

ACT ONE

Lights on full stage. There is a sign close to the tree that reads "Merry Christmas 2010". MOM ENTERS from upstage left door. She is rushing about, trying to get everything ready. She is on her way to the table when she notices the lights are not on on the tree. She rushes to the tree and turns them on. Sitting in a stage right chair (in which she will remain for the length of the play) is GRANDMA. MOM rushes back toward the table and checks on GRANDMA.

MOM

(Loud)

Mom, the kids are gonna be here any minute. Would you like anything to drink?

GRANDMA

Could I have a Dr. Pepper please?

MOM

Dr. Pepper? Okay.

MOM heads toward the kitchen when the doorbell rings.

MOM

(Excitedly)

Oh, they're here.

(Calling)

Nathan! They're here!

MOM runs back across stage to the outside door and opens it. It is HOLLY and her new husband ERIC. They ENTER.

MOM

Holly!

HOLLY

Hi Mom.

MOM

Merry Christmas.

HOLLY

You too. The tree looks great from the outside.

MOM

Oh, I'm not as good at decorating that thing as I used to be.

(Beat. She looks at Eric)
Hi Eric.

ERIC
Hi.

MOM
How's everything?

ERIC
I cleaned out the garage today.
Found a filter wrench I thought I'd
lost.

MOM
(Feigning interest)
Well, good for you!

ERIC
Yeah, it was awesome.

Eric immediately takes HOLLY's coat and hangs it up on the
coat rack while HOLLY and MOM catch up. Then ERIC goes
outside.

MOM
So are you doing okay?
(Whispering)
You need any money?

HOLLY
Mom.

MOM
I know how it is. The first year
of marriage is the toughest. You
wouldn't hesitate to ask me for
money, would you?

HOLLY
We're fine. Eric's job is going
great. I'm waitressing four days a
week... Life is wonderful.

MOM
What do you know about life?
You're 20 years old. How's he
treating you?

HOLLY
Like a princess. Look at these.
(Shows off her earrings)

MOM
Nice earrings.

HOLLY
They're fake. I have to take them off in the shower or they turn my ears green. But it was still so sweet. They were an anniversary present.

MOM
Anniversary?

HOLLY
Yep. We've been married exactly three and a half months today.

MOM
Impressive.

NATHAN ENTERS through the upstage left door. He sees and hugs HOLLY.

NATHAN
Hey, little sis.

HOLLY
Merry Christmas, Nathan.

NATHAN
You pregnant?

HOLLY
No. Do I look pregnant?

NATHAN
I just don't wanna be the last to know.

NATHAN walks over to ERIC, who has just ENTERED, with presents.

NATHAN
Hi Eric. How're you doing?

ERIC
Great. I found a lawnmower at a garage sale for 50 bucks. Works pretty good.

NATHAN
(Feigning interest)
Wow. That's amazing.

ERIC

Yeah, it was awesome.

Eric leaves immediately, puts the presents under the tree.
Nathan turns his attention to Holly.

HOLLY

So where's Dad?

MOM

I'm afraid he's not going to be
able to make it tonight.

HOLLY

What?

MOM

He's on a business trip.

HOLLY

On Christmas Eve?

MOM

Couldn't get out of it.

HOLLY

That's crazy. Nobody does business
on Christmas Eve.

MOM

Apparently your father is a nobody
then.

NATHAN looks at HOLLY and shakes his head as if to say "Don't
listen to her."

HOLLY

How about Josh? When's he coming
in?

MOM

He should be here any minute.

HOLLY

How were his grades this semester?

MOM

He hasn't mentioned it yet.
Doesn't seem to think it's any of
my business.

HOLLY

The only reason he's there is because of your money. I think it's your business.

MOM

Well, that ends in May. If Josh is going to adopt the six-year plan for college, he's paying for the last two on his own.

HOLLY

Can I be there when you tell him that?

(Sees Grandma)

Oh, goodness, I almost forgot about Grandma. Eric, come here and say hi to Grandma.

ERIC joins HOLLY. They walk over to GRANDMA's chair. She is sitting there, staring into space.

HOLLY

(Loudly)

Grandma! Grandma, it's Holly and Eric.

There is no response. HOLLY casually checks her pulse.

HOLLY

(To ERIC)

She's fine. Sleeps with her eyes open sometimes. Scared us to death first couple times she did it.

(Whispering)

I don't think Grandma's gonna make it much longer.

HOLLY sees something out of the corner of her eye. She rushes to the corner stand. On it sits a Nativity scene.

HOLLY

(As she's rushing)

Oh, Eric. You have to see this. It's our Nativity scene.

ERIC

(Looking at it)

Ain't there usually more people in there?

HOLLY

We don't have the whole set yet. Mom got this from one of those mail order places where you can buy one piece at a time. She decided she would get a new piece every time a member was added to the family. So Mom's Mary there, Dad's Jo-... Wait a minute. Mom! Joseph's missing!

MOM

Oh, yeah. I couldn't find him.

HOLLY

You couldn't find him? Don't you always just put him back in the box after Christmas?

MOM

Sure. But he wasn't there this time.

HOLLY

Weird.

(Beat)

Well, anyway, my Dad is usually Joseph, then I'm shepherd number one, Josh is the first wise man, and Nathan is the second wise man. And now... since you're new to the family, we get to add a new piece. You got the piece, right Mom?

MOM

I sure did. Right here.

MOM hands HOLLY the piece.

HOLLY

Oh, you're shepherd number two! How romantic. We get to watch the flocks together!

ERIC

Cool.

The doorbell rings.

MOM

That must be Josh.

NATHAN

I'll get it, Mom. It could be Ellen.

NATHAN heads over to the door.

HOLLY
(To MOM)
Who's Ellen?

MOM
Nathan's new girlfriend.

HOLLY
He has a girlfriend? Did she lose
a bet?

MOM
She'd been calling him every night
for three weeks. Suppose she just
outlasted him.

NATHAN opens the door. ELLEN ENTERS.

HOLLY
(Seeing her)
Cute. She nice?

MOM
Oh, yeah. Religious girl. Takes
him to church every Sunday.

HOLLY
Is she aware that he's never been
to church in his life?

MOM
I think so.

HOLLY
Is she aware that he's 22, has no
job and still lives with his
parents?

MOM
It would be hard to keep that one a
secret.

NATHAN and ELLEN have made their way over to MOM and HOLLY.

NATHAN
Holly, I'd like you to meet Ellen.
Ellen, this is my sister Holly.

ELLEN
Nice to meet you.

HOLLY

Ellen, I feel like I know you
already.

NATHAN

And this is her husband Eric.

ELLEN

How are you?

ERIC

I got a boil lanced on Thursday.

ELLEN

(Feigning interest)
Did you?

ERIC

Yeah, it was awesome.

MOM

(Quickly)
Well why don't we all sit down? I
need to check on the turkey.

MOM goes to the kitchen. ERIC pulls a plastic grape off the
basket of fruit off the table, then HOLLY and ERIC sit
together on the couch. HOLLY whispers something in his ear
and she giggles.

HOLLY

Hey, I didn't tell you. Eric got
employee of the month at the Lube
Stop. And a two percent raise.

ELLEN

Good for you.

ERIC

(Popping a plastic grape
in his mouth)
I'm definitely the smartest one
there.

HOLLY

Honey, that grape's plastic.

ERIC

Are you sure?

HOLLY

Spit it out, Honey.
(He does)

(MORE)

HOLLY (CONT'D)

It's a ten minute oil change place,
but Eric can do it in nine.

ERIC

My record would have been seven and
a half, but it turned out I only
made it that fast 'cause I forgot
to put the oil back in the car.

NATHAN and ELLEN are confused.

HOLLY

(Abruptly)

Okay, so what's the story on Dad?

NATHAN

Mom's telling everybody he's not
gonna be here. He has been away
for about two weeks, but he'll be
here.

HOLLY

I kinda figured.

NATHAN

No way he'd miss Christmas. She's
just trying to give everybody a
surprise. He'll walk through the
door and she'll call it a Christmas
miracle.

