

THE GODDAMN COUPLE DOWN THE HALL (OH...AND MERRY
CHRISTMAS)

By

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A Pasadena condo. It's mid-century modern. From the cherry wood, kidney-shaped coffee table to the Eames lounge chair and matching Ottoman, it's clear that whoever lives here has some serious chops, taste-wise.

A bamboo brown etagere bookcase and an L-shaped writing desk, with a chair tucked under it, sit stage left. Room has been made for a small Christmas tree – maybe four feet high. A solitary string of lights wrap around the tree, which displays a few lonely ornaments. To say the least, it feels...minimalist. The door to the condo is also stage left. Upstage, a swinging set of doors leads to an unseen kitchen. Moving downstage center, the coffee table sits in front of a mid-century, sectional couch. The couch is flanked on one side by the lounge chair and on the other by a brown armchair with a wooden frame.

Stage right, we find a wood and marble TV console that doesn't actually have a TV on top of it. Instead, a couple of flower vases and a row of books occupy that space. Above the console, a window looks out on the street. A Queens Gambit mid-century style wall clock and other decorative touches tell us that nothing in this place has been left to chance.

The lights come up on DANA WOODRUFF who is on her hands and knees examining one of the couch's velvet pillows. DANA is in her early thirties and looking good. This is the world she always pictured for herself. Still, there's the matter of this pillow.

DANA: What is...? (*Sniffs the pillow*) Oh myyy goddd! (*Yells to the kitchen, undone*) Chad! Chad!!

CHAD'S VOICE: Basting, angelheart!

DANA: Now!!

CHAD BELLOWS, *in an apron, dutifully emerges through the swinging doors. Dana's fiancé, he's also in his thirties. A touch pompous, he's as fond of their lifestyle as she is. His apron wryly proclaims "I have no idea what I'm doing." He tries very hard to stay on DANA'S good side.*

CHAD: At your service, madam.

DANA: (*Shoving the cushion at him*) Look at this. You see what I see?

He peers at the pillow, then looks up at her.

CHAD: Apart from the hand-sewn daisies and the exquisite stenciling?

DANA: Hair oils.

CHAD: What?

DANA: There's hair oils all over this pillow. I swear I'm gonna puke!

CHAD: Gotta be honest, bug. I don't see any evidence of hair oils.

DANA: They're there, Chad. Obviously from when my sister's whatever he is, that Lance person, came over.

CHAD: In his defense, Lance probably situated his head on it as a means to afford himself a little more comfort.

DANA: It's a *decorative* pillow. It's not meant to be comfortable. *No* decorative pillow is meant to be comfortable.

Beat.

CHAD: I'll get the back-up pillow.

DANA: Thank you.

CHAD *suspects this isn't just about hair oils.*

CHAD: Don't trouble yourself about the money. It's their oldest daughter's wedding. You can't put a price on that.

DANA: I told them fifty thousand. Now it's almost a hundred.

CHAD: You're their light. The daughter who's done everything right. Including, if I may, getting engaged to yours truly. *(He gives her a peck on the cheek.)* It's Christmas. Let's enjoy our blessings.

And across the hallway, we hear loud voices coming from another condo –

LUCINDA: You're an asshole!

KENNY: Well, you're a bitch! That's a great Christmas present!

LUCINDA: It's a bag of oranges!

KENNY: From Florida! They're Florida oranges!

LUCINDA: This is it? This is the only present you're giving me?!

KENNY: Most girls would love Florida oranges!

LUCINDA: You are a fucking idiot! This is the worst fucking gift ever!

KENNY: Maybe if you tasted one of them first, you'd shut up for a change!

LUCINDA: I don't have to taste it! It's a fuckin' orange. I know what an orange tastes like!

And as quickly as the voices arose, they have now subsided.

CHAD: *(Sighs)* On Christmas morning. Nice.

DANA: Why should it be different than any other morning.

There's a knock at the door. DANA crosses to the front door and opens it to her parents, JERRY and MAUREEN WOODRUFF. JERRY is carrying Christmas presents. Both in their early 60's, he's puckish and a little more laid back than his wife. She's hands-on all the way. As DANA and her mom exchange a hug --

MAUREEN: That wasn't us, sweetie.

DANA: The neighbors have a few issues.

JERRY: I wouldn't mind a bag of Florida oranges.

MAUREEN: Good. Now I know what to get you next year.

JERRY: It's better than those damn pears Harry and David send you. They're hard as a rock. I broke a tooth on one a few years back. Wrote a letter of complaint. They told me to take a hike. *(Beat)* God, I hope they're both dead.

CHAD: Me too, Jerry. *(Re: coats)* Let me take those.

MAUREEN and JERRY *hand him their coats. As he heads towards the swinging doors --*

DANA: *(Reminding him)* Pillow.

CHAD: Top of mind, pumpkin.

MAUREEN: You need to report those maniacs to your condo association.

DANA: We have, Mom. They could stage cock fights in the lobby -- as long as they're paying their dues, nobody does anything. It's ridiculous.

MAUREEN: They sound like they're ready to kill each other.

DANA: We can only hope.

CHAD *emerges from the kitchen with a replacement pillow. As he trades it out for the offending pillow --*

JERRY: *(Amused)* You have back-up pillows?

CHAD: There was some schmutz on this one.

JERRY: I don't see any schmutz.

MAUREEN: It's their condo, honey. They can change pillows all day long if they want. By the way, the place looks great. Who doesn't love mid-century modern.

JERRY: No argument there. Although you know what would look good on that console? A twenty-first century TV.

CHAD: Your daughter and I prefer reading and conversation.

JERRY: *(Nods)* Every couple goes through that stage. It'll pass.

DANA: If we really want to watch something, we have our computers.

JERRY: Watching Jason Bourne on a laptop? That's a huge slap in the face to Matt Damon.

MAUREEN: We're not watching a Jason Bourne movie today if that's what you're getting at.

JERRY: It's a Christmas tradition!

MAUREEN: No, it's a Jerry tradition.

CHAD: Speaking of traditions, if I may...

DANA: Not now, Chad, they just got here.

CHAD: I was going to ask who wanted mulled cider.

MAUREEN: What'd you think he was talking about?

DANA: Nothing.

JERRY: Great. I'll have some of that cider.

CHAD: Coming right up.

CHAD *disappears through the swinging doors on his mulled cider mission.*

MAUREEN: Whatever it is, you're obviously going to bring it up at some point. Just tell us already.

JERRY: They don't want to. *(Calling to CHAD)* Can you put two cinnamon sticks in mine? *(Then to his daughter)* Things are loaded with anti-oxidants. Probably help me live to a hundred and ten.

MAUREEN: *(To DANA)* I think you're being silly. C'mon, out with it.

JERRY: Leave it alone, Maureen.

MAUREEN: Just because you never like to talk about uncomfortable things doesn't mean I can't.

JERRY: We don't know that it's uncomfortable. Might be very comfortable.

MAUREEN: If it were comfortable, it wouldn't be an issue for them, would it?

JERRY: (*Calling out to CHAD*) Make it one stick. I changed my mind. I don't want to live to a hundred and ten.

CHAD: (*Reappearing with a tray of mugs*) Too late, Jerry. (*Handing out the mugs*) Here we go, cheers everyone.

MAUREEN: If you don't want to tell us, then so be it. I just thought we were a family that didn't have secrets.

JERRY: Oh please. This family has nothing but secrets. Lucky for us, they're hidden under a huge pile of grudges and lies.

CHAD: We were talking about the cost of the wedding.

DANA: Chad!

CHAD: Your mom's right. Might as well discuss it now. Before your sister gets here and has a field day with it.

JERRY: We agreed on fifty grand.

DANA: Turns out it's gonna be a little more than that.

JERRY: How much more? Because, as you know, your mom and I are officially retirees.

And once again, from across the hallway --

LUCINDA: You're a motherfucker!

KENNY: It's the Lakers and the Celtics! It's the greatest rivalry in basketball!

LUCINDA: You are helping me cook this fucking meal!

KENNY: Fuck you!

LUCINDA: If you don't help me, you will not get a single fuckin' bite!

KENNY: I don't give a fuck! I'll eat the Florida oranges!

LUCINDA: Stop calling them that! They're just oranges! Doesn't matter where the fuck they're from!

KENNY: You don't know shit! They're so much better than California oranges, it's not funny!

LUCINDA: Fuck you and your fuckin' oranges. Are you gonna help or not?!

KENNY: When the fuckin' game is fuckin' over!

LUCINDA: I'm gonna eat that whole fuckin' meal by myself, Kenny. Right in front of your fuckin' face!

KENNY: There's no way you can eat a whole fuckin' turkey!

LUCINDA: Watch me!

KENNY: Oh, I will. And I hope you fuckin' choke on it! And by the way, those oranges are a great fuckin' present!

*The group stands in stunned silence for a moment, bracing for more venom.
Finally --*

JERRY: I don't know about the oranges but he's not wrong about the Lakers and the Celtics – it is the greatest rivalry in basketball. FYI – they're playing today.

MAUREEN: Great. You can read about the game in tomorrow's paper. *(Then)* Have you tried talking to these people?

DANA: Kenny and Lucinda. Chad's gone over a couple of times.

CHAD: They always apologize and say it won't happen again. And then it does.

MAUREEN: What do the other neighbors say?

DANA: There's only two other condos on the floor. One's for sale and the other one, the guy's got a girlfriend in Phoenix or somewhere, so he's hardly ever there.

CHAD: Sadly, it's just us who bear the brunt of their mutual and unrelenting hatred.

JERRY: So? The new figure? For the wedding?

MAUREEN: Whatever it is, we can afford it. Your father was a lawyer.

JERRY: Yes, but not a very successful one.

MAUREEN: How much is it, sweetie?

DANA: A hundred thousand dollars.

JERRY: What?? That's twice as much!

MAUREEN: No problem. We'll make it work.

JERRY: Can we at least negotiate?

MAUREEN: If these two kids say they need that amount, that's the amount we're gonna give them. Try to be a little more supportive.

DANA: Thanks Mom.

CHAD: Really appreciate it, Jerry.

JERRY: I haven't actually said yes.

MAUREEN *fixes him with a stare.*

JERRY: Fine. But that's it. That's all you're getting.

There's a knock at the front door.

DANA: *(Calls out)* Coming.

DANA *crosses to the door and opens it to her sister SYDNEY and her boyfriend, LANCE. Both of whom are in their late 20's, and who are currently making out. SYDNEY is determined to not be like her older sister. The rebel in her is one of the reasons she's dating LANCE, who is not exceedingly sharp. DANA makes a sound to alert them to her presence. No luck. Finally --*

DANA: Okay guys, show's over.

They finally stop making out.

SYDNEY: We'll pick this up in their bathroom later, babe.

DANA: And to all...a good night.

She goes to shut the door but LANCE is already halfway in.

LANCE: I will do my utmost to respect your bathroom, Dana. *(He starts dragging in a big box.)* Hey everyone.

MAUREEN: *(Through gritted teeth)* Lance. I didn't know you were joining us.

LANCE: Last minute. My mom got a DUI last night. She's drying out in county so we're postponing Christmas dinner 'til she makes bail.

JERRY: I'm sorry about that.

LANCE: Don't be. That DUI was a godsend. Woman's a terrible cook. Hell, we pray *after* we eat. Ha!

MAUREEN: *(Half-hearted)* Ha.

CHAD *eyes the box nervously.*

CHAD: What do you got there?

LANCE: Your guys' Christmas present.

As LANCE drags the box over to the Christmas tree --

DANA: Could you maybe not drag that across the floor. It's Brazilian teakwood.

LANCE: Gotcha. (*Picking it up*) Don't wanna piss off any Brazilians, right?

DANA: It scratches easily, that's all.

SYDNEY: We'll just stand on the rug all day. Will that make you happy?

DANA: I'm not going to apologize for trying to preserve my home.

SYDNEY: Don't be so modest. You can call it a museum.

DANA: I'm an interior designer. People pay me for my taste. In the same way they pay you to make them a decent latte.

LANCE: It's true. She makes excellent lattes.

SYDNEY: Wasn't a compliment, babe.

JERRY: Girls, it's Christmas. How about a truce?

MAUREEN: Your dad's right. Can we all just please get along?

SYDNEY: Fine by me.

