

**The Gift of  
Speech**

**By  
Ellen West**

Gift of Speech  
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by Ellen West

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## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

LORENZO	A large intelligent dog
FRAN	A woman in her 20s
BETS	A woman in her late 70s, Fran's grandmother
BART	A good looking man, thirtyish
STAN	A good looking man, thirtyish
MUTT	An ugly, scraggly mutt
DONKEY	A shy creature with a Middle Eastern accent
ANIMALS	A variety of animals

Note: The animals can be represented however resources and creativity allow.

## **SETTING**

The decaying library of a baronial mansion. A terrace is visible beyond the windows of the library.

Note: The set can be minimal, with drapes for the French door and furniture.

## **TIME**

Christmas Eve, the present, and an autumn and Christmas Eve long ago.

# Scene 1

## SETTING

A once very elegant library, but it has now been given over to the care of animals, so it has become a bit frayed. There are birds in cages, a snake in a vase, a turtle crawling around the floor. The two armchairs beside the table are covered with elegant but torn scarves and cloths, the curtains are frayed by cats' claws, etc. But the room is nevertheless cheerful. To one side is a wall of books and a fireplace in the center with a clock on the mantle and a door to a back hall to the kitchen part of the house and back entrance. A 1940s telephone sits on a table in the back hall. Across the room is a double-doored entrance from the center hall. Across the upstage wall are windows through which we can glimpse a terrace and on occasion animals. A door in the wall to the terrace stands ajar.

*{As the lights come up, we hear the commotion of animals followed by a holiday song. Lorenzo leads the animals onto the terrace and comes down center.}*

**Lorenzo:** *{Speaking above animals to audience}* Well. . .come in. . .Well, come in. . .  
WELCOMEIN! WELCOMEIN! *{Shouting animals down}* PIPE DREAM FOR A MINUTE.  
*{To himself}* Is that right? Pipe dream? Pipe up? PIPE DOWN!. . . Quietness!

*{Animals subside good naturedly.}*

**Lorenzo:** These peoples are here to hear. . .that can't be right. *{Gesturing around}* Here. . .  
*{Pointing to ear }*to hear?. . .Anyway, they want to know the story of Pet Paradise.

*{Lorenzo comes downstage to the side and settles down to tell the story.}*

**Lorenzo:** Once upon a time, three important people owned Pet Paradise: *{Holding up incorrect number of fingers}* One: Bets Farnsworth and Two: her granddaughter, Fran Farnsworth, and, of course, Three: my illustrious ancestor, named Lorenzo, too. *{Looking at incorrect fingers}* Named Lorenzo, also.

*{Fran enters front hall from upstairs, wearing a coat and carrying a suitcase.}*

**Lorenzo:** Fran was a sweet people, but she had a big problem:

*{Fran enters library, puts down suitcase.}*

**Lorenzo:** She believed the world outside was better than Pet Paradise. Yet she hated going outside because whenever she did they made fun of her. They made fun of her because of her Grandmother Bets. Because outsiders thought Bets was a little strange, and if her grandmother was strange, then Fran must be, too. . . .

*{Bets enters from back hall, accompanied by several animals and carrying a gerbil in a cage. Lorenzo becomes an ordinary dog, incapable of speech, and romps up to Fran in an overpowering way as Fran is taking off her coat.}*

**Fran:** Oh, Lorenzo, don't! You're muddy.

**Bets:** Of course he's muddy, we both are. We were talking to the goats in the barn. . .  
*{Noting suitcase}* My word, Frances! Are you going away for Christmas already? What time is it?

**Fran:** It's eleven o'clock.

**Bets:** I mean, what time of year?

**Fran:** It's not Christmas, Grandmother. It's not even Thanksgiving. I'm not going away yet.

*{Fran drops into a chair.}*

**Bets:** You're just coming back, then.

**Fran:** No.

**Bets:** You're not leaving and you're not arriving and any case you haven't told me anything about it.

*{Fran rises and puts her coat on.}*

**Bets:** You must be leaving.

**Fran:** What am I doing. I can't go. *{Taking off her coat, Fran takes the gerbil cage from Bets}* Here. Let me. Where are you going with the gerbil?

