

I Wish You Actually Liked Me
(And Other Familial Impossibilities)

By

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Cast of Characters

<u>OLIVE:</u>	The middle child, fresh off a suicide attempt
<u>BEN:</u>	The youngest child, well-liked if neurotic
<u>SOPHIA:</u>	The oldest child, professionalism incarnate
<u>NOAH:</u>	The boyfriend, a nondescript good listener
<u>JULIA:</u>	The half-sister, who is ten
<u>CARRIE:</u>	The stepmother, stirring the pot
<u>WADE:</u>	The father, trying to ignore the problems
<u>KENT:</u>	Gay uncle #1, cool and collected
<u>AUGUST:</u>	Gay uncle #2, tongue lodged in cheek
<u>LIV:</u>	Olive's younger self
<u>FIA:</u>	Sophia's younger self
<u>BENNY:</u>	Ben's younger self

ACT I

Scene 1

The set is a living room and kitchen of an upper-middle class suburban home in Arkansas. The women in this neighborhood all go to Junior League and have had some work done; the men all wear suits to work. A lot of the teenagers are on drugs. This house contains a kitchen SR with an island separating it from the living room C, a couch CR, and a chair CL. There is a front door SL, and the back wall has an arch in it leading to the hallway. A bedecked Christmas tree stands behind the chair and couch, a dragon's trove of presents spilling through the gap between them. Four filled stockings rest on the couch. The house is bedecked as well: everything matches. It's dark now, predawn, and the tree is aglow.

OLIVE, a noticeably overweight woman in her early 20s, creeps out of the arch, looking from the kitchen to the tree and back. She's in pajamas. She begins to walk towards the kitchen, pausing to look at the presents and wrinkle her nose a bit. In the kitchen she fishes a bottle of eggnog out of the fridge and pours herself a generous glass, taking a sip and mulling for a moment before deciding something. She sets the glass down and hunts under the counter for a moment before coming up with a bottle of bourbon. She pours so much into the eggnog that the surface tension is the only thing keeping it from spilling over. She internally debates moving somewhere more comfortable, but in the end decides that the chance of spilling the eggnog is too great. Instead, she finds a silly straw and delicately breeches the surface of the liquid, beginning to slurp the cocktail. BEN enters from the arch, also in pajamas; he is a young collegiate with an air of tiredness and humor. Olive doesn't notice him, and he watches the shameful display with relative amusement. He doesn't speak for a long time: she gets about a quarter way through the glass. God, it takes so long.

BEN

She's beauty, she's grace.

OLIVE

'Sup.

BEN

And how is our favorite lush this morning?

OLIVE

Not quite lush enough. Working on it. Want one?

She disposes of the silly straw and begins drinking in earnest.

BEN

No, thanks. It might be five o' clock in Bangladesh, but here it's still morning. Give it.

OLIVE

No. If it was a mimosa you wouldn't say shit.

BEN

C'mon. What would the Good Doctor say about this shameful display?

OLIVE

She'd say 'do whatever it takes to stay alive today', and if that includes a predawn lubrication, so be it.

BEN

(advancing on her)

Olive. C'mon.

OLIVE

Touch my drink and the next person I try to kill will be you.

BEN

That's not funny.

OLIVE

I think it is.

BEN

Give me the drink.

OLIVE

Pry it from my cold, dead hands.

Ben lunges for her, but Olive is too fast and downs the rest of the drink in one mighty gulp. She can't quite get it all and some of it dribbles out of her mouth and onto her shirt; it should be funny, but it should be sort of sad, too. She slam dunks the glass into the trash (there is hopefully a muffled shattering sound).

BEN

Altogether?

OLIVE

(hunting for more liquor)

No, each--sorry, shoulda said that. 25 grand each. A week later the man dies and the friends each place an envelope in the coffin. *Several* months later, the priest finally confesses that he only put \$10,000 in the envelope and sent the rest to a mission in South America.

BEN

Here it comes...

OLIVE

(grinning)

The doctor says that his envelope had only \$8,000 because he donated to a medical charity.

BEN

Wait for it...

OLIVE

The lawyer is outraged! He says, "I am the only one who kept my promise to our dying friend, you losers. I want you both to know that the envelope I placed in the coffin contained my own personal check for the entire \$25,000."

BEN

There it is.

OLIVE

And that's you. You're the lawyer.

BEN

Thank you, Olive.

(massages his temples for a moment, then holds out his hand, snapping his fingers)

Okay. Give.

OLIVE

What?

BEN

Give me the bourbon. And a glass. Do we have more nog?

OLIVE

(assembling ingredients)

You kidding? They buy in bulk.

BEN
That too, then. If your drunk self can manage it.

OLIVE
Noice.
(pause, then fond)
You always give into my demands.

BEN
I am weak and you are drunk. I refuse to let you be the only one having a decent time today.

OLIVE
God, how sad is it that we have to be drunk to enjoy Christmas?

BEN
Don't do that.

OLIVE
Do what?

BEN
Make this something tragic and deep. It's not. It's just...kinda sad.

He has finished assembling the drinks and hands one to Olive, the other he raises to eye level.

OLIVE
What're we toasting?

BEN
(pause)
Here's to those who wish us well, and those who don't can go to hell.

OLIVE
Cute. Very...Seussian.

BEN
(clinks his glass against hers)
Thanks.
(they both drink deeply)
If we're drinking in the morning we need to eat, too. What do you want for breakfast?

OLIVE
No! No, have I taught you nothing? You never eat when you're drinking your feelings away, it dulls the effect and makes you uncomfortably lucid.

BEN

(attempting to take her drink)
If words like 'lucid' make you uncomfortable you shouldn't be drinking.

OLIVE

Fine, you'll just drink alone, then.

BEN

Done it before.

OLIVE

You know nothing, Benjamin Peterson. The only thing sadder than drinking your feelings away is drinking your feelings away alone. I will not let my baby brother drink alone.

(pause)

How old are you now?

BEN

Not old enough for this to be legal.

OLIVE

(pause, then shrugs and continues drinking)

Don't tell Mom.

BEN

You're such a good influence.

Olive settles herself on the floor and pats the space beside her, indicating Ben should sit. He does so.

OLIVE

Hey, um--

BEN

So--

They both laugh again, then begin gesturing at each other.

OLIVE

Go.

BEN

No, you.

OLIVE

Listen here, you--

BEN

Okay, okay. I just--y'know. I wanted to ask if you were okay.

OLIVE

Ben...

BEN

No, I mean, I get it, I mean I don't, but you don't have to tell me. If you don't want to.

OLIVE

C'mon, man. It's Christmas.

BEN

So make it my Christmas present.

OLIVE

You're already getting a Christmas present.

Ben drops his head on her shoulder and she puts her head on his. They hold hands. It is familiar and comforting.

BEN

Humor me.

OLIVE

I'm okay. You know. You're all successful, and Sophia's showing off Noah, which is like, good for them, but I feel--I dunno, lesser? And I hate it here, but you know that. Overall, it's been--a couple of months since it happened, and...I'm getting there. Keepin' on keepin' on. Like we do.

BEN

Good.

OLIVE

Yeah. It will be.

Olive drops her glass, it should be largely empty by now, but there should be a small spill. She extricates herself from the embrace to react.

OLIVE

Oh my god. Oh no.

BEN

Tragedy of the century.

OLIVE

(sighs deeply)
Might as well kill myself.

Beat. Ben stares at Olive for a long second, Olive stares back, seeing if her joke landed. After a moment Ben begins laughing, hard, so hard he tips on his side and is laughing on the floor. Olive laughs too; it is good to joke about this. It makes it feel less scary.

BEN

You can't say that!

OLIVE

I can. I did.

BEN

Oh my god!

JULIA (OS)

Santa?

BEN

(still laughing)

Oh crap.

(collects himself, the glasses, and Olive)

No, honey, not yet. Me and Olive just got a little excited, too.

JULIA, their 10-year-old sister, comes in through the arch; she's in her nightgown and too sleepy to notice the presents.

JULIA

He won't come if you're not asleep!

BEN

(as he puts the glasses in the sink)

You're right. Let's all go back to bed.

OLIVE

You big dweeb.

BEN

You're a loser and I hate you.

JULIA

Don't call people losers.

BEN

Absolutely right.

They all three go back in the hallway, Ben with his arms around them both. Dim lights slightly, indication of changing timeline. After a moment, BENNY, Ben's younger self, creeps out of the archway. He wears cute pajamas, which are matched by his sisters. The pajamas are worn for the whole show.

Benny is furtive as he ninjas his way to the fridge and grabs a plastic bag full of little cooked dough balls. He begins shoveling them into his face as LIV, Olive's younger self, roused by the noise, comes through the arch.

LIV

Ben! No!

Liv runs over to him but he runs as well, around the island, Liv chasing after him.

LIV

Those are for tomorrow, Ben! She's gonna be so mad!

Finally, Liv catches him and there is a brief scuffle over the food, until finally Liv wrests the bag from him. Unfortunately, the force of her grab sends the dough balls flying, scattering across the floor. They both stop moving, standing stock-still in horrified silence, listening for footsteps. When none approach, Liv begins scrambling for the dough balls.

LIV

Ben! Come on, help pick these up!

Benny shakes off his horror and begins helping, picking them up and putting them back in the bag.

BENNY

Maybe we can rinse them off?

LIV

They're bread, idiot! We can't rinse off bread!

BENNY

Maybe we--

LIV

We're going to pick them up and put them in the fridge. And we're gonna hope there's not too much dog hair on them.

BENNY

I'm sorry, Liv.

LIV

Just put them away.

Ben takes the ZipLoc from her and puts it in the fridge. Liv massages her temples in a way strikingly similar to Benny in the last scene. He comes back and stands beside her, and only then does she notice how shaken he is.

LIV

Oh, no--Benny, it's okay. We got it cleaned up.

BENNY

You hate me.

LIV

No, I don't--

BENNY

You yelled!

LIV

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to. I don't hate you.

BENNY

We're gonna get in trouble.

LIV

No, we're not. It's Christmas. And hey, look. Look!
(she points to the presents)
Santa came!

BENNY

Oh!

LIV

Yeah! And it looks like you got the new Gameboy.

BENNY

Do you think I got any games?

LIV

(sarcastic)
No, Santa brought you a Gameboy and no games.
(ruffles his hair fondly)
Dummy.

BENNY

We don't know. Maybe he forgot.

LIV
I bet he didn't. I bet you got the new Pokémon game.

BENNY
Really?

LIV
Yeah. But you have to be surprised. Okay?

BENNY
Okay.

LIV
Okay. Um...knock knock.

BENNY
Liv...

LIV
No, come on! Knock knock.

BENNY
(tentatively smiling)
Who's there?

LIV
Harry.

BENNY
Harry who?

LIV
Harry up, it's cold out here!
(Benny giggles and Liv hugs him.
Warmly,)
Come on, we gotta go back to our rooms for a little
bit.

*They exit, Liv's arm around Benny. Dim lights to
next scene.*

SCENE 2

*SOPHIA, NOAH, Ben, and Olive enter left, in front
of the set (they are actually in the hall). They
are all three in their pajamas. Sophia is a young,
professional 20-something, and Noah is her
nondescript boyfriend.*

SOPHIA
Okay, Olive, can you please--

OLIVE

I will do my level best to not embarrass you--

SOPHIA

Olive, please--

OLIVE

(sarcasm incarnate)

--but I'm just soooooooo good at it, you know?

SOPHIA

Don't try to pull that on me.

OLIVE

What?

SOPHIA

Don't. It's Dad's birthday, and it's Christmas.

OLIVE

I'll be sweet, I promise. Check me out, I put on mascara and everything. I'm dressed like a girl. You could never tell I'm the--

(hands like claws)

--crazy lesbian stepdaughter!

SOPHIA

(unruffled)

Don't say "stepdaughter" like it's a bad word. I'm her stepdaughter, too, and she likes me--and Ben!--

BEN

Don't drag me into this.

SOPHIA

Because we put in the effort to be decent kids.

OLIVE

Being someone's child shouldn't require effort.

SOPHIA

Regardless--

OLIVE

And she has her own kid, she's got Julia, why does she want us here?

