

MINNIE AND IRVING
AND DOOGAN AND PETUNIA

A comedy in one act
by
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PREVIEW ONLY!

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SYNOPSIS

On adjoining front porches, a gentle gardener and his cantankerous neighbor pass the seasons in gentle disagreement while their mischievous pets -- an energetic golden retriever and a cynical Siamese cat -- secretly plot a backyard alliance. Through stealthily relocated flower pots and a pitcher of ice cold lemonade, the devoted animals manage to melt the ice between their humans. Ultimately, the furry companions successfully prompt an unexpected invitation that reminds their elderly owners that while the clock keeps ticking, it's never too late to make up for lost time.

RUNNING TIME

45 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(1 male, 1 female, 2 either)

IRVING.....A kind, optimistic man in his 80's
DOOGAN.....His goofy, energetic Golden Retriever
MINNIE.....A cranky, opinionated woman in her 80's
PETUNIA.....Her sleek, cynical Siamese cat

SETTING

The stage is divided by a brick wall between two attached porches:

IRVING'S porch is a vibrant oasis. There are lush pots full of colorful flowers hanging over the railing, a shiny silver dog bowl beside a wooden porch swing, and a small rolling cart with a pitcher of ice cold lemonade on it. A well-kept screen door leads inside.

MINNIE'S porch is bare and neglected. The wood is faded, the steps leading up to the porch are falling apart, weeds creep up the railing, and a single folding lawn chair sits all by itself. Her rickety screen door has duct tape covering a few tears in the mesh.

In front of both porches is a shared grassy lawn.

The flowers and decorations on IRVING'S porch change with the passing seasons, but MINNIE'S porch hardly changes at all.

SCENE 1: JULY

(AT RISE: The flowers on IRVING'S porch are in full bloom. Prominently featured on his railing is a colorful ceramic pot. It's painted with whimsical brushstrokes and holds a single, bright red geranium that seems to glow in the summer sun.)

(DOOGAN is sprawled out on IRVING'S porch, chin resting on his paws, panting happily as he watches the world go by. PETUNIA sits atop MINNIE'S porch railing, grooming her paw with aloof, regal licks. IRVING steps out of his screen door, whistling a jaunty tune. He carries a watering can and begins showering his flower pots. MINNIE comes through her screen door, holding a mug of coffee. She scowls at the sun and plops into her lawn chair with a grunt. IRVING looks up at the sky, his eyes full of wonder.)

IRVING

(Gently)

What's it all about?

MINNIE

Oh, for Pete's sake, Irving! Quit your yappin'. It's too hot for philosophy.

IRVING

Just a question for a beautiful July morning, Minnie. Look at those clouds. Like big scoops of vanilla ice cream. Don't you ever wonder, what's it all mean? Why we're all here?

MINNIE

I know exactly why I'm here. To drink my coffee in peace before the asphalt starts melting. And I know why you're here... to aggravate my tinnitus.

(DOOGAN'S tail wags and whacks against the porch. He looks at IRVING with pure adoration, panting away. PETUNIA narrows her eyes at DOOGAN and lets out a judgmental hiss.)

IRVING

Well, seeing as it's so hot, and seeing as I happen to have a fresh pitcher of lemonade, why don't you come on over? The swing gets a beautiful breeze this time of day.

MINNIE

I have my own chair.

IRVING

Your chair doesn't move. A porch swing is like travelling without ever having to leave home. Come sit next to me. We'll talk about the old days.

MINNIE

The old days are gone. And I've got nothing to say to you.

IRVING

You don't have to say anything. We can just sit.

MINNIE

I don't sit with neighbors. I never have. Alex and I kept to ourselves, and I intend to keep it that way.

IRVING

Alex has been gone a long time, Minnie.

MINNIE

And I'm still here. Unfortunately.

(She takes a sharp sip of coffee. IRVING looks down at the colorful ceramic pot on his railing, gently touching the petals of the red geranium.)

IRVING

My Wanda made this pot, you know. Years ago. She used to say that a geranium was the most special part of July. She called them stubborn survivors. No matter how brutal the heat gets, a geranium just digs its heels in and decides to bloom anyway.

MINNIE

Flowers don't decide anything. They just die when you forget to water 'em.

IRVING

Maybe. But look at that color. It's hard to be cynical when something fights that hard to show you a little beauty.

(DOOGAN rolls onto his back, paws in the air. IRVING looks at him with adoring eyes, then kneels down to scratch his belly.)

IRVING

When my daughter brought Doogan here after Wanda passed, I told her, "Sweetheart, I'm too old for a puppy. I'm running out of time." But you know what she said?

MINNIE

I don't care what she said.

IRVING

She said, "Dad, dogs don't know what time is. They just know *now*." And she was right. Look at him. He doesn't worry about yesterday. He doesn't fret about tomorrow. He's just glad to be on the porch.

