

TRIALS, TRIBULATIONS, AND CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

by Matthew Carlin



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**TRIALS, TRIBULATIONS, AND
CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS**

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By Matthew Carlin

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SYNOPSIS: Kim's widowed dad, John, is a grinch, and she's decided enough is enough. She hatches a plan to break him out of his rut this Christmas and invites several unwanted guests, including John's first love, Leslie, who he hasn't seen in 30 years, her elderly mother and her ten-year-old niece, who seem to want to give him nothing but grief. Add Kim's husband, Dennis, who John has never accepted, and her friends, Laney and Julie, a couple of over-the-top Christmas fanatics, and you've got a "Christmas to end all Christmases!" When they all get iced in together, seasonal madness ensues, and it's a Christmas John will never forget!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 females, 2 males)

JOHN BILLINGS (m) (420 lines)
KIM DONAGHE (f) (196 lines)
DENNIS DONAGHE (m) (193 lines)
JULIE MACBRIAR (f)..... (79 lines)
LANEY TODD (f)..... (66 lines)
MAE TURNER (f)..... (25 lines)
LESLIE TURNER (f) (111 lines)
KELLY TURNER (f)..... (100 lines)
JENNY BILLINGS (f)..... (67 lines)

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

TRIALS, TRIBULATIONS, AND CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS premiered in Friendswood, TX in November 2011. The production was directed by Matthew Carlin with the following cast (in order of appearance):

JOHN BILLINGS.....	Rod Didier
KIM DONAGHE.....	Katie Montz
DENNIS DONAGHE.....	Jeremy Smith
JULIE MACBRIAR	Kim Griffith
LANEY TODD	Michelle Koran
MAE TURNER	Carmen Sherrard
LESLIE TURNER.....	Janet Bell
KELLY TURNER	Isabella Morrison and Alyssa Pubentz
JENNY BILLINGS	Judith Ahlhorn

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

SETTING: *The scene opens on the living room of JOHN BILLINGS. He has lived in this same home for nearly thirty years. It is a southern home with a front door and screen door that leads out to a front porch. The room is furnished simply but tastefully. We can see that it once had a woman's touch but only remnants of that remain. There is a sofa and chair with coffee table and up left is a small breakfast table with a few chairs. Next to that, up right, is the entrance to the kitchen. Down right is a hallway that leads off to the bedrooms. There is one more entrance stage right that leads off to a couple of guest rooms. A large bookcase holds several knick-knacks that have probably been accumulated through many years. The art on the walls is mostly old family photos, graduation pictures of kids, family outings, etc.*

AT RISE: *The stage is dark. After a moment, we hear someone opening the front door. JOHN enters first, and before the lights come up, we hear his voice and see him shining a flashlight behind him.*

JOHN: Sure you don't need a hand with that?

Behind him is his son-in-law, DENNIS DONAGHE, who is trying to make his way up the steps and onto the porch in the dark.

DENNIS: I said, I got it!

JOHN: Suit yourself.

As JOHN steps in, he turns the light on and we see that he is a healthy-looking man in his mid-fifties. HE is dressed in a Confederate Army uniform. A moment later DENNIS, about thirty years old, enters and we see he is dressed in a Union uniform. He is weighted down trying to carry two Civil War era rifles, canteens, blankets and other camping paraphernalia. As he enters, he unceremoniously drops the whole thing on or near the breakfast table and some of it clatters to the floor, and in his haste to try and catch it, he kicks it around and makes a bigger mess.

JOHN: You're going to have to try that again if you want to wake up the Moseleys.

DENNIS: The Moseleys?

JOHN: That's the nearest neighbor.

DENNIS: I thought the nearest neighbor was a half mile down the road.

JOHN: They are.

DENNIS: Forgive me! I'm not really used to carrying...stuff...like this around.

JOHN: I could say you had me fooled, but I'd be lying.

At that moment, we see a light in the hallway come on and KIM DONAGHE, DENNIS' wife and JOHN's daughter, enters. She is about the same age as DENNIS. She is dressed in nightgown and robe and has clearly been asleep.

KIM: What is going on here? Why are you two back already? Did something happen? Is everything all right?

DENNIS: Everything's fine.

KIM: What time is it?

JOHN: *(Looks at his watch.)* Five o'clock, give or take.

KIM: Give or take? Five? Five AM? In the morning? Well, something happened. You were supposed to be home at five in the evening, not five in the morning!

JOHN: See there, Denny...

DENNIS: It's Dennis!

JOHN: Dennis! You can't fool my daughter! She's a sharp one, she is. *(She looks at both of them, still waiting for an explanation.)* I'll let Dan'el Boone here explain this one.

JOHN sits at a chair, puts his cap on the table and begins to remove his boots. KIM looks at DENNIS, who is still standing in the same spot and clearly not looking forward to elaborating.

KIM: Well?

DENNIS: Nothing! Really!

KIM: Dennis?

DENNIS: Nothing!

KIM: Dennis?

DENNIS: It was just a couple of little things.

KIM: Little.

As she waits, he finally lets out a sigh and gives it up.

DENNIE: They kicked me out, okay!

KIM: They kicked you out? They who? The reenactors? Why?

DENNIS: I don't know!

KIM: Dennis!

JOHN: Better 'fess up. I told you she's a sharp one!

She sees DENNIS is not going to give it up, so she turns to JOHN.

KIM: Daddy?

JOHN: *(Looks from one to the other and then:)* Well, if I must. *(Of course, he relishes telling the story.)* The first "little thing" occurred during the reenactment of the Battle of Chickamauga yesterday afternoon. I asked the Union commander, that's Dave Dearborn, you remember Mr. Dearborn, don't you, honey? He's the manager over at Fancy Food's grocery? Been there since you were knee high to a grasshopper.

KIM: I remember. *(She sits.)*

JOHN: You dated his son in high school, didn't you?

KIM: *(Raises the eyebrows.)* You know I did, Daddy.

JOHN: For quite some time, if I remember correctly. I always liked that boy.

KIM: *(Shakes her head.)* Of course you did. Now, you were telling me about the reenactment.

JOHN: Sorry. Anyway, I asked Dave early on to give Dennis here something simple, since his life experiences have been somewhat limited.

KIM: Daddy!

JOHN: I wanted to make it as easy as possible his first time out.

KIM: That's good.

JOHN: One would think. Anyway, Dave put him up on the front lines and told him when the shooting started to just lie down and play dead and wait for everything to be over.

KIM: Good.

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JOHN: One would think. Went well at first. Your husband took one for the team, and to his credit, died straightaway. (*Looks at DENNIS.*) I appreciated that, Dennis, I did.

DENNIS: Yeah, thanks. (*He crosses to the sofa and begins removing his boots.*)

JOHN: Some of the men tend to embellish a bit when they die.

KIM: I remember that.

JOHN: The battle ensued for several minutes and just as it reached its peak, Denny...

DENNIS: Dennis!

JOHN: Dennis literally jumps back to life and starts dancing a jig and screaming bloody murder!

KIM: Dennis!

JOHN: It seems sometime during his repose a little green snake had worked its way up his pant leg unnoticed until it reached what I guess it thought was a distant cousin of sorts.

DENNIS: Hah, hah.

KIM: Oh, my lord!

JOHN: When that snake arrived in the nether regions, I assume it began to feel somewhat restricted, and well...that's when the fun started.

KIM: (*Crosses behind him.*) Oh, Dennis! That must have been awful.

DENNIS: (*Looks at JOHN.*) Thank you!

KIM: You can't blame him for that! I'd like to see you hold still with a snake wiggling around inside your pants.

JOHN: You've got me there, sweetheart, but you see, the dancing and screaming wasn't the real problem.

KIM: No?

JOHN: No. The real problem came to pass when Denny...Dennis promptly unbuckled his belt, dropped his trousers and started fumbling around in an attempt to remove that "snake" from his tightie-whities!

KIM: Daddy!

JOHN: Excuse me! His less than substantial undergarment, in front of about two hundred junior high school students who had come for a history lesson and instead got an "exhibition" in biology.

KIM: Oh no! Dennis, you didn't!

DENNIS: There was a snake in my pants!

JOHN: Needless to say, snake boy wasn't invited to participate in the next battle. Surprisingly though, he didn't actually get kicked out until last night.

KIM: What happened?

JOHN: At two o'clock in the morning, he came over to our side and woke up half the camp looking for me.

KIM: But why?

JOHN: He was looking for mosquito repellent.

DENNIS: They were eating me alive!

JOHN: That's when we were asked to leave.

DENNIS: Thank God!

KIM: Daddy, I'm so sorry. I thought you two would have a good time.

DENNIS: Daddy? Sorry, Daddy? What about me? *(He stands and starts to pace.)* I haven't slept for more than twenty-four hours! We got up before daylight yesterday! I endured a two and a half hour drive listening to music I'm fairly certain hasn't been heard since Dwight D. Eisenhower hit puberty! When we got there, I had to carry all of this junk uphill for half a mile to get to the campsite. By ninety-three, I'm pretty sure it was ninety-eight degrees, ninety-eight percent humidity and one-hundred-percent hell on earth!

KIM: *(Tries to stop him, but he goes on.)* Dennis!

DENNIS: *(Still pacing.)* After a "wonderful" lunch of beef jerky and beans, I had a *truly* memorable visit to a very authentic Civil War style latrine. I am, without a doubt, woefully lacking the necessary vocabulary to describe that experience! Then, to top it all off, I get attacked by a snake and offered up at dusk as a human sacrifice to a tribe of blood-thirsty insects! I have welts the size of silver dollars covering half my body and I know...I know I came this close... *(Holds his two fingers slightly apart.)* ...to being robbed of the ability to someday father your child!

JOHN: *(Smiles.)* Its special times like these we cherish. *(Pulling out a camera.)* I have pictures.

DENNIS: *(Stares at him.)* And with that bit of good news, I am going to bed. You can feel free to wake me up at around... *(Looks at his watch.)* oh, nine. Tomorrow morning!

He grabs his boots and with some difficulty the other paraphernalia he carried in. In the processm he drops some, leans over to pick it up, drops some more. Finally, with all the dignity he can muster, he gives them a look and stalks out. KIM stares at JOHN for a moment with a questioning look. JOHN does his best to look innocent.

JOHN: What?

KIM: You made him carry all of that?

JOHN: I didn't make him. He offered.

KIM: And when you saw he was having a hard time?

JOHN: I didn't want to insult the man.

KIM: And everything else that happened?

JOHN: He's thirty years old. I assumed he could take care of himself.

KIM: You know this reenactment thing was all new to him.

JOHN: The outdoors is new to him. Physical labor is new to him.

KIM: That's not true. He's out at construction sites all the time.

JOHN: He's out there. Yes. He draws the plans, but he doesn't build anything.

KIM: He's an architect. That's his job.

JOHN: And my job is to build. I build with a hammer and nails. He builds with a pencil and computer.

KIM: And what would your job be if you didn't have people like Dennis?

JOHN: Heaven on earth.

KIM: Bull! (*Crosses behind the table.*) I've heard it all my life. From when you worked just as a carpenter until the time you started your own company. You always griped about the architects. They didn't know what they were doing. They should come out and pick up a hammer and saw before they put those crazy things down on paper!

JOHN: It is what it is! (*Changing the subject.*) Dennis is an architect. I don't hold that against him. That's where his talents lie.

KIM: Exactly.

JOHN: That's his only talent.

KIM: Daddy, you know that is not true.

JOHN: You're right. I forgot. He does ski and play golf.

KIM: Just because he didn't grow up hunting and fishing and roaming around in the woods like you did, and just because he works in an office and doesn't do manual labor for a living doesn't make him a bad guy.

JOHN: He thinks manual labor is the president of Mexico.

KIM: (*Glaring.*) Not fair!

JOHN: (*Crosses to the armchair carrying his boots.*) You know what? You're right. I suppose I could have helped him out a little, but if you remember, I didn't ask him to go to this thing. He asked me.

