it at her. GLYNIS gestures and suddenly PRONT has swiftly brought the gun to his temple. He's genuinely scared because he can't understand how it got there. Much as PRONT tries, he doesn't have the power to take it away. As he struggles:

GLYNIS: William, I don't come from heaven and I'm no angel. In fact, becoming an angel is *not* one of my goals. Imagine dealing with those big wings! I warned my friend Clarence who just *had* to be an angel: "Be careful what you wish for," but *no*, he had to have those enormous things on his back. Now he must turn sideways every time he wants to get through a door. But never mind him; you don't know what I'm talking about, anyway. Let's get back to you.

PRONT: Don't kill me.

GLYNIS: I won't. I *want* to be nice.

(GLYNIS waves her hand, and PRONT not only takes the gun from his temple, but finds himself quickly and involuntarily throwing it into the wastebasket.)

But I had to show you that I have extraordinary powers. As my friend Glinda says, "You had to learn that for yourself."

(smiles)

Come here.

PRONT: No!

GLYNIS: Come here. I'm not going to hurt you. Honestly. Come here.

(PRONT doesn't want to, but she gestures and he involuntarily finds himself drawn to her as if by magnet. Once he reaches her, she gives him a big hug. PRONT has never had this happen to him, and he doesn't know how to respond. His arms just hang. But despite his confusion, he is calmed.)

Considering your background, I know that you couldn't have turned out any differently.

PRONT: *(pulling away)* Okay, what do you want from me?

GLYNIS: It's not what I want *from* you, it's what I want *for* you — Good Lord, I sound like

an insurance salesman.

(shakes her head as if to clear it)

No — I'm here to make you a nicer person. It's what we ghosts do —

PRONT: — Ghosts!

GLYNIS: Yes, for centuries now, we *ghosts* have been visiting stinkers like you.

PRONT: Hey!

GLYNIS: We used to send one to look at a person's past, another to look at his present and yet another to look at his future. But that's when there were so many fewer terrible people in the world. Now there are so many, many horrible ones that we don't have enough ghosts to go around, so each one of us must do everything. We're on the job rehabilitating people all year 'round, twenty-four hours a day, six days a week. Not until the seventh day do we rest.

PRONT: And why would a *ghost* need to rest?

GLYNIS: *(a smile)* Someday I'll have you read a nice big book that explains all about that seventh day.

PRONT: I ain't readin' no book.

GLYNIS: We'll see ... But I *do* apologize for barging in. It would have been nicer if I could have let you know earlier that I was dropping by. But if I'd called you and said, "Hello, I'm Glynis the Ghost, and I'd like to stop in," you'd have hung up. If I'd sent an e-mail, Jason would have deleted my message faster than the ones that says "I'm a Nigerian who need to transfer my millions." So what's left but the good old-fashioned house call? Usually by this point, I've made better progress, because everyone else has either read the novel or seen a movie version of *A* —

PRONT: — I don't go to no movies!

GLYNIS: *(slow, deliberate shake of the head)* You've missed a lot of good films — although missing *Willard* was actually a good thing. All right, I'll admit the sequel had a nice song. You should hear it some time.

PRONT: I don't listen to no songs, neither, and don't expect me to buy no records, neither. I hold onto my money! You got any idea how much I'm worth?

GLYNIS: Of course! I do my homework before going out on a job. Because of the outrageously unfair rents you charge for your tenements —

PRONT: — Fu ! —

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

(Once again GLYNIS gestures and chokes him, but then immediately releases him.)

GLYNIS: — in your three buildings, you now have sixteen million, nine hundred six dollars and change. If only it were the kind of change I'm interested in seeing.

PRONT: Yeah, well, you don't get sixteen mill from wastin' money on things like movies or them things they call plays. I went when I was a kid and that seventeen-fifty is the last money they're ever gettin' from me.

GLYNIS: Thirty-five dollars. You took a date, remember?

PRONT : Never mind that! I don't want to think what they must get for them plays now.

GLYNIS: And if I told you, you might have a fatal heart attack — for William, you *do* have a heart, much as you try to pretend you don't. Let's find it by seeing a play you won't have to pay for. It's my treat.

PRONT: I ain't goin' to no play.

GLYNIS: You don't have to. I'm bringing the show right here: *The William Pront Story*.

PRONT: I ain't watchin' no play!

(eyes narrowed with sarcasm)

Why don't you just start without me?

GLYNIS: If you don't watch the play, I'll get rid of every McDonald's in the neighborhood — and every ninety-nine cent pizza parlor to boot.

PRONT: All right-all right-all right! But if you really wanna do somethin' good, get those pizza places to *really* charge ninety-nine cents. None of them gives you the back the penny when you give them a buck. You gotta ask them for the penny and then they give you this look ...

GLYNIS: ... Nobody knows the troubles you've seen! Now before we start the play, I know I don't have to worry about a cell phone going off because —

PRONT: — I don't got no cell phone!

GLYNIS: We need more theatregoers like you.

(pointing to the McDonald's bag)

But if you plan to eat your hamburger, *unwrap it now*.

PRONT: It's cold by now — thanks to you.

GLYNIS: Fine! So! Ta-da! The curtain rises on *The William Pront Story* — starting all the

way back when you were William Ballard.

PRONT: Ballard?

GLYNIS: That was your real last name. You don't remember that, do you?

PRONT: I only remember my mother callin' me William. I don't remember my father calling me nothin'.

GLYNIS: He was furious that you were born. And when you were four —

PRONT: (*nods soberly*) —my mother was killed by a hit-and-run driver.

