

The Guest

A one-act play based on “The Ambitious Guest” by Nathaniel Hawthorne
Adapted by Jake Lewis

THE GUEST
by Jake Lewis

Characters

Dad/Father
Mom/Mother
Sis/Sister
Bro/Brother
Grandfather/Guest

Setting: A cabin in the woods in a snowstorm, Now/Then

“Mankind can only disappoint Mother Nature for so long.”
– Anthony Douglas Williams

THE GUEST

by Jake Lewis

SCENE ONE: NOW

The stage remains black as the sound of strong winds are whistling and blowing loudly for several long moments, followed by the noise and flash of the power suddenly zapping out.

Lights rise, dimly, on the interior of a cabin where there has been a power loss. It is lit only by a small fire that DAD has just finished kindling in the hearth and perhaps a gas lantern or two.

MOM is in the nearby kitchenette, making hot chocolate on the gas-powered stove. BRO and SIS are doing time-killing things, like her using her phone or him playing something like a Nintendo Switch. Both are annoyed by the loss of electricity, but her more so. GRANDPA appears asleep in a rocking chair in front of the fire. The words "I WAS HERE" are etched into the mantel.

DAD:

Ah! There we go! You warm, Dad?

GRANDPA snores in response.

BRO:

Knowing Dad, let's hope he doesn't burn the whole place down.

MOM:

At least we'll be warm.

DAD:

(Sarcastically.) You're welcome!

SIS:

I don't know what's worse – being engulfed in flame or trapped out there in the middle of nowhere, in a snowstorm, with hardly any WiFi.

THE GUEST

by Jake Lewis

BRO:

Unlike you, you sad human, who is reliant on the Internet, I don't need WiFi to stay entertained.
(Begins playing his video game.)

MOM:

I'd save those batteries if I were you, kids. We don't know how long the electricity will be out.

SIS:

And do what, just sit here in the dark and...dear God, talk to each other? Thanks, but I'll pass. I think Grandpa's got the right idea. *(She lays down in her bed.)*

DAD:

You guys are party poopers. Where's your sense of adventure? We're facing the elements of Nature here! Man Vs. Mother Nature!

BRO:

Not really. I mean, apart from right now, it has electricity, running water, and flush toilets. You want to fight nature, go outside and make a lean-to.

DAD:

My point is, it's exciting! I couldn't have planned this if I tried!

SIS:

But you did plan this. I saw you make the reservation online.

BRO:

And you could have checked the weather forecast, but we all know you think that takes the fun out of it.

DAD:

Alright, I get it! The Boy Scout in you should love this!

BRO:

I was never a Boy Scout. And I haven't been a *Cub* Scout for 4 years, Dad.

MOM:

I think what your Dad is trying to say is to just think about how memorable this vacation will be compared to all the others we've gone on.

Beat.

BRO:

Snowstorm in a cabin vs. cruise ship in the Caribbean...Yeah, you're right. This is better.

THE GUEST

by Jake Lewis

SIS:

I thought about it too, and no, it's not exciting. At all. Especially if we die.

BRO:

Ugh, even though you're always the lead in the school plays, that doesn't mean you have to be such a drama queen offstage.

SIS:

Ha. Ha. You're so funny. But I'm serious. Just watch. Any minute now some mysterious dude is going to show up at the door, and we're going to let him in because he's cold and hungry and we're nice—

BRO:

You're not.

SIS:

Ok. You're right for once. *You're* all nice and I never have a say in family stuff... and this guy will end up killing us in our sleep.

They all look at the door.

DAD:

See? Nothing. Now, let's put our phones and games away and do something as a family. I mean, isn't that why we came here? To get some quality time together?

The kids groan slightly, but reluctantly move to join MOM and DAD at the table, downstage center. Before they do, a rumbling sound is heard from outside, and the door rattles. The wind? Or something else? They all look at each other, slightly perturbed.

MOM:

That wind sure is something...(to DAD, a bit off to the side) I'm a little worried, actually. The snow's really piling up, and with us being in this valley...

DAD:

Relax. We're fine. This cabin has been here for decades and withstood many a winter storm.

BRO:

That's really reassuring, Dad.

