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A Tiny Miracle with a Fiber-Optic Unicorn

A somewhat nostalgic, sentimental comedy in two acts

By Don Zolidis

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Cast of Characters

PRESENT-DAY LOUIS, 30s. A rather-normal looking adult.

LOUIS, 13, a rather normal-looking 13 year old boy. That is to say, awkward.

KELLY, 17, Louis' older sister. Big big big unbelievably big hair.

GEORGE, early 40s. A big jokester. Maybe a beer belly..

EMILY, early 40s. Pretty. Nice. A good Mother. Probably wears jeans that are a little out of style, but the kind of person who will clean before a cleaning lady arrives.

CAROLYN, 13, a little weird. Pretty. The object of Louis' affection.

GRANDMA JACOBS, 70ish. Mother of EMILY. In between her sixtieth and seventieth year Grandma Jacobs starting swearing like a sailor. Walks with a cane. Speaks rather loudly.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI, 70ish. Mother of GEORGE. More than slightly demented. Remembers the old country. Never lived there. Has acquired a mysterious British accent from watching Masterpiece Theatre.

Setting: Brookfield, Wisconsin, a suburb of Milwaukee. December 19-25, 1986.

Act One

(The JACOBS home. A modest ranch-style home in a modest ranch-style neighborhood of a modest ranch-style suburb. Built in the 1970s. Still recovering.

((Please be creative with the set. It must function as the house, but also needs to have room for various other locations. Most of these could be delineated with light, but the look of the show should always be somewhat soft.)

(At rise, PRESENT LOUIS is sitting on the edge of the stage, outside of the world of the play. He is dressed nicely and looks respectable. He watches as LOUIS, a boy of about thirteen, darts into the living room to check his hair. Christmas music plays.)

EMILY *(off-stage)*

I thought we were leaving!

LOUIS

Just a minute!

(LOUIS goes to a closet and pulls out a rather disgusting-looking jean jacket.)

KELLY *(off-stage)*

Louis! Let's go!

LOUIS

I'm coming!

(He checks his hair again. He tries to wet it and takes a comb from his back pocket.)

KELLY *(off-stage)*

I'm going to murder you if we're late!

EMILY *(off-stage)*

Don't say that Kelly!

KELLY *(off-stage)*

I'm going to maim you if we're late!

PRESENT LOUIS

Let's freeze this for a moment.

(LOUIS freezes)

That's me. December 19th, 1986. About six forty-five p.m. I'm on my way to church. In about two minutes my mother is going to disapprove of everything I've done to get ready. The big question of the day was whether or not to feather my hair. I'm torturing myself internally over it. Michael J. Fox did it. Jason Bateman did it. Michael Jackson… well, at this point in time he was still kinda cool.

(PRESENT LOUIS walks around the set.)

We're in Brookfield, Wisconsin. A pretty ordinary place. I'm thirteen years old. And this is going to be the worst week of my life. And also the best.

(KELLY, 17, enters, sporting big hair. LOUIS unfreezes)

KELLY

Oh my god, what are you doing?

LOUIS

I'm fixing my hair.

(KELLY snorts)

KELLY

Whatever.

LOUIS

Does it look cool?

KELLY

Yeah Louis you look really cool. You're such a reject. Come on.

(They freeze.)

PRESENT LOUIS

1986 was the epicenter of big hair. There was always a faint aroma of aquanet in the air, we inhaled the stuff daily, and my sister Kelly, she was the living, breathing, beating heart of the frizzy-haired earthquake. She was personally responsible for a hole in the ozone layer the size of eastern Connecticut. I used to think that you could trap a gerbil in her bangs.

KELLY

Here.

(KELLY produces a can of hair spray and sprays down LOUIS' head.)

LOUIS

Ah! Stop it I'm going to get cancer!

KELLY

You are not, shut up. I'm trying to help you.

(EMILY enters.)

EMILY

What are you doing to him?

KELLY

He's feathering his hair.

EMILY
You are not feathering your hair before we go to church. Where's your coat?

LOUIS
I'm wearing my jacket.

EMILY
You're not wearing that to church.

LOUIS
Why not?

EMILY
Louis, Jesus loves you, but he does not love you in that jacket.

LOUIS
It's not cold out.

EMILY
It's minus seven degrees outside.

LOUIS
I don't like my coat.

KELLY
God you are immature Louis.
(imitating him in a whine)
`I don't like my winter coat.' You're such a baby.

LOUIS
Shut up.

KELLY
You shut up.

LOUIS
You shut up.

KELLY
No you shut up first. How bout this?
(she sprays him with hair spray.)

EMILY
Kelly. Not helping. Go sit in the car.

KELLY

I'm gonna take my car to church.

EMILY

Get in the car.

KELLY

Fine. If I'm late to rehearsal, you're dead.

LOUIS

Bite me.

KELLY

What was that?

EMILY

KELLY GO SIT IN THE CAR!

KELLY

I didn't do anything! GOD!
(She leaves.)

LOUIS

Mom, can I please just wear my jean jacket?

EMILY

Why do you want to wear your jacket, sweetheart? Are you trying to impress a girl?

LOUIS

No.
(A light shines on CAROLYN, 13, looking resplendent in church attire.)

PRESENT LOUIS

One of the conditions of being thirteen is that you are continuously lying. I hadn't told my mother the truth about anything in three months. Of course there was a girl.

EMILY

Let me tell you something about the people who go to church, okay pudding?

LOUIS

Don't call me that.

EMILY

I can't even call you that any more? You used to like that.

LOUIS

When I was five.

EMILY
I carried you in my stomach for nine months, I changed five thousand diapers, and I can't call you pudding if I want to?

LOUIS
No.

EMILY
Do you understand what pregnancy does to a woman?

LOUIS
Mom. Fine.

EMILY
That's all I ask. Let me explain about the people who go to church. They're very judgmental. They see a child sit in a pew wearing a jean jacket and you know what goes through their minds? Oh that poor boy—his father doesn't have a job. I mean it's bad enough they look at Kelly and see that contraption pasted to her forehead. Okay?

LOUIS
Fine. I'll wear the stupid coat.
(He switches coats.)

EMILY
That's all I ask, pudding.
(They leave.)

PRESENT LOUIS
The girl.
(Lights shine on CAROLYN. Perhaps a breeze fans her. Something like Peter Cetera's "The Glory of Love" plays.)
Carolyn Warren was the hottest girl in the eighth grade gifted and talented class. Okay, she was the only hot girl in the eighth grade gifted and talented class. And I loved her. A mad, consuming, devouring, stomach-churning love. I dreamt about her. I drew very poor sketches of her in my free time. I would write `I love Carolyn Warren' on every conceivable surface I could find. Except I was so clever I would write each letter on top of each other making the whole indecipherable. Carolyn Warren was my secret goddess.
(KELLY enters with LOUIS in tow.)

KELLY
Okay let's get started. Sorry I'm late I had to wait for retardo over there.

PRESENT LOUIS
Due to a trick of fate, Kelly was the leader of our church youth group. I don't know how this happened, I don't know who put her in charge; I think maybe she was the only high

school kid to come around our church. And our activity for December was to put on the nativity play; Kelly was going to be the director. Carolyn was going to be Mary. Therefore I wanted to be Joseph.

(KELLY addresses CAROLYN, LOUIS, and a group of imaginary kids.)

KELLY

Okay. I don't want to be here. You don't want to be here. But we're supposed to be honoring the birth of Jesus so we're going to get through this thing. Louis. You are going to be an ass.

LOUIS

What?

KELLY

Shut up. That's what they're called. Get used to it. You live in the manger with the other animals. Now we're supposed to use the Jensen baby for the baby Jesus because they just had a baby but I think their baby is gross. It looks like it got caught in the washing machine, it's got like permanent upturned nostrils. Baby Jesus did not look like that. Plus it smells. Ugh.

LOUIS

Hey Kelly can I be Joseph?

KELLY

Raise your hand if you want to speak.

(LOUIS raises his hand.)

What?

LOUIS

Can I be Joseph?

KELLY

No. You're an ass.

(she addresses the group again.)

All right people let's get to work! Baby Jesus isn't going to birth himself! Hey! Hey Micah! Are you an idiot?! The wise men do not do that!

(she storms off-stage. LOUIS sees CAROLYN going over her script.)

CAROLYN

Hey Louis.

LOUIS

Hi.

CAROLYN

Sucks that you're an ass.

LOUIS

It's fine. I've got less lines, you know? Just sort of a braying.

CAROLYN

Well you should practice. Baaah.

LOUIS

That's a sheep.

CAROLYN

What does a donkey do?

LOUIS

They bray. Like… braaaaay.

CAROLYN

That's pretty good.

LOUIS

You're awesome by the way. In the play.

CAROLYN

Oh. Thanks.

LOUIS

Like really… you know like… I bet you're gonna be like a professional actress.

CAROLYN

Thanks.

(They've run out of things to say.)

Is that your coat?

(LOUIS is stabbed through the heart.)

LOUIS

Yeah… I uh… my grandmother… she's demented and she just gives me things sometimes.

CAROLYN

Huh. I should go work on my lines.

LOUIS

Wait um… I got you a Christmas present.

CAROLYN

Really? That's sweet.

LOUIS

I don't have it on me. Maybe I could um… give it to you sometime.

CAROLYN

Okay. See ya.

(she leaves. LOUIS watches.)

PRESENT LOUIS

Of course I didn't have a present for her. I had five days to get it, and I had to figure out how to deliver it without getting a ride from my Dad. But life was pretty good. Which brings me to the subject of… my Dad.

(GEORGE appears.)

He wasn't an orthodox father.

GEORGE

Yes, the monsters are coming to get you. They think you look tasty. And they're living in your closet. Go back to sleep. Oh by the way, I may have used some glow-in-the-dark paint to paint some eyes on your walls. But don't worry about that.

PRESENT LOUIS

He wasn't a mean man, just… continually amused.

GEORGE

You will get a little brother when your Daddy apologizes to Mommy for the Jell-o incident. But that's all I'm gonna say about that.

(Christmas music. Back to the house. LOUIS is stringing lights on a newly erected Christmas tree. GEORGE, EMILY, and KELLY sit and watch.)

EMILY

No. Those don't go there.

LOUIS

I didn't put—

EMILY

If you put them too close to the tree it will set it on fire.

GEORGE

Oh it will not. Put them anywhere Louis. In fact, what if we used lighters for Christmas ornaments this year?

EMILY

Don't tell him that.

KELLY

Put `em higher Louis.

LOUIS

I can't reach any higher.

GEORGE

Try jumping.

EMILY

Why don't you go help him, Kelly?

KELLY

I'm tired.

GEORGE

Kelly. Help out.

KELLY *(whine)*

Dad?

GEORGE

Are you really tired?

KELLY

Yes.

GEORGE

Well you just rest then.

LOUIS

What?

EMILY

Concentrate on what you're doing Louis.

LOUIS

Why does she get to sit there and I have to do it?

