

The Gift

by
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The Gift

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Characters:

Jim

Joe

Assistant

Police officers

Lawyer

Judge

Jury

Optional chorus (in the public gallery of the courtroom)

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The Gift

Act One: The Gift Shop

(Jim, the customer, enters a shop which is decorated with colourful gift wrapped items on the shelves, looks around but is soon looking bewildered. A shop assistant, Janice, who wears a prominent name tag, looks on pleasantly optimistic.)

Assistant: (Cheerfully) Welcome to The Gift Shop. May I help you, sir?

Jim: I'm just looking around thanks. Janice, is it? On your name tag?

Assistant: Yes, and you're...

Jim: Jim. Just call me Jim.

Assistant: Sure, Jim. If you need any help I'm only too glad to be of assistance. (Looks on with interest.)

Jim: Thanks.

(Jim looks around the shelves, picks up objects, listens, smells, shakes a few and returns them to the shelves. Eventually but reluctantly decides to ask for help.)

Jim: I couldn't help noticing that all of your merchandise is already gift wrapped.

Assistant: Yes, that's right. We gift wrap free of charge.

Jim: That's very good but why do you do that?

Assistant: It saves the customer all that trouble, you know, clumsy fingers, not able to find the sticky tape or scissors. Some things are just plain hard to wrap, aren't they?

Jim: Yes, but...

Assistant: (Interrupting) So, we wrap the gifts for you.

Jim: That's a very generous idea.

Assistant: It's actually our company policy.

Jim: Well, how can I choose a gift?

Assistant: Why, that's easy. This is a gift shop. Everything we sell can be a gift for that special person or for that special occasion. Did I tell you that we gift wrap free of charge?

Jim: (Irritated) Yes, you made that perfectly clear.

Assistant: We wrap everything. It's company policy.

Jim: Look, I'm after a gift for a friend of mine.

Assistant: (Proudly) We have an enormous range of gifts here. All wrapped for your convenience. May I ask what kind of gift you are looking for?

Jim: I'm looking for a gift that will, you know, surprise my friend.

Assistant: We have a shop full of gifts that will surprise, all wrapped for your convenience.

Jim: How do I know what I'm buying if I can't see what I'm buying.

Assistant: Didn't you say you wanted to buy a gift for your friend? A surprise gift?

Jim: Yes, but ...

Assistant: Well, we are a gift shop full of surprises, already gift wrapped for your convenience.

Jim: How do I buy the right kind of gift for my friend if I don't know what it is?

Assistant: Why do you want to know that for?

Jim: So that I can choose the gift that I like for them.

Assistant: Don't you think that's a bit selfish?

Jim: (Very surprised, shocked) I beg your pardon?

Assistant: When you buy a gift for someone, who cares what it is? It only concerns the person opening it. It's really nobody else's business, is it?

Jim: What? You mean, when I give a gift to someone it's no longer my business?

(Indignant) That's ridiculous.

Assistant: Not really. Once you give a gift to that special person, that gift becomes their property, doesn't it?

Jim: (Agreeable) Yes, I suppose you're right.

Assistant: They get to decide whether to keep it, throw it away or give to somebody else, don't they?

Jim: Yes, of course.

Assistant: (Counts using fingers) So, will that be a large gift, small gift, soft gift, hard gift, light gift, heavy gift, regular-shaped gift, irregular-shaped gift, “I-think-I-know-what-this-is” gift, “what-is-this?” gift, flat gift, bumpy gift, squeaky gift, smelly gift, tasty gift or what?

Jim: I don’t really know. I only need a surprise gift, that’s all.

Assistant: I think I know just the thing. Take a look at that. (Indicating a wrapped gift with a ribbon).

Jim: What is it?

Assistant: It’s a surprise.

Jim: What kind of surprise?

Assistant: A surprise gift for your friend.

Jim: What’s in it, I mean?

Assistant: (Mischievous) Oh, I can’t tell you that.

Jim: Why not?

Assistant: If I told you that it wouldn’t be a surprise, would it?

Jim: I guess not.

Assistant: And besides, it’s none of your business, is it?

Jim: No, I forgot.

Assistant: (Speaks quickly not allowing the customer to change their mind) So, will that be cash or on a card? Perhaps you might like the “half-off-the-second-purchase” offer. Do you have someone else in mind? We gift wrap free of charge for your convenience, remember.

(Janice appears to process the purchase after Jim offers his card.)

Jim: Do you sell cards?

Assistant: No but you could try The Card Shop next door. They’re pre-written and already sealed for your convenience.