GLYNIS: Right in front of you. I'm sorry. I'll spare you that scene. I also wish I could spare you the fact that your father — well ...

PRONT: — never wanted me around to begin with, I know, I know. He dumped me.

GLYNIS: (*coaxing the truth out of him*) Actually ...

PRONT: (*glumly admits*)... He *sold* me.

GLYNIS: To Sam Falcon — Sammy “The Elbows” Falcon — who abused you terribly.

PRONT: What?! What are you talkin' about, “abused?” Sam was my real father. He gave me three squares a day and a nice room to sleep in. Only thing I had to do was make a few deliveries and heat up some franks and beans.

GLYNIS: There was a little more to it than that — as we'll see. Lights up on Act One: Time: Early December, 1975. Place: Sam Falcon's dingy hideout.

(YOUNG WILLIAM (the actor who will later play ADAM), around 12 years old, enters with a green book bag over HIS shoulder.)

PRONT: Holy sh —

(stops himself and puts up his hand)

I know. No swearin'. Don't choke me! But look at that! That *is* what I looked like back then!

(SAM FALCON is rolled on, in a bed, asleep. [He's played by the same actor who played JASON.]

Sam!

YOUNG WILLIAM: Hi, Sam!

SAM: Ah, fa God's sake, you woke me up!

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

YOUNG WILLIAM: Sorry! Thought you'd be up by now. Here's what you wanted me to get.

(SAM takes the package from the bag, quickly opens it and takes out an enormous sheaf of bills. He starts counting.)

SAM: Now go over to the window and make sure no one's pokin' their nose in my business.

YOUNG WILLIAM: Oh, come on, not again —

SAM: Yes, again! 'Smatter, you don't like bein' my lookout?

YOUNG WILLIAM: Just stand all day there doin' nothin'?

SAM: *(stops counting)* You want me to send you to school?!

YOUNG WILLIAM: I don't know ... maybe ...

SAM: *(resumes counting)* No, you don't. You won't like it. But do what you're told or I'll send ya. Besides, when you're at the window, you ain't "doin' nothin'." You're *lookin'*! You're a lookout! It's excitin'! And don't stand close enough so that someone outside can see ya like what happened last time.

YOUNG WILLIAM: I'm sorry.

SAM: Just pay attention and make sure no one who's got no business around here is lookin' in. And that goes for any woman, too. Let me give you a tip. Don't never get involved with no woman. None of them's worth it.

YOUNG WILLIAM: Some of them are kinda pretty.

SAM: *(smiles)* Don't grow up too fast. I'm goin' back to bed.

(SAM returns to bed while YOUNG WILLIAM looks out the window on the fourth-wall. Then:)

YOUNG WILLIAM: Hey ...

SAM: *(offstage)* I told ya! I'm tryin' to sleep!

YOUNG WILLIAM: I'm sorry!

SAM: No, what?

YOUNG WILLIAM: I was just wonderin' about them guys standin' on ladders putting up some wires.

(An alarmed SAM jumps out of bed.)

SAM: Wires! You mean like wiretaps!?

YOUNG WILLIAM: I don't know. Is that what them are?

SAM rushes over, looks out fourth-wall, and disgustedly elbows YOUNG WILLIAM.

SAM: Them ain't wiretaps! Fa God's sake ...

SAM returns to bed.

YOUNG WILLIAM: Well, then, what are they?

SAM: Don't ask no questions. You'll live longer.

YOUNG WILLIAM: No, come on, what are they?

SAM: I can see I ain't gonna get no sleep today. We might as well play gin. Get the cards and get over here.

YOUNG WILLIAM: Ohhhhhh!

SAM: Come on! It passes the time, don't it?

YOUNG WILLIAM: Can't you get the TV fixed?

SAM: Nobody gets in this room! *Nobody!* And the thing weighs a ton, so I ain't lugging it nowhere. Now we gonna play cards or ain't we? Deal! How much you into me now?

YOUNG WILLIAM: What?! You owe me ten-fifty.

SAM: Nah, nah. I'm up eight bucks.

YOUNG WILLIAM: You was. Then we played last week and —

SAM: *I'm up eight bucks.* Now deal!

YOUNG WILLIAM deals out 10 cards to himself and 11 to SAM.

YOUNG WILLIAM: So what are the wires outside?

SAM: They're decorations, all right?

(before YOUNG WILLIAM can speak)

And now you want to know what decorations are.

YOUNG WILLIAM: Yeah. Do you know?

SAM: *(another elbow thrust)* 'Course I know. They're lights they put up once a year. Red,

green —

YOUNG WILLIAM: Oh, wait, yeah — those! I remember! It happens when it gets real cold out.

SAM: That's right. Every Christmas.

YOUNG WILLIAM: Yeah, what is that, anyway? Sometimes I hear people talkin' about Christmas.

An incensed SAM jumps up and starts hitting YOUNG WILLIAM — hard.

SAM: You talkin' to people! What are you doin' talkin' to people? Didn't I tell you never to talk to no one!

YOUNG WILLIAM: I'm sorry! I'm *sorry!* I'm SORRY!

SAM: (*still hitting*) What are you supposed to do! *Tell me!* TELL ME!

YOUNG WILLIAM: I'm supposed to be out in the mornings from seven to eight and in the afternoons three to four!

SAM: (*still hitting*) And *why?!*

YOUNG WILLIAM: 'Cuz that's when other kids are out walkin' to school or comin' home. So anyone who sees me'll think I'm a kid who's goin' to school, too!

SAM: (*still hitting*) Because why?

YOUNG WILLIAM: Because if a cop saw me on the street after I was supposed t'be in school, he's start askin' a lotta questions!

