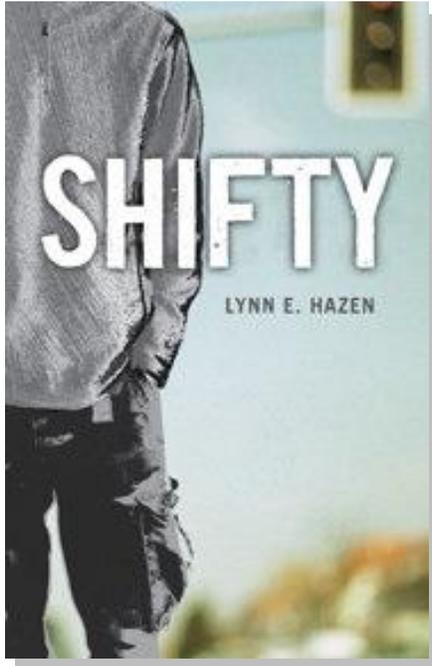


SHIFTY: A Readers Theater Script
By Lynn E. Hazen

Adapted for Readers Theater by Lynn E. Hazen, from her young adult novel, SHIFTY, published by Tricycle Press/Random House 2008 & 2010.

Visit Lynn's websites at www.LynnHazen.com & www.ShiftyTheBook.com



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Cast of Characters:

Shifty

Sissy

Martha

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Narrator 3

Narrator 4

Jamba Juice Cop

Clerk

Dazed Old Woman

NARRATOR 1: SHIFTY by Lynn E. Hazen

NARRATOR 2: Shifty, Martha, and Sissy eat dinner in Martha's kitchen.

NARRATOR 3: Seven-year-old Sissy eats head-down, silent as usual.

NARRATOR 2: Their foster mom, Martha, gently rocks a baby in one arm as she eats and worries about the \$275 ticket Shifty got earlier in the day for parking in a bus zone.

NARRATOR 4: What Martha doesn't know is that Shifty has been driving without a license. His driving permit is a fake, too. But Shifty isn't thinking about the ticket. He's thinking about...

SHIFTY: Food! One good thing about Martha is she doesn't skimp on meals. The food might not all match up—like tonight's Chinese take-out, leftover hot dogs, and canned beans—but there's plenty of it.

NARRATOR 4: Shifty serves himself two more hotdogs--

SHIFTY: Not like some foster places I've lived where they lock up the refrigerator and cupboards, and you got to listen to your empty stomach grumbling all night and day.

NARRATOR 3: Sissy sets her fork down.

MARTHA: You want some more?

NARRATOR 3: Sissy shakes her head, no.

NARRATOR 1: Martha stacks dishes and containers from their hodge-podge meal with one hand. She's still holding the baby.

NARRATOR 4: Shifty doesn't help.

SHIFTY (to the audience): Why should I?

NARRATOR 1: Martha shakes three fortune cookies out of a bag onto a small plate.

NARRATOR 3: Sissy watches with interest.

NARRATOR 4: Shifty grabs one and opens it.

MARTHA: What's it say?

SHIFTY: 'A sly rabbit has three openings to its den.' Whatever that's supposed to mean...

NARRATOR 3: Sissy's fortune has too many words. She hands it to Martha.

MARTHA: 'Keep a green tree in your heart and a songbird will come.'

SHIFTY (mumbling quietly): Songbirds. Right.

NARRATOR 2: Martha pats Sissy's hand, gives back her fortune, then opens her own cookie.

MARTHA: You both did better than me. Listen to this: 'You will come to the attention of those in authority.' I hope not—that's the last thing I need.

NARRATOR 1: Martha tosses her fortune in the trash.

SHIFTY (to audience): I should have paid attention to Martha's fortune. Because Martha and me—maybe we got our fortunes crossed.

NARRATOR 1: The following day, Martha asks Shifty to walk Sissy to nearby Mission Street to pick out a cheap present for her friend's birthday.

NARRATOR 4: But when Martha isn't looking, Shifty takes the keys to the van and drives to Toy Mart near Shifty's favorite car-part store.

SHIFTY: I can't find a parking spot.

NARRATOR 4: So Shifty parks in a handicapped space.

NARRATOR 3: Shifty stays in the van and tells Sissy to go into the store by herself.

SHIFTY: Go on.

NARRATOR 3: Sissy stares at him wide-eyed, then looks away at the big store.

SHIFTY: What? Go buy your present.

NARRATOR 1: Sissy unbuckles her seat belt, but doesn't get out.

SHIFTY: Hurry up. Get out. And stay away from that lady cop in the Jamba Juice.

NARRATOR 3: Sissy opens the van door and climbs out. She walks tentatively toward the big toy store, her tiny frame surrounded by the vast parking lot, bustling with cars and shoppers.

NARRATOR 4: Shifty looks to where he last saw the cop and slumps down low in the front seat.

NARRATOR 1: A little while later...

SHIFTY: What's taking her so long?

NARRATOR 3: Sissy finally leaves the store, and stands empty-handed by Shifty's car window.

SHIFTY: What? Where's the present?

NARRATOR 3: Sissy looks back toward the store.

SHIFTY: You better hurry up. Or I'm leaving.

SISSY: What if...

SHIFTY: What if what?

SISSY: What if I get the wrong thing?

SHIFTY: Choose something you like for yourself, and your new friend will like it just fine. And hurry up while you're at it.

NARRATOR 3: Sissy runs back into the store.

NARRATOR 4: Shifty slouches impatiently, listens to several songs on the car radio, then finally leaps from the van, slams the door, and saunters into the toy store.