DANA: As long as they don't get it on in our bathroom, I will be the perfect hostess.

LANCE *examines the tree.*

LANCE: Is this your Christmas tree?

CHAD: It is.

LANCE: Huh.

DANA: What?

LANCE: Just seems kind of skimpy. Decoration-wise.

CHAD: We didn't want it to feel too gaudy.

LANCE: There's like five ornaments and a couple of lights. It looks like something you find in a dumpster *after* Christmas. No offense...

CHAD: Not everything has to look like the tree at Rockefeller Center.

Then, from across the hallway --

KENNY: That bird is coming out!

LUCINDA: Don't you fuckin' dare, fuckface!

KENNY: You wanted me to help – I'm helping!

LUCINDA: Don't touch that oven!

KENNY: Your turkey is always dry as shit! It needs to come out now!

LUCINDA: It'll be underdone!

KENNY: It's never underdone. It's always overdone!!

LUCINDA: Then put some gravy on it, you big fuckin' baby!

KENNY: Gravy doesn't help! You put gravy on a car tire, you're still eating a car tire!!

LUCINDA: Nobody else says it's dry!

KENNY: Because it's so dry they can't get the words out! Your turkey is so dry, it's what they use to feed other turkeys!

LUCINDA: Go ahead asshole! Take it out! Get e coli for all I care!!

The argument, at least the loud part of the argument, is over. A beat of silence for the family. Then --

LANCE: Wow. Pretty intense.

JERRY: Although somewhat inaccurate. You don't get e coli from eating underdone turkey.

LANCE: You don't?

JERRY: Naah. Salmonella. Symptoms are similar. Nausea, cramps, diarrhea. Even death.

MAUREEN: Jerry, can we not be so...vivid? It's Christmas.

JERRY: Sorry, the Lakers and the Celtics aren't on so it's hard for me to tell.

CHAD: We have mulled cider. If my fellow merrymakers would like to partake.

SYDNEY: Count me in.

ANCE: Me too. Let me give you a hand, Chadbo.

CHAD: *(Through gritted teeth)* You can just call me Chad.

LANCE: How 'bout Hangin' Chad? You ever heard that one?

CHAD: I have actually.

LANCE: I like that one a lot. Hannginn' Chaaad!

They disappear through the swinging doors.

SYDNEY: Anyway, how goes the coronation?

DANA: It's a wedding.

SYDNEY: There's a difference?

JERRY: Yeah. They spend less on coronations.

SYDNEY: What a surprise. Daddy's little girl is breaking the bank. How much are you guys shelling out for this thing?

MAUREEN: We don't know yet. But whatever we spend on your sister's wedding, we'll spend on yours. You won't get a penny less.

JERRY: A hundred thousand dollars.

MAUREEN: (*Annoyed*) Really?

JERRY: This family doesn't have secrets, remember?

SYDNEY: Relax Mom. It's not like I wasn't gonna find out eventually.

LANCE and CHAD enter from the kitchen. As LANCE hands SYDNEY a mulled cider --

LANCE: What are you guys talking about?

SYDNEY: Weddings.

MAUREEN: I was just telling Sydney that when the time comes, we'll give her the same amount as her sister.

SYDNEY: (*A beat*) It's come.

DANA: What?

SYDNEY: It's come. The time has come. Lance and I are getting married.

DANA: Very funny.

SYDNEY: It's true. Right sweetie?

LANCE: We talked about it. I didn't know it was, like, official official. But sure, Vegas, ready or not, here we come.

DANA: Cut the crap. You're not getting married.

SYDNEY: Am too. This Saturday as a matter of fact.

DANA: Really. Where's the ring?

A beat.

SYDNEY: Gonna pick one up in Vegas.

LANCE: That's a great idea. I bet Costco's got some awesome deals.

MAUREEN: Costco??

JERRY: Don't be a snob, Maureen. People who shop at Costco can fall in love.

There's a knock at the door.

DANA: (To CHAD) We expecting anyone?

CHAD: No. Santa's already been here.

DANA: Please don't talk about Santa like he's real. It's annoying.

CHAD: Maybe he's not real but he can still be in our hearts.

DANA: Just answer the door, Chad.

CHAD: As you wish.

He opens the door to LUCINDA, 30's. She's beautiful and knows it. She flirts as easily as she breathes. CHAD is a little smitten.

LUCINDA: Hey guys. I brought you some Christmas cookies.

CHAD: That's very sweet, Lucinda. Come on in. Say hi to everyone. *(To group)* Everyone, it's our neighbor, Lucinda. She comes bearing Christmas cookies.

LUCINDA: I hope we didn't disturb you just now. Sometimes our love-making gets a little loud.

DANA: Eww.

CHAD: Honestly, we didn't hear anything or anyone making... the love.

LUCINDA: *(To DANA)* Is this little rascal telling the truth?

DANA: *(Reluctantly)* You bet.

LUCINDA: Alright, if you say so. This your family?

CHAD: Sorry. How rude of me. Dana's mom, Maureen, and her dad, Jerry. Her sister Sydney and her boyfriend, Lance.

SYDNEY: Fiancé Lance.

DANA: (*Under her breath*) Ucchh.

LUCINDA: Anyhow, if you didn't hear us, great. If you did, thanks for being so cool about it. I should go. That turkey's not gonna baste itself.

CHAD: (*Over the top*) Hahaha!

DANA: Down doggie.

LUCINDA *leaves*.

SYDNEY: I think Chad's got a girlfriend.

LANCE: Who?

SYDNEY: Never mind, babe.

MAUREEN: I think you let her off too easy. I think you should have given her what for.

JERRY: They did just fine.

MAUREEN: They were not having sex, Jerry.

JERRY: Well obviously. Still, they saved her being humiliated. Now Lucinda and what's his face will be quiet for the rest of the day.

SYDNEY: I'm waiting for everyone to congratulate us on our wedding.

JERRY: I'm sorry. Of course. (*Moves in for a hug*) Congratulations, sweetie. And you too, sir.

LANCE: Thanks Jerry.

SYDNEY: (*Reaches out for a hug*) Mom?

MAUREEN: You're serious? You're getting married?

SYDNEY: As of this Saturday, I will officially be Mrs. Lance Dombrowski.

LANCE: Holy shit turds, you're taking my last name? I didn't know you were gonna do that.

DANA: You didn't know she was gonna do any of this!

MAUREEN: It does seem...very sudden.

DANA: How long have you two even known each other?

LANCE: One month to the day. Long enough to say I feel real good about this one.

MAUREEN: *This* one? You've been married before?

LANCE: Three times. Which I know ain't the greatest track record. But this'll be my first wedding in Vegas. Which somehow makes it legit, ya know?

JERRY: Vegas is a great town.

MAUREEN: What is the matter with you?

JERRY: You told me to be more supportive.

SYDNEY: Thanks Dad.

LANCE: Appreciate the love, Jerry.

CHAD: Here Dana and I have been planning our wedding for almost a year and you guys are taking care of business. Just like that. No muss, no fuss. Makes me a little jealous. Does it make you jealous, bug?

DANA: (*Flat*) No, it does not.

CHAD: (*Realizing he overstepped.*) And nor should it. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have some onions to blanche.

DANA: You are staying right here.

CHAD: Absolutely.

LANCE: Maureen, if it makes you feel any better, I don't really count the other three marriages.

MAUREEN: But you were, nevertheless, married. You've had three wives.

LANCE: Sure. On paper. But there were extenuating circumstances.

SYDNEY: The first girl, he knocked her up in high school. That shouldn't count.

LANCE: I was basically cornered. Had to marry her. That was a pretty sucky senior year. Living in her parents' basement. Screaming kid. No TV.

JERRY: Been there.

LANCE: Really? You had a bastard child?

JERRY: No, I was referring to the TV situation.

LANCE: Anyway, her parents finally threw me out. So then I went back home to get my life together. My mom's a drunk but she's pretty strict. She made me get my GED and go to church every Sunday.

JERRY: Sounds promising.

LANCE: (*Nods*) I was on an excellent path. Until...

MAUREEN: Lemme guess. You knocked up a girl at the church?

LANCE: (*Nods*) The minister's daughter. On the down side, there was a lot of talk about God. On the plus side, they had a much nicer basement.

JERRY: (*Singing the line from Evita*) Another suitcase in another hall.

DANA: And lucky wife number three? You knock her up as well?

LANCE: Naah. That was just awesome sex. Talk about a wildcat. But that faded after a year. So...here I am. Free as a bird.

MAUREEN: Except for the two children that you fathered.

LANCE: Boy Andy and girl Andy. I've always loved that name.

And once again from across the hall --

LUCINDA: You haven't even tried it!

KENNY: Why bother?? It's gonna taste like my wallet!

LUCINDA: Where the fuck do you think you're going??

KENNY: KFC!

LUCINDA: You are not going to a fucking KFC!!

KENNY: I've gotta eat some kind of bird today. One I won't choke on!

LUCINDA: Do not go out that door, Kenny fuck-face!

KENNY: Oh, I'm going out the door. And when I come back I'm gonna eat a sixteen piece bucket of KFC and all my Florida oranges right in front of you! What do you think about that??

LUCINDA: I swear, you take one more step and I will fuckin' end you!

KENNY: Fuck you! I will end you!

LUCINDA: Oh big talking man! C'mon! Come at me!

KENNY: Augghhhh! I can't believe you did that! You bitch! You are dead!

And then an eerie silence. They all look at each other uneasily.

SYDNEY: Wow.

DANA: Yeah.

MAUREEN: That didn't sound good.

JERRY: It did not.

CHAD: Sounded really bad.

LANCE: Man, that is some angry lovemaking.

And the lights go down...

Scene Two

Fifteen minutes later. JERRY, MAUREEN and SYDNEY are sitting around the coffee table, drinking their mulled cider. LANCE is adding a long string of lights to the Christmas tree.

JERRY: When your mom and I lived in Santa Monica, the neighbor lady fed hundreds of pigeons at 6:00 o'clock every morning. All cooing at once. It was hell. I went to talk to her. Sweet old bird. I said maybe you could feed the pigeons at 8:00 o'clock? She told me to go fuck myself. *(Beat)* God, I hope she's dead.

MAUREEN: What's your point, dear?

JERRY: We shouldn't have neighbors. Human beings aren't built for it.

SYDNEY: Society developed that way for a reason, dad.

JERRY: Yeah, back when we had to worry about sabre-toothed tigers eating everyone in the village.

LANCE: Where I grew up, one of my neighbors, Freddie Wheeler, hanged himself.

A beat as MAUREEN stares at him.

MAUREEN: What does that have to do with neighbors being good or bad?

LANCE: Just that the good neighbors tend to hang themselves, Maureen. Freddie used to give out excellent candy at Halloween. Then he was gone. And the people who moved in after – they gave us raisins and dental floss.

SYDNEY: I'm sorry, babe. That sucks.

LANCE: They heard some kid complaining and the next year they gave out Mary Janes. The taffy candy? Tasted like peanut butter that fell out of a hobo's ass.

MAUREEN: *(Can't believe this guy)* Ohhh...

She downs half her drink, which JERRY catches.

JERRY: *(Sotto)* I think someone needs to slow down.

MAUREEN: (*Sotto*) This is slow. Seriously, you need to tell our daughter to stop this nonsense.

JERRY: She hasn't listened to either of us since she was five. She's not gonna start now.

DANA *enters from the kitchen with a cheese tray. She sees LANCE threading the lights through the tree.*

DANA: What are you doing?

LANCE: Brightening up the tree.

SYDNEY: Lance thought it would be a nice surprise.

DANA: Where did you get those lights?

LANCE: Out front.

DANA: (*Appalled*) You took these off the tree in front of the complex?

LANCE: I figured nobody would miss 'em. They've got a crapload of lights on that thing.

DANA: They're meant for the enjoyment of everyone who lives here.

LANCE: I'll return them eventually. Same with the wreaths.

He nods to a big pile of wreaths on the TV console.

DANA: These were on our neighbors' doors!

SYDNEY: Lance felt your place needed a little holiday sparkle. So just chill already.

CHAD *bursts through the front door.*

CHAD: His truck is still here. So we know he hasn't left.

JERRY: Makes sense. I'm sure there's some mopping up to do.

MAUREEN: Or maybe they've made up. Couples do that, ya know. Argue and then make up.