SOPHIA

Because we're her kids too, Olive!

OLIVE

(beat)

Besides, decency sucks. It's boring, and dry, like your vagina.

SOPHIA

That's disgusting.

(pinches the bridge of her nose)

Just--one visit. One nice visit. That's all I ask.

OLIVE

(bats her eyelashes sardonically)

I'll try.

SOPHIA

I guess that's the best I can hope for. Oh, and Ben, try not to do that thing.

BEN

What thing?

Sophia exits left with Noah, shaking her head.

BEN

What thing?!

Olive laughs and begins to exit as well, but Ben grabs her arm before she can.

BEN

Please be nice.

OLIVE

I will if they will.

BEN

You know they won't. Be the bigger man.

OLIVE

I don't want to.

BEN

Please. If not for Sophia, for me. For Julia.

OLIVE

I don't want to.

BEN

One nice visit isn't hard.

OLIVE

For you, it isn't.

(beat)

Do you think she could tell we're drunk?

BEN

I took a shower.

OLIVE
She's the worst.

BEN
You're the worst.

OLIVE
Very true.

As they exit:

OLIVE
Are you still drunk?

BEN
God, I hope so.

Crossfade to living room to meet CARRIE, a disillusioned Desperate Housewife, and WADE, the balding pater familias. They are making last minute preparations for Christmas morning. Wade is practically vibrating with excitement, Carrie is more subdued but still excited.

WADE
Do you think she'll like it?

CARRIE
Of course she will.

WADE
I mean, she asked for it, right?

CARRIE
Yes, she asked many times.

WADE
I'm sorry, I'm just excited. It's been so long since we've had a family Christmas.

CARRIE
Four years.

WADE
At least. And now we're all healthy and well and able to celebrate as a family.

CARRIE
(laughing)
Okay, okay--dial it down.

Wade grabs her and kisses her.

WADE

I'm so happy you're here.

CARRIE

(fond)

Of course I'm here. I'm okay, Wade. I'm excited to spend Christmas with your kids.

WADE

Our kids.

CARRIE

Of course.

Wade kisses her again and turns to the archway.

WADE

Okay--now!

The kids come tearing in, Julia ripping into her stocking like there's a bomb at the bottom, the others more subdued due to their age. Wade and Carrie put down their coffee on the island. The next lines overlap.

WADE

(laughing)

Wait! Wait, for God's sake wait!

CARRIE

Julia, slow down, I want pictures!

JULIA

(agonized)

I don't want to slow down!

BEN

You get me a toothbrush every year, are you trying to tell me something?

OLIVE

Yes, you smell. Sorry we were being too subtle.

BEN

Says the girl who got deoderant!

OLIVE

You did, too!

SOPHIA

I like these socks a lot. Noah, did you get yours?

NOAH

I assumed I didn't get one.

WADE

Don't be silly, of course we got you one.

NOAH

(genuinely touched)
Wow. Thank you, Mr. Peterson.

WADE

Please. My name is Wade. And it was all Carrie's idea.

CARRIE

We figure you're family now. You're marrying Sophia, right?

SOPHIA

Carrie!

CARRIE

What? Honest question.

OLIVE

Yes, they're going to get married and have lots and lots of babies.

CARRIE

Please! Yes. I want grandkids.

WADE

Who knows, Livvie and Pen might get there first.

CARRIE

(an attempt at a tease that is a little too cold)
I don't think so.

Olive flinches and goes back to her stocking, much more lackluster, but with Sophia's words in her head.

WADE

Okay, you can go through all your stockings, but only open one present, one of the ones from us. We're waiting on the others until Kent and August come over.

BEN

The uncles are coming over?

OLIVE

(singing deeply)
Gay unclleeeees.

SOPHIA

(to Julia)
She means gay like happy.

OLIVE

No, I mean gay like homosexual. She knows about gay people.

BEN

Gays aren't like Nessie, the world is prepared to know about them.

OLIVE

Ben--

BEN

Nessie is real and I won't hear another word about it.

JULIA

Yeah, I got to meet Pen!
(to Olive)
Why didn't you bring her?

SOPHIA

Well--

OLIVE

She wanted to be with her own family.

Olive glares at Sophia, Ben begins fiddling with his game system, Wade picks up Carrie's coffee cup and takes a sip. He nearly spits it out; this is not coffee.

WADE

Can I see you for a moment?

CARRIE

I'm taking pictures.

WADE

Now.

He drags her over to the kitchen, the kids keep going through stockings. All dialogue is stage whisper for the next bit. Wade is not angry, he is upset and concerned, Carrie is hard.

OLIVE

I love it when they whisper-fight.

WADE
Really?

BEN
Why?

WADE
After everything we talked about?

OLIVE
I don't know. It's funny to me.

WADE
You couldn't go one day?

CARRIE
Wade--

WADE
One day!

JULIA
I don't think it's funny.

CARRIE
This is my house--

WADE
It's my house too, don't you dare try to pull that.

OLIVE
(uncomfortable)
Yeah, I guess so.

CARRIE
And I will do what I want.

WADE
We talked about this. Carrie, I was so excited--

CARRIE
There's nothing wrong with it.

WADE
There is when it's every day.
(pours her coffee out)
Our family is here. It's my birthday. I want one day,
please.

CARRIE
I'm just going to start again later when you do. You
try to be holier than me--

WADE

Carrie--

CARRIE

But you just start later in the day.

WADE

So start later in the day. One morning, not even the whole day. I want you here right now.

CARRIE

I am here. I'm just happy.

WADE

You can't be happy without it?

(beat, she doesn't answer)

Carrie...fine. I don't care. Do what you want.

CARRIE

If you don't care, I'm just going to start back up again.

WADE

I don't care, Carrie.

OLIVE

(normal voice)

Do you think people change?

BEN

(also normal voice)

What do you mean?

Olive shrugs as Wade makes his way back over. The kids have each picked out a present. Wade is smiling, ever willing to avoid conflict.

WADE

Okay, who wants to go first?

JULIA

Me! C'mon, mom!

WADE

All right, Julie going first!

CARRIE

(quietly)

Damn it.

She puts her cup in the sink with more force than necessary and makes her way over. Julia is delightedly ripping into a box.

JULIA

What is it?!

OLIVE

Just get in there, Hopalong!

She does, squealing as she pulls out a new toy, one of the kinds that makes noise. She begins decimating its box as Ben opens his present: a nice new tie.

BEN

Wow, this is really nice.

CARRIE

Make sure you don't put it in the dryer.

BEN

One time that happened!

SOPHIA

(opening her present, takes out a silk scarf)

Oh, wow. Wow.

WADE

It's not exactly warm, but--

CARRIE

We thought you might want something fashionable. No telling how many cocktail events you two go to.

SOPHIA

Less than you think, but still. Thank you. I love it. Noah, open yours.

NOAH

I get one?

CARRIE

(as Sophia hands her a present)

You keep acting like we're not going to give you a proper Christmas just because you're not related. Yet.

NOAH

(as he unwraps his present)

I'm honored, really.

WADE

Quite the gentleman you have here.

(to Noah)

It's a crossword book. New York Times. You've probably already done them all, but--

NOAH

No, this'll be perfect for when Sophia's sucked into her crime shows.

WADE

So nothing really has changed for you, has it?

Olive opens her present and pulls out: socks. To their credit, they're nice socks, a burgundy pair and a navy blue pair, but they're no silk. Olive forces a smile, Wade looks confused.

OLIVE

These are...very nice.

CARRIE

Well, you wear a uniform to work. And you said you and Pen don't go out too much anymore.

JULIA

I thought we got her a scarf, too? I picked it out.

CARRIE

No, you picked out a hat.

(to Olive)

You're getting a hat, too. We wanted to make sure to get you things you'd actually wear.

OLIVE

I appreciate it. I'll definitely wear these.

JULIA

No, we got her a scarf, it was blue and had lines on it--

CARRIE

You're still thinking of the hat.

Kent and August enter left, outside the door.

KENT

Behave.

AUGUST

Oh, Kent, you know better than to ask me to do that. It's part of my charm.

Kent knocks.

JULIA

The uncles are here!

OLIVE

(singing again)
Gaaaaay unclleeeeeees!

Julia bolts towards the door and opens it, letting Kent and August in. There are many hugs exchanged all around, lots of 'hello's and 'you look great's. Julia takes their coats and runs out through the arch, Ben takes their packages and unpacks them around the tree.

WADE

How was your flight?

KENT

Oh, you know how it is, lots of screaming children, lots of unpleasant adults.

AUGUST

What he's not telling you is that he was one of the unpleasant adults.

KENT

Did I not just tell you to behave?

AUGUST

Did I not just tell you 'no'?

WADE

Well, settle in, make yourself at home. Can I get you anything to drink?

AUGUST

Trying to get me liquored up already? Kent, your brother is so forward.

WADE

(awkward)
Hahaaa.

They all make their way back to the living room and settle in, except for Wade and Carrie, who go to the kitchen. Julia reenters with a video tape.

JULIA

Look what I found!

OLIVE

What is that?

JULIA

It says 'Christmas 01'. Can we watch it?

SOPHIA
Oh, honey, no.

JULIA
Why not?

NOAH
Why not?

SOPHIA
Because, uh...

OLIVE
Because we were all little in it.

JULIA
I want to see!

OLIVE
No, you don't. We look the same as we do now, but
shrunk down. It's freakish and grotesque. We look like
we belong at a sideshow.

Kent and August are struggling not to laugh.

JULIA
I have to see it.

OLIVE
Watch it on Halloween.

NOAH
Might be fun.

OLIVE
Please. I'm not nearly drunk enough to deal with that
tape.

CARRIE
(to Wade)
What do you mean we're out of bourbon?!

*Olive smiles sheepishly and sinks into the couch.
Julia's toy makes a defeated noise. End scene 2.*

SCENE 3

*Maybe an hour later. Crossfade to downstage, where
Olive enters in a coat. She stomps around for a
moment, cold, then pulls out a pack of cigarettes
and smacks them against her hand a few times. Liv
enters.*

LIV
That's gross.

OLIVE
(muttering)
Who asked you.

LIV
Why did I turn out so gross? Ugh. I hate me.

OLIVE
You and me both, kiddo.

Liv sticks her tongue out and exits as Noah enters. He stops short at the sight of Olive, eyes wide, a deer in headlights. Olive is still, a cigarette halfway out of the pack. After a long moment she exhales and decides to venture into unknown territory.

OLIVE
What's your brand?

They both relax: they know why they are here, and neither of them is caught.

NOAH
American Spirits.

OLIVE
What the hell kind of brand is that?

NOAH
They're the hippie cigarettes.

OLIVE
Hippie cancer sticks. Perfect.

NOAH
My small way of sticking it to the man.
(he taps out his own pack)
Cancer sticks. I haven't heard anyone call it a cancer stick since eighth grade DARE.

OLIVE
I always thought it sounded kinda cool. Cancer sticks!
Coffin nails! Putrid, sucking--

NOAH
(laughing)
No one called them putrid, sucking anything.

OLIVE

They should've. How kickass of a brand would that be?
Or a band name.

(as she lights her cigarette)

We are the Putrid Sucking Coffin Nails! We're here to
rock your world!

*She air guitars for a moment, with sound effects.
Noah lights his own cigarette.*

NOAH

What's yours?

OLIVE

My what?

NOAH

Brand.

OLIVE

Oh. Marlboro. Menthols.

NOAH

Whoa, you may be too hardcore for me.

OLIVE

You kidding? I smoke these because they're not
hardcore. It's like smoking a peppermint.

(flicks her cigarette)

Not a word of this, to anyone. Ben is of the opinion
that I shouldn't smoke, Julia *shouldn't* see me smoking.
Fia has no idea.

NOAH

She knows.

OLIVE

She does?!

NOAH

Yeah. She knows everything.

OLIVE

Why were you so surprised to see me out here, then?

NOAH

Just because she knows doesn't mean she tells me. She
just knows.

OLIVE

You're a smart man.

(beat)

So how're you liking it so far?

NOAH

Liking what?

OLIVE

(deadpan)

The cigarette.

(back to real life)

This, doofus. This whole--scene. Family. Thing.

NOAH

Oh. It's fine.