MINNIE

He's a golden idiot.

IRVING

(Laughs warmly)

Oh, he is! He absolutely is. But he's got a good heart. We're still figuring each other out, him and me. He's got a lot more pep than these old knees can handle, but... it's nice having a soul to care for.

(PETUNIA leaps down from the railing. She walks over to MINNIE'S chair and rubs her flank against MINNIE'S ankle. MINNIE reaches down with a surprisingly gentle hand and strokes PETUNIA'S head.)

MINNIE

Cats are better. They don't beg for your approval. They demand your respect. Petunia doesn't care about *now*. She just wants her Fancy Feast while we watch Jeopardy.

IRVING

She's a beautiful cat. A little serious, maybe. Like her owner.

MINNIE

She's discerning.

(IRVING stands and takes a step toward the brick divider.)

IRVING

The offer stands, neighbor. July won't last forever. The lemonade is cold and the swing is empty.

(MINNIE stands, protecting her territory.)

MINNIE

And it's going to stay empty. Go drown your flowers, Irving. Leave me to my peace.

(She turns and marches back inside, slamming the screen door behind her. PETUNIA struts proudly after her and sits squarely in front of the door like a tiny, feline guard. She lets out another hiss. IRVING sighs. He walks back to his swing, sits down, and gives a little push with his feet. The swing creaks pleasantly.)

IRVING

Well, Doogan boy. Maybe August.

(DOOGAN lets out a happy bark and flips back onto his feet. He trots over to IRVING and rests his head on IRVING'S knee. IRVING strokes his ears as the lights fade.)

SCENE 2: AUGUST

(AT RISE: A newspaper has appeared on IRVING'S front step.)

(MINNIE steps out onto her porch. She holds a framed photograph tightly to her chest, full of sorrow. She sits in her lawn chair and looks at the photograph, tracing the edge of the frame with her finger. IRVING comes out of his door and picks up the newspaper. He looks over at MINNIE, notices her intimacy with the photograph, and respectfully looks away. He sits on his porch swing, gives it a gentle push, and starts to read the newspaper. Down in the front yard, DOOGAN appears from around the corner of IRVING'S porch. He's somehow managed to unspool a great length of garden hose and his back paw is hopelessly entangled in it. He does everything he can to detach himself from the hose, but the more he wiggles and rolls on the grass, the more it loops through his legs and eventually around his neck. He pants wildly the entire time, but is strangely optimistic about his predicament. PETUNIA appears from around the corner of MINNIE'S porch. She watches DOOGAN'S dilemma with judgmental eyes.)

DOOGAN

Oof! Okay. Don't panic. The snake has a firm grip, but I can negotiate. Let go of me, snake! I promise to leave all the mice alone if you just let me go!

(PETUNIA chuckles.)

DOOGAN

Hey, Petunia! A little assistance, please? My hindquarters have been compromised by this snake.

(PETUNIA licks her paw, completely unfazed.)

PETUNIA

It's a hose, you idiot.

DOOGAN

It's a constrictor! And it's thirsty! It bit the house on one end and now it's trying to swallow me whole! If you could hop over here and swat the tail end of it, I'd be very grateful!

PETUNIA

I don't do manual labor. Especially not for the opposition. Besides, watching you suffer is the first real entertainment I've had this summer.

(DOOGAN struggles some more, which only wraps the hose further around his snout.)

DOOGAN

Mmph! Mmph-er! Trust me, I'm fine! I'm not suffering! I'm experimenting!

PETUNIA

Why don't you just bark for the old man? He'll come save you.

DOOGAN

No way! He's having a quiet moment. He gets this look on his face sometimes, like he's looking at something that isn't there anymore. He's missing his person. I'm not gonna ruin his peace just because I got outsmarted by a rubber snake.

PETUNIA

Minnie does that, too. The looking at nothing. She does it inside at night. She even talks to the wall sometimes.

DOOGAN

Really? What does she say?

PETUNIA

None of your business. But she doesn't do it quietly. She cries. It's highly disruptive to my nap schedule.

DOOGAN

She's lonely. Irving is lonely too. I can smell it. It smells like old rain.

PETUNIA

Well, Irving tried to fix it last month and Minnie bit his head off. Case closed. They're incompatible species.

(DOOGAN shakes wildly, causing him to flop onto his side.)

DOOGAN

Whoa! Down goes Doogan! But wait! No! They're perfect for each other! They both have white fur on their heads, they both move slow in the morning, and they both need a pack. We have to bring them together. It's our job!

PETUNIA

(Scoffs)

My job is to sleep sixteen hours a day and shed on things she freshly laundered. I don't do matchmaking.

DOOGAN

Come on, Petunia! Think about it. If they sit on the porch together, that means more lunches. And more lunches means more crumbs on the floor. Maybe even a piece of cheese! And they'll stop looking at the nothing.

