

## **Wigilia**

“As is *wigilia*, so is the entire year.” – Polish proverb

A game about family, grief, ritual, and a haunted plant. Created by Jeff Dieterle.

### **Materials**

- Chairs (One more than the number of players, typically five)
- Several large wafer-like edible things (Polish *oplatek* wafers are optimal, but graham crackers or matzo would work in a pinch. Anything flat and crisp is fine)
- **Optional, but nice:** A small potted plant, a flashlight, food, name tags

### **Introduction**

Grandma died of acute renal failure at the beginning of the spring. A few weeks later, Grandpa was diagnosed with lung cancer, and he didn't bother fighting; he was dead within another two weeks. The family lost its heart and soul over the course of just a few months. Everyone found their own way to grieve. Some of us held it in, and some of us let it out. Some of us focused on cleaning out Grandma and Grandpa's house. Mom took up gardening, which was pretty funny, because besides her children, she'd never been able to successfully care for another living thing for more than a few weeks. True to form, she killed a lot of plants this year, but one managed to thrive under her care. She put it in a pot and brought it inside. She believes that it survived because it contains the souls of Grandma and Grandpa, and she refers to it as “Grandma and Grandpa.” Everyone else thinks she's weird, but humors her, because it's been a tough year. No one suspects that she's right. The spirits of Grandma and Grandpa live on in the plant, watching over the family and helping them deal with their troubles.

Now it's *Wigilia*, or Christmas Eve, and the family is trying to cope by keeping traditions alive. They gather, catching up and making small talk, waiting for someone to see the first star so they can dig in to the Polish comfort foods Grandma used to make: pierogi, kielbasa, golomki, and babka.

### **Safety**

If you are not familiar with cut and brake larp techniques, look them up and use them. They're important.

This game requires players to touch one another in the way one might affectionately touch a family member. As written, players may be touched on the shoulder, and will give one another a hug or a kiss on the cheek. Please discuss any touch boundaries before the game starts; all players should limit themselves to forms of touch affirmative consented to by **all** players.

### **Dramatis Personae**

**Jean (Mother)** – *Career-focused but profoundly sentimental. She wants everything to be like it used to be, and any deviation from her expectations will likely result in an emotional outburst. She's pretty sure her parents' souls live in her houseplant.*

**Alan (Stepfather)** – *Short-tempered but reliable. He wants to be there for his wife and stepchildren, but he doesn't always have the emotional tools to offer proper support. He loves both of his stepchildren, but doesn't get along well with Wayne, who he thinks has a bad attitude.*

**Wayne (Son)** – *Iconoclastic but unambitious. The only atheist in the family, he is prone to wallowing in his sorrow, and he misses his grandparents dearly. While he finds the tradition comforting, he is the most likely to take issue with anything he perceives as superstition.*

**Barbara (Daughter)** – *Selfless but reserved. She is primarily interested in keeping the peace and avoiding family conflict. She does her best to take care of everyone, but keeps her feelings to herself unless pushed.*

*The Plant (Grandma and Grandpa) – Traditional but loving. Very Catholic. They want what is best for everyone in the family, whether or not the family members in question agree about what is “best.” They can also grant wishes.*

### **Sequence of Play**

The game takes place across four years of Christmas Eves. During each year, the following script should be followed:

1. Gathering. Walk around and make small talk, talking about the events of the past year. During the first year, the conversations should focus on the loss of Grandma and Grandpa; in subsequent years, the conversations should focus on the events of the year. During this phase, the Plant player should walk around and pay attention to the details of the conversations. If they wish, they may touch the shoulder of another player, which indicates that the living family member feels the influence of Grandma and Grandpa, and should shift the tone or subject of the conversation as appropriate. When the Plant player feels that conversation has hit a lull (or after about five minutes), they should turn on a flashlight (or in the absence of a flashlight, flick the lights on and off; when another player notices the light, they should mention that the first star has appeared, which leads to the next phase of play.
2. *Oplatek* ritual. This is a common Eastern European Christmas Eve ritual. The *oplatek* is like a large communion wafer, and while there are many variations on the ritual, for the purpose of the game, it works as follows: the host (in this case Jean), splits the wafer in four pieces, and distributes them to every family member. Then the family members go around to each other member of the family, expressing a wish for that family member in the coming year and sharing a piece of their *oplatek*, which their relative eats. The relative then reciprocates with a wish and a piece of *oplatek* of their own. The family members exchange a sign of affection (a hug or kiss on the cheek). The Plant player should pay close attention to the wishes made. Once all players have exchanged wishes and wafers with every other player, they may sit, and dinner may begin.
3. Grace. The players sit down at the chairs, leaving the traditional empty seat for unexpected guest (the Plant player can sit in this chair or stand near it. Whatever feels comfortable). The person playing Jean will say grace, or ask someone to do so. Each character should say grace once during the course of the game. Grace is a short prayer of thanks before eating. Players may improvise their own short prayers, or use the traditional Catholic prayer:  
*“Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.”*
4. Time passes. Based on the wishes expressed, the Plant player should give a brief summary of the major events of the next year for each player, and for the family as a whole. The Plant must grant at least one wish for each family member; this is their Christmas gift to their loved ones. Keep in mind, however, that while the Plant loves every one of its living relatives, its values are more traditional, and may be different from those of the family members; as such, “monkey’s paw” wishes that fulfill the letter, but not the spirit, of the wish are acceptable and encouraged. Keep in mind, however, that the end result of the wishes must genuinely be what the Plant considers “best” for their loved ones.

This sequence of play repeats for four years; at the end of that time, the family is getting ready to move, and has to decide what to do with the plant, which is beginning to die. They may choose to give it some sort of memorial, or try to bring it with them, or just throw it in the garbage. Regardless of what they do, the plant’s magical energy dissipates. Grandma and Grandpa have done all they could, and are now truly gone.

### **Variants**

The game can accommodate interested strangers who wander by; hospitality is always encouraged! Ask newcomers about themselves, and let them pull up a chair.

The game can also accommodate more than four players; feel free to create aunts, uncles, cousins, siblings, or anyone else who might show up for Christmas Eve dinner. All they need is a sentence or two about their personality and relationship with the rest of the family.