The doorbell rings.

NATHAN

Might be him now.

MOM

(Leaning out the kitchen
door)

That's Josh. Get that, will you,
Nathan?

NATHAN goes to the door and it is JOSH. He ENTERS with
TIFFANY.

JOSH

Hey, Nathan!

NATHAN

Hi Josh.

They hug. HOLLY has come over with ERIC behind her.

JOSH

Sis!

HOLLY

Hey Josh.

JOSH

Good to see you. Hi Eric.

ERIC

I'm starting a coin collection. So far, I've got a penny from 1986.

JOSH

Wow. That is... so... mind-numbingly unimpressive. Hey, I'd like you all to meet Tiffany.

They all exchange greetings with TIFFANY.

JOSH

Her family's in the Bahamas this week so I invited her to come home with me.

TIFFANY

I'm sorry, is this carpet organic?

NATHAN

Is it what?

JOSH

Tiffany just wants to make sure that no animals were harmed in the making of this carpet.

HOLLY

It's Berber.

JOSH

Don't worry about it, Tiffany. Mom only buys from the free range carpet store.

HOLLY

So you love animals?

JOSH

She's studying to be a vet.

HOLLY

Oh.

TIFFANY

And that's a vet as in
veterinarian, which is an animal
doctor, not a vet as in veteran,
which is somebody who does a lot of
wars.

JOSH

Thanks for the clarification.

TIFFANY

It confuses some people.

JOSH

Not as many people as you might
think.

TIFFANY

Then how come so many girls in my
sorority were worried I was gonna
be shipped to Iran?

MOM

(From the kitchen)

Hi Josh! I've got greasy hands
right now, I'll hug your neck
later.

JOSH

Great, Mom.

(Sees ELLEN)

Wait a minute. Who is this?

HOLLY

Nathan's girlfriend.

JOSH

(Going over)

No way!

NATHAN

Josh, this is Ellen.

JOSH

Ellen! Do we have things to talk
about, or what?

NATHAN

You're not gonna embarrass me, are
you?

JOSH

Nathan! Come on. This is
Christmas.

(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)

Of course I'm gonna embarrass you.

(To ELLEN)

You know he sings in front of the mirror in his underwear, don't you?

NATHAN

I do not.

JOSH

Celine Dion, Adele mostly.

ELLEN

Really.

JOSH

Sometimes Abba, if he's feeling disco-ish.

NATHAN

Josh!

JOSH

Nathan, the lady deserves fair warning, don't you think? Before she commits to anything.

NATHAN

Don't listen to him, Ellen.

ELLEN

Actually, I think a conversation with Josh might be helpful.

JOSH

Hey! I like her already. So where's Dad?

NATHAN

He'll be here in a minute.

MOM

(From the kitchen)

He's on a business trip.

JOSH

Is Mom trying to pull something?

NATHAN

Yes.

JOSH

Christmas miracle stuff?

NATHAN

Exactly.

JOSH

Hey, Grandma!

HOLLY

She's asleep.

JOSH

Either that or she really likes
that wall hanging.

HOLLY

So how's college life for a senior?

JOSH

A blast. There're three parties a
week just in our apartment complex.
Friday night, Saturday night, and a
Sunday matinee. The women are
incredible...

(Glances at TIFFANY)

...as evidenced by Tiffany here.

TIFFANY

I smell meat.

JOSH

It's soy turkey.

(Back to Holly)

Oh, and there's this great place
called "The Cosmopolitan". Wild.
Actually, that's where we met.

TIFFANY

I work there.

JOSH

It's so much cooler being out of
the dorms.

HOLLY

And... classes?

JOSH

Oh, yeah, I do those too.

MOM ENTERS from the kitchen.

MOM

I gotta get my hug now.

JOSH
I gotta get mine.

MOM gives JOSH a hug.

MOM
You doin' okay? You need money?

JOSH
I'll get back to you.

MOM
Well, dinner's going to be a little later than I expected, so why don't we just sit down and talk a bit?

MOM sets up some chairs from the table as everybody sits down. JOSH continues.

JOSH
Maybe we could do presents.

MOM
No, we have to wait until after dinner.

HOLLY
Oh, you know what we have to do? It's my turn to pick the theme!

JOSH
Are we still doing that?

HOLLY
Yes, the Christmas theme. It's my year.

JOSH
(To TIFFANY)
This gets more and more lame every year.

HOLLY
So here's my theme. "A Sweetheart Christmas."

NATHAN
Oh, no.

HOLLY
It's perfect. We've got all our sweethearts with us. I've got Eric, Nathan's got Ellen, Josh has Tiffany. Mom... well...

(MORE)

HOLLY (CONT'D)

I figured Dad would be here. You can have Grandma.

MOM

Very romantic.

JOSH

This is really dumb.

MOM

Now, Josh, this is family tradition. It's Holly's turn to choose the theme, she can pick whatever she wants.

JOSH

So what do we have to do?

HOLLY

Every time you hear a word that begins with a "W", you have to tell everyone why you love your sweetheart.

JOSH

What?

HOLLY

Oop! There's one. Um... I love my sweetheart because he's got the cutest little nose.

NATHAN looks at ELLEN sheepishly, then quickly turns away.

JOSH

You gotta be kidding me. There's, like, a trillion words that begin with "W".

HOLLY

Oh, Josh, I think I heard you say "Words"? Hmm. I love my sweetheart because he gives wonderful back rubs.

NATHAN

I'm not doing this.

MOM

Maybe we should rethink the family tradition.

JOSH

Yes!

HOLLY

I believe I heard the word "we".
Let's see. I love my sweetheart
because he's so handy around the
house.

JOSH

I'm gonna be sick.

HOLLY

Come on, Mom, you have to do this.

MOM

(Reluctantly, looking at
Grandma)
All right... Um... I love my
sweetheart because... she's quiet.

HOLLY

There ya go, Mom!

JOSH

I propose an amendment to the
family tradition. The theme
concept is immediately suspended if
it makes the participants nauseous.

MOM

I'm gonna have to agree.

NATHAN

Me too.

JOSH

Great. We have a majority. Write
it into the Constitution. Let's do
something else.

HOLLY

So you're ignoring my theme?

JOSH

Yes. Next?

MOM

Oh! The picture. Let's take the
picture!

They all get up and head toward the tree.

MOM

Where's the camera? Nathan, do you
remember where I put the camera?

NATHAN

Last time I saw it, it was in your
bedroom.

MOM

Right.

MOM EXITS through the upstage door while everyone else gets
situated by the tree and underneath the sign that reads
"Merry Christmas 2010". HOLLY puts everyone in place.

HOLLY

Now Eric, you can go right... Wait
a minute.

MOM returns with the camera.

HOLLY

What are we doing, Mom? We can't
take the picture without Dad.

MOM

(Fiddling with the camera)
I told you, he's not going to be
here.

HOLLY

Oh, come on. We all know you're
just messing with us.

MOM

He's on a trip.

HOLLY

We'll do the picture later.

MOM

(With inappropriate
sternness)
We'll do the picture now.

Everyone is struck by MOM's tone. Pause.

JOSH

Ma?

MOM gets the camera loaded and walks toward the group.

MOM

Squeeze in a little bit, I wanna
get the sign in there too.

HOLLY

Forget the picture, Mom.

(Beat)

Where's Dad?

MOM tries to hold back the tears. She turns away from the group.

MOM

He's... not going to be here.

HOLLY

Why?

MOM

Because...

(Beat, emotional)

I wanted to wait until after Christmas to tell you this. Didn't want to put a damper on things, but... He left. We'd been fighting a lot, and... He said he needed some time away from me. That was two weeks ago.

JOSH

What?!

HOLLY

That's crazy!

JOSH

What are you talking about? Are you sure?

MOM

What do you mean, am I sure? I was here, wasn't I? He left out that door and I haven't heard from him since.

HOLLY embraces MOM when she starts crying.

JOSH

This is unbelievable. After 24 years of marriage, he took off-- just like that? Did you see this coming, Nathan?