(PETUNIA eyes him, considering this. Then, she slowly stands up, stretches her back into a high arch, and walks down the steps. DOOGAN looks hopeful.)

DOOGAN

Yes! You're gonna help me out of the hose!

PETUNIA

Absolutely not.

DOOGAN

Oh, come on! That was a tease!

PETUNIA

I'm always a tease. Consider it a lesson in problem solving. If they're going to become friends, it's not going to be because I played the hero.

DOOGAN

I'll figure it out! I have time! Whatever that means!

PETUNIA

That's the trouble with August. There's too much time. At least that's what Minnie says. The days just sit there, like hot soup.

(MINNIE stands up, wipes a tear from her eye, and walks back inside. A moment later, IRVING folds up his newspaper and goes inside as well.)

DOOGAN

Hey... if I give you my squeaky hedgehog, will you at least consider untangling me?

PETUNIA

Hmm. Make it a salmon treat and I'll think about it.

DOOGAN

Oh goodie! Oh goodie! Oh goodie!

PETUNIA

By September.

DOOGAN

(Deflated)

Oh.

(He shrugs, then flops back down on the grass and resumes wiggling as the lights fade.)

SCENE 3: SEPTEMBER

(AT RISE: The bright red geranium on IRVING'S porch has been replaced by a large pot filled with yellow chrysanthemums. The painted ceramic pot, now empty, is turned upside down by his door.)

(IRVING sits on his porch swing, wearing a cozy flannel shirt. He sips from a thermos of hot apple cider. DOOGAN is sprawled at his feet, his chin resting right on IRVING'S shoe. Across the brick divider, PETUNIA sits on MINNIE'S railing, shivering slightly in the autumn air. After a moment, MINNIE enters from stage right, walking down the sidewalk and toward the steps to her porch. She walks a bit slower than usual, clutching her purse tightly against her winter coat, looking thoroughly annoyed.)

IRVING

(Brightens up)

Well, afternoon, Minnie! Coming from the east side today? Took the scenic route, did you?

MINNIE

(Without stopping)

None of your business, Irving. The sidewalk is public property. I can walk on it from whatever direction I please.

(She trudges up her steps, huffing. When she reaches her screen door, she begins rummaging through her purse. Her movements get faster, more frantic. She digs deep, emptying old receipts onto her lawn chair, but comes up empty.)

MINNIE

(Muttering)

No. No, no, no... Where the devil are they? I just had them.

IRVING

(Leans forward)

Everything alright over there, Minnie? You look like a woman who's missing something.

MINNIE

I'm not missing anything! I'm *searching*. There's a difference.

IRVING

Did you lose your keys?

MINNIE

I didn't lose them. They've just relocated.

(She turns her purse upside down over the lawn chair. A bunch of things falls out, but no keys. MINNIE freezes, her shoulders dropping. IRVING stands, his voice gentle.)

IRVING

Hey. Let me come over and help you look. Maybe they slipped out by the sidewalk. I've got good eyes for shiny things.

(MINNIE whips around, pointing a fierce finger at him.)

MINNIE

Don't you dare! Stay off my porch! I mean it. I don't need your charity, and I don't need you hovering over my property.

IRVING

(Puts his hands up)

Okay. I'm staying right here. Just trying to be neighborly, Minnie. You've had a long day.

MINNIE

You don't know anything about my day.

(She gathers her belongings back into her purse.)

IRVING

I know you took the bus toward the medical center this morning. And you only take that bus when you have an appointment.

MINNIE

Spying on me now? Is that your new hobby?

IRVING

Not spying. Just noticing. I want to make sure you're okay.

MINNIE

I'm fine. The doctor says I'm disgustingly healthy for a woman of my disposition. I'm just... I'm tired. And I want to go inside.

(She checks her coat pockets. PETUNIA hops down from the railing, stretches gracefully, and casually walks to the edge of the steps. She pauses, then deliberately nudges a set of keys off the porch with her paw. A soft clinking sound echoes as they hit the ground.)

MINNIE

(On the verge of tears)

Confound it... Alex always kept track of the keys. Every single time...

IRVING

Minnie, look. Down by the bottom step. I think I see a purple ribbon. Aren't those your keys?

MINNIE

(Looks down and and gasps)

Oh.

(She walks down the steps, her knees wobbling slightly, and scoops up the keys. She looks up at IRVING and speaks, barely audible.)

MINNIE

Thanks for... pointing them out.

IRVING

(Smiles warmly)

Anytime. Autumn's coming on fast. Sure you don't want a cup of warm cider to heat up those bones before you go in?

MINNIE

Cider gives me heartburn. Goodnight.

IRVING

Goodnight, Minnie.

(MINNIE unlocks her door and goes inside. PETUNIA jumps back up onto the porch railing and poses regally. IRVING walks over to the

brick divider and gives PETUNIA playful wink.)