**Bets:** You tell me.

**Fran:** I suppose you were going to get medicine for her. She seems to have a cold.

**Bets:** How wonderful, Frances!

**Fran:** To have a cold?

**Bets:** No, you diagnosed the gerbil! You have the gift!

**Fran:** *{Giving back the gerbil and putting on her coat}* No, I don't.

**Bets:** A rare gift. You communicate with the animals, just as I do.

**Fran:** I don't communicate with the animals, Grandmother. You wish I could, but I can't.

**Bets:** You just diagnosed the gerbil—

**Fran:** She has a runny nose! Anyone can see that.

**Bets:** They can't see that she's a she.

**Fran:** I don't have any gift, Grandmother. Listen. I'm going into Waybridge. I have a job.

**Bets:** A job, Frances! I had no idea you were looking for a job.

**Fran:** Well, it's just volunteer, at the animal shelter—

**Bets:** Of course! With your gifts with animals, of course they'd want you!

**Fran:** I don't have any gifts! They're just desperate for volunteers. *{Assertively picking up suitcase}* I'll stay in Waybridge and that's what I've decided to do. Before it's too late.

**Bets:** *{Checking clock}* It's still morning.

**Fran:** I mean in my life.

**Bets:** You're right, Frances. You should've flown the nest before now.

**Fran:** *{Putting suitcase down}* I'll come back on weekends.

**Bets:** *{Picking the suitcase up and handing it to Fran, who does not take it}* I'll look forward to weekends, then.

**Fran:** There's so much to be done in Pet Paradise. You really do need me.

**Bets:** Joe and Mary have helped me since long before you arrived. I'm sure they'll continue long after you've gone. *{Bets forces the suitcase on Fran and hugs her}* I'll be all right. Go find your dream out there, Frances.

**Fran:** Do you really think I will?

**Bets:** I know for certain that you can't find anything if you're not looking for it. All I would say to you is to stay away from people who love money. You have quite a bit of it, and they may love the money instead of you. *{Releasing Fran}* Oh, and don't listen to gossip.

**Fran:** I won't.

**Bets:** Oh, and Frances. If anyone offers to teach you how to fly an aeroplane, please refuse.

**Fran:** I will. I mean, I won't. I mean, goodbye, Grandmother.

*{With a final hug, Fran half runs to front hall. The door slams. Lorenzo looks puzzled.}*

**Lorenzo:** Owwww???

**Bets:** Flying is only for birds, as my poor son found out. Well, Lorenzo, we must remember that Frances has never been entirely comfortable in Pet Paradise.

**Lorenzo:** *{Denial: yes she has}* Nooo.

**Bets:** Oh, it's true. She loves us but she's always wanted something more.

**Lorenzo:** *{Disappointed}* Owwww.

**Bets:** Let us hope that she finds it out there. *{To gerbil}* I'm sorry, little one, how selfish of me to ignore you when you have a miserable cold. *{Starts to front hall and upstairs.}* When they were children I was certain Frances and Stanley Segal would grow up to be a match.

**Lorenzo:** Whooo?

**Bets:** I forgot. That was in the time of your grandfather. Stanley Segal was a neighbor child. A very, very special neighbor, if you take my meaning. Stanley shared Christmas Eve with us.

**Lorenzo:** *{Disbelief}* Noooo!

**Bets:** Yes, indeed. Stanley came for Christmas Eve from the time he was in knee pants. Then he grew up and disappeared. Grown-ups don't have to disappear, but Stanley did.

**Lorenzo:** *{Mourning}* Owwww.

*{Bets suddenly has an attack of arrhythmia and can't get her breath. She sits abruptly. Lorenzo fusses.}*

**Lorenzo:** Oww???

**Bets:** Stop that, Lorenzo. What good does it do to fuss? I'm sure he had his reasons.

**Lorenzo:** Whoo????

**Bets:** Stanley. He was a very sensible boy. *{To gerbil}* I have just the thing for your cold upstairs in my medicine cabinet. *{To Lorenzo and others}* Come along, then.

*{Bet rises and exits to front hall and upstairs, Lorenzo and others following.}*

END OF SCENE 1

## Scene 2

*{In the transition we hear animal sounds such as common barnyard cows, horses, chickens. Then these merge into an increasing crisis of alarm. It is evening. Mutt, scraggly and unkempt, with a stolen bone in his mouth, noses his way into the library and hides with it, gnawing away hungrily. In a moment Lorenzo comes roaring after the Mutt and threatens to take away the bone. Mutt growls. Lorenzo barks. Bets rushes in from the back hall.}*

**Bets:** Here, here, what is this! Oh, my goodness, a new guest. *{Mutt growls at Bets. Lorenzo growls at Mutt}* Now, Lorenzo, stop that. He's just a youngster. He's never had anyone to teach him manners.

**Lorenzo:** *{Self-pity}* Owwww.

**Bets:** I know he took your bone, but surely that isn't the only bone in Pet Paradise, now is it? *{To Mutt}* Now, come along to the kitchen and I'll ask Mary to give you something more substantial than that old bone. *{As Mutt looks suspicious}* That's right. This way.