GEORGE

Life is unfair. It's about time you learned—

EMILY

George, please.

KELLY

You said you wanted to do it.

LOUIS

No I didn't.

KELLY

Well I'm not doing it!

LOUIS

It's not fair that I have to do everything!

EMILY

Oh so no one wants to have Christmas!

LOUIS

That's not what I'm saying—

EMILY

We'll just sit here and twiddle our thumbs until the cows come home because the two kids are too lazy to care about Christmas any more. Just load up a trough of presents and have the two little piggies gorge themselves on gifts! That's what you want? That's what Jesus died for?

KELLY

Jesus was born on Christmas.

EMILY

Kelly?!

GEORGE

Quiet, Kel.

EMILY

I guess we won't have any presents then.

LOUIS

Fine! I'll decorate the tree.

EMILY

I have been slaving away all day cleaning this house; the least you could do is fake a little enthusiasm for trimming the tree. Just fake it Louis. That's all I'm asking of you.

KELLY

Yeah, fake it Louis.

EMILY

Kelly you can do the dusting.

KELLY

What? Dad said I didn't—

EMILY

Is your father the boss of this house?

KELLY

Yes.

(GEORGE mouths the word "no.")

EMILY

Oh he is?

(GEORGE is shaking his head.)

KELLY

I'm going out.

EMILY

What did you just say?

KELLY

I'm going out.

(LOUIS and GEORGE merely stare.)

GEORGE

Kelly, maybe um—

EMILY

Sit down young lady.

KELLY

You're the one who cares about whether the house is clean. I don't give a crap.

EMILY

Grandma Jacobs is coming tomorrow—

KELLY

She hates us!

EMILY

She does not hate you—

GEORGE

Don’t take it personally Kelly, she hates everyone.

EMILY

George!

KELLY

She’s gonna complain anyway Mom! She’s gonna find fault with something. She hates my hair—

LOUIS

To be honest, there’s a lot a hate about—

KELLY

Shut up Louis! I don’t like Grandma Jacobs I’m not cleaning the house for her! I hate it when you get like this! You don’t care about me! All you want is a maid!

EMILY

Fine. Leave. I’ll clean the house myself. Louis stop what you’re doing.

LOUIS

I want to help, Mom.

EMILY

No. I’ll do it. I’m the only one who cares, apparently.

LOUIS

Mom I want to do this.

EMILY

Give me the lights Louis.

LOUIS

Look see I’m doing a good job now.

EMILY

You sure are sweetie, why don’t you go live on the streets with your sister?

LOUIS

What?

KELLY

Oh stop taking it out on him.

EMILY

Skipping Forward

KELLY
I'm waiting for you to ask your stupid question!

LOUIS
What do you think would be a good present to get for Christmas? From a guy?

KELLY
Which guy?

LOUIS
A guy who liked you.

KELLY
Like he liked me liked me or just liked me?

LOUIS
Liked you liked you.

KELLY
I don't know. I've never had a guy who actually liked me buy me a present before. Maybe something pretty with a card.

LOUIS
Like a poster?

KELLY
A poster?

LOUIS
There are these posters that have all these dolphins on them and stuff. They look cool.

KELLY
Were you dropped on your head? Actually, I know that, you were dropped on your head. That was my fault. I'm sorry. I probably knocked about 20 IQ points out of your skull. A poster of dolphins? What the heck am I gonna do with a poster of dolphins?

LOUIS
Put it on your wall and then every time you look at it you'll be reminded of the guy and you'll think about the dolphins and how they're free and live in the ocean and stuff.

KELLY
Huh. No. That's lame. You're thinking about lame things. I would want like earrings or something.

LOUIS

Where do you get those?

KELLY

At the mall.

LOUIS

When are you going to the mall next?

KELLY

What do you want, Louis?

LOUIS

I told Carolyn I'd get her a present.

KELLY

You're such a dork.

LOUIS

Can you take me to the mall?

KELLY

Have Dad do it.

LOUIS

No, I need someone to tell me what to get.

KELLY

Look, I have an image, okay? I go to the mall to be seen. And the last thing I need is to have my dorky little brother trailing me around asking me which dolphin poster looks coolest.

LOUIS

Please.

KELLY

No.

LOUIS

Please.

KELLY

Shut up.

LOUIS

I'll tell Mom what happened to that bottle of Jack Daniel's.

KELLY

All right tomorrow. But we're gonna be on separate ends. You don't know me, you have no idea who I am, you cannot speak to me. You buy what you want and I'll let you know if you need to return it. Okay?

(Lights shift.)

PRESENT LOUIS

My Mom was generally a nice person. And she was usually very sweet to us, except for one specific time: When company was coming over. When company was coming over, she turned into a demon taskmaster from the underworld—all of a sudden we were cleaning areas of the house that we didn't even know existed. We were washing baseboards, we were bleaching the grout in the basement, we were alphabetizing the books on the shelves. It didn't matter who the company was, we cleaned. In later years, my Mom would hire a cleaning lady and would clean before the cleaning lady showed up because she didn't want the cleaning lady to think badly of us. And when Grandma was coming to visit…

(EMILY enters.)

EMILY

Why aren't you doing something?

LOUIS

I'm just standing here.

EMILY

Is the drain in the tub clean?

LOUIS

Yes.

EMILY

Let's go check it together.

LOUIS

Okay, fine, I'll go clean it.

(KELLY enters as LOUIS exits.)

KELLY

Why is there a sleeping bag in my room?

GEORGE *(off-stage)*

Ah come on!

EMILY

What are you doing, George?

GEORGE *(off-stage)*

I'm cleaning the television!

EMILY

The Packers game better not be on!

KELLY

Mom, why is there a sleeping bag in my room?

(LOUIS returns.)

LOUIS

Why is there a weird blanket on my bed?

EMILY

If I come in there and find that game on you're going to be mopping the floor of the garage!

(she turns to LOUIS and KELLY.)

Okay, sweetheart. Grandma Jacobs is staying in your room.

LOUIS

Where am I staying?

EMILY

In Kelly's room.

KELLY

Where am I staying then?

EMILY

In your room.

KELLY

Are you kidding me!? Mom, he's bizarre!

LOUIS

Can I just sleep in the living room?

EMILY

The living room is for living not sleeping.

KELLY

I don't want him looking at me.

EMILY

He's your brother.

KELLY
So? I'm not responsible for the fact that he grew up weird.

LOUIS
Do you know what those aerosol fumes are going to do to my brain? Look what it did to Kelly! She used to be smart!

KELLY
Shut up, retard! Can I stay at a friend's house?

EMILY
No.

GEORGE *(off-stage)*
What! That was pass interference! PASS INTERFERENCE!

LOUIS
Can I stay at a friend's house?

EMILY
Both of you are staying here. Both of you are behaving. My God, it's four days.

KELLY
Four days!? Grandma Jacobs is staying four days?! Oh my God my life is over.

EMILY
Kelly. Settle down. Breathe.

GEORGE *(off-stage)*
Where is the instant replay!?
(KELLY heads to the side of the stage.)

EMILY
That game is going off now!
(GEORGE enters quickly.)

GEORGE
Randy Wright is dead to me. `Hey look at me I'm the quarterback of the NFL's most storied franchise! Ah I'm total idiot I'll throw the ball up into the air for no reason whatsoever! Oh no look it's my fourth interception of the day I suppose I'll just FALL OVER and PLAY POSSUM and maybe NO ONE WILL STEP ON ME.' Arg. He won't live long. They will hunt him down. This is a state of hunters.

EMILY
You're not going to live long if you don't mop the kitchen.

GEORGE

We're mopping the kitchen?!

EMILY

Yes we're mopping the kitchen! What do you think, we're not going to mop the kitchen?!

KELLY

Dad, Mom wants Louis to stay in my room.

LOUIS

Can I take your tent and camp out in the back yard?

EMILY

It's freezing outside!

LOUIS

I'll kill a ton-ton and climb inside its stomach.

EMILY

What the heck does that mean?

LOUIS

Didn't you see The Empire Strikes Back?

KELLY

Oh my God. Stop referencing that movie.

GEORGE

Where's the mop bucket?

EMILY

Where it's been for the last fifteen years.

GEORGE

Is it in the garage?

EMILY

Why don't you go check in the garage and see if that's where it is.

GEORGE

Is it in the garage or not?

EMILY

Check and see.

GEORGE

If you know where it is why don't you tell me?

KELLY

Maybe Louis can sleep in the basement!

LOUIS

I can't be in Kelly's room I'm allergic to stupid people!

EMILY

ALL RIGHT EVERYONE SHUT UP.

(Everyone is stunned into silence. EMILY tries to get a hold of herself.)

Kelly. Get over it. Louis. Get over it. George. The laundry room.

GEORGE

Oh, the—

EMILY

Shut up. We are going to have a wonderful Christmas week with your Grandmother.

(KELLY is about to say something)

Kelly! I know that you do not… enjoy the company of Grandma Jacobs. But you are going to smile and be polite—I don't care if you have to draw a smile on your face with lipstick, you're going to be a sweet wonderful child while she is here. Okay? And you two are going to stop fighting like six year olds and start behaving like human beings or I am going to have a conniption fit and drop dead on the floor of the kitchen and then you people will be forced to figure out how to clean the house without me, which will be a problem BECAUSE YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE THE MOP BUCKET IS!

GEORGE

It's in the laundry room.

(she glares at him.)

Sorry.

EMILY

OKAY?!

(They freeze.)

PRESENT LOUIS

So she could be a little high-strung. At this point in time, I didn't realize that my Mom and Dad weren't getting along. I just thought that's how adults behaved when they loved each other. I used to daydream about the amazing shouting matches I would have with Carolyn after our inevitable marriage. Boy wouldn't that be wonderful? But I didn't have much time to ponder that because—

(The doorbell rings.)

EMILY

Oh fudge she's early.

PRESENT LOUIS

Except she didn't say fudge.

(EMILY catches herself.)

EMILY

You didn't hear that. Smiles!

(Everyone smiles.)

GEORGE

Do you think it would be more festive if we started a Christmas Carol? `Oh come all ye.—'

EMILY

Stop it.

(EMILY opens the door. GRANDMA JACOBS carries one bag and a cane and shuffles in.)

Merry Christmas Mom!

GRANDMA JACOBS

Oh dang it look at you all.

(Lights change.)

PRESENT LOUIS

Where to begin with her?

(GRANDMA JACOBS coughs horribly.)

I have no idea.

(Lights up on the living room.)

GRANDMA JACOBS *(through a horrible cough, unintelligible)*

What happened to your dog?

EMILY

Are you okay Mom?

GRANDMA JACOBS

What?

EMILY

Are you okay?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Why wouldn't I be okay?

EMILY

You were just—you were—never mind.

Skipping Forward

KELLY

I didn't know what you meant.

GRANDMA JACOBS

What is wrong with you?

KELLY *(flabbergasted)*

I don't know.