CHAD: Dana and I never argue. We're above that, aren't we, Dana doodle?

DANA: Yup.

SYDNEY: (*Sotto, to her dad*) I swear, I'm gonna vomit in a Christmas stocking.

JERRY: Save some room.

MAUREEN: These neighbors are always going at each other. It's never led to murder before.

JERRY: Well, maybe he wanted the last word for a change.

MAUREEN: Then you say your piece and storm out. You don't kill the person.

JERRY: He called her a bitch and said he would end her. We haven't heard a peep since. The woman is dead, Maureen.

SYDNEY: Hey, couples kill each other for less than being served really dry turkey. Some guy in Chicago killed his girlfriend because she wouldn't buy him Avril Lavigne tickets.

DANA: That's an urban myth.

SYDNEY: No, it's not. I heard it from a friend.

DANA: Everyone always hears it from a friend. That's what makes it an urban myth!

SYDNEY: It happened. So there. Fuck you.

JERRY: And the day's first F-bomb. (*Offers a mock toast*) Cheers everyone.

CHAD: Just after he screamed, he said I can't believe you did that. I wonder what *that* was.

MAUREEN: Could be anything. Maybe she threw a Florida orange at him. Or tossed the remote out the window.

JERRY: (*Beat*) That would make me scream.

LANCE: Me too. (*To Sydney*) Promise when we're married you won't ever throw the remote out the window.

SYDNEY: I can't promise that.

LANCE: Wow. You think you know someone.

DANA: That's the whole point. You've been going out for a month. You don't know her!

SYDNEY: (*To LANCE*) That's just my sister watching her hundred grand leave the building. Don't sweat it.

DANA: You're not getting the hundred grand.

SYDNEY: Unless you get married between now and Friday, we are too. (*Sweetly*) Right, daddy?

JERRY: It's insane but that's the number we settled on.

LANCE: Far be it for me to get involved in the family financials, but why not give each of your daughters a hundred grand?

MAUREEN: Because we're not made of money, Lance. Their dad and I would have nothing to live on for the rest of the year.

JERRY: We don't want to draw down from our capital. A lot of folks make that mistake. Blow through their savings at the start of their retirement.

LANCE: (*Nods gravely*) Ever thought about declaring bankruptcy? Might help you get back on your feet.

MAUREEN: We live on a budget. We're not bankrupt.

LANCE: You don't have to be ashamed.

MAUREEN: We're not ashamed!

JERRY: I'm a little ashamed. I was a lawyer for forty years. I should've had a bigger nest egg.

MAUREEN: We are very comfortable, Jerry.

LANCE: I had some credit card issues a few years ago. Visa, MasterCard, Discover, they were all hounding the crap out of me. Then I declared bankruptcy and now I'm riding high. *(Takes a sip)* Cheers! Cowabunga, baby!

CHAD: *(To DANA)* What's he doing to our tree?

DANA: Who the fuck knows.

As JERRY helps himself to the cheese and crackers, a thought occurs.

JERRY: You could invite them over.

SYDNEY: What?

JERRY: Invite Kenny and Lucinda over for a drink. Offer them some of Chad's delicious mulled cider. That's a neighborly thing to do.

CHAD: I like that. That way, if Lucinda comes over, we'll know she's alive.

JERRY: Exactly.

DANA: Seems kind of out of the blue. We've never had them over before.

JERRY: She brought you Christmas cookies. You're just returning the hospitality.

SYDNEY: What if this Kenny guy says no?

CHAD: We'd still get to see their place. See if there's any signs of foul play.

JERRY: Chad's right. Maybe there's blood or some brain matter he overlooked. You think cleaning up after a Christmas dinner is hard, it's got nothing on a crime scene.

MAUREEN: What makes you such an expert?

JERRY: *(Enjoying this)* I've done some research, Maureen.

MAUREEN: (*Enjoying this as well*) If you're thinking about killing me, you'd never get away with it.

JERRY: Don't be so sure. Forty percent of murders go unsolved.

SYDNEY: Dad!

DANA: Yeah, guys. Don't even kid.

JERRY: Don't worry. I'm not gonna murder your mother.

LANCE: (*Impressed*) Damn, you two. (*Sincere, to SYDNEY*) I think we should have a no murder pact.

DANA: You're marrying my sister. You'll need one.

SYDNEY: I'm gonna be a newlywed. Why can't you just be happy for me?

DANA: Because I'm not an idiot!

JERRY: Girls! Both of you! Knock it off!

And both daughters sink into reluctant silence.

JERRY: Thank you. Now let's get back to the task at hand.

CHAD: (*To DANA*) Whaddya say? Should we go over and extend the invite?

DANA: Definitely. Then when Lucinda answers the door, we can stop all this gruesome murder talk and concentrate on what's important. Namely, the wedding. (*To SYDNEY*) My wedding. The real wedding. Not your...money grab.

SYDNEY: Not a money grab.

DANA: Ha!

And she and CHAD head out through the front door.

SYDNEY: (*Calling after them*) It's love, bitch!

JERRY: Ladies and gentlemen of the jury -- our charming daughters.

SYDNEY: I need a refill.

And she goes through the swinging doors to the kitchen. LANCE, a little unsettled, fixes himself a cheese and cracker.

LANCE: Have they, uh...always been like this?

MAUREEN: I'm afraid so.

JERRY: You understand it when they're teenagers but it hasn't gotten much better.

LANCE: My brother and I used to beat the crap out of each other. He knocked me unconscious once.

MAUREEN: But then you grew out of it and now you get along, right?

LANCE: Mostly. He did stab me with a Swiss army knife at Thanksgiving a couple of years ago. But that was my fault. I'd smoked some weed and said a couple of things about his lady I shouldn't have.

MAUREEN: (*Appalled*) He stabbed you?

LANCE: He was just defending her. Gotta respect it. (*Starts to pull up his shirt*) I can show you the scar.

MAUREEN: That won't be necessary.

JERRY: Maybe later, Lance. After we open the presents.

SYDNEY *re-appears, drink in hand.*

MAUREEN: Tell me you at least got your sister a present?

SYDNEY: I did. I doubt she got me one.

JERRY: You know, your mom and I aren't gonna be around forever. Then Dana is gonna be your only family. You grew up in the same house. You have a shared history. It means something.

LANCE: Your dad's right.

SYDNEY: You're one to talk. Your brother stabbed you.

MAUREEN: Boys are different, honey. They get over stuff much quicker.

CHAD *and* DANA *enter from the hallway.*

JERRY: So. Any luck with the lovebirds?

DANA: Nobody answered the door.

SYDNEY: No surprise there. He's too busy cleaning up. And she can't come to the door because...she dead.

MAUREEN: Or they're taking a nap.

CHAD: The TV was on.

MAUREEN: You can fall asleep in front of the TV.

JERRY: That's the best way to fall asleep. With a bowl of chips on your belly and your hand down your pants. Watching Matt Damon take out bad guys. Nothing beats that.

DANA: *(Looks at her mom)* Tell me he doesn't really do that.

MAUREEN: Your father's retired. He can do whatever he wants.

CHAD: We left them a note to come over for some cider.

JERRY: Nice. Even if they don't want any, they'll have to drop by and tell you.

SYDNEY: He's probably busy trying to figure out what to do with the body. That can't be easy. It's like throwing out the Christmas turkey. You've gotta wrap it up, avoid any leaks, make sure none of the bones stick you...

DANA: For god's sake, you're talking about a human being.

SYDNEY: When you're alive, you're a human being. When you're dead...carcass.

DANA: Thank you. I'll know what to call you at your funeral.

SYDNEY: You are not gonna live longer than me. Someone will accidentally leave a coffee ring on this table and you'll kill yourself.

JERRY: Girls, please, we have a life and death situation here.

MAUREEN: No we don't! They probably got drunk and passed out.

LANCE: Or they're exhausted from their lovemaking.

SYDNEY: Babe, they weren't making love. That was a lie.

LANCE: Oh. In that case, I guess she is dead.

JERRY: The good news is that even if Kenny does manage to get rid of the body, we can go to the cops, tell them what we heard and they'll get a confession out of him.

LANCE: Damn right! That dude is gonna fry!

SYDNEY: I love it when you get worked up.

LANCE: Awww.

They share a lengthy kiss. DANA shakes her head in disgust and turns to CHAD.

DANA: I will set the bathroom on fire before I let those two animals get near it.

She flops down on an armchair, grabs her iPad and starts scrolling through it.

JERRY: In point of fact, you don't generally get the chair if you kill a girlfriend or a wife, Lance. You get life in prison.

LANCE: No kiddin'.

JERRY: Don't get me wrong. The law frowns on you killing your partner. But because everyone's thought about it at one point or another, they give you some leeway. That's why you get life instead of the death penalty.

MAUREEN: More of your research, honey?

JERRY: Naah. Research is how they catch you. Google is basically another arm of the law.

LANCE *is looking out the window.*

LANCE: What kind of vehicle does Kenny drive?

CHAD: I dunno. Something white. A Tundra or a Silverado maybe...why?

LANCE: Because he's driving it away.

CHAD: *(He crosses to the window and looks out.)* Yeah, that's his truck.

JERRY *and SYDNEY cross to the window and look out on the street.*

SYDNEY: You're sure that's his?

CHAD: Definitely. License plate is FLORANGS.

JERRY: FLORANGS?

CHAD: F, L. Then ORANGS. Florida oranges.

SYDNEY: Probably left to get more cleaning supplies.

JERRY: Also Tupperware.

SYDNEY: Tupperware?

JERRY: If she's dead, they're gonna have a ton of leftovers.

MAUREEN: *(Frowns)* You people...honestly.

SYDNEY: We're just trying to put ourselves in the mind of a murderer, Mom.

MAUREEN: Well maybe you should try reality instead. He probably went out to get her a better Christmas present. Some stores are open today.

LANCE: Or maybe the dude found a KFC. And he's thinking – fuck it, I'll get the sixteen piece bucket. And he'll bring that back and eat the KFC while Lucinda eats the dry turkey. Neither of them gets what they want but it's enough that they're in love and that they're together. Like the Henry Christmas story.

Beat.

DANA: I think you mean O'Henry.

LANCE: I mean the guy who's a friend of mine. Henry Torkelson. His girlfriend likes turkey. He likes ham. They make it work.

CHAD: *(Steps forward)* Speaking of Christmas dinner... we're at two hours and counting for the great feast. Might be an ideal time to open the presents.

JERRY: I think that's a wonderful idea, Chad.

LANCE: Gotta say, Chadomo, you are kicking my ass in the son-in-law department.

MAUREEN: You're not our son-in-law yet.

LANCE: Yeah, but we're full speed ahead. Vegas!! Vegas!! Vegas!!

MAUREEN *sighs and goes to drink from her glass. It's empty. She reaches for JERRY'S glass but he quickly pulls it out of reach.*

DANA: *(Standing up)* Before we open the presents... Mom, Dad... I have a question for you. Are you really planning to give a hundred thousand dollars to Sydney?

CHAD: Jellybean, maybe it's best not to --

DANA: Just tell me. And I'll drop it, I swear. We can enjoy Christmas. There'll be no more talk of murder or marriage.

JERRY: We promised your sister the same amount of money as yourself. She's getting married first so she's getting the money first.

SYDNEY: It's only fair.

DANA: Is that how you see it, Mom?

MAUREEN: (*Not thrilled*) It's what we agreed to.

DANA: Even though her Vegas wedding is gonna cost a thousand dollars at most.

SYDNEY: Probably half that. Lance just wants to eat at the buffets.

LANCE: It's true. The carving station at the Luxor has a hundred and fifty cuts of meat. A hundred and fifty. I didn't even know there were that many animals in the world.

MAUREEN: (*To DANA*) We're giving you both the same amount of money. You can spend it any way you want.

JERRY: I have to say, neither of you girls are behaving like a shining star at the moment. You've been petty and mean-spirited and acting like this money is your right. We're happy to give it to you but your mom and I deserve better. Especially on Christmas.

DANA: I was just curious when I would get my hundred thousand dollars, that's all.

JERRY *and* MAUREEN *exchange a look.*

JERRY: Realistically, it'd be a couple of years from now.

CHAD: (*Nodding*) Perfectly understandable. Like you said, you don't want to pull from your existing capital.