Jim: (Mutters to himself) That sounds familiar. How do I give this gift to my friend when I don’t know what’s inside?

Assistant: That’s easy. Just say that you knew it was their birthday and that you wanted to surprise them by giving them a gift. Just remind them not to open it so they don’t ruin the surprise.

Jim: Won’t they want to know what’s inside?

Assistant: That’s why it’s gift wrapped, so they’ll see it’s a surprise. I’m sure you’ll get the hang of it. Practise it a couple of times in front of the mirror at home.

Jim: OK. I’ll give it go.

Assistant: There you are, Jim. Come again some time soon. We gift wrap for your convenience, you know.

Jim: Yes, I know. Thanks. Bye.

(The customer leaves slightly cautiously, thinking they may have been ripped off. The shop assistant smiles confidently.)

Act Two: The Surprise

(Jim meets his friend, Joe. Jim is carrying a gift-wrapped parcel which he conceals behind his back when he sees Joe approaching.)

Jim: (Cheerfully offering a gift) Happy Birthday, Joe! I got you a gift.

Joe: (Surprised) Why, thank you, Jim. How nice of you!

Jim: (Proudly) I chose it myself, but don’t open it.

Joe: (Uncertain) Why not? It’s a gift, isn’t it?

Jim: (Assertive) Yes, that’s right. It’s a gift but don’t open it.

Joe: (Insistent) Why not? It’s my birthday!

Jim: (Explanatory) That’s why I gave you the gift.

Joe: (Inquisitively shakes it) What’s in it?

Jim: (Mischievously) It’s a surprise.

Joe: (Decisive) If it’s a surprise then I should open it.

Jim: (Pleading) But then it won’t be a surprise, would it?

Joe: (Insistently) But it’s a gift. You gave it to me.

Jim: (Proud) That’s right. It’s your birthday. I thought I’d surprise you.

Joe: (Questioning) So you gave me this gift. (Sniffs it)

Jim: (Urgent) That's right. But don't open it. It's a surprise.

Joe: (Assertive) Wait a minute. Wait just a minute. Let's see if I've got this straight. It's my birthday so you want to surprise me.

Jim: That's right.

Joe: You want to surprise me by giving me this gift.

Jim: You got it!

Joe: It's my gift?

Jim: Absolutely! It's all yours.

Joe: (Hand & finger gestures indicating) It's my gift, but I can't open it because then it won't be a surprise.

Jim: That's right. It's a gift.

Joe: (Increasingly bewildered) If it's a gift, and I can't open it because it's a surprise, then what am I supposed to do with it?

Jim: (Magnanimously) It's a gift! Give it to someone who'll like something like that.

Joe: Something like what?

Jim: A surprise, silly.

Joe: What surprise?

Jim: A surprise gift for their birthday! They'll think you're very generous.

Joe: OK. When is it your birthday?

Jim: The day after tomorrow, why?

Joe: Happy birthday. Here's a gift.

Jim: Why, thank you. What's in it?

Joe: It's a surprise, but don't open it.

(Joe and Jim part company to end the scene.)

Act 3: The Return Of The Gift

(A few boxes of varying sizes and shapes wrapped in bright paper with ribbons and bows on shelves behind shop assistant. There is a small picture frame on the counter with very fine writing below a heading entitled "Returns Policy". Jim enters the gift shop with a gift-wrapped object and is greeted by a shop assistant.)

Assistant: Hello, may I help you with anything?

Jim: Yes please, Janice. I want to return this gift. If you remember I bought it the day before yesterday for a friend. I wanted to give them a gift as a surprise for their birthday.

Assistant: I'm sorry. You must have me confused with someone else. My name is Mandy. (Shows her name tag) I don't recall seeing you in this shop before.

Jim: Oh, come on Janice. It's me, Jim, you know, I bought this gift from here just the other day. You even helped me choose it.

Assistant: I'm sorry Jim, if that's your name, but I've always worked here. I'm here every day. Let me assure you there is no Janice working here. Never was.

Jim: But you must be Janice. She looks exactly like you – her I mean. Same hair, height, face, make up, (Leans forward to sniff) and perfume. Chanelle Number Five, I believe.

Assistant: Now you're being silly.

Jim: Look, whoever you are, it doesn't really matter but I've come to return this gift. You see, I tried to give it as a surprise gift to my good friend, Joe, but he gave it back to me.