IRVING

(Whispers)

That was amazing. You saved the day, little lady. You're like a secret agent. I knew you cared about her.

(PETUNIA turns her back to IRVING and blinks slowly, completely dismissing him.)

IRVING

(Chuckles)

Yep. A highly classified, elite operative.

(He sits back down on his swing and gently strokes DOOGAN'S ears.)

IRVING

We're making progress, Doogan boy. She said "thanks." That's a whole syllable more than last month. September is fleeting, but we've got time.

(He takes a slow sip of his cider as the lights fade.)

SCENE 4: OCTOBER

(AT RISE: A carved Jack-o'-Lantern sits on IRVING'S rolling cart. It's lit from within by a flickering candle.)

(IRVING steps out of his screen door, wearing a thick knit sweater. He holds a plastic bowl filled with Halloween candy and sets it down next to the pumpkin. He adjusts the Jack-o'-Lantern so its toothy grin faces the street, smiles to himself, and goes back inside. Across the brick divider, MINNIE comes out onto her porch, wrapped in a dark shawl. She hangs a cardboard sign over her railing that says "NO CANDY" in handwritten block letters and retreats back inside. Down in the yard, DOOGAN sits at the bottom of IRVING'S steps, staring intensely at the glowing Jack-o'-Lantern, his tail between his legs. PETUNIA stands near the brick divider, her tail twitching with cautious curiosity.)

DOOGAN

(Terrified)

Petunia... look at it. The orange squash has grown a face. And it's glowing. From the inside! Do you think it's a ghost? What if it's a dog eating ghost?

PETUNIA

(Scoffs)

Don't be ridiculous. It's just a dead vegetable with a candle shoved up its butt. He does this every October. It's part of the ritual.

DOOGAN

What ritual? The ritual of scaring me out of my fur? My tail is tucked so far between my legs it's practically tickling my ribs.

PETUNIA

Tonight is the night of the Great Tiny Invaders.

DOOGAN

(Gasps)

The what?!

PETUNIA

For some bizarre reason, the humans let their offspring dress up like monsters, zombies, and giant bumblebees. They march up the sidewalk in packs, stomp onto the porch, and shout at the door.

DOOGAN

They shout?! What do they shout? Do they want to fight? Because I'm a lover, not a fighter! If a giant bumblebee comes for me, I'm going to cry!

PETUNIA

They shout "Trick or Treat." And then... this is the most humiliating part... the humans just give them things. Not real food, mind you. No fish. Just little wrappers full of sugar. It's a total breakdown of societal order.

DOOGAN

Wait... the strangers come onto the porch?

PETUNIA

Oh, yes. Last year, a small human dressed as a skeleton pulled my tail. The indignity! I had to hiss at him until his mother dragged him away. It was a harrowing experience.

DOOGAN

(Paces nervously in a small circle)

Oh boy. Oh boy. This is spooky. This is very spooky. Why would Irving want monsters on the porch? He's such a nice man! Why invite the danger?

PETUNIA

Because Irving likes the noise. He likes the smiles. Minnie, on the other hand, has implemented standard defence protocols. No light. No sugar. And a sign of ultimate rejection. Nobody is crossing our border tonight.

DOOGAN

But... aren't you guys going to be lonely over there in the dark?

PETUNIA

It's peaceful. The monsters leave us alone.

DOOGAN

But the monsters aren't real, right? You said they're just tiny humans. And tiny humans usually smell like peanut butter and dirt. I love peanut butter and really really really really really love dirt!

PETUNIA

They're unpredictable, chaotic, and they move too fast. It's unnatural.

(DOOGAN sits and looks up at PETUNIA thoughtfully.)

DOOGAN

You know, Irving told me that October is when the veil gets thin. I don't know what a veil is, but he said it's when the people we miss feel a little closer. He said tonight is for remembering.

PETUNIA

(Leans in)

Remembering... ?

DOOGAN

His Wanda. Maybe he lights the candle so she can find her way back to the porch. He always wishes for a minute with Wanda. I don't know what a minute is either, but it sounds nice.

PETUNIA

(Softly)

The man in the picture... Minnie told him tonight that she misses the days when they used to run out of chocolate bars. She told him that the house is too quiet now.

(DOOGAN steps onto the first step of MINNIE'S porch.)

DOOGAN

Then why did she put up the "NO CANDY" sign? Why stay in the dark?

PETUNIA

(Hisses)

Get your paws off our steps. She stays in the dark because opening the door to happy children is a reminder that her life stopped being happy a long time ago. It hurts, you dope.

DOOGAN

Oh. I don't like when her heart hurts. I wish I could give her my hedgehog.

PETUNIA

Your hedgehog smells like drool.

(Suddenly, DOOGAN gasps and swivels his head

toward the sidewalk. He pants wildly and points forward.)

