

THE SECRET ANNIVERSARY

a play by

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-WHO-

HELEN ROBERTS FREEMAN,
age 32

GEORGE "GUFF" FREEMAN,
age 35

FREDDY SCHMIDT,
age 29

RICHARD "DICK" FREEMAN,
age 32

-WHERE-

Detroit, MI &
various suburbs

-WHEN-

December 1955 - December 1956

*"The holiest of Holidays are those
Kept by ourselves in silence and apart,
The secret anniversaries of the heart."*

-H.W. Longfellow, *Holidays*

AT RISE: Christmas Eve 1955.
A holiday party in Ferndale,
MI. Traditional music plays
somewhere in the background.

HELEN ROBERTS, an attractive
woman of 32, sits alone in a
corner of the room, crying
softly.

After a moment, her cries turn
into sobs.

From nearby, a voice calls
out.

GUFF (off)

Helen...?

(HELEN immediately stops crying,
dries her eyes.)

Helen!

(GEORGE "GUFF" FREEMAN enters.
HE is 35, handsome and jovial.
A cigarette held tight between
his lips, HE carries a cup of
eggnog in each hand.)

There you are... I been lookin' all over the place.

(No response from HELEN.)

Why'd you run off like that, leavin' me in the lurch?

(HELEN throws her arms around
GUFF, bursting into tears.)

Easy there...

(HE places the eggnog on the
table, stubs out his cigarette
in the ashtray as HELEN continues
to cry.)

What's-a matter? Somebody do somethin' to upset you?

Where's the bum?

(HELEN pulls away, composes
herself.)

HELEN

I'm sorry...

(GUFF takes out his handkerchief,
dries HELEN's eyes.)

GUFF

Is there somethin' I can do?

HELEN

I don't think so.

GUFF

Is it somethin' I did?

HELEN

Don't be silly, Guff.

GUFF

'cause you never know with me.

HELEN

You've been a perfect gentleman.

GUFF

You sure? I got a tendency to make a complete and total jackass out-a myself and never even know it.

HELEN

You've been a perfect host.

GUFF

Then how come you're not enjoyin' the party?

HELEN

The party's wonderful.

GUFF

So what're you doin' in here all by yourself?

HELEN

I'm sorry...

GUFF

C'mon, Helen! It's a party, not a funeral... What's got you so blue?

HELEN

It's nothing... Really.

GUFF

You wouldn't be sittin' in here cryin' your eyes out over nothin'.

(Pause.)

HELEN

It's got nothing to do with you or the party... I just needed to get away from Christmas for a while.

GUFF

Well, that's good to know... 'cause I'm not used to bein' in charge-a these kinda things.

HELEN

Your Father will be very proud of you.

GUFF

If there's one thing he taught me... "Gotta show the employees a good time... Reward 'em for a hard year's work."

HELEN

You've done a fine job running the market in his place.

GUFF

I appreciate you saying that.

HELEN

It's the truth.

GUFF

I couldn't-a done without you.

(HE takes hold of HELEN's hand.
They sit in silence a moment.)

HELEN

I suppose we should get back inside...

(SHE gets up to go, but GUFF
draws her back.)

GUFF

Hold on a second... There's somethin' I wanna do, first...
In private.

(HE reaches into his pocket,
takes out a small gift-wrapped
box.)

GUFF (cont'd)

Merry Christmas, Helen.

(HE presents her with the gift.
HELEN hesitates a moment, before
accepting it.)

HELEN

You didn't have to get me a gift.

GUFF

You're the best checker we got... My folks are lucky to have
you workin' for 'em.

HELEN

This gift is from your parents, then?

GUFF

No, the gift's from me... Though Mother did help pick it
out.

HELEN

I see...

GUFF

Think maybe you should open it?

(HELEN unwraps a tiny velvet
box containing a modest ring.)

HELEN

It's beautiful.

GUFF

You like it, then?

HELEN

I do.

GUFF

Kinda looks like an engagement ring to me.

HELEN

It does, doesn't it?

GUFF

Think maybe you should try it on?

(HELEN hesitates.)

HELEN

I don't know, Guff...

GUFF

I promise, it'll fit-cha.

HELEN

I'm sorry... But I can't.

GUFF

Sure you can.

HELEN

It's too soon.

GUFF

We've known each our entire lives.