SYDNEY: (*To DANA*) What's the big deal? At the rate you're going, the wedding will probably still be in the planning stages.

DANA: I was just trying to figure out the ground rules.

JERRY: I'm sure you and Chad will still be in love two years from now.

CHAD: (*Nodding*) Two years is nothing when your love is eternal.

SYDNEY: (*Makes a gagging sound into a Christmas stocking*) Bwaach.

DANA: We're not getting married in two years.

LANCE: Whoa. What's the matter? You getting cold feet, Chadamorra?

CHAD: How dare you! Dana is my best friend. I'd marry her tomorrow if she wanted.

DANA: Well, you're gonna get the chance. Cuz that's when we're getting hitched.

CHAD: We are?

DANA: At City Hall. Just made the appointment. Nine o'clock on the dot.

SYDNEY: You bitch.

Suddenly, LANCE'S Xmas lights come on.

LANCE: Look at that. Now that is a fine ass Christmas tree.

Suddenly there's a couple of popping sounds and the lights in the condo start flickering.

MAUREEN: *(Alarmed)* What's happening?

CHAD: Lance?

SYDNEY: Babe?

The flickering continues for a few more seconds, then all the lights on the tree and in the condo go out, leaving the stage in darkness.

LANCE: Damn. Overload.

And if there are any lights still on, they go down to black.

Scene Three

It's half an hour later. The lights are back on and the family has gathered around the tree. The string of lights is still wrapped around it – they're just not lit. CHAD is in charge of handing out the presents – most of which have been opened. JERRY opens a box and pulls out an expensive-looking hoodie.

JERRY: Aw. A golf hoodie. And it's my favorite color. *(To MAUREEN)* Thank you, sweetie.

MAUREEN: It's all-weather. Keeps out the wind and rain and keeps you warm when it's chilly.

JERRY: *(As he slips it on)* Perfect timing, given the temperature in here at the moment.

LANCE: Again, mucho sorries about the blown fuse.

CHAD *digs out another present from under the tree.*

CHAD: And let's see...this is from Sydney to Dana.

CHAD *goes to hand the present to DANA. SYDNEY grabs it first.*

SYDNEY: Oh no. Forget it. I'm not giving her anything.

DANA: Well then, she can't have my present. Chad, that little box, with the blue wrapping – give it to me.

CHAD: *(Holds up a gift)* This one?

DANA: Yes. Toss it to me.

CHAD: I don't think I should toss it. It might break.

She stares daggers at him.

CHAD: As you wish, sugar plum.

He tosses it to DANA, who puts it on the floor and steps on it, crushing the box under her heel. SYDNEY picks up the present meant for her sister, gets up and crosses to the window. She opens it and tosses the present out the window.

SYDNEY: Bye bye. *(Then to DANA)* Merry Christmas, sis.

DANA: Whatever it was, it probably wouldn't have fit.

JERRY: I'm starting to seriously think we shouldn't give either of you the money. Especially if it's gonna cause this much friction.

SYDNEY: It's not causing friction. Because they're not getting married tomorrow.

DANA: *(Holds up her phone)* It's right here. We're the first couple of the day. Read it and weep.

SYDNEY: As soon as you leave for that courthouse, I am calling in a bomb threat. I'll close the whole place down.

MAUREEN: Don't be ridiculous. You're not calling in a bomb threat.

LANCE: I'm pretty sure that's against the law.

JERRY: Thank you, Lance. Cooler heads and all that.

LANCE: At least it was when I did it.

A beat. They all look at each other.

CHAD: You're kidding, right? That's a felony. You could go to jail for ten years.

LANCE: It's not like I called it in to a courthouse.

JERRY: That's a relief.

LANCE: It was a high school.

MAUREEN: *(Sighs loudly)* Sweet Jesus.

LANCE: I'm not proud of it but there were extenuating circumstances. They were holding the GED exams in the cafeteria and I needed another week to study. Which, thanks to the bomb scare, I got. And then I aced the test.

SYDNEY: Super proud of you, babe. *(To DANA)* I'll use a burner phone to call in the threat. Untraceable.

DANA: You're just pissed that I beat you to the punch. For once, you weren't able to shake them down.

SYDNEY: What is that supposed to mean?

DANA: Oh please. You've had your hand in mom and dad's pockets forever.

SYDNEY: You're high.

DANA: How many times did Mom give you two thousand dollars to stop smoking cigarettes?

SYDNEY: *(Shrugs, defensive)* I have no idea.

DANA: Liar! *(Turns to MAUREEN)* Mom?

MAUREEN: I don't know. I lost track. Can we just open the rest of the presents?

DANA: Thirteen times! From the age of sixteen until last January. Every year she gave you two thousand bucks to stop smoking.

LANCE: Two thousand bucks. That's a pretty sweet deal.

DANA: It was a *very* sweet deal, Lance. My mom would give her two thousand dollars. She'd quit for a month and start smoking again. And she'd keep the money in the bargain.

SYDNEY: Mom was trying to help her youngest daughter overcome a terrible addiction. How about a little sympathy?

DANA: You used the money to go to Cancun every year!

SYDNEY: I'm an addict! I was addicted to Cancun!

LANCE: (*To CHAD*) By the way, you guys still haven't opened my present.

SYDNEY: Shut up, babe! (*To her sister*) You know why I had to go to Cancun? Because I had PTSD. Brought on by you!

JERRY: Another long lost grievance. I'd begun to wonder where that one had disappeared to. And now, lo and behold, it's been excavated and held out to the world like the Hope diamond.

SYDNEY: It's true, Dad. She basically tortured me.

JERRY *sighs and hands a glass of scotch to MAUREEN.*

MAUREEN: I thought you didn't want me to drink.

JERRY: I'm not a monster.

SYDNEY: (*To LANCE*) We had adjoining bedrooms. I'd be trying to sleep and after a few minutes my lovely sister here would sneak up on me in the dark, quiet as can be, and clamp her hand over my mouth. Scared me to death! She called it her bedtime inspection.

DANA: I'm the oldest. If I didn't terrorize my younger sibling once in a while I could've been kicked out of the older sibling club.

SYDNEY: See. She admits it!

DANA: Like you're so innocent. (*To LANCE*) At night, she used to put stuff on my bedroom floor. I'd trip on it when I had to go to the bathroom. And not like a plushie. Hard stuff. Waffle irons, firewood, an inkjet printer. See this tooth? It's fake. I have to replace it every five years because I tripped on a toaster oven and smashed my mouth on the bathroom sink.

MAUREEN: And yet you still have a lovely smile.

DANA: Not the point, mom.

JERRY: You're siblings. A punch for a punch. Anyway, it's ancient history. You both need to get over it.

LANCE: I don't think there's any such thing as ancient history when it comes to family.

MAUREEN: (*Surprised*) That's actually very perceptive, Lance.

LANCE: People have told me that I'm full of surprises, Maureen. Speaking of which, how about you guys open my present?

JERRY: Absolutely. Full speed ahead.

CHAD: Let's do it.

CHAD *opens the box and lifts out a blue and white bean bag chair.*

DANA: A bean bag chair?

LANCE: It's not just a bean bag chair. It's a Dodger bean bag chair. See the logo? You can sit on it and watch the boys in blue.

DANA: Sadly, we don't have a TV.

JERRY: Well, now you've got an excuse to get one.

CHAD: It's a lovely present, Lance. I'm not sure where it would go.

SYDNEY: I think it looks good right there.

DANA: (*Flashes her a dirty look, then turns back to LANCE*) It's very thoughtful, but we have a mid-century motif and I'm not sure if there's a place for it in here.

LANCE: I think you'll change your mind once you sit in it. You're not gonna find a more comfortable piece of furniture.

JERRY: I'll give it a go, Lance. (*He sits in the chair.*) Oh, he's right. Very comfortable. You just sink in. Maureen, try this.

MAUREEN: I'm fine where I am, thank you.

CHAD: (*At the window*) He's back.

JERRY: What?

CHAD: Kenny. He's got something on the flatbed.

MAUREEN: (*Rushing over*) What is it?

CHAD: I don't know. It's covered by a tarp.

JERRY: (*Joining the other two at the window.*) Damn. He just went into the garage.

SYDNEY: How big was it?

CHAD: What do you think, Maureen? About four feet high?

MAUREEN: Yeah. And maybe five feet around. Like I said, he went out and got her a real present.

LANCE: Sounds to me like it's an ATV.

JERRY: What?

LANCE: All-terrain vehicle. You said four by five. Those dimensions match an ATV.

MAUREEN: Why would he buy her an ATV as a Christmas present?

LANCE: I think he bought it for himself. That way he can bury the body in the desert, leave his truck and escape on the ATV.

JERRY: Why bother with the ATV? Why not just leave in his truck?

LANCE: That's what the Dodge Ram people want you to believe. That you can bury someone out there in the middle of the sand and the cacti and then head home. Free as a bird. The truth is your basic pick-up truck is useless in the desert. You run into a gully, you might as well be driving a school bus.

JERRY: I like that theory, Lance. I like that a lot.

SYDNEY *crosses over to the front door. She opens it slightly.*

MAUREEN: What are you doing?

SYDNEY: Just taking a look see.

DANA: For god's sake, close the door already.

SYDNEY: I wanna find out what's under that tarp.

DANA: Whatever it is, he's probably keeping it on the truck.

SYDNEY: Maybe, or maybe he's bringing it up here.

MAUREEN: Girls, spying on your neighbors is very rude. None of us would like it.

JERRY: None of us are murderers.

MAUREEN: Neither is he!

SYDNEY: Shhhh!

And they all go silent. We hear something on wheels coming down the hall. DANA joins her sister at the door. We hear the thing rattle. One of the wheels makes a squeaking sound. Then we hear a door open, followed by more rattling, then the door closing. It's a little creepy. SYDNEY carefully closes the front door. She and DANA turn back to the group. They look like they've seen a ghost.

CHAD: You okay, sweetpea?

DANA: I'm not sure.

CHAD: What was it? What did you see?

DANA: A grocery cart.

JERRY: A grocery cart?

SYDNEY: Being pushed down the hall.

MAUREEN: So it's not an ATV. It's a grocery cart. They probably forgot something they needed for Christmas dinner.

SYDNEY: There were no groceries in the cart, Mom. Just the tarp.

MAUREEN: So. He's probably painting one of their rooms.

CHAD: On Christmas Day?

DANA: It wasn't a he, Mom. It was a she. It was Lucinda.

JERRY: Lucinda?

DANA: Yeah.

LANCE: Pushing the grocery cart?

SYDNEY: It was definitely her.

CHAD: Which means she was driving his truck.

LANCE: Whoa.

MAUREEN: It doesn't mean he's dead. Just means she borrowed his truck.

DANA: I don't know, Mom. I think there's something going on here.

MAUREEN: Oh no, Dana. Not you too.

DANA: It's just...she had this look on her face.

SYDNEY: Dana's right. It was like a "I have a job to do" look. It was...grim-faced.

DANA: Yes! Grim-faced!

MAUREEN: She's making Christmas dinner for her ungrateful dickhead of a boyfriend. Of course, she was grim-faced.

JERRY: When is trash day in your neighborhood?

CHAD: Tomorrow.

JERRY: (*Nods thoughtfully*) Makes sense.

MAUREEN: (*To JERRY*) Really? You're actually going to indulge this fantasy?

JERRY: You had your say, now it's my turn. (*Then*) If you're gonna get rid of a body, you wrap it in a big rug or a tarp and then stick it in the closest dumpster the night before the city picks it up. That way, the body doesn't have time to start smelling. The next day, the contents of the dumpster are emptied into a garbage truck. Then the truck unloads it at the local landfill. Where you'll never find it because those things are huge.

LANCE: Like how huge?

JERRY: Your average landfill, you're talking five or six hundred acres. So even if you suspect a body's in there, it's basically a poke and hope situation.

MAUREEN: How do you know the average size of a landfill?

JERRY: I'm civic-minded.

MAUREEN: Go ahead and kill me. But you'll never get away with it.

JERRY: You're right. Too many witnesses.

SYDNEY: Is this what I have to look forward to in our marriage? Jokes about killing each other.

JERRY: Who's joking? (*Holds up his empty glass*) Cider run.

He disappears into the kitchen.

LANCE: (*Take SYDNEY'S hand*) We'll never joke about killing each other, babe.