KIM: (*Follows him.*) He was making an effort. He was trying to show you there was more to him than the city boy you've decided he is.

JOHN: (*Smiles.*) It went well, don't you think?

KIM: I give up. I'm going back to bed. It looks like I'll be driving when we head home later today. But before I do, Daddy, I want to tell you something. (*She gives him her best demanding daughter routine.*) We're coming back here in a few weeks for Christmas! Christmas, as you know, is my favorite holiday! Christmas is very special to me, and you are in large part responsible for my feelings concerning Christmas. So I feel I should, before I leave, emphasize to you that I want...no, more like I expect...actually, it's more like I insist that this Christmas be as wonderful as all the ones I remember having in this house as a little girl.

JOHN: Kimmy, I...

KIM: (*She sits on the arm of his chair, puts her arm around him and shushes him.*) Shhhh! No, no, not done. (*Hugs him close and really lays down the law.*) I love you very much. You know that. I also love that man in the other room, and as much as both of you drive me to the brink of insanity and insomnia at times, that is not about to change. So! You two will find common ground and will come to terms with each other, and we will have the Christmas to end all Christmases! Or else! (*Gives him a kiss on the forehead.*) Love you. (*Starts to exit.*) Make sure I'm up by nine will you? Got to pack. (*She exits.*)

He watches her leave. As he does, we see a woman emerge from the shadows and move over to him. She is JENNY, JOHN's deceased wife. It is unclear to us if this is truly her spirit or an apparition that JOHN has created in his own mind. It is clear that to him, she is very real and her appearance here now is no surprise. Of course, no one can see or hear her except JOHN.

JENNY: That's my girl.

JOHN: *(Without looking at her, he stands and removes his gun, canteen, etc. from his uniform.)* She's just as hard-headed as you were.

JENNY: Just as hard-headed as I am, you mean.

JOHN: Don't you start in on me.

Through the following, she straightens up his things. Puts his boots and cap in the closet, hangs up his coat, etc.

JENNY: If you don't want to hear it, make me go away. I am just a figment of your imagination.

JOHN: At first, I thought so, but now I'm not so sure. Seems like every time you would have had something to say, you...show up and have something to say!

JENNY: She's not going to let you get away with being your old stubborn self, you know.

JOHN: My old stubborn self? Everything I learned about being stubborn, I learned from you.

JENNY: Why, thank you. I'll take that as a compliment. *(Sits in the chair next to him.)* I did a good job passing it down as well, so I suggest you get your act together.

JOHN: This is not all about me!

JENNY: You're her father, John. I'd say it mostly is about you. She made her choice, now you're going to have to live with it...and him, like it or not.

JOHN: What if I don't like it?

JENNY: I suppose you could just stop seeing your daughter.

JOHN: *(Stands and picks up the rest of his things and puts them in the closet.)* We know that's not going to happen.

JENNY: Then I suggest you find a way to get along with the boy. *(He looks at her and sighs.)* Come, now. You think you're the first father-in-law to ever dislike his son-in-law? I think initially at least, it's some sort of requirement. *(He just grunts and moves to the front of the sofa.)* It's a normal reaction. She's your little girl, he's sleeping with her...

JOHN: *(Turns on her.)* Stop! *(Shakes his head.)* You always know which buttons to push!

JENNY: She's all grown up now, John.

JOHN: I got that.

JENNY: And she has a mind of her own

JENNY: Got that, too.

JENNY: And she's made up her mind that this family, all of you, are going to stop with the pettiness and move on.

JOHN: (*Crosses to her.*) Pettiness, is it? Let me tell you something...

JENNY: (*Begins to step back into the shadows.*) Time to go, my love.

JOHN: Don't you come in here, start something and then try to leave!

JENNY: (*Smiles.*) Good night!

JOHN: (*Crossing toward her.*) Good night? What do you mean good night? It's almost daylight. You come back here!

JENNY: (*Mischievously.*) And a Merry Christmas to all! (*Disappears into the shadows.*)

JOHN: Aaaahhh! (*Stops and looks around in frustration but she is gone.*) Women! (*He stalks off.*)

ACT ONE, SCENE 2**SETTING:**

The same setting but a couple of months later. It is now two days before Christmas, although you couldn't tell it from the scene since virtually nothing has changed. There are no Christmas decorations, no tree, no presents, nothing that would let us know the season has arrived.

AT RISE:

The stage is bare until we hear a knock at the door. No one appears, so the knock comes again, this time louder and more insistent.

JOHN: *(Entering from bedroom, stage left.)* I'm coming! Hold your damn horses!

He opens the door, and KIM stands there. She holds several wrapped Christmas presents.

KIM: Merry Christmas!

JOHN: *(As he opens the screen door.)* Kimmy! You finally made it. Merry Christmas to you, too!

They attempt to hug, but with her heavy coat and all the packages she's carrying it is difficult.

KIM: We made it. Just barely though! Weather's getting rough! Radio said we're in for ice and snow. *(Calling back over her shoulder.)* No, Dennis! Get the rest of the gifts first! You can get the bags later!

JOHN: *(As she turns back to him, he reaches for the packages.)* Let me help you with those.

He takes some of the packages and quickly sets them aside. He removes her coat and puts it in the entryway closet. He will put everyone's coats away as they enter. KIM enters and puts the rest down on the sofa. Then she looks around the room, which is not decorated at all for the holiday.

KIM: Daddy? *(Stares at him.)* Where's the tree?

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JOHN: Tree? I thought I'd wait until you got here to put the tree up.

KIM: (*Looking around the room.*) Uh-huh. And the Christmas decorations?

JOHN: They, uh.... They're...

KIM: Waiting for me too, I suppose.

JOHN: I didn't want you to miss anything.

KIM: That was so thoughtful, Daddy! (*Calls out the open door.*) Dennis, hurry up! Julie, would you bring my purse in, please? I left it on the front seat!

JOHN: Julie?

KIM: (*Still looking outside.*) Dennis, don't drop that!

JOHN: (*Quizzically.*) Julie? Who is Julie?

KIM: (*Still looking out the door.*) She's a friend of mine from work. Dennis! That one's breakable!

JOHN: A friend from work? Your car was in the shop? She drove you here? What?

KIM: No, Daddy! She was going to be all alone for Christmas and... (*Turns and looks him in the eye with a big smile.*) ...I could not let that happen.

JOHN: You invited her here? You did not!

KIM: (*Smiles at him.*) I did.

JOHN: Kimberly Ann Billings!

KIM: Donaghe, Daddy. It's Donaghe. (*Showing her wedding ring.*) Remember?

JOHN: How could I forget? You know how I feel about strange people in my house. You're just going to have to explain to her that she can't stay!

KIM: (*Crosses to him.*) And what would my explanation be, Daddy? My father's a butthead? Don't worry. Julie is great! You're going to love her...and Laney is really a hoot!

JOHN: Laney? Kimmy, you...! (*Looks quickly out the front door and then turns to her in total frustration.*) Kimmy! You have to fix this! I'm warning you! I'll...

KIM: (*Smiles.*) Explode?

DENNIS: (*Enters with another load of packages followed closely by JULIE and LANEY.*) Where do you want these?

KIM: *(Looking at her father.)* The tree's not up yet, so just set them in the corner for now. *(Looks at the two girls, whose arms are overloaded with bags.)* Oh! Just set those by the door. Dennis will bring them to your room. *(Turns to her father again.)* Daddy! I want you to meet Julie McBriar and Laney Todd, two very good friends of mine. Julie. Laney. This is my dad!

The girls drop their bags and excitedly run over to JOHN. These two are over-the-top Christmas fanatics!

LANEY: Mr. Billings! It is so awesome to meet you!

JULIE: Kim's told us so much about you! It's like we already know you!

They give him a big hug together.

LANEY: It was so nice of you to invite us for the holiday!

JULIE: Kim told us it was all your idea! You are so sweet!

They hug him again and in unison reach up and give him a big, over-exaggerated kiss on the cheek. During all of this, he is a little shocked and pretty much at a loss for words.

LANEY: So sweet!

JULIE: Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Now they both take him by the arm and move him into the room.

LANEY: We want you to know we will not be any bother at all!

JULIE: We'll be quiet as mice! You won't even know we're around!

LANEY: Little tiny mice! *(They pull him to the sofa with him between them.)*

JULIE: We want you to sit back, relax and let us do all the work! You won't have to do any of the cooking, decorating, anything. We girls... *(Indicates KIM also.)* we have everything planned. Right, Kim?

KIM: Everything.

JULIE: You won't have to lift a finger. *(They sit on the sofa and plop him down between them.)* Kim told us how much you love Christmas. We love it, too!

LANEY: It's our favorite!

JULIE: *(Reaches into her bag and pulls out several movies on DVD.)*
And look, I brought *Frosty* and *Rudolph* and *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*. I've got tons more in my suitcase. We can have a Christmas movie marathon!

JOHN: *(Glumly.)* Oh boy.

LANEY: And I brought all the makings for my famous hot chocolate! We stopped at the grocery on the way in. I make the best hot chocolate you have ever tasted! With homemade whipped cream!

KIM stands behind the sofa, pretty amused by all of this. DENNIS watches, obviously enjoying the scene as well. Every time JOHN makes an attempt to stand and escape, they hold him back.

KIM: It's true, Daddy! You'll love it!

JULIE: Love it!

LANEY: Kim told us how you like to go all out for Christmas!

JULIE: But don't you worry, we are exactly the same way!

LANEY: Exactly the same. There is no such thing as too much Christmas! And may I say, I think it is so cool that even at your age you still want to make Christmas special!

JULIE: So cool!

JOHN: At my age?

JULIE: *(Grabs his hand and shakes it.)* This is going to be so much fun!

LANEY: *(Does the same to the other hand.)* I am so excited! Thank you again!

She kisses him on the cheek again.

JULIE: Ditto! Ditto! Ditto!

She gives him a big smack on the other cheek. Then both girls lay their heads on his shoulders.

KIM: *(Sitting on the back of the sofa.)* Told you they were great!

JOHN: Yeah.

LANEY: You remind me so much of my grandfather!

JOHN: *(Looks over his shoulder at KIM.)* Kim!

LANEY begins to get a little teary eyed.

JULIE: Don't start, Laney! *(To JOHN.)* She gets all emotional when she starts thinking about her Pops! That's what she called her grandfather. *(Whispers.)* He died a couple of years ago.

LANEY: I'm not going to get all emotional! *(To JULIE.)* But doesn't he remind you of Pops? Pops was the best!

JOHN: *(Stands abruptly.)* We should probably take care of these bags! Dennis, why don't you take the girls' bags to their room. They can take the guest room next to Kim's old room. And Kim? Could we talk for just a minute? Alone! *(Points to the bags and looks at DENNIS.)* Dennis?

DENNIS: *(Picking up the bags.)* Sure! I'll just get the bags! *(To himself.)* Every time I come here, I get the bags. I get my bags, I get their bags, I get his bags. I get all the bags.

JULIE: *(Takes a small bag and hands another small one to LANEY.)* We can help.

LANEY: Absolutely!

DENNIS: *(Looks at the small bags they've taken as he picks up the last of his heavy load.)* Oh, thanks. That's a big help.

LANEY: We could get more.

KIM: *(Steps up and puts her arm around them.)* No! Let Dennis get them! You don't mind. Do you, sweetheart?

DENNIS: Of course not. *(Points off right.)* That way! *(They start off as he shoots JOHN a look and mumbles to KIM.)* His arms broken or what?

KIM: Dennis. Be nice.

He gives her a look over the shoulder as he continues to mumble to himself. He struggles with the bags as he exits, dropping one, having to pick it up again, draping straps over shoulders and anywhere else he can.

DENNIS: Be nice, she says. I'm being nice. I'm a nice guy. Nice is my middle name. I'm so nice it hurts. Look in the dictionary under nice? You'll find me. Dennis Donaghe! *(Pause.)* That rhymes!

