

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

(2 MEN, 7 WOMEN)

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)

PRODUCTION HISTORY

TRIALS, TRIBULATIONS, AND CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS was first produced in Friendswood, TX in November 2011, 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
Director	Matthew Carlin

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.

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 nine-thirty, 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?

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... Well, 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!

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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!

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 Laneey 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.

BY MATTHEW CARLIN

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