THE GUEST

by Jake Lewis

DAD:

I know what we can do. I'll tell you a story that will put your mind at ease. About a family that once stayed here and disappeared.

SIS:

Wait. What?!? A family disappeared?!? And that's supposed to comfort us?!?.

MOM:

Your Dad is just trying to mess with you. *(To DAD.)* Cut it out, hon.

DAD:

You're right. Bad timing. Sorry. So, who can think of a game to play?

SIS:

No, no, you can't do that. Just drop that little morsel of info and then try to strike up a round of Charades.

BRO:

What's the truth, Dad?

DAD:

(in full Dad-joke mode)

The truth? You want the truth? You can't handle the truth!

BRO:

(To SIS.) Are we actually related to him?

DAD:

Alright, if you think you're ready for it...

BRO and SIS look at each other briefly.

SIS:

I think I'll be even more scared if you don't tell me now.

DAD:

OK, but remember, you asked for it.

MOM:

Tell us already!

GRANDPA:

(In his sleep.) I was here...

THE GUEST

by Jake Lewis

BRO:

(To SIS.) Hey, that's what that weird thing on the fireplace says.

DAD:

You see, Grandpa loved to tell me and your aunt Susan this story about this cabin, on a night just like this when he, his parents, and his sister were visited by a mysterious guest...

A huge blast of the storm causes the fire to flicker out briefly. A scream is heard. The door rattles loudly and blows open. THE GUEST stands in it, although you can only see his silhouette. The door closes, immersing the stage in darkness once again.

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### SCENE TWO: THEN

*When the lights come back up, the characters have changed to their other roles – those within the story DAD is telling. The etching on the fireplace mantel is gone.*

GUEST:

Ahh! This fire is the right thing! You are very kind to invite me in.

MOTHER:

What sort of Christians would we be if we left you to freeze in the snow?

GUEST:

For a time I figured that may be my fate after knocking so long at your cabin door.

FATHER:

I thought it was the wind shaking the bones of this old place! Yet it's a good thing you have such ambition and were so persistent! I apologize for not receiving you sooner.

GUEST:

Think no more of it! I am not sure I would have been so generous if a half-frozen stranger appeared at my doorstep. Especially with children present.

FATHER:

It was actually our son's idea to let you in.

**THE GUEST**  
*by Jake Lewis*

GUEST:

You have raised them well to be so kind hearted to strangers..

FATHER:

What brought you to The Notch this evening, sir?

GUEST:

Adventure, I suppose! You see, I was meant to be at Montpelier tonight to meet with a friend, long since absent in my life. But I found myself delayed by The Notch...these hills call to a man, don't they?

FATHER:

I have heard that voice on the wind myself.

*The sound of a strong wind blowing.*

GUEST:

There she is now.

BROTHER:

Doesn't seem like a very friendly invitation. More of a cry.

SISTER:

Or a scream.

MOTHER:

Oh, hush, children! You with your imaginations! *(To GUEST.)* Please, go on.

GUEST:

Legend goes that the waters at the bottom of the Flume are life-giving. I don't go out much for myths, but as I was in these woods, I have taken a vial of the snow just in case. *(He removes a small vial tied on a string below his shirt to show the family.)*

BROTHER:

We should do the same, Father!

FATHER:

*(Chuckling.)* Maybe when the snow lightens a bit, son.

GUEST:

There's not much more to say past that. On my departure from The Flume, I soon became buffeted on all sides by the bellows of this terrible winter blast.

## THE GUEST

by Jake Lewis

FATHER:

My! How fortuitous you saw our light, or you might have been a snowman before long!

SISTER:

*(Mumbling.)* He resembled something close to a Yeti when we first laid eyes on him.

GUEST:

This may sound a bit daft, but I felt you had kindled this fire just for me and were awaiting my arrival.

FATHER:

Well...in any event, as good Christians, you are welcome to ride out the storm here.

*A long, low, rumbling noise is heard, first getting louder, then eventually dissipating in intensity. The GUEST goes to the window and looks out.*

BROTHER:

What do you see out there?

SISTER:

Are we going to be buried under the snow?

GUEST:

No, no, no. It's just the mountain reminding us of His presence, lest we forget.

FATHER:

*(Joining GUEST at the window.)* That's right. We are old friends, the mountain and I, and every once in a while He will nod His head and threaten to come down. But we agree with each other on the whole.