*{With a smug look at Lorenzo, still holding the bone, Mutt follows Bets out back hall. Lorenzo frowns, defeated. Then he hears front door open.}*

**Lorenzo:** Woof??

*{As Lorenzo races to front hall, he collides with Fran as she enters with her suitcase, wearing her coat. But she is not really irritated. She embraces him.}*

**Fran:** Oh, Lorenzo, I'm glad to see you. You're the oldest puppy I've ever known.

**Lorenzo:** *{Happily}* Woof!

*{Bets enters.}*

**Bets:** Frances! What a nice surprise. What time is it?

**Fran:** It's December, Grandmother. Waybridge didn't. . . . didn't work out.

**Bets:** Ah, yes, the animal shelter. I'm sorry. They didn't like your work?

**Fran:** Oh, it wasn't that—

**Bets:** I hope you aren't going to tell me you changed your mind. That's a bad habit of yours, Frances.

**Fran:** No, I came home because, because. . . .you know why, don't you?

**Bets:** No, I don't.

**Fran:** Because the doctor said you need me here.

**Bets:** Need? It's nice to have you here, but I don't need you. Whatever was Dr. Andrews thinking?

**Fran:** Grandmother, we're worried about your heart. . . .

**Bets:** Nothing wrong with my heart. Ask the animals.

**Fran:** You're working too hard. It's confusing.

**Bets:** What are you confused about?

**Fran:** I'm not. I think you are.

**Bets:** Who've you been talking to? Mary? Just because I gave dog food to the donkey. I picked it up by mistake.

**Fran:** The donkey?

**Bets:** No, the dog food.

**Fran:** You gave dog food to a donkey?

**Bets:** The donkey didn't mind. I don't know why you should.

**Fran:** I mean. . . .there's a donkey here?

**Bets:** Isn't it nice? I'm hoping I can persuade him to stay. *{Lorenzo rushes to terrace, barking}* Oh, Lorenzo, slow down. I can't understand a word when you're so excited. *{Lorenzo continues to bark and harass Bets}* All right, Lorenzo, all right, show me what you mean. . . .

*{Bets starts out the terrace.}*

**Fran:** Grandmother, where are you going?

**Bets:** To see what's upset Lorenzo.

**Fran:** You can't!

**Bets:** What?

**Fran:** I mean, it's dark.

**Bets:** Well of course. It's past eight o'clock.

**Fran:** A, a storm's coming!

**Bets:** The moon's out.

**Fran:** But it's predicted!

**Bets:** Is that so? *{Going to front hall}* I'll get my coat then.

**Fran:** I can't let you!

**Bets:** When did you begin to give me permission to go in and out?

**Fran:** I didn't mean it to sound like that. I don't think you should go outside in the dark with a storm coming. Something might happen to you.

**Bets:** I'm concerned about the donkey.

**Fran:** Oh, Grandmother. There's. . . probably the donkey's gone back home by now.

**Bets:** You don't believe there is a donkey, do you?

**Fran:** Maybe you saw something, a, a tree limb—

**Bets:** Now you come along. *{Handing Fran Fran's coat}* Come right along with me.

*{Bets leads Fran off through front hall, Lorenzo barking and leaping around. More animal commotion, then a flash of lightning outside and wind and rain. Bets and Fran hurry in from terrace, followed by Lorenzo,, protecting themselves from rain. Lorenzo does a big dog shake. Rain sounds continue.}*

**Bets:** Lorenzo! *{Lorenzo puts his head down and his tail between his legs}* You led us on a wild goose chase. Or wild donkey chase, I should say. You frightened the poor creature away. The donkey is our guest. I want you to remember that—

*{Bets staggers and Fran catches her.}*

**Fran:** Grandmother! Let's get you to bed.

**Bets:** You didn't get to see the donkey.

**Fran:** No.

**Bets:** He found a place to hide, I'm sure.

**Fran:** Lean on me. I'll put you to bed and bring you some hot milk.

*{Bets and Fran go to the front hall.}*

**Bets:** Lorenzo, watch for the donkey. And don't chase him away!

*{Bets and Fran exit. Rain sounds continue. Lorenzo goes to windows and stares out watchfully. Frightened by a lightning flash, Lorenzo hides behind the chair. Rain sounds cease.}*