He exits. KIM sits on the sofa and smiles at her father. She motions for him to join her. Instead, he stands, folds his arms and looks at her.

JOHN: Does he always talk to himself like that?

KIM: He's one of you, isn't he?

JOHN: (*Confused.*) One of...me?

KIM: A man. You all talk to yourselves. Don't you? I know you don't talk to each other or to the women in your lives.

JOHN: I talk!

KIM: Uh huh.

JOHN: In fact, I want to talk right now. I'd really like to know what you think you're doing?

KIM: I'm doing what I told you a few weeks ago I was going to do.

JOHN: Which is?

KIM: Having the Christmas to end all Christmases.

JOHN: And you're doing that by inviting strangers into my home?

KIM: They're not strangers to me. They're friends. Friends who couldn't be with their families this year. Friends who would have spent Christmas alone. And the last time I checked, this is my home too. At least it was.

JOHN: (*Crosses and sits next to her.*) It still is, but sweetie, you know I don't like having a bunch of people I don't know in my house.

KIM: You don't like having anyone in your house. Strangers or not.

JOHN: That's not true. You are welcome here any time.

KIM: And Dennis?

JOHN: (*Hesitates.*) He...he can come too. I guess.

KIM: I told you I wanted a Christmas like we used to have when I was growing up. When Mom was still here.

JOHN: We can do that.

KIM: Well, that involves people being here.

JOHN: Why?

KIM: Come on, Daddy. *(She stands and moves behind sofa, speaking to him over his shoulder.)* Our house used to be the place that everyone came for the holiday. Family, friends, friends of friends. Pretty much anyone who came through that door was welcome. And don't try and tell me that was all Mom because that's not true. You loved it! You were the one who always insisted on a real Christmas tree, and you were the one who wanted everyone together to decorate the first day after Thanksgiving!

JOHN: Things have...changed.

KIM: *(Takes his hand.)* I know. I know it's hard. I miss Mom, too.

JOHN: Kim. Don't go there!

Again, JENNY steps from the shadows and stands behind the sofa.

KIM: She loved Christmas, Dad. She loved it. *(Stands and crosses downstage.)* Look at this house. A few days before Christmas and no tree, no decorations, no...nothing. What do you think she would say if she were here right now?

JENNY moves around and sits next to JOHN on the sofa. No one sees or hears her, of course, except for JOHN.

JOHN: I have a feeling I'm about to find out.

JENNY: Listen to your daughter, John.

KIM: She would tell you to stop moping around and feeling sorry for yourself!

JENNY: I would.

KIM: She'd tell you to get up in that attic and get those decorations down!

JENNY: I would.

There is a knock at the door.

KIM: And she'd tell you not to freak out but instead stay calm and act like a gentleman when I answer the door!

JOHN: What now? What did you do?

KIM: *(Stands and starts for the door.)* Like I said, "Anyone who came through that door was welcome."

JOHN: (*Stands.*) Kim!

JENNY: (*Smiles and addresses this to KIM.*) You little conniver!

JOHN: (*Stands and follows her.*) Please tell me you did not invite someone else. I'm still trying to figure out a way to kick the others out.

JENNY: (*She follows JOHN.*) Oh, you're not kicking anybody out. Get over yourself, you big lug.

JOHN: What did you call me?

KIM: (*At the door.*) Smile, Daddy!

She opens the door. When she does, we hear the sounds of a winter storm and some snowflakes fly inside. In fact, whenever there is silence, we should hear the storm raging outside. In a moment, three people will enter. The first is MAE TURNER. She is about 80 years old. She wears a huge coat and walks with the assistance of a cane. After her is LESLIE TURNER, her daughter. She is in her mid-fifties and still a very attractive lady. Next to her is ten-year-old KELLY TURNER. She is LESLIE's niece. For the first moments, JOHN can only stand and stare in shock. As they enter, MAE is the first to speak.

MAE: (*Gives JOHN a pop with her cane as she passes him.*) Out of my way! Get out of my way! I need heat! It's colder than a polar bear's butt out there!

LESLIE: Mae!

MAE: (*Sits on the love seat.*) Never thought I'd miss those hot flashes!

LESLIE: (*Horried.*) Mae!

KELLY: (*Defending MAE.*) It is really cold.

LESLIE: I know it is, sweetheart, but your grammy should learn to watch her language.

MAE: (*To KELLY.*) I'm senile, dear. I don't have to watch anything!

LESLIE: Mother! (*Looks at KIM and JOHN.*) Sorry to barge in like this. Merry Christmas!

KIM: Merry Christmas to you! I'm so glad you made it. I was worried about the weather.

LESLIE: Me too. I hope we're still able to get home, but I did promise we'd stop by when we got into town.

KIM: I'm glad you did.

JOHN: (*Perks up.*) So you're not staying?

LESLIE: No. We promised we'd drop by, and if the invitation is still good for Christmas dinner...?

KIM: Of course it is. We're looking forward to it.

MAE: Will somebody get this coat off of me! I'm sweating like a pig at a luau.

LESLIE: Mother, please! *(Starts to remove her coat.)* We can't stay for long anyway. The bridge that leads onto your property was already beginning to ice up.

MAE: I could use a cup of coffee here!

LESLIE: Mother!

DENNIS: *(Enters.)* I showed them to their rooms. They may actually be unpacked in a couple of days. *(Seeing the others, he goes to LESLIE and shakes her hand.)* Leslie! You made it!

KIM: Dennis, Leslie said the bridge was already beginning to ice up. Could you grab your coat and go check it out?

DENNIS: Check it out? It's freezing out there!

KIM: You'll be fine. We just want to make sure it's okay for them to cross over when they get ready to leave. Would you? Please?

DENNIS: Sure! Sure! Don't worry about me! I'll be fine! *(Grabs his coat and opens the door.)* If I'm not back in ten minutes, come out with a hair dryer and a really long extension cord. *(KIM gives him a look.)* To defrost me!

He exits.

KIM: He's kidding. Let me take your coats. *(As she does.)* Forgive my manners. I haven't even introduced everyone. Although, I'm sure Daddy remembers you, Leslie.

LESLIE: I doubt that. It's been such a long time.

KIM: Daddy? You remember Leslie Turner. Don't you?

JOHN: *(Stunned, as he does remember.)* Leslie? Leslie Turner?

KIM: Your first love. *(Smiles at him.)* And surely you remember her mother, Mae, and this... *(Indicates the girl.)* is her niece, Kelly.

JENNY: *(Behind JOHN, she seems amused.)* Your old girlfriend.

JOHN: Very old girlfriend.

LESLIE: Pardon me?

JOHN: I...I...uh, I didn't mean you were old. You're not old. You're the same age as me and I'm... Wel,I I'm not young, but... What I meant to say was it was a long time ago. But you look great! You really... You do. You look great!

JENNY: Nice cover.

LESLIE: It was a long time ago.

KIM: (*Motions for everyone to sit down.*) Let's not stand here. Come on. Sit down. Please.

MAE: I am sitting down! And still waiting for that coffee!

LESLIE: Mother!

MAE: And a big slice of pecan pie would do the trick!

LESLIE: Mother! We won't be here long enough for that!

MAE: Oh, bah humbug!

MAE gives LESLIE a big raspberry at the end of the line.

KIM: Well, let's not just stand here. Sit down, please.

LESLIE and KELLY sit on the sofa. JOHN sits in the armchair. JENNY sits on the arm of the chair next to him. KIM stands next to JOHN.

KIM: It was the craziest thing, Daddy. Ever since Dennis started working at the corporate office, we've been invited to their annual Christmas party, and every year for some reason or other, we never made it. Until this year. And guess who was there.

MAE: Not me! I wasn't invited!

KIM: Leslie! She had been working with Dennis all these years. He had no idea who she was. That there was a connection. But as soon as she introduced herself, I had to ask if she might possibly be your Leslie Turner, and...she was!

JENNY: This is so cute! She's setting you up, John.

JOHN: That's crazy.

LESLIE: Wasn't it? Five years of working together and we never realized.

KIM: So when I heard she was coming home for the holiday, I had to invite her over.

JENNY: She is so setting you up.

LESLIE: Actually, I'm not just coming home for the holiday. I'm moving back here.

JOHN: Moving back?

LESLIE: I'm retiring. We never sold my mom's old house. She's been living with me for the last couple of years, you see. But now we've decided to move back and give small town living a chance again.

KIM: Isn't that great, Daddy? You're going to have a new neighbor.

MAE: Neighbors!

JENNY: You have officially been set up.

JOHN: That's nuts!

MAE: I'm not nuts! You're nuts! (*Looks at LESLIE.*) Slap him! He said I was nuts!

LESLIE: Mae. He didn't say you were nuts. He was talking about the situation.

MAE: Then tell him to speak up! I'm old! (*Loudly to JOHN.*) You need to speak up! I'm old! Can't you see I'm old!

KELLY: She doesn't hear so good sometimes.

MAE: I hear just fine, young lady, and don't you forget it.

KELLY: Yes, ma'am.

LESLIE: (*To JOHN.*) She hears when she chooses to hear.

MAE: Heard that!

LESLIE: Anyway. We really should be getting along... (*She stands as the front door opens and DENNIS enters.*) ...before we get iced in.

DENNIS: Too late for that! (*Shivers.*) Boy, it is cold out there!

JOHN: What do you mean too late?

DENNIS: (*Begins to remove gloves as he crosses to the fireplace to warm up.*) The ice must be at least three inches thick already, and even if you did make it across the bridge, you'll never make it home.

KIM: Well, that settles it. You'll all stay here with us.

JOHN: What!

LESLIE: I really thought we would have more time. Ira is never wrong.

JOHN: Ira? Who's Ira?

LESLIE: Ira is our local weather man. He has quite a reputation. They say it's uncanny how accurate he is with his predictions. I don't know him personally, but Kim and Dennis have been friends with him since college. She said she talked to him yesterday, and he was positive this front wouldn't be coming through until later tonight. Isn't that right, Kim?

KIM: That's what he said.

LESLIE: So when Kim insisted we drop by on the way in... *(Laughs uncomfortably.)* Well, she said he was never wrong.

JOHN: Never wrong?

KIM: There's a first time for everything! *(Crosses to JOHN and takes his arm.)* Isn't there, Daddy?

JOHN stares at her a moment. She says nothing, just smiles, and after a second, gives him a kiss on the cheek. There is a moment of uncomfortable silence.

LESLIE: Maybe we should try and make it home.

KIM: *(Crossing to her.)* Don't be ridiculous. If you had an accident, we would never forgive ourselves. Isn't that right, Daddy?

JOHN: I... *(KIM places a hand on him to shut him up.)*

KIM: You're staying with us. No arguments. We've got plenty of room. And besides, it's Christmas. What would Christmas be without lots of family and friends around? Right, Daddy?

LESLIE: *(Looks at KELLY and MAE.)* I suppose it would be the safest thing to do. But didn't you tell me a couple of your friends were going to be staying with you, too?

KIM: I did. Julie and Laney. They're putting their things away. I'll introduce you guys later.

LESLIE: *(Looks at JOHN.)* John, are you sure it's not a problem?

KIM: Are you kidding? Daddy loves company at Christmas. When I was a kid, we had wall-to-wall people. It will be just like old times! *(Looks at DENNIS, who has just removed his coat.)* Dennis will go out and get your bags while I show you to your rooms.

DENNIS: *(Stops with one arm out of his jacket.)* I will? *(She shoots him a look.)* I will! No problem. *(Puts the jacket back on.)* What's a little frostbite among friends?

LESLIE: Let me help you.

DENNIS: No. No. Wouldn't want to lose my nice guy standing. Are the bags in the trunk?

LESLIE: Yes. Here are the keys. Are you sure I can't help?

DENNIS: Wouldn't dream of it. *(He opens the door and we hear the wind howl.)* Good times!