OLIVE

Fine?

NOAH

Better than my family. You know where I'd be right now if I was in Maryland? *Mass.*

OLIVE

You're *Catholic*? You poor thing.

NOAH

Being a Catholic adult isn't so bad. I imagine it's a lot like being a disillusioned young Jew, outwardly cynical but still unable to bring ourselves to eat stuff we want to. Now, being a Catholic *kid*--

OLIVE

Oh my god, I can't even imagine. So many nuns.

NOAH

No, I didn't go to Catholic school. No nuns for me. Probably why I'm still Catholic. No, what was rough for me was finding out I didn't have any friends because I told them all they were going to hell for reading Harry Potter.

OLIVE

You didn't.

NOAH

I definitely did.

OLIVE

Christ, I can hear it now.

(puts on a tiny voice with a '40s accent)

Now see here! I will not stand for this! You young hooligans can't read that devil nonsense!

NOAH

Devil Nonsense! Another great band.

OLIVE

They can go head-to-head with Putrid Sucking Coffin Nails. I bet PSCN will win, though.

NOAH

Yeah, probably. Audiences aren't ready for Devil Nonsense, they'd rather chew easy stuff.

OLIVE

You wound me.

(beat, something crashes inside)

That'll be Carrie.

NOAH

Is she okay?

OLIVE

Yeah, she's just sober. She doesn't do well sober, not when she's surrounded by people.

CARRIE (OS)

Hell!

NOAH

Should we go check on her?

OLIVE

You can, if you want. I don't care. Let her break every dish in the house. I broke a cup this morning.

NOAH

When?

OLIVE

When I was drinking the rest of the bourbon.

Carrie enters L, with her keys.

CARRIE

Oh, Noah, you shouldn't smoke.

NOAH

(with a smile)

We both shouldn't really.

CARRIE

(without acknowledging Olive)

I'm going out, do you need anything?

OLIVE

Where could you be going? It's Christmas, everything's closed.

CARRIE

Wade found an open convenience store. They should be selling liquor there.

OLIVE

It's Christmas. They won't be selling liquor anywhere in Arkansas.

CARRIE

We're driving into Missouri. Shouldn't take too long; an hour, maybe.

OLIVE

Oh, my god. Of course you are, of course.

NOAH

No, I don't need anything.

OLIVE

For god's sake. No, don't let us keep you.

CARRIE

(narrows her eyes at Olive)

We'll be back soon. Don't let Julia see you.

Carrie exits after one more glare.

NOAH

Poor thing.

OLIVE

Hah! Yeah. Poor thing. Life is very hard when everything is handed to you.

(beat)

So you like it here?

NOAH

Uh...

OLIVE

You can be honest.

NOAH

Feels like I can't.

(beat)

Carrie's making me feel welcome.

(Olive barks a gross laugh)

Though I sense some animosity between the two of you.

OLIVE

You don't say! I'm surprised Fia didn't tell you.

NOAH

Tell me what?

OLIVE

That I hate it here.

NOAH

You don't mean that.

OLIVE

I really, truly do. Carrie's a drunk, Dad's a pushover--separate I can deal with everyone but throw them all together and I just hate it here.

NOAH

If you really hated it here, you wouldn't be here.

OLIVE

How many siblings do you have?

NOAH

None.

OLIVE

Okay, so you're not an idiot, you just don't understand what I'm talking about.

NOAH

Hey, c'mon--

OLIVE

No, that's not a slight, it's actually pretty close to a compliment. Sometimes people tell me I don't hate my family, then I find out they have siblings and it's like 'how can you even think like that? Like, how rosy are your glasses?'

NOAH

Pretty close to a compliment isn't a compliment.

OLIVE

You're out of luck if you think you're gonna get a compliment from me.

NOAH

You can't hate your family. I don't care how grouchy you are, no one bar-none hates their family.

OLIVE

(acquiescing)

Okay, yes, you're right, I don't hate my family. I love my family. But I do not like them. Ben is the exception, and Julia. And my uncles. And my mom. Really just my dad, Carrie, and Fia. I have no idea how you can like her so much.

NOAH

She's funny, she's brilliant. You know, all the standard stuff, of course, but more than that she's honest. When she says something about you, you know she's being serious.

OLIVE

She *is* honest.

(beat)

I'm here because Fia asked me to be here, and I love her, and I would do anything any of these people asked. Even after all these years. Anything.

NOAH

Why?

OLIVE

Because that's what you do when you love someone.

NOAH

That doesn't seem healthy.

OLIVE

It's probably not.

(she has finished her cigarette and butts it out on the bottom of her shoe, slipping it back in the pack)

But it's all we've got, in the end.

NOAH

(as he extinguishes his cigarette)

Coming inside?

OLIVE

In a bit. It's nice out here.

Sophia enters R, holding her phone.

NOAH

Sure, okay.

Noah exits L. Fia enters R, Liv enters L, meeting in the middle of the stage between Olive and Sophia. Liv is carrying a baby doll. Sophia answers the phone, Olive takes hers out and places a call.

SOPHIA

Hello?

(beat)

Oh! Hi, Dr. Reynolds!

LIV

Look what mom got me!

OLIVE

Hey, honey. Merry Christmas.

FIA

Uh. Neat.

SOPHIA

Why are you calling? Do you work on Christmas?

LIV

Her name is Laura and I love her. Do you want to hold her?

FIA

No.

OLIVE

No, I just wanted to call you.

SOPHIA

Yeah, I guess you'd have to.

OLIVE

Yes, I'm fine.

LIV

Why?

OLIVE

Yes, I'm sure.

FIA

I just don't want to.

LIV

(melodramatic)

Do you hate her?

FIA

No!

SOPHIA

I'm not really where I can sit down. Do I have to be sitting?

The doctor says something that shocks her. It takes a moment to process.

OLIVE

Really, honey, I'm fine. I just...

LIV

You hate her!

OLIVE

You know. You know about this. No, I just wanted to call and say I love you. And Merry Christmas.

FIA

I don't hate her!

LIV

Hold her, then!

OLIVE

How's your family? How's Thomas?

FIA

I don't want to! I don't want to hold your stupid doll!

LIV

I knew it! You do hate her!

OLIVE

And Lily? Good. Give them my love.

FIA

I don't hate your doll! I hate babies! *I hate babies!*

SOPHIA

Wow. I...should have been sitting down.

OLIVE

And you too of course.

(she sighs)

I wish I was there.

SOPHIA

And you're sure?

OLIVE

I wish I was anywhere but here.

FIA

Why would anyone like babies?! They're loud and smelly and I hate them!

SOPHIA
Never? Are you sure?

FIA
I never want kids!

LIV
Well, I want a million kids!

SOPHIA
Of course. I'm sorry.

LIV
And I'll love them all!

OLIVE
I love you.

SOPHIA
It's just--wow. My parents are gonna be really disappointed.

FIA
I hope you do!

Fia runs off R, Liv screams after her and runs L.

SOPHIA
Me? Oh, no. I'm fine.

OLIVE
I'm fine.

SOPHIA
I'm awesome.

OLIVE
I'm...fine.

SOPHIA
Thank you, doctor. Yes. We'll do a followup soon, I'll call you tomorrow. Go home, enjoy your family.

OLIVE
I'm sorry. I don't want to bum you out. Listen, I'll call later, okay? They're gonna be wondering where I am.

SOPHIA
Yes. Thank you.
Goodbye.

OLIVE
I love you, babe. Bye.

They both hang up and stare at their cell phones, a mirror perfectly in synch. After a moment they stow them in their respective pockets and exit on opposite sides, faces unreadable. Dim lights to next scene.

SCENE 4

A couple of hours later. Everyone but Sophia, Noah, Carrie, and Wade are relaxing in the living room.

OLIVE

Wanna see my socks?

KENT

What?

OLIVE

Check 'em out.

(busts out the new socks)

They're my Christmas present.

KENT

Oh, dear.

OLIVE

And I'm getting a hat, too.

JULIA

I picked out the hat.

AUGUST

Don't worry, we brought presents, too.

OLIVE

(mollified)

Sorry for being a whiner.

AUGUST

Honey. You got socks for Christmas. You get to be a whiner.

(pause)

I don't understand this show.

KENT

Hm?

AUGUST

This show. I don't understand it.

KENT

What's not to understand?

AUGUST

Why are these children so poorly dressed?

KENT

They're not children, August--

AUGUST

They're children to me. Look at that man. He looks like he's wearing his father's suit.

KENT

It was the 90s.

AUGUST

I was very well-dressed in the 90s.

KENT

You were a New York homosexual. Being well-dressed was a requirement.

AUGUST

I'm certain you were well-dressed, too.

KENT

(guffaw)

You have no idea how poorly I dressed in the 90s.

AUGUST

Nonsense, all homosexuals are well-dressed. Look at Ben.

BEN

(sputtering)

I'm sorry?

KENT

Ben's not gay, honey.

AUGUST

(with a large, conspiratorial wink)

Right, of course.

OLIVE

(rescuing Ben)

And I am, and look how poorly dressed I am.

Noah enters through the arch.

AUGUST

You're a lesbian, you don't count. What's this show called?

NOAH

'Friends'.

OLIVE

'Sup, squirt. Where's Fia?

NOAH

She's napping. She's fine, just tired. Long day, you know.

OLIVE

(sarcastic)

Sure, she deserves a bit of a lie-down.

AUGUST

(attention needs to be back on him)

Hah! That's fitting.

KENT

What? What's fitting?

AUGUST

The name 'Friends'. It's fitting for this show.

KENT

What are you going on about now?

AUGUST

Only that such a simpering, philandering show would have such a gauche name as 'Friends'.

KENT

You don't mean that.

AUGUST

I do.

BEN

No, you really don't. Philandering means cheating. This show is cheating on us?

AUGUST

(scoffs for a moment, saving face)

Yes. Cheating us out of decent programming.

Everyone boos.

KENT

Nice try, honey.

AUGUST

You can all go rot.

(to Ben)

That Chandler's pretty cute, though, huh?

BEN

(stiffly)

I wouldn't know. I'm straight.

AUGUST

Oh, hah! Me, too.

NOAH

Why are we watching Friends?

JULIA

Oh!

(scrambles up, finds the video tape)

Because I wanted to watch this! But no one will let me.

OLIVE

It's just very boring, hon.

BEN

It is Christmas--

JULIA

That's what I mean! I want to watch this because it's Christmas and this has Christmas on it right here--

(she traces the word Christmas)

And I want to see what you look like.

BEN

Christmas '01, that would have been--thirteen years ago? Christ, I would've been, like, seven.

JULIA

Littler than me! We have to watch it.

OLIVE

Maybe some other time, kiddo.

NOAH

(singing under his breath)

So no one told you life was gonna be this way...

August claps his hands four times, then mentally kicks himself. Julia stamps and huffs, plopping down on the ground with the tape.

BEN
Oh no! The kaiju roams again.

JULIA
I'm not Godzilla!

BEN
You're acting like him.

Ben mock-roars, then descends on Julia, tickling her. Olive gets in on the action, too, reducing Julia to tears of laughter.

JULIA
Okay! Okay! Uncle!

KENT
I cannot help you here.

BEN
You know what? If you can convince Olive to watch the tape, we'll watch it.

JULIA
Really?!

BEN
Really. You guys don't mind?

KENT
Sounds fine to me.

AUGUST
I think it sounds grand. Children have such joi de vivre, such--
(with a wink at Ben)
--gaiety.

NOAH
I think it might be fun to see you guys as kids. What's on the tape?

BEN
I don't know. It's been so long.

JULIA
Oh! Oh!
(rounds on Olive desperately)
Olive please! Please!

OLIVE
Gee, Ben, thanks. No, honey, I don't really want to watch it and you need to respect when people say no. You can't have what you want all the time.

JULIA

But it's just a tape!

OLIVE

Exactly. It's not all that important.

BEN

Why are you so against watching it?

OLIVE

I just don't want to watch it. I don't like the way I look.

BEN

Olive was a little fat kid.

OLIVE

Thank you, Benny.

(to Noah)

He's not wrong. I was always big. But mostly--I had this terrible haircut. I never dressed well. I don't know, I just don't want to.