END OF SCENE 2

## Scene 3

*{Spotlight comes up on telephone in the back hall. In early morning light, Fran, wearing a robe, enters from front hall, crosses library, and picks up the back hall telephone. Lorenzo peeks at Fran curiously. Seeing him, Fran puts the telephone down and exits down the back hall. Lorenzo stretches and gets in the chair. A moment. Fran returns, prepares to pick up the telephone. Lorenzo perks his head up and Fran hangs up the telephone, exits. Lorenzo gets up and follows Fran off back hall. Spotlight fades on back hall then comes up on a new area which contains a telephone and desk and is part of the office of Davondale Institute for Better Living. The telephone rings. Bart, wearing a white aide's jacket, dashes in and answers it.}*

**Bart:** Hello, this is the Davondale Institute for Better Living where the better you live, the liver you bet, hi, Pug Nose. . . .Aw, come on, if it wasn't you I'd pretend one of the loonies answered the phone. I suppose you want to know what old lady Crocker left me in her will. . . .Yeah, she mentioned me. "To John Barton," she said, "faithful aide, the sum of. . . ." Are you ready?. . . .Excited?. . . . Can't wait to hear how much?. . . .*{Holds phone away from ear as Pug Nose apparently shouts impatiently}* Okay, okay. One hundred. *{Holds phone away}* No, not one hundred thousand, just one hundred. One tenth of a grand. In other words, almost nothing. Looks like we can't afford to get married this Christmas after all. . . .*{Holds phone away from ear again}* Hey, listen, this is a hospital phone. I can't have this discussion on a hospital phone. See ya later. . . .*{Hangs up. Off a woman screams.}* Ah, shut up. *{Another scream.}* All right, all right.

*{Bart exits but the Spotlight stays on the Davondale telephone. Spotlight comes up on the back hall telephone as Fran enters, determinedly picks up the telephone and dials, all in*

*such a hurry that she is panting. The telephone rings in Davondale. Several times. Fran is about to hang up when Bart picks it up.*

**Bart:** *{He starts talking as soon as he picks up the receiver}* Hello, this is the Davondale Institute for Better Living, where betting is living and living is betting. I knew you'd be upset, Pug Nose, but I'll fleece some other old nut.

**Fran:** *{Panting}* Oh, excuse me, I think I've dialed the wrong number.

**Bart:** *{Pretending he's wrestling the telephone from a patient, he speaks in a stern voice}* Give me that phone! *{In a scared female voice}* No, no, no. . . .*{Stern voice}* All right, now. Go back to your room, Mrs. Jones. . . . Hell-o, John Barton speaking. Sorry about that. One of the patients likes to answer the phone.

**Fran:** Is this the Davondale Institute for Better Living?

**Bart:** It is. How may I help you?

**Fran:** Do you take care of people who are. . . .who are seeing, I mean, imagining things that aren't there? People who are—

**Bart:** Insane. You've got the right place.

**Fran:** May I speak to Dr. Kitterling, please?

**Bart:** He's not available. Give me your name and I'll have him call you.

**Fran:** Oh, no. I'll try later—

**Bart:** You sound out of breath.

**Fran:** I was hurrying before my grandmother gets up—

**Bart:** Your grandma chasing you?

**Fran:** No! I shouldn't have called—

**Bart:** Suit yourself. If you want to give me your name I'll have Dr. Kitterling call you back.

**Fran:** I'm Fran Farnsworth. I live in Pet Paradise. I mean, Farnsworth Farms.

**Bart:** Farnsworth Farms? That's your grandma? Bets Farnsworth? That's who you're worried about?

**Fran:** *{A despairing statement}* You've heard about Grandmother.

**Bart:** Sure, everybody knows about your grandma. She's the old lady that talks to the animals.

**Fran:** Lots of people talk to their pets.

**Bart:** But she thinks they talk back. Well, no wonder you're worried! Bets Farnsworth.

That old lady's been missing her marbles for years. Tell me. What does she really do on Christmas Eve? Bloody sacrifices, that kind of thing?

**Fran:** No! You shouldn't listen to gossip.

**Bart:** Okay, okay. So what does happen?

**Fran:** I don't know. She sends us all away, but it's not what you think. She does it for me! She wants me to have a normal Christmas and, and, with a family and everything, so she sends me to Mary's sister's house. She does it so I can have a normal Christmas. I'm sorry I bothered you.

**Bart:** Wait, don't go away mad! Don't you want some help?

**Fran:** My grandmother's a wonderful person.

**Bart:** Sure she's a wonderful person. But something made you think she's gone over the edge, so to speak.

**Fran:** She thinks there's a donkey. . . .Never mind. I'll manage.

**Bart:** She sees donkeys that aren't there? Ooohh, that's a bad sign. But, don't you worry. Put the whole matter right in my hands.