SAM: (*STILL hitting*) So who are you allowed to talk to?

YOUNG WILLIAM: No one! *No one!* I take packages to wherever you tell me to go! I give it to the person sitting on the step who's got a green hat on! I take what he gives me and get right back here! I don't say nothin' to him! I don't let him say nothin' to me! I don't talk to no one! I just hear people talkin'! That's all!

SAM stops hitting.

SAM: Well, don't listen to no one, neither! Now play a card!

(YOUNG WILLIAM plays with no enthusiasm.)

Christmas ... has somethin' to do with a guy named Jesus. It's his birthday.

YOUNG WILLIAM: What's that?

SAM: You don't know what a birthday is?

YOUNG WILLIAM: Not really. No.

SAM: Don't you know nothin? Birthday is the day you was born, when you came into the world.

YOUNG WILLIAM: What's mine?

SAM: *(annoyed)* I don't know ...

YOUNG WILLIAM: When's yours?

SAM: Sometime in November.

(before YOUNG WILLIAM can ask)

November ninth, all right?

YOUNG WILLIAM: So can November ninth be my birthday?

SAM: *(snorts out a laugh; then)* Yeah, sure, kid. November ninth can be your birthday. I'll split it with ya.

YOUNG WILLIAM: Is November ninth coming up soon?

SAM: Oh, fa God's sake! No! You just missed it. Come on! Play cards!

(but YOUNG WILLIAM doesn't)

What's the matter?

YOUNG WILLIAM: You think I'm stupid, don't you?

SAM: Nah, I don't think you're stupid. Wanna know the truth? I never had no delivery boy make deliveries as pronto as you.

YOUNG WILLIAM: I wasn't too pronto today. I got confused tryin' to find 129 West 4th Street.

SAM: Out of your district. I knew I shouldna sent you.

YOUNG WILLIAM: I was walkin' down Sixth Avenue, past Ninth and Eighth Streets — and then there was a street with no number on it.

SAM: Oh, yeah, Waverly Place. Shoulda warned you 'bout that one.

YOUNG WILLIAM: I just kept walkin', and the *next* street had no number on it, too.

SAM: *Washington* Place. My fault. So whud you do?

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

YOUNG WILLIAM: I just kept walking, and the next street finally had the number four on it.

SAM: Ya done good. And you were still pretty pronto. Maybe we should start callin' you Willie Pronto! No, Pronto's too long. Pront! From now on, you're Pront. You like it?

YOUNG WILLIAM: Yeah! Pront! I was hopin' you'd give me another name one of these days — like your friend “Fat Fingers” and the lady you call “Nice Ones.”

SAM: *(laughs heartily)* And I'm gonna give you a tip, too — and I don't mean the “advice” kinda tip. I mean a real money kinda tip.

(SAM gets up and hands YOUNG WILLIAM a bill from his pocket.)

Don't spend it all in one place.

YOUNG WILLIAM: Hey ... is this real money?

SAM: What do you mean, is it real money? 'Course it's real money.

YOUNG WILLIAM: But it's got “twos” all over it and not “ones.”

SAM: That's because it ain't a one-dollar bill but a two-dollar bill. Worth twice as much. And two dollar bills is good luck. That's why I'm givin' it to you — so you'll have good luck.

YOUNG WILLIAM: So if it's good luck, should I just keep it?

SAM: Do whatever you want! What do I care?

YOUNG WILLIAM: Tell me what this stuff on top here is.

SAM: Why do you keep askin' about them things? I told you, they're just *words*.

YOUNG WILLIAM: But what do they mean?

SAM: They just tell you the bill's worth two bucks. Look how many, uh, letters it takes to say “two bucks” when just the number does it for you. Numbers is all you ever need to know.

YOUNG WILLIAM: *(pointing to another part of the bill)* And what's this over here?

SAM: Somebody wrote on the bill, that's all. Sometimes people write little notes on bills, and *don't* ask me why.

YOUNG WILLIAM: How do you write?

SAM: What is this, you want me to teach you to write, what, like your name or sumpin'?

YOUNG WILLIAM: Yeah!!

(SAM sighs, but takes a pencil from his shirt pocket. He uses the paper in which his package was wrapped.)

SAM: All right, you ready? Watch this.

(SAM wildly scribbles.)

There!

YOUNG WILLIAM: That's called writin' your name?

SAM: It's just as good as writin' your name. You don't have to write out no "William," no "Pront." You just, whaddaya call it, *scribble*. Important people just scribble their names.

(SAM scribbles again.)

The ones who are careful and write 'em out one letter at a time are jerks. Come on — back to the game.

(They continue playing.)

YOUNG WILLIAM: Sam?

SAM: *Now* what?

YOUNG WILLIAM: How much you pay my father for me?

SAM: Play cards.

YOUNG WILLIAM: Was it a lot?

SAM: *(slamming down cards)* Gin! You see what happens when you don't pay attention? Four hundred bucks! That's how much I wasted on you! 'Cuz right now, you ain't worth a penny! Now go back to the window if you ain't gonna play cards right. Go ahead! *Now!*

(SAM hits him again. YOUNG WILLIAM puts down the cards and dejectedly goes to the fourth-wall window. A few seconds after he gets there and starts watching, we see reflected in his face that the red and green Christmas decorations have been lit. Then the lights fade to black.)

GLYNIS: How can anyone blame you for turning out the way you have? Staring out the window all day and night made you accustomed to doing nothing. That's why now you sleep fourteen hours a day and spend most of the rest of the day playing solitaire. A *lot* of solitaire. In fact, you're only forty-four games away from your hundred-thousandth game.