LOUIS

No one does.

EMILY

So how was your trip up, Mom?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Terrible. All right, so. This happened to me three days ago. There was a snake loose in my backyard. A rattler.

EMILY

In Wisconsin?

GRANDMA JACOBS

I know what the snake sounds like, don't treat me like an idiot. I've been bitten by enough rattlers in my life, okay? Is that okay with you?

EMILY

I guess.

GRANDMA JACOBS

So I call the police.

GEORGE

Why did you call the police?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Because there was a rattler in my back yard.

GEORGE

Was it breaking any laws or anything?

EMILY

Quiet, dear.

GRANDMA JACOBS

I've got my handgun underneath my bed just in case.

EMILY

You have a handgun?

GRANDMA JACOBS

I have two actually.

KELLY

Where's the second one?

GRANDMA JACOBS

I'm not telling you. Can I actually tell my story? But I know if I go to my room to get my gun—

LOUIS

What kind of gun do you have?

GRANDMA JACOBS

One that shoots bullets at small children. If I get my gun, the snake is going to run away. Or slither away or whatever. So I can't get my gun. But if I get my gun I can shoot `em. So I'm faced with a dilemma.

(Really long pause.)

EMILY

What did you do?

GRANDMA JACOBS

You never could shut up. So I get my gun. I come back. No more snake. But I know he's there somewhere—

LOUIS

Is your gun loaded?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Why would I keep an unloaded gun under my bed? The doorbell rings.

GEORGE

Was it the snake?

GRANDMA JACOBS

It's the police. Well one cop. This lesbian.

EMILY

Mom!

GRANDMA JACOBS
What? She was a lesbian. It was obvious. I have nothing against them.

EMILY
There are children present.

LOUIS
We learned about them in school.

EMILY
What?!

KELLY
Oh yeah. There's a whole class in it.

GEORGE
Boy high school sure has changed.

KELLY
I'm kidding Mom. God.

EMILY
I'm calling your principal.

GRANDMA JACOBS
All right so this lady police officer is there who happens to enjoy the company of other lady police officers, and she's looking at me. I mean, she's giving me the eye. Real slow. And I'm wondering what's going on in her head. I mean I'm a defenseless old woman.

KELLY
With a loaded gun.

GRANDMA JACOBS
I left that on the counter. Jesus. Why would I open the door with a loaded gun? So she says what seems to be the problem. Like she doesn't know. I *called* 911 and told them there was a snake. Why else would she be here? I tell her, there's a rattler in the backyard and she says, we don't have rattlers in Wisconsin, and I told her that I had been bitten by enough of them to know what one looked like and would she please take care of it. Guess what she said to that?

GEORGE *(trying not to laugh)*
She said I'm a police officer and that's a snake.
(EMILY tries to quiet him with a look.)

GRANDMA JACOBS

She said she couldn't do anything about it. So I said why? And she said because the snake hadn't broken any laws by being in my back yard. Why do we even have police? Why am I paying taxes? So I said if you don't shoot him, I'll shoot him. So how about that? And this lesbian—excuse me, lady, says she doesn't have the authority to give me permission to fire my gun. So I said fine, I'll just wait till you leave and then I'm gonna shoot that snake. And this is where the story gets weird. She says, have you registered that firearm? So now I'm living in Nazi Germany where a lesbian cop can bust into my house and not shoot a snake and instead I'm the criminal? There's no law against the snake but I can't have a gun.

EMILY

You didn't register it?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Why do I have to register it?

EMILY

Because it's a law.

GRANDMA JACOBS

So? I'm old.

KELLY

So then what happened?

GRANDMA JACOBS

She gave me a written warning and then she left. So then I took my gun and I looked for the snake.

LOUIS

You went out into the yard?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Well I can't look for it inside the house. So I'm in the backyard. I look to my left. I look to my right. I turn around. The snake is going inside my house.

EMILY

No.

GRANDMA JACOBS

I left the door open and the snake is going inside my house.

KELLY

What did you do?

GRANDMA JACOBS

I fired six shots at the snake.

(GRANDMA JACOBS has a coughing fit while continuing to tell her story. An entire sentence is unintelligible.)

So. Now I need to replace my screen door. So the next day I go down to Ace Hardware.

GEORGE

Whoah, whoah whoah. What happened to the snake?

GRANDMA JACOBS

I'm still here aren't I? It's dead. I hit it once.

PRESENT LOUIS

Oh yes, it was going to be a festive yuletide season.

(Lights shift. KELLY and LOUIS are getting ready for bed. LOUIS has an inflatable mattress on the floor. It is quite dark.)

KELLY

If you look at me, I'll kill you.

LOUIS

I wasn't looking.

KELLY

You better not snore.

LOUIS

God you're mean. I don't snore.

KELLY

You snore. I've heard it.

LOUIS

You snore.

KELLY

I do not.

LOUIS

It's like a motorcycle.

KELLY

You're a moron.

LOUIS

I love you too, Kelly.

(KELLY throws something at him.)
Ow! What was that?

KELLY

My clock radio.

LOUIS

That hurt.

KELLY

Really? I'm sorry. Let me make it better.
(She hits him with a pillow.)

LOUIS

Ah!

KELLY

Shhhh! Grandma's sleeping!
(She hits him with a pillow again.)
Don't make noise. Louis! Don't make noise!
(She pounds on him with her pillow. LOUIS escapes and fights back.)
Stop it!
(LOUIS manages to knock KELLY over with a vicious hit from his pillow.)
Ow.

LOUIS

Take that, wench!
(She fights back. The lights come on suddenly. EMILY is there.)

EMILY

What is wrong with you two?

LOUIS

She threw a clock radio at me.

KELLY

You're such a liar.

EMILY

Can you please act your age? Okay? People are trying to sleep.

LOUIS

Can you tell her not to throw things at me?

EMILY

No. I'm not going to tell her that. You have to do it yourself.

LOUIS

That's what I was just doing.

KELLY

He's got anger issues, Mom. He said that he's upset because he hasn't undergone puberty yet.

LOUIS

Shut up.

KELLY

See? It's driving him insane.

EMILY

Both of you: be quiet. Go to bed. I don't want to come in here again.
(She flips off the lights and leaves.)

LOUIS

God you're a liar.

KELLY

Have you undergone puberty?

LOUIS

Has your hair undergone puberty?

KELLY

Oh good one. Good one, Louis. You really got me there.

LOUIS

One of these days I'm gonna come at you with a match and your whole head is going to ignite.

KELLY

Errr. You're cool, Louis.

LOUIS

Ah! My head's on fire! Ah!
(KELLY throws something else at LOUIS.)
Ow!

KELLY

Go to sleep or I'm going to knock you unconscious.

LOUIS

Fine. Good night.

KELLY

Good night.

LOUIS

I hope I don't roll onto you in the middle of the night.

KELLY

I'm not talking to you any more.

LOUIS

Good night.
(Pause.)
Hey Kelly?
(no response.)
Hey Kelly are you asleep?

KELLY

Yeah I fell asleep in the ten seconds you shut your stupid mouth. I am not talking to you any more. Do not talk to me.

LOUIS

How old were you when you had your first kiss?

KELLY

I'm not telling you.

LOUIS

Was it with that guy from Wilson?

KELLY

Which guy?

LOUIS

The guy with the little mustache and the rat-tail?

KELLY

No. Gross.

LOUIS

You never kissed him?

KELLY

He wasn't my first. Wait a minute, have you kissed anybody?

LOUIS

Define kissed.

KELLY

So you haven't kissed anybody?

LOUIS

I kissed Rachel Marber on the bus in sixth grade. Well… I mean, she kissed me. And then later I found out that Cass Thompson had bet her a dollar she wouldn't do it.

(KELLY snorts.)

So do you think that counts?

KELLY

No.

LOUIS

Why not? She kissed me.

KELLY

Yeah, but it was on a dare. Like, I bet you won't kiss the monkey over there. Or, I bet you won't eat a ball of cat fur.

LOUIS

Uck.

KELLY

It's not as gross as it sounds.

LOUIS

You ate a ball of cat fur?

KELLY

I got five bucks for it. Shut up. Like you've never done anything weird.

LOUIS

You ate a ball of cat fur and you kiss people and I never ate any cat fur and I never get to kiss anyone.

KELLY

Yeah, life sucks that way.

LOUIS

I'm gonna kiss Carolyn Warren.

KELLY *(sarcastic)*

Yeah you are.

LOUIS

I am. I made a pact with myself.

KELLY *(even more sarcastic)*

Oh well in that case then.

LOUIS

You don't think I can do it?

KELLY

Like, if you tie her up and knock her unconscious then you could do it. Otherwise no.

LOUIS

Why not?

KELLY

Oh come on. Carolyn Warren?

LOUIS

What about her?

KELLY

Have you seen Carolyn Warren?

LOUIS

Obviously that's why I want to kiss her.

KELLY

Is she like freakishly weird in ways I don't know about?

LOUIS

I don't think so.

KELLY

Has she called you on the phone or anything?

LOUIS

No. I mean, yeah. One time. For math help.

KELLY

She doesn't like you, Louis. She's cute, right?

LOUIS

Yeah.

Skipping Forward

(Pause.)
Kelly?
(Pause.)
Do you think Mom and Dad are happy anymore?
(KELLY lies there. Lights change.)

PRESENT LOUIS
My plan for the mall visit hit a serious road bump.
(GEORGE enters.)

GEORGE
Hey Kelly—why don't you take Grandma Jacobs to the mall with you?
(GEORGE leaves.)

PRESENT LOUIS
There were many reasons why we didn't want to take Grandma Jacobs to the mall with us. One: she was insane. Two: there were stuffed snakes in the KB Toys that she might mistake for rattlers, and Three: we never did find out where the second gun was. Kelly, genius that she was, wasn't able to articulate any of those reasons in the moment. So, we got to take Grandma Jacobs on a sight-seeing tour of the Brookfield Mall.
(GRANDMA JACOBS enters.)
The Brookfield Mall was the center of all social activity for all people aged 10 to 17. In later years I would meet a girl at Aladdin's Castle, fall in love near the Swiss Colony and break up by the time we reached The Buckle. But at this time I had just one thing on my mind: the perfect present.
(KELLY and LOUIS enter, chagrined. They walk very slowly.)

GRANDMA JACOBS
Okay, can we stop?

KELLY
We haven't even made it out of JC Penny's yet. It's not good for me to be seen here.

GRANDMA JACOBS
Well you were the one who parked a million miles away. You should've parked in the handicapped spot.

KELLY
I'm not handicapped.

GRANDMA JACOBS
I am.

KELLY
You just have a cane that doesn't make you handicapped.

GRANDMA JACOBS
Oh I'm faking it. I've got degenerative arthritis in my right hip and I'm faking it.

LOUIS
Maybe we could get you a wheelchair.

GRANDMA JACOBS
I don't want a wheelchair I'm not a cripple.

LOUIS
Okay.