**Fran:** I don't mean to sound rude, but who are you?

**Bart:** Me? I'm. . . .*{His voice deepens and alters as he assumes the persona of a doctor}*  
I'm the director of Davondale.

*{Lorenzo enters behind Fran and listens. Fran does not see him.}*

**Fran:** I've been talking to Dr. Kitterling all this time?

**Bart:** That's right. It may sound strange to you, but I have to screen my calls. I can't take just any case that comes my way, but your grandmother interests me.

**Fran:** Maybe I should think about it.

**Bart:** *{Becoming Bart again}* No! You need to let me do all the thinking. What rhymes with Bart?

**Fran:** With what?

**Bart:** Bart. That's me, John Barton. *{Becoming doctor}* My, my middle name. John Barton Kitterling. But they call me Smart Bart.

**Fran:** What?

**Bart:** Smart! Smart rhymes with Bart! *{Screams off. They continue. He becomes Bart again}*  
Woops. My fans are calling me. Gotta go. *{Becoming doctor}* I'll, uh, I'll have my secretary call and make some arrangements for the *{Muttering rapidly to cover inaccuracy}* neurotic-

o-pathetic examination of your grandmother. We find it goes smoother if she has a dose of *{Muttering again}* anti-psycho-medi-cillin beforehand.

**Fran:** Examination? I don't think Grandmother would let you do that.

**Bart:** That's why we need the *{Muttering}* anti-psycho-potion. . . .tate. I'll be there myself in person. This afternoon, Miss Farnsworth. . . .it is Miss?

**Fran:** Yes.

**Bart:** About five.

*{Bart hangs up gleefully. Fran hangs up. Lorenzo harasses her.}*

**Fran:** Oh, Lorenzo. Grandmother really needs help and I can't cope with it alone. I really can't.

*{Fran exits off back hall with Lorenzo following.}*

END OF SCENE 3

## Scene 4

*{In the transition, animals whine, blending with wind sounds. It is now broad daylight. We hear the honking of geese. Doorbell rings off. Bets answers it. She greets an unseen person.}*

**Bets:** *{Off}* Yes? You must be lost unless you're the new veterinarian.

**Stan:** *{Taking Bets by the hands and swinging her into the library}* I'm not lost, Bets. I'm Stan Segal. Don't you remember me?

**Bets:** I can't believe my eyes! I must be hallucinating. May I touch you?

**Stan:** Sure. In fact—

*{Stan hugs Bets. Animals gather on terrace to watch. Lorenzo tries unsuccessfully to get Stan's attention.}*

**Bets:** Oh, Stanley. I thought the world had swallowed you up.

**Stan:** It did. But it spit me back out.

**Bets:** Oh, good.

**Stan:** *{Noticing Lorenzo}* And you must be Lorenzo.

**Bets:** That's right. Lorenzo the Third.

**Stan:** *{Going to terrace where animals greet him}* The family's doubled since I was here last.

**Bets:** Word of Pet Paradise seems to spread.

**Stan:** So everything's the same, just bigger.

**Bets:** Except you've been gone. What happened to you, Stanley?

**Stan:** My parents hustled me off to boarding school.

**Bets:** They wanted you to have a normal life?

**Stan:** Something like that.

**Bets:** And have you had a normal life?

**Stan:** I'm afraid not.

**Bets:** Oh, I'm so relieved to hear that. You must stay for Christmas. Promise me you'll be here Christmas Eve.

**Stan:** I promise. This Christmas and every Christmas after that.

**Bets:** Oh, Stanley! You're home for good?

**Stan:** Yes. I've moved to Waybridge. I'm finally a doctor. That's why I've been gone for so long. Studying medicine.

**Bets:** Oh! Don't tell me you're the new veterinarian!

**Stan:** No, I'm a psychiatrist. I'm the director of Davondale.

**Bets:** Davondale! The director? But you're so young to be the director.

**Stan:** In spite of that, they wanted me because I've done some interesting work with the mentally ill.

**Bets:** I'm sure you have. With your imagination, you can get right into those poor distressed minds. I feel you've been sent, Stanley, to help me deal with Frances.

**Stan:** Has something happened to her?

**Bets:** No. Isn't that sad? Nothing at all. She's still moping around here. She tried to leave, but she came back saying she has to care for me. Of course you and I know she was using me as an excuse to run and hide.