MAUREEN: Well, you better joke about something. Because *this* disappears. (*She yanks their two hands apart.*)

SYDNEY: Ow! Mom!

MAUREEN: And so does having sex in other people's bathrooms and making out all day.

SYDNEY: Well, you guys have managed to stay together all this time. There must be some secret.

MAUREEN: Oh please. People always ask that. How do you do it? What's the secret? Like all lasting marriages can be explained by one piece of elusive knowledge.

DANA: So there's no secret?

MAUREEN: Oh, there's a secret. But you won't like the answer.

DANA: He's your best friend, right?

MAUREEN: Have you seen us together? God no. I'm much nicer to my best friend.

SYDNEY: You're soul mates.

MAUREEN: Oh my god, you're worse than your sister. *Nobody* has a soul mate. Unless you wanna marry yourself. That's your only soul mate. The secret to staying together -- can you stand each other? That's it. Can you tolerate this person? That's the whole shooting match.

LANCE: No offense but that doesn't feel like a very high bar.

MAUREEN: Trust me, it is. It boils down to do I wanna be irritated or alone?

JERRY *returns with a mulled cider.*

JERRY: What are we talking about?

MAUREEN, SYDNEY *and* LANCE *exchange a look. Then --*

DANA: You. I think you're right. I think dead Kenny's headed to a landfill.

MAUREEN: How would she even get him to the dumpster? Wrap him in that tarp and sling him over her shoulder? He's much too heavy.

SYDNEY: Adrenaline!

MAUREEN: What?

SYDNEY: Women get super human strength when their child is trapped. Everybody knows that. They can suddenly lift a car! Admittedly, it's a small car but maybe the same thing happens with corpses of boyfriends you hate.

MAUREEN: Or Kenny has fallen asleep in front of the TV.

LANCE: There's only one way to find out.

He marches towards the kitchen.

SYDNEY: Where you going, babe?

LANCE: *(Stops)* Gotta do something in the kitchen.

CHAD: If I may, Lance, the kitchen is really my domain. None other than Jacques Pepin himself calls it the *droit de chef*.

LANCE: You lost me there, Chadinsky, but I promise I won't lay a finger on the bird.

JERRY: Still. Maybe you could give us a hint as to what you have in mind?

LANCE: Naah. I don't wanna get your guys' hopes up in case it doesn't work.

He disappears through the swinging doors. A long beat as they all look at each other.

MAUREEN: What's in the kitchen?

CHAD: The oven. The fridge. The fuse box...

JERRY: He can't really do anything with the fuse box, can he?

CHAD: Nothing he hasn't already done.

A beat.

SYDNEY: I'll go check.

And she hops out of her chair and makes a beeline towards the kitchen. As the group waits on whatever LANCE has in mind --

CHAD: *(To DANA)* I am curious. Now that we're getting married tomorrow, does this mean we're not having a big, fancy wedding? Because if that's the case, I'll need to tell people.

DANA: *(Frowns)* Who's so important that you can't tell them after the fact?

CHAD: Well, my parents for one.

DANA: *(Shrugs)* Okay. Who else?

CHAD: The partners at the firm. Our friends here in Pasadena. Also, I have some college chums who wanted to take me out so I could "misbehave" one last time.

DANA: You mean go to a strip club.

CHAD: *(Nods)* I've already told you I would wait in the parking lot while they were inside the establishment. I respect you too much to patronize that kind of place.

MAUREEN: Oh for god's sake, Chad, if you wanna see some tittie, see some tittie.

JERRY: "Houston. Tranquility base here. The Eagle has landed." *(He beckons for her to hand him her glass.)* Maureen.

MAUREEN: You just poured me this.

JERRY: And now I'm taking it back.

MAUREEN: *(To her glass, as she hands it to him)* I'll miss you.

DANA: We'll still have the wedding, Chad. We'll just be married already.

CHAD: That's all I needed to hear. Let the festivities abound.

DANA: *(To her dad)* Just need you guys to be witnesses.

JERRY: Tomorrow?

MAUREEN: Is that a problem?

JERRY: (*Holds up his hoodie*) I'm supposed to play golf tomorrow. You don't necessarily need us, per se, right? It can just be any two people?

MAUREEN: It *could* be any two people. But it won't be. Because it will be us. The parents of the bride.

JERRY: It's just...it's Riviera. One of the best golf courses in the world. And I get to play it maybe once a year.

MAUREEN *stares at him. After a beat --*

JERRY: City Hall, here we come.

And we suddenly hear the FIRE ALARM go off. It makes a terrible racket. LANCE and SYDNEY rush out from the kitchen. They're both very wet.

LANCE: It worked!

Curtain

ACT TWO

Scene One

An hour later. JERRY is sitting in the beanbag chair. DANA and MAUREEN, equally grim-faced, are pouring themselves another drink. LANCE, dried off, is on the couch, his head on the decorative pillow. He nods towards the kitchen.

LANCE: I don't know why Sydney's in there and not me.

MAUREEN: Because Sydney is the best liar and best flirt in the family. And if we want to come out of this situation without some sort of citation or a hefty fine, we need that combination of talents.

LANCE: *(Nods)* Huh. *(Looks at the tree)* You guys ever think about adding tinsel to this?

DANA: *(Not in the mood)* Nope.

JERRY: You don't see a lot of tinsel these days. It's considered a choking hazard.

LANCE: Well, at least nobody's choked to death today. Right?

DANA: The day's still young.

Then seeing his head resting on the decorative pillow, DANA yanks it out from under him.

LANCE: Hey. What'd you do that for?

DANA *looks at the pillow, disgusted, and tosses it aside.*

DANA: No reason.

CHAD, SYDNEY *and a uniformed cop, OFFICER HOYT, 30's, fresh-faced and well-meaning, enter from the kitchen.*

SYDNEY: Everyone, this is Officer Hoyt.

JERRY: I didn't know policemen came to fire alarms.

OFFICER HOYT: I didn't either.

MAUREEN: You didn't?

OFFICER HOYT: First week on the job. Still learning. I was told to secure the perimeter, direct traffic, that sort of thing...

Beat.

DANA: Isn't the perimeter... outside?

OFFICER HOYT: That's a very astute observation. It is outside. But since there wasn't a fire, I thought I'd come inside and find out what happened.

SYDNEY: (*Faux impressed*) Officer Hoyt pointed out that there's a lot of water damage.

DANA: Obviously.

SYDNEY: It's always good to have a second pair of eyes, Dana. Especially when they're so piercing and so blue.

OFFICER HOYT: (*Embarrassed*) Aww.

JERRY: And our Christmas dinner?

CHAD: (*Emotional*) Ruined. The only thing that wasn't soaked was the turkey.

MAUREEN: That's good.

CHAD: But because we weren't allowed back in the building for an hour, it is now severely overcooked.

JERRY: Heck...a little gravy.

CHAD: We have no gravy. My gravy boat is literally a boat!

DANA: Don't worry, sweetie. We'll figure out something.

CHAD: And even if the turkey were not overcooked, we wouldn't be able to slice it because a certain someone thought he could stop the alarm by stabbing it with my entire collection of extremely expensive Myabi carving knives.

LANCE: Apologies dude. I thought one would do the trick but they kept breaking on me.

SYDNEY: I'm so sorry we pulled you away from your family on Christmas Day, Officer Hoyt.

OFFICER HOYT: I have two families, Miss Woodruff. My police family, those brothers and sisters in blue I'm just now getting to know – but with whom, eventually, I hope to share a wonderful degree of camaraderie, including backyard barbecues, softball games and skiing – both water and jet -- on Lake Mead. And my other family – John Q Public. Folks like yourselves. Whose lives I'm here to protect and serve. And in that vein, I have to ask...do you know what caused the alarm to go off?

JERRY: My money is on smoke coming from the oven.

OFFICER HOYT: I took the liberty of talking to one of the firemen and he said that smoke doesn't set off this kind of alarm. Heat does. It's a heat alarm. *That* is what triggered the sprinkler heads.

A beat.

SYDNEY: We can explain.

OFFICER HOYT: Great. I'm all ears.

A beat.

SYDNEY: Anyone?

JERRY: (*No one else is answering so...*) I think the heat from the turkey rose in a convecting type manner. It was then magnified by the stainless steel backsplash until it eventually reached the temperature of the sun. Thus the alarm being sounded.

SYDNEY: Thank you, father, for that very sound scientific explanation. *(Beat)*
Officer?

A preoccupied OFFICER HOYT looks up from a manual he's pulled from his front pocket.

OFFICER HOYT: I'm just checking my training manual for other scenarios.
Gimme a sec.

A long beat as they all wait for OFFICER HOYT to peruse his manual. He finally looks up

OFFICER HOYT: Are there any troubled young people in the house?

JERRY: No.

OFFICER HOYT: *(Nods)* Anyone you think might enjoy setting a fire?

SYDNEY: No, officer.

OFFICER HOYT: Does anyone have a vendetta against you?

SYDNEY: Not that I know of. Guys?

JERRY: If you count Harry and David and that old bat in Santa Monica, I'd say yes. But if not, then no.

OFFICER HOYT: Well technically, we have a disturbance of the peace situation here. But it is Christmas and I don't wanna spoil anyone's day so consider this investigation closed.

CHAD: It's too late. My day's already been spoiled.

DANA: Chad, how about we give it a rest.

OFFICER HOYT: *(To CHAD)* Real sorry about your Christmas dinner.

CHAD: It wasn't just a dinner. It was a...feast. A once a year feast.

OFFICER HOYT: I think KFC is open. They have great biscuits these days.

CHAD: *(In pain)* Oh god...

OFFICER HOYT: Anyway, you all have a Merry Christmas.

SYDNEY: You bet. Thanks so much, Officer Hoyt.

And she closes the door on OFFICER HOYT. Then crosses over to LANCE and gives him a kiss.

SYDNEY: Good job.

LANCE: Right back atcha, babe.

DANA: *(Incredulous)* I'm sorry. Explain to me why having half of the Pasadena fire department and your new best friend, Officer Hoyt, storm the premises is a good thing?

SYDNEY: Really? You didn't notice?

CHAD: All I saw was a Christmas dinner that was ruined by a certain someone's intemperate behavior. Along with a lot of angry neighbors who will no longer be wishing us a Merry Christmas. And I, for one, will miss that social nicety.

MAUREEN: I didn't notice anything.

SYDNEY: Dad?

JERRY: *(Admiring)* You use a match or a lighter?

LANCE *smiles and holds up a lighter. He flicks it and a flame appears.*

LANCE: Somebody's getting warmer.

JERRY: I believe our boy Lance here wanted everyone out of the building.

MAUREEN: *(Sighs)* And why is that?

JERRY: *(To LANCE)* The floor is yours, sir.

LANCE: To see if Kenny was really napping or not. I figured it was the best way to see if he was still alive. Nobody can sleep through that racket.

SYDNEY: And when we were out front, did anyone see Kenny?

JERRY: No, we did not.

MAUREEN: You don't even know what Kenny looks like!

JERRY: Chad?

CHAD: There was no Kenny.

SYDNEY: Lucinda was out there but there was no sign of him. Something's definitely happened to the guy, Mom.

MAUREEN: Fine, let's say you're all correct. Let's say it happened. She killed him. What can we actually do about it?

LANCE: We could call the cops. The proctor did that after I called in my bomb scare. They came and gave us all the third degree. It was pretty intense.

MAUREEN: But you obviously lied to the police and got away with it.

LANCE: True. But I felt terrible about what I did.

MAUREEN: Not terrible enough to tell the truth! You lied to get your GED. You don't think she's gonna lie to keep from spending the next thirty years in prison!

JERRY: *(To his daughters)* I think your mom's right. I think our detective work has come to an end.

DANA: You're the one who kept saying there's something there.

JERRY: There probably is but short of knocking down the front door to their condo, our hands are tied.

SYDNEY: Didn't you once tell us that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere?

JERRY: I did. Although I stole that from Martin Luther King.

MAUREEN: I think your dad and Martin Luther King were talking about social justice. Not stab your boyfriend on Christmas Day justice.

JERRY: Maybe she'll make a mistake and the police will solve the case. Happens all the time.

SYDNEY: You said forty percent of murderers get away with it.

DANA: Sydney's right. You did, Dad.