DOOGAN

They're coming! The peanut butter monsters are on the street!

PETUNIA

Stand your ground, canine! Protect your pumpkin!

(PETUNIA leaps down from the porch and stands guard in front of the steps. DOOGAN scrambles up IRVING'S steps and puffs out his chest, trembling.)

DOOGAN

I'm ready! I'll protect the candy! I'll protect the porch!

PETUNIA

Just don't let them smell your fear. That's how the Twizzlers win.

(PETUNIA hisses and DOOGAN whines. They both put up their paws in fight mode as the lights fade.)

SCENE 5: NOVEMBER

(AT RISE: The chrysanthemums on IRVING'S railing are gone. In fact, all of his flower pots are gone. Instead, there's a colorful plastic toy truck in the front yard. MINNIE'S "NO CANDY" sign is gone, too.)

(DOOGAN is asleep, snoring loudly with his chin resting on the toy truck. On MINNIE'S porch, PETUNIA is curled into a tight, miserable ball on the lawn chair. The screen doors on both porches open simultaneously. IRVING steps out, wearing a thick wool cardigan and a long scarf. He looks tired but has a wide, radiant smile on his face. MINNIE steps out wearing a heavy winter coat, a scowl practically frozen onto her face.)

IRVING

Whew! Afternoon, Minnie! Quiet out here now, isn't it? Like the calm after a storm.

MINNIE

"Quiet" is not the word I'd use. "Eerily silent because the circus finally packed up its tents and left town" is more accurate.

IRVING

(Laughs)

Oh, come on now. They weren't that bad. Grand kids take a lot of energy, not to mention the great grands! Eight of them running around. I think little Andy spent the whole weekend trying to teach Doogan how to sit. Neither of them learned a thing, but they had a grand time.

MINNIE

It was a public nuisance, is what it was. For forty-eight hours straight, your house sounded like a bowling alley inside a daycare center. My floorboards never stopped vibrating. Shrieking! Giggling! I couldn't hear myself think.

IRVING

It's the sound of life, Minnie.

MINNIE

It's the sound of a migraine. Some of us value our peace and quiet.

IRVING

There's a difference between peace and quiet. Quiet is the absence of noise. Peace is something else entirely. Didn't you hear them playing tag in the yard yesterday morning? Little Lettie kept calling you the "Mystery Lady in the Window." She wanted to leave a drawing of a rainbow on your porch, but I told her to respect your space.

MINNIE

Good. I don't want any sticky finger paintings on my property. And I don't need children staring at my window like I'm some kind of exhibit at the zoo.

IRVING

She didn't mean anything by it. She just noticed the house looked a little lonely. Children can see right through walls, you know. They know when a place needs some life.

MINNIE

My house doesn't need life! My house is exactly the way I want it. It's consistent. It doesn't leave, it doesn't grow up, and it doesn't move clear across the country like your ungrateful flock is about to do.

IRVING

Yes, they're driving back to the airport right now. And you're right, the house is going to feel very empty in about ten minutes. The silence hits you like a cold draft under the door.

MINNIE

Then why do you do it? Why invite them in to tear the place apart, just to watch them pack up and leave you behind? You're setting yourself up to miss them.

IRVING

Because missing them means I have them to miss. The memory of that noise keeps me warm all through the winter. If I shut the door, I'm just letting winter win.

MINNIE

Winter always wins. Look around you. Everything dies eventually.

IRVING

But it comes back in the spring.

MINNIE

Does it, though?

IRVING

Every single time.

(MINNIE pauses, her shoulders loosening. She looks over at the toy truck. For a second, it appears that she wants to say something kind, but she stops herself and her shoulders stiffen once more. She points at the toy truck.)

MINNIE

Pick up your grandkids' trash. It's making the neighborhood look untidy.

(She slips inside, closing her door with a soft click. IRVING walks down the steps toward DOOGAN and the toy truck. DOOGAN lifts his head and nudges the truck toward IRVING. IRVING pats DOOGAN on the head as he picks up the truck.)

IRVING

Pretty cold out, boy. Come inside.

(IRVING and DOOGAN walk up the steps together and go inside. PETUNIA leaps down from the lawn chair and peeks over at IRVING'S porch. She lets out a quiet whimper as the lights fade.)

SCENE 6: DECEMBER

(AT RISE: A Christmas wreath with colorful twinkle lights has appeared on IRVING'S door.)

(DOOGAN slowly sneaks out of IRVING'S door, hindquarters first. He makes careful, stealthy movements. In his mouth, he's carefully holding a beautifully wrapped Christmas gift by its shiny green ribbon. The package is wrapped in red and white striped paper. He tiptoes down the steps and across the yard, looks around nervously, then climbs up MINNIE'S steps. He gently lowers his head and drops the gift right in front of her door. PETUNIA suddenly materializes from the shadows. Her ears are flat, her tail twitches violently, and she looks entirely ready to file a police report. She hisses. DOOGAN leaps several feet into the air.)