**Stan:** What do you think I could do?

**Bets:** Encourage her to go, Stanley. You did, maybe she'll take you as an example.

**Stan:** You don't want to keep her here at home?

**Bets:** Oh, Stanley, Frances is different. Do you know, she has never received her Christmas card?!

**Stan:** No Christmas card?

**Bets:** I look and look for it, year after year, but it never comes. What time is it?

**Stan:** It's almost Christmas.

**Bets:** I mean, what time of day?

**Stan:** Ten oh five. Am I keeping you?

**Bets:** No, I want you to join me, Stanley. They're only here for a few hours.

**Stan:** A few hours?

**Bets:** On their way south. I always like to advise them to detour around McCormick's. The McCormicks shoot geese, you know.

**Stan:** Oh, the Canadian geese on Paradise Pond! Yes, let's go. Let's warn them. *{Bets and Stan, followed by Lorenzo and other animals, exit from terrace.}* I've missed all this! It's good to be back in Pet Paradise.

END OF SCENE 4

## Scene 5

*{The honking of geese orchestrates with mournful music and then fades. It is late afternoon. Fran enters with a tea tray with three cups and tea pot and sets it on the table. Doorbell rings. Fran exits to front hall. Door opens.}*

**Fran:** *{Off}* Dr. Kitterling?

*{Bart stumbles into the library, hopping on one foot and sneezing. The trauma of Pet Paradise, which has kicked off his asthma as well as soiled his shoe, makes Bart forget his doctor persona.}*

**Bart:** Ah-choo! This can't be Farnsworth Farms!

**Fran:** Yes. I'm Fran. . . .Oh, what happened?

**Bart:** I stepped in ah-choo!

**Fran:** Oh, I'm so sorry. Joseph cleans the grounds twice a day but I guess he missed something. Let me take your shoe—

**Bart:** I got it. Farnsworth Farms! Showplace of the state! It's a zoo-oo-hoo-choo! Could we close the door? I have an elegy thing to animals. They make me snee-ee—

**Fran:** I'm sorry.

*{Fran exits to front hall to close the door. Now Bart can stop sneezing. He wipes his eyes.}*

**Bart:** I musta seen at least twenty dogs out there.

**Fran:** *{Off, calling}* We don't have twenty dogs.

**Bart:** What were they? Coyotes?

**Fran:** *{Returning}* It's more like forty-seven dogs, and only one coyote. . . .

**Bart:** *{Staring at Fran and realizing how pretty she is}* Hey, you're something, aren't you? *{Assuming doctor role}* I mean, uh, something of a....recool...recluh.... a hermit. The Princess in the tower.

**Fran:** I go out sometimes.

**Bart:** I've never seen you around.

**Fran:** I don't go into town much.

**Bart:** *{Prowling the room, its former splendor makes him become Bart again. He picks up a Chinese vase}* Yeah, I can't say as I blame you. This is some place to call home. *{Drops the vase and a snake falls out}* Aaaa! A snake!

**Fran:** *{Calmly returning snake to vase}* That's just Joshua. He can't hurt you.

**Bart:** Cheeze! *{Becoming doctor}* That's criminally insane, a snake in an expensive vase. Look at this! This looks like the stable, not the living room.

**Fran:** This isn't the living room, it's the library. Grandmother spends most of her time here with the animals. The rest of the house isn't so bad.

**Bart:** *{Noticing the tea tray}* Ah, good. You've got the tea things ready like my secretary told you. You've done your part, good girl. *{Whips out a thick sheaf of papers}* Now it's time for me to do mine. My secretary explained about these commitment papers, didn't she?

*{Bart searches pockets for a pen.}*

**Fran:** She said it's illegal for you to examine Grandmother until I sign all these papers. And make the deposit. Here's the check for the deposit. *{Fran hands him the check but she does not let it go}* I have to tell you, Dr. Kitterling, I wondered at such a big amount. So I called Davondale to make sure.

**Bart:** *{Alarmed}* You called Davondale? About the deposit?

**Fran:** I used the private number your secretary gave me.

**Bart:** *{Relieved}* Oh, my private number. Yes. I don't normally give it out. Only for you, Fran. May I call you Fran?

**Fran:** If you want.

*{Fran releases the check and Bart pockets it. He gives her the pen. Fran starts to sign.}*

**Bart:** As soon as you get the papers signed, I'd like for you to bring your grandmother here. Then we'll put the, um, medication in her tea and she'll be like a little lamb.

**Fran:** It won't hurt at all?

**Bart:** Hurt! She won't know what hit her. That is to say, she'll feel no pain. . . .no anxiety at all. She'll practically run to Davondale.

**Fran:** I'm very nervous about this.

**Bart:** You're doing the right thing. From what you say, it's only a matter of time before she goes into the violent stage.