He exits. The rest are left standing there. LESLIE looks a little uncomfortable, JOHN looks in shock, and KIM looks overjoyed.

KIM: Daddy, why don't you look in the hall closet for some extra blankets while I show everyone to their rooms? *(Steps toward the bedrooms off left but stops to wait for the others.)* Everybody, follow me.

LESLIE: Kelly? Could you help your grandmother?

KELLY: Okay.

MAE: *(To KELLY as she stands.)* You're a good girl. *(JOHN manages to get into her path as she moves left and she whacks him with her cane.)* Out of my way, Casanova!

JOHN: Casanova?

MAE: Don't think I don't remember you, Mr. Smoochie Smooch!

JOHN: Smoochie what?

MAE: *(Points at him and then to LESLIE.)* Like a duck on a June bug! Broke my little girl's heart! Once a slime ball always a slime ball! *(To KELLY as they exit.)* You remember that!

LESLIE: Mother!!! Please!!!

MAE: I've got my eye on you!

She starts for the bedrooms off left followed by LESLIE and the others. KIM stops at the hallway and points.

KIM: Actually, you know what? Your room is going to be the first one on the left there. Why don't you go in and get settled? Dennis will be in with your bags in a minute. I'm going to grab a couple of my things and be right there. Is that okay?

LESLIE: Of course. *(Looks back at JOHN while MAE and KELLY exit.)* John, are you sure we're not putting you out?

KIM: *(He opens his mouth as if to say something, but she is too quick for him.)* Don't be silly. It will be a chance for you two to reminisce.

LESLIE: *(Still looking back at JOHN.)* If there's anything I can do to help...

KIM: Tell you what. We'll get everyone settled, then you can help me with dinner. I've heard tell you're a great cook.

LESLIE: *(Shrugs.)* I do my best.

KIM: Great! *(Points down the hall.)* First room on the left.

LESLIE: And, John? I am so sorry about Mom! I'll talk to her.

JOHN: It's okay. Kind of brings back memories.

LESLIE: Sorry about that, too.

She puts on her best "forgive us" smile and exits to the bedroom. KIM crosses back to the front door and grabs a couple of her bags. JOHN has watched all of this and is still looking a little stunned. As she crosses back, she stops and looks at him.

KIM: What? *(He just stares at her without saying anything.)* What? *(Lift his eyebrows.)* Please! You don't seriously think that I am devious enough to plan all of this. *(Just gives her a look.)* Just because I happen to know a meteorologist who is really good at his job doesn't mean I would have the imagination to come up with a scheme that would get all of these people iced in with us for...who knows how long. I suppose you could imagine that I invited Laney and Julie here for no other reason than to fill this house with people the way it used to be filled at Christmas! You can't seriously accuse me of that because I already told you they were going to be spending Christmas alone and no self-respecting Billings would allow that to happen! I suppose you could imagine that I'm trying to hook you up with an old girlfriend! But please, I had nothing to do with her retiring and moving back here! I had absolutely nothing to do with the fact she'll be living in her mother's old house, a house that is probably less than a mile from where we're standing! That was providence! I have no control over providence. Or fate. Whatever you want to call it. And although I do admit the timing of these unrelated and completely incidental events is remarkable... *(Pause.)* ...I don't make the weather. So don't flatter yourself. I'm not that smart. *(He stares in disbelief as she crosses away from him and then stops again.)* Even though it has been six years since Mom passed away, and you know she would be the first one to tell you to get up off the

bench and get back in the game! *(She starts off.)* You can't believe I could be so conniving as to do such a thing! *(As she exits.)* Fathers!

JENNY: *(Watches proudly as she exits.)* She is scary good!

JOHN: *(He plops down on the sofa as JENNY moves in behind him.)*

Scary doesn't even begin to describe it.

JENNY: *(Leaning over the back of the sofa.)* I believe your daughter has decided your license to be a stick in the mud has just expired. *(He looks at her over his shoulder.)* This is going to be fun!

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

AT RISE: *The same setting as before but now the stage is dark. JOHN is alone in the room, lying on the sofa with a pillow and blanket, tossing and turning, trying to get to sleep. He is dressed in a white tee shirt and long pajama bottoms. Every time he turns, he complains in some form or fashion, with a grunt, a sigh or an ad-lib but seems to finally fall asleep. After a moment, LANEY enters the room. She is dressed also in long pajamas and big fluffy slippers with a Christmas theme of some sort. She is on the phone and doesn't notice JOHN on the sofa until she sits on him. She is talking on the phone, trying to whisper but we can also tell she is a little upset.*

LANEY: No, Paulo! *(Pow-lo.)* I told you! I can't leave! Even if I wanted to, the roads are too icy to drive, and anyway, I don't have a car. I rode with a friend. I told you all of this. Because you told me you were spending Christmas with your family. *(Pause.)* Paulo? Who is that talking in the background? That sounded like Emily? Was that Emily? Paulo? What? What's that noise? Are you having a party? Then what is that...? I can't understand you? Paulo? Paulo? Men!

She sits on the end of the sofa which means she sits on JOHN's legs. At the moment she mumbles the word "men," she flings the cell phone on the sofa which lands squarely on JOHN's stomach. When it lands, he sits up, startled!

JOHN: Ouch! Watch it!

LANEY: *(Springs up from the sofa with a scream and assumes a martial arts pose.)* You stay away from me!

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JOHN: *(Jumps up from the sofa.)* You threw something at me! *(Moves toward her.)* What are you doing?

As he moves to her, he instinctively reaches for her in the dark. The following action should go very quickly.

LANEY: Stay away! *(She yells so others in the house can hear.)*
There's an intruder! Stay away! I've got a gun!

JOHN: No. I'm not an...

LANEY: Intruder!

She grabs his arm, turns into him and elbows him in the stomach. Then she spins him around and throws him to the sofa.

JOHN: Umphhh!

LANEY: *(Not sure if she should be loud, she half whispers a yell.)*
Help! Help! *(JOHN reaches up and flips on the lamp.)*

JOHN: I don't think you need any help!

LANEY: Mr. Billings? Oh no! *(She rushes to him and helps him sit up on the sofa.)* I am so sorry! I didn't mean it! I didn't know it was you!
Are you hurt? Let me help you!

He struggles up with her help.

JOHN: It's all right! I'm all right! I'm good! I'm good!

LANEY: *(Sits on the sofa next to him.)* I'm sorry!

JOHN: You pack quite a punch. Where did you learn to do that?

LANEY: Self-defense classes. My dad's idea. He's a little paranoid.

JOHN: Good for him. Not so good for me.

JULIE rushes into the room.

JULIE: What is happening in here?

JOHN: *(Holding it out to her.)* Here's your phone.

JULIE: *(Crossing to LANEY.)* Have you been talking to him again?

LANEY: *(Guiltily.)* No. Maybe. Yes.

JULIE: Laney!

KELLY walks in looking wide awake.

KELLY: Can you people give a kid a break?

LANEY: Oh! Did I wake you up?

KELLY: *(With some attitude.)* No. I wasn't sleeping, but you almost woke Mae up. If she wakes up, she won't go back to sleep until tomorrow afternoon.

JOHN: Why weren't you asleep?

KELLY: I don't sleep so good in new places.

JOHN: I can understand that. So your aunt didn't wake up?

KELLY: *(Crosses behind chair toward him.)* No. Why do you care?

JOHN: I don't care. I mean, I care because I didn't want to wake her up.

KELLY: Are you asking about her because you still love her?

JOHN: *(Stunned.)* What?

KELLY: Miss Kim said she was your first love.

JOHN: That was a long time ago.

KELLY: Aunt Leslie says she thought you two would get married. But then you dumped her.

JOHN: I didn't dump her. Did she say I dumped her? I didn't dump her. We were going in different directions at the time, that's all. I don't think your Aunt Leslie would appreciate your talking about this.

KELLY: Why? It's the truth. Aren't you supposed to always tell the truth? That's what adults always say. Practice what you preach, old man.

LANEY: Okay! *(Puts her arms around KELLY's shoulder and attempts to move her back toward her room.)* I promise I will be quiet from now on. Maybe you should try to get some sleep. You must be tired.

KELLY: I'm not tired. I'm wide awake.

JULIE: You're sure? *(KELLY nods.)* Good! *(She has been fuming, staring at LANEY the entire time.)* Because I am about to lay down the law!

KELLY: About what?

JULIE: Not to you. To her! *(Points to LANEY.)*

KELLY: *(With a big smile.)* Ooh! What did she do?

LANEY: *(Behind the armchair.)* Julie! Not now!

JULIE: Why not!

LANEY: You know why not. It's embarrassing!

KELLY: (*Moves to her and shakes a finger in her face.*) If it's embarrassing, you shouldn't be doing it.

JULIE: You see, even the kid knows.

KELLY: (*Crosses to JULIE.*) Don't call me a kid! I'm a young lady!

JULIE: You called yourself a kid!

KELLY: I can do that. You can't!

JOHN: Then, as a young lady, you shouldn't be calling me or anyone else "old man!"

KELLY: I call 'em as I see 'em.

JOHN: You... I... Ohhh! Now I remember why Kim is an only child!

KELLY: That's rude!

JOHN: I'm rude? Are you kidding me?

JULIE: Will you two stop? (*JOHN gives her a look.*) Sorry, Mr. Billings. (*Looks at KELLY.*) Mr. Billings is right. You should treat every adult with respect.

KELLY: (*Plops down in the armchair.*) Whatever!

JULIE: Now to the matter at hand.

LANEY: Julie!

JULIE: Mr. Billings? You're a man of the world. You have a daughter. Will you please talk some sense into Laney for me?

LANEY: Julie! (*She moves just downstage of the armchair.*)

JOHN: About what?

JULIE: (*Crosses to him and sits.*) Her boyfriend! Or what is supposed to be her ex-boyfriend!

JOHN: I really don't think I want to...

JENNY steps from the shadows and sits on the back of the sofa.

JENNY: Of course you do, sweetheart.

JOHN: You stay out of this!

As he turns to look at JENNY, he seems to be looking at KELLY, who sits in the armchair, so she responds.

KELLY: I didn't say anything! Rude again! Jeez, Louise!

JOHN: I wasn't talking to you, I was... (*He gives her a look of pure frustration, and she responds with a derogatory grunt.*) Never mind!

JENNY: Don't be rude to the little girl, Mr. Scrooge!

During the following, JENNY will repeatedly let JOHN know what she thinks. He will try to ignore her repeatedly.

KELLY: (*Whispers to LANEY.*) Aunt Leslie says people get this way when they get old. You just have to go along. Good thing we're only visiting.

JOHN: I heard that!

JULIE: (*Trying to ignore her.*) As I was saying! The reason we're all up right now and not sound asleep in our comfy beds is that Laney can't seem to let go of her loser boyfriend.

LANEY: He's not a loser!

JULIE: (*To JOHN.*) He is such a loser.

JOHN: I don't think I'm qualified to comment.

JENNY: You couldn't be more qualified.

JULIE: (*She continues as if not hearing him.*) So it's like this. Laney met this guy about six months ago. He tells her his name is Paulo Dustino. He says he's Italian. He says his great-great-grandfather came over from Italy and was like a godfather in the mafia in New York City. He says his father was the first one to have enough guts to break away from the family business and go straight, but he stills warns...Paulo...to keep an eye out and stay on his toes because you never know.

JOHN: That's very interesting, but...

JENNY: You never did want to deal with Kim's "boy problems."

JULIE: Makes him sound all dangerous and exotic, right? Of course, his driver's license says his real name is Paul Dustin, and he's from Cleveland, Ohio. I know this because I snuck his wallet from his coat pocket so I could check up on the guy, the way any best friend would do.

KELLY: (*Offers her an air high five.*) Good move!

JENNY: You always wanted to leave those discussions up to me.

JULIE: (*Accepts the high five.*) Thanks! So when I do some checking on this guy, I find out his family has lived in Cleveland for, like, five generations now, and his father works at a hardware store selling hammers and nails for a living. Nothing wrong with that profession, mind you, but it's a long way from dangerous and exotic!