JULIA

(shewdly)

We'll watch it. You'll see.

Ben gets up and goes to the kitchen, Fia enters L and sits on the corner of the stage in her pajamas with a blanket, reading a book.

AUGUST

I don't know why you thought you didn't look good as a kid. I thought you were very cute.

OLIVE

Thanks. I never thought so, but thanks.

AUGUST

But why? I mean, you were no coquette like Miss Julia over here--

JULIA

What's a coquette?

KENT

Can we not psychoanalyze the ten-year-old, please? Leave work at work.

LIV (OS)

Fia?

FIA
What?

AUGUST
But she is a coquette, a little Lolita. They're starting them earlier and earlier--

BEN
That's awful.

Liv enters, her face caked in awful makeup.

LIV
I can't get it off.

FIA
What did you do? Is that Carrie's?

LIV
(upset)
I thought it would be good, but it's not.

FIA
(obviously uncomfortable)
No, look, don't--do that. Come here.

Fia pulls out a pack of baby wipes and starts cleaning off Liv's face.

AUGUST
Regardless, you were a beautiful child.

OLIVE
It doesn't really matter. I wasn't, but it doesn't matter.

JULIA
I bet you were! I bet you looked good! Can we watch the tape?

OLIVE
No.

LIV
Will she be mad?

FIA
Did you clean up?

LIV
Yes.

FIA

Then she won't ever know. Come on, let's go wash up.

Fia and Liv exit together as Carrie and Wade enter, holding sacks. Carrie looks considerably more upbeat. Wade is still wearing the Santa hat.

CARRIE

We're back!

WADE

You should have seen the look the man in the convenience store gave me! But I gave him a tip.

CARRIE

You shouldn't have, he gets paid a decent wage.

WADE

Aww, it's Christmas.

BEN

What'd'ja get?

CARRIE

Kahlua, vodka, and bourbon. We were running low on all of them.

OLIVE

It never ceases to amaze that you can just buy liquor in the convenience store here.

JULIA

Of course you can. Can you not?

OLIVE

Not in my state you don't.

WADE

Well, hey, it's almost noon! Who wants a drink?

CARRIE

God, I do.

WADE

(fondly, kisses her on the head)
I know you do. Kent? August?

KENT

I would love a drink, Wade, thank you.

AUGUST

Me, too!

WADE
Well, let's get some orders! Kent, I know you like
scotch and soda, August?

AUGUST
Do you have any cranberry juice?

WADE
Yes, absolutely.

AUGUST
I'll do a Cape Codder, then.

WADE
(beat)
Remind me.

AUGUST
Cranberry and vodka.

WADE
I can do that. Noah? Eggnog?

NOAH
That would be awesome, Mr. Peterson, thank you.

WADE
And Livvie. What can I get you?

OLIVE
(warmly, he has used her childhood
nickname, it is reminiscent of good
times)
Whatever you're having will be great.

WADE
(teasing)
Now, c'mon, don't be like that. Gimme an order.

OLIVE
Seriously, I'm not picky.

WADE
Olive. C'mon.

OLIVE
(tentative)
Okay, um...a white Russian?

CARRIE
Hah!
(nasty)
We don't do specialty drinks here.

Olive is taken aback, Wade even flinches. This seems to have been the reaction she wanted.

OLIVE

(quiet)

Whatever you're having is fine.

Wade begins mixing drinks. Sophia enters from the archway.

NOAH

Hey, honey.

SOPHIA

Hey. What're we talking about?

CARRIE

Nice of you to join us, sleepyhead. So it's like I was saying in the car--

(to everyone else)

I have this friend, Julianne, and her daughter is a big gal. Or, she was a big gal.

(back to Wade)

And she's always been pretty big. Well, you know Julianne, she's very liberal, very *laissez-faire*. She would never say anything to hurt Danielle. But being big, being that big, it's dangerous. They've done studies, all the scientists have.

OLIVE

(deadpan)

Yes, all of the scientists. Every single one. They actually had a convention--

BEN

Olive--

OLIVE

To discuss how much fat people suck. Lovely affair. Fully catered.

CARRIE

Anyway, I told Julianne that, and she didn't believe me. But what do you know, soon enough Danielle comes home feeling winded, she starts having trouble getting up the stairs, so I told her she needed to do something. Fat people will not do anything unless you motivate them for them. I mean, we did something about Olive, and Olive, you look great, you really do.

OLIVE

Thank you.

CARRIE

So I told Julianne to start weighing her weekly, track her progress, restrict her diet. She thought about being lenient, but I knew if she was nothing would get done. She had to be strict, and Danielle would thank her for it later. And do you know what she did? She--

(glances at Julia)

She *left*.

AUGUST

Well, I'm not surprised. Where did she go?

CARRIE

No, she *bought the farm*. In cash. Herself.

SOPHIA

(beat)

Oh.

JULIA

What does that mean?

BEN

Nothing, honey.

CARRIE

Can you believe that? I mean, how selfish. How melodramatic. I didn't know the girl personally, but it just goes to show you--

OLIVE

(distantly)

Goes to show you what?

CARRIE

That when you don't nip that in the bud, bad things always happen.

Wade brings Carrie a drink.

CARRIE

Thank you, honey. That's why I keep waiting, Olive, I want you to get this phase over with already. You're so pretty, you've always been pretty, and I want everyone else to see that. I worry about you.

OLIVE

I'm healthy. My doctors said--

CARRIE

Doctors want to make money. If you want me to draw up another diet plan for you, just say the word.

OLIVE

I like how I look.

CARRIE

(taken slightly aback)

Oh. All right. You're a big girl, you can handle it.

AUGUST

(beat)

Kent, can I help you with--

OLIVE

You know, I think I do want to watch that tape.

JULIA

(thrilled)

Really?

OLIVE

(with a big, fake smile)

Sure, kid, pop it in. What the hell, it's Christmas.

WADE

Olive--

OLIVE

Sorry. What the heck.

SOPHIA

What tape?

OLIVE

An old family movie Julia found. I didn't want to watch it, but she wore me down. You don't mind, do you?

SOPHIA

I guess not.

Julia "pops" the tape onto the bottom of the stage, then scrambles back to the couch, grabbing at the remote. The tape starts on Benny and Fia in Santa hats. They enter and freeze for a moment, then Julia presses a button on the remote and they spring into action. Fia is shaking a present beside her head, Benny is waving at the camera.

CARRIE

What is this?

OLIVE

Christmas '01.

CARRIE

(blanches)

What?

OLIVE

Oh yes. Apparently we still have the tape. I'm surprised, I would have thought you'd have gotten rid of it by now.

CARRIE

I don't want to watch this.

JULIA

Why?

CARRIE

I just don't want to.

OLIVE

(still blank)

Fine. You don't have to. We'll watch it without you.

Carrie exits. Wade dithers for a moment, then follows her.

JULIA

Mom?

OLIVE

Hang on, baby. I want you to see this.

WADE (OS)

Say hi to the camera, Fia!

FIA

Oh! Hi!

JULIA

That's you!

SOPHIA

Yeah, it is! Shh.

WADE (OS)

Merry Christmas, honey!

BENNY

Merry Christmas!

FIA

Happy Birthday!

BENNY

Happy Birthday!

JULIA

(to Olive)

Where are you?

OLIVE

Just wait.

WADE (OS)

Where's Olive?

FIA

She said she had to go to the bathroom.

WADE (OS)

She's been gone a long time.

Wade reenters in present day, standing behind the couch to watch.

BENNY

I bet she fell in!

FIA

She did not! Gross!

BENNY

I bet she did! I bet she forgot to put the seat down, and she--

CARRIE (OS)

(furious)

What are you doing?!

Everyone goes unnaturally still, even the people watching in the living room. No one moves to turn it off, though.

LIV (OS)

(terrified)

I'm sorry!

CARRIE (OS)

No, you're not! You think you are, but you're not yet! Don't you cry, I'm gonna give you something to cry about!

FIA

Carrie?

CARRIE (OS)

You come with me!

LIV (OS)

Ow! You're hurting my arm!

BENNY

Daddy?

Carrie enters, dragging Liv by the arm, carrying a bathroom scale in her other hand.

CARRIE

I caught her eating the snacks for tonight. She was stuffing her face with oyster crackers in the pantry.

LIV

(near tears if not already crying)

I was hungry!

CARRIE

Liar! What have I told you about lying to me? You look at me, Olive!

(she grabs Liv's face and forces her to look at her)

Look at you, how could you ever be hungry.

FIA

S-she didn't mean it, I bet she didn't mean it.

CARRIE

Don't try to cover for her or you'll get it too.

FIA

Dad, say something.

Carrie puts the scale on the ground and Fia looks into the "camera" as if she wants her dad to say something. Benny is too scared to react.

CARRIE

Now I want you to get on that scale.

LIV

I don't want to.

CARRIE

Don't you sass me, Olive Peterson.

LIV

Please don't make me.

CARRIE

I want you to get on that scale and I want you to see how high that number is and I want you to see how gross it is that you eat so much. You've never wanted for anything and you still have too much. You should weigh 90 pounds at most, I guarantee you weigh more than that.

LIV

Dad--

CARRIE

Don't drag your father into this. This is between us now. You're a big girl, you can take it.

Liv, trying not to cry, steps up on the scale and waits while it reads. When finally it does, Carrie sneers openly at it.

LIV

I'm sorry!

CARRIE

Look at that! You should be! None of your classmates are your size, Sophia was never your size. And you still try to sneak food?

Liv looks to her siblings for help, but they can't do anything.

LIV

I didn't--I didn't--

CARRIE

You're going to get diabetes and they're going to cut off your foot. Is that what you want? You'll be so big you won't even fit through the door anymore, you won't be able to walk anywhere. You just don't want to walk anywhere anymore? You'll never get married, you'll never find someone to love you. Boys don't like fat girls.

BENNY

Maybe she'll stretch out.

CARRIE

If she was going to stretch out she'd have done it by now! I've put you on diet after diet and you haven't lost any weight. It's that damn mother of yours, she spoils you, well no more. When you're here you won't eat *anything*, to make up for all the candy and sugar you eat at that wonderland you call your mother's house!

FIA
You can't starve her!

CARRIE
Don't you tell me what I can and can't do. You'll understand when you're older, but for right now--

LIV
(quiet)
I hate you.

CARRIE
(apoplectic with rage)
You what?!

LIV
I hate you! I hate you!

Liv runs off and Carrie follows, the maddest we have ever seen her. The family continues to watch, all of them shellshocked except for Olive, who watches with a mild, resigned expression. Suddenly there is a slap offstage and Liv begins to wail; everyone keeps staring at the screen, increasingly upset. Olive takes the remote from Julia and presses a button, turning off the VCR. No one moves.

OLIVE
So, who wants lunch?

BLACKOUT

END ACT I

ACT IISCENE 1

Lights up on an empty set. The chairs have been pushed back and replaced with a dining room table at an angle and nine chairs. After a moment, Carrie enters, looking around the corner furtively, much like Olive at the top of the show. When she sees no one is here she breathes a small sigh of relief and steps in. She first goes to the television and turns it on, flipping through music channels until she reaches the Christmas music station. She changes the volume to an appropriate level and goes to the kitchen. She rummages around for an apron and, upon finding one, puts it on and begins rooting through the fridge. The scene immediately following should be a perfect mimic of the top of the show but with Wade replacing Ben: he enters, stands in the arch and watches while she makes her drink and drinks it, slow. The main difference is that Wade is not even a little bit amused.

WADE

Carrie.

Carrie jumps and knocks the glass over. It falls to the floor and creates a terrific spill.

CARRIE

Wade! You scared me! Look at this mess.

WADE

That's what I was thinking.

CARRIE

(as she goes on hands and knees)

Well, don't just stand there, get me a paper towel or something.

Wade continues to just stand and watch for a moment, then goes and gets a roll of paper towels. Carrie takes them and begins to clean up.

CARRIE

Where is everyone?

WADE

Kent and August went back to their hotel room to get some stuff they forgot. Ben went with them. They'll be back.

CARRIE

And the kids?

WADE

Julia, Sophia, and Noah are watching a movie upstairs.

(beat)

Livvie's in her room.