NATHAN's mouth is wide open. He shakes his head.

JOSH

I mean, everyone fights. There has to be an actual reason.

MOM

We hide it well, but... we haven't connected in a long time. There were times I picked a fight with him just so I could hear his voice. Plus, he's been stressed by his job. I guess I didn't help with that.

JOSH

Stress is not an excuse for abandoning your family.

HOLLY

Josh! You're not helping.

JOSH

I want answers! Where is he?

MOM

I don't know.

Long pause.

MOM

I'm sorry for lying. I just didn't know how to tell you.

HOLLY

It's okay, Mom.

Another long pause. The bell in the kitchen goes off. MOM backs away from HOLLY, and gathering herself, walks toward the kitchen.

MOM

Turkey's ready.

As everyone remains stunned, the lights go out. Lights up stage right on the children's choir as they sing.

ACT TWO

Lights on full stage. GRANDMA is still in her chair, but is awake. She has her reading glasses on and is reading a book. NATHAN and ELLEN are sitting down on the couch, talking quietly among themselves. MOM ENTERS from the kitchen and walks to the tree. She straightens out the sign, which now reads "Merry Christmas 2013." She looks out the window expectantly.

MOM

I wonder where everyone is.
Dinner's almost ready--it's gonna
get cold.

ELLEN

The roads were kind of icy. They
might be having trouble getting
here.

MOM

I hope they're okay. Nathan, would
you put the silver on the table?

NATHAN walks toward the kitchen and ELLEN follows him.

MOM

(To GRANDMA)

Mom? Are you going to eat with us?

GRANDMA shows no sign of hearing her. She concentrates on her book.

MOM

Mom!

(Beat)

Her hearing's getting worse and
worse.

NATHAN

(Getting in front of her
and trying to get her
attention)

It's like she doesn't even know
we're here.

MOM

I'm afraid she's just not gonna be
around much longer. This might be
her last Christmas. Go ahead and
set a place for her.

The doorbell rings. MOM runs to the door. It is HOLLY. She is holding a car seat with an infant in it.

HOLLY
(Yelling out to the car
angrily)
Just get the presents! And the
diaper bag! What are you doing?!
Why are you bringing the bassinet?!
(Turning inside)
Simple instructions.
(As she passes MOM)
Merry Christmas, Mom.

She kisses MOM quickly on the cheek as she heads stage right.

MOM
Wait a minute, wait a minute.
Don't I get to see my Grandson?

HOLLY
He's finally asleep, I don't wanna
wake him up. Can I put him in your
bedroom?

MOM
Sure.

HOLLY EXITS through the left door with the baby. Suddenly, a pile of packages, baby equipment, and ERIC come crashing through the outside doorway. ERIC lies flat on the ground amidst all the presents, etc., and tries to regain his composure. MOM rushes to help him.

ERIC
I'm okay.

HOLLY ENTERS, sees ERIC sprawled out on the floor, and rolls her eyes.

HOLLY
Amazing. You put him under the
hood of a car and he's Fred
Astaire. But if he tries to walk
and breathe at the same time, he
trips over shadows.

HOLLY helps them pick up the presents.

ERIC
Well if you hadn't left all this
stuff for me to bring...

HOLLY
(Sarcastically)
You're right. I remember
specifically telling you to do it
all in one trip.

MOM
(Trying to break the
tension)
Merry Christmas, Eric.

ERIC
Merry Christmas.

HOLLY hands ERIC her coat and he takes it to the coat rack.
HOLLY's frown slowly becomes a smile as she turns around and
sees NATHAN and ELLEN.

HOLLY
Hi Nathan.

NATHAN
Hey sis.

They embrace.

HOLLY
Hi Ellen. Wait a minute. Show me
your hand.

ELLEN extends her hand.

HOLLY
No ring? What's going on, Nathan?

NATHAN is embarrassed. He goes back to the table.

NATHAN
I have to set the table.

HOLLY
Are you one of those guys who's
afraid of commitment?
(No answer, to ELLEN)
Is he one of those guys?

ELLEN
I don't know.

HOLLY
So are you dropping hints?

ELLEN
We've talked about it.

HOLLY
You want me to drop some hints?

ELLEN
I think you already have.

The doorbell rings. MOM goes to answer it as HOLLY and ELLEN continue.

HOLLY
You can never have too many hints.

ELLEN
You mean, badger him?

HOLLY
Nagging is a proven scientific method.

MOM opens the door. IT is JOSH and a girlfriend, HEATHER. They ENTER. NATHAN goes to see his brother.

JOSH
Hi Mom.

MOM
Merry Christmas, Josh.

JOSH
Sorry we're late. You haven't started eating yet, have you?

MOM
Of course not.

JOSH
Fantastic. Mom, I'd like you to meet Heather.

MOM
Heather. Nice to meet you.

HEATHER
(Loudly)
It's nice to meet you. I've heard a lot about you.

JOSH
No, no. It's my Grandmother that's going deaf. This is my Mom.

HEATHER
Oh, I'm sorry.

MOM
That's fine.

NATHAN
(Looking into the
driveway)
Are you kidding me? What are you
driving?

JOSH
Ah, you like the wheels?

HEATHER
It's a Porsche. He got a ticket
for going 95.

JOSH
School zone came out of nowhere.

NATHAN
Mom said you had a good job, but...
Wow.

JOSH
Ah, but you haven't seen my pride
and joy yet.

JOSH reaches into his back pocket and pulls out his wallet.

JOSH
Got a little Christmas present for
myself.

MOM
What is it?

JOSH
My very own bouncing baby boat.

He shows his pictures. ERIC comes over to look.

NATHAN
No way.

MOM
You got a boat?

NATHAN
Have you taken it out yet?

JOSH
No, I've been too busy showing it
off in my front yard.

HOLLY

(From across the room)
This is the reward he gets for
totally blowing off college.

ERIC

(Looking at the pictures)
It's a beaut. What size is the
engine?

JOSH

Well...

JOSH sizes up his hands to show him how big the engine is.

JOSH

Hey, where's my nephew?

HOLLY

Sleeping. And he shall remain that
way.

JOSH

You named him after me, didn't you?

HOLLY

Hardly.

HEATHER

What's your baby's name again?
Soil?

HOLLY

Clay.

HEATHER

I knew it had something to do with
dirt.

MOM

Oh! The rolls!

Mom heads to the kitchen.

JOSH

So let's sit down, catch up.

They all make their way to the couch and chairs and sit.
ERIC stays behind the couch and plays with the Christmas tree
ornaments..

JOSH

(As they are all moving)
So what's new with everybody?

Pause.

JOSH
Anybody getting married?

He looks at NATHAN, who looks the other direction.

JOSH
Anybody getting a job anytime soon?

He looks again at NATHAN.

NATHAN
I've got a job. It's not what I
wanna do for a career, but I'm
working.

HEATHER
You're a lumberjack, right?

NATHAN
I work in a hardware store.

JOSH
How much do you make?

NATHAN
I don't... wanna say in front of
everybody.

JOSH
Gimme an estimate.

NATHAN
Well, I can't buy a boat.

JOSH
Can I guess?

NATHAN
No.

JOSH
Is it more expensive than a bread
box?

HOLLY
Lay off him, Josh.

JOSH
We're brothers. He should feel
comfortable giving me a full
financial disclosure.

ERIC

(Proudly)

I make twelve bucks an hour.

JOSH

Look at that. An in-law feels secure enough to tell me what he makes, and my own brother doesn't.

HEATHER

I make \$7.50 at the nail salon.

JOSH

An in-law and a complete stranger open up their lives to us! But this family? We're a bunch of closed doors. We used to tell each other everything. I guess we're off in our own parts of the country, we feel like we have our own lives now--we don't need each other.

(Beat)

You know what? It's my year to pick the Christmas theme and I'm gonna do it right now. This is going to be a "Dirty Little Secret" Christmas.

MOM

What was that?

JOSH

We're going to go around this room, and you tell everyone a secret that you've never told anyone in the family.