**Fran:** Grandmother wouldn't hurt any creature on earth.

**Bart:** She won't be able to help herself. She'll start spinning out of control and all her fantasies will become realities. To her. It's an awful sight. I expect that's why she sends everyone away at Christmas. But cheer up! We've made great strides with these *{Muttering to cover the inaccuracy}* zoo-ill-logical delusives at Davondale.

**Fran:** You have other patients who have animal delusions?

**Bart:** *{Gradually losing his doctor persona}* Do we! People who talk to the birdies and I've got one old man who thinks I am an animal. He thinks I'm his pet pig come to life. Now, I ask you, what's going on in his brain? Do I resemble anything like a pig? The old guy must be outa his mind. *{Resuming doctor role, pretending to joke}* Well, sure he is. That's why he's in Davondale, isn't he? *{Fran has finished signing and hands Bart the papers}* Ah, good. Good. Now, where is your grandma?

**Fran:** Probably in the barn.

**Bart:** She lives in the barn? Doesn't she get cold?

**Fran:** She's nursing the geese.

**Bart:** *{Startled into being Bart}* Nursing geese did you say? Like, honk, honk?

**Fran:** They were flying south for the winter. Two of them were injured.

**Bart:** *{Resuming doctor role}* Oh, that is really a bad sign. What a shame. I did have hopes we could return your grandma to you, but. . . .nursing ducks, that's bad.

**Fran:** Geese.

**Bart:** Doesn't matter, ducks, geese, donkeys. When they get that far gone there's not a lot of hope.

**Fran:** Oh, doctor, don't tell me that—

**Bart:** We must act quickly. Quickly! Go! Bring her now!

*{Fran exits off the terrace, leaving the door ajar. Bart pulls out the packet of white powder and kisses it. Meanwhile Mutt, seeing the door open, sneaks in through it. He sees Bart with the powder and crawls stealthily on his belly toward it.}*

**Bart:** Oh, how I love you, hellocino. . . .hallocin. . . .little crazy maker, you sweet little ticket to Smart Bart's future of luxury and comfort! *{Opens the packet and puts it down in order to pour a cup of tea. Suddenly he sneezes.}* Ah-choo! Ah-choo! Ah-choo! *{Seizing his opportunity, Mutt snatches the powder off the table and runs with it off the terrace. Between sneezes Bart takes in after him}* Hey! Hey! You! Stop! Stop thief! Give that back! That's not for you, you miserable low down excuse for a dog! Stop!

*{Bart dashes into the twilight, sneezing.}*

END OF SCENE 5

## Scene 6

*{In the transition we hear Mutt's insane barking. It is night. Mutt, under the influence of the strong psychodrug Bart was going to give Bets, enters the terrace, illuminated by strobe-like flashlights and pursued by Bets and Stan.}*

**Bets and Stan:** Here! There! Where! Over here! There!

*{Mutt collapses suddenly in the doorway to the library and lies like a rock, limbs straight up in the air. Bets and Stan catch up with him and peer down at him. Lorenzo follows and sniffs.}*

**Bets:** Oh, the poor thing. Is he dead?

**Stan:** No. If he was a human I'd say he had a psychotic episode and went into a catatonic state.

**Bets:** Psychotic! Maybe he got into a patch of locoweed.

**Stan:** *{Dragging Mutt off}* These street mutts are tough. I think he'll sleep it off. I'll take him to the barn.

*{After Stan and Mutt exit, Fran enters the darkened library from front hall and turns on a light in time to hear Bets.}*

**Bets:** *{Calling after Stan}* And then you'll stay for dinner?

**Fran:** Grandmother, who are you talking to?

**Bets:** *{Entering library with Lorenzo, who continues to sniff suspiciously}* Stanley Segal.

**Fran:** Stan Segal, who used to live down the road? He left a long time ago.

**Bets:** I know that, Frances, I am not entirely out of my mind. He returned! *{Seeing the tea tray}* Oh, you're joking with me, Frances, you knew Stanley was here. You had tea ready for us. I'm sorry we didn't know.

**Fran:** I didn't. I mean, the tea was for someone else.

**Bets:** We have another human visitor? If we keep this up, Pet Paradise will have as many two-leggers as four-leggers. Where is this person?

**Fran:** I don't know. When I went to get you, I thought I heard him calling and when I came back, he'd gone. Lorenzo, stop that sniffing.

**Bets:** He? You had a gentleman here?

*{Lorenzo growls softly as he prowls the room.}*

**Fran:** No. I mean, he was, a, he was someone I met at the animal shelter. He wanted to see, to see Pet Paradise and to meet you. Lorenzo, what are you growling at?