CARRIE

Why's that? Did she get tired? I'll tell you what, I've had a headache all day--

WADE

No, she went up there because we're terrible parents!

CARRIE

I'm sorry?

WADE

Why didn't you want to watch that video?

CARRIE

Oh, because I look terrible. That's from 2001, I had this awful haircut and my *nails*--

WADE

Do you even remember any of it?

CARRIE

I assume it's standard Christmas fare. Opening presents, you in that silly hat--Julia wouldn't have been there, of course.

WADE

Where are you right now, Carrie? Where do you go? How can you not remember any of it?

CARRIE

(suddenly sharp)

You didn't remember any of it either. Not until this afternoon.

WADE

So you do--!

CARRIE

I don't know what you're talking about, Wade. I have to get dinner ready.

WADE

You can't just stick your head in the sand, Carrie--

CARRIE

Why not? It's been working so far.

WADE

It won't this time. Everyone saw it. My brother saw it, my daughter saw it, my potentially future son-in-law saw it--

CARRIE

Ooh, so you feel it too! I swear, if he hasn't proposed yet, he's going to soon, I can feel it.

WADE

(slaps the counter)

Carrie!

CARRIE

What! Oh my god, Wade!

WADE

Pay attention, for once, for once! We can't act like it didn't happen anymore. We need to do something.

CARRIE

I am doing something, I'm making dinner.

WADE

You're not--you're not even cooking. You're just heating up the meal you bought yesterday.

CARRIE

(beat)

It wasn't even my fault. You know that, right?

WADE

Carrie, we've been over this.

CARRIE

You've been over this, Wade, you don't listen to me.

WADE

I do, but--

CARRIE

I asked her to do a few simple things. I asked her to stop eating so much, and I asked her to not lie to me. Those don't seem like hard things to do!

WADE

Carrie, please--

CARRIE

I had to punish her or she would never learn. That's how you parent! My mom smacked me a couple of times, I turned out fine.

WADE

That's not how things are done anymore and you know that.

CARRIE

Well, maybe that's how they should be done. You know, back when I was a kid--

WADE

Back when we were kids everything was easier, but that's because we were kids! We're not kids anymore. We need to do better.

(beat)

One of us should say something.

CARRIE

Say what?!

WADE

I don't know. Apologize, or something.

CARRIE

Hah!

(dark)

What's done is done. You can't take it back. And I don't want to.

WADE

You can't mean that?

CARRIE

Can't mean what?

WADE

What?

CARRIE

What are you talking about?

(beat)

Can you get the tablecloth? It's in the hall closet.

WADE

(beat)

Are you waiting for me to call your bluff?

CARRIE

What bluff?

WADE

We can't--go back to this morning. We can't. We can't act like nothing happened.

CARRIE

Why not? Easier this way.

Beat, they stare at each other for a second. Finally, Wade turns and goes to the hall. Carrie nods and takes a big paper bag out of the fridge, taking out Styrofoam containers and popping them open. After a moment, Wade reenters with the tablecloth, unfolding it and spreading it on the table. Carrie gets out a tray and puts food on it in preparation for the oven. There are still Christmas carols playing. The tension is so thick you can cut it with a knife, until finally--

WADE

Because that's not how the world works!

CARRIE

What! Oh my god, Wade!

WADE

That's not how the world works! You can't ignore a problem and hope it goes away!

CARRIE

We've been ignoring the Olive problem for more than a decade, why are you so wound up now?!

WADE

Because everyone saw! Everyone saw what you did.

CARRIE

What I did?! I didn't exactly see you rushing in to stop me.

WADE

I didn't know how to stop you! In those days I was scared of you, for you.

CARRIE

Scared of me? I'm half your size!

WADE

I didn't know how to talk to you--

CARRIE

You still don't know how to talk to me.

WADE

And now everyone saw it! My family saw it, I thought that tape was gone--

CARRIE

And that's another thing, you keep talking about how everyone saw it! Why do you care so much what this looks like instead of what happened?

WADE

What?

CARRIE

You keep saying "everyone saw" instead of "I did".

WADE

I didn't!

CARRIE

Yes, of course, how could I forget, nothing is ever your fault.

WADE

That's not what I meant.

CARRIE

You're just acting, you're just lying like she does, you're such birds of a feather. Why don't you quit worrying about if everyone sees you as father of the year and start trying to act like it?!

(beat, suddenly soothing, she goes to him)

Wade, Wade...we can't let her do this to us.

WADE

What?

CARRIE

Every time Olive is here, we fight. When she's not here, we're okay.

WADE

(worried, tired)

Carrie, that's...that's not...

CARRIE

Shh sh sh, it's okay. We have to look at the common denominator here. She turns us into this. And I don't want to be this.

WADE

No. Me neither.

CARRIE

Not on Christmas. Not on your birthday.

WADE

I'm sorry.

CARRIE

It's okay. We're okay.

(she kisses him)

Why don't you set the table for me?

WADE

Okay, I can do that.

*He smiles, tired, and goes to get the tableware.
Julia enters from the arch.*

JULIA

Daddy, have you seen my--

(she spots Carrie)

Oh!

CARRIE

Hey, honey. What're you looking for?

Julia's demeanor instantly changes, she steps back, looks away, anything to subtly indicate fear.

JULIA

(mumbling)

Nothing.

CARRIE

Oh. Um. Is there something I can get you?

JULIA

No.

CARRIE

All right.

Wade reenters with dishes.

WADE

Heya, sport. What'cha need?

JULIA

Oh! Have you seen my singing bird book? I wanted to show Sophia.

WADE

Did you look in your bookshelf?

JULIA

Yes.

WADE

What about your book basket?

JULIA

No! I forgot. Thank you!

Julia looks mistrustfully at Carrie for a half second, then exits through the arch. Wade puts the plate stack down on the kitchen island and begins to exit to look for silverware. Before he can, Carrie grabs a plate, screams, and smashes it on the ground. She is apoplectic again. Wade shouts as well, panicked.

WADE

Carrie! What the hell?!

CARRIE

Did you see that?! DID YOU SEE THAT?!

WADE

No! What?! See what?! What happened?!

CARRIE

Julia!

WADE

What about Julia?!

CARRIE

(snarling)

Olive turned her against me!

WADE

...What?

CARRIE

She did! Olive turned my daughter against me! Did you see how Julia looked at me? She looked at me like I was a monster! I'm not a monster, I did what I had to do to be a parent, and Olive doesn't understand that! How can she not understand that?! Does she ignore the meals I cooked for her, the clothes I put on her back, the roof I put over her head just because I had to discipline her?! I had to discipline all of them! Olive just wouldn't listen to anything but violence! And now Julia thinks I'm a *monster*--Olive didn't have to show that

(MORE)

CARRIE (cont'd)

tape! She thinks she's so smart, she thinks she has one up on me, but she doesn't understand that I'm the bigger man, I'm the better person here. She's a fat overdramatic lesbo and I'm not gonna sugarcoat it for her anymore! She needs help, and I tried to be that help and what do I get for it?! Hah?! What do I get?! A big ol' pot of *nothing*, that's what I get! Because I'm the wicked stepmother, well, hah! She wanted me to be wicked and then she had the nerve to throw a tantrum when she got just what her fat little heart desired--someone to blame all of her problems on!

(looks at Wade)

Don't look at me like that, Wade.

WADE

(flaty)

I'm not picking up the dish. You need to clean up your own mess.

He exits through the arch. Carrie looks down at the plate, nearly picks it up, then in a last fit of fury, rears back and spits on it instead. Satisfied, she returns to the boxes of food. Christmas music is still playing. Dim lights (and music) to the next scene.

SCENE 2

Maybe an hour later. Crossfade to downstage, where Ben enters in a coat. He stomps around for a moment, cold, then pulls out a pack of cigarettes and smacks them against his hand a few times. Benny enters.

BENNY

You shouldn't do that.

BEN

(muttering)

Who asked you.

BENNY

When are you gonna talk to Liv?

BEN

Go away.

Benny sticks his tongue out and exits as Noah enters. He stops short at the sight of Ben, eyes wide, but after a moment, shakes himself and joins him, taking the cigarettes out of his own pocket and pulling one out.

NOAH

Didn't know you smoked.

BEN

Didn't know you did, either.

NOAH

(he lights Ben's cigarette for him)
Started in college, easiest way to make friends was
outside the theater door.

BEN

You were a theater major?

NOAH

No. Psychology.

BEN

This must be your wet dream.

(beat)

I actually don't smoke. These are Liv's. I figured if
there was ever a day to pick it up....

NOAH

I should tell you not to.

BEN

Probably. Will you?

NOAH

No.

(beat)

Hell of a thing about Olive.

BEN

Yeah, hell of a thing.

(he inhales, starts coughing)

What's *in* this?

NOAH

Nicotene, tar, formaldehyde...

BEN

No, this is--it tastes like a stick of gum.

(inhales again)

That's a little better.

NOAH

It gets easier with time. I mean, y'know, don't smoke,
but it does.

BEN

Not a word of this, to anyone. Liv is of the opinion that I shouldn't smoke, Julia *shouldn't* see me smoking. Sophia has no idea.

NOAH

I guarantee she knows.

BEN

C'mon, don't say that.

NOAH

Yeah. She knows everything.

BEN

She can't just know. She's not psychic, or magical, or whatever.

NOAH

She won't tell you any of that, she just knows. Trust me on this one.

BEN

(flicks cigarette ash)
You're a smart man.

NOAH

Thanks. Your sister said the same thing.
(beat)
That one's a menthol. That's why it--

BEN

I wish I could have done something.

NOAH

Pardon?

BEN

For Liv. I mean, we both got it, I got the general emotional crap, but Liv got it worse. She couldn't just fly under the radar, that never registered as a thing she could do. And seeing that tape--god, I'd forgotten so much of it. I forgot all about that tape. How could I not've helped her?

Wade enters through the arch, looking for something.

NOAH

You were a kid.

BEN

I guess. Still. It's gonna eat at me.

(beat)

I mean, she didn't stick up for me, either. We couldn't. When we stuck up for each other, we just got it worse from her.

(beat)

Why didn't *Dad* stick up for us?

NOAH

I, um...

BEN

Oh, god, I'm so sorry, I shouldn't be asking you all this. It's just--kind of all I can think about right now. I don't mean to dominate the conversation. How are you? How's your life?

NOAH

I think maybe your dad was having a rough time, too.

BEN

Noah, seriously--

NOAH

I mean, if I can be presumptuous, I think your dad is struggling, too. Carrie's not in a good place. And your dad loves her.

BEN

But we're his kids!

NOAH

I think he might feel like he needs to choose between you guys and Carrie. You guys are his kids, but Carrie, she's his wife. He picked her, he didn't pick you. But he still loves you, of course...so maybe he just figured he should stay out of it.

Wade finds a liquor bottle and takes it with him through the arch.

BEN

I hate that. I hate that you're probably right.

NOAH

I don't want to be. Let's pretend I'm not.

(beat, they both take a drag,
simultaneously)

For the record, I think you did everything you could, and I don't think anyone blames you.

BEN
God, I hope you're right.

NOAH
I know I am. I have this aunt, right, and she says that people can tell a good soul when they see one. You've got a good soul, Ben. As cheesy as that sounds.

Ben stares at him for a moment, watches him smoke, then tosses his cigarette on the ground, grabs Noah's face, and kisses him, hard. Noah does not react, and Ben soon pushes himself back, aghast.

BEN
Oh my god.

NOAH
Oh.

BEN
Oh no.

NOAH
I was not expecting that.

BEN
Oh god. Oh no.

BEN
I have to go.

Ben attempts to exit, Noah grabs his sleeve to stop him.

NOAH
Ben--

BEN
I'm sorry, I didn't--that was not my intent--

NOAH
Ben, it's okay.

BEN
No, god, no it is not, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to, you were just--you're so nice.

NOAH
Thank you. Don't run off.

BEN
I'm not sure--what else--I don't know what to do--with my hands.

NOAH

I'm sorry?

BEN

I don't know what to do with my hands. I don't know what to do with my hands.

(he holds them in awkward claw-like shapes)

They don't--why am I doing this?

NOAH

Because you just kissed your sister's boyfriend. Here.