MOM

I'm not sure that's a theme, Josh.

JOSH

Oh, right, so when Holly was eight, we could do "A Daffy Duck Christmas" and have to wear those cardboard duck bills all day, but we can't do this very simple one.

HOLLY

I'm not in the mood to open my heart right now.

JOSH

Come on, it'll be good for us.
It'll bring us closer as a family.
And dagnabbit, what's Christmas for
if it's not for bringing families
together?

MOM

Well... it is tradition.

JOSH

There we go. Nathan, you start.

NATHAN

Why me?

JOSH

Because it's my year. Nathan, tell
us a deep, dark secret.

NATHAN

Oh, I don't really have one.

JOSH

Of course you do. Come on, Nathan.
Enlighten us.

NATHAN gets very serious and looks at ELLEN. ELLEN nods as if
to say "Tell it", and everyone knows they have a secret
between them.

NATHAN

Well... okay. I guess I've got
one.

JOSH

Wow. This is gonna be juicy, I can
already tell.

NATHAN

It's something I've been wanting to
tell you for a while now, but I
kept chickening out.

(Beat)

You know how I've been going to
church with Ellen for a few years.
Well...

(Beat)

a couple of months ago... I...
became a Christian.

Pause. Everyone is stunned.

HOLLY
A Christian?

JOSH
Why?

NATHAN
It was something I felt I needed to do.

JOSH
Why?

MOM
Did you make this decision at church?

NATHAN
I talked to the pastor. We prayed together.

JOSH
So what does this mean?

NATHAN
It... means I'm a Christian.

JOSH
But are you gonna be a different person now? Are you gonna wear funny hats and badger people in airports?

NATHAN
No.

JOSH
So you won't change at all. You'll live the very same life you had before.

NATHAN
No.

HOLLY
Do you even know what it means?

NATHAN
Yeah. It means I've given my life over to Jesus.

JOSH
What's your view on this, Mom?

MOM

Well... I've known a lot of good Christian people. Known a lot that weren't so good too. If it makes him a better person, I don't see anything wrong with it, I guess. It's his life.

JOSH

Is it gonna make you a better person, Nathan?

NATHAN

You know, why don't we move on to somebody else?

JOSH

I don't think anybody can top yours.

NATHAN

What's the big deal?

JOSH

The big deal is that this is not a secret that remains dead somewhere in somebody's past. This is a secret that'll affect the entire family.

NATHAN

How?

MOM

Why don't we eat?

HOLLY

Good idea.

JOSH

I'd kinda like to talk about this.

NATHAN

Nobody else has to do their secrets?

MOM

The food's ready, let's eat.

Everybody gets up and moves to the table except JOSH. As they are picking their places:

JOSH

Ellen, hey.

ELLEN turns around and walks over to him.

JOSH
Did you do this to him?

ELLEN
Did I do what to him?

JOSH
Made him a Christian.

ELLEN
I can't make someone a Christian.
He made the decision himself.

JOSH
Sure, but... Did you... encourage
it?

ELLEN
Yes.

JOSH
How?

ELLEN
What do you mean?

JOSH
You didn't deal the marriage card
on him, did you?

ELLEN
Excuse me?

JOSH
I know my brother. He was never
that great with women, and if he
did find one that liked him, he...
latched on with all he was worth.
And if he were told that he had to
become a Christian in order to
marry somebody...

ELLEN
(Sternly)
He made the decision himself.

ELLEN turns around and heads back to the table. Everyone is
seated and JOSH gets there as well. Long pause.

HOLLY
Should we... say grace?

JOSH

No. Absolutely not. Just because Pope Nathan the first joined us today doesn't mean we suddenly have to change everything in our house.

HOLLY

I thought it might make him feel more comfortable.

JOSH

I don't care if it-

NATHAN

We don't have to say grace!

(Beat)

Let's just eat.

Long pause as everyone eats. There is no conversation as the awkwardness continues. JOSH notices the silence and drops his fork on the plate.

JOSH

Well, way to go, Nathan. Look what you've done. Nobody even knows what to say to each other anymore. Everybody's afraid they're gonna accidentally curse or eat the wrong kinda meat on the wrong day of the week. Everybody's wondering if we can talk about evolution now.

NATHAN

When have we ever talked about evolution?

JOSH

I would like the option!

NATHAN

You are completely free to talk all you want about evolution.

JOSH

Am I though? Am I free? I don't know, do I? And that's the point. Everyone's gonna be walking on eggshells around you until the day you meet your Savior in Heaven. Thanks a lot, Nathan. From now on, Christmas is just never gonna be the same.

Lights out. Lights back up stage right on children's choir.

ACT THREE

MOM

Everybody say "Merry Christmas."

EVERYONE

Merry Christmas.

Lights on full stage. The whole family is there, including NATHAN, ERIC, JOSH, HOLLY, MOM, ELLEN, JOSH'S new girlfriend TIFFANY (TIFFANY #2), and CLAY, now three years old. ERIC is absent. They are posing in front of the Christmas sign, which reads, "Merry Christmas, 2016." GRANDMA is asleep in her chair.

The camera flash (on timer) goes off, and everyone relaxes. Ad-lib lines like "I think my eyes were closed" and "I hope that one comes out better than last year's", etc. HOLLY takes CLAY aside.

Eric walks immediately to a seat away from everyone and takes out his phone. He looks bitter.

HOLLY

You feel okay?

(She feels his forehead.)

You don't look like you feel well.

Come on, let's put you to bed.

HOLLY EXITS with CLAY through the upstage door.

MOM

(To JOSH)

Josh, would you help me put out the presents?

And he does. Downstage left, TIFFANY #2 approaches ELLEN and NATHAN.

TIFFANY #2

So how long have you been married?

ELLEN

About a year and a half.

TIFFANY #2

Congratulations. Josh talks about you all the time.

NATHAN

I'm sorry--What was your name again?

TIFFANY #2

Tiffany.

NATHAN

Tiffany. Weren't you here a few years ago?

Josh runs behind Tiffany #2 to make the "Stop talking!" sign for Nathan. But it's too late.

NATHAN

I seem to remember-

TIFFANY #2

No. I'm Tiffany number two.

NATHAN

(Sheepishly)

I'm sorry.

TIFFANY #2

That's okay. I'm getting used to being mistaken for one of Josh's ex-es. There are also two Rebeccas and two Michelles.

ELLEN

So what do you do, Tiffany?

TIFFANY #2

I'm a student.

ELLEN

What are you studying?

TIFFANY #2

Business. I'm opening my own store soon.

NATHAN

What kind?

TIFFANY #2

I call it "Chartbuster Video." It's like "Blockbuster Video", but my town doesn't have one of those.

NATHAN

Oh.

ELLEN

Chartbuster.

TIFFANY #2

Yep. I'm so excited.

NATHAN

I thought... video stores were going out of business.

ELLEN

Yeah. Blockbuster vanished, like, two years ago.

TIFFANY #2

That's crazy. How are people going to watch movies now?

NATHAN

On the internet.

ELLEN

Yeah.

TIFFANY #2

Okay, but what about movies that just left theaters?

NATHAN

All movies. Every movie you could ever want is on the internet.

TIFFANY #2

But what about people who don't have internet?

ELLEN

Unless you're opening a store in North Korea, that's... no one.

Pause. It's the first time this has ever crossed Tiffany's mind.

TIFFANY #2

Excuse me.

Tiffany #2 goes to Josh, and is upset. He tries to comfort her during the following exchange. HOLLY ENTERS from the upstage door. MOM is there.

MOM

Is he okay?

HOLLY

He just fell asleep. He's got a fever.

MOM

Does he need some medicine?

HOLLY

I gave him some Tylenol.

Josh and Tiffany #2 cross in front of Holly and Mom, left to right.

JOSH

It's gonna be okay.

TIFFANY #2

I just ordered 45 copies of
"Finding Dory".

JOSH

Don't worry.

They pass by and continue their conversation quietly behind them.

MOM gestures toward Eric, who is still sitting alone with his phone, not talking to anyone.