PRONT: Do you know how many I won?

GLYNIS: 14 thousand, 288.

PRONT: That's somethin' like one in seven. I woulda thought I was doin' better than that.

GLYNIS: And the rest of the time, you simply count your rent money — over and over again — in every possible way.

(GLYNIS loudly claps her hands and PRONT rushes to the adding machine and starts punching in numbers and pulling a lever.)

PRONT: (as a man possessed) This month compared to last month! This year compared to last year! This year compared to ten years ago!

(GLYNIS snaps her fingers and PRONT stops.)

GLYNIS: Counting money — the only other thing that Sam taught you to do with your time.

PRONT: It hadda be a lot more fun than sittin' in school. Sammy taught me all I hadda know. Scribblin's all the writin' I ever hadda do — on the back of checks, on the front of contracts —

GLYNIS: — On eviction notices —

PRONT: — All right, yeah, on them, too. All I had to do was hire a assistant —

GLYNIS: A total of sixty-two of them. Sixty-two trips to McDonald's where you yelled "Who wants a job?" — because you couldn't put an ad in a newspaper, could you?

PRONT: A ad in a newspaper costs money! You don't need to do that. All you gotta do is go someplace and yell out loud you're hiring.

GLYNIS: *(smiles at his trying to put one over on her)* As if that were the *real* reason! So your assistants did all the paperwork, collected the rent and the late fees at compound interest.

PRONT: Nothin' illegal about int'rest.

GLYNIS: Jason was easily your longest-lasting employee at five years and two months — until he couldn't take it anymore.

PRONT: He came back, didn't he? It was his lucky day when I ran into him —

GLYNIS: — right after Lucas quit after a record-setting 58 minutes. It was your lucky day when you ran into Jason. But now, after three weeks —

PRONT: — All right, enough about him. And what do you want me to say about Sammy — that he did me wrong? Okay, so he hit me once or twice when I deserved it. But lotsa times I felt really bad for the guy.

GLYNIS: Especially on November 11, 1981 — two days after you —

(air quotation marks)

— “turned 18” ...

(SAM now has his hand on his heart, about to fall over. A horrified PRONT grabs SAM and tries to save him, but SAM falls to the floor.)

PRONT: Sammy! Sam! Oh, no! Sam! Are you all right? Come on, Sam! Wake up!

(a pause)

Dad!

(GLYNIS snaps both fingers and the lights on the apartment fade. PRONT is once again in his office.)

See? Poor guy! There was too much pressure on him. The income tax people, the state taking over the lottery, the Tringali family ... His heart just couldn't take it.

GLYNIS: That's what made you decide to work within the law — well, after you took the tens of thousands you knew that Sam had in his secret safe.

PRONT: You know about that, too, huh?

GLYNIS: Interesting, isn't it, that as far away as those little numbers were on the dial, you *didn't* need glasses to see all six numbers of the combination?

PRONT: Yeah, well, I was young then ...

GLYNIS: Lucky you could, for if you hadn't known how to open the safe, you wouldn't have been able to buy this building for cash, raise the rents and lower the quality of life.

PRONT: There ain't nothin' wrong with this buildin'!

GLYNIS: William! Why be so stingy about making repairs? How much money does a person need?

PRONT: A lot! Look at Jason! His wife dumped him because he wasn't making enough.

GLYNIS: You weren't paying him enough — especially considering all you asked of him. During his first tour of duty:

(GLYNIS loudly claps her hands.)

PRONT: Jason! Where are you! Get in here! I got somethin' you gotta do.

(JASON enters from the bathroom.)

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

JASON: Can't it wait till after my lunch hour?

PRONT: No lunch hour today! We're too busy.

GLYNIS: And then, at the end of the day.

PRONT: Jason! Get up to Six-E at 440.

JASON: Didn't I tell you that was going to be a problem?

PRONT: Never mind. Just get up there now.

JASON: Now?!

PRONT: Yes, *now*, whaddaya think? NOW!

JASON: It's nearly eight o'clock! I was going home to work on my novel!

PRONT: Instead you're gonna work on your *work*. Or doncha you want to work no more?

JASON: All right, all right ...

(JASON exits through the front door.)

GLYNIS: Jason had earmarked his lunch hour to pay bills, do errands and call friends to see if they knew of any jobs. When you took that time away from him, he had to do all that once he got home — and that was the time he lost in writing his novel. You stole time from him — no, you *embezzled* it — that's a better word, because you were stealing small amounts of time for years on end, a little bit here, a little bit there — but it added up to plenty of time he couldn't devote to his book.

PRONT: He woulda had plenty of time to write a book if the jerk didn't do what costs you the most time *and* money. He fell in love and got married.

GLYNIS: Two of the best things that can happen to anyone.

PRONT: Yeah, well, maybe in the *ghost* world it's great. Here everyone gets divorced — which costs a bundle. Like Sam taught me — ain't no sense in gettin' in with no woman.

GLYNIS: Which brings us to Mary Chalmers.

PRONT: *(stung and startled; vulnerable; a croak)* Mary! Why you bringin' her up?

GLYNIS: That's the next scene of our play: February 24, 1982.

PRONT: Oh, no, come on —

GLYNIS: *(sincerely)* It's important, William. February 24, 1982 was the day that you and Mary meet at a Burger King when you're both 18.

PRONT: Come on! Don't!

(But then PRONT gasps when HE sees)

Mary!

(MARY [the actress who will later play LISA] has entered. She's a striking blonde who's intently reading a book. PRONT now enters the scene himself slowly walks over to her as he's taken back to that day, again captivated.)

