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MEET UNCLE CASPER  
[EXCERPT]

a play  
by

Robert Kerr

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## CHARACTERS

CASPER, 40.

## SETTING

A park in a small town in Wisconsin. Summer.

MEET UNCLE CASPER was developed at the Seven Devils Playwrights Conference in McCall, Idaho.

(Dinnertime at a large family reunion in a park in a small town in Wisconsin. The children's table—really an area where the children happen to be eating. This area includes the audience. There are a few folding chairs and a table with half-eaten food and half-empty cups of Kool-Aid.)

(CASPER enters carrying a guitar case and a camcorder case.)

CASPER

Hey there. Mind if I join you? I was just sitting over at the grownups' table, but they kicked me out. I guess I'm not grown up enough for them. There wasn't anywhere else for me to go but here. If you don't mind.

(Beat)

Do you mind?

(He waits for a response.)

I'll take that to mean you don't. Excuse all this junk here. I'd leave it in my car, but the lock on the driver's side is busted and the trunk's full. I mean, I know we're not exactly in Fort Apache the Bronx here or anything, it's just Buttwipe, Wisconsin, but you can never be too careful, you know?

(CASPER sits down.)

Man, I haven't sat at the kids' table in years. This is great. The kids' table is where it's *at*. I mean, who really wants to sit at the grownups' table anyway? Who wants to sit there and talk about property taxes and people's jobs and who's going to college and who's still mooching off their folks at age thirty-five

(cousin Richard), and whether cousin Marlene—who you'll notice is conveniently absent this weekend—should have the kid or get an abortion. I mean, who wants to talk about that kind of crap just to sit with the grownups? I'd rather sit here any day.

Hey, you do remember me, right? I remember all of you.

(to an audience member)

Like you, you're Lee Harvey. I mean, that's your nickname, remember?

(to audience members)

And you, you're Boo-Boo. And that's Goldilocks over there. Now, you have *got* to remember me.

How could you forget? I'm Casper, your uncle. You know, your crazy uncle Casper. It hasn't been that long, has it?

(addressing an audience member)

You. You look familiar. How old are you?

Come on.

(if the audience member answers with their actual age)

You're putting me on.

(in any event, continues with:)

You must be about nine or ten. You must remember. No?

(addressing other audience members)

Do you remember me? How about you? Or you?

Oh, man, I can't believe this. Nobody here remembers me. Well, this time I'll make sure you don't forget.

I see you all are pretty much done eating. I hope you don't mind if I finish this chicken. I haven't eaten a thing since I left Spokane.

(CASPER nibbles at the chicken, watching the audience, until the pause grows uncomfortable.)

Hey, don't stop talking 'cause of me. You were having loads of fun before I came over. Don't stop on my account.

(CASPER eats a little bit more. Uncomfortable pause.)

Why are you so quiet all of a sudden? It's because I'm a grownup, right? Hey, I remember what it's like when you're a kid. You only cut loose when the grownups aren't around. Well, I'll let you in on a little secret. Your Uncle Casper isn't like most grownups. I love horsing around, so let 'er rip!

(CASPER continues eating. Uncomfortable pause. He holds up a drumstick, as if about to throw it.)

FOOD FIGHT!

(He waits for a reaction.)

Whatever.

(He eats. He stops, looks at the drumstick for a moment, then starts picking his nose with it, attempting to elicit a reaction from the audience.)

Yeah, yeah. You see? I'm a fun guy. So much fun, in fact, that once upon a time I had my own kids' show on TV. I'm serious. I was gonna be the next Captain Kangaroo. Anybody here ever seen him? Boy, did they know how to make kids' shows then. None of this Barney the Dinosaur or Teletummies crap. That was when kids' shows had *soul*. My show was called "Casper's Clubhouse." It was on a cable access station down in Laramie. I told stories and sang songs and did puppet shows, the whole kit and caboodle. Maybe you might have seen it. Anybody here from Laramie?

Anybody from Wyoming, even?

(if someone is from Wyoming:)

Did you see it? No? Well, I'm not surprised.

(if not:)

Well, you probably wouldn't have seen it anyway.

(in either case he continues with:)

Those cable access people screwed me over. I mean, here I am with this totally kick-ass (pardon my Cantonese) kids' show, and what do they do? They bury it on Thursdays at three in the morning. I mean, how many kids are up watching TV at three a.m.? The only piece of fan mail I ever got was from some kids at the university there. They said every Thursday night they'd get stoned out of their gourds and watch my show. It wasn't exactly the demographic I was aiming for, so I packed it in.

Hey, I just had an idea. I have this video camera here that I, ahem, borrowed from a Radio Shack in Coeur d'Alene on my way out here. I was originally gonna use it to tape my statement, but maybe I could set it up right here, and we could do a special episode of Casper's Clubhouse right now. You could be my live audience. I'll tell you some stories, sing you some songs, and if everything goes according to plan, everybody in the country's going to see this in a few days. You could all get to be on national TV. What do you say? Who wants to be on TV?

(CASPER claps his hands and cheers, trying to prime up the audience.)