MOTHER:

All this talk has me hungry. Shall we sit and eat now?

BROTHER:

Yes! I'm starving!

MOTHER:

Stop that talk! You are far from starving!

BROTHER:

*(Cowed.)* I'm sorry, Mother.

**THE GUEST**  
by Jake Lewis

*The family all sit, but the GUEST hangs back.*

SISTER:  
(*To the GUEST.*) You can join us too.

MOTHER:  
There's enough for all of us.

FATHER:  
And then some!

MOTHER:  
I hope you don't mind soup.

GUEST:  
Nothing better to warm the soul of a cold man.

*The GUEST joins them. They begin to eat, as another rumble is heard.*

*Lights fade to black.*

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SCENE THREE: THEN. SOME TIME LATER

Dinner is now finished, BROTHER and SISTER have gone to sleep. The adults sit and relax at the fire.

FATHER:
And what do you do back home?

GUEST:
Nothing of note. If I were to die tomorrow, none would know of me, apart from you. I'm only a youth who appeared at your door one evening, and then passed through The Notch the next morning, never to be seen again.

MOTHER:
But what about your friend in Montpelier? Was it a Mr. Crawford? Surely he would wonder what has happened to you?

THE GUEST

by Jake Lewis

GUEST:

(Chuckling.) He is not expecting my visit. Like you, I tend to surprise people upon my sudden arrivals. Nor would he know me as the man who appears before you now.

MOTHER and FATHER exchange a brief confused glance.

GUEST:

(Melancholy.) No, not a soul would ask “Who was he?” or “Where did he go?”

MOTHER:

No family?

FATHER:

A special woman maybe?

GUEST shakes his head.

FATHER:

(Breaking the tension.) Well, you are still young. You have many years to make your mark, no doubt.

GUEST:

(Roused.) Indeed. I cannot die until I have achieved my goal. Then I shall cry out to Death to come and take me!

Children stir.

GUEST:

(Recalcitrant.) I apologize. I am quite passionate about my destiny, one might say. Foolish, I suppose. With any luck, my monument will be nothing more than my frozen body atop Mount Washington that people will laugh at from the road!

FATHER:

No! It is a noble pursuit, whatever your aims may be. Although you have gotten me thinking now about things that will never come to pass for me as well. *(He pauses to reflect.)* It has reminded me of my dream of owning a farm one day around The White Mountains.

MOTHER:

Ha!

THE GUEST

by Jake Lewis

FATHER:

(Ignoring her.) Not so close that it will come tumbling down on our heads, mind you. Maybe run for political office, too, be admired by our neighbors. I'd only serve a term or two, do some good to the community, as only honest men can.

MOTHER:

An honest politician? That's an oxymoron for the ages!

FATHER:

(To MOTHER.) And that's how we would pass our years peacefully until I was an old man, and you were an old woman. I would die happily in my bed, with you and the children all crying besides me. There would be a fine grave stone, slate would do as well as marble, with just my name and age. Oh, and a verse from a hymn, something to let people know I lived a good Christian life.

GUEST:

You see? It is in our nature to want something to be remembered by! A monument for some, a line on their grave stone for others, just a memory in the mind of their loved ones for others yet! But, before we die, every man desires the same!

MOTHER:

Women too.

GUEST:

Is that so?

MOTHER:

Why wouldn't it be? We have our secrets too.

GUEST:

And what's yours?

MOTHER:

It is my secret fear I will not be buried in my best clothes.

FATHER guffaws.

GUEST:

Now, now. Let's hear her. I think women are so hesitant to share their innermost fears because men unfairly scoff at them.

MOTHER:

Yes. Well. I have already prepared my funeral clothes.

THE GUEST
by Jake Lewis

FATHER:
What? You have?

MOTHER:
I have. It's the finest thing I will ever wear. Apart from my wedding dress, of course.

GUEST:
Men and women alike – we all dream about graves and monuments. But, perhaps it is best to sit before a warm fire and be content, even though no one else in the world thinks of us.

A silence falls over the cabin as they all contemplate their recent conversation. The fire crackles.

A roar, unlike any heard yet. Everyone sits up straighter, including the children who had been sleeping.