(he unfolds Ben's hands and puts them down at his side)

Now--I'm not mad.

BEN

(immensely relieved)

Oh, thank god.

NOAH

However--

BEN

(hands go back to dinosaur claws)

What?!

(notices hands, forces them back down)

Sorry.

NOAH

However, I am a little bit confused. So, you are gay?

BEN

No, I'm super straight. That's why I just tried to put my tongue down your throat.

(groans, covers face)

I'm sorry. This is weird.

NOAH

This is weird? Were you here a few hours ago? This is nothing.

(beat)

I'm flattered, for what it's worth.

BEN

Thanks.

NOAH

No, I'm serious. And I'm honestly not surprised--

BEN

(bitterly)

Why should you be? No one else ever is.

NOAH

I'm not surprised you and your sister have the same taste in guys. Clearly now I just have to wait and soon Olive will flock to me, demanding a taste of my ashtray psychology mouth.

BEN

(laughing)
God, that's disgusting.
(beat, then shy)
Can I tell you something?

NOAH

Go for it.

BEN

I *hate* dating.

NOAH

I think most people do.

BEN

No, you don't understand. I hate dating.

(beat)
Dating is the biggest crock of shit in the universe. I don't care if you're gay or straight, finding someone to be with in the long term is mindblowingly terrible. It looks pretty good once you're with them! Once the deal is sealed, the invites are sent, you bought the curtains, it looks like it would be pretty good! It's the getting there that I hate. I don't know where to meet people. I try meeting people in class, but they're all either just want one night together or they're ready to move in after one date. Which I guess is what it sounds like I want, but...hrm.

(beat)
I want casual intimacy. The slow burn. I want someone to come home to, I want to skip the first dates and the cheap cologne and the drinks being bought for me that aren't even what I drink and go right to coming home after a long day and kicking your shoes off and sitting down and seeing someone in the kitchen making your favorite food. I'm tired of eating alone. I want someone to hold the door at stores for me and touch my back when I walk in. I want someone to argue the finer points of Friday night television with. I want someone to sleep with--not to have sex with, someone to sleep with, who will stroke my hair and *hold* me and I won't have to worry about them being gone in the morning.

(beat)
Which is impossible.

NOAH

Why?

BEN

Because I don't want to do the work to get there.

(rubs his eyes, tired)

I'm tired of eating alone, Noah. I don't care about fairy tales anymore. I want real life now. I don't want grand romance, I want love. And I guess--you seem like the kind of guy who would do that. Love someone. Not me, obviously, but...Fia is lucky to have you.

Olive enters R, a different part of the house. She sits and pulls her knees to her chest, glaring.

NOAH

Thank you.

BEN

Sorry. I kinda rambled.

NOAH

No, I think that was really nice. And I know you'll find him, I really do. You're too sweet of a guy to not find that kind of love.

BEN

Careful there, I might just kiss you again.

They both laugh, Ben makes to exit.

BEN

Coming inside?

NOAH

In a bit. It's nice out here.

Ben shrugs and exits L. Sophia enters R, sees Olive. Noah remains L, staring up. Eventually, over the next scene, he takes his phone out and writes a text.

SOPHIA

Oh! Um...

OLIVE

(aggressive)

What?

SOPHIA

Chill. I came in for my book. I didn't know you were in here.

OLIVE
Yeah, I totally buy that. You just happened to come up to my room for your book--

SOPHIA
We're sharing the room, Liv.

OLIVE
Right.
(beat)
So get your book and go.

SOPHIA
Okay.

Sophia begins hunting around, but she isn't hunting very hard. Olive watches and sighs, then begins helping her look.

OLIVE
Which one is it?

SOPHIA
It's about ghosts, and there were like...I think there was a boarding school? Maybe?

OLIVE
Oh my god, you mean the one--

SOPHIA
From when we were kids!

OLIVE
What was it called?

SOPHIA
I don't remember, I just picked it up last night.

OLIVE

(on the tip of her tongue)
God, what was it called?

SOPHIA
I don't remember. It's probably not in here.

OLIVE
They probably took it. Do you remember that? When we got in trouble, they took our books? TV and Internet and books?

SOPHIA

(uncomfortable)
Yeah.

OLIVE

They trusted you to not mess with yours, but they boxed mine up. Took 'em up in the attic. I never did get them back. They're probably still there.

Noah sends the text and exits L.

SOPHIA

I still can't believe they did that. That's one of the things that still sticks out to me, like--our books? What were we supposed to do while we were grounded?

OLIVE

Stare at the wall--
(Sophia's phone pings)
--and think about what bad kids we are.
(beat)
Who is it?

SOPHIA

Noah.

OLIVE

Ah. What's he got to say?

SOPHIA

Nothing. Actually, heh, he says "I really like your family." Whatever that means.

OLIVE

You've got a good one there.

SOPHIA

I think so.
(she sits next to Olive, venturing into unknown territory)
Are you--okay?

OLIVE

Don't ask questions you don't want the answer to.

SOPHIA

I do want the answer, though.

OLIVE

I'm exhausted. And I'm pissed off. And I don't want to talk about it, especially with you, so can we skip it?

SOPHIA

Why especially with me?

OLIVE

(she is beyond tact)
 Because you're not good at emotions. You just aren't.
 You're great with problems, but this--
 (indicates to herself)
 Isn't something you can solve.

SOPHIA

Oh. Okay.
 (beat)
 So...I got you some wine for Christmas. I know you
 haven't opened it yet, but that's what it is. You said
 you liked the sugarplum wine from last year, this is
 from that same brewery. It's dandelion wine. It's
 really good with sushi.

OLIVE

(a little perplexed)
 Thank you.

SOPHIA

Yeah. Just wanna give you a reason to stick around
 tonight. At least until after dinner.

OLIVE

Ahh.

SOPHIA

Yeah. Um. Y'know, it's Christmas.

OLIVE

Yeah. But Christmas isn't, like--it's not magic to me
 anymore. I used to love Christmas because it was the
 time of year when everyone had to be nice to each
 other, and it's not that anymore. And I guess it never
 was. But it sorta felt like it. Maybe that's how it
 felt at Mom's house.

SOPHIA

Maybe.
 (her phone pings again, she checks it)
 Noah again.

OLIVE

What this time?

SOPHIA

He wants me to promise that our family Christmases
 won't be like this.

OLIVE

(suggestive eyebrow waggle)
 Ooh, *our* family Christmases. Do I hear wedding bells?

SOPHIA

No you do not.
(beat, she fiddles with her phone)
He actually did propose.

OLIVE

What?!

SOPHIA

Yeah.

OLIVE

No!

SOPHIA

Yup.

OLIVE

Oh my god!

SOPHIA

My thoughts exactly.

OLIVE

What did you say?!

SOPHIA

Nothing, yet.

OLIVE

What are you going to say?

SOPHIA

I don't know. I went to the doctor's recently, and I
got a phone call from him earlier--

OLIVE

Oh my god, are you dying?! Are you gonna pull a Walk to
Remember on me?

SOPHIA

No, I'm not dying! Calm down!

OLIVE

I'm sorry, this is just--wow! Huge news!
(immediately suspicious)
Why are you telling me this?

SOPHIA

Aren't sisters supposed to do this?

OLIVE

Not us.

SOPHIA

Yeah. True.

(beat)

I don't know. I had to tell someone. I couldn't tell any of our parents, for obvious reasons, and my girl friends are no use. They all just tell me to tell him yes because we've been together for five years and that's that. They're all getting married, everyone's getting married. It's just weird.

OLIVE

You don't want to get married?

SOPHIA

No, I do, I think I do, but--being someone's *wife*? That just seems like such an ugly word.

OLIVE

You have been together for a long time.

SOPHIA

Okay, yeah, we have...I don't know. I don't want to sacrifice everything I've worked for.

OLIVE

So don't.

SOPHIA

And he's Catholic, and he'll want me to convert, or at least his parents will...

OLIVE

He'll love you anyways.

SOPHIA

And I can't have kids.

OLIVE

(beat)

What?

SOPHIA

Yeah. That's what the call was about earlier.

(beat)

You can't say any of this, to anyone, especially Noah. I'm not kidding, Liv--

OLIVE

Did you even want kids? I never got the impression that you were a motherhood kind of person.

SOPHIA

I don't know. Maybe eventually. But not...now. Or for a long time. Or maybe ever.

OLIVE

And your doctor's certain?

SOPHIA

No, I'm going in for a followup soon.

OLIVE

So why don't you wait for that before you talk to anyone about anything? Marriage, commitment, babies...just wait until you have more information.

SOPHIA

That's what I was thinking. I think I wanted someone else to say it, too.

OLIVE

I'm a good echo chamber.

SOPHIA

You're not just an echo chamber.

OLIVE

Don't try to be nice to me, I know you don't mean it. You just don't want there to be any more runs in the tablecloth.

SOPHIA

You can't tell me how I feel.

OLIVE

Can't I? I know you better than anyone here.

SOPHIA

No. You can't.

(beat)

New rule: you're not allowed to tell me about myself. I know myself better than you know me. And I know that I want you to be okay. Maybe I'm terrible at showing it, but I do.

OLIVE

New rule, huh?

(beat)

Remember when they'd fight, and I could hear it because my room was right over theirs, and I'd come into your room and we'd watch Letterman?

SOPHIA

Yeah, I do.

OLIVE

Good.

(beat)

I don't want anyone to forget anything anymore. I'm tired of being the only one remembering.

Sophia dithers for a moment, then sits beside her. Olive puts her hand on Sophia's leg, and Sophia puts her hand on top of Olive's. They remain still for a moment. Dim lights to next scene.

SCENE 3

Dinnertime. The plate is still shattered on the ground. Wade is already seated at the table with Julia and Ben. Carrie is transferring things into serving bowls, she's almost done. The table is set. Wade is folding something on the table. In this scene it is crucial above all other scenes that it look natural. People should murmur in the background, laugh at unheard jokes; the written words are only the ones the audience needs to hear, there allows for a lot of ad-libbing otherwise.

WADE

And if you fold it a little bit here, and tug on the tail--

BEN

Where did you learn how to do this?

WADE

One of my clients. And--voila!

(he holds up a paper crane)

And if you pull the tail, the wings flap. Not a lot, just a little.

BEN

That's so cool.

JULIA

He's made me a million.

BEN

I bet not a million.

WADE
Probably not, but darn close.

Kent and August enter through the front door.

AUGUST
Hello, hello!

KENT
Sorry we're late!

AUGUST
Traffic was awful, just awful, who knew so many people would be out today--

Olive enters from the arch, August has the grace to notice but not stop in his spiel. She goes to the table and sits next to Ben.

AUGUST
--I mean, what were these people all doing out? Going to the movies? People watch endless movies here.

BEN
(quiet)
You okay?

CARRIE
(loud)
I'm sure she's fine, Benny. Go get Sophia and Noah, please.

Ben reluctantly goes to get Sophia and Noah.

AUGUST
Can we help with anything, Carrie?

August and Kent go help in the kitchen. Julia slides into Ben's seat.

JULIA
Look what Dad made.

OLIVE
Dad made that?

JULIA
Yeah, it's a paper crane. You pull the tail and its wings flap.

OLIVE
You made this?

Wade nods as Sophia, Noah, and Ben reenter and take their seats at the table.

CARRIE

Nice of you two to join us!

AUGUST

Ooh, Elvira, mistress of the snark.

KENT

Clever, honey.

They put food down on the table and seat themselves. The family all joins hands. Everyone but Olive bows their heads.

OLIVE

(sarcastic)

Dear lord baby Jesus.

SOPHIA

Ssh.

WADE

Dear God, thank you for blessing us with this bounty of food to enjoy with the ones we love today.

Ben raises his head and looks at Olive, bemused. She suppresses a giggle. They make faces at each other throughout the prayer.

WADE

We thank you for giving us your one and only son on this Christmas day, bequeathing his grace and glory unto us that we can only hope to live up to. I personally also thank you for this the day of my own birth, and for giving me my family that I might celebrate with them. Thank you for my wife, my children, my brother, and all of the people who love them. Amen.

EVERYONE

Amen.