PETUNIA

Halt! Drop the contraband and step away from the perimeter!

DOOGAN

Whoa! Petunia! You scared the kibble right out of me!

PETUNIA

What on earth do you think you're doing?

DOOGAN

I'm on a mission. A top secret holiday operation.

(PETUNIA marches over to the gift and sniffs it suspiciously.)

PETUNIA

This smells like pine needles, Scotch tape, and sugar cookies. Explain yourself, Doogan. Why are you littering on our porch?

(DOOGAN'S tail wags so aggressively that it knocks PETUNIA over.)

DOOGAN

It's not litter, it's a present! Irving wrapped it! I watched him do it with his human paws. He used the shiny paper that makes the crinkle sound. It's a gift for Minnie!

PETUNIA

(Horrified)

A gift?! Are you insane? If Minnie finds this on her porch, she'll flip! She doesn't do gifts.

DOOGAN

But it's Christmas! Irving said nobody should have an empty porch at Christmas. He was sitting by his tree, looking over at your dark windows, and he got that old rain smell again. Then he packed up this box, wrote her name on it, and left it by the front door. He was gonna bring it over tomorrow, but I figured, why wait?! The present is now!

PETUNIA

Intercepting mail is a federal offence. And if this is a fruitcake, I'll personally shred your hedgehog.

DOOGAN

I don't know what's inside! But as Irving wrapped it, he whispered, "I hope this makes you smile, Minnie."

PETUNIA

Minnie doesn't smile in December. She spends the whole month looking at the calendar, just waiting for January so she can pretend the holidays never happened.

DOOGAN

Why? Holidays are great! There's turkey to eat! And wrapping paper to rip! And people singing loudly in the streets!

PETUNIA

Because, you dope, holidays are when you're supposed to be with the people you love. And when your person is gone, the pretty lights just make the dark corners look even darker. She told the man in the picture tonight that she remembers the Christmas they got engaged. She cried so hard she forgot to give me my evening treat.

DOOGAN

See? That's why she needs the present. Irving wants to help light up her dark corners. He keeps his twinkle lights on because Wanda loved the color. He's trying to share the light.

PETUNIA

It's a terrible plan. She's going to open the door tomorrow morning, see this, and immediately accuse Irving of stalking.

DOOGAN

Not if she thinks it fell from the sky! Or what if she thinks you got it for her?

PETUNIA

I'm a cat, Doofus. I don't have opposable thumbs to operate the tape dispenser.

DOOGAN

Please? If she gets mad, you can blame it on the golden idiot. I don't mind. I have a very thick skull.

PETUNIA

Well, I can't argue with that.

(She sighs heavily, then carefully steps over the box.)

PETUNIA

Fine. It stays. But if she throws it in the trash, I'm not retrieving it for you.

(DOOGAN gets so excited that his tail starts going again and he runs in crazy circles around PETUNIA.)

DOOGAN

She won't! She won't! I know she won't! Oh, look at your porch now, Petunia! With the red box! And the green ribbon! It looks almost decorated! Oh, the joy! I love the joy! Don't you love the joy?! Joy! Joy! Joy!

(He bursts into song.)

DOOGAN

Joy to the world!

(PETUNIA hisses loudly, cutting him off.)

PETUNIA

Don't push your luck. Go back to your twinkle lights before I swipe that goofy grin off your stupid face with my claws. Now, *that* would bring me joy.

(DOOGAN trots back to his porch, beaming with pride.)

DOOGAN

Goodnight, Petunia! Merry Christmas!

(He scratches at the screen door. IRVING appears and lets him in. PETUNIA eyes the green ribbon. She carefully bats at it with her paw. Then again. Then again. Then again. Each time, a little more playfully. She finally can't resist any longer and pulls at the ribbon. The bow falls apart and she gasps. She looks around to make sure nobody is watching.)

PETUNIA

(Whispers)

Merry Christmas. To me!

(She eagerly rips into the paper as the lights fade.)

SCENE 7: JANUARY

(AT RISE: The Christmas wreath on IRVING'S door is gone and a snow shovel leans on his railing.)

(DOOGAN is on the inside of the screen door, his face pressed against the mesh, looking longingly at the frozen yard. PETUNIA is nowhere to be seen. MINNIE steps out of her door, bundled up like an arctic explorer in a heavy coat, thick scarf, and mittens. She carries her usual cup of coffee. Despite the freezing temperature, her posture is upright, and she looks strangely serene. She takes a deep breath of freezing air. IRVING nudges DOOGAN out of the way and opens his door. He steps out, rubbing his hands together to stay warm)

IRVING

(Teeth chattering)

M-m-Minnie! M-m-Morning! Good heavens, it's colder than a polar bear's toenails out here. What are you doing on the porch? You'll freeze your coffee solid!