JOHN: Again, I don't think I...

JENNY: You were their age once, you know. Even though I'm sure that's become a distant memory.

JOHN: *(To JENNY.)* Now it's you with the "old" cracks!

JULIE: What?

JOHN: Nothing.

JULIE: After further review - you can learn so much on the internet these days - I learn that Paul has just moved to town after being left at the altar by his fiancée of five years back in Cleveland. He disclosed none of this to Laney, mind you, which in combination with his fictional background makes him a liar, a phony and most definitely a big time loser.

LANEY: *(Crosses to the love seat.)* He has some good qualities, too.

JENNY: The girl needs someone who's been through it all to give her some counseling.

JULIE: *(Gives LANEY a look, then goes back to JOHN.)* And I'm not finished! Even though I told Laney about all of these things, he was actually able to convince her that all of that was just a cover story to keep the bad guys away.

KELLY: *(Shakes her head and gives LANEY a look.)* Oh, girl!

JULIE: So he got away with it. Until about a month ago, when I found out that his ex-fiancée had tracked him down and the two of them had kissed and made up. Two days...two days, mind you...two days later, he shows up at her doorstep with the ex and informs Laney that not only was he dumping her but that the marriage to Miss Ohio was back on! No. To be fair, that's not true. I was there at the time, and it wasn't really him. She did all the talking. He just sort of whimpered in the background. The woman was scary! I mean, scary!

JENNY: If there was a man around with any compassion...

JOHN: *(Sighs and gives in.)* All right, already! I got it! *(JULIE gives him a strange look.)* So! Paulo is out of the picture. What's the problem now?

JULIE: The problem is the creature from Lake Erie has apparently slunk back into the depths, leaving this tramp with no lady waiting at the end of those long strings of spaghetti he says he feasts on every other day!

KELLY: Oh! I love that movie!

LANEY: It's sad. He's all alone for Christmas.

JULIE: As he so richly deserves.

LANEY: But it's Christmas! It's a time for giving and forgiving. I mean what if he really is...you know...Italian. What if...? I mean, what if...? She could have... *(Pause.)* It could happen!

JULIE doesn't say anything else. She just looks at JOHN, holds her open palm toward LANEY and gives him an expectant look.

JENNY: A man of compassion...

JOHN: I got it! *(He stands.)* Look, Laney. I don't know you very well. Obviously, you're a lovely young woman.

LANEY: *(Shyly.)* Thank you!

JOHN: *(Crosses toward her.)* Sure. Uh. You seem to be an intelligent young woman. I guess. So the question seems to be why? Why would you put up with this Paulo or Paul or whoever he is? *(Starts to get into it.)* I mean...why...in the world would you put up with the bunk this guy has been feeding you? The mafia? Come on! And he's obviously using you as a rebound from this other woman! Any idiot could see that!

JENNY: *(Warning.)* John!

JOHN: What I mean is...

He sits at the end of the sofa and tries again. Although the advice is good, we can tell he is not really enjoying giving it. Shaking his head, lifting the eyebrows, he feels very uncomfortable dealing with this.

JOHN: If you were my daughter, I would tell you that you're worth more than a million guys like Paulo. I would tell you that if this guy or any other guy lies to you about one thing, then he's probably lying to you about other things and you have to know you deserve better than that. I would tell you that when I was growing up, my father always told me that if I wanted to be a real man, I would show respect to every woman. He told me that during my lifetime women would beguile me, hypnotize me, confuse me, and at times, infuriate me, but when it was all said and done, one woman would complete me. *(For a moment getting lost in his own thoughts.)* He was right. I found that one woman. She's been gone now for six years. But she has never and will never come down from the pedestal I put her on. *(He pauses to a moment to regain his composure.)* There is someone out there who wants to put you on a pedestal. Probably several someones. But Paulo...he isn't one of them. I think you already know that.

LANEY: *(Pause.)* I do.

JOHN: Then here's what I suggest. Give your phone to Julie. She's a good friend. She'll let you know if anyone of importance calls. Won't you, Julie?

JULIE: I will.

JOHN: Just enjoy the time you're here. It's Christmas. There are people here who care about you. If you have a moment of weakness, talk to them. They'll see you through.

JULIE: *(To LANEY.)* We will.

JOHN: Well. That's all I've got.

LANEY: *(Goes to him and gives him a hug and kiss on the cheek.)*
Thank you.

JENNY: You've still got it. You sweet talker, you.

JOHN: *(Embarrassed.)* It's okay. It's fine. Maybe we could all get some sleep now.

JULIE: Thanks, Mr. B. I told you that you could do it.

JOHN: Yeah.

JULIE: The wisdom of the elders.

JOHN: Could we let up on the age comments? I'm beginning to feel like I should be making reservations down at Happy Meadows.

KELLY: What's Happy Meadows?

JOHN: The local rest home.

JULIE: Ah, don't worry. I'm sure you still have a few good years left before they have you committed.

JOHN: Thanks! I feel better already.

JULIE: Sure thing, Mr. B.

LANEY: *(Starts to leave.)* We'll let you get some sleep.

JULIE: Not so fast! *(Holds out her hand and LANEY gives her a questioning look.)* Phone?

LANEY: Oh. Right. *(Starts to hand it over but hesitates.)* You know. On the other hand, I'll probably be just fine with it.

JULIE: Give it up!

LANEY: *(Clings it to her.)* But it's like my blankey!

JULIE: *(Good-natured but insistent.)* Hand it over!

LANEY: *(Does so grudgingly.)* Oh, all right! *(Literally shivers.)* Ohhh! I feel like I just stepped back into the dark ages! Take good care of her.

JULIE: I will. Now, let's get some sleep. Good night, Mr. B.

LANEY: Good night.

JOHN: Yeah. Good night.

They exit and JOHN, apparently forgetting all about KELLY, turns off the lamps and lays back down on the sofa. KELLY moves over to the end of the sofa and stares down into his face. When he does not respond, she gives him a tap on the forehead. He jumps up and turns the lamp back on.

JOHN: Oh! I thought you had... Well, it's late. So. Good night...uh...uh...

KELLY: *(Still sassy.)* Kelly! My name is Kelly. *(Spells it.)* K-E-L-L-Y!

JOHN: Right. I knew that. Good night, Kelly.

KELLY: So you don't have any of that good advice for me, do you?

JOHN: Please tell me you're not having boy problems.

KELLY: I'm not having boy problems.

JOHN: Good.

KELLY: Your wife died, huh?

JOHN: *(Catching him off guard.)* Yes. She did.

KELLY: Six years ago?

JOHN: *(Nods his head.)* Six years ago.

KELLY: *(Sits on the sofa next to him.)* Is that why you don't like Christmas anymore?

JOHN: I... Who said I didn't like Christmas anymore?

Obviously interested in what she has to say, JENNY sits in the chair next to the sofa and listens. KELLY still has her "attitude," but we notice during the scene that she slowly begins to soften.

KELLY: You don't have any decorations. You don't have a Christmas tree.

JOHN: I...just haven't gotten around to it.

KELLY: Tomorrow is Christmas Eve.

JOHN: I've slowed down in my old age.

KELLY: You're not that old. I was just giving you a hard time.

JOHN: Thank you for that. *(Pause.)* For saying I'm not that old, not for giving me a hard time.

KELLY: You're welcome, but I'm not that young.

JOHN: What do you mean?

KELLY: I'm not so young that you can just lie to me and I'll believe it just because you're an adult. I got past that a long time ago.

JOHN: I hope not too long ago.

KELLY: So is it because your wife died six years ago that you don't like Christmas anymore? Did she die around this time of year?

JOHN: Yes. She passed away in early December, but that doesn't have anything to do with why I... *(Catches himself.)* I still like Christmas. Okay?

KELLY: You don't act like it.

JOHN: How do you know I don't act like it? Maybe this is how I've always acted at Christmas!

KELLY: No. Kim told Aunt Leslie that your house used to look like a Christmas store. There were so many decorations, and you were always decorating outside and having people over and cooking lots of food and...

JOHN: Okay! I get it! I get it! *(Stands and paces around the room.)* I used to do a lot of stuff for Christmas that I don't do anymore. Okay? That doesn't mean I don't like Christmas! It just means there aren't little kids running around anymore to enjoy all of that. There aren't people from the neighborhood coming over anymore. There's nobody around during the holiday until the last day or two, and I just don't deem it necessary to do all of that just for me.

KELLY: So you're lonely?

JOHN: Yeah, I get lonely sometimes, but... *(Catches himself again.)* You know, you ask a lot of questions for a kid.

KELLY: How else am I supposed to find things out?

JOHN: That may be true, but there are some things you don't need to know.

KELLY: I just thought that maybe...

JOHN: What I think is that it's very late and you should go to bed now.

KELLY: *(Stands.)* But I thought if you could tell me...

JOHN: *(Losing his temper a little.)* I don't want to tell you anything, okay!

JENNY: *(Stands.)* John!

KELLY: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you mad.

JOHN: You didn't make me mad. It's just that there are some questions that shouldn't be asked. Especially from children who really don't know what they're talking about.

JENNY: John, don't!

JOHN: We'll just forget about it. It's late. You really should go on and go to bed now. You think you can do that?

KELLY: Yes, sir.

JOHN: Good.

She stands and starts to head off. JOHN just stands watching her go. Just before she exits, she turns back.

KELLY: I'm sorry I asked bad questions.

JOHN: Forget about it, okay? Good night.

KELLY: Good night.

She exits. JOHN stands there for a moment looking off. JENNY just stands and looks at him. After a moment, he turns the lamp off and grabs his pillow, trying to ignore JENNY as she moves behind the sofa watching him. He sits on the sofa, fluffs the pillow and then lies down as if to sleep. All the while, she watches him as if waiting for him to say something. Finally, having taken all of it he can stand, he sits up turns the lamp on again.

JOHN: What?

At that moment, LESLIE comes from the kitchen holding a glass of milk. She is dressed in Christmas pajamas as well. She tries to remain upbeat during the conversation, hoping to steer JOHN in that direction as well.

LESLIE: *(Seeing JOHN.)* Oh! I'm sorry. I didn't know you were up.

JOHN: *(Stands.)* Yeah. Just having a little trouble falling asleep.

LESLIE: Me too. I came in to get a glass of milk. It helps me sleep.
Could I get you one?

JOHN: No. No, thanks.

LESLIE: Well, I guess I should... *(Pauses.)* John. I know it's late, but could we talk? For just a minute or two?

JOHN: *(Starts to show his frustration.)* It's really kind of late.

JENNY: *(Fussing at him.)* John!

JOHN: But like I said, I can't sleep either. So, sure. Why not. *(Moves to one side of the sofa and motions for her to sit down.)* Have a seat.

JENNY: *(Behind the sofa.)* Better!

LESLIE: *(Crosses to the sofa and sits on the line.)* I just wanted to say how sorry I am for all of this. I mean, if I had known the weather was going to deteriorate so quickly, we would have headed straight for home. I never meant to put you out like this.

JOHN: Don't worry about it.

LESLIE: I do. I do worry about it. I know this has become a difficult time of year for you, and I really don't want to add to that.

JOHN: Why does everyone think this is such a difficult time of year for me?

LESLIE: John, you know the answer to that.

JOHN: (*Sighs and shakes his head.*) Okay, yes. Jenny passed away around the holidays. But that was six years ago. I've moved on.

JENNY: Me too! (*Looks around.*) Oh, look! No! I'm still here!

LESLIE: (*Good-naturedly giving him a hard time.*) And I believe you. But I think it's normal. Every time I hear the word graduation, I get a little disturbed down deep inside.

JOHN: Oh?

LESLIE: Yes. I mean, don't get me wrong, John. I am over you. I was over you long ago, but when a guy breaks up with a girl on the evening of her high school graduation? She tends to remember that.