(But PRONT doesn't know how to proceed. Then over the loudspeaker comes "Call Me" by Blondie (COPYRIGHT PROBLEM we don't have the rights to use it).)

MARY: *(stiffens. To herself, teeth clenched)* I don't believe it.

PRONT: Sumpin' wrong?

MARY: Oh! Excuse me! I'm sorry. No. Nothing's wrong! I'm sorry.

(MARY tries to return to reading, but she's distracted by the song. She slams the book shut — at the precise moment that GLYNIS signals the music to stop.)

PRONT: No, come on, somethin's wrong.

MARY: *(breathes in frustration, points to speaker)* I can't believe this song has come on: Blondie's "Call Me." My boyfriend — my *former* boyfriend, my *old* boyfriend — used to call me "Blondie" whenever he *would* call me.

PRONT: *(seize the day)* Your old boyfriend? So whaddaya mean, you broke up?

MARY: I guess we have. We were supposed to go to Long Island tonight to see *The Wall*. Are you going?

PRONT: All the way to Long Island to see a *wall*?

MARY: *(takes it as a joke)* Yeah, like you haven't heard that Pink Floyd is going to be there! I thought Michael would call me this morning, we'd make up and go. Shows you how stupid I am! I'll bet he's still going — although I don't know how he's gonna pay for tickets. I'm the one who works. He just sits home all day and listens to Air Supply.

PRONT: If he's just been listenin' to nothin' but a supply of air, you're better off without him.

MARY: *(again assumes he's joking)* Thanks for trying to make me laugh. The sad thing is we have so much in common! He's the one who introduced me to Herman Hesse. Do you know him?

PRONT: No. He live around here?

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

MARY: (*laughs; slaps his arm*) You really *are* funny!

PRONT: (*confused but pleased*) Thanks! Look — your boyfriend, he sounds like a loser. You're smart, workin', makin' money. That's what I been doin' — and now I'm gonna buy a buildin'.

MARY: You're buying a *building!*?! How old are you?

PRONT: Eighteen — I think.

MARY: (*takes this as a joke, too*) You think! Well, I'm eighteen, too — and I'm having the hardest time just trying to buy a used car. And you're going to buy a whole *building*?

PRONT: (*pleased she's impressed*) Well, it's a — used building ...

MARY: (*laughs; then*) But even being able to buy a *very* used building at 18 is pretty cool.

PRONT: Yup, gonna have tenants and everything. Hey, you wanna see the place? Maybe some time we can go out and, y'know ... see it.

MARY: (*a beat; then militantly ready to move on from Michael*) Yes! Sure! Why not?!

PRONT: I mean, if you wanna get a bite or somethin', we can do that before we go there. Or after —

MARY: Have you seen *The Elephant Man*?

PRONT: (*laughs mockingly*) Oh, you mean that real fat guy down the street?

MARY: (*an embarrassed laugh; then*) No! A few years ago I devoured a book called *The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity* — about a poor soul who was terribly disfigured. So when I heard they made a play *and* a movie out of it, I told Michael I wanted to see the movie — and that I'd even pay for myself. I mean, I couldn't expect him to buy a ticket to a Broadway play —

PRONT: — How much they get for them?

MARY: Seventeen-fifty.

PRONT: (completely outraged) *What?!*

MARY: Well, that's for the best seats.

PRONT: You could buy twenty-two Whoppers for that, eat for a whole week and have twelve cents left over!

(*MARY looks mystified*)

Well, I mean, a Whopper costs seventy-nine cents, right? Twelve seventy-nines make

seventeen-thirty-eight, and twelve cents more makes seventeen-fifty.

MARY: Wow ... you just figured that out, just-like-that?

PRONT: *(somewhere between modest and proud)* Yeah ... I'm kinda good with numbers.

MARY: *(with admiration)* You sure are!

PRONT: Thanks ... You want to see this *Elephant Man*?

MARY: Too late now. They stopped showing the movie last week.

PRONT: They still showin' the play?

MARY: *(blinks in astonishment)* Yes!

PRONT: So let's go!

(puts out his hand)

I'm William.

MARY: I'm Mary. Huh! William and Mary! I've applied there.

PRONT: Good! I hope you get the job!

MARY: You are *hilarious!*

(GLYNIS snaps both fingers to indicate the passage of time.)

MARY: Was that a great play or what?

PRONT: *(didn't think so)* Yeah ... yeah .. *really* great.

MARY: Wasn't Philip Anglim amazing?

PRONT: He the guy who was supposed to be The Elephant Man?

MARY: Didn't you read your *Playbill*?

PRONT: Yeah, sure I read it. I just forgot. But how come he didn't look like an elephant?

MARY: Because you're supposed to use your imagination.

PRONT: How come? I mean, they showed you those pictures at the beginning, but then he looked nothin' like them.

MARY: *(stymied by that)* But you know, good as the play was, the book was even better. I've found that whenever I see a movie of a book, the book is always better.

PRONT: Then why go the movie?

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

MARY: To see what they've done with it! I realize that every page can't make it to the screen, but it's fun to see how many do. Anyway, I'll lend you the book and you can see what they kept and what they left out.

PRONT: So you mean we're gonna go out again?!

MARY: 326-6522!

PRONT: Great

MARY: Not if you don't write it down. You'll forget it.

PRONT: No, 'cuz 326 doubled is 652. The last "2" I'll remember because the first three numbers are doubled.

MARY: Wow.

(MARY shakes his hand. Then she decides to kiss him on the cheek. PRONT looks young and alive for the first time.)

GLYNIS: Two days later, you called her.

PRONT: Well, I thought one day might be kinda fast and three was kinda slow.