Everyone raises their heads and begin passing around the food. When the mashed potatoes reach Olive she holds them there, piling scoop after scoop onto her plate, maintaining eye contact with Carrie.

KENT

So, what do you think about the Razorbacks this year?

AUGUST

Oh, good, football talk.

WADE

Well, they have a new defensive tackle and their scrimmages last season looked very good, which I think could give them their best season yet.

KENT

Are you joking? That was last season. With Wilson gone and that idiot coach, they'll be lucky to make a bowl.

WADE

Ahh, Wilson-schmilson.

KENT

Joke all you want, but Wilson was obviously heavily concussed and could still run a ball better than any of the ass--

(sees Julia, catches himself)

jerks out there now.

AUGUST

(under his breath, singing)

So no one told you life was gonna be this way--

Julia claps four times and August mentally kicks himself.

CARRIE

Isn't that enough, Olive?

OLIVE

Is it? I hadn't noticed.

Olive passes the potatoes. Ben turns her plate towards his and eats off it. Long, awkward beat as everyone eats.

SOPHIA

So, uh...

(beat)

Okay, um, I have a joke.

KENT

You have a joke?

SOPHIA

Yeah. So, this teenage boy is getting ready to take his girlfriend to the prom. First he goes to rent a tux, but there's a long tux line at the shop and it takes forever. Next, he has to get some flowers, so he heads over to the florist and there's a huge flower line

(MORE)

SOPHIA (cont'd)

there. He waits forever but eventually gets the flowers. Then he heads out to rent a limo. Unfortunately, there's a large limo line at the rental office, but he's patient and gets the job done. Finally, the day of the prom comes. The two are dancing happily and his girlfriend is having a great time. When the song is over, she asks him to get her some punch, so he heads over to the punch table and he gets some punch.

NOAH

(beat)

And?

SOPHIA

Oh, that's it. There was no punch line.

Long beat, then August begins laughing uproariously.

AUGUST

Oh my god! Oh my god! There's no punchline!

SOPHIA

Yep.

AUGUST

That is--*easily*--the worst joke I've ever heard in my life.

SOPHIA

It's supposed to be.

(satisfied that the mood is restored)

Well, hey, this looks delicious! Good job, Carrie.

BEN

Yes, these potatoes are wonderful.

OLIVE

Can someone please pass the salt?

WADE

It's my favorite meal. Birthday and all.

KENT

Happy birthday, small one. Ah, to be your age again.

WADE

You're not that much older than me.

BEN

How old are you now?

AUGUST

Ben, didn't you know it's rude to ask a man's age? Come on, you'll never find a husband that way.

BEN

I don't want a husband, August, we've been over this.

AUGUST

Right, because you're "straight".

CARRIE

Speaking of husbands, Sophia--

SOPHIA

(laughing)

No, Carrie. Not yet.

CARRIE

I'm just saying, my grandma clock is ticking, I'm ready.

SOPHIA

Bother Olive about it, then, she's been with Pen for a while too.

CARRIE

You need to get married to have a baby, and here it's still illegal, so I'm going to bother you.

OLIVE

Can someone please pass the salt?

SOPHIA

Suit yourself.

AUGUST

Do you remember when we got those baby dolls for you two for Christmas? I was against them, but Wade said your hearts were so set on them--

SOPHIA

I do remember those! Olive's was Laura. I don't remember what mine was. And then Benny broke her!

AUGUST

You did?

BEN

Sat on her, crushed her head. Doctors said there was nothing to be done.

CARRIE

God, you were always breaking things back in the day.

BEN

(embarrassed)

I was a clumsy kid.

CARRIE

Do you remember when your head got stuck in the chair? We had to call the fire department! They said you had the biggest head of any six year old they'd ever seen. You just kept crying and crying--

Amusement at this anecdote begins to die down.

CARRIE

And crying, your face was red for days. Or, do you remember when you broke your sleeping bag on the scout trip and you begged us to bring you a new one? You were so sad. I bet you remembered to take better care of them from then on out.

BEN

I remember. It was November.

CARRIE

(blissfully oblivious)

Oh! Or when you broke my favorite vase, god, I still remember that vase. You said it was an accident, but I knew better.

BEN

It was an accident.

CARRIE

Oh, come on, don't tell me that you're still on about that.

BEN

Do you remember when I had a zit on my face and you dug it out with a safety pin when I said not to? You pinned me down and said if I fought it would just hurt worse.

(beat)

I remember that.

OLIVE

(beat)

Will someone pass the salt?

Someone passes her the salt and everyone remains silent for a long beat.

CARRIE

I don't understand why you're all ganging up on me.

AUGUST

We're not--

KENT

Carrie--

CARRIE

I worked my fingers off making this meal--

OLIVE

Yes, I'm sure the Colonel appreciates your hard work.

WADE

Olive.

OLIVE

What? She didn't make this, I can practically taste the seven secret spices.

BEN

Can we please talk about this later?

OLIVE

Talk about what later? When are you gonna talk to me?

CARRIE

All I get from you all is venom! You hate me!

WADE

We don't hate you.

CARRIE

Olive hates me.

WADE

Olive doesn't hate you.

Finally something happens, someone jostles her or maybe she does it on purpose, but Olive drops some food on the floor.

CARRIE

You did that on purpose!

OLIVE

No I didn't, you crazy woman!

Carrie screeches and launches herself at Olive. Everyone shouts, Ben and Wade try to break them up. The fight escalates, there is hair pulling.

Finally Ben tugs Olive off, but she begins fighting him instead. Liv and Benny run in from opposite sides, Fia following Liv, and Liv launches herself at Benny, fighting him with more fervor but less violence.

SOPHIA

Olive! Stop!

FIA

Liv! Cut it out!

NOAH

Is it always like this?

KENT

Come on, Olive, that's enough!

Olive wrests herself away from Ben, Liv does the same with Benny. Olive is still full of rage, Liv is terrified of herself.

OLIVE

God! I hate it here! Nothing ever changes!

SOPHIA

Olive--

OLIVE

No, Fia, you can't make me be quiet anymore! God! I went on this whole trip for you, I went on this trip because you're my sister and I love you, and I love Ben and I know you both love me too, even if it really doesn't feel like it. You just--wow! You have no clue. You're so stupid, if you got your head out of your ass every once in a while to take a deep breath of the air out here in the real world you'd see that I can't be here right now, or maybe ever! I can't deal with this, I'm weak and I'm dumb, I feel like I'm about to tear my hair out, but I have to stick around, I have to tough it out, I have to act like the years I spent here weren't the worst years of my life. You have no clue what went on here, do you? Or do you care?

Liv, Benny, and Fia scramble DSL, holding each other.

SOPHIA

You're not much better.

OLIVE

At least I admit it! At least I have the decency to admit that I suck, which is more than any of the rest of you can say. You just--you don't have any idea, do you? I'm in awe. I'm in awe of this family. You'd look

(MORE)

OLIVE (cont'd)
at this house from the outside and have no idea the kind of freaks living here! My brother, the repressed queer--

BEN
Olive!

OLIVE
Shut up, Ben, everyone knows! What a freaking shock, Ben who wanted to do musical theater in high school and dresses like he just stepped out of a J. Crew catalogue is gay! Who would have ever thought?!

BEN
That's not your job to say!

OLIVE
I'll be honest with you, I'm swinging a little wild right now! You're a coward, you're all cowards, that's the problem with all of you. You saw me come out and saw how they treated me and you decided you were just gonna stay in the closet--until you get married? Forever? Give me a ballpark estimate here. I'll wait.
(beat)
I thought we were gonna be in this together.

BEN
We are.

OLIVE
Then act like it!

KENT
Now Olive--

OLIVE
And you both think it's so funny to tease him about it. Like, drop little shy coquettish hints, like you're so clever because holy crap, you figured out something everyone already knew.

KENT
I didn't!

OLIVE
Your husband did. But I guess it's just a Peterson family trait to sit by while your partner is being a complete tool to people who care about him and not say anything. God knows Wade did it my whole life, why shouldn't you get in on the action? Congratulations, Noah, looks like you're gonna fit in just peachy.

SOPHIA

Leave him out of this.

OLIVE

Why?! Do you think it's not fair to have him sucked into what will ultimately be his family, too?! You'd better sweep me and all my ugly trappings under the rug so he doesn't have to see me, because everything has to be perfect for Noah because otherwise he'll leave you and you'll never be able to get another person like him. You know the kicker? I actually like Noah. I like him a lot better than you, that's for sure. And one day he'll figure out you can't have kids--

SOPHIA

Olive!

FIA

Make her stop!

LIV

I can't!

OLIVE

And then he'll be out of here like a shot! Oh, I'm sorry, did he not *know*? Did you ever tell him you didn't even want kids?

NOAH

Sophia?

SOPHIA

Noah--

OLIVE

And you know what the kicker is? I do. I want kids so bad, and you don't want them, and he--

(points at Ben)

--will have a hell of a lot harder of a time than I will, so I'm currently the best shot these jokers have at grandkids! And you screwed it up. Ya blew it. And now I'm gonna have a whole mess of kids and I'm going to see how it feels for me to take them over here and show you how it looks when kids like their parents, because if I learned anything at all from you people, it's *how not to parent!*

Carrie does not wait for Olive to continue; instead she, without much emotion, steps up to her and slaps her across the face. Olive stumbles back, stunned, silent for a moment.

LIV

No!

OLIVE

You're the worst of them all.

LIV

Olive, no!

CARRIE

Am I? Because from where I'm standing, you look just like me.

OLIVE

The difference between us, Carrie, is that I'm not a bitch.

CARRIE

You certainly look like one.

OLIVE

No, because this is all a long time coming. This isn't because I woke up one morning and decided you deserved for me to be mean to you because you didn't scrub the baseboards well enough or had the audacity to be fat. This is because you're trying to clip my wings after it took so long for me to grow them back.

CARRIE

Don't martyr yourself, it's unflattering.

OLIVE

I wouldn't dare, because out of everyone here, I'm the only one willing to freely admit that I suck. I'm mean and I'm overemotional and I was born with shoes on my feet and money in my pockets and I *still* tried to kill myself. Oh, did you not know? I was in a mental hospital for two weeks. Two weeks I was there, and did I get a phone call from anyone here except Ben?

WADE

We didn't know.

OLIVE

You didn't ask! I dropped out of school. I stopped posting online. I dropped off the face of the earth and no one here even noticed.

WADE

We're sorry.

LIV
I'm sorry!

BENNY
Liv--

LIV
I'm sorry.

OLIVE
You're too late.
(beat)
Things don't change! Things never change. I always hoped they would, when I was a kid I'd stay up reading about kids with parents that loved them and siblings who cared about each other and I always wished, I prayed, I wanted relationships like *that*. I wanted to be like the people I read about, before you took my books away! You took my books, you took the one thing I had that let me pretend that you were decent people and not the monsters you are! I hate it here! I hate you! I hate Christmas! What's the point?! Ho ho ho, we all hate each other!
(beat)
Why are you all looking at me like that?! Why are you all so scared of me?!

They are scared of her because, at this moment, Olive is terrifying. She has become a woman possessed, wild-eyed and as scared as she is frightening.

JULIA
(small, soft)
You said a bad word.

A long pause. Olive noticeably deflates.

OLIVE
Yeah. I did. I guess I said a couple of bad words.
(beat)
Being here is literally killing me. You were right, Noah. It is bad for me.
(beat)
I'm leaving.

Ben goes down the hall to fetch the bags.

SOPHIA
No.

OLIVE

Yes. It's been real, Fia. I'll see you at Easter.

SOPHIA

You can't leave.

OLIVE

You want me to stay?

(beat)

Yeah, that's what I thought.

WADE

I want you to stay. I love you, we can still have fun, it's still Christmas, we can--

OLIVE

I'm sorry. I know you love me. But I wish you actually liked me, too.

Ben has returned with the bags.

WADE

You can't leave. It's Christmas.

OLIVE

I know. Me and Ben are gonna go eat at a Denny's. Sort this out. I'll...hm.

(beat)

I'm sorry I couldn't be what you wanted. Maybe next Christmas will be better.

She exits through the front door, followed by Liv. Ben makes to follow her, but Sophia grabs his arm. Benny grabs Sophia's arm.