JENNY: You didn't!

JOHN: I admit it wasn't good timing.

JENNY: You think?

LESLIE: (*Smiling.*) And that's all I'm saying, John. It's never easy to lose someone you... (*Pauses.*) you love...but it can be especially difficult to get over when it happens at a time that is so special to you.

JENNY: Listen to the woman, John.

JOHN: I'm listening!

LESLIE: I'm sure it was special to both of you.

JOHN: It was.

LESLIE takes a drink from her glass of milk.

JENNY: Listen to her, John. It's time to move on.

JOHN: (*To JENNY.*) Move on?

LESLIE: Move on?

JOHN: (*Again to JENNY.*) Are you trying to set me up?

LESLIE: (*Confused.*) Am I what?

JOHN: (*To JENNY.*) My old girlfriend? Really?

LESLIE: I'm not trying to do anything, John.

JENNY: She is still a beautiful woman.

JOHN: (*To JENNY.*) You're still a beautiful woman!

JOHN stands exasperated and takes a couple of steps away during the next line.

LESLIE: (*Surprised.*) That's really sweet, but...

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JENNY: And she's here, and I'm gone!

JOHN: (*Turns on JENNY.*) Will you cut it out!

With a loud uttering of despair, JENNY stomps away from him toward the front door in frustration.

LESLIE: (*Shocked.*) I'm sorry?

JOHN: No! Leslie!

LESLIE: I apologize! (*She stands as if to leave.*) I shouldn't have said anything about it.

JOHN: (*Finally realizes.*) No! Leslie! I'm sorry! (*Stops her by taking her hand.*) I was...I was...I don't know what I was doing. I was caught up in my own thoughts! That's all. That wasn't directed at you!

LESLIE: (*Shakes her head.*) You are as frustrating and confusing as you were thirty years ago!

JENNY: (*With her back turned.*) Tell me about it!

JOHN: I'm sorry. Please. Sit down. (*They do so.*) It's just, all this talk about me and the holiday. I get tired of it. I'm living. I've moved on.

JENNY: Liar!

JOHN: And what about you?

LESLIE: Me?

JOHN: Yes. I mean. You're here without your husband. I hope everything is okay.

LESLIE: You mean you don't know?

JOHN: Did I bring up a sore subject?

LESLIE: No, John. I don't have a husband.

JOHN: Did he...?

LESLIE: What?

JOHN: Pass away?

LESLIE: No. He didn't die. He never was.

JOHN: What?

LESLIE: I never married.

JOHN: You're kidding.

LESLIE: You didn't know that?

JOHN: I guess I didn't. I just assumed that you would have gotten married.

LESLIE: Why would you assume that?

JOHN: Well, you... I mean, you're a beautiful woman. You're bright. Funny. You had so much going for you.

LESLIE: Had?

JOHN: You still do! Obviously! (*Apologetic.*) You know what I mean. I'm sorry, Leslie. You moved off to college. Then I heard from someone that you weren't coming back here. I lost touch. I guess that doesn't speak so well of me, does it?

LESLIE: Don't be ridiculous. You were with Jenny by then. I had college and then a career. It happens. When you're young, you think there are friends that you'll be close to forever. No way would you ever stop being friends. I was that way with Susie Jordan. Remember her? We were inseparable in high school.

JOHN: (*Smiles.*) I do remember her.

LESLIE: No clue where she is now. I can't even remember the last time I saw her or how we drifted apart. But we did. It happens.

JOHN: Still. I'm sorry I didn't keep up.

LESLIE: I'm sorry we didn't keep up. But we're here now.

JENNY: (*Crossing back.*) Yes, you are.

LESLIE: And I guess we'll be seeing more of each other, so we can do some major catching up.

JENNY: Let me go, John.

JOHN: I can't.

LESLIE: You can't?

JOHN: I can't...anymore tonight, I mean. I suddenly got...really sleepy!

LESLIE: Of course. It's so late. I didn't mean to keep you up. (*Stands and turns as if to go.*) Oh, John?

JOHN: Yes.

LESLIE: I meant to tell you earlier, but I never got the chance.

JOHN: Tell me what?

LESLIE: The little one. Kelly?

JOHN: Yeah?

LESLIE: She's a great kid but...well... She has her moments.

JOHN: Tell me about it.

LESLIE: Cut her some slack. Okay? This is her first Christmas without her mom and dad.

JOHN: Without... What?

LESLIE: You remember my younger brother, Danny? He was, Kelly's dad.

JOHN: Was?

LESLIE: Last December, he went on a skiing trip a week before Christmas with his wife. Her mom. They thought the car must have hit a patch of ice. Anyway. They didn't make it.

JOHN: *(Sinks back to the sofa.)* I didn't know.

JENNY: *(Crosses to him.)* Oh, John.

LESLIE: I'm really the only family she has left. In the will they had asked that if anything ever happened I be appointed Kelly's legal guardian. So. Anyway. I just wanted you to know that if she acts a little weird at times, there's a reason. Well, good night, John. I enjoyed the talk.

JOHN: Me too.

She leaves. JOHN sits in silence for a moment. JENNY reaches out and touches him gently on the shoulder. He turns to her.

JOHN: I didn't know.

ACT TWO, SCENE 1

AT RISE: *The next day. The same setting as before except now there has been a transformation. The house is elaborately decorated for Christmas. There is a large Christmas tree adorned in full splendor. There are wreaths, greenery, poinsettias, Santas, nativity scenes and any other assortment of Christmas decor imaginable. It is obvious that if all of this came from the attic, as we assume it did, this has been a home that, in the past, loved Christmas. Everyone is in the room now, gathered around and playing a game of Christmas charades. It seems to have been going on a while. There are empty snack plates around, half-empty glasses and trays of snacks laid out as well. The coffee table has been moved aside. At the moment, DENNIS is up trying to get his team of JOHN, LANEY and JULIE to figure out his title. It doesn't appear to be going well. DENNIS is trying to act out the word harpoon, which he thinks might help his team get the word lampoon. He should try several things but fail miserably. First, he tries to pantomime the ocean. We should hear some ad libbed guessing. In fact, feel free to throw in a few ad-libs throughout.*

LANEY: Water! *(He motions for more guesses.)* Ripples! *(He moves around the room making big movements with his arms.)*

JOHN: Drunk!

He shakes his head vigorously and tries another tack. This time, he pantomimes playing a harp.

JULIE: Spirit fingers!

LANEY: Pick! Guitar!

Frustrated, DENNIS grabs the top of his head and then slaps himself in the face with both hands a couple of times.

JULIE: *(Excitedly jumps up.)* Oh! Oh! *The Three Stooges Meet Santa Claus!*

DENNIS: No!

LANEY: Three Stooges?

JULIE: I saw it when I was a kid. I love the Stooges!

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DENNIS: Can we focus here?

MAE: (*Whacks DENNIS with her cane.*) Don't talk! You're not supposed to talk!

DENNIS: All right! (*He turns to his teammates.*) Okay.

As soon as the word comes out of his mouth, she whacks him again. He turns to her and starts to say something, but she points the cane at him and gives him a threatening look, so he decides to keep his mouth shut. He then turns and tries again. This time, he pantomimes a big spear and trying to shoot it. A whale and pretends to be stabbed.

LANEY: Spear! Stab! (*DENNIS nods to let her know she's close and urges her to keep going.*) Kill! (*He tries to imitate a whale being harpooned.*) Big! Giant! Kill! Slay!

JOHN: What kind of Christmas movie is this?

KIM: Time's almost up!

DENNIS is totally frustrated but now tries to act out a whaler shooting the harpoon and having it sail in an arc out to the whale, which he again imitates rather poorly.

JOHN: Machine gun! Rainbow!

JULIE: (*Jumps up excitedly.*) Somewhere Over the Rainbow!

LANEY: It's got to be a Christmas song or a Christmas movie! That's not a Christmas song!

JULIE: Well, neither is kill Santa with a giant spear while he flies his sleigh over a rainbow!

KIM: Times up!

DENNIS: Oh, for crying out loud! It's *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation 2, Cousin Eddie's Island Adventure*!

JOHN: It's what?

LANEY: Is that a real movie?

MAE: Of course it is. I put that one in there. I don't cheat! (*Looks at JOHN.*) You're not calling me a cheater, are you?

JOHN: (*He's learned his lesson.*) No, ma'am! I am not!

KIM: We're up. This is for the game. Leslie, it's your turn.

LESLIE: Great. I'm terrible at these things.

DENNIS grabs the bag of titles and has LESLIE draw and then he joins his team. LESLIE does the sign for movie, then for five words and then points to her nose. Everyone calls out the title at the same time along with KIM.

KIM: *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer!*

LESLIE: Yes!

DENNIS: *(DENNIS' team reacts.)* You've got to be kidding me! Let me see that. *(She hands the slip of paper to him.)* You get this, and I get National...whatever the name of that movie was?

LESLIE: Luck of the draw.

KIM: What word were you going for? I couldn't figure it out either.

DENNIS: Harpoon! I don't even know what a lampoon is. I was trying for word association.

KIM: I hate to say it sweetheart, but there's not a lot to associate between lampoon and harpoon.

DENNIS: Well, at least there's a 'poon on the end of both of them.

JOHN: *(Laughs.)* There is that.

DENNIS: I suppose you could have done better?

JOHN: *(Throws up his hands.)* Me? Not in a million 'poons! I mean moons!

DENNIS: Ho ho ho! Very funny. Very funny! *(To KIM.)* We suddenly have a stand-up comedian in the room. Now if you'll all excuse me, I'm hungry. *(To KIM.)* Can I get you something?

KIM: No thanks, sweetie.

DENNIS starts for the kitchen.

JOHN: Could you spear me a couple of whales in a blanket while you're in there? Oh! I mean pigs in a blanket! I don't know what's wrong with me all of a sudden. My brain has just gone to 'poon!

DENNIS: *(Aside to KIM.)* I know he's your father, but I'm going to kill him. I'm going to kill him, and I'm going to stuff him so far under the ground that he won't be heard of again until he's fossil fuel!

KIM: *(Laughs.)* Stop! At least he's talking.

DENNIS: I think I liked him better before.

KIM: Go get your food.

He exits to the kitchen. In the meantime, JULIE reaches into her bag of tricks and pulls out about a bunch of Christmas movies.

JULIE: Time to start our Christmas movie marathon! Who's in?

LANEY: I am!

MAE: *(Takes KELLY by the arm.)* You can count us in as long as we watch *A Christmas Carol*. Any one of them will do. It's not Christmas without good old Uncle Scrooge!

KELLY: Do I have to?

MAE: You have to. Come on! It can't be any worse than watching these people try to play charades, can it?

KELLY: I guess not.

JOHN: *(Points offstage.)* You can use the player in the den. That's got the biggest TV.

JULIE: What about everyone else?

LESLIE: Give me a few minutes. I'll be there.

JOHN: I think I'll pass.

JULIE: Kim? You're coming, aren't you?

KIM: You know I wouldn't miss it. We'll be there as soon as Dennis gets his snacks.

JULIE: Don't wait too long!

KIM: We won't.

LANEY, JULIE, MAE and KELLY exit. LESLIE remains. KIM crosses to her father.

KIM: What has gotten into you?

JOHN: Just trying to get into the Christmas spirit.

KIM: And I appreciate that, but do you think you could aim it somewhere other than Dennis? He thinks you're trying to give him a hard time.

JOHN: Me? Give your spouse a hard time? Where would he come up with an idea like that?

KIM: Very funny. You're a funny guy. *(Notices LESLIE, who has remained.)* Leslie? Aren't you going to join the others?

LESLIE: I will, but Dennis wanted me to, uh... Well, he said that when we had the chance to get you two alone that he would like me to be here when he... (*Sees DENNIS entering with a plate of food.*) You know what? I'll let him explain.