GLYNIS: Although when you *did* call her, it took you a long time to reach her, because you didn't want to spend a dime on the phone call. Sam had taught you —

PRONT: — That if you spit on a penny and put it in the nickel slot of a pay phone, the spit could sometimes get it to sli-i-ide into the place where the dimes go. Then you got the call for a penny. I miss them pay phones with slots.

MARY: *(re-entering on the phone)* Hello?

PRONT: Mary?

MARY: *(big smile; bubbly voice)* William! I was just thinking of you!

PRONT: You were?! Great! Look, I did buy that buildin', and I thought you might wanna come out and see it ...

MARY: Tomorrow's my day off!

PRONT: Great!

MARY: And listen: a friend and I went to see a really great film you just have to see. Maybe you didn't like *The Elephant Man* —

PRONT: No, no: I liked it! I liked it! It was great!

MARY: But I just know you're really gonna *love* this film that's getting a revival at the Regency. It's so magnificent that I wouldn't mind seeing it again.

PRONT: What's it called?

MARY: *War and Peace.*

PRONT: (*enthusiastically*) Oh, it's a war movie?!

MARY: (*long pause; the first serious doubt she has about him*) ... Yyesss, it's a war movie, but more importantly — it's a *peace* movie, too.

(She waits and hopes that sinks in. When she feels it hasn't)

I loved it so much that I've started reading the novel — which'll take a while, considering it's over a thousand pages long.

PRONT: A thou — ! But that's gotta be with the pictures.

MARY: (*stunned that he'd say that*) Nn-o, there aren't any pictures ... and sometimes it's rough reading because of all those Russian names.

PRONT: It's *Russian*?!

MARY: (*more doubts, but airily*) Don't worry, it was written long before the Russian Revolution. I'm sure we can see it without turning into Communists.

PRONT: Wait a minute — you really mean they talk like in *Russian*?

MARY: It's no problem! There are subtitles, so all you have to do is read what everybody's saying.

PRONT: (*after a long pause*) ... *Read* ...

MARY: And eat before you go. It's in two parts for a grand total of six hours —

PRONT: You mean ya gotta read for six hours?

MARY: I can see you've never seen a foreign film. Don't worry — you'll get the hang of it. So we'll catch the first part, then go see your building, and come back for the second part. And I'll bring my copy of *The Elephant Man* for you.

(GLYNIS snaps her fingers to indicate the passage of time. MARY is walking briskly, as if exiting a theater. She twirls around and looks at PRONT, who is utterly dazed.)

And Part Two is even better, if you can believe it!

PRONT: (*stunned after three hours of not understanding a word*) Let me ask you

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

something: How can you even read what they're saying when they're standing in front of somethin' white and the things they're sayin' is in white, too?

MARY: *(laughing)* That *is* hard sometimes. But a study done at Cambridge says our minds only have to see the first and last letters of any word to figure out what the whole word is.

PRONT: I don't know how the hell you do it.

(immediately contrite)

Oh, sorry! Pardon my French.

MARY: Gee, and I always thought the French word for "hell" was "*l'enfer*."

(MARY laughs, expects he will, and is disappointed when he doesn't.)

PRONT: Uh-huh. You ready to go see my buildin'?

MARY: *(no joy)* Sure. Let's go.

(They start to walk. Then she stops.)

But wait — are you saying that you don't like the film?

PRONT: No, it's great! Just like you said.

MARY: *(his last chance)* What part impressed you the most?

PRONT: I dunno, I liked the whole thing.

MARY: *(zeroing in)* Oh, sure, I know, me too, but what part impressed you the most?

PRONT: I dunno ...

MARY: William! Come on! Out of three hours, something had to impress you!

PRONT: Why, you got a part that, uh, impressed you?

MARY: Of course! For one, when Andrei saw that Lise wasn't very interesting.

(realizes that she is now talking about him)

And he thought that even going to war would be better than living with someone who's boring.

PRONT: Yeah, I liked that part, too. Hey, come on, let's get there before it gets too dark and you can't see it too good.

(GLYNIS snaps her fingers and they are now in front of his building. PRONT proudly positions MARY to look fourth-wall and points.)

That's it! All mine!

MARY: *(a wan smile)* Very nice.

(She suddenly turns to him)

William, I'm going to be honest with you. The person I went to *War and Peace* before I went with you? He's someone with whom I think I might be able to get serious.

PRONT: What?! No!

MARY: I'm really sorry. But at least now you don't have to see the rest of the film if you don't want to.

(He doesn't know what to say)

You don't, do you? It's okay.

(MARY walks off slowly and exits. PRONT begins to follow her.)

PRONT: Mary! No! Look! I — just couldn't read what the movie said — because

(the first time he uses this lie)

I didn't have my glasses!

GLYNIS: It *did* seem to be a good excuse, didn't it?

(PRONT watches MARY go.)

PRONT: ... yeah.

GLYNIS: And why do you think Mary preferred someone else?

PRONT: She was scared that if she got in with me I'd make her live in my building, and it wasn't in good shape then. But I woulda fixed it up for her, made it real nice for her, you know, but she just couldn't picture it.

GLYNIS: Remember that day in 1995 when you saw her on the street?

PRONT: *(nods soberly)* She was with this guy — her husband, I guess. Was it that Michael she was talkin' about?

GLYNIS: No.

PRONT: *Good.* Glad she didn't wind up with him. Whoever it was, they had two little kids with them. Two kids! I don't want to think how much those kids was costing them.

GLYNIS: Let me look that up.