KELLY
Well I'll see you guys later.
(KELLY gets up.)

LOUIS
Where are you going?

KELLY
Like I'd spend time with you here. I've got things to do. Meet me at the Orange Julius when you want to leave. But don't wave at me or anything, okay? No one should know we're related. Bye Grandma.

GRANDMA JACOBS
You'd leave me to die in a desert, wouldn't you?

KELLY
There's plenty to drink in the mall.
(KELLY leaves.)

(GRANDMA JACOBS watches her go, then gets up.)

GRANDMA JACOBS
Thank God she left. All right, let's go to a bar.

LOUIS
I don't think there is a bar at the mall.

GRANDMA JACOBS
What the heck kind of mall is this?

LOUIS
Besides, I'm thirteen.

GRANDMA JACOBS

Louis, are you wearing girls' underpants? We used to give your mother beer in a bottle when she was one year old. Not a lot, just enough to put her to sleep. Oh she would cry and cry until she got her Stroh's.

LOUIS

You gave Mom beer when she was a baby?

GRANDMA JACOBS

She was one, she wasn't hardly a baby any more. She loved it. It was the forties, no one knew anything about anything. We didn't have seatbelts, we didn't have warning labels, you took your chances in life. If you gave a kid a present and it was full of nails, well, that's one way they learned. Now you kids are babied all the time. Next thing you know you'll have to wear a helmet to walk out of the house. I mean would it hurt you if you broke a bone doing something stupid?

LOUIS

Yeah that would probably hurt.

GRANDMA JACOBS

God you're a pansy. Fine. We won't go to a bar, we'll go to the baby store and get you a dolly. Let's go.

(They get up and begin walking)

LOUIS

No I need to get a present for a girl.

GRANDMA JACOBS

Oh? A girl? Good. I'm sure that'll put your family's mind at ease.

LOUIS

About what?

GRANDMA JACOBS

I'll explain it to you when I'm drunk sometime. What are you gonna get her?

LOUIS

I don't know. It's gotta be the perfect present.

GRANDMA JACOBS

Did you see those talking teddy bears when we came in?

LOUIS

Teddy Ruxpin?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Yeah. How do they get their mouths to move like that?

LOUIS

I don't know.

GRANDMA JACOBS

You should get her one of those. They're fantastic.

LOUIS

I don't really think she would like a talking bear.

GRANDMA JACOBS

Have you asked her?

LOUIS

No.

GRANDMA JACOBS

Who wouldn't like a talking bear? The mouth moves, Louis.

LOUIS

You really think I should get a Teddy Ruxpin?

GRANDMA JACOBS

I think if you've got one chance to impress a girl, I don't know if you could do better than a teddy bear with a moving mouth.

PRESENT LOUIS

Luckily, Teddy Ruxpin cost twenty-five dollars and I only had eleven. So I managed to avoid that mistake. So we hobbled through the mall.

GRANDMA JACOBS

You know what you should get? Chocolate. Girls love chocolate. They'll tear each other's eyes out over it.

PRESENT LOUIS

You ever look back on your life and think, there was the piece of advice I should've followed? There was the piece of advice I should've followed. I didn't.

GRANDMA JACOBS

You should be glad you never met your Grandfather. He wouldn't a liked you much. I don't mean that as an insult but old Jake liked things his way or no way at all. He was a bona fide class A prick. As you can imagine we took to fighting just about every night—I used to throw things at him when he turned his back on me. Course in those days it was hard to get a divorce. But that wasn't gonna stop me. You had to prove you had a reason to get divorced. So we went to court, and they said why are you divorcing this man, and I

said, "cause he's an a-hole." And this judge says, "you shoulda thought of that before you married him."

(She sits down.)

PRESENT LOUIS

After two hours, The Brookfield Mall held a fierce deathgrip on my soul and was crushing the life out of me. For eleven dollars you could get the smallest diamond pendant visible to the naked eye or a t-shirt with a cat on it.

GRANDMA JACOBS

I like the t-shirt.

PRESENT LOUIS

I was resigned to utter failure.

GRANDMA JACOBS

You should get the t-shirt. It's got a cat on it. He's wearing sunglasses.

PRESENT JACOBS

The pressure was building—

GRANDMA JACOBS

Does she even like cats? If she likes cats she'd like a shirt with a cat on it.

LOUIS

I'm not getting the stupid cat shirt!!

(Pause. GRANDMA JACOBS is stunned for a moment.)

GRANDMA JACOBS

Why not?

PRESENT LOUIS

If I didn't get this present now, I was doomed. She would never love me. But then… out of the corner of my eye, accompanied by a choir of angels… I saw it.

(CHOIR of angels begins singing.)

Heavenly light shone upon it. All that was glorious, good, and divine in the world was contained within it. Perfection itself. What every girl wanted. I would be a hero. She would kiss me on the spot.

(Light shines on a fiber-optic unicorn figurine.)

It was a fiber-optic unicorn figurine. They sell them by the basketful at the sharper image, but we didn't have a sharper image in the mall, we just had a mysterious kiosk in the center of the aisle run by a couple of Armenian drug dealers. And they had somehow lucked into a shipment of fiber-optic unicorns. To give you a feeling of my wonder at the sight of this: I had never seen anything fiber-optic before. It cycled through different colors, first green, then blue, et cetera… and then back again, always changing. I thought

it was gorgeous. I wanted one for my room. And it was ten ninety nine. With tax that came out to eleven fifty four.

LOUIS

Do you have a dollar?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Why would I have a dollar?

LOUIS

I don't know, cause you're an adult?

GRANDMA JACOBS

I don't have crap. You wanna piece of gum instead?

LOUIS

No, I—wait here.

(KELLY appears on the other side of the stage.)

LOUIS

Can I borrow a dollar?

(KELLY ignores him.)

Kelly. Kelly!

(KELLY waves at someone else, smile falsely, then instantly switches it to a sneer.)

Kelly.

KELLY *(a fierce whisper)*

Get away from me. I don't know you.

LOUIS

Can I borrow a dollar?

KELLY *(a fierce whisper)*

What did you do with Grandma?

LOUIS

She's fine. Do you have fifty cents?

KELLY

Where's Grandma?

LOUIS

Like you care where Grandma is. Do you have fifty cents?

KELLY

Did you ditch Grandma?

LOUIS

You don't have fifty cents for me?

KELLY

I don't know you—I don't give strangers money. Now get away from me, kid.
(she smiles at someone else.)

LOUIS

Kelly if you don't give me fifty cents I'm going to hug you.
(Beat. They stare at each other. KELLY reaches into her purse and shows LOUIS that she has no money. LOUIS is about to hug her.)

KELLY

I have mace.

LOUIS

I love you.
(KELLY gets out her can of mace.)
Fine. I'll get the money elsewhere.

PRESENT LOUIS

There was no elsewhere. I checked behind the arcade games. Nothing. My eyes were glued to the floor. There must have been an army of junkies scrounging the floor for loose change when we weren't looking. No kids with money. No one. Nothing to sell. I would never get the fiber-optic unicorn.

GRANDMA JACOBS

Take the money out of the wishing well in front of the bank. I've seen ten kids throw pennies in there while I've been sitting here.

LOUIS

Isn't that stealing?

GRANDMA JACOBS

They're throwing the pennies away Louis. I'll cover you.

LOUIS

Okay.
(LOUIS looks shifty. He darts off-stage.)

PRESENT LOUIS

It took me fourteen trips. I got some weird looks—

GRANDMA JACOBS *(yelling at someone off-stage)*

What are you looking at? I'm an old lady. I'll call security.

(GRANDMA JACOBS gets up and stands near the edge of the stage, hiding LOUIS.)

What. Go away. You think I don't have a gun in my purse? You wanna find out?

(LOUIS returns, soaked, carrying a thick handful of pennies.)

PRESENT LOUIS

And I bought that unicorn.

(He exchanges it for the unicorn.)

And I was a hero.

(The soaked, filthy LOUIS and GRANDMA JACOBS approach KELLY.)

(KELLY ignores him.)

GRANDMA JACOBS

All right let's go.

KELLY

Oh my God.

(LOUIS holds up the glowing unicorn figurine.)

That's what you got?

LOUIS

Yeah, isn't it awesome?

(beat.)

KELLY

Um… yeah. It's awesome. Let's go.

PRESENT LOUIS

She betrayed me.

GRANDMA JACOBS

Merry Christmas.

(GRANDMA JACOBS reaches into the folds of her dress and produces two boxes of chocolate.)

LOUIS

I thought you said you didn't have any money.

(She shrugs.)

GRANDMA JACOBS

Old people get things for free.

(Lights shift.)

PRESENT LOUIS

When they steal them.

(Lights up on GEORGE in the kitchen, putting away dishes. EMILY enters.)

Meanwhile, the event that was about to change my life forever was unfolding.

EMILY

Where's Mom?

GEORGE

She went to the mall with the kids.

EMILY

Really?

GEORGE

Yeah it was the darndest thing. They all just really wanted to spend some quality time together.

EMILY

Seriously?

GEORGE

No I made Kelly take her.

EMILY

How'd you manage that?

GEORGE

Honestly, I don't know. I think I just behaved as if I had the authority to make your Mom go and then Kelly just sort of accepted it. It was surreal. She actually did something I said. Made me feel like a man.

EMILY

Those bowls don't go there.

GEORGE

They don't?

EMILY

You have to stack them.

GEORGE

Oh.

(EMILY takes a look in the cabinet.)

EMILY

George. What have you been doing in here?

GEORGE

Putting dishes away.

EMILY

Why?

GEORGE

Because… when dishes are clean I like to put them away, I don't know I'm crazy that way.

EMILY

Yeah but you do it wrong. Look at this. You see, the little bowls go inside of the big bowls. It's not that hard.

GEORGE

See, I thought it was the other way around. I was trying to bend the laws of physics to make the big bowls go inside of the little bowls.

EMILY

You know, you're not half as funny as you think you are.

GEORGE

That still makes me pretty funny.

(He goes to get some more dishes.)

EMILY

Don't. Just let me do it.

GEORGE

Fine.

(He walks off.)

EMILY

Where are you going?

GEORGE

I'm going to go recklessly mess up another room.

EMILY

Don't you want to see where they go?

GEORGE

No I don't really give a crap.

EMILY

What is wrong with you?

GEORGE

I can't put dishes away in my own house; I think that's a little messed up that's all.

EMILY

You just don't put them in the right places.

GEORGE

No, I don't put them in your places. Your places are not automatically the right places!

EMILY

Fine, do you want to democratically decide where the dishes go?

GEORGE

No.

EMILY

See! You don't care. I do. That's why my places are the right places.

GEORGE

Fine. Whatever.

EMILY

Why are you being like this?

GEORGE

Does she have to stay for four days?

EMILY

How often do we get to see her?

GEORGE

She probably brought a gun!

EMILY

Oh my God, George—

GEORGE

It's like she's been living on a dock the past ten years learning English from a bunch of sailors.