Assistant: I'm only too glad to be of assistance but I'm sorry. This is a gift shop, not a returns shop. (Indicating the Returns Policy picture frame) As you can see from our sign, if you study the fine print it says that we can *exchange the gift* but not *return it*. Know what I mean?

Jim: (Distracted) It really is fine print. Is that Chinese? I can see Italian, German, Spanish, French... Oh, here it is. English, just below... Wingdings! What's Wingdings doing in this?

Assistant: That's for the computer people. They usually like a challenge.

Jim: I think I'll need a magnifying glass to read that. What's it say, "The party of the first part agrees to exchange for the party of the second part...?"

Assistant: I can't help you with that other than to direct you to one of the shelves to buy a magnifying lens. It is, of course, gift wrapped for your convenience as are all of our gifts.

Jim: Never mind. Look. I bought the gift from your shop based on, well, let's just say, *advice* that it would be a surprise to my friend on their birthday. I even practised saying it in front of the mirror.

Assistant: That's between you and your friend, sir. If they don't like it, well, that can happen to anyone. As everybody knows, once you give them the gift, it's none of your business whether they like it or not.

Jim: (**Accusingly**) Hey, wait a minute. Janice said that. You really are Janice aren't you?

Assistant: Excuse me sir, but we are going off the track again. Perhaps they didn't like it. Perhaps you caught them by surprise and they felt embarrassed.

Jim: But they did like it. They were really surprised.

Assistant: Well, how come you're returning it?

Jim: It got complicated. They asked me what was inside the gift. I didn't know so I said it was a surprise but not to open it because then it wouldn't be a surprise.

Assistant: What's wrong with that? It seems perfectly logical to me. So what happened next?

Jim: They asked me when my birthday was. I told them that it was to be today so they said Happy Birthday and gave me the gift back.

Assistant: Why did they do that for?

Jim: Well, I asked them what was in it and they said it was a surprise but not to open it because then it would not be a surprise. I suppose they thought they were being generous.

Assistant: When they gave you the gift they absolved themselves of any responsibility because whether or not you liked the gift, it was none of their business, was it?

Jim: There you go again. Janice said that the other day.

Assistant: Remember I said *everybody* knows that.

Jim: So, what am I to do with a second-hand gift that hasn't been opened by two people who didn't know what was inside?

Assistant: As far as The Gift Shop is concerned we can exchange it but can't refund your purchase price because we consider the gift to be used. I hope you understand our policy. After all, we do gift wrap free of charge.

Jim: Janice made that abundantly clear a couple of days ago. Where do the gifts come from in the first place before you put them on the shelves in your shop?

Assistant: We have a hi-tech fully computerised factory where robots package everything. They pack the boxes and gift wrap everything before we put them on the shelves. We have a great range.

Jim: So that explains how nobody knows what is inside the gift boxes. Just how many customers have returned gifts to your shop?

Assistant: Why, you're our first one. We have had a one hundred percent customer satisfaction record up till now. I'm sure we can work something out.

Jim: But how do I know what I'm buying if I can't see what I'm buying.

Assistant: Didn't you say you wanted to buy a gift for your friend? A surprise gift?

Jim: Yes, but ...

Assistant: Well, we are a gift shop full of surprises, already gift wrapped for your convenience.

Jim: How do I buy the right kind of gift for my friend if I don't know what it is?

Assistant: Why do you want to know that for?

Jim: So that I can choose the gift that I like for them.

Assistant: I think we've been over this before.

Jim: I beg your pardon?

Assistant: When you buy a gift for someone, who cares what it is? It only concerns the person opening it. It's nobody else's business, is it?

Jim: But that's the reason why I came back with the gift. My friend didn't open it. They just gave it back to me as a gift. They wanted me to be surprised by it just as much as I wanted them to be surprised.

Assistant: Once you give a gift to that special person, that gift becomes their property, doesn't it?

Jim: Yes, I suppose you're *both* right.

Assistant: Pardon?

Jim: Janice and you. You both said the same thing.

Assistant: Whatever. Getting back to your friend who really is the most important person here, right? They get to decide whether to keep it, throw it away or give to somebody else, don't they?

Jim: **(Accepting)** Yes, of course.

Assistant: Well, your friend decided out of the goodness of their heart to honour you with a gift for your birthday.

Jim: So you're saying I should keep the gift because it's a surprise from my friend?

Assistant: That's right.

Jim: It's a surprise gift which I shouldn't open because then it wouldn't be a surprise any more.

Assistant: It's a surprise.

Jim: What kind of surprise?

Assistant: A surprise gift from your friend.

Jim: What's in it, I mean?