HELEN

But we've only been out on a handful of dates.

GUFF

And weren't they all a real blast? You didn't have a good time on each and every one?

HELEN

You know I did.

GUFF

I took you bowlin', didn't I? Out to Yates' cider mill... Mary had a good time on that hayride, didn't she?

HELEN

Two months later, she can't stop talking about it.

GUFF

I'd be a good father to her, don't-cha think?

HELEN

Mary adores you.

GUFF

I'm a charmin' fella, ain't I? A real catch, if I do say so myself?

HELEN

The most popular boy at Hazel Park High.

GUFF

I wouldn't go that far.

HELEN

Back then, a girl would just about die to have George Freeman ask her for a date.

GUFF

Including you?

HELEN

I honestly thought you had no idea I was alive.

GUFF

Now you're talkin' crazy.

HELEN

You were a senior... I was a freshman.

GUFF

Don't think I didn't notice... (beat) All the time you spent at our place doin' homework with that kid brother-a mine... I'd sneak a peak at you every chance I got.

HELEN

Now you're the one talking crazy.

GUFF

Guess you were too busy with your nose buried in your schoolbooks, like some "book worm!"

HELEN

I beg your pardon! If you were so interested, how come you never asked me for a date?

GUFF

You spent so much time with Brother Dick, I thought maybe you were sweet on him.

HELEN

Dick and I were never anything but best of friends... You could've asked me out if you really wanted to, Guff.

GUFF

I was gonna... Till good old Billy Roberts beat me to the punch... Stole you right out from under my nose.

(At the mention of Bill's name,
HELEN begins to cry.)

GUFF (cont'd)

Jeez Louise! There I go puttin' my foot in my mouth... I'm sorry.

HELEN

No, I'm sorry.

GUFF

I didn't mean to upset-cha, bringin' Bill up like that.

HELEN

It doesn't usually affect me like this...
(SHE dries her tears.)
It's always harder around the holidays.

GUFF

I hear ya.

HELEN

You think I'd be over it after all these years, wouldn't you? (beat) 1944 was a long time ago.

GUFF

Doesn't make your heart hurt any less. (beat) I know I'm not over losin' Bill... (beat) I really loved that man.

(Pause.)

HELEN

I know you did.

(Pause.)

GUFF

He was a terrific fella, huh? The way he lit up a room the minute he walked into it. He made everybody smile just by lookin' at him.. He never had a bad thing to say against nobody. No matter who they were or where they came from, he treated everybody the same.

HELEN

He was one in a million, wasn't he?

GUFF

Day after we got the telegram, why d'you think I went out and joined up? I couldn't sit back and let those goddamn Nazi Bastards win, could I? Not after what they did to my best pal.

HELEN

It would've meant a lot to Bill, knowing you did that.

GUFF

Don't-cha think he'd wanna know his wife and daughter were bein' looked after?

HELEN

We've done okay on our own, so far.

GUFF

Bet-cha could do even better with somebody else by your side.

(Pause.)

HELEN

Are you sure that's where you wanna be, Guff?

(Pause.)

GUFF

A fella knows to follow his heart when it's tellin' him somethin'.

HELEN

It never seemed like you were interested in getting married.. I never thought that's what you wanted.

GUFF

Maybe not back in high school... Maybe not even once I got outta the Navy. (beat) But now...

HELEN

You changed your mind?

GUFF

I'm thirty-five years old... Don't-cha think it's about time I settle down?

(From another part of the room, Bing Crosby's rendition of "I'll Be Home for Christmas" begins to play.)

GUFF (cont'd)

Good Ol' Bing... Nobody does it better.

(HELEN fights to hold back tears.)

HELEN

Bill used to love this song... He sang it to me that day, right before he left. He wrote it at the bottom of every letter he ever sent... Till the very last one. (beat) But he never came home, Guff... Not for Christmas. Not ever again.

GUFF

Close your eyes...

(HE closes his eyes. HELEN does not as SHE watches GUFF.)

Bet-cha he's here with us, right now...

(HELEN is silent.)

You feel him?

HELEN

I do.

GUFF

Merry Christmas, Bill.

(HELEN takes GUFF's hand.)

HELEN

Thank you...

(GUFF opens his eyes.)

GUFF
I'm not tryin' to replace him, Helen.

HELEN
I know.