SOPHIA

Please don't leave. Please don't leave me here.

BENNY

We can't leave her!

BEN

(simply)

She's my ride.

FIA

Don't leave me!

They look at each other for a moment, then Sophia lets him go. He and Benny follow Olive out.

FIA

Don't leave me!

Everyone stands in stunned silence for a moment, then Julia bursts into tears and runs off through the arch.

WADE

Julia! Wait!

Wade runs after her.

KENT

I, uh...I think we're going to go back to the hotel.
Early flight.

AUGUST

You have a lovely home, Carrie.

KENT

(under his breath)

For God's sake, August.

Kent collects his bag and he and August exit through the front door. Silently, Sophia takes Fia's hand and goes through the arch, back to her room. Noah stands there awkwardly for a moment, but follows her. Carrie bows her head and shakes it, then goes to the kitchen and begins picking up the plate. Crossfade to downstage lights, Olive and Ben enter, on their way to the car. Halfway across the stage Olive stops and begins to sob, ungracefully. More broken than beautiful. Ben immediately stops, puts the bags down, and hugs her. Olive latches onto him, trying to speak through her sobs.

OLIVE

I'm sorry.

BEN

I know.

OLIVE

I love you.

BEN

I know.

OLIVE

I didn't mean it.

BEN
I know.

OLIVE
I don't deserve you.

BEN
I know.

He kisses her forehead and takes her hand, then takes her hand and leads her offstage. Dim lights to next scene.

SCENE 4

It's nearly midnight and everything is silent. The Christmas lights are still on and it all looks like it did at the top of the show, minus the presents. The only real difference is a sense of dread hanging over everything there like so much mistletoe, the golden lights burn harsher. Liv enters from the arch, eyes wide, looking out towards the audience, over their heads. She creeps DSC and sits or kneels, still looking up. She remains there for a moment, still, then Benny enters. He watches her for a moment.

BENNY
What're you looking at?

LIV
It's snowing.

BENNY
Oh!

He goes over to her and sits, watching the snow as well. She takes his hand. After a long moment, Fia enters as well. She doesn't say anything, just stands in the archway. Eventually, Benny notices her.

BENNY
Fia, look! It's snowing!

FIA
Yeah.
(beat)
It's so quiet out.

She goes to Liv's other side and sits there. Liv considers taking her hand but doesn't.

LIV

Do you think things change?

BENNY

What?

LIV

Do you think--do you think anything will change? Or will we just keep doing the same thing all the time?

FIA

I think things change.

LIV

When?

FIA

I don't know. But I think they do.

BENNY

Yeah, like I used to not like carrots, and now I kind of do. Sometimes. If they're raw, or cooked with sugar. Brown sugar.

Liv laughs and lowers her head onto Benny's. She puts her hand on Fia's leg. Fia puts her hands on top of Liv's.

LIV

Promise me.

BENNY

Promise you what?

LIV

Not you, dummy. Fia. Promise me. Promise me things change.

FIA

(ever honest)
I can't. I'm sorry.

LIV

Why can't you?

FIA

Because stuff is weird. Promising stuff isn't fair unless I know I can keep the promise. And I don't know if I can keep that one.

LIV

(beat)
Okay. I guess that's okay.

BENNY

It's not so bad if we keep doing the same thing all the time. I know you think it is, but it's not.

LIV

Yes, it is.

BENNY

Not with me. If we kept doing this all the time, I would like it. The snow is so pretty.

LIV

That's not what I meant, Benny.

BENNY

(quiet)

I know. But pretend like it was.

LIV

(beat)

Okay. If we kept doing the same thing, the three of us--I think that would be fine, too.

(beat)

I love you.

BENNY

I love you, too. Fia, I love you, too.

LIV

Yeah, Fia, I love you too.

FIA

Thank you.

Liv almost says something, but doesn't. Instead they all three remain staring out at the snow, a tableau of unmet expectations. Wade, in pajamas, creeps around the archway much like Olive did in the opener. It is night now. He makes his way to the fridge, but, instead of pulling out a bottle, he takes out a box. This, he puts on the counter, fetching a bag of party hats, birthday candles, a lighter, and a party popper (if the space doesn't allow, use a bag of confetti). He assembles these on the counter, then opens the box and takes out his birthday cake. He puts a hat on his head.

WADE

(singing softly)

Happy birthday to me.

LIV
Oh! It's dad's birthday!

WADE
Happy birthday to me.

FIA
I forgot!

WADE
Happy birthday dear Wa-ade...
The kids all scramble up and rush over.

FIA
Are we celebrating?

BENNY
Is the cake for Jesus?

LIV
No, the cake is for Daddy! It's his birthday, dummy!

FIA
Don't call him a dummy.
(to Wade)
Light the candles, dad!

BENNY
You gotta make a wish.

LIV
But you can't tell what it is!
Noah wanders through the arch.

FIA
He knows that, Liv, gah.

BENNY
What're you gonna wish for?

LIV
Don't tell him. Just make a wish. Light the candles!

FIA
Happy birthday!

LIV
Happy birthday!

BENNY

Birthday!

LIV

Geez, Benny.

WADE

When did everything change?

NOAH

Mr. Peterson?

Wade turns to look at him, the kids run off.

WADE

Oh, uh, hi. Noah.

NOAH

Are you okay?

WADE

Oh yeah, I'm fine. Y'know, just...

(weak laugh, an attempt at humor)

What a day, huh!

NOAH

Yeah, quite the spectacle.

WADE

Shock and uh...spectacle. Yeah. That's a good word for it.

NOAH

Do you--need any help?

(gestures to party)

With that?

WADE

Oh! No. No, I was just cleaning up.

NOAH

You're wearing a hat, sir.

WADE

So I am.

(touches the hat)

I'm sorry, this must all seem very pathetic.

NOAH

I don't think so. Shame to waste a perfectly good party, I think.

WADE

Yeah, I suppose. It just seems a little pathetic. I mean, I'm alone in my kitchen with a cake and I'm wearing a stupid hat. I shouldn't--want a birthday this bad.

NOAH

I get it.

WADE

I suppose. I just always loved birthdays. It was nice to have a day where everyone liked you.

(beat)

What if she's right?

NOAH

Who?

WADE

Liv. What if she's right?

(beat)

I always thought--eventually, she'd come around. She'd figure out that adults are people too, parents are people too, and we make mistakes and we aren't perfect. None of us can be perfect. We--there are things we do that can't be forgiven, but I didn't think I--I mean, she's my wife. I have to be on her side. I didn't want to pick sides, I didn't want to have to choose between the woman I chose and the child I...I don't want to say stuck with. I wasn't stuck with her, I wanted her, too. I love Olive so much. But I love Carrie, too. It's not fair to make me pick.

(beat)

I guess life's not fair.

(beat)

It was crazy. It was crazy that we thought we could make it this far into the day. I mean look at this--she bought *hats*. She thought we could all put on hats and pop poppers and eat cake and be happy and that's just not in the cards for us, that's never really been in the cards for us. We are not the kind of family that can do that.

(beat)

And it would be so easy to blame Liv. But I can't just blame her. One wrench might throw off the cogs, but it can't destroy the whole machine. No, that needs a--a concentrated effort.

(beat, pops popper/throws glitter)

Whee. Happy birthday.

(beat)

What a clusterfuck.

NOAH

That's a good way to describe the evening, I think.

WADE

I wish that your first visit had been more pleasant. I think we jumped the gun a little early--no one was in a good place, and I just wanted it so bad. I was willing to overlook all the things screaming in my face that I should have waited until next year. I mean--I drove to *Missouri* for *bourbon*.

NOAH

To be fair, we probably wouldn't have made it this far in the day without *bourbon*.

WADE

I know you're joking, but that's honestly such a scary thought. Families are supposed to like each other without liquor, right?

NOAH

I honestly don't know, sir.

WADE

How can you not know?

NOAH

My family is very tightly laced. I don't think I've ever heard my dad say a curse word in his life. My mom's never drank a drop of anything alcoholic except communion wine.

WADE

Oh my god, you're *Catholic*? You poor thing.

NOAH

You sound just like your daughter.

WADE

Which one? No, no, I know which one. Everyone always said Livvie and I were a lot alike, I think she always resented them for it.

NOAH

My family spends Christmases at mass for three hours, followed by a flavorless meal and practical presents. Shoes, khakis--I think I got maybe one toy a year, and only after it was carefully vetted by my grandmother. When I told them I was spending Christmas with protestants, my dad lost his mind. "No son of mine will spend Christmas with Presbyterians!" I only got him to stop when I told him I'd try to convert Sophia before we got married.

WADE

Are you? Getting married?

NOAH

I don't know. It's up to her at this point, but that's neither here nor there. I tell him that because it's the only way I can get him to leave me alone about living in sin. When Sophia told me that you guys were a little intense, I got so excited.

(chuckles)

And *man*, did you guys *deliver*!

WADE

Did we?

NOAH

Are you kidding? There was a fistfight! At Christmas dinner! A fistfight! If my poor grandmother could see me now, god rest her soul, she'd have a heart attack and die again. My aunt, she's cool, she always said do the thing that makes for a better story--

WADE

A better story.

NOAH

Yeah. Do the thing that makes for a better story and you will have lived a fuller life.

WADE

Hah! Well, I can assure you we didn't mean to give you a better story. Carrie actually had it all planned out, we were gonna give you the picture of southern hospitality, and then this....

NOAH

Honestly, if you'd given me the charming perfect southern Christmas, I'd have been more unnerved than if you'd given me this one. This Christmas, this mess--this is what I think family really is.

(suddenly aware that he has crossed some kind of boundary)

I mean, uh, hmm, eh--you have a lovely home, sir--

WADE

Can't take it back now, kid.

NOAH

I'm sorry. That was presumptuous.

WADE

Yeah, but it was also kind of nice. It's good to know that today's not a total loss.

(beat)

What the heck am I gonna do with all this cake?

NOAH

Eat it?

WADE

I mean, obviously, but there's so much of it. There is too much cake, Noah.

He puts his elbows on the table and rubs his fingers across his head. He straightens the hat. Noah wanders to the front of the set.

WADE

I'm so tired.

NOAH

Yeah, I imagine you would be. It's been a long, ugly day. But it's almost over.

WADE

You should go back to bed. I'll take care of all this, thank you.

NOAH

It's snowing.

WADE

(beat)

Is it really? After all this, the universe has the--*audacity*--it's snowing?

While Wade is distracted, Noah goes to the cake and puts the candles in.

WADE

The universe, *God*, whoever, thinks he can toss every single one of my failures as a parent in my face and then make it beautiful outside? Is he serious? Does he really feel the need to taunt me? What does he want? What do you want from me?!

NOAH

You're shouting, Mr. Peterson.

WADE

So I am.

(he turns and sees the candles.)

Noah--

NOAH

Hang on.

WADE

You don't have to do this.

NOAH

I know.

He's put all the candles in and starts to light them.

WADE

I really don't want you to do this.

NOAH

I know you think--I don't want to be presumptuous again.

WADE

Please, presump away.

NOAH

I know you think you don't want me to do this, but it's your birthday. Everyone deserves a birthday. Even *Hitler* got birthday parties, it's not fair that you don't get one.

WADE

Didn't we establish that life's not fair?

NOAH

It should be. On your birthday at least, it should be.

The candles are lit and Noah puts on a hat.

WADE

I feel silly.

NOAH

That's okay.

(beat)

Liv is hurting, and she's scared, and she's like a rat in a trap right now--she's chewing off her own foot, she's not looking at the consequences of her actions because she's so scared. She needs patience, everyone needs patience. Ben needs patience, Sophia needs patience--Carrie needs patience. Patience is the greatest gift we can give each other, when there's nothing left to give. It's all we've got, in the end.

(beat)

Liv was wrong. I think it's important that you hear that. I think you need to hear that people change, that you have changed, that everything changes.

WADE

Do you believe that?

NOAH

I don't know. Let's find out.

Wade laughs to himself and claps Noah on the shoulder. Finally, he looks back at the cake, the candles, the glow that has lit the room. He glances back at Noah one more time, then he closes his eyes. He makes a wish. He blows out the candles.

BLACKOUT

END OF SHOW