Assistant: I can't tell you that.

Jim: Why not?

Assistant: If I told you that it wouldn't be a surprise, would it?

Jim: I guess not.

Assistant: And besides, it's none of my business because that's between you and your friend isn't it?

Jim: Of course, I forgot.

Assistant: So, happy birthday. Enjoy your gift but don't open it!

Jim: Thanks. By the way, I bought one of those cards from The Card Shop next door. I can't give myself a card, can I? Do you think they will refund me the cost of the card?

Assistant: You might have to look at their exchange policy. Did you give your friend the card at the same time you gave them the gift?

Jim: Yes, of course I did.

Assistant: I think you'll find that the card and the gift arrangements will be the same. I'm so glad I was of some assistance. Come again some time. Remember, we gift wrap for your convenience.

Jim: Thanks Janice-Mandy-Janice whoever you are.
(Jim collects his gift and card and leaves the shop. The Janice smiles confidently as he leaves.)

Act 4: The Attack On The Gift Shop

(Mimed. Jim acts alone. He creeps silently through darkened passageways to The Gift Shop front door. He carries a large object which he uses to attach the door, breaks through. At this point appropriate music is played– suggest a Strauss waltz – as he proceeds to destroy the interior to the beat of the music in a semi-dance style. He does not open any gifts but is merely intent upon destroying the shop. He is eventually apprehended by two police officers who cart him away. Duration should be approximately ninety seconds, Director's discretion.)

Act 5: The End Of The Gift

(Jim, the defendant and a lawyer appear in a court room. Jim sits on a chair positioned higher than the lawyer. Other participants provide the appearance of the courtroom. The scene opens towards the end of the trial.)

Lawyer: **(Walking to and fro)** So, could you tell the jury what you did next?

Jim: I went back to the shop with a sledge hammer.

Lawyer: The shop you refer to is The Gift Shop? Is that correct?

Jim: Yes, that's correct.

Lawyer: What were your intentions at the time? Do you recall how you felt?

Jim: **(With feeling)** Yes, I recall the feeling. I felt ripped off. I was so angry. I had trusted the shop, the shop assistants who served me and the laws of the land to protect me from bad consumer practices. I wanted to get even. Get even *real* bad.

Lawyer: So, when you approached The Gift Shop you raised your sledge hammer and began striking the door, the windows and then the shelves, counter and gifts as well. Is that correct?

Jim: Yes. That is correct.

Lawyer: At any stage did you think that what you were about to do was wrong?

Jim: Yes, I knew it was wrong but what else could I do?

Lawyer: Tell the court how and why your destruction of The Gift Shop began.

Jim: Some time ago I went to The Gift Shop at the shopping centre to buy a gift for a friend's birthday. All of the gifts were already wrapped on the shelves so you couldn't tell what you were buying.

Lawyer: You had to trust them, did you?

Jim: Yes, I trusted them as you might trust a restaurant that serves food to you. You trust that the food is fresh, clean and good for you.

Lawyer: I see. Go on.

Jim: I chose a gift which, I was advised by Janice, the shop assistant, would surprise my friend.

Lawyer: Were there any special instructions given to you by the shop assistant?

Jim: Yes, she said that I should tell my friend that it was a surprise gift for their birthday but not to open it because then it wouldn't be a surprise.

Lawyer: What was so unusual about that?

Jim: If you receive a gift for your birthday you naturally would want to open it, wouldn't you?

Lawyer: What did your friend do when you presented them with the gift? Were they surprised?

Jim: Yes, they were surprised.

Lawyer: Were they confused by you saying not to open the gift because it would stop being a surprise?

Jim: They were at first but then we parted after he returned the gift to me saying Happy Birthday.

Lawyer: Happy Birthday? Why?

Jim: It was also my birthday two days later.

Lawyer: You accepted the gift?

Jim: Yes I did. And he said that I shouldn't open it because then it wouldn't be a surprise.

Lawyer: You then tried to return the gift, didn't you?

Jim: Yes, but I got nowhere. Mandy, the shop assistant, said they would allow an exchange but not a refund.

Lawyer: You were served by Janice weren't you? Who is Mandy? Another shop assistant?

Jim: When I returned with the gift I assumed that the shop assistant was Janice, She looked just like her. Even had the same kind of perfume on. Chanelle Number Five. She said her name wasn't Janice at all but was called Mandy. She showed me her name badge and said no person by the name of Janice worked there at all.

Lawyer: Confusing. Is that the reason why you didn't exchange the gift for another?