GUFF
I bet-cha good old Bill agrees with me... Eleven years is a long time for you and Mary to be left alone.

HELEN
We're not alone... We've got each other.

GUFF
In fact, I bet-cha he'd wanna see the three of us spendin' our lives together.

(Pause.)

HELEN
I think he'd like that, too, Guff.

(Far away, a voice calls out.)

FREDDY (off)
Guff!

(GUFF looks toward the sound of the voice as...

FREDDY SCHMIDT, a handsome young man in his late 20's, appears.)
You coming, Guff?

(GUFF looks back to HELEN.)

GUFF
Then how's about marryin' me?

(HELEN holds out her hand. GUFF places the diamond on her finger. SHE clasps the ring to her heart, then disappears.)

GUFF lights a cigarette. HE looks back to FREDDY as Bing Crosby sings on.)

--SCENE 2--

Christmas Eve 1955.

FREDDY's apartment in nearby Royal Oak, later that night.

FREDDY

What's taking you so long?

(No response from GUFF.)

Guff? Did you hear me, Old Man?

GUFF

I'm sorry...

FREDDY

You coming?

GUFF

I'll be right there.

(HE does not move.)

FREDDY

What're you doing?

GUFF

Nothin'.

FREDDY

Don't seem like nothing.

GUFF

Thinkin', I guess.

FREDDY

About?

GUFF

Lot-a things.

(HE continues to sit, staring
down at the floor.)

FREDDY

Is there something I can do?

GUFF

I don't think so.

FREDDY

Is it something I did?

(GUFF looks up at FREDDY.)

GUFF

I love you, Freddy Boy.

(Pause.)

FREDDY

I thought you didn't believe in all that queer stuff.

GUFF

Guess I changed my mind.

FREDDY

You always said one fella could never love another fella.

GUFF

Guess I was wrong.

(Pause.)

FREDDY

I love you, too.

GUFF

You mean it?

FREDDY

Would I put up with you for this long if I didn't?

(GUFF throws himself on FREDDY,
tears in his eyes. HE kisses
him hard and strong as if his
life depended on it. Suddenly,
GUFF pulls away.)

GUFF

I'm sorry...

(HE crosses to the bar, pours
himself a scotch.)

FREDDY

That good, huh?

GUFF

I don't wanna get too carried away.

FREDDY

Why not? I never had an anniversary before... Let's
celebrate!

(GUFF downs his drink then pours
another.)

Hard to believe it's been a year... Remember I kissed you
under that mistletoe?

GUFF

You're damn lucky we didn't get caught.

FREDDY

I made sure no one was looking.

GUFF

How'd you know I wouldn't punch your lights out?

FREDDY

From the moment I met you at that party that night... I
could feel something between us. I know you felt it, too.

(HE embraces GUFF, holds him.)

I thought you might wanna make this thing we got going
official... Maybe move out of your mother's house and in
here with me.

GUFF

Two grown men livin' together? You know what people'd say
about us?

FREDDY

I'm tired of hiding my feelings all the time... I can't live
the rest of my life like this.

GUFF

You're gonna have to learn to.

FREDDY

Says who?

GUFF

We can't live together.

FREDDY

Why not?

(GUFF pulls away.)

GUFF

Freddy Boy... (beat) I'm gettin' married.

FREDDY

Who's the lucky bastard?

(Pause.)

GUFF

This ain't no joke.

(Pause.)

FREDDY

Fuck you.

GUFF

It's for your own good.

FREDDY

You just told me you loved me... For the first time since we been together. (beat) Now you tell me it's over?

GUFF

You think the goddamn Board of Education is gonna let a known homo teach boys Phys. Ed.? They get wind of the two of us livin' together, it's "Bye Bye, Freddy Boy."

FREDDY

Who I live with and who I love doesn't affect my ability to do my job.

GUFF

Think about it... All those sweaty young boys runnin' around in their Jockey shorts... There's no way in Hell anyone's gonna trust you.

(Pause.)

FREDDY

Do I know this girl?

GUFF

I don't think so.

FREDDY

Does she know you?

GUFF

What's that s'posed to mean? I've known her since we were kids.

FREDDY

Not in your head but in your heart.

GUFF

She's never gonna know about any of that.

FREDDY

Does she know how much you love pumpkin pie with Reddi Wip?