MOM

What's going on here?

HOLLY

We had an argument before we left.
And another one on the way here.
And another one for the last five
years.

MOM

So you're not talking to each
other?

HOLLY

Oh, silence is not always the
result of an argument. Sometimes
it's just... what is.

MOM

Meaning?

HOLLY

In November, we had an eight-day
period where we spoke a grand total
of 16 words to each other. No
fight. Just our marriage.

MOM

You counted them?

HOLLY

16 words. 33 if you count "Huh?"

MOM

Why didn't you start a conversation with him?

HOLLY

I wanted to see what would happen if I didn't. And I found out. 16 words.

MOM

I don't think it's healthy for you to keep count.

HOLLY

I need to amuse myself somehow. Since I'm not yukking it up with my husband.

JOSH comes over to Nathan and Ellen. Tiffany #2 stays behind them, upset.

JOSH

(To Nathan)

Dude, why did you say that to Michelle?

ELLEN

I thought her name was Tiffany.

JOSH

Yes. Tiffany. Why are you stomping on a woman's dream?

NATHAN

Don't you think somebody should've told her that already?

JOSH

It's what keeps her in school, Nathan. Haven't you ever had a dream? Or is your dream standing in the unemployment line?

ELLEN

Why would you say that?

JOSH

What? Nathan's not aware of his own unemployment?

ELLEN

A little sensitivity, maybe?

JOSH

That can go both ways. Watch what you're saying to my girl, Nathan. I happen to care a lot about Rebecca.

ELLEN

I thought her name was Tiffany.

JOSH

Tiffany!

TIFFANY #2

(Coming over)

Do people who live on top of mountains have internet? I could open one there.

JOSH

Excellent idea, honey. Good thinking!

MOM

(To the group)

Okay, let's open presents!

The group gathers around and sits, with the exception of Eric, who continues to sit in his chair with his phone. The presents are in a pile in front of the couch.

MOM

Josh, you hand 'em out.

JOSH

Okay. Holly, here's one for you from Nathan and Ellen.

JOSH hands her one and immediately digs back into the pile.

HOLLY

All right.

JOSH

Mom, here's one from me.

MOM

Oh, my. It's heavy.

JOSH

And Ellen, here's one from Mom.

ELLEN

Thank you.

MOM rips her present open. She gasps.

MOM

What is this?

JOSH

It's a Bosch mixer. You can use it to make bread, cookies, lots of stuff.

ELLEN

Those are amazing.

MOM

Thank you. This is nice.

HOLLY opens hers. It's a clay bowl.

HOLLY

Neat. A clay bowl.

NATHAN

Yeah, Ellen's got a friend who's been teaching her pottery.

HOLLY

I like it.

NATHAN

(To everyone, smiling)
By the way. There will be a common theme to all the presents you'll get from us this year. None of them will have cost money. Most of them we made ourselves. We did that, not to be creative, but kind of by default.

MOM

That's fine, honey.

HOLLY

Yeah, this is great.

ELLEN opens hers. It is a bottle of perfume. She looks grateful.

JOSH

Nathan, here's one from me.

NATHAN

Okay.

He opens it. It is a laptop.

NATHAN

Wow!

JOSH

I know you don't have a laptop, I thought you might like that.

NATHAN

This is great.

JOSH

(Looking at presents,
referring to Ellen and
Nathan)

Oh, here's one to me from you guys.

Josh opens it. It is a seashell.

JOSH

Wow.

(Not terribly enthused)
It's a seashell.

NATHAN

Yeah, I remembered how you used to collect seashells when you were a kid.

JOSH

I did. Yeah, I collected seashells. Course, I threw 'em all away, but yeah. This is... nice.

NATHAN

I got it at Hilton Head a couple months ago.

JOSH

What were you doing at Hilton Head?

For some reason, this question makes NATHAN stop suddenly. ELLEN looks at him like she knows what's going through his mind.

HOLLY

Did you guys go for vacation?

NATHAN

Um... No. I went alone.

HOLLY

You don't even like the beach.

JOSH

Yeah. Why were you there?

All eyes are on NATHAN. He looks at ELLEN, and ELLEN seems to be urging him to say what's on his mind.

NATHAN

I went to see Dad.

MOM and HOLLY gasp.

JOSH

What?

NATHAN

I found his address... so I drove down there.

JOSH

Why?

NATHAN

Because I hadn't seen him in six years. I wanted to talk to him.

HOLLY

What did you say?

JOSH

Did you yell at him?

NATHAN

No. We talked about little stuff for a while. Then we talked about what happened six years ago...

JOSH

Did you tell him we were better off without him?

HOLLY

Did you ask him how he could've abandoned his family?

NATHAN

No.

JOSH

Then what did you say?

NATHAN

By the time I left, I realized that he was sorry for what he had done. He was going through a tough time, and he knows he made a mistake. So I kind of... I... forgave him.

JOSH

What?

HOLLY

Forgave him?

NATHAN

He feels awful.

HOLLY

Oh, that's just so wonderful.

JOSH

He feels bad?! What about us!

NATHAN

He knows it was wrong. And he'd come back right now if he thought we'd take him back.

JOSH

Fat chance of that.

HOLLY

Josh is right, Nathan. As the only person who's contacted him, you were representing the family. You should've told him off.

NATHAN

But that wouldn't have accomplished anything.

HOLLY

What were you trying to accomplish?

NATHAN

I want to be able to talk to my father again.

JOSH

No! That's not it. I'll tell you what you want out of this. You wanna look like the good son. "Boy, Nathan sure is a good person. It must be because he's a Christian.

(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)

Maybe I'll become a Christian, too." Ever since Ellen converted you, you've been trying to show us up.

ELLEN

Show you up?

JOSH

Yes. Now you've forgiven Dad, and I suppose somewhere down the line you'll say, "God told me to forgive him." You just do whatever God tells you, don't you? Well what has God ever done for you? Tell me that.

NATHAN

You want me to make a list?

JOSH

That would take all of ten seconds. Look at you. You're giving away seashells for Christmas presents. You're broke. You've got no job. Your life is a joke!

NATHAN

(Yelling)

Oh, like your life is so perfect, Josh! I'm tired of you acting like you've got it all together, when you don't know anything!

JOSH

(Yelling)

Stop acting like you're the morality standard of this family! You had no right to talk to Dad without asking the rest of us!

MOM

(Quickly)

Why don't we finish opening presents?

Pause as they stop yelling. JOSH is staring at NATHAN.

JOSH

Yeah. Let's finish.

As JOSH starts to give out presents again, it is quiet. MOM gets up from her seat.

MOM

Nathan, would you help me in the kitchen for a second?

MOM goes and NATHAN follows. They get to the kitchen.

NATHAN

What do you need?

MOM

How is he? Your Dad. Is he okay?

NATHAN

Not really.

MOM

Does he have a good job?

NATHAN

He's a manager at a hotel in Hilton Head.

MOM

Nice house?

NATHAN

Not too bad.

MOM

Did he look... happy?

NATHAN

He regrets a lot of things.

MOM nods. Pause.

MOM

Grab a garbage bag, okay?

MOM returns to the living room and NATHAN gets the garbage bag. NATHAN returns to the living room, picking up wrapping paper as the family ad-libs unwrapping presents. Lights out.

Lights up on stage right and the children's choir.

ACT FOUR

Lights on full stage. It is six years later. CLAY, now nine, is sitting on the floor with ELLEN, downstage center, playing video games with her. HOLLY is looking at the tree and examining the ornaments. NATHAN is holding their new baby, HANNAH, in the chair.

JOSH and his new girlfriend, JOANN, are sitting at the dining room table eating dessert. JOSH is having a good time with her, whispering things in her ear and laughing. She doesn't appear to be enjoying this playfulness quite as much as he is. Presents have already been opened and wrapping paper is everywhere. The sign in the back reads, "Merry Christmas, 2022."

ELLEN

Why can't I climb up the mountain?

CLAY

You've got to press the "B" button.