EMILY

She's not that bad.

GEORGE

Yeah, cause she hasn't been drinking yet, but that'll probably start any minute—

EMILY

Oh and your mother is a saint.

GEORGE

We're not talking about my Mom.

EMILY

I see, she's off-limits while it's open season on my mother—

GEORGE

My Mom is sick.

EMILY

So is mine!

GEORGE

No your mother is depraved. There's a difference.

EMILY

I don't see why you can't be civil for four days. You sit there and you make those stupid sarcastic comments during every story—

GEORGE

Cause she's full of it!

EMILY

So? She likes telling the stories.

GEORGE

You mean lies. She likes telling lies.

EMILY

I don't like them either, okay? I want my Mom to be normal! She used to be!

GEORGE

She used to ride with the Hell's Angels!

EMILY

No she didn't.

GEORGE

No, she said that!

EMILY

Skipping Forward

EMILY

I love you.

(Pause.)

GEORGE

I love you too.

(They are still apart.)

EMILY

Do you think…?

GEORGE

What?

(Silence. EMILY can't bring herself to say what's on her mind. A long pause.)

(The doorbell rings. GEORGE gets it. GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI, a small, thin, elderly woman enters. Inexplicably, she has an upper-class British accent.)

GEORGE

Mom?!

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I knew I could find this house. They told me I couldn't but I said I could.

EMILY

What are you doing here?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Why I've come for Christmas. I'm on holiday.

(Lights change.)

PRESENT LOUIS

I have to say a few words here about my Grandma Skolowski. First off, in 1986 she was diagnosed with severe dementia, which rapidly proceeded to incapacitate her. I have a few memories of how she was before the disease struck, and I remember her as a really neat lady. Here's the thing: she had trouble remembering things, so she just started making things up. It wasn't that she was reliving her childhood, she was somehow imagining a childhood that never happened. My grandmother was born in Pittsburgh in 1916. She was a teenager during the depression. I think she worked as a nanny for a little while in there. Her husband, my grandfather, was a second-generation American who first worked in a butcher shop before branching out and owning his own restaurant, which was eventually put out of business by Denny's, but you never wanted to get him started on that. He went to fight in the Pacific in World War 2 and got some shrapnel in his back which bothered him the rest of his life. Those are the facts of my family. Here's how she would tell it.

(GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI speaks in a very sweet, very soft voice, with a british accent acquired from Masterpiece Theater.)

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

When I was thirteen years old a man came up to me on the street and asked if he could see my legs. This was a very strange proposition at that time, but I thought I had wonderful legs so I showed him and he said those are some pretty stunning legs. I was quite flattered. In those days, if a man said something nice to you you were obligated to marry him. But I was thirteen so I couldn't marry him and besides he was more attracted to my brother Joseph but I didn't know there were such men at the time. And he said he could get me an audition for the Rockettes. Imagine me, dancing for the Rockettes. So I said I'd love to be in the Rockettes, so he gave me a ticket on the train and I went to New York City, and I went straight to Radio City Music Hall for my audition. And there I was in front of the producer, Howard Shulz and he said how old are you and I said thirteen and he said I was nineteen and I said no I'm thirteen and he said are you sure you're thirteen? And then I said I might be nineteen and he said you're hired. My parents knew nothing about this. They thought I was in Poland for girl scout camp. So I started dancing and let me tell you it was the best time of my life. Fifty girls—they were my family. We used to go skinny dipping in the East River. That was before the East River was discovered to be poisonous. We had a girl die. Esther was her name and she was from Iowa and she had huge knockers. I used to think everyone in Iowa had huge knockers until I went there one time and discovered it wasn't true, that no one in Iowa looked anything like Esther, which is why she left I suppose. Anyway, she drank some of the water and died which was a shame because she was the girl on my left. For the 1930 Christmas show we decided we were going to release live doves at the end of the dance. Don't ask me why. Well it so happened that someone forgot to feed the doves and they all died in their cages. The cages were over our heads so when they released the doves, we just heard plop plop plop as their carcasses rained from the sky. They were landing on us. I got hit in the shoulder which hurt because it was a rather large bird with talons and a beak. Mary on my right got hit right in the head and it knocked her out cold. I didn't know what to do. I started shouting, Mary's dead! Mary's dead! All the while more birds are dropping from the sky and the other girls are trying to continue the kickline. I thought that was the most absurd thing ever because if a girl is dead no one wants to see live girls dancing any more. Well maybe some people do, but I think those people are wrong. Mary lived. But we didn't use birds any more after that.

(Lights change. KELLY and LOUIS sit in the car.)

KELLY

Are you going to go to her door or not?

LOUIS

Hold on. Do I look all right?

KELLY

What do you expect me to answer to that? You look okay for you.

LOUIS

Thanks. I think. Do you think she'll like it?

KELLY

Ask her. God. Just go and get it over with. I wanna go home.

LOUIS

Okay.

(Pause. KELLY punches him.)

Ow.

KELLY

Get out of the car.

LOUIS

Fine.

KELLY

God you're retarded.

(LOUIS gets out of the car and heads to the opposite side of the stage. He waits for a moment, then looks back at KELLY, who throws up her hands in disgust and mimes strangling herself in frustration. LOUIS looks at his present, then rings the "doorbell.")

(Dogs barking loudly. We hear CAROLYN off-stage.)

CAROLYN *(off-stage)*

Shut up! Shut up! JARED! Come and get your stupid dog!

(LOUIS thinks about running as CAROLYN opens the door.)

LOUIS

Hi.

CAROLYN

Hey.

(she turns around and yells off-stage)

Oh my God he peed on the floor! Are you kidding me?! JARED!

(she turns back to LOUIS)

LOUIS

Hi. Again.

CAROLYN

Hey Louis. What are you doing here?

LOUIS

I just wanted to wish you good luck before the um… show tomorrow.

CAROLYN

Oh. Okay. You too.

LOUIS

Thanks! Thanks.
(Pause.)

CAROLYN

That's all you wanted?

LOUIS

I'm caroling.

CAROLYN

By yourself?

LOUIS

Yeah. It's um… better this way. Actually, traditionally, one person would do the caroling. They'd like go on ahead as like a scout caroler.

CAROLYN

I didn't know that.

LOUIS

Oh yeah because of the plague… and robbers. So if the one guy went to a house and they didn't have boils or anything, then the other carolers would know it would be safe, so they'd… go. Yeah. You know, they were crazy back in medieval times. So anyway.

CAROLYN

What are you gonna sing?

LOUIS

A medley… of Christmas favorites. Kind of my signature. Like um…
(he tries to think of a song)
Deck the halls with balls of holly,
Fa la la la la la la la
Tis the season to be jolly
Fa la la la la la la la
(she's still watching him—he pauses for a second to remember what comes next)
Don we now our gay apparel
Fa la la la la la la la la
(forgetting the next part of it)
Sing the happy yuletide carol

Fa la la la la la la la la
(CAROLYN claps.)

CAROLYN
That was good! You're so funny.

LOUIS
You think so?

CAROLYN
Yeah. You're like the funniest donkey in the show.

LOUIS
Actually I'm an ass.

CAROLYN
Right. Well you're a fine ass.

LOUIS
So what are you doing after the show?

CAROLYN
There'll probably be some kind of hideous scrabble marathon over here. We have these cousins in, and as soon as they get here it's like, `break out every board game we own and play them till our eyes bleed!' Usually I have to fake a stomach cramp to get out of it.

LOUIS
Oh.

CAROLYN
Why?

LOUIS
We're having people over. You know, like a cast party thing. If you can make it.

CAROLYN
Probably not. I wish I could.

LOUIS
Okay. If you change your mind.

CAROLYN
All right.
(LOUIS can't think of anything to say.)
I'll see you later then.

LOUIS

Hey I got you a present.
(LOUIS produces the present.)

CAROLYN

Really? That's so sweet.
(He gives it to her.)

LOUIS

Open it.

CAROLYN

Shouldn't I wait till Christmas?

LOUIS

No.

CAROLYN

Okay.
(She unwraps the unicorn.)
Wow.

LOUIS

It's a unicorn.

CAROLYN

I see that.

LOUIS

It glows different colors and stuff.

CAROLYN

Cool. No one's ever gotten me a glowing unicorn before.

LOUIS

Yeah. It spoke to me.

CAROLYN

It talks? That's so cool!

LOUIS

No I mean like, you know `it *spoke* to me' not that it actually spoke to me. Like I saw it and just thought of you because it's different colors and you have different colors and I thought it was cool.

CAROLYN

Oh.

LOUIS

It's fiber-optic.

CAROLYN

Cool.

(Pause.)

LOUIS

Do you like it?

CAROLYN

Sure.

(LOUIS is crushed.)

LOUIS

So um… bye.

CAROLYN

Bye. Thanks for the present.

LOUIS

Yeah.

(She leaves. LOUIS remains. Barking off-stage.)

CAROLYN *(off-stage)*

Shut up! SHUT UP! Shut up! No!

(Lights fade on her, leaving LOUIS alone on-stage.)

PRESENT LOUIS

I remember it was pretty cold that night, but I was warm until she shut that door. And then all of a sudden it was like I was freezing all over. When you're older you don't quite fall as hard as you once did. I guess you build up armor and cushions and all sorts of defenses to protect yourself against such naked hope. Because my relationship with Carolyn, which I had built in my mind, was all hope. And when it fell apart, when I looked at her and realized that she was never going to like me in the way I wanted, it was like all that hope had just been carved out of me and I was left hollow and weightless and cold, standing alone in the dark like an idiot. The stars above me were alien and distant and the world was empty.

KELLY

Hey come on!

(No answer.)

Come on!

(KELLY comes over.)

Louis. There'll be other girls.

(She puts her arm around him and they walk off.)

LOUIS *(as they are leaving)*

But I wanted this one.

PRESENT LOUIS

Hope, though, is not such an easy thing to kill, especially in the face of reality. On the way home my thoughts went like this:

(LOUIS is alone in a pool of light.)

LOUIS

She's never gonna like me. She's probably gonna go out with some guy in high school who can bench press 400 pounds and has a cleft chin. Maybe if I bench pressed 400 pounds she'd like me. I could probably do it. I'd just have to spend a lot of time in the gym. Like, every day, I'll just go to the gym ever day and I won't even go to school any more, I'll just work out all the time and then I'll be huge and no one will make fun of me any more. Who'm I kidding? I got a nosebleed that time I was in the gym. I never shoulda gotten her that unicorn. But she said she liked it. She didn't like it. But why would she say she liked it if she didn't like it? She's not a liar. She's a very honest person. And she was mad at her brother when she opened the door. She even smiled when she opened it. You don't just smile for no reason. She smiled at me and she took the present and she said she liked it. And I'm gonna see her tomorrow after the show. And after the show she's gonna hug me. She hugged me twice this week. I think she likes me. I can tell by the way she hugged me, that wasn't just an ordinary hug. That was like an I like you hug and I was too stupid to pick up on it. I shoulda gone in. I shoulda said, maybe we should get some coffee or something. I just totally missed my chance. Tomorrow it's gonna be different. I'm gonna kiss her.