(No response from GUFF.)

How you enjoy sitting in front of the television on a Saturday night watching "The Honeymooners?"

(No response from GUFF.)

Or how to tickle the inside of your forearm just so, before you fall asleep?

(No response from GUFF.)

It's gonna be cold, tonight... We can keep each other warm.

GUFF

I told you... I can't do this.

(Pause.)

FREDDY

How long have you been seeing her?

GUFF

Coupl-a months.

FREDDY

Explains why you've hardly been around... I sure as hell didn't expect this!

GUFF

Would you listen to me?

FREDDY

You sleeping with her?

GUFF

It's not like that...

FREDDY

Then why are you marrying her?

GUFF

She's a widow... Got herself a little girl, eleven years old... Girl needs a father.

FREDDY

Doesn't have to be you.

GUFF

She was married to a buddy of mine from high school... Got himself killed over in France.

FREDDY

I'm sorry to hear that.

GUFF

He was my best pal in the whole wide world.

(Pause.)

FREDDY

I thought I was your best pal.

GUFF

You are, now.

FREDDY

Then tell me why the fuck you're doing this!

GUFF

I'm tryin' to explain...

FREDDY

I don't wanna hear your bullshit!

(Pause.)

GUFF

All my life, I knew I was different... I always liked the kinda things other boys liked. I always did the kinda things other boys do... But somethin' wasn't right with me... Not in my head but in my heart. (beat) I knew I wasn't s'posed to feel like that. I knew it had to be wrong... So I pushed those feelings deep down inside-a me... Into a place where I knew they'd never escape. (beat) I knew I could do it. I had to do it... And I can do it again.

FREDDY

You think being queer is something you can choose or not?

GUFF

A fella controls his own destiny... He's got the power to be whoever he wants.

FREDDY

This is who I wanna be.

GUFF

And what if I don't?

FREDDY

You don't wanna love me, any more?

GUFF

Sure, I want to... I just can't.

FREDDY

Says who?

GUFF

Says the World.

FREDDY

Fuck the World!

GUFF

If only we could.

FREDDY

You don't wanna be a queer, any more? Fine! Don't be a queer.

GUFF

How many queers served our country the way I did? They don't allow friggin' fairies in the goddamn U.S. Navy.

FREDDY

They let you in.

GUFF

I ain't like the rest of those other fags out there... Neither are you.

FREDDY

What makes you think we're any different?

GUFF

We ain't a bunch of pansies... We're men.

FREDDY

Who sleep with other men.

GUFF

You ever dress up in women's clothes and parade around in public? You ever come on to a cop in a bathroom and get your name printed up in the papers?

(FREDDY is silent.)

Then you're not like all the others... And neither am I.

FREDDY

You honestly believe that?

GUFF

There's a big difference between the kind of fellas we are and the faggots runnin' around the streets of Detroit.

FREDDY

We're all a bunch of pansies... We're all a bunch of queers! Why can't you just accept it?

GUFF

How the hell'm I s'posed to, if nobody else can?

(Pause.)

FREDDY

Let's go and have our supper... Then we'll sit by the tree and open our presents, okay? I got some eggnog and some rum... We'll have a drink and then we'll go to bed.

GUFF

Didn't you hear a word I'm sayin'?

(Pause.)

FREDDY

Do you love this woman?

GUFF

I care about her... Very much.

FREDDY

But do you love her?

GUFF

Sometimes there's more important things in life than love.

FREDDY

What if she finds out your secret?

GUFF

Who's gonna tell her?

(FREDDY is silent.)

Then she'll never know.

FREDDY

What's gonna happen on your wedding night?

GUFF

I've made love to a woman before... I'll think of somethin'.

FREDDY

You'll think of me.

GUFF

I'm puttin' all-a this behind me... I'm puttin' it all outta my mind.

(FREDDY kisses GUFF.)

FREDDY

You'll never forget me, Guff...

(Far away, a voice calls out.)

HELEN (off)

Guff!

(GUFF looks toward the sound
of the voice as...

HELEN appears wearing a simple
white dress.)

HELEN (cont'd)

You coming, Sweetheart?

(GUFF looks back to FREDDY.)

GUFF

It's been swell, Freddy Boy... Merry Christmas.

(FREDDY watches GUFF as HE takes
his place beside HELEN.)