Yeah, yeah. This'll be even better than what I had planned. I was just gonna set this up in a hotel room tonight and talk until the tape ran out, but this is gonna be so much better. Hold on while I get set up.

(CASPER goes into the audience and sets the camera up on a tripod. He hums to himself.)

Da-da-da-da-dum. Da-da-daddle-da da. Here we go. On the air in five, four, three...

(CASPER counts down "two, one," silently on his fingers.)

(in a deep announcer's voice)

All right, everyone, hold onto to your hats, because it's time for Ca-a-a-a-sper's Clubhouse!

(CASPER turns the camera to tape the audience. Presumably, the audience is just watching him.)

Cut! Okay, guys, if we're gonna do this, we gotta do it right. When I say the name of the show, you've gotta go totally apeshit, like it's the greatest thing since Go-Gurt, okay? Let's try it again. Five, four, three...

(CASPER counts down "two, one" on his fingers.)

Coming at you live from Thorp, Wisconsin, it's Ca-a-a-asper's Clubhouse.

(CASPER prompts the audience to cheer. If they do, he is pleased. If not, he is perturbed, but soldiers on, figuring this will have to do.)

(announcer's voice)

Now grab on to your galoshes, because here comes Casper the Friendly Host!

(CASPER trots up onto the stage.)

Hey kids! I'd like to thank all of you for tuning in to a very special episode of Casper's Clubhouse, coming to you from the... Which family would you say this is? There's so many people out here. Well, we've got some Gundersons, some Haases, some Armstrongs, a whole bunch of Nelsons. So let's just say it's the Gunderhaasarmson family reunion. Anyhoo, the reason this episode is so special is because I'm surrounded by my family, all my nieces and nephews. I swear, we've got just about every kid in the clan here. Let's meet some of them right now.

(CASPER runs to the camera and trains it on different people in the audience.)



Over here we've got Smokin' Joe Sixpack. Wave to the folks in TV land. Next to him we've got Tinkles. And Up Chuck. Here's Lee Harvey. And Boo-Boo. And don't forget Goldilocks. It's time for your close up, Miss De Mille.

Come on, darling. The camera loves you. Yes it does.

Don't you wanna look at me? You don't wanna look at me, 'cause you know if you do you're gonna smile. You better not let Casper see you smile 'cause then he'll know you like him. No...

Don't smile.

Don't smile.

Aw, dang! You *smiled!* Now Casper knows you like him. Well, don't worry. It's our little secret.

(CASPER returns to the stage.)

Hey, I didn't mean to embarrass you with the close-up and everything. I guess some kids like a lot of attention, and some kids don't. Me, I could never get enough. I'd do the dorkiest things to get attention. I didn't even care if people liked me or not, just as long as they noticed. I didn't even care if they called me names. I loved it. I mean, when the Casper comic books came out I was on top of the world. There was somebody famous with my name! Casper the Friendly Ghost. Except nobody called me that exactly. It was always "Casper the Friendly Gimp," 'cause even then I had this little limp, see? Or "Casper the Retarded Ghost," that was another one. It started out kind of mean, I suppose, but before those comic books came out, it was like I really was a ghost nobody

could see. But when people finally did start noticing me, I loved it so much I'd play along. I'd act really retarded and walk really gimpy, you know, like:

(CASPER demonstrates.)

Yeah, yeah. I'd do my walk, and they'd laugh, and I'd laugh, and it was almost like we were friends. So when I make up funny names for you guys, it's because I like you. I'm talking about something that makes you special. Like your beautiful golden locks. Goldilocks. And I call you Lee Harvey because you have such great aim. Remember? Uncle Ted, on the riding mower, and you with the air rifle? "Back and to the left! Back and to the left!" And you, you're Smokin' Joe Sixpack, from the time I kept sneaking you cigarettes and beer. Or you, Boo-Boo. It's from the time at the lake. Remember?

I mean, how could you forget? It was when we were all staying at that cabin in Green Bay, you and your folks and your sister. It was like eight in the morning and I was out on the dock, going after the crappies and the bluegills. I baited the hook, I brought the rod back like this, and I cast.

(imitating a reel letting out fishing line)

RrrRrrRrrRrrRrrRrrRrrRrr... And I'm like, the reel's spinning, but where's the friggin line? I look left, I look right, and finally I look behind me.

Thook! Right up your nostril, with the barb sticking out of your nose and the worm hanging over your lip like a big piece of snot. Oh, man!

(to another audience member)

And you, you're his sister, right? You were there, too, so I said, "Look what I caught!" Do you remember what you said? "He got a boo-boo." Your exact

words. I said, "That's right! I caught me a fifty-pound Boo-Boo! Should I throw him back?" And you were like, "Mommy! Mommy! He caught a boo-boo!" We were all laughing so hard.

(to "Boo-Boo")

Except you, maybe. But then, you were the one with the fishhook in your face.

So then your mother came out, and... Something came up, I don't remember what exactly, and I had to leave later that morning.

So anyway, that's why you're Boo-Boo. Boy, have you gotten big. You're too big to throw back now. I can't believe it's been, what, five years since I've seen you. It feels more like thirty.