DENNIS enters carrying a plate of food and a glass of eggnog on a tray. There is also a full pitcher of the eggnog on the tray. As he enters, he is taking a long drink from the cup.

KIM: Is that the eggnog that Daddy made?

DENNIS: (*Takes another drink.*) Yep!

KIM: Then you'd better drink it a little more slowly or we'll be picking you up off the floor. Soon.

DENNIS: (*He places the tray down and refills his glass.*) I think I deserve a little comfort after that stimulating round of Christmas charades.

KIM: Maybe so, but...take it easy.

DENNIS: I always do.

LESLIE: Dennis?

DENNIS: Yes?

LESLIE: Don't you think this might be a good time to...discuss the...you know. The thing you needed to tell Kim.

DENNIS: (*Immediately becomes uncomfortable.*) Oh. (*Pause.*) I don't know. Maybe we should wait.

KIM: (*Now becoming very curious.*) Wait? There won't be any waiting. I really don't like the tone I'm hearing from you two. If there's something you need to tell me, I think you'd better do it. (*DENNIS and LESLIE exchange concerned looks.*) Well?

DENNIS: Can we at least talk to you alone? Minus... (*Nods toward JOHN.*) you know who.

JOHN: Hah! Now look who's become the comedian!

DENNIS: Kim!

KIM: (*Crosses to him.*) Dennis, I'm sure that if I asked my father to step out of the room and allow you to tell me whatever it is you need to tell me, he would honor my request.

DENNIS: Good.

KIM: But then he'd be after me later to tell him what this was all about, and if it's something I'm not going to like, in all probability he won't like it either. Then I'd have to deal with him by myself. On the other hand, if it's good news, something I'm going to like...well...there's still a pretty good chance he won't like it and I'd still have to deal with his objections all by myself. So, no. He stays.

JOHN: *(Very satisfied.)* Thank you.

KIM: *(To JOHN.)* You weren't going to leave the room anyway, were you? *(With a little sarcasm.)* This being your house and all.

JOHN: *(To her.)* Smart girl.

KIM: *(Turns back to them.)* So what is going on?

DENNIS: *(Takes a deep breath.)* Why don't we all sit down?

KIM: *(Gives him a look but does go to sit.)* All right.

DENNIS: *(Smiling at her.)* Sweetheart.

KIM and DENNIS sit. DENNIS puts his arm around her and snuggles up close. JOHN sits on the love seat and props a leg up, anxious to hear what he is sure not going to be a good thing for DENNIS.

DENNIS: *(Motions for LESLIE to be seated.)* Leslie.

LESLIE: *(She sits in armchair.)* Maybe I should just say what Dennis wanted me to say and then go and watch the movie with the girls. I'm sure you'll want some family time.

JOHN: I'm sure we will.

KIM: *(Looking at DENNIS.)* Well, what is it? I'm fairly certain you haven't cheated on me, because you're within arm's length of Daddy, and you do remember what he told you he would do to you if you ever cheated on me.

DENNIS: *(Gulps.)* I do. And no. Of course not. I would never.

KIM: Then what?

DENNIS: Leslie?

LESLIE: Let me preface this by saying that Dennis hasn't done anything wrong. That's not what this is about. *(DENNIS smiles at KIM and leans his head against hers.)* Let me also say that I wanted him to tell you about this weeks ago. As soon as I found out.

KIM: *(To DENNIS.)* This is something you've known for weeks and haven't told me?

DENNIS: I was hoping things might change, and if they didn't, I was trying to pick the right time.

KIM: (*Getting anxious.*) What is it?

DENNIS looks to LESLIE again.

LESLIE: About six weeks ago, I went in to talk to David Garner. That's my boss. Our boss. He knew I was thinking about retiring. I went back and forth about it. It was a tough decision for me, but when I finally made up my mind, I went in to talk to him. I wanted to give him plenty of notice so he could find someone to fill my spot, thinking he might promote someone up through the ranks.

KIM: You got a promotion?

DENNIS: Not quite.

LESLIE: When I told him I was leaving, he was actually relieved.

JOHN: Relieved?

LESLIE: It turns out, you see, the company was downsizing and even though he'd miss me, he said, that was one less person he'd have to let go.

KIM: Let go?

LESLIE: I didn't ask him to tell me anything. I didn't want him to tell me anything, but he thought since I was leaving that I might want to know who else was going to be leaving.

KIM: Dennis?

LESLIE: As soon as I heard Dennis' name, I knew I had to tell him. I just didn't think it was right to fire someone right before the Christmas holidays and not give them any warning.

KIM: Fired? You got fired?

DENNIS: Not fired! Not technically. Released...due to downsizing of the staff.

KIM: And how long have you known this was coming?

LESLIE: I told him right away. I wanted him to have time to start looking for something else.

KIM: Looking for something else? But there aren't any other architectural firms in Grayson, are there? (*To DENNIS.*) You told me they were the only one. Is that still true?

DENNIS: It's...still true.

KIM: And they fired you yesterday? Right before Christmas? That's just wrong!

LESLIE: Actually...

DENNIS: (*Trying to caution her.*) Leslie!

LESLIE: (*But she can't stop in mid-sentence.*) They fired him two weeks ago.

KIM: (*Stands.*) Two weeks ago!

DENNIS: Now, Kim! Take it easy.

KIM: Two weeks ago, and you're just telling me this now! On Christmas Eve!

JOHN: (*Shaking his head.*) You would not have cut it as one of the wise men.

KIM: (*To LESLIE.*) And how long ago did you tell him about this?

LESLIE: I told him right away, like I said. About six weeks ago.

KIM: (*She's fired up now and begins pacing.*) So you've known it was coming for six weeks, and you didn't bother to tell me this? Why?

DENNIS: I was trying to find the right time?

KIM: And you consider this the right time?

LESLIE: I think I'll join the ladies for that movie now! (*To DENNIS.*) Good luck!

She stands and makes a quick exit.

KIM: If they fired you two weeks ago, what have you been doing since then?

DENNIS: They asked me to stay on until yesterday. Bob...you remember Bob. He had the flu, and they needed someone to put some finishing touches on the project he was working on. And the project I had been working on was due. That's why I had to work late a few nights.

KIM: Doing your work and Bob's?

DENNIS: Yes.

KIM: They paid you for the extra work. Right? You did ask them to pay you for the extra work! Didn't you?

DENNIS: Not really.

KIM: (*Sits beside him and smiles.*) Let me get this straight. They gave you the boot, and you did them a favor by finishing Bob's project.

DENNIS: I guess I did.

KIM: (*Sweetly.*) That was very nice of you.

DENNIS: Thanks.

KIM: (*She is up again.*) Unbelievable!

DENNIS: You see! This is why I didn't want to talk about this. I knew you'd be upset!

KIM: (*Crosses behind the sofa.*) I'm not upset that you got fired! I mean, I am, but I'm not upset with you for being fired! I'm upset because you didn't trust me enough to talk to me about it!

DENNIS: I trust you.

KIM: Obviously not! I love you! I'm not going to kick you out of the house because you lost your job! Didn't you think there were things we needed to discuss? Like what do we do next?

DENNIS: I guess so.

KIM: You guess? (*Walks away from him.*) I don't believe this!

JOHN: I do.

DENNIS: Oh! Here we go!

JOHN: So what did you do?

DENNIS: What do you mean what did I do?

JOHN: To get fired. What did you do?

DENNIS: I didn't do anything!

JOHN: How many others did they fire?

DENNIS: I don't know.

JOHN: But they didn't fire everyone? The company does still have employees doing what you did?

DENNIS: Of course they do. They downsized. They didn't go out of business.

JOHN: So what did you do?

DENNIS: (*Stands.*) You know what? I don't have to answer these stupid questions.

JOHN: (*Stands.*) So I'm stupid?

DENNIS: (*Turns on him.*) I didn't say that!

JOHN: (*Gets in his face.*) In my experience, stupid people ask stupid questions!

DENNIS: You said it! Not me!

KIM: (*Has been watching in disbelief.*) All right! Stop it! Stop it right now!

DENNIS AND JOHN: (*Simultaneously.*) He started it!

KIM: And I am ending it! Both of you, sit down! (*They look at her.*) Now! (*Between her tone and the look in her eyes, they decide it is best to comply.*) Dennis. (*Crosses to him and puts her hand firmly on his shoulder.*) You are my husband, and I love you dearly. But, I have to say that not talking to me about this as soon as you found out was not the smartest thing you've ever done!

JOHN: That's an understatement.

KIM: (*Then turns on JOHN.*) And, Father! I love you dearly, too. But, to put it gently, you have been no picnic to be around the last few years.

DENNIS: Now there's an understatement.

KIM: (*She gets on a roll, moving from one to the other.*) Like it or not, the two of you are the two most important men in my life, and it is time... No, I have to rephrase that. I can't even begin to express to you how far past time it is for the two of you to grow up and act like men! No! You know what? I have failed to communicate adequately again! Because I suppose you have been acting like men - self-centered, inconsiderate, knock 'em over the head, drag them home by the hair, men!

DENNIS: That's not...!

KIM: (*Cuts him off with one look.*) Do...not...speak! (*He settles back in his seat.*) That is how you've been acting, but that is not the kind of man I married, and that is not the kind of man that raised me. I want both of those men back, and I believe I have finally come to understand that until you two work out the testosterone-laden issues you obviously have with each other, issues that my poor female brain can't even begin to comprehend...and may I say, don't want to comprehend...that's not going to happen! (*Trying to calm herself.*) So here's what we're going to do. I'm going to go and join the Christmas movie marathon with our guests. You two are going to stay in this room together until you work out your differences. And I mean really work out your differences! Until then, I don't want to see you, I don't want to hear you, I don't even want to imagine you leaving this room! The next time I see your smiling faces, they'd better be smiling! At each other!

She storms out. The two of them watch her leave and then reluctantly look at each other and both let out a big sigh as the lights dim.

ACT TWO, SCENE 2

AT RISE: *The same setting as before. About an hour has passed. The coffee table is back. DENNIS sits slumped in the armchair holding a half-empty glass of eggnog. JOHN sits on the opposite side of the sofa, staring straight ahead and holding a nearly empty glass of the same. There are now two pitchers on the table, one empty and another getting close to empty. JENNY, who is now present, is pacing behind the sofa.*

JENNY: *(Crossing to JOHN.)* This is getting ridiculous, John. It has been more than an hour since Kimmy left you two in here to work things out. All either of you have done is drink, pace around now and then, and mumble to yourselves about “how unfair all of this is” or “if he thinks I’m going to bow down to him, he’s got another thing coming.” This is nonsense! That boy is our Kimmy’s husband, and I happen to think he’s a very nice young man! It’s time for you to be the adult here and start talking!

JOHN turns, stands and faces her. As he does, we can tell both by his voice and his mannerisms that he is fairly tipsy. In fact, he is quite intoxicated. When DENNIS responds, we see and hear the same in him.

JOHN: I think it’s time for you to stop talking!

DENNIS: Finally!

JOHN: *(Turns drunkenly to face him.)* What?

DENNIS: You said it’s time to start talking, so go ahead and talk.

JOHN: I didn’t say start talking. I said stop talking!

DENNIS: I wasn’t talking. So why would you tell me to stop talking?
(Stands and poses hands on hips.) I know what I heard!

JENNY: *(To JOHN.)* This is good. At least you’re speaking.

JOHN: Then you’d better check your hearing, Dennis the menace!

DENNIS: *(Crossing to him.)* Oh! Ho! That’s a good one! I haven’t heard that one before! Only about a million times. If you want to insult me, you need to try a little harder!

JOHN: *(They are now face to face.)* If I wanted to insult you, it would be an easier job than the one you just got fired from, believe me!

JENNY: That’s not very nice.

DENNIS: Easy? Easy! You have no idea what you're talking about!

JOHN: *(Taps him on the chest with two fingers.)* I know you don't get many pulled muscles pushing a pencil!

DENNIS: *(Does the same to him.)* And you don't need many brain cells to hammer a nail!