NARRATOR 1: He finds Sissy in the dollhouse aisle staring at a row of little plastic mamas--a brown mama, a black mama, and a white mama.

SHIFTY: What's taking you so long?

SISSY: I can't decide.

SHIFTY: The brown mama's good—it looks like a skinny version of Martha. Let's go!

NARRATOR 2: Shifty switches some price tags around.

NARRATOR 4: So they'll get more change.

SHIFTY: We buy it quick but not quick enough.

NARRATOR 4: Yeah, because as they head toward the automatic glass doors, Shifty sees the Jamba Juice cop standing in front of their van, which is, of course, parked in the handicapped spot.

SHIFTY: Come on, Sissy!

NARRATOR 1: The cop holds her Jamba Juice cup in one hand and her ticket pad in the other. She looks around as if she is searching for a place to set her cup down.

NARRATOR 4: Shifty runs toward the van, stops, then forces himself to slow down and walk casually.

NARRATOR 3: Sissy follows cautiously behind, gripping her bag.

SHIFTY: Good morning, Officer.

COP: This your car?

SHIFTY: Yes, Ma'am. We were just leaving. Hop in, Sissy.

COP: You know you're in the handicapped zone?

SHIFTY: Yes, Ma'am. My mama's handicapped.

NARRATOR 4: Shifty reaches into the glove box.

SHIFTY: Sissy, look—you forgot to put Mama's sign on the mirror!

NARRATOR 1: Shifty pulls out Martha's blue handicapped tag, and hooks it over the mirror.

SHIFTY: Excuse me, Officer, my mama's in the Rite Aide buying lots of stuff. I better go help her.

NARRATOR 1: The cop shakes her head, skeptical, and takes a long sip from her Jamba Juice.

SHIFTY: I better go help my mama.

NARRATOR 4: Shifty turns and walks quickly away, practically running into the drugstore.

COP (to Sissy): Is your mama handicapped?

NARRATOR 3: Sissy looks down and doesn't answer.

NARRATOR 2: The cop and Sissy both stare as Shifty disappears into the drugstore.

NARRATOR 4: Once he's inside the store, Shifty looks out the front window. The cop is still standing in front of the van. And now, a tall, skinny clerk eyeballs Shifty suspiciously.

CLERK: Can I help you?

SHIFTY: No thanks.

NARRATOR 1: The clerk wanders away, but keeps watching Shifty.

SHIFTY (to audience): He doesn't want to help me. He wants me to steal something so he can call security.

NARRATOR 1: Shifty ignores the clerk and peers through the dusty window display at the cop standing by the van. Sissy sits silent in the front seat.

NARRATOR 4: Now Shifty sees a dazed old woman in the parking lot.

NARRATOR 2: She trudges along wearing layers of clothes, and lugging shopping bags full of bottles, newspapers and random stuff.

NARRATOR 4: Shifty leaves the store and approaches the old woman as she walks closer and closer to the van.

SHIFTY: Mama, there you are! Let me help you with those bags.

NARRATOR 2: The raggedy old woman squints at Shifty.

NARRATOR 4: She has deep wrinkles, and gray hair wisping out from a not-too-clean, purple-flowered scarf.

NARRATOR 1: The cop shakes her head, skeptically.

COP: *This* is your mama?

SHIFTY: Actually, she's my grandma, but everyone calls her Mama. Isn't that right, Mama?

NARRATOR 4: Shifty slides open the side door to the backseat.

COP: Is this your grandson, Ma'am?

NARRATOR 1: The confused old lady looks slowly from the cop to Shifty.

NARRATOR 4: Shifty takes a breath and reaches for one of the old woman's bags.

SHIFTY: Mama, you ready?

NARRATOR 2: The old woman lets Shifty take her bags.

DAZED OLD WOMAN: Thank you, son.

NARRATOR 4: Shifty helps her into the back seat.

NARRATOR 3: Sissy's eyes grow large as she turns to look in the back, then quickly faces front.

NARRATOR 4: Shifty winces at the smell of the old woman as he buckles her into the back. He quickly closes the side door, nods to the cop, runs for the driver's side and jumps in.

NARRATOR 1: The cop looks up at the graying sky, shakes her head, and sips her Jamba Juice.

SHIFTY: (*loudly, for the cop's benefit*): Everyone got their seat belts on?

NARRATOR 3: Sissy half nods, half rocks her body slightly—forward and back.

NARRATOR 4: Shifty buckles his own seat belt, puts the key in the ignition, and starts the van. He shifts into reverse, backs up, then pulls forward--away from the cop.

SHIFTY: We are *out* of here!

NARRATOR 1: Shifty pounds the wheel in happiness, watching the cop get smaller and smaller behind him out the passenger side mirror—

NARRATOR 4: --until he notices Sissy looking grim.

SHIFTY: Don't worry--Martha's not going to find out.

NARRATOR 3: Sissy says nothing, but turns to glare at Shifty. She tightens her fist on the Toy Mart bag.

SHIFTY: What?

NARRATOR 3: Sissy remains silent.

NARRATOR 1: It starts to drizzle and Shifty turns the wipers on low.

NARRATOR 4: They SWUSH SWUSH real slow.

NARRATOR 2: The old woman in the backseat starts humming loudly, making odd sounds in rhythm to the wipers.

DAZED OLD WOMAN: Hummmmmm, hummMMMM...

NARRATOR 3: Sissy keeps facing front, but she slides her eyes toward Shifty and finally has something to say...

SISSY (*slowly and clearly*): Where're we taking your new grandma?

END SCENE

(All readers close their scripts, face the audience, and bow together)