PRESENT LOUIS

Yeah. I wasn't the brightest kid.

KELLY

What are you smiling about?

LOUIS

Oh you'll find out.

(They exit.)

PRESENT LOUIS

When I was little we used to open presents on Christmas morning. I think I was about nine when my Dad suggested that we each open one present on Christmas Eve. That led to a second present, and then a third, and within two years we were opening all of our presents on Christmas Eve.

(Festive music. GEORGE and GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI enter the living room.)

GEORGE
All right, who is ready to open some presents!

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI
Oh I am.
(LOUIS enters.)

LOUIS
I've been ready. Kelly is re-adjusting her hair. Apparently exposure to the outside has damaged its structural integrity.

GEORGE
Where's your Mom and Grandma Jacobs?

GRANDMA JACOBS *(off-stage)*
I'm coming! I'm coming! Hold your horses!
(she slowly enters.)
I can't sit on the pot for more than five minutes without someone wondering where the heck I am!

GEORGE
Merry Christmas.

GRANDMA JACOBS
Yeah, yeah. Where's Emily?

GEORGE
I thought she was with you.

GRANDMA JACOBS
In the bathroom? Emily? EMILY! WE'RE HAVING CHRISTMAS WITHOUT YOU.

EMILY *(off-stage)*
Coming!

GRANDMA JACOBS
DID YOU HEAR ME?!

EMILY *(off-stage)*
I'm coming!

GRANDMA JACOBS
WELL SAY SOMETHING.

GEORGE
She's coming.

(GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI takes GEORGE aside.)

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I hope you're not disappointed but I only got one present for you this year.

GEORGE

That's okay, Mom. We didn't even know you were going to be here.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

It's for Kelly.

GEORGE

Oh.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I'm giving her everything I own.

GRANDMA JACOBS

ARE WE GONNA DO THIS OR NOT?!

(Lights fade. End of act one.)

Act Two

(The action is continuous with the end of act one.)

GRANDMA JACOBS

ARE WE GONNA DO THIS OR NOT?!

(EMILY enters, carrying several recently wrapped presents.)

It's about time.

EMILY

Here we go. Santa needed to do a little last-minute work.

GRANDMA JACOBS

All right let's get started.

EMILY

Where's Kelly?

LOUIS

Well, there was a problem with the humidity, so her hair deflated and now—

KELLY

I'm coming! Shut up Louis!

LOUIS

I was just trying to explain—

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I think you look lovely, Kelly.

KELLY

Thank you Grandma. I love your new accent.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

What accent?

KELLY

Ri-ight.

EMILY

Let's open the presents!

KELLY *(aside to EMILY)*

Why does Grandma have a British accent?

EMILY

Oh look here's one from Santa!

KELLY

You actually put from Santa on these?

EMILY

I didn't put anything on them. They came that way.

GEORGE

And Santa spent a lot of money on these presents so they better be appreciated.

EMILY

George.

GEORGE

Okay, what gets opened first?

GRANDMA JACOBS

I've got one already.
(she's already opening it.)

GEORGE

Oh, all right. Just jump right in there.
(She opens a very large sweater with a cat on it.)

GRANDMA JACOBS

It's a sweater.

GEORGE

Hey! A sweater! All right.

GRANDMA JACOBS

It's got a cat on it.

EMILY

I know you like cats.

GRANDMA JACOBS *(through a coughing fit)*

I like them better than I liked your father.

EMILY

What?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Cause I didn't really like him that much.

GEORGE
O-kay. Kelly, you wanna pick something out?

KELLY
Sure. Let me find Louis' present.

LOUIS
Oh.

KELLY
What?

LOUIS
Um… your present isn't out yet.

KELLY
Why not?

LOUIS
Because it's in the other room.

KELLY
Well go get it.

LOUIS
Um… okay.
(LOUIS sits there.)

KELLY
You totally forgot to get me a present, didn't you?

LOUIS
No I'll go get it.
(LOUIS exits.)

KELLY
He's just gonna go to his room and grab something. I'm not giving you your present unless it's from the store! I don't want any of your used tapes!

EMILY
Kelly, don't be so hard on your brother.

KELLY
What? He didn't get me a present.

GRANDMA JACOBS

This one's for me.

(She starts unwrapping another present.)

GEORGE

Here's five bucks.

KELLY

What's that for?

EMILY

What are you doing?

GEORGE

That's for his present.

KELLY

Five bucks?!

GEORGE

All right fine, here's another ten.

GRANDMA JACOBS

It's another sweater. Thank you.

EMILY

You're going to give her fifteen bucks?

KELLY

Thanks, Dad.

GEORGE

Louis come on back out.

LOUIS *(off-stage)*

No I found her present!

KELLY

I don't want it!

GRANDMA JACOBS

I get so dang cold these days. It's always freezing.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

This is such fun. Christmas was always such a dreary affair back in Poland.

GRANDMA JACOBS

I didn't know you lived in Poland.

EMILY

Kelly, give that money back to your father.

KELLY

No.

GEORGE

You can keep it Kelly.

EMILY

This is ridiculous, giving your own daughter money on Christmas.

KELLY

I'm cool with it.

GEORGE

Hey I got her a present.

(LOUIS returns with a few tapes wrapped in a plastic bag.)

LOUIS

Here you go, Kelly. Merry Christmas.

KELLY

What is that?

GEORGE

Guess you'll have to open it and find out.

EMILY

George, why don't you open a present?

GEORGE

Hold on, the kids are sharing something special.

KELLY

You just took two tapes from your room and wrapped them in a plastic bag.

LOUIS

Why would I do that?

KELLY

Cause you didn't buy me anything you jerk.

LOUIS

Skipping Forward

EMILY
How about we go back to opening presents? What did you get me, Mom?

GRANDMA JACOBS
It's under the tree.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI
We always used to have pie for dinner. Rhubarb pie, strawberry pie, it was really just those two kinds. I got quite sick of it actually. Well one day my older brother Viclas said I don't want any more pie, I hate it, and that's when my father beat him with a shovel.

GEORGE
Wow, I guess that explains Uncle Viclas.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI
Of course that was after he had fallen in the well as a child. He always did things like that. He was quite stupid.

EMILY
This looks great Mom, thank you.

GRANDMA JACOBS
Open it already, don't just sit there sniffing it like an idiot.

LOUIS
Can I open mine, Grandma?
(he starts opening it.)

GRANDMA JACOBS
Sure. I got you cat food.

LOUIS
What?

GRANDMA JACOBS
For your new cat.

LOUIS
You got me a cat?!

EMILY
You got him a cat?

KELLY
I'm allergic to cats.

GRANDMA JACOBS
Then don't let him in your room. His name is Schmoopy.

EMILY
Where is Schmoopy?

GRANDMA JACOBS
He's in the basement right now but don't worry about it. He has leukemia.

LOUIS
Oh.

GRANDMA JACOBS
You're gonna have to give him shots three times a day. I left the syringes in your room. He also only has one eye. But I always say that the more damaged a creature is the more you love it. So what I'm giving you, Louis, is a lesson in love.

EMILY
How old is Mooshy?

GRANDMA JACOBS
Schmoopy. I don't know.

LOUIS
Well thanks, Grandma.

GRANDMA JACOBS
Kelly I also got you a cat. I know, I know, you're allergic. But he doesn't have any fur so that won't be a problem. I'm kidding ya! I'll take the one back that I got.

KELLY
Oh. Thanks.

EMILY
I can't wait to open my present.

GEORGE
I don't know how you fit the cat in there.

GRANDMA JACOBS
It's not a cat.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI
I don't like cats. They always look like they're planning something.

EMILY

I don't like them either.

GRANDMA JACOBS

How can you not like cats?

GEORGE

She's crazy like that.

(EMILY opens her present.)

EMILY

Oh it's… it's… what is it?

(She takes it out of the package. It's a taser gun.)

It's a taser gun?

GRANDMA JACOBS

It's a taser gun.

GEORGE

Oh darn it I got you the same thing.

EMILY

Shut up George.

GRANDMA JACOBS

Now you put that in your purse and you carry it with you wherever you go. Cause there are a lot of sickos out there and this way you can hit `em with twelve thousand volts if they try anything. I was on the bus the other day and this guy tried to start something.

GEORGE

Really?

GRANDMA JACOBS

And this came in awful handy. He was getting all feely with the hands.

EMILY

Did you hit him with this?

GRANDMA JACOBS

I just showed it to him and I said, "you wanna dance?". He backed off.

GEORGE

Well I think if anything fits with the spirit of Christmas, it's the threat of permanent damage to the brain from high voltage.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Here it is!
(She produces an envelope.)

GEORGE

What's that, Mom?

GRANDMA SKOLOWKSI

It's Kelly's present.

KELLY

Oh. Thanks.

GEORGE

How did you fit the cat in the envelope?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I don't think there is a cat in the envelope. I hope there isn't.

GRANDMA JACOBS

No one would put a cat in an envelope unless they were sick.

GEORGE

It would have to be a really small cat.

EMILY

George, would you just--?

GEORGE

And flat. A small flat cat.
(KELLY opens it.)

LOUIS

What'd you get?

KELLY

It's papers.

EMILY

It's just papers?

LOUIS

Is there, like, writing on them, Kelly?

KELLY

Shut up, Louis. I don't know, it's like a contract or something. Oh it's a will.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I wonder what it says.

GEORGE

Don't you remember, Mom?

(Pause.)

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I can't say that I do.

KELLY

Oh my God.

EMILY

What is it dear?

KELLY

Whoah.

(Lights shift.)

PRESENT LOUIS

When my grandparents moved out to Wisconsin from Pittsburgh, they originally had a crazy idea that they were going to be farmers. That didn't last for very long, but they did buy up quite a bit of swamp that someone told them was perfect farming land. It grew mostly mosquitoes, deer ticks, and the occasional Ebola virus. When Kelly and I were fighting, my Mom would take us there for vacation. As the suburbs around Milwaukee expanded, however, the land grew more and more attractive to developers, who would pester my grandmother about it. She was bizarrely sentimentally attached to it, and then later once she was sentimentally attached to Poland, she was attached to the land by inertia. Anyway, she never sold it. And now she was leaving it to Kelly.

KELLY

Wow thanks Grandma.

PRESENT LOUIS

And it was probably worth something like three million dollars. Merry Christmas.

(Bright Choral Christmas music plays.)

On Christmas morning I woke up to a dusting of snow and a feeling of absolute dread that I would be forced to perform in the worst Nativity Story play ever seen by God or Man. Kelly's domineering attitude and draconian directing techniques had taken their toll on our cast.

(KELLY is on the phone.)

KELLY

What do you mean you're not coming?! It's freaking Christmas! You are not sick, you're a liar! You know that! You are lying on Christmas! I'm going to find you! Hello? Hello?