JOHN: That's the second time tonight you've called me stupid!

DENNIS: And for the second time tonight, I didn't call you anything! But as you said, stupid people do say stupid things!

JOHN: All right! That's it! *(Almost stumbles as he moves away.)* I consider myself a peace-loving, non-violent human being! *(The eggnog and the adrenaline are really beginning to get to both of them.)* But you have pushed me to the edge, buddy boy! I am just about ready to punch you right in the mouth!

DENNIS: Is that right? *(Points at him.)* You couldn't punch me in the mouth even if you wanted to!

JOHN: Could too!

DENNIS: Could not!

JOHN: Could too!

DENNIS: Could not!

JENNY: Oh, get on with it!

JOHN: Is that so?

DENNIS: Yeah! That's so!

JOHN: Why not?

DENNIS: Because *you* are too old and too slow, while *I...* *(Begins to hop up and down.)* am too young and too quick! *(Begins bouncing around JOHN, shadow-boxing, giving quite an exhibition of footwork for a moment.)* Oh, here I am! *(Dodges to the other side of him.)* Oh! There I was! *(Dodges again.)* Is that me? *(And again.)* No! It's... *(Pauses for effect.)* "The Shadow"! *(And once again.)* I float like a butterball and sting like a bee! *(Catches himself.)* I meant butterfly! I float like a butterfly! A but-ter-fly! *(He attempts a spin move and falls into the armchair.)* Butterfly!

JOHN: *(Almost gets dizzy watching.)* Looks to me like your butterfly is still stuck in its cocoon! *(Laughs hysterically at his cleverness.)* You had it right at butterball! *(Then calls him one and again bursts into laughter.)* Butterball!

JENNY: John!

DENNIS: Oh, is that it? Is that the best you got, old man?

JOHN: *(Lunges at him, but misses as DENNIS dodges.)* I'll old man you!

DENNIS: *(With huge, slurred, bravado he leaps onto the sofa.)* Oh! Oh! Did you see that? Did you see that? No, you didn't! Because I am too quick for you!

JOHN: Butterball!

DENNIS: It's about time somebody cut you down to size, and I am just the man to do it!

JOHN: And you think you're just the man to do it, huh?

DENNIS: *(Stops.)* I just said I was!

JOHN: Oh? *(Pause.)* Then do it, big shot!

DENNIS: *(Crosses down left and begins to remove his sweater.)* Oh! You want some of this? You want to mix it up?! *(The sweater gets tangled, and he has difficulty getting it off, turning in circles and talking at the same time.)* Let's get to it! Let's party! Party down! Party hearty! Right here and right now! Right...right...here...and...and...right... *(He get so tangled he falls down but jumps right up and finally gets it off.)* now!

JOHN: *(Starts rolling up his sleeves.)* Anytime you're ready, Mighty Mouse!

DENNIS: *(He has no clue.)* Who?

JENNY: Dating yourself there, John.

JOHN: Spongepants!

DENNIS: Oh, that does it!

JOHN: *(Both assuming the fighting pose.)* Time to rumble bumble!

JENNY: John! Don't you dare! Don't you do it!

For the next few moments, they move around the room, fists up. They each try to assume a fighter's pose and feign right and left as they attempt, badly, to threaten each other. Since they're drunk, as they circle around, they stumble, get dizzy and have a difficult time not running into things. JENNY just follows them around, flinching when it looks like they may actually do anything. As they move, they ad lib lines such as the following.

DENNIS: Come on! Come on! You want some of this!

JOHN: Come here, you little weasel.

JENNY: John! Don't call him that!

DENNIS: I'll knock you into next week!

JOHN: You couldn't punch your way through a bag of cotton candy!

DENNIS: What the heck does that mean?

DENNIS dodges behind the loveseat.

JOHN: I don't know! (*JOHN lunges over the loveseat.*) Shut up and fight! Loser boy!

As DENNIS dodges, he bumps the table lamp and the lamp is nearly knocked off. He grabs it and picks it up in both arms.

DENNIS: Whoa!

JOHN: (*Panicked.*) Don't break that! Kim gave us that lamp!

JENNY: (*Remembering with a smile.*) She did! I remember that!

DENNIS: Sorry!

JOHN: If you break anything, she'll know we were fighting

DENNIS: (*Stops.*) You're right! If we break anything, she'll know! Then she'll yell at you again!

They are back at each other again!

JOHN: You mean yell at you again! You're the one in trouble, not me.

DENNIS: Yeah, right! She sounded pretty miffed at you, too, if you ask me!

JOHN: Nobody asked you! (*The lamp slips in DENNIS's arms and they stop in their tracks.*) Put it down! Will you put the lamp down! (*He starts to.*) Gently!

DENNIS gingerly replaces the lamp on the table.

DENNIS: There. It's down!

JOHN: Maybe we should take this outside.

DENNIS: Right. (*Takes a step in that direction then turns back with a whimper.*) But it's cold outside!

JOHN: What? Are you afraid of a little snow and ice?

DENNIS: No! *(Starts again and then turns back sounding like a little kid afraid of getting caught by Mom.)* But she told us not to leave the room. If we leave the room, she'll know.

JOHN: How would she know?

DENNIS: She could walk in here while we're outside. Even if she doesn't, she'll know. Trust me. The woman either has eyes in the back of her head or strategically placed cameras everywhere I go.

JOHN: Yeah, you're right. She is pretty sharp! I don't know how you managed to get that job thing past her.

DENNIS: *(Sits, exhausted on the sofa.)* Believe me. It wasn't easy.

JOHN: I raised a pretty smart, tough little girl, didn't I?

DENNIS: That you did!

Somehow, suddenly they have forgotten about fighting, and in the next few lines seem to settle into a real conversation. JENNY will not speak at all for quite some time. She watches as the scene unfolds, reacting accordingly. They settle down some, but it should be obvious they are still intoxicated. We should hear that in the way they speak. In other words, don't let the mood get too somber.

JOHN: I still don't know how she ended up choosing you?

DENNIS: I've asked myself the same question. Many times. She is too good for me!

JOHN: Yes, she is!

DENNIS: *(Accusingly.)* But you felt that way about Jenny, too. Didn't you?

JOHN: *(Sits on the sofa opposite him.)* Yes, I did! *(Thinking back.)* I always did.

DENNIS: I wish I'd gotten to meet her. You remember she passed before I got to meet her. Kim and I had been dating for a few months, but we never managed to get up here. Last year of school and all. We had a lot going on. I regret that!

JOHN: Yeah.

DENNIS: It really messed Kim up for a while. She really loved her mom.

JOHN: We all miss her. *(There are a few moments of silence.)* Kim said you really helped get her through all of that.

DENNIS: I didn't do anything. Just tried to be there.

JOHN: Sometimes that's enough. It's more than I did. She was at school. I had work.

DENNIS: She understood. Life gets in the way. She wanted to be around more when her mom was sick, but she had school. I think she even tried to tell her mom she was going to quit and come home to spend more time with her, but Jenny wouldn't have it.

JOHN: I didn't know that.

DENNIS: Yeah, anyhow. It goes both ways. We do what we can do.

JOHN: I guess.

DENNIS: (*Trying to change the mood.*) Well, like I said, I wish I'd known her.

JOHN: (*Laughs.*) In a way, you do! If there was ever a child that took after a parent, it is Kim after her mom!

DENNIS: Really?

JOHN: You already know from pictures that she looks like her mom.

DENNIS: You're right. She does look a lot like her.

JOHN: Carbon copy.

DENNIS: In other ways, too?

JOHN: (*Rolling his eyes.*) You better believe it! Stubborn, hard headed,. loyal, generous to a fault, loving! I'm guessing Kim doesn't leave much to doubt when you two don't see eye to eye. I mean, she lets you know where she stands. Not shy about it.

DENNIS: No, she is not! She's always more than happy to tell me how she really feels!

JOHN: Some people call that honesty! Jenny was that way, too. That didn't always make for peace and harmony, being as I can be a little hard-headed myself. Jenny never let me skate. Kim's not going to let you, either.

DENNIS: I'm gathering that. (*Pause.*) How did you meet her?

JOHN: How did I meet Jenny?

DENNIS: Yeah. How did you two get together? There's got to be a pretty good story there. I mean, I've seen pictures of her when she was younger, and nothing personal, but she was way too good-looking to end up with the likes of you! (*Punches JOHN in the shoulder.*) Just kidding. But seriously, she was pretty hot! Or back then, what was the term? Boffo? Socko? The cat's pajamas?

JOHN: (*Bemused and slightly irked.*) Cat's...? You know what? I'm going to let that slide. Let's just say she was beautiful.

DENNIS: (*Laughs.*) So let's hear it!

JOHN: There's not a lot to tell. We grew up here. In this same town. And it's a small town, so we pretty much knew each other our entire lives.

DENNIS: So you were destined to be together since birth?

JOHN: (*Smirks.*) No! We didn't really get to know each other until the summer after high school graduation. I had been dating Leslie my senior year, but she was going off to college, and I... Well, I wasn't.

DENNIS: So what happened? What made you notice each other? What twist of fate brought you together?

JOHN: (*Not anxious to tell this story.*) I'm going to have a little more eggnog! Would you like a little more eggnog?

He goes to the tray and pours the last of the eggnog into his glass.

DENNIS: I'm good. (*JOHN crosses down left and takes a pretty hefty drink.*) I'm waiting!

JOHN: I... (*Hesitates.*) I dropped a hammer off of her father's roof and hit her in the...in the rear end.

DENNIS: You hit her in the butt with a hammer?

JOHN: Not intentionally! I was lucky! Another couple of inches, and it would have hit her in the head!

DENNIS: Why were you on her father's roof?

JOHN: I was working. As soon as I got out of school, I went to work for a roofing company. We were putting a new roof on her father's house. She happened to come out of the house just about the same time I lost my footing. The hammer slipped out of my hand and...there it went.

DENNIS: How romantic.

JOHN: I have never made a bigger idiot of myself in my entire life.

DENNIS: It gets better?

JOHN: The only way I knew I had hit her was because I heard her scream!

DENNIS: She screamed? Ouch!

JOHN: I was a wreck! I climbed down as quickly as I could to see if she was hurt. Obviously, I didn't know at the time where I had hit her! She had dropped her bag, picked up the hammer and was standing there holding it, looking like she was in pain!

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DENNIS: What did you do?

JOHN: I asked her if the hammer had hit her.

DENNIS: Yes.

JOHN: She said, "Yes."

DENNIS: And then?

JOHN: Then I asked her if I could look at it!

DENNIS: You asked to look at her butt?

JOHN: I didn't know where I had hit her!

DENNIS: And they say the younger generation is too forward!

JOHN: *(Sits in the armchair.)* I didn't know. I just wanted to see if she was bruised or bleeding or something.

DENNIS: What did she say?

JOHN: She said, "No!" That I could not look at it! *(Begins to laugh a little himself.)* She said she was all right. She picked up her bag and started to walk away. Then she started rubbing the...spot. Then I knew. I ran after her and apologized over and over. Then I asked if I could make it up to her.

DENNIS: How?

JOHN: That's what she said. I don't know why, but I asked her out.

DENNIS: *(Suggestively.)* I bet I know why.

JOHN: What? *(Getting his meaning.)* No. That's not why. She did have a... *(Catching himself.)* Uhh! I mean she was certainly attractive, but that's...not why. I felt bad. I said she should at least get a free meal out of the whole thing.

DENNIS: And she said yes.

JOHN: She did. I was such a bumbling, stumbling idiot, she must have felt sorry for me. Anyway. That's how we got together.

DENNIS: A fairy tale if I ever heard one.

JOHN: Yeah. But trust me. It got a lot better from there.

DENNIS: I'm sure it did.

There are a few uncomfortable moments of silence.

DENNIS: Maybe I will have another one of those.

JOHN: Absolutely!

Pours himself an eggnog and another for JOHN.



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