Jim: Partly but I felt that whatever I did was useless. I couldn't tell what was inside any of the gifts because they were already covered by gift wrapping paper. The shop assistant looked just the same as the previous time but was called something else. My head was in a spin.

Lawyer: You took the gift home with you. What did you do next?

Jim: I tried giving it to other people I knew who had a birthday coming up but they all returned it to me with the same idea, that I shouldn't open it because it would stop it from being a surprise.

Lawyer: So you took the final step, didn't you?

Jim: Yes, I couldn't give it away. I couldn't return it. All I could do was to open it myself.

Lawyer: Tell the court how you did that, please.

Jim: The gift was wrapped in bright paper with a ribbon and a nice bow on top. It had a birthday card which I had bought from The Card Shop. I also tried to return it but they had the same kind of refund policy.

Lawyer: Did you open the card?

Jim: Yes. The card said Happy Birthday and seemed to know who I was, how old I am and some funny things that made me laugh out loud. I found some scissors and began opening the gift.

Lawyer: You opened the card but did you open the gift?

Jim: No.

Lawyer: But it was a gift for your birthday.

Jim: Yes it was a gift but how could I open it? It would have stopped being a surprise, wouldn't it? So I decided not to at the last instant. I had gone through so much.

Lawyer: So rather than opening the gift you decided to attack The Gift Shop instead using a sledgehammer?

Jim: **(Emotional, torn with feelings)** I really had no other choice. How could I go on allowing other people to be tortured by the suspense of having a gift just sitting there, day after day, teasing me, beckoning to me to open it? Then, on the other hand, something was saying to me that to open it would destroy that special feeling you get when you receive a surprise, or taste something for the first time that's really unique, or even hear a tune that you want to hear over and over again.

Lawyer: Couldn't you just move away?

Jim: No, it was too powerful. I had to meet force with force.

Lawyer: How do you feel now that you've succeeded in destroying The Gift Shop?

Jim: Much better. I sleep at night. I enjoy my food now. Friends have called to see how I am.

Lawyer: Did you know that The Gift Shop has re-opened under a new name? It's now called The Surprise Shop.

Jim: **(Surprised, shocked)** What? No I didn't. What do they sell?

Lawyer: It's a surprise shop. I can't tell you what they sell because then it wouldn't be a surprise shop, would it?

Jim: I suppose not.

Lawyer: **(Pause)** Is there anything you've learned from your experience with the gift?

Jim: Yes. I learned that it's the thought that counts when you give someone a gift.

Lawyer: Is that all?

Jim: Although it's none of my business what *I* think of the actual gift I chose, I hope *they* think of my effort to *afford* the gift, to *choose* the gift, to find the right time to *present* it, and that special *thought* that goes into the card.

Lawyer: Is there anything else you would like to say to the court? What do you intend doing with the gift, Exhibit A?

Jim: Someone once said, "Yesterday's history; tomorrow's a mystery; today's a gift and that's why it's called the present!" Would you like the gift while I'm in the slammer?

Lawyer: Why certainly, if the court would allow. I'll keep it for you until you are released.

Jim: I'll have plenty of time to think of what I will do with it when I get out. Who knows, I might even open it.

(Curtain)

Production Notes:

Character Descriptions:

Jim – The customer.

Joe – Jim’s friend.

Assistant – Janice or Mandy, both are exactly the same person. May double as Lawyer or judge later on.

Police officers – Self explanatory, both are silent parts.

Lawyer – Jim’s lawyer.

Judge – Judge presiding over Jim’s trial.

Jury – A jury for Jim’s trial.

Public gallery – optional chorus of Jim’s friends and family in the courtroom

Character Appearances:

Act 1 - Jim, Joe and Assistant (Janice)

Act 2 - Jim and Joe

Act 3 - Jim and Assistant (Mandy)

Act 4 - Jim and two police officers.

Act 5 - Jim, lawyer, a judge, jury, public gallery.

Props List:

Act 1-

Shelves (Onstage)

Gift wrapped items (Onstage)

Name tag, Janice (Assistant)

Act 2-

Wrapped item (Jim)

Act 3-

Shelves (Onstage)

Gift wrapped items (Onstage)

Returns policy sign (Onstage)

Wrapped item (Jim)

Sealed card (Jim)

Name tag, Mandy (Assistant)

Act 4-

Shelves (Onstage)

Gift wrapped items (Onstage)

Sledgehammer (Jim)

Police uniforms (Police officers)

Act 5-

Chairs, one set higher than the others (Onstage)