ELLEN

I am pressing it!

CLAY

Press and hold it.

ELLEN

I am holding it!

CLAY

Hey, Uncle Josh, thanks for the game. This is fun.

JOSH

No problem, Buddy. I'm glad you like it.

ELLEN

How are you catching up to me so fast?

CLAY

(Laughing)

You better get going!

ELLEN

Wait. Stop. What are you doing?

CLAY

(With accent)

Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya.

(MORE)

CLAY (CONT'D)

You killed my father. Prepare to die.

(With a giant button push)

Hyah!

Everyone (Nathan, Ellen, Holly, Joann and Mom) stares at the television in horror, gasping.

HOLLY

(Shocked)

Clay! Did you just cut off your aunt's head?

CLAY

What was I supposed to do? Let her go?

HOLLY

Yes! In the future, when given the choice between cutting off someone's head and letting them go, the proper manners would be to let them go. What kind of game is this?

CLAY

It's called "Combat Zone."

HOLLY

Josh, what were you thinking, getting him something like that?

JOSH

Oh, come on. He's having fun.

HOLLY

You think decapitating relatives is fun?

JOSH

She's only related by marriage.

HOLLY

Clay, you may not play that game anymore.

CLAY

Mom!

HOLLY

It's time for you to go to sleep anyway. Take your Uncle Nathan's present and go upstairs and read in your bed for a few minutes.

CLAY
The Bible?

HOLLY
Yes. You need something to cleanse
your mental palate.

JOSH
Nathan, aren't there places in that
book where people get their heads
cut off?

NATHAN
Yes.

JOSH
You're no better than me, Holly.

HOLLY
Josh!

CLAY
Cool! Where are those stories?

NATHAN
You should probably stay in the New
Testament.

CLAY
Good night, everyone.

Everyone says good night.

HOLLY
Your great grandmother didn't hear
you. Go over and say goodnight.

CLAY goes over. GRANDMA is knitting extremely slowly and
unsuccessfully (and will continue through the length of the
act).

CLAY
Good night, Great Grandma.

GRANDMA smiles but doesn't speak. CLAY and HOLLY EXIT
through the upstage door.

JOANN
Is your Grandma okay?

JOSH
(To JOANN)
Not really.
(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)
We're all kind of figuring this'll
be her last Christmas.

JOANN
Oh, that's too bad.

JOSH
Hey, are you thirsty?

JOANN
Yes.

JOSH
What do you want?

JOANN
I'm not sure.

JOSH
Why don't you go raid the frig?
Make yourself at home.

JOANN
Okay.

JOANN EXITS to the kitchen. As soon as she's out of earshot,
JOSH rushes to MOM, ELLEN and NATHAN.

JOSH
So what do you think of Joann?

NATHAN
She seems nice.

ELLEN
Not that my opinion matters to you,
but I like her, Josh.

MOM
I have to admit, she seems better
for you than any of the others.

NATHAN
How long have you been dating?

JOSH
Nine months.

MOM
My! Nine!

JOSH
I know. A record.

MOM

So what's so special about this one?

JOSH

She's different. She's smart and sweet and... perfect.

MOM

It's good to see you this way.

JOSH

I'm really happy.

NATHAN

Is this the one, Josh?

JOSH

I don't know.

(Smiles)

Could be.

JOANN RE-ENTERS. She stands in the doorway.

JOANN

I can't find anything. All I see is tea.

JOSH

Oh, okay. I'll get you something.

JOSH rushes into the kitchen past JOANN, who comes back into the living room.

MOM

So... I hear you and Josh are really hitting it off.

JOANN

Hmm. I suppose.

MOM and NATHAN exchange looks. Does the relationship mean more to JOSH than JOANN?

MOM

It's just that... Josh has never been one to stay with one girl for as long as he has with you.

JOANN

I wouldn't really say that I'm with Josh.

NATHAN

Haven't you been dating for nine months?

JOANN

It hasn't been nine months and it's a pretty significant stretch to call it "dating". Is that what he told you?

MOM

Perhaps... we misunderstood.

MOM and NATHAN exchange looks again. JOSH comes back in with juice.

JOSH

Here you go, honey.

JOANN

Why are you telling your family that we've been dating for nine months?

JOSH

Well... Come to think of it, I guess-

JOANN

I've known you for four.

JOSH

(Sheepishly)

Really? It seems like... longer.

JOANN

What are you doing?

JOSH

I think this was all just a misunderstanding.

JOANN

I don't believe that. You've been falling all over yourself since we got here to parade me in front of your family like we're in love or something.

JOSH

Honey-

JOANN

Like that! Calling me honey.
Putting your arm around me.
Whispering these inane things in my
ears and giggling--what kind of
show are you putting on?

JOSH

Okay, that's-

JOANN

I don't even like you that much.
The only reason I came tonight is
because my parents are in Europe.
If I'd known I was going to be on
display, I would've spent Christmas
in my house alone.

(Beat)

And in fact, I think that's where
I'd like to be now.

JOANN goes for her coat on the coat rack.

JOSH

Okay, I'll drive you.

JOANN

No thanks. Just call me an Uber,
will you? I'll wait outside.

JOANN storms out. Long, awkward pause. JOSH looks sheepishly
at his family, then, embarrassed, goes to the kitchen to set
up an Uber. HOLLY RE-ENTERS. She sits on the couch with MOM
and NATHAN.

HOLLY

(Noticing the awkwardness)

What's going on?

MOM

It appears Josh and Joann aren't as
close as anyone thought.

ELLEN

Including Josh.

HOLLY

Uh oh. Where are they?

MOM

Josh is calling her an Uber.
Joann's waiting on the porch.

HOLLY
What should we do?

MOM
I imagine they'd both prefer we
ignore it.

(Beat)
Did you get him to bed?

HOLLY
Yeah.

MOM
Are you tired?

HOLLY
Exhausted.

Pause.

MOM
So where's Eric?

Pause. HOLLY sits up in her chair. She obviously doesn't
want to tell her.

HOLLY
He...
(Bitterness)
...decided to stay home.

MOM
Why?

HOLLY
He's been working every day for the
past three weeks, and with his only
day off being on Christmas Day, he
thought he should take the time to
work on his car.

MOM
Work on his car?

HOLLY
And he, quote, "Doesn't want to
waste his time going to my Mother's
house." End quote.

MOM
Did he realize that also meant
being away from his child on
Christmas day?

HOLLY

Yes. In fact, I brought that up.
He said, quote, "He's nine years
old. There's no difference for him
between December 25th and December
29th." End quote.

MOM

I'm sorry.

HOLLY

(Tearing up)

I don't know if we're going to make
it.

MOM

Don't say that.

MOM scoots over to comfort her.

HOLLY

I'm too stubborn. Maybe I
should've let him win an argument.

MOM

This is not your fault.

Long pause as no one knows what to say.

MOM

Let me get you some tissue.

MOM EXITS to the kitchen. JOSH is still on the phone.
Pause.

ELLEN

I'm gonna put her to bed.

NATHAN

(Handing over the baby)

Okay.

ELLEN

I'm really sorry, Holly.

HOLLY

Thanks.

ELLEN takes the baby with her through the upstage door.
NATHAN and HOLLY are alone now.

HOLLY

You know what? In your entire life, you've had one girl, total, who's been interested in you. Me? I was the High School Prom Queen. If I sneezed, I had 15 guys lined up to hand me a Kleenex. I was a bright light in the middle of a hoard of mosquitoes. And you were this giant can of "Off".

NATHAN

Is there a point to this?

HOLLY

I just don't get it.

NATHAN

You don't get what?

HOLLY

How you ended up with a better marriage than me.

(Beat)

If I asked you your secret, you're gonna say it's Jesus, aren't you?

NATHAN

Putting him first in our marriage puts a lot of other things in the right order too. Plus, she makes me pancakes on Saturdays.

HOLLY

Jesus and pancakes.

NATHAN

In that order, yeah.

Pause. MOM RE-ENTERS with hot chocolate and tissues and gives some to HOLLY. At the same time, JOSH ENTERS and stands at the door, drinking a coke.