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

(She consults an imaginary fourth-wall chart)

Ah! Current statistics show that to properly raise a child to age 18 the estimated cost is now —

(She's a bit taken aback)

... Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

PRONT: Two hundred and fifty G's?! For each *kid*?

GLYNIS: You know, it's much more than I thought, too. And that doesn't even include college.

PRONT: Yeah, come on — tell me — *tell me* — that some kid's worth a quarter of a mill! And how much of that money you gonna get back from them?

GLYNIS: Some grown children care very attentively for their elderly parents.

PRONT: Yeah? How many?

GLYNIS: Well, all right, William, you have me there.

(looking directly into the faces in the audience)

Not that many.

PRONT: You got that right! You're ever better off buyin' a lottery ticket than havin' a kid. Even there you got a more of a chance of gettin' a winner.

GLYNIS: There are plenty of lovely and charming children around.

PRONT: Name one!

GLYNIS: Certainly! Time: a couple of years ago.

(ADAM, a handsome lad of 12 [the same actor who played YOUNG WILLIAM] enters. He's rabidly reading the final pages of The Hunger Games.)

PRONT: Hey, this kid kinda looks like me when I was that age.

GLYNIS: *Doesn't* he? But that's where the similarities end. Adam is a voracious reader who's discovered *The Hunger Games*.

ADAM: *(smiles as he slams shut the book in awe)* Awwwwww! That was *great!*

(LISA, ADAM's mother [the same blonde who played MARY], enters with a tray on which are small pieces of food on toothpicks.)

LISA: You've finished it already?!

ADAM: Well, it was so awesome!

LISA: I admire you for not watching any of the movie versions until you've read each book.

ADAM: Well, a book is always so much better than the movie.

PRONT: Hey, that's what Mary thought!

LISA: I thought it was ironic that Ms. Collins chose thirteen for the number of districts — because thirteen is considered such an unlucky number here — and everywhere else, except in Italy, where — did you know? — it's considered to be a very lucky number.

ADAM: Mom-m-m! Can we ever have *one* conversation where you don't try to teach me something?

LISA: *(smiles at that)* It won't happen again. Taste this and tell me what you think.

(She offers the tray. He takes one item.)

ADAM: Shrimp?

LISA: *Honeydew* shrimp.

ADAM: That sounds really good.

LISA: It better be. This is my most important job yet.

ADAM: Mmmm! They'll love it! And since you're soon gonna be raking in the money —

LISA: —I hope!

ADAM: —Can I have my allowance so I can go get *Catching Fire*?

PRONT: See how they cost you money?

LISA: *(as GLYNIS glares at PRONT)* Sure. You earned it by teaching me how to make a pdf file.

GLYNIS: See how they help?

(LISA takes a sheaf of bills from her pocket, and begins counting into ADAM'S palm:)

LISA: One, two —

ADAM: Hey, when'm I gonna get a raise? Come on. I've been here twelve years!

PRONT: *(as LISA gives ADAM a "That won't work" glare and smile)* Smart kid!

LISA: Three, *five* —

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

ADAM: Wow, a two-dollar bill!

ADAM and PRONT: That means good luck!

PRONT: How does he know that?! I never heard nobody know that but Sam!

LISA: Six, seven, eight, nine — oh, look at that: only one dollar bill left, and it's torn.
Almost half of it's gone.

ADAM: No, it's fine, I'll take it, it's good.

PRONT: You mean this kid knows that you only gotta have fifty-one percent of a bill and the bank's gotta take it?

ADAM: All you need is fifty-one percent of a bill, and people have to take it.

PRONT: Wow! Nobody knows that!

LISA: Where'd you hear that?

ADAM: I saw it on Google.

PRONT: What's Google?

GLYNIS: Later.

LISA: That can't be right.

(LISA goes to the table with the computer, sits, and starts typing.)

ADAM: Go ahead! Check!

PRONT: Tell her, kid!

LISA: *(typing in:)* "Torn," "Dollar," "Bill," "Fifty-one," "Percent."

ADAM: Wanna bet? Double or nothing?

PRONT: That's right, kid! Bet her! Even give her great odds.

ADAM: I'll even give you great odds.

PRONT: *(utterly delighted, elbowing GLYNIS in the ribs)* Ha!

GLYNIS: Watch the elbow. Another bad thing you learned from Sam.

PRONT: *(challengingly)* Yeah? What's a poke in the ribs to a ghost?

GLYNIS: *(a slight shiver of repulsion)* I just don't like the idea of it.

ADAM: What's coming up?

LISA: “Voters were *torn* between William McKinley and William Jennings Bryan, who preferred gold to *dollar bills*. So *fifty-one per cent* of the electorate —

ADAM: No matter how many words you give Google, it’ll always come up with something you weren’t looking for!

PRONT: What’s this Google?!

GLYNIS: *Later*, William.

LISA: Oh, wait-wait-wait, here we go, you’re right: “Your torn-up dollar bill is still worth its face value if fifty-one percent of the bill is remaining.”

PRONT and ADAM: Told ya!

ADAM: See — you shoulda bet!

(LISA kisses him on the cheek and smiles as ADAM wipes it off in irritation.)

All right, you didn’t want to bet, but can’t you give me something for bein’ right? How about taking those bumper stickers off your car and delivery van?

LISA: The ones that say, “My Son Is an Honor-Roll Student at Robert F. Wagner Middle School?”

ADAM: *Yes*. They’re so embarrassing.

LISA: *(still looking at the screen)* Not a chance. I’m proud of you!

(before he can rebut with something else)

Hey, look at this: did you know that “The Bureau of Engraving and Printing produces thirty-eight million bills every day. Forty-eight per cent of them are one-dollar bills.”