MINNIE

It's magnificent, Irving. Absolutely magnificent.

IRVING

Magnificent? It's well below zero, Minnie. My porch thermometer just threw its hands up and quit.

MINNIE

Exactly. January is the only sensible month of the entire year. The holidays are dead and buried. The forced cheer is over. No more jingle bells, no more bright colors, and best of all, people finally go into hiding. The world is quiet, cold, and entirely unbothered. It's perfect.

IRVING

(Laughs)

Only you could find joy in a deep freeze. I find January a bit grey. The house feels so big after the tree comes down. In fact, I just started a jigsaw puzzle on my card table. It's a picture of the Greek Isles. Lots of blue sky. Very tricky.

MINNIE

Sounds like a colossal waste of time.

IRVING

Oh, it passes the hours. I was actually thinking, it's too cold for the swing, but my living room is nice and warm. I've got a fresh pot of coffee, and I could use a second pair of eyes to help me find the edge pieces. What do you say, Minnie? Come on inside and help me with the sky.

MINNIE

I don't do puzzles, Irving. And I certainly don't go into other people's houses. I told you, January is my quiet time. I don't need any distractions. Especially not this week.

IRVING

This week? What's special about this week?

MINNIE

(Waves her hand dismissively)

Nothing. Just the calendar reset. Another year older, another year closer to the finish line. I turned eighty-four on New Year's Day and I --

(She freezes mid-sentence and her eyes widen. She realizes what she just let slip, and her jaw drops in horror. IRVING'S eyes light up with genuine joy.)

IRVING

Your birthday? Minnie! Your birthday is January first? Why, that's wonderful! Eighty-four! You're a New Year's baby!

MINNIE

Confound it! Forget I said that! Erase it from your brain!

IRVING

Forget it? How can I forget a milestone like that? Happy belated birthday, neighbor! Why didn't you say anything? All these years! We could have had a toast! Forget the coffee. I have a nice bottle of champagne inside!

MINNIE

I don't want your champagne, I don't want your congratulations, and I don't want you to know! I'm an idiot. A loose lipped, blabbing old fool.

IRVING

(Softly)

Minnie, hey... calm down. It's just a birthday. It's a beautiful thing to celebrate another year on this big blue marble. Why are you so angry for sharing a piece of your life?

MINNIE

Because when you share things, people expect things. They start asking how you're doing, and they start bringing over red and white boxes with green ribbon!

(DOOGAN howls proudly through the door.)

MINNIE

I don't want anyone caring about me, do you understand? Alex was the only one allowed to care. And when he left, he took my birthday with him. January first used to be our special day. Now it's just another day. So keep your "Happy Birthdays" to yourself. I don't want them.

IRVING

I hear you, Minnie. I do. But Alex loved you. And I bet a man who loved you that much wouldn't want your birthday to be just another day. He'd want someone to be glad you're still here. I know Wanda would want that for me.

MINNIE

Well, you aren't Alex.

IRVING

No. I'm just Irving. The guy next door who's missing a lot of edge pieces.

(MINNIE looks at him for a long beat. The anger slowly drains out of her, leaving her cold and tired. She pulls her coat tighter around herself.)

MINNIE

I'm going inside. It's too cold out here.

IRVING

Keep warm, Minnie. Happy birthday.

(MINNIE opens her door and slips inside, closing it quietly behind her. IRVING stands on his porch, looking at the winter sky. He smiles a determined, warm smile, then turns and goes back inside.)

IRVING

Come on, boy. Let's turn up the heat.

(The lights fade.)

SCENE 8: FEBRUARY

(AT RISE: A strand of pink wooden hearts are draped from IRVING'S railing.)

(PETUNIA sits on the top step of MINNIE'S porch, curled tightly into herself. Her fur is slightly unkempt and she doesn't look aloof or arrogant today. She looks tired and stressed. DOOGAN comes bursting out of IRVING'S door, wearing a ridiculous, oversized red felt collar with pink hearts and lace trim. He vibrates with energy, his tail swinging so hard that his entire back half shakes. He leaps off his porch, boundaries completely forgotten, and jumps onto MINNIE'S steps, right over PETUNIA.)

DOOGAN

Petunia! Petunia! Petunia! Happy love day! Happy red hearts and flower scented love day! L-O-V-E! Love! D-A-Y! Day! I've been waiting to tell you this ever since my eyes opened this morning!

PETUNIA

(Hisses)

Get back! Don't cross that line! I'm absolutely, categorically, one hundred percent not in the mood for your mania today!

(DOOGAN slowly backs down the steps, still panting and still happy.)

DOOGAN

But it's February! Irving says today is the day where you have to tell the people you love that you love them, over and over, until their ears fall off! And guess what? I love you! I love you so much! I love your pointy ears! I love your mean little face! I love your cute little hiss! It's about the cutest little hiss in the whole wide world and I love it, I love it, I love it!