PRESENT LOUIS

One by one, our cast members developed allergies to their coats, or had appendicitis, or were mysteriously called away to happier Christmas celebrations at other churches.

KELLY

Are you kidding me?! Who's going to play Joseph?!

(She hangs up. LOUIS enters.)

LOUIS

My stomach hurts.

(KELLY grabs him.)

KELLY

You are not getting out of this. Do you understand me? I will murder you in your sleep.

LOUIS

Merry Christmas.

KELLY

Yeah. Merry Christmas. Murder you.

PRESENT LOUIS

When we got to the church things weren't much better. Our leading actor, Tommy, was kept home by his mother because she didn't approve of Kelly's biblical interpretation. In the end there were just the three of us; any sane human would have called off the show.

(KELLY comes downcenter and addresses the audience as if they were a church filled with people. She is sweating bullets.)

KELLY

Okay, so… um… the youth group will now present The Nativity Story for your entertainment and… spiritual fulfillment.

(KELLY gathers herself)

Uh… but first I wanna say that this is kind of an experimental version… We used to have more actors in the show, but certain people, I'm not even going to say their names, but they know who they are, thought that it was more important to fake illnesses than to portray the birth of Jesus. Okay? That's all I'm going to say about that. But God knows who you are and so do I. And one of those people is sitting on the left side of the church in the back row and I can see you, okay? And God sees you. And if you think you can not be in the nativity story and not get eggs thrown at your house then you got another thing coming, all right? Cause I know where you live. Amen.

(KELLY gathers herself again.)

I want you all to take a moment to mentally prepare yourself for what you are about to witness. We've all heard this story before. But have we truly seen it? Have we lived it? Think. Believe. Feel.

(KELLY produces a boombox and presses play. Some horrible cheesy 80s music plays.)

This is Mary's Story. Imagine yourself in the past. Long ago. Before television or radio. Before fish. There was a girl.

(KELLY moves off to the side as CAROLYN enters, dressed as Mary. CAROLYN is an excellent actress and does everything quite well.)

Mary.

CAROLYN

Who's there?

KELLY

It is I the holy spirit.

CAROLYN

The holy spirit?

KELLY

You are to be blessed above all women, Mary.

CAROLYN

Me?

KELLY

You.

(KELLY assumes the role of narrator again.)

Bam! And it was so. Immaculate. And she found herself with child.

(KELLY puts another tape in the boombox. Madonna's "Papa Don't Preach" plays.)

But does anyone really know what happened between Mary and her father?

(KELLY puts on a beard. CAROLYN enters, hugely pregnant now.)

CAROLYN

Papa?

KELLY

Whoah! What the heck happened to you?

CAROLYN

It was the holy spirit, papa.

KELLY

Tell me another one! Now Joseph will never have you as a wife and I'm gonna have to hit you with rocks until you die.

CAROLYN

Please, papa, no, you have to believe me.

KELLY

And just then—
(KELLY takes off her beard.)
It was Joseph.
(KELLY becomes JOSEPH.)
I love you Mary!

CAROLYN

I love you Joseph!

KELLY

And we'll raise this baby together! We don't need your parents! You see, they don't believe that two crazy teenagers can be in love. They don't believe in our love. Run away with me to Gallillee.

CAROLYN

I can't. I'm grounded.

PRESENT LOUIS

I was waiting in the wings, watching the nightmare unfold. From where I sat I could see the faces of the audience, and I knew what they felt: hate. And they were trying to make up their minds if this was blasphemous, or merely bad.
(KELLY becomes the father again.)

KELLY

I forbid you to leave this house!

CAROLYN

You just don't understand me, Papa! Me and Joseph are running away!

KELLY

Never! You're my daughter!
(she switches back to the narrator)
But that night God sent him a message.
(KELLY becomes GOD.)
Eric. ERIC.

PRESENT LOUIS

Jesus' grandfather's name was Eric?

KELLY
This is GOD. I need to talk to you. You're being a real jerk.

PRESENT LOUIS
And that's when I heard it.

GRANDMA JACOBS *(off-stage)*
Boo! Booooo! Boooooooooo!

PRESENT LOUIS
They were booing God. Well, my sister playing God. So what does Kelly do?
(KELLY switches to Joseph wig and escorts CAROLYN.)

KELLY *(speaking louder, over the booing)*
Come on Mary, let's check out that inn!

CAROLYN
I'm feeling sick, Joseph!

KELLY *(patting CAROLYN's belly)*
Hold on, baby! We're gonna make it!

PRESENT LOUIS
I couldn't take it any more. I had to do something to save the show. It was okay if they booed Kelly, but Carolyn?

KELLY
Help us Jesus! Help us Jesus! Help us Jesus!
(CAROLYN is in labor. More boos.)

(LOUIS enters in a donkey costume. CAROLYN and KELLY stop to look at him.)

(Long, uncomfortable pause.)

KELLY *(a whisper through clenched teeth)*
Get off the stage, it's not your turn yet.
(Pause.)

LOUIS
BRAAAAAAAAY!
(Lights change.)

PRESENT LOUIS
I saved the show.
(CAROLYN and LOUIS appear.)
Okay. Maybe not.

LOUIS

So um… you were great!
(He hugs CAROLYN.)

CAROLYN

Thanks. I thought it kinda sucked.

LOUIS

What? I mean—well, I guess a little. It woulda been better if the other people were here.

CAROLYN

Yeah.

LOUIS

And if Kelly didn't play God.

CAROLYN

Yeah.

LOUIS

And if my grandmother wasn't booing us.

CAROLYN

That was your Grandma?

LOUIS

Yeah. She's kinda evil. I mean I think the booing was actually justified, but still… we're her only grandkids. At least it's over.

CAROLYN

My Dad has this new videocamera and he taped it.

LOUIS

That's not good.

CAROLYN

I don't think I'm ever gonna watch it.

LOUIS

Yeah. No. So… um… did you talk to your parents about tonight?

CAROLYN

What about tonight?

LOUIS

We're having that cast party thing?

CAROLYN

Oh.

LOUIS

You think you can make it?

CAROLYN

Probably not.

LOUIS

Okay.

CAROLYN

Well I'll see you later. Good job.

LOUIS

Oh—um.

CAROLYN

What?

LOUIS

Never mind.
(short pause.)

CAROLYN

Okay.
(She leaves. LOUIS watches her as KELLY enters.)

KELLY

How does it feel to have ruined Christmas for everybody?

PRESENT LOUIS

But the horrible disaster of the Nativity Play could only distract my parents for so long from the other horrible disaster which was my Grandmother's present to Kelly.
(Lights up on the living room. EMILY and GEORGE pace.)

EMILY

It's not legal.

GEORGE

I really don't want to get into it.

EMILY

Why not?

GEORGE

It's what she wants.

EMILY

George, she doesn't know what she wants. She didn't even know what was in her will.

GEORGE

She told me earlier.

EMILY

She told you she was giving everything she had to Kelly?

GEORGE

Yes.

EMILY

Why didn't you say anything?

GEORGE

It didn't come up.

EMILY

What do you mean it didn't come up?

GEORGE

It just didn't, okay. I couldn't get a word in edgewise with your Mom handing out diseased cats left and right.

EMILY

How much is that land worth?

GEORGE

I don't know. A lot.

EMILY

She can't do this.

GEORGE

I don't think there's anything we can do about it.

EMILY

She's not in her right mind.

GEORGE

I know that.

EMILY
So the will isn't binding. It'll never hold up in court. We can have your Mom declared mentally incompetent.

GEORGE
I'm not doing that.

EMILY
So you think—

GEORGE
I'm not doing that, Emily.

EMILY
Why not?

GEORGE
Because it's wrong.

EMILY
It's true, it isn't wrong. Unless you haven't noticed, she didn't grow up in Poland, she wasn't in the Rockettes, and your father wasn't a cross-dresser. She doesn't even remember her life. She hardly knows who Kelly is.

GEORGE
And if she did know, she wouldn't give her the money.

EMILY
Exactly.

GEORGE
I still don't—

EMILY
What do you think Kelly is going to do with that land?

GEORGE
I don't know.

EMILY
She's irresponsible—

GEORGE
She's seventeen—

EMILY

And she's a normal seventeen year old who doesn't understand how to handle this. I wouldn't have known what to do when I was seventeen. Your mother is very sick. She doesn't remember her actions. She doesn't consider what she's doing. She has no idea why she's given the money to Kelly. I don't think it's so out of the question that we challenge this in court. What if she decided to give it all away to a homeless guy she met? What would we do then?

GEORGE

I'm not her guardian.

EMILY

Yet. You're not her guardian yet. But you probably will be.

GEORGE

I am not taking my mother to court.

EMILY

What about Louis? Shouldn't he get something? Do you think it's fair that it all goes to Kelly?

GEORGE

It's not my place to say—

EMILY

Oh grow up! You're so content to sit back and make jokes and never come to a decision about anything—

GEORGE *(overlapping)*

I came to a decision about it! I'm not challenging this!

EMILY

Because you don't want to face what your mother is!

GEORGE

I know what she is! Don't sit there and tell me I don't know what's happening to her—

EMILY

Well you won't make a decision based on—

GEORGE *(cutting her off)*

I'm not going to strip her of her dignity! Hauling her in front of some judge so I can sit there and prove to her and the world that she isn't capable of controlling her life! Her only son doing that to her? Her husband dead and her boy fighting her in some airless compartment and laying out the evidence of her dementia?! That's going to make a nice final memory for her.

EMILY
She won't remember it. And she doesn't have much need for dignity.

GEORGE
That's an ugly thing to say.

EMILY
Yeah. It is. But it's also true, isn't it?
(Lights switch.)

(Lights shift. In KELLY's room. LOUIS is reading a book. GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI knocks quietly.)

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI
May I come in?

LOUIS
Sure.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI
What's that you're reading?

LOUIS
Just a book.
(she looks at it.)

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI
Fantasy adventure? Well, what sort of fantasies are you having?

LOUIS
Um…

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI
Kelly told me about your little relationship issue.

LOUIS
I don't have a relationship issue.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI
No I remember it quite well, she said you did.

LOUIS
Well Kelly is also known around here as a gigantic liar.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

So I took it upon myself to come give you a little bit of advice.

LOUIS

That's okay, Grandma. I'm doing fine.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Nonsense. I was quite good at this at one point in time. First, you must be tender. Take her hands as if they were made of melting snow.

LOUIS

I'm not really in the taking her hands stage.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Why not?

LOUIS

I'm just not.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Don't worry about the fact that you're short, Louis. You'll grow.

LOUIS

I'm not worried—

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

When I was growing up in Poland there was a boy who had a kidney ailment and never… developed.

LOUIS

I don't think that's my problem.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

We called him Shrimpy. In Polish, though. He was a wonderful boy. Never married. Hung himself. Quite awful, really. But you're such a handsome boy. A little impish, but I think that's charming.