(looks directly at ADAM)

How many is that?

(GLYNIS snaps her fingers; ADAM and LISA freeze.)

GLYNIS: Well, William? What’s forty-eight percent of thirty-eight million?

PRONT: Ah ... eighteen million — sumpin’.

(GLYNIS snaps her fingers; ADAM and LISA unfreeze.)

ADAM: *(immediately, without fanfare, as if everyone could do it)* Eighteen million, two-hundred and forty thousand.

PRONT: *(very impressed)* Wow! I could do that when I was a kid, but now ...

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

LISA: (*shaking HER head*) I don't know how you do it. But you always do.

(*LISA kisses ADAM, puts his arm around him, and as they walk off.*)

PRONT: That kid's amazin' ...

GLYNIS: I knew you'd like him.

PRONT: I didn't say I *liked* him. I just said he was amazin'.

GLYNIS: Which means ...?

PRONT: All right, all right, all right! I kinda liked him! A little! You happy now?

GLYNIS: You liked him because he's smart about your favorite subject: *money*. I knew what scene to show you. I wasn't born yesterday. In fact, I wasn't *remotely* born yesterday, but that's another story. Our next scene takes place this time, last year.

(*ADAM enters, walking fast, stomping in anger. LISA enters behind him. ADAM turns around and confronts her.*)

ADAM: (*angrily*) I'm going to my room and I don't want anyone coming in and bothering me!

LISA: Adam!

(*But ADAM walks off and we hear a loudly slamming door. LISA just puts her hand to her forehead as if trying to think.*)

PRONT: What's wrong with him?!

(*JASON enters.*)

Hey! What's Jason doin' here?

GLYNIS: He's Adam's father and Lisa's ex-husband.

PRONT: What?!

LISA: He just went into his room and says he doesn't want to talk to anyone.

JASON: The counselor did say he'd be angry.

LISA: At least it's progressing slowly.

JASON: But it *is* progressing.

LISA: And he knows it. Every time we come out of the doctor's office, he's expecting us to be smiling and brimming with good news. And we never are.

PRONT: No!

(PRONT doesn't even realize it, but he moves closer to them, feeling drawn into their conversation. He'll look into each of their faces as they talk.)

LISA: You know, though, I'm afraid that if we don't talk about it, he might feel even more cut off and even more scared.

JASON: I agree. We have to be honest with him.

LISA: Right. No matter what he asks us, we have to tell him the truth.

JASON: That way, he'll know he can always depend on us for the facts, bad as they might be.

LISA: Do you want to stay here tonight just in case he needs both of us?

JASON: I don't necessarily have to stay over — thank you, though.

LISA: You sure?

JASON: Well ... on second thought, maybe I'd better.

LISA: You know, this might sound crazy, but he may even become a little less frightened if he knows what to expect.

JASON: Everything sounds crazy right now.

(ADAM enters.)

ADAM: Hi ...

LISA: *(nervous at what he might have heard)* Hi ...

JASON: Hi, pal ...

ADAM: I'm sorry for taking it out on you. It's not like any of this is your fault.

JASON: It's all right, son.

LISA: And we want you to know we'll talk about this with you whenever you want.

ADAM: Okay. Let's talk about it now.

PRONT: Wait! No! Don't! I don't want to hear this!

(GLYNIS waves a hand, and lights fade on JASON, LISA, and ADAM.)

Is he really that sick? Is there nothin' nobody can do?

GLYNIS: Some doctors in Athens — that's a city in Greece — are making some progress on

Adam's Gifts by Peter Filichia

a cure.

PRONT: Good! But wait a minute — you said what you just showed me was last year. What's happening right now?

GLYNIS: Act Two: Time: The present. The place: Lisa's apartment.

(GLYNIS snaps her fingers and we are now in LISA'S apartment. LISA, aproned and wiping her hands, enters, opens the door, and JASON enters.)

JASON and LISA: Hi.

(JASON isn't sure if LISA expects him to kiss her on the cheek. LISA's not sure if that's what he wants, so there's a little push-me-pull-you going on before she finally offers him her cheek and allows him to kiss it. They walk a few steps, and ADAM's bed appears with him in it, reading a book. He is wearing a stocking cap that is pulled down to his ears to mask his baldness.)

PRONT: Oh, no ...

JASON: Hi, pal. Happy birthday.

ADAM: Yeah. Showed those doctors who said I'd never make it to 13.

JASON: Got a present for you I think you'll like.

(JASON reaches into his coat pocket and brings out a nicely wrapped package.)

ADAM: *(with as much enthusiasm as HE can muster)* Hey ... thanks. I'm gonna try and get out next week and get you something for your birthday.

JASON: That's okay.

(ADAM starts to remove the wrapping paper. But it's a struggle. LISA makes a move to help, but JASON puts a hand on her arm, and she stops. But ADAM still struggles.)

PRONT: Oh, no! What's wrong with him? Why ain't they more upset?

GLYNIS: Parents in this situation somehow find the strength ... most of the time.

LISA: Honey, would you like me to help you with that?

ADAM: No, it's okay, I almost got it.

(ADAM finally does. The present is a book.)

Oh, great! *Cool Zone* by Pat York! I've been wanting to read this!

JASON: Yes, I know you like his work.

ADAM: *Her* work!

(JASON gives a gesture that says "Excuse me for livin'.")

Mind if I start reading it now?

JASON: Well, there goes you for the rest of the day!

GLYNIS: Not quite. Now, William, it's time for you to become a part of this.

(GLYNIS gestures. JASON, LISA and ADAM are astonished to see PRONT standing there.)

24 MORE PAGES TO THE END