BROTHER:
Father?

SISTER:
What was that?

FATHER looks to MOTHER whose brow is knitted with concern. He then looks to THE GUEST, who rises and walks quickly to the window.

FATHER:
What is it?

GUEST:
It's...an avalanche. We must leave. Now.

SISTER:
What?!? Leave?!?

FATHER:
(Looking out window.) He's right. It's headed straight toward us.

MOTHER:
But surely this cabin can withstand it! This couldn't be the first avalanche this cabin has ever faced!

THE GUEST

by Jake Lewis

GUEST:

It's coming quickly! We must go now unless we want to be buried underneath it!

BROTHER:

To where?!? There's nowhere to go!

FATHER:

That's not true. (*Pointing.*) There! An outbuilding about twenty yards off! That will probably be out of the way of the destruction!

MOTHER:

Come, children! Hurry!

The roaring noise grows louder and louder until it's almost deafening. There is a frenetic energy about the scene as the family and Guest quickly gather a few belongings and make it out the door.

GUEST removes the vial of water again from around his neck, and quickly drinks from it.

Instead of a blackout, the lighting goes to full white, nearly blinding in its intensity.

Then, a quick blackout.

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## SCENE FOUR: NOW

*The family is still seated as they were before.*

SIS:

...And?

DAD:

And what?

BRO:

And what happened? To the family? Did they make it to the other building?

**THE GUEST**  
*by Jake Lewis*

DAD:  
Oh, right. Leaving off the best part!

SIS:  
You're killin' me, Dad.

DAD:  
Just as the family fled the cabin, the avalanche split, cutting to both sides of this structure...

MOM:  
Oh, no!

DAD:  
...and buried them all underneath its heavy snow. The cabin, though, was practically untouched.

*DAD sits back, arms crossed, as though pleased with himself at his ability to tell this ghost story and frighten his family.*

*There is an extended silence as GRANDPA slowly rises from the chair.*

SIS:  
That's a terrible story!

BRO:  
It's kinda' cool, actually.

SIS:  
If you mean cool as in a pun on the cold snow, then maybe, but what else about it is any good?

BRO:  
I dunno, it's scary. They all died at the end. Good one, Dad!

*DAD and BRO high-five.*

GRANDPA:  
Not quite.

DAD:  
Dad! You're awake! Have you been listening the whole time?

## THE GUEST

by Jake Lewis

GRANDPA:

I have. And you did a good job telling them the story as I told it to you and your sister when you were kids and we came here. Except you left out one small detail.

DAD:

I did?

GRANDPA:

Yes, you did. None of them were ever found.

DAD:

I said pretty much the same thing. They were all buried under the snow.

GRANDPA:

That is not the same thing! Not being found doesn't mean they died.

BRO:

I get it. You're saying they survived and are feral, wolf-like people living in the mountains here, and that wind is actually the sound of them screaming. Right?

GRANDPA:

No. I'm not saying that either.

MOTHER:

What are you saying, Ethan?

*Lights fade over the following lines, then rise again on the cabin, now empty as in the "Then" scene.*

GRANDPA (v.o.):

The next morning, some other travelers in The Notch came across the cabin when they saw smoke pouring from the chimney. But inside, the family was gone. Everything looked just as they had left it. It was as though they had gone for a walk in the woods to witness the devastation they had miraculously escaped. Their story, like the one about the life-extending waters of The Flume, became a legend in these parts. And I guess that there's something poetic about that, isn't there? Because now they are remembered. As they all wanted to be.

*The cabin door opens. The GUEST enters, covered in snow. Outside, the storm has ceased.*

SIS (v.o.):

What do you think happened to them, Grandpa?

## THE GUEST

by Jake Lewis

BRO (v.o.):

The Guest drank from the Flume, right? And so maybe he's still out there....watching us...

*THE GUEST crosses to the fireplace, pulls  
poker out, and writes something with it on  
the stone mantel.*

GRANDPA (v.o.):

He may be a lot closer than we think...about to knock on that door and be asked inside to keep  
warm by this fireplace.

DAD (v.o.):

Why do you think that, Dad?

*Instead of answering, The GUEST  
steps away from the fireplace mantel  
and exits, his message clearly seen:*

*I WAS HERE.*

The End