**Bets:** Hush, Lorenzo. He must not have wanted to see me all that much.

**Fran:** Oh, he did, he really did. I'm sure he'll call and explain what happened. He'll be back.

*{Lorenzo makes a fierce bark.}*

**Bets:** What is it, Lorenzo? My word. Are you concerned about the new dog? He's going to be fine.

**Lorenzo:** *{Frustrated}* Owwww.

**Fran:** Dinner's ready, Grandmother, whenever you are.

**Bets:** I'm going to freshen up. Tell Mary to set a place for Stanley. Come along, Lorenzo.

**Fran:** Stan?

*{Bets and Lorenzo exit front hall and go upstairs.}*

**Fran:** *{Noting disarranged cups}* Now what happened here?

*{Shaking her head, Fran piles cups on tray to take them back to the kitchen. Stan enters terrace and, seeing Fran, sneaks up behind her and puts his hands over her eyes.}*

**Stan:** **Guess who?**

**Fran:** *{Drowning out his Guess who}* Aaaa! Help!

**Stan:** *{Dropping his hands}* Sorry, Fran.

**Fran:** *{Whirling on him}* Who are you?

**Stan:** I'm Stan Segal. Don't tell me you've forgotten me.

**Fran:** *{Stress is wearing her down to tears}* Stan. How could I forget you?

**Stan:** Hey, you're moved to tears. I'm touched.

**Fran:** I hate it when you sneak up on me like that. I always did.

**Stan:** Sorry. I wasn't thinking. I guess for a moment there I forgot we were grown ups.

**Fran:** *{Recovering}* Well, obviously, you're not. I can't handle any more surprises today.

**Stan:** Tell Stan all about it. What was your first surprise today?

**Fran:** Nothing.

**Stan:** No need to worry about your grandmother. She's fine.

**Fran:** Oh? When did you get your medical degree?

**Stan:** About seven years ago.

**Fran:** You're a doctor?

**Stan:** In a European university. You've never heard of it.

**Fran:** I didn't ask you where you went to medical school.

**Stan:** You were going to.

**Fran:** It so happens I wasn't!

**Stan:** You still won't admit I know what you're going to say before you say it.

**Fran:** You still won't admit how you do it.

**Stan:** I don't know how I do it.

**Fran:** How convenient for your so-called patients. They don't have to tell you what's wrong.

**Stan:** It only works with some people that I feel close to.

**Fran:** If only half of the things you say were true. . . .

**Stan:** I do want to help, but I don't see any problem to help. Bets is fine.

**Fran:** Oh? Then you'd better talk to Dr. Andrews. He says her heart will give out at any time. He says this is her last Christmas.

**Stan:** Oh, her heart. I didn't know.

**Fran:** You've been with her all day, Doctor Mind-Reader, and you didn't know?

**Stan:** How did you know I've been with her all day?

**Fran:** Stop that! I just guessed you were here all day.

**Stan:** You have the gift, too.

**Fran:** I don't have any gifts! And you're obviously incapable of admitting that Grandmother needs help. *{Beginning to cry}* You haven't watched her getting worse and worse. . . .She talks to Lorenzo and when he doesn't answer she says, "Never mind, you can tell me later," just like she really thinks he's going to speak sometime, and now she thinks a donkey's come to visit, and I don't know exactly what the animal population is by now, and this room looks like a stable. . . .None of this is normal.

**Stan:** It's normal for Bets. If you want to escape so much, why don't you, Fran?

**Fran:** I was not thinking that.

**Stan:** She wants you to go.

**Fran:** Did you read her mind or did she say that in words?

**Stan:** She asked me to urge you to leave.

**Fran:** Because she knows she's going into her violent phase.

**Stan:** That's nonsense! Because she wants you to be happy. *{Responding to Fran's unspoken thought}* Yes, I do, too, understand your dilemma. You truly believe it's your duty to see that Bets is. . . .*{Realizing what he's picking up}* locked up in Davondale?

*{Stan begins to grin.}*

**Fran:** Treated, not locked up! Davondale is not a prison! It's the best psychiatric hospital in the country. *{Alarmed as Stan laughs out loud}* What is it? What's wrong with you? What would you know about it?

**Stan:** Oh, Fran, you are wonderful. I know it's the best in the country. It's mine! I'm the director of Davondale! If you try to commit Bets there I can guarantee I'll release her the same moment.

**Fran:** Oh! You're insane, Stan Segal. The director of Davondale! You're crazy. You always were and you still are! Completely insane!

*{Fran rushes off front hall and exits upstairs.}*

**Stan:** Oh, oh. I must've said the wrong thing.

*{Stan exits after Fran.}*

END OF SCENE 6

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Script**