JERRY: I say a lot of things. Clearly, she's a dangerous person. If we push her buttons, who knows... she might come for us.

DANA: (*A touch dramatic*) "First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist."

SYDNEY: (*Also, a touch dramatic*) "And then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist."

DANA: "And then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew."

SYDNEY: "Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me."

A beat.

LANCE: I'd speak for you, babe.

SYDNEY: Not the point, babe, but thanks.

JERRY: It's a quote from a German pastor, Lance. One I used to inflict on the girls at family dinners. It reflects his belief that to do nothing in the face of evil makes you complicit.

LANCE: Well, that guy didn't have a crazy, knife-wielding, Florida orange-hating lady living across the hall, did he?

JERRY: Not that I know of, no.

LANCE: Then I say fuck that German dude.

MAUREEN: I agree with Lance. I think it's time we dropped the whole thing.

CHAD: (*Shaking his head*) Great. She gets away with murder and my dinner is ruined.

LANCE: Real sorry, Chadsky. Setting off the alarm seemed like a good idea at the time.

MAUREEN: Maybe dinner's not completely ruined. Maybe we can salvage a couple of the dishes.

CHAD: I appreciate the offer, Maureen, but when you dump fifty gallons of water on a collage of butternut squash, apples and sweet onions topped with drizzles of peppery cider, all infused with fermented cream and a Normandy butter sauce, the water generally wins.

LANCE: C'mon now, that's loser talk. Maybe that one dish is a goner but you were cooking all sorts of stuff in there. I'll give Maureen a hand. We'll figure out something.

JERRY: I think it's best if you stay out of the kitchen.

SYDNEY: He's right, babe. The wounds are still a little fresh.

JERRY: Tell you what, Lance, why don't you and I go watch the rest of the Lakers game on their desktop computer – tiny as it is – while Maureen helps Chad come up with Christmas dinner 2.0.

LANCE: I love that idea, Jerry. I'll call my two Andys while we're at it. They can talk to their new grandpa.

MAUREEN: He's not their grandpa yet.

LANCE: He will be in another forty-eight hours.

MAUREEN *sighs deeply, then rises and follows JERRY, LANCE and CHAD through the swinging doors. The two sisters start to throw the wrapping paper into a trash bag. Finally, DANA can't help herself.*

DANA: Are you really gonna marry that guy?

SYDNEY: Are you really gonna marry Chad?

DANA: Chad worships me.

SYDNEY: Lance worships me. Anyway, who doesn't come with a little baggage.

DANA: He's got three exes, two kids and at least one bankruptcy. For most people that takes a lifetime. He's not even thirty.

SYDNEY: Now you sound like Mom.

DANA: Even Mom is right once in a while. How does he even support his kids?

SYDNEY: Ski instructors get paid a lot more than you think.

DANA: No they don't! They make squat!

SYDNEY: (*Defensive*) For your information, he also wants to be a whitewater rafting guide. Y'know, when he's not on the slopes.

DANA: So why hasn't he done it.

SYDNEY: He will.

DANA: When?

SYDNEY: I don't know. Sometime.

DANA: I don't understand. It's not like he's trying to be a surgeon. What's the hold-up?

SYDNEY: None of your business.

DANA: Oh, for god's sake, just tell me already.

A beat.

SYDNEY: He doesn't agree with their drug policy. He doesn't like the idea of random testing.

DANA: (*Rolls her eyes*) He's taking people down intense rapids. Whitewater. Quick drops. Fast climbs. Boulders. You need to have your wits.

SYDNEY: That's why he hasn't gone through the training. He's being responsible.

DANA: By continuing to smoke pot?

SYDNEY: He'll apply for a job when they change their drug policy.

DANA *frowns, which SYDNEY catches.*

SYDNEY: I saw that look. That's your judgy, I'm the older sister, I know everything look. I don't wanna be like you, okay?

DANA: Well, Lance is helping you achieve that goal.

SYDNEY: Nice.

DANA: (*Regrets what she just said*) I'm sorry. That was unkind. For Lance's sake, I hope the river rafting people come to their senses and hire guides who are complete stoners. But even if they do, he still has all these other obligations. You'll be dragged into that mess for the rest of your life.

SYDNEY: They're *ex-wives*. They're not sister wives. It's not like we're gonna spend every holiday together. People make mistakes. Maybe you marrying Chad is a mistake and you just don't know it yet.

DANA: Chad and I are not a mistake.

SYDNEY: He wears driving gloves!

DANA: (*A painful reminder*) I know. I've talked to him about it.

SYDNEY: They look ridiculous. Why not wear a monocle while he's at it?

DANA: That's never gonna happen. Although he did ask for a pocket watch for Christmas.

SYDNEY: Oh god.

DANA: I said no. We both like the finer things in life but you have to draw the line somewhere.

And, for the moment, the two sisters have found some common ground.

SYDNEY: Lance wants to take me to a monster truck rally.

DANA: Jesus.

SYDNEY: I know but, hey, if it makes him happy.

DANA: *(Nods)* I wonder at what point you go from tolerating driving gloves and monster truck rallies to I have to stab this son of a bitch.

SYDNEY: Good question. Although gotta say...I don't mind being worshipped.

DANA: Me too. But after a while, it's like how about you grow a spine?

SYDNEY: *(Nods)* It's a delicate balance. Although mom and dad haven't turned on each other and they've been together for forty years.

DANA: They've probably just lost the energy.

DANA *tries to move the bean bag chair. It's heavy and unwieldy.*

DANA: Can you give me a hand with this.

SYDNEY: *(Kidding)* Why. That's a good place for it.

DANA: I know you bought this to fuck with me.

SYDNEY: It was Lance's idea. He thought it was a great gift for you guys. *(Then)* I will admit I didn't discourage him. *(As she picks up her side of the bean bag chair)* Where to?

DANA: Over here, by the tree.

SYDNEY: Damn, this is heavy.

DANA: Right? I thought the idea was you were supposed to be able to move these things around. *(They get a few steps, when suddenly --)* Oh my God, of course. *(And, in her excitement, DANA drops her end.)*

SYDNEY: Hey! Little heads-up maybe.

DANA: I know why she wanted the cart!

SYDNEY: What?

DANA: Why Lucinda got the grocery cart. It wasn't just to carry the tarp. It's how she plans to bring Kenny's body down to the dumpster.

SYDNEY: In the cart?

DANA: *(Nods)* Mom's right. He's too heavy to carry. So you wrap him in the tarp, load him in the grocery cart and wheel him out to the dumpster when everyone in the building has gone to sleep.

SYDNEY: *(Getting it)* Of course. Then you drive the cart back to the grocery store and nobody's the wiser.

DANA: Exactly. Then it's what Dad was talking about. Garbage truck picks up the body tomorrow morning, unloads it at the town dump and you're one of the forty percent who get away with murder.

SYDNEY: *(Impressed)* Nice.

DANA: Thank you. Of course it doesn't mean we're any closer to getting inside that apartment.

SYDNEY: I have a thought about that.

DANA: Yeah?

SYDNEY: Maybe we can't get inside that apartment, but the cops can.

DANA: The police are gonna laugh in our faces if we tell them our neighbors fought over a dry turkey and now we think one of them's dead.

SYDNEY: That's why we're not gonna tell them that. Instead, we're gonna tell them something else. Something that will get them here right quick. *(She picks up her phone and dials 911. After a beat)* Hi 911? I have an emergency.

And the lights go down...

Scene Two

The lights come up on almost everyone sitting around, looking slightly on edge. After a moment, CHAD and MAUREEN emerge from the kitchen. He's holding a casserole dish.

LANCE: I smell sweet potatoes. Is that what that is? Sweet potatoes?

CHAD: It *was* sweet potatoes.

He kneels down next to the tree and pours water and burnt sludge out of the casserole into the base of the tree.

SYDNEY: So... no luck with Christmas dinner 2.0?

MAUREEN: The sweet potatoes were the one dish we thought we could save.

LANCE: Heck, I'll still try 'em.

JERRY: You'll have to fight me for them, Lance.

DANA: I know everyone's pretty hungry right now but we'll figure something out after we take care of the business across the hall.

JERRY: Gotta say, I think that phone call was a bad idea.

SYDNEY: It gets the cops inside her apartment, Dad.

JERRY: Maybe. Maybe not.

DANA: It will.

MAUREEN: He's just upset because the Lakers lost.

LANCE: And he didn't cover the spread.

MAUREEN: *(To JERRY, annoyed)* You bet on it?

JERRY: A hundred bucks. Helped keep my mind on the game and not the fact I'm starving to death.

There's a knock at the door. DANA and SYDNEY exchange a look. Who the hell is that?

DANA: You didn't tell them to come here, right?

SYDNEY: The cops? No, you heard the call. Absolutely not.

DANA: That's what I thought.

Another knock. DANA finally crosses and opens the door to... OFFICER HOYT.

OFFICER HOYT: I'm back. You folks called 911?

DANA: My sister did.

SYDNEY: What are you doing here?

OFFICER HOYT: Domestic disturbance. I'm just following up.

DANA: I didn't think you followed up with us. I thought you followed up with our neighbor. Y'know...the disturber.

OFFICER HOYT: I did. I just thought you'd want to know how it went.

SYDNEY: We do. We just don't want her to know that we know!

OFFICER HOYT: Oh. Yeah. That makes sense. Rookie mistake. Sorry.

DANA: *(To SYDNEY)* Oh for god's sake. Just get him in here and close the door already.

SYDNEY *pulls* OFFICER HOYT *inside and closes the door after him.*

DANA: So you talked to Lucinda?

OFFICER HOYT: The young lady across the hall? Yes ma'am. She insisted that there had been no argument of any kind with her boyfriend.

SYDNEY: There was too. Everybody here will tell you that.

DANA: It was intense.

LANCE: Real loud. WWE death match kind of loud.

OFFICER HOYT: Oh, I suspected she was lying.

CHAD: That's good.

DANA: That's great. Now we're getting somewhere. Did you go inside her apartment?

OFFICER HOYT: I did not.

DANA: But she lied to you.

OFFICER HOYT: That was disappointing. But it doesn't mean she has to let me inside her place. She didn't even have to open the door. That's just your basic fifth amendment.

JERRY: Fourth amendment.

OFFICER HOYT: What?

JERRY: It's the fourth amendment. It protects you from unreasonable search and seizure.

OFFICER HOYT: Well, it's one of those.

JERRY: It's that one.

OFFICER HOYT: There's like five hundred of the things. Hard to keep 'em all straight.

JERRY: There's actually only twenty-seven.

MAUREEN: Jerry, would you please let him finish.

OFFICER HOYT: I'm done, ma'am.

SYDNEY: So you're just gonna take her word for it?

OFFICER HOYT: Unless I have a warrant, there's not much else I can do.

SYDNEY: Then get a warrant.

MAUREEN: We heard screaming, Officer.

OFFICER HOYT: Could sound like a rifle range in there. Good luck getting a warrant on Christmas Day. I've only been doing this for a week but I know that ain't gonna happen. Anyway, consider the investigation closed.

DANA: There was no investigation! It was you asking a few questions!

OFFICER HOYT: My questions were of an investigatory nature. Anyway, if there's anything else I can help you with, let me know.

DANA: You didn't help us with this!

CHAD: My little marzipan, let's not berate an officer of the law.

DANA: (*Ignoring him -- to the officer*) Maybe everyone should commit crimes on Christmas Day. You can't issue a warrant. You can't arrest anyone! Do whatever, people! It's a free day! Run a red light. Stab your boyfriend. Rob a bank. Or better yet, kill a banker. The Purge has come to Pasadena!

OFFICER HOYT: I don't think banks are open on Christmas Day. Although I guess you could kill a banker. He just wouldn't be in the bank at the time.

MAUREEN: So this woman is gonna get away with murder.

OFFICER HOYT: Do you ever get away with murder? If she did it, it's gonna weigh pretty heavy on her conscience. That's something at least.

DANA: No it's not!

OFFICER HOYT: I guess we'll just agree to disagree.

JERRY: Well, thanks for coming out again, Officer.

OFFICER HOYT: My pleasure. By the way, it smells great in here. Is that sweet potato?

CHAD: *(With a deep sigh)* It was. Before “le deluge.” Now the dregs are nourishing our Christmas tree.