MOM

Here. I got you some hot chocolate too. Does anybody else want any?

NATHAN

No thanks.

MOM

I've got plenty.

NATHAN

I'm fine.

MOM sits down with her own cup of hot chocolate. Long pause.
NATHAN looks around at the sad faces.

MOM

We didn't quite finish opening the
presents. I suppose we could do
that now.

No answer. MOM reaches into the pile of paper and picks a
package out.

MOM

Josh, this one's for you.

NATHAN

Wait.

(Beat)

Forget the presents, Mom. Let's do
something else. This is my year to
pick the theme and I'm gonna do it
now. Come on over, Josh.

JOSH

I'm happy over here.

NATHAN

Grab a chair and sit.

JOSH reluctantly obeys.

NATHAN

This year's theme is "A Christmas
of Memories."

JOSH rolls his eyes.

NATHAN

Here's what we'll do. I need a
pencil and paper.

MOM opens up the nightstand next to the couch and pulls out a
piece of paper and a pencil.

NATHAN

(As he's writing)

I'm going to write down the names
of everyone in this group. Then
I'll take each name and put it into
a...

(Finds a hat among the
presents)

(MORE)

NATHAN (CONT'D)

...hat, and then somebody else will pick a name out. Whatever name you pick out of the bowl, you have to tell the group about a fond memory you have of that person. Okay?

JOSH

This is weak.

HOLLY

You know, I'm not in the right mood.

NATHAN

I don't care. We're doing this. Now everybody pick out a name--and make sure you don't get your own.

NATHAN passes around the hat and everyone reluctantly takes a name.

ELLEN

What are you doing?

NATHAN

Come on, sit here, Ellen. We're talking about memories.

ELLEN sits next to NATHAN.

NATHAN

I'll tell you what. I'll go first. I got... Holly. So I need to come up with a special memory of her. Um...

(Beat)

Okay, I got one. It was when I was eight and you were six. It was your first day of school. You know how we were always bickering, Mom would have to separate us four times a day. But we were standing at the bus stop waiting for the bus, and you were so nervous about your first day. And you reached over to hold my hand. We sat on the bus together and I told you there was nothing to be afraid of. That was the first time I really felt like a big brother. It was a special moment for me.

HOLLY

I remember that.

MOM

Very sweet.

NATHAN

(To HOLLY)

Okay, why don't you go next?

HOLLY

All right.

(To NATHAN, looking at
paper)

Actually, I got you.

(Sitting up)

I have one. I remember when I was
in 8th grade, and you were in the
10th, and I had a sleepover with a
bunch of my friends.

NATHAN

Right.

HOLLY

And I told you before they got to
the house that a bunch of them had
a crush on you.

NATHAN

Right. They did. Was it Allison?
And Josie, right?

HOLLY

Nobody had a crush on you, Nathan.

NATHAN

What?

HOLLY

They all thought you were a geek.

NATHAN

You...

HOLLY

Lied to you, yes. The other thing I
lied about is that I told you that
they all thought you were really
muscular and that you'd look good
working out.

NATHAN

Wait-

HOLLY

I also told you that they heard you
sing in school choir and they
thought you had a great voice-

NATHAN

I do have a great voice.

ELLEN

No you don't, Honey.

NATHAN

What?

HOLLY

I also told you that they loved
Britney Spears. You believed all of
it.

Some laughs from Ellen, Mom and Josh.

NATHAN

So you're saying-

HOLLY

That night, we were watching a
movie in the living room, and you
walk in in a muscle shirt. You pass
right in front of us. Your biceps
were--well, not bulging, they were
sitting quietly--and you were
holding two gallon milk jugs. You
said, "Excuse me, I gotta do my
dailies."

JOSH

Your dailies?

HOLLY

You went to the corner of the room
and starting curling with the milk
jugs--just close enough to us so
that they would see you. And then
you started belting out "Oops, I
Did It Again".

Josh and Mom laugh.

NATHAN

Are you saying they didn't like any
of that?

HOLLY

They thought you were a freak.

NATHAN
You're horrible!

More laughs around.

JOSH
Wait a minute, that reminds me.
I've got a Nathan story too.

NATHAN
You have to draw out of the hat!

JOSH
Forget the hat. Do you remember
when you used to watch that one TV
show, Supercarp?

NATHAN
Yeah, I loved that show!

JOSH
It was a terrible show, but it was
a big fad for about a year.

ELLEN
Supercarp?

JOSH
Yeah, it was this crime fighting
carp.

HOLLY
(Laughing)
Oh, I know what you're gonna tell!

JOSH
You just loved this show. And Mom
and Dad bought you all this
Supercarp paraphernalia--trading
cards, pencils, a lunch box--you
even had a Supercarp Halloween
costume.

MOM
We have pictures of that.

ELLEN
Oh, thank goodness!

JOSH
So I came up with this idea to
trick you into joining the
Supercarp Fan Club--which didn't
really exist.

NATHAN

Yes it did. I was a member!

JOSH shakes his head.

NATHAN

You people are all liars!

JOSH

So I have him write this letter to a fish, and I write back, like I'm the fish, and I write this note on it. "Dear Nathan, I'll be coming to your area. Please meet me in the Town Square at noon on that day... and wear your Supercarp costume."

NATHAN

I can't believe that was all a lie.

As he tells this next part, HOLLY and MOM are in hysterics.

JOSH

(Laughing so hard he can hardly say it)

So he goes out there, stands in the Town Square, in the middle of the day with this big Fish costume on, he's got his fish watch and his fish belt buckle...

(Laughing hysterically)

Cars are going by...

NATHAN

This is unbelievable! I was devastated he never showed up. I never watched that show again.

The others are holding their sides in laughter.

MOM

Okay, I'm next, I'm next! I've got a gullible Nathan story!

NATHAN

Now wait a minute, we're not following the rules here.

MOM

Oh, hush up, I'm gonna tell this.

ELLEN

I've got a Nathan story after you.
And none of you know anything about
this!

JOSH

Join the party! Nothing says
Christmas like humiliating Nathan!

NATHAN

Nobody's following the rules!

MOM

Oh, I just thought of another one!

HOLLY

Me too!

Lights out as they continue laughing.

NATHAN

Oh, come on! Let's move on,
people!

The laughter continues. Lights up on stage right (children's
choir).

ACT FIVE

Lights on full stage. The sign by the tree reads, "Merry Christmas, 2026." It is four years later. CLAY is now 13. He is on stage with ELLEN, ERIC, NATHAN, JOSH, GRANDMA, and HOLLY. MOM is absent. They are all sitting down, looking depressed and exhausted--except for HOLLY, who is behind them looking at the tree. They are all wearing dark clothes like they have just gotten back from a funeral (which, in fact, they have). Long pause before anyone says anything.

HOLLY

Look at this. Everything in place.
The tree completely decorated. The
presents all accounted for. The
sign's up.

(Beat)

I guess she did it before she went
into the hospital.

Pause.

NATHAN

Who was the guy that did the
eulogy?

HOLLY

One of Mom's old friends. Knew him
since grade school, I think.

NATHAN

He did a good job.

Pause.

HOLLY

Hey, Clay?

CLAY

Yeah, Mom?

HOLLY

Why don't you go upstairs and get
out of those clothes?

CLAY

Okay.

HOLLY

You haven't said much.

CLAY

There's not much to say.

HOLLY
I guess not.

CLAY
Are you okay?

HOLLY
No. But I will be.

CLAY
You want a Snickers or something? I
can ride my bike to 7-11.

HOLLY
I would love a Snickers.

ERIC
I'll go get it in a little bit,
Clay. Just get changed.

CLAY
Okay.

Clay heads off out the stage left door.

Pause.

ELLEN
We should probably go pick up
Hannah.

NATHAN
Yeah, you're right. Here.
(Stands up and pulls out
his keys)
You mind if I stay behind?

ELLEN
No.

NATHAN
(Giving her the keys)
Why don't you go on ahead and get
her? Come back and get me.