PETUNIA

Stop! Stop saying that word! It's disgusting, it's noisy, and it's inappropriate! Do you even know what that word means? "Love." What is it?

(DOOGAN blinks, his ears flopping down. He tilts his head entirely sideways, thinking deeply.)

DOOGAN

Uh... well. Uh... hmm. It's... it's when I look at you and my stomach feels like I swallowed a grasshopper. It's when I see a piece of bacon and the drooling starts. And it's the thing that makes my tail hit the furniture.

PETUNIA

Those are physical symptoms of hyperactivity, you dolt. That's not a definition. I'm asking you strictly: what is it?

DOOGAN

I... I don't actually know. I don't speak human. I just hear Irving say it to me, and he says it to the picture of Wanda, and he says it when he looks over at your porch. I just thought it was a sound you make when you feel warm inside. Do you know what it means?

PETUNIA

(Looks away)

No. I don't. Humans throw it around like table scraps. But Minnie stays up at night and whispers it to a picture in a wooden frame. If it's so wonderful, why does it make her cry?

DOOGAN

We have to get to the bottom of this! If we can figure out what this "love" is all about, maybe we can use it to fix them!

(PETUNIA steps forward and looks into the distance, thoughtfully.)

PETUNIA

I think... maybe love means the same thing as time.

DOOGAN

What's time?

PETUNIA

Exactly. You don't have it. For you, everything is just now. But for Minnie, time is this thing that stretches on forever and ever.

DOOGAN

So you think love, whatever that is, is the same thing as time, whatever that is?

PETUNIA

And when you love someone who isn't here, time is the thing that separates you.

DOOGAN

(Blown away)

Whoa!

PETUNIA

You agree with me?

DOOGAN

(Eyes wide, not blinking)

I have no idea what you're talking about. My brain is mostly pictures of squirrels and tennis balls. And sometimes squirrels chasing tennis balls. But mostly tennis balls.

PETUNIA

It's complicated for me, too. So just go away. Please.

(Instead of going away, DOOGAN takes one step up.)

DOOGAN

Hey. Your ears are down. And your fur smells... different. It smells. You didn't groom your paws today. What's wrong?

PETUNIA

Nothing is wrong. Cats don't have "things wrong." We're perfect specimens.

DOOGAN

You're shaking. And it's not from the freeze. I know the freeze shake, it's bouncy. This is the scary shake. Is Minnie mad again?

PETUNIA

No. She's not mad. I wish she were mad. I wish she were throwing shoes at the wall or yelling at Irving to turn his music down. She's not doing anything.

(DOOGAN takes another step up.)

DOOGAN

Is she having a quiet moment?

PETUNIA

She's having all the moments. She's been in the big bed for days. She only gets up to give me my food, and then she goes right back under the blankets. She doesn't even turn the television on to watch Jeopardy. She just sleeps. And when she's awake, she holds the picture of the man and stares at the ceiling.

DOOGAN

Maybe she's just tired? Old knees get tired in February. Irving's knees sound like bubble wrap when it snows.

PETUNIA

No. It's not her knees. It's her soul. She told the picture last night that she's tired of waiting. She told him she wants to come home.

DOOGAN

But her home is here. With the cracked steps. And the taped door. And you.

PETUNIA

She's giving up, Doogan. The winter is winning and I don't know how to stop it. I scratched at her blankets, I sat on her chest, I purred right into her ear until my throat ached. But she just patted my head and said, "You'll be okay, Petunia. Irving will look after you."

DOOGAN

(Gasps softly)

She said Irving?

PETUNIA

I'm terrified.

(Without a single drop of his usual dopiness, DOOGAN climbs the final step. He doesn't bounce, he doesn't bark. He walks right up to PETUNIA, lowers his head, and presses it gently into her lap.)

PETUNIA

Wait... what are you doing? I told you to get off my porch.

DOOGAN

(Closes his eyes)

Irving says when the dark gets too heavy, you aren't supposed to carry it by yourself. You're supposed to share it. I'm big, Petunia. I've got lots of fur. Let me hold some of the dark for you.

(PETUNIA looks at him. She looks back at her dark house. Slowly, deliberately, she puts her paw on his golden fur. She closes her eyes and lets out a long, shaky breath.)

PETUNIA

(Whispers)

Your collar is ridiculous.

DOOGAN

(Laughs)

I know. Irving made it. He says it's full of love. Whatever that means.

PETUNIA

Maybe it just means this.

DOOGAN

Maybe.

PETUNIA

Stay with me a minute.

DOOGAN

I will. Whatever that means.

PETUNIA

Then we go back to being mortal enemies.

DOOGAN

Deal.

(PETUNIA rests her head on DOOGAN as the
lights fade.)

END OF PREVIEW

For a complete script, or to apply for production rights:
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