OFFICER HOYT: ABC. Always be composting. I like it. *(As he goes to open the door)* Anyway, y’all have a Merry Christmas and maybe my little visit will help make sure they keep it down.

DANA: There’s no they. It’s just her! The murderer!

And DANA says that just as OFFICER HOYT has opened the door – revealing LUCINDA in the doorway. Something dark in the way she’s standing. If she just heard that accusation, she’s not letting on.

LUCINDA: *(To DANA)* Hi Dana. Officer Hoyt.

DANA: Lucinda. What a nice surprise.

LUCINDA: Hi everyone. *(To OFFICER HOYT)* You get around.

OFFICER HOYT: *(Lamely)* Can’t resist the smell of sweet potatoes.

LUCINDA: *(Flirty)* Now my feelings are hurt. I was making a sweet potato casserole and you didn’t say a thing.

OFFICER HOYT: I was trying to be professional.

LUCINDA: Didn’t stop you from dropping in on my neighbors.

OFFICER HOYT: Umm.

LUCINDA: That’s okay. You’re forgiven.

SYDNEY: Maybe you should go back and try her casserole.

LUCINDA: It’s baking. But if you come back in an hour.

OFFICER HOYT: Damn. My shift’ll be over by then.

LUCINDA: Maybe tomorrow in that case. I always make too much food at the holidays.

OFFICER HOYT: Well, I've never met a meal I couldn't finish.

LUCINDA: As long as you don't think it's a bribe, Officer Hoyt.

OFFICER HOYT: (*Clearly infatuated*) No worries on that account.

SYDNEY: (*Sotto, to DANA*) I thought I was a pretty good flirt but she blows me out of the water.

LUCINDA: Saw your guys' note. Thought I'd join you for some mulled cider.

DANA: How about Kenny? Does he want some?

LUCINDA: Naah. Poor guy. He's out like a light. I don't know if it's the flu or he ate something that didn't agree with him.

SYDNEY: Must be pretty bad if he was able to sleep through that fire alarm. I know I couldn't sleep through that.

LUCINDA: Good point. Maybe he's sicker than I think.

JERRY: In that case, we should call a doctor.

SYDNEY: Good idea, Dad.

LUCINDA: He's a big baby. He'll be fine. Anyway, just because he's not here doesn't mean I can't partake. That is if there's any left. I don't want you to go to any trouble.

CHAD: No trouble at all. Be right back.

CHAD *heads into the kitchen.*

OFFICER HOYT: Aww.

MAUREEN: Aww?

OFFICER HOYT: All week I've been taking calls from citizens who hate their neighbors. "They're playing their music too loud or they're smoking outside my apartment." It's nice to see folks getting along. Anyway, I'm gonna take off.

DANA: You're leaving?

OFFICER HOYT: (*Pointed*) I see nothing, *amendment-wise*, that would keep me here.

LUCINDA: That's too bad. Don't be a stranger, okay? You can protect and serve me anytime.

SYDNEY: (*Aside, to DANA*) Oh my god, she's the Einstein of flirting.

OFFICER HOYT: Y'all have a great Christmas.

As OFFICER HOYT leaves, CHAD emerges from the kitchen and hands LUCINDA a cup of his mulled cider.

LUCINDA: Thanks neighbor.

CHAD: Careful. It's hot.

LUCINDA: You want to blow on it for me?

CHAD: (*Tempted*) Ummm...

DANA: The answer is no.

LUCINDA: (*Takes a sip*) Oooh, yummy.

LANCE: I wouldn't mind a little more of that, Chadley.

CHAD: You know where to find it. (*Holds up a tray for LUCINDA*) Cookie?

LUCINDA: They all look so good but I don't want to spoil my appetite for dinner. (*Takes another sip*) You know what's odd? Officer Hoyt said he came down here because he smelled your sweet potatoes. I was in the hallway talking to him I and didn't smell anything.

MAUREEN: I guess he has a great sense of smell.

LUCINDA: So do I. (*Takes another sip*) You need to give me the recipe for this.

CHAD: Happy to. At least one thing wasn't ruined by the sprinklers.

LUCINDA: That was you guys?

JERRY: Turned out to be a false alarm.

CHAD: Tell that to my dinner. *(To LUCINDA)* Completely soaked.

LUCINDA: I'm sorry, Chad. You probably worked like a dog to make a lovely meal for your family.

CHAD: I did.

LUCINDA: If you want, I can bring you some of my casserole.

CHAD: I'd love to taste your casserole.

DANA: *(Jumping in)* We're fine.

LUCINDA: By the way, I wanted to apologize again. For disturbing you guys earlier.

CHAD: Honestly, we didn't hear a thing.

LUCINDA: Come on.

DANA: Okay, maybe we heard a little something. But, heck, there's espresso machines in this building that are louder.

JERRY: Really wasn't a big deal.

LUCINDA: Well, someone called the cops on us.

An awkward beat.

JERRY: We can explain.

LUCINDA: All ears.

A beat.

JERRY: Anyone?

MAUREEN: Truthfully, we got a little concerned and we did call the police. But that was earlier. And they finally got around to responding. To the call. That we made earlier. Much, much earlier. And now...everything's fine.

A beat.

LUCINDA: *(Nods)* Okay.

CHAD: Believe me, Lucinda, I don't want to see the cops any more than you. Then they'd just dig into *my* criminal record. Haha. I'm kidding. I don't have a criminal record. They wouldn't let me be a lawyer if I had a criminal record.

SYDNEY: *(To DANA)* It's like watching a chihuahua try to hump a giraffe.

LUCINDA: He's good-looking *and* funny. *(Setting down her mug)* Well, that is the best mulled cider I've ever drank.

CHAD: I've got more.

LUCINDA: That's sweet but I've gonna go wake up the patient. And seriously, we're gonna have a ton of leftovers. So if you guys get hungry...lemme know.

CHAD: Will do!

She takes one last look around – it's a little unnerving – and leaves.

MAUREEN: Oh my god. She killed him!

CHAD: Let's not rush to judgement.

DANA: Pull the mulled cider out of your pants! Of course she killed him!

CHAD: I don't know. He's a lot bigger than she is.

MAUREEN: So what. He probably had his back to her for a second and she plunged a big old knife into him. He falls to his knees in shock then you finish him off by slicing his carotid. He's dead within twenty seconds.

A beat.

JERRY: You seem to know the most efficient way to butcher someone.

MAUREEN: You're not the only one who's done their research, Jerry.

SYDNEY: She definitely knows that we've got the goods on her.

JERRY: Well it's not like she can come over here and kill all of us.

DANA: Why not? It's Christmas Day in Pasadena. You get a free pass. She'd slice us all up like a Christmas ham and Officer Hoyt would just shake his head and say his training didn't cover this.

CHAD: Okay, maybe she did stab Kenny, but I doubt she's a serial killer.

DANA: Will you stop defending her!

LANCE: I don't think she's worried about us. At this point, she just needs to move the body. Then, as they say in show biz, it's a wrap.

MAUREEN: Lance makes a good point. We tried to get the police involved and failed miserably. Now the woman has carte blanche.

LANCE: Thanks for saying I made a good point, Maureen. *(To SYDNEY)* I think your mom is warming up to me.

JERRY: Well, I'm too hungry to wait around for her to make her next move. I say we all go out and get something to eat.

SYDNEY: You can pick me up something. I'm staying.

DANA: Me too. The only way to nab this woman is to catch her red-handed.

MAUREEN: She's a murderer. I don't want you two anywhere near her.

LANCE: You're a good mom, Maureen.

MAUREEN: I already gave you a compliment, Lance. Take the win.

LANCE: Gotcha.

SYDNEY: We'll be fine. As soon as we hear that grocery cart going down the hallway, we'll call 911.

MAUREEN: You will do no such thing.

DANA: It's not like she can break down our door.

MAUREEN: She wouldn't have to. She could just blast the thing to smithereens.

JERRY: So now she has a gun?

MAUREEN: Everyone in this country has a gun. What do you think they get for Christmas?? *(Then)* I'm not leaving these two alone, Jerry.

LANCE: I'll stay.

MAUREEN: No, their father will stay.

JERRY: But I'm very hungry.

MAUREEN *stares at him.*

JERRY: *(He sighs. Another battle lost.)* Bring me back two of everything.

CHAD: *(To DANA)* Is it okay if I go with these guys?

DANA: Don't know why not – you already think she's innocent.

CHAD: I never said that.

DANA: You were gonna blow on her cider!

CHAD: Mulled cider can get very hot!

DANA: Just go already, Chad.

CHAD *sighs. No winning this argument. He, MAUREEN and LANCE gather up their coats and start to head out. LANCE gives SYDNEY a good-bye kiss.*

LANCE: I'm only a phone call away. Although I'm down to one percent on my battery so, realistically, I'm a few minutes of charging, then a phone call away.

SYDNEY: We'll be fine, babe.

And the three of them leave.

JERRY: More mulled cider, girls?

They both nod. JERRY grabs their mugs and heads into the kitchen.

DANA: *(To SYDNEY)* Did you see the way Chad looked at her?

JERRY: *(From the kitchen)* What?

DANA: Nothing, Dad.

JERRY: *(From the kitchen)* Tell me!

DANA: *(Calling to him)* I said did you see the way Chad looked at her?

JERRY: *(Pokes his head back out)* Oh sweetie. That's every guy.

DANA: He's supposed to be my best friend.

JERRY: It's still every guy.

DANA: You didn't look at her.

JERRY: Not on the outside. But on the inside... *(Shrugs)* He's young. Rookie mistake.

And he disappears back into the kitchen.

SYDNEY: *(Sympathetic)* Dad's right. It's no big deal. So he looks at other women. Who cares how the tires are inflated as long as he's riding the bike.

DANA: It annoys me. It's disrespectful.

SYDNEY: You hate it when he treats you like a goddess and then the minute he doesn't treat you like that, you're annoyed. The guy can't win.

DANA: I know. What's that all about?

SYDNEY: Who knows. I'm not any better. Lance loves me but, if I'm being honest, I don't know whether or not we're built to last.

JERRY: *(From inside the kitchen)* What?

SYDNEY: Nothing!

JERRY *(Entering with the mulled ciders)* Actually, I heard you. *(As he hands one to each girl)* You worried about his family?

SYDNEY: How did you...?

JERRY: His mother is in the pokey on Christmas Day. Enough said.

SYDNEY: It's just...they're a bit...

JERRY: Rough around the edges?

SYDNEY: *(Nods)* Is that me sounding like Mom? Am I a snob?

JERRY: For sure. But it's only gonna be a problem if you let it. Your mom's family are basically jackals and blowhards. We deal with it by only seeing them once a year. We only have to endure their company for a few hours and they get to go away talking about how elitist and horrible we are. Everyone wins.

DANA: You're not horrible.

JERRY: In someone's eyes, everyone is horrible. I'm sure your mother thinks I'm horrible occasionally.

SYDNEY: You're still married.

JERRY: Going on forty-two years.

DANA: That's pretty impressive, Dad.

JERRY: (*Dismissive*) Enh. It's not like I won Wimbledon. Don't ever tell your mom I said this, but the secret to staying married, the one thing that keeps you together...can you tolerate each other? That's it. Everything else is BS.

DANA: That's pretty cynical.

JERRY: Don't underestimate cynicism. Saves you a lot of disappointment. Like with the two of you. Your mom and I aren't asking for the world. We just want you to be able to stand each other. Even if it takes the cold-blooded murder of a neighbor to bring you a little closer together.

Suddenly they hear a hallway door open. Then the telltale squeaking of the grocery cart's wheels.

SYDNEY: It's go time, people.

JERRY: Don't open the door.

SYDNEY: I'm not an idiot.

DANA: Once she gets on the elevator, I'll take the stairs. Then I can watch her toss dead Kenny into the dumpster.

They all move closer to the door. But, to their surprise, the grocery cart is moving towards their front door, not away from it.

DANA: What's going on?

SYDNEY: (*Shushing her*) Shhhh.

DANA: (*Annoyed*) You shhhh.

JERRY: Girls!

They all go quiet. The cart finally comes to a stop outside the door. They all look at each other. What the hell is going on? And then...there's a double knock.

SYDNEY: Oh fuckity-fuck.

DANA: What should I do?

SYDNEY: Just answer.

DANA: *(After a beat, calling out)* Who is it?