LOUIS

I just made an ass of myself on stage.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Oh nonsense. When was this?

LOUIS

Two hours ago? And she didn't really like my Christmas present.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

What does that have to do with anything? My husband Charles once bought me a meat grinding machine for Christmas, with an attendant package of meat. I think it was mutton. I can't be sure of that, though.

LOUIS

But didn't you pretend to like it? For his sake?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Why on earth would I pretend to like a package of meat? He was lucky he didn't get his fingers ground up in that contraption. Love, Louis, is what happens when you stop pretending to care about another person's feelings. You don't have to pretend.

LOUIS

Right, but—what?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

If she truly cared about you she wouldn't care at all about hurting your feelings and would simply tell you the truth. For instance, when Charles gave me the meat I told him that he could take that grinding machine and shove it some place quite personal. And that solved that situation.

LOUIS

I don't know.

GRANDMA SKOLOWKSI

Let's do a little role play, shall we? You be you and I'll be this girl.

LOUIS

That's kind of weird, Grandma.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Not at all. Go ahead, tell me… how you feel.

LOUIS

Okay… um… I don't know if I can do this—

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Yes you can. Talk away.

LOUIS

Okay… Carolyn.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Who's Carolyn?

LOUIS

You're Carolyn.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

What?

LOUIS

You just said that you were going to be her.

GRANDMA SKOLOWKSI

Right.

LOUIS

Her name is Carolyn.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I thought her name was Phyllis.

LOUIS

No.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Phyllis is a lovely name. I knew a girl named Phyllis growing up. Had only one leg. A cow ate the other one.

LOUIS

A cow?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Oh yes. It just ran out of a field and grabbed her by the leg, tore it clean off. We were all shouting, "oh no! It's that cow again! Someone kill it!" But then it ran off. It was grotesque.

LOUIS

Wow. I didn't know cows were that dangerous.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

If provoked. What were we doing again?

LOUIS

We're role playing. I'm going to be me and you're going to be Carolyn.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Right. Carolyn. I'm sorry, continue please. Oh, wait. We need something for the present you're going to give me.

LOUIS

Oh… um…

(LOUIS grabs a stuffed animal.)

Is this okay?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Excellent. Tell me how you feel.

LOUIS

Carolyn. I've known you for a long time.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

And I you.

LOUIS

And… there are some things I've always wanted to say to you.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Such as?

LOUIS

I really like you.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

You're just saying that. You don't like me.

LOUIS

No no I really do like you—

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

If you liked me you'd talk to me but you never do, do you?

LOUIS

I talk to you.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Not often. You're always over there fidgeting in the corner.

LOUIS

Because I'm nervous.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Whatever for? I'm not going to bite you I don't even have real teeth any more.

LOUIS

Well I'm nervous you're not going to like me—

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I don't like you when you stand in the corner. Why would I like you then? Oh look at that boy standing over there playing with himself he seems like a jolly chap, I suppose I'll pine after him. No I'm sorry I have other things to do with my time. I enjoy the company of young men who are dashing and confident and you don't seem to have either of those qualities. Why don't you take me dancing?

LOUIS

I don't dance.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

You don't dance? Well that's a lovely characteristic, isn't it? Well now I'm really going to love the small boy who doesn't dance, doesn't talk and can't seem to find the courage to talk to me even though he's known me for quite some time. Quite the gentleman you make.

LOUIS

That's not fair!

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

You know what's not fair? Having babies! If I'm going to be having your babies I want to dance first. I also want flowers. Do you have flowers?

LOUIS

Here.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

What's this?

LOUIS

It's a glowing unicorn.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

It's a what?

LOUIS

It's a symbol of my love.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

As a glowing unicorn?

LOUIS

It changes colors.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Well I think that's the most idiotic thing I've ever heard. What am I supposed to do with it? Look at it?

LOUIS

Yeah?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

But it's not even real. It's imaginary. There are no unicorns.

LOUIS

But that's why—

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

So you give me something that doesn't even exist? How absurd.

LOUIS

Can we stop?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I wasn't aware we had started something.

LOUIS

No I mean stop role-playing?

GRANDMA SKOLOWKSI

I don't know what you're talking about. All I know is that a boy who can't talk to me has given me a statue of something that doesn't exist. And he can't even tell me why he likes me.

LOUIS

I like you because…

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Because I don't really like myself.

LOUIS

I'm sorry? What?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

You haven't talked to many girls in your life, have you Louis?

LOUIS

Um… I like you because….

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Yes? Am I pretty?

LOUIS

You're very pretty.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

So what?

LOUIS

And besides that you're… nice and funny, I mean not really all that funny but you're kinda funny, but more than that you're fun. And I mean fun like you've got this energy, you know? Like everything in the world is exciting to you. Like walking home from school and you are practically dancing in the street and I want to be something that makes you excited too. I want to be a part of that world. I want to love everything like you do.

(pause.)

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

See now that's a reason Louis. If you tell her something like that, it won't matter that you're petite.

LOUIS

I prefer the term short.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Do you understand what I'm saying? She needs to hear something like that.

(Pause.)

LOUIS

Can I ask you a question, Grandma?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I don't think I can stop you.

LOUIS

Why do you have a British accent?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

It's more fun this way. Can I tell you a true story while I have a moment of clarity? I'm aware that I'm a bit daffy.

LOUIS

You? No.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

It's true. And I don't think my stories necessarily happened. Occasionally I do, but I mostly I know… I'm having difficulty speaking what I mean. The words don't work so well any more. I'm trying, Louis.

LOUIS

It's okay.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

You see I've forgotten most of my life. It's… everywhere inside me. I remember… pieces of things that don't really make sense… and instead of fumbling, which is what I'm doing now because… I want to get at it right—I mean truth—and that makes it hard—the lies come easier—rather than fumbling… invention is easier.

LOUIS

Right.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I like to watch… Masterpiece Theatre on television. Only thing I watch. And I used to play this game… where I would sound like them. Everything seemed more chipper that way. So I did… and I learned it… and then I played the game more and more. And I'm afraid I've forgotten who I was supposed to be. So.

LOUIS

It's okay.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I don't remember you, I don't remember when you were born, I don't know anything about you… When I think about it… when the clouds part long enough… I suppose I should be very sad. All those… disappearances from my life.

(Pause. LOUIS hugs her.)

LOUIS

It's nice to meet you.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

It is, isn't it?

(Lights change.)

PRESENT LOUIS

There was a time growing up when my Grandmother was a very vibrant woman. I remember playing in the park with her, and sliding around on the monkey bars, and she would always be right there with me. And I guess I took that for granted. Well, as a kid, how can you not take things for granted? But then, when I thirteen, I remember sitting in Kelly's room and talking to her, and she was a different person. And I loved this new person, she still had that same energy, that same sparkle of life in her eye. But every so often I'd see it waver, as if the shield dropped for a moment, and I'd catch a glimpse of a black fear. Beneath that glow, and beneath all those inventions of Poland and Masterpiece Theater, there was a profoundly terrified woman. Which made what happened next all the more awful.

(Lights shift. GEORGE is setting the table. GRANDMA JACOBS enters.)

GRANDMA JACOBS
All right I am starving! Where's the turkey?

EMILY *(off)*
We're having chicken!
(GEORGE stands awkwardly during this next conversation.)

GRANDMA JACOBS *(shouting off-stage)*
WHAT?

EMILY *(off)*
We're having chicken!

GRANDMA JACOBS
WHY ARE WE HAVING SOUP?!

EMILY *(off)*
No. CHICKEN.

GRANDMA JACOBS
IT'S CHRISTMAS!

EMILY *(off)*
I KNOW IT'S CHRISTMAS!

GRANDMA JACOBS
THERE SHOULDN'T BE SOUP ON CHRISTMAS!

EMILY *(off, screaming)*
IT'S NOT SOUP IT'S CHICKEN!!!
(she enters)
Mom! Listen! We're having chicken! Deal with it!
(she stomps off. Pause. GEORGE looks at GRANDMA JACOBS.)

GEORGE
I'm gonna go in the garage.

GRANDMA JACOBS
For what?

GEORGE
I forgot things.
(He leaves. LOUIS enters.)

LOUIS

Hey.

GRANDMA JACOBS

How are ya? How's Schmoopy?

LOUIS

He's um… good.

GRANDMA JACOBS

Yeah? Where is he?

LOUIS

Last I saw him he was in my room. But he bumped in the wall.

GRANDMA JACOBS

Yeah… no depth perception. Happens when you've only got one eye.

LOUIS

Yeah. How old is Schmoopy?

GRANDMA JACOBS

No idea. I just found him. He's a great cat, though. You're really going to love him before he dies.

LOUIS

Yeah.

GRANDMA JACOBS

Sit down Louis let me explain this to you.

LOUIS

Okay.

GRANDMA JACOBS

When I was about your age we had a dog named Sweetie Pie. He was just this big dumb mutt, but I grew up with him and I loved him. Well, one day Sweetie Pie ran into the street—

(EMILY enters with more dishes for the table.)

EMILY

Are you telling him about that dog?

GRANDMA JACOBS

What's wrong with telling him about the dog?

EMILY

It's sick, Mom. This is Christmas.

GRANDMA JACOBS

He needs to learn about life!

LOUIS

Did Sweetie Pie get hit by a car?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Can I tell you the story? Don't you wreck it.

EMILY

Fine, tell the stupid story. I'm not listening to it again though.

GRANDMA JACOBS

You need to hear it again!

(EMILY leaves.)

So Sweetie Pie runs into the street. And I'm sitting on our front porch and I say, Sweetie Pie, no, don't run into the street! Course we never had him trained properly. He used to jump up on the kitchen table when we were having dinner. He'd go whoop up on a chair and then bam right onto the table, my father had fits, he wanted the dog dead. So, anyway, he's not trained, he doesn't listen, he's out in the middle of the road—and then I see it—there's a dead dog in the road!

LOUIS

There's a dead dog in the road?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Yeah. So Sweetie Pie runs over to the dead dog, and he starts chewing on the corpse.

EMILY *(off)*

Oh my God Mom! Christmas!

GRANDMA JACOBS

And he's out there gnawing on this other dead dog's leg.

LOUIS

Sweetie Pie was a cannibal?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Most dogs are cannibals if you give `em the chance. So I'm screaming, no, Sweetie Pie don't eat that dog's leg! And bam a truck runs him over! Sweetie Pie is dead.

LOUIS

Wow.

GRANDMA JACOBS

Yeah. I've been trying to make sense of that story my whole life. Basically I think it comes down to this: Don't laugh at the misfortunes of others, because the truck might be right behind ya.

(EMILY returns with more dishes and a basket of biscuits.)

EMILY

Are you done?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Almost. So don't laugh at Schmoopy cause he's only got one eye and leukemia.

LOUIS

Because pretty soon I might only have one eye and leukemia?

GRANDMA JACOBS

Right.

(GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI and KELLY enter.)

End of Excerpt.
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