ELLEN
Sure.

ELLEN gives him a hug, then leaves. Pause.

HOLLY
You know, we need to figure out a
few things.

JOSH
Holly, not yet.

HOLLY
We're all here now, who knows when
we'll be back together again?

JOSH
Don't worry about it.

HOLLY
We need to figure out what we're
gonna do with the house, and most
importantly... what we're gonna do
with Grandma.

JOSH
We'll draw straws later to see who
gets her, but right now I just
kinda want to sit here.

Pause.

HOLLY
Somebody needs to call her lawyer.
She had a will.

JOSH
Later.

HOLLY
Bank accounts need to be closed,
insurance canceled...

JOSH
I just got back from my mother's
funeral, okay? I think I've earned
the right to just sit here and mope
for a while.

Pause. Holly notices the Nativity scene.

HOLLY
You know, if she doesn't have
anything about it in her will, I'd
like to have the Nativity Scene.
Do you guys mind?

JOSH
Take it.

NATHAN
It's yours.

HOLLY

I love this thing. I'll keep up the tradition, too. You know, when somebody's added to the family, I'll buy a new piece. I know the name of the company that-...

(Beat)

Nathan, look at this.

NATHAN leans over and looks at the Nativity Scene.

HOLLY

Joseph's back.

NATHAN

You're right.

HOLLY

Joseph's been missing for, like, fifteen years.

NATHAN

That's really weird.

There is a knock at the door. Pause. HOLLY finally walks over and opens it. It is their father. HOLLY gasps, and when NATHAN and JOSH see him, they rise and gasp as well.

HOLLY

Dad.

FATHER

(Nervous)

Hi.

Pause.

HOLLY

(Unemotionally)

What are you doing here?

FATHER

Nathan called me when she died. I was there at the church today. I stayed in the back--didn't really want you to see me, to be honest.

HOLLY

So why did you come here?

FATHER

I have something to give to you.

Father reaches into his pocket and pulls out a letter in an envelope.

FATHER

It's from your mother. She gave it to me about two weeks ago in the hospital. Wanted me to give it to you when she died.

HOLLY snatches the letter and opens it.

JOSH

You saw Mom?

FATHER

Yes.

(Beat)

She called me a few months ago when she was beginning to have the heart problems.

JOSH

What did she say to you?

FATHER

She was very... merciful.

JOSH

Are you expecting that from us too?

FATHER

I'm not expecting anything. I'm just delivering a letter.

JOSH

Well, you've delivered it. Now you can leave.

FATHER

I understand.

(Beat)

I'll go.

FATHER turns to leave.

NATHAN

No. Wait. Stay to hear the letter. Read it, Holly.

HOLLY

Okay.

(Deep breath to steady her nerves, then reading:)

(MORE)

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Dear Kids: Okay, it's my year to pick the Christmas theme. This is it. It's going to be "A Christmas of Forgiveness." Over the last few weeks I've learned how fragile life is—and how short. It's way too short to be carrying around hatred and bitterness.

(Beat)

I've forgiven your father for leaving us 16 years ago. And now I feel as though I am, in a way, free. I want you to have this same freedom. I urge you to look at your father as he stands in front of you, and know that he is a man who has suffered for his sin. And know that he wants his family back. Forgive him.

(Beat as HOLLY looks at her Father)

Holly, I urge you to forgive not only your father but all the men in your life who you feel have let you down. As much as they have hurt you, forgive them anyway.

(Beat as Holly looks at Eric. He looks back)

Josh, you need to forgive yourself. For all the wasted years you spent empty and incomplete. For failing to grow up, forgive yourself. You have such a good heart, Josh. It's not too late to mature into a fine man. Nathan... Forgive me... for not listening to you. And for shoving aside your beliefs like they were some phase. Jesus wasn't a phase. Jesus was your life. Although I don't know much about Him, I can see through what He's done with you, Nathan, that He is the author of grace, and love, and family and Christmas... and I suppose life itself. Forgive me for not accepting your beliefs. If it's any consolation, I accept them now. Not just as your beliefs, but as mine.

(Beat)

I ask each of you for your forgiveness for waiting until now to give you this critical advice. But you're young. You're smart.

(MORE)

HOLLY (CONT'D)

And if you take my advice, by this time tomorrow maybe you'll be free. Goodbye, children. You were my joy. I love you very much. Love, Mom.

Long pause. HOLLY folds the letter back up and starts to lose it a little.

JOSH

(To NATHAN)

She always did like you better.

(Beat)

How could she say that? That I wasted my life. I mean, of the three of us, why would she pick me out as having a wasted life? Look at you guys.

(To NATHAN)

You've got a lousy job, you barely make it month to month.

(To HOLLY)

You've got a loveless marriage. And she picks me out? That doesn't even make sense. Look at me! I've got a great life! I have a great job, I've got... a boat. I've got...

(Beat)

...a very nice boat.

Pause. They all exchange looks.

JOSH

My life is fine the way it is. It always has been. It's this family that's messed up.

JOSH thrashes out in anger, hitting the Nativity Scene and knocking it to the ground.

JOSH hurries out the door without looking at anyone. Holly immediately goes to the Nativity Scene.

HOLLY

Oh, no. He broke it.

NATHAN

We can fix it.

FATHER

Here. Let me help. Does your Mom still keep the glue in the kitchen cabinet?

HOLLY

I think so.

FATHER heads into the kitchen to get the glue.

HOLLY

Joseph's broken.

NATHAN

It looks like most if it's okay.

HOLLY

There's a piece missing.

NATHAN

(Handing it to her)

Right here.

Eric walks over to them, addresses Holly.

ERIC

Josh was wrong. It's not a loveless marriage. I know at least one of us is still in love.

(Beat, she looks at him)

I meant me.

HOLLY

I know who you meant. And the number's two.

ERIC

I'm gonna get you that Snickers.

Eric leaves.

FATHER returns with the glue.

HOLLY

Joseph's in three pieces.

FATHER

Oh, yeah, I see. Mind if I give it a shot?

FATHER takes the figure and glues it back together successfully while NATHAN returns the pieces to their proper places.

FATHER

There you go. Couple minutes and it'll be good as new.

HOLLY
Looks that way, huh?

Long pause. HOLLY and FATHER exchange long, thoughtful looks.

FATHER
I suppose I should go.

NATHAN
Are you heading back to Hilton Head tomorrow?

FATHER
Yeah. I've got a flight in the morning.
(Beat)
Look... While I have you here in front of me, I do want to tell you how sorry I am for all the pain I've caused you over the last 16 years. I can never make up for it, but I did want you to know I apologize for it.
(Beat)
Goodbye.

FATHER starts to head out.

HOLLY
Wait.

FATHER stops and turns back around.

HOLLY
What time does your flight leave?

FATHER
10:30.

HOLLY
Would you... like to meet for breakfast?

FATHER
(Touched)
I'd like that very much.

HOLLY
Okay.

FATHER
And could you do something else for me?

HOLLY

Sure.

FATHER

Could you bring my Grandson with you?

HOLLY

Of course.

FATHER

Okay.

FATHER smiles, then heads back out. He exits, and HOLLY starts to cry. NATHAN hugs her.

HOLLY

Weird day, huh? Lose one parent and gain another.

NATHAN

You want some hot chocolate?

HOLLY

Sure.

NATHAN goes across stage to get the hot chocolate. When he gets into the kitchen, we hear CAROLERS outside. They are singing "Silent Night." HOLLY looks out through the front window.

HOLLY

We've got carolers.

(Beat)

Hey, bring the whole thermos and some cups. Maybe they'd like some.

NATHAN brings the thermos.

NATHAN

Shall we?

HOLLY

Sure.

They start for the front door.

NATHAN

Merry Christmas.

HOLLY

Merry Christmas.

They exit the front door and join the CAROLERS, leaving GRANDMA alone on the stage. She wakes up with a start and look around.

GRANDMA
Where's my Dr. Pepper?

Lights out. The CAROLERS continue to sing "Silent Night."