LUCINDA: *(From the hallway)* Your neighbor. Wanted to drop off some of my sweet potato casserole.

DANA *looks at the other two. What now? They shrug. No idea. Finally --*

SYDNEY: That's very nice of you but we're eating our own sweet potatoes.

LUCINDA: *(From the hallway)* You told me your Christmas dinner was ruined.

JERRY *and DANA look at her, as if to say that's the best you can do?*

SYDNEY: Like you guys had something better.

LUCINDA: *(From the hallway)* Don't be proud, Dana's family. C'mon, open the door already.

A beat.

DANA: I'll be right there.

SYDNEY: *(Whispering)* You don't need a grocery cart to bring over a sweet potato casserole.

DANA: *(Whispering)* It's obviously a trick.

JERRY: *(Whispering)* Maybe or maybe she's gonna drop off the casserole and then bring the cart back to the grocery store.

SYDNEY: *(Whispering)* You think?

JERRY: *(Whispering)* I don't know. But I'm so hungry I don't want to send her away if she's really brought it over.

Another knock.

LUCINDA: *(From the hallway)* You don't want it to get cold, do ya?

DANA: (*Looks at JERRY, uncertain*) Dad?

JERRY: Go ahead and answer the door. It's not like she's gonna shoot us. Half the building would be up here in no time.

DANA *crosses to the door and opens it. LUCINDA barges in with the cart. A tarp covers its contents. Well, mostly covers. A pair of shoe-covered feet hang off one side of the cart. A knife sticks out of him. LUCINDA slams the door behind her and pulls out a gun.*

LUCINDA: I lied about the casserole.

JERRY: Okay, let's not go crazy here.

LUCINDA: Anything but, Dana's dad. (*She trains the gun on the two girls.*) I need you two to go stand next to your father.

JERRY: Don't move. Either of you.

LUCINDA: This is hard enough and now you wanna make it even harder?

JERRY: Just put the gun down, Lucinda.

She keeps it trained on them while crossing to draw the blinds on the window.

LUCINDA: Trust me, Dana's dad, I debated whether or not to do this. I'm not a cold-blooded killer or anything. But I've reached my breaking point. It's probably the stress of the holidays. That, and having a shitty boyfriend. Kenny spoiled my Christmas and now you're doing the same.

SYDNEY: (*Nods towards the grocery cart*) Is that really Kenny?

LUCINDA: (*Nods*) Finally found a way to shut him up.

DANA: You stabbed him?

LUCINDA: (*Re: the knife*) What gave it away?

JERRY: Don't make it any worse, Lucinda. You can tell the police it was self-defense.

LUCINDA: I could but you guys would say otherwise.

JERRY: We would not, would we, girls?

DANA: We definitely would not.

SYDNEY: Self-defense all the way. That whole business with the Florida oranges? It's not like he didn't deserve it.

A beat as LUCINDA weighs her options. Finally --

LUCINDA: Naah. I'm sorry. I can't risk it. (*Gestures for the two girls to stand next to JERRY*) C'mon, you two.

DANA *obliges*. SYDNEY *doesn't*.

LUCINDA: Oh that's right. You're the rebel of the family.

DANA: Our neighbor will hear the gunshots.

LUCINDA: Our neighbor's in Phoenix.

SYDNEY: Then other people in the building.

LUCINDA: Most of whom are visiting their loved ones. It's Christmas after all. But let's test your theory.

She shoots the gun into the ceiling. Twice.

LUCINDA: There. Let's see if anyone comes by. If they do, I put this away. If they don't...

JERRY: The police will trace this back to you.

LUCINDA: Already thought about that, Dana's dad. First, this is Kenny's gun. Got it for him for Christmas. Second, I'll just say I was napping. Kenny came over here because he was sick and tired of you guys telling us to shut up. You got into a big argument with him – neighbors, right? He pulled out his gun. You managed to knife him but not before he could shoot all of you.

DANA: That still leaves half the family.

LUCINDA: I saw them leave. I'll just wait for them to come back. In the meantime, I'll enjoy my Christmas dinner. Despite what Kenny here said, my turkey is really good. *(A beat)* Too bad. Looks like the neighbors aren't coming through for you. *(Then)* I'm real sorry. I never thought this is how my Christmas would turn out. *(To SYDNEY)* You gonna stand next to them or not?

SYDNEY: Fuck you.

LUCINDA: *(She raises her gun.)* Just for that, I'm gonna shoot you first. Merry Christmas.

SYDNEY: Bedtime inspection!

SYDNEY ducks to the floor and plugs in the Xmas lights as a shot goes off.

LUCINDA: What the hell?

And just like before, there's a couple of popping sounds and the lights in the condo start flickering. Which allows us to see SYDNEY and DANA jumping into action. Which involves DANA scurrying behind LUCINDA and clamping her hand over her mouth. A surprised LUCINDA bites down on her hand as DANA holds onto her for dear life. They knock over a lamp and knick-knacks in the brief struggle. LUCINDA finally breaks free as SYDNEY pushes the bean bag chair into HER path. A disoriented LUCINDA takes a couple of steps towards SYDNEY, then trips over the bean bag chair as another shot rings out and the condo is plunged into darkness. A long beat of silence, then --

DANA: Sydney? Sydney??

JERRY: Sydney?

DANA: Dad?

JERRY: Dana?

DANA: Over here. Please don't be dead, Sydney. *Please.* Dad?

JERRY: Just need another second.

DANA: What are you doing??

JERRY: Just hold on. There!

And the lights come back on. JERRY emerges from the kitchen a few seconds later. Where he sees what we see, SYDNEY, lying on the floor motionless, next to the bean bag chair. The lamp, some books and assorted knick-knacks are strewn across the floor.

JERRY: Sydney!

A beat.

SYDNEY: I'm fine.

And she slowly gets to her knees. And we see that she's been lying on top of a motionless LUCINDA.

JERRY: Is she dead?

SYDNEY: *(Checks her pulse)* Nope.

JERRY: Unconscious?

SYDNEY shakes LUCINDA'S head back and forth. Then lets it drop on the floor with a clunk.

SYDNEY: Yup.

SYDNEY looks over at her sister and motions to the tree.

SYDNEY: Can you hand me one of those strands?

DANA: Sure. You have a preference?

SYDNEY: No. Either one's fine.

DANA grabs the longer strand of lights off the tree and brings it over to her sister, who starts to tie up LUCINDA. As DANA starts to straighten up the room --

SYDNEY: Nice work by the way.

DANA: You too.

JERRY: Aww. Bedtime inspection. Just like when you were kids.

DANA: You never forget how to torture someone. It's like riding a bicycle.

The door opens and MAUREEN, LANCE and CHAD enter with bags of food.

SYDNEY: About time.

JERRY: Hey folks.

MAUREEN: *(Surveying the scene)* What on earth??

CHAD: Dear god...

JERRY: *(Points to KENNY)* Dead. *(Then to LUCINDA)* Not dead. We'll tell you all about it over dinner. Suffice to say you'll be very proud of both our daughters. *(Pulls out his phone)* Almost forgot. Gotta call 911.

He pulls out his phone and heads off to the kitchen. DANA peeks into one of LANCE'S bags.

DANA: *(Delighted)* KFC!

LANCE: The Colonel to the rescue.

MAUREEN: *(As she heads into the kitchen)* Unfortunately, they ran out of chicken. All they had were sides.

SYDNEY: Better than nothing.

MAUREEN: Alright if we eat in the living room? All that water -- the dining room is pretty squishy.

DANA: No problem.

CHAD: *(To DANA)* Talk about traumatic. How are you holding up, my little sparkle?

DANA: I'm fine, Chad. Hungry but fine.

CHAD: Well, I'm gonna make you a plate for a queen.

LANCE: *(To SYDNEY)* And I'm gonna do the same for you.

SYDNEY: Hold on, guys.

SYDNEY starts digging into LUCINDA'S pockets. She pulls a set of keys from the unconscious woman's pants.

SYDNEY: *(Tosses them to LANCE)* Here.

LANCE: What's this for?

SYDNEY: Lucinda said she makes a great turkey. Let's see if she's right.

DANA: Nice.

CHAD: I'm not sure about this. Breaking and entering is a felony.

LANCE: C'mon Chadman. Live a little.

DANA: If you have a key, I don't think it's breaking and entering.

LANCE: She's right. It's just entering.

CHAD: Then count me in. I might even bring over some of those Florida oranges.

And the two guys disappear into the hallway. SYDNEY picks up the gun. DANA looks over as SYDNEY carefully places it on the coffee table.

SYDNEY: Don't worry. I won't scratch it.

DANA: Never even crossed my mind.

SYDNEY: Liar.

DANA: Thank you for respecting my coffee table but I'm over it.

SYDNEY: *(Doesn't believe her)* Whatever you say. *(Beat)* I've been thinking about what mom and dad said.

DANA: About?

SYDNEY: Can we tolerate these guys for the next forty years?

DANA: Truthfully? I'm not sure.

SYDNEY: Five or ten maybe. But forty?

DANA: I know.

SYDNEY: That's basically a life sentence.

A beat.

DANA: You could tell Lance that until he gets a job as a whitewater guide, you're not gonna marry him.

SYDNEY: *(Smiles)* That's brilliant. Knowing Lance, that gives me at least five years to decide.

DANA: Still leaves me having to go to the courthouse tomorrow.

SYDNEY: Right. *(Beat)* You could tell Chad you changed your mind.

DANA: Then he's gonna think I have doubts and he'll double his worship. Then I'll really hate him. That doesn't seem fair.

SYDNEY: You're right. *(Then)* I could call in that bomb scare. That'll buy you some time.

DANA: *(Touched)* Really? You'd do that for me?

SYDNEY: You bet. I'll do it right now.

SYDNEY *pulls out her phone. Starts to dial, when --*

DANA: Wait.

DANA *kneels down next to LUCINDA and fishes through her pockets – finally pulling out her phone.*

DANA: Use this one.

SYDNEY: Good thinking, sis. *(She dials)* 911? I need to talk to someone at the Pasadena City courthouse. *(Beat)* I know it's closed. I also know there's a bomb in the building and that it's set to go off tomorrow morning. Oh, and Merry Christmas, operator.

She hangs up.

DANA: Thanks. You're a lifesaver.

SYDNEY: *(Shrugs, happy to have done it)* Enh.

CHAD and LANCE *enter with a big, beautiful golden brown turkey and a big bag of Florida oranges.*

DANA: *(Impressed)* Wow.

SYDNEY: Lucinda wasn't lying. That is a fine-looking bird.

LANCE: Where do you want it?

DANA'S *moment of truth has arrived.*

DANA: Coffee table's fine.

CHAD: Really. What if the juice from this succulent turkey gets on it?

DANA: We'll live.

SYDNEY *nods, impressed.* MAUREEN and JERRY *enter from the kitchen, carrying plates of food.*

MAUREEN: Everyone. Gather around. Our Christmas dinner is finally happening.

As everyone converges on the food, voicing their gratitude, JERRY looks at the turkey.

JERRY: How are we gonna slice up that thing?

DANA: I'll get a knife from the kitchen.

CHAD: There are no more knives. Remember? They were destroyed in Lance's futile attempt to silence the heat alarm.

And all eyes settle on the murder weapon sticking out of Kenny. A long beat.

JERRY: I really want to eat some turkey.

MAUREEN: Hard to argue with a Christmas tradition.

DANA: And that knife is obviously very sharp.

MAUREEN: If we pulled it out and cleaned it off, we could stick it back in him when we're done.

JERRY: Good point. *(Then)* Any objections?

LANCE: Naah.

CHAD: Not really.

SYDNEY: I say go for it.

JERRY gets up and starts to pull the knife out of dead KENNY when OFFICER HOYT appears in the doorway.

DANA: *(Surprised)* Officer Hoyt.

SYDNEY: Care to join us?

OFFICER HOYT: I'm afraid I'm here on official business. Just got a 911 call. Possible murder in the building. *(Re: LUCINDA)* Is this the victim?

JERRY: No, she's alive.

OFFICER HOYT: How about the man in the shopping cart with approximately a dozen knife wounds?

JERRY: *(Pointing with the knife)* This man?

OFFICER HOYT: Yup.

MAUREEN: He would be dead, yes.

A beat.

JERRY: We can explain.

And the lights go to black.

Curtain