

Past and Present Tense

A Play in 3 Acts

by Richard Romano

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Characters

Daniel Harper, 36, Kevin's brother
Kevin Harper, 39, Daniel's brother
Christine Harper, 64, Daniel and Kevin's mother
Frank, 73, father of Christine, grandfather of Daniel and Kevin
Young Daniel, 16, Daniel as a teenager 20 years earlier
Young Kevin, 19, Kevin as a teenager 20 years earlier
Young Christine, 44, Christine 20 years earlier
Deb, 16, would-be girlfriend of Young Daniel
Paula, 36, wife of Daniel
Erika, 35, friend of Kevin
Karen, 20, college friend of Young Kevin
Dr. Bramble, hospital OB/GYN
Nurse
Waiter

Scenes and Settings

Act I

Scene 1: Hospital room, present day (i.e., 2009)
 Scene 2: Harper living room, 20 years earlier (i.e., 1989)
 Scene 3: Harper living room, a few hours later, 1989
 Scene 4: Appleton's Restaurant, two hours later, 1989
 Scene 5: Appleton's Restaurant, 45 minutes later, 1989
 Scene 6: Harper living room, late that night, 1989
 Scene 7: Hospital room, present day (2009)

Act II

Scene 1: Bus station, present day (2009)
 Scene 2: Bookstore, a few minutes after Act I, Scene 3 (1989)
 Scene 3: Young Kevin's bedroom, a few hours after Act I, Scene 5 (1989)
 Scene 4: Harper living room, Christmas morning (1989)
 Scene 5: Bus station, present day (2009)

Act III

Scene 1: Hospital room, present day (2009)
 Scene 2: Hospital waiting room, a few minutes later (2009)
 Scene 3: Hospital waiting room, an hour or so later (2009)
 Scene 4: Hospital room, a few minutes later (2009)
 Scene 5: Hospital waiting room, a few minutes later (2009)

Act I, Scene 1

A hospital room, Christmas Eve. Present day. It is about 8:00 p.m. It is a standard, antiseptic hospital room. There is a bed at stage right, which can be curtained off from the rest of the room, and one chair alongside it. On the wall opposite the bed is a basin, above which is mounted a dispenser of sanitizing lotion. On the downstage side of the basin is the door to the room. On the upstage wall is a row of windows, looking out on darkness. There are a few half-hearted attempts at Christmas decorations. A Nurse enters, pushing Paula in a wheelchair. Paula is very pregnant, and yet is dressed in a formal evening dress. They are followed by Daniel, who is also dressed in a tie and jacket. They have just come from a somewhat upscale dinner party. The Nurse helps Paula to her feet and escorts her toward the hospital bed.

NURSE

The first thing we're going to have to do is get you out of that dress.

PAULA

That exact line was what got me in this situation in the first place.

(The nurse tosses Paula a hospital gown.)

DANIEL

Honey, just do what the nurse says.

(Daniel takes out a cell phone.)

I'll see if I can get Trevor to keep the party from falling apart.

PAULA

Good luck. He can barely keep your sales force from falling apart.

(The Nurse pulls the curtain around the bed so that Paula can change in privacy. Daniel dials his cell phone.)

DANIEL

(Talking on cell phone.)

Trevor, it's Daniel. We're at the hospital. Sorry we had to run off like that. One minute Paula's putting out *hors d'oeuvres*, the next her water breaks....She's fine, so far. She—... Me? I'm fine...so far....No, she wasn't due for

three more weeks, so we figured a Christmas Eve party would be safe. What can you do?....Just try to hold everything together, but I doubt I'll be back tonight....

(The Nurse glares at him.)

NURSE

You're not supposed to use your cell phones in here.

(Daniel nods at her to indicate that he at least heard what she was saying.)

DANIEL

(Talking on cell phone.)

I have to go, but, Trev—my mother's driving in from Syracuse and she's due in at about 9 or so. When she shows up, let her know where we are....Oh, and the same if my brother shows up. Thanks, and I'll check in later if I get a chance. If I don't talk to you, have a good holiday. My best to Marcia...Thanks.

(He snaps the phone shut. The Nurse pulls the back the curtain. Paula is lying in bed wearing a hospital gown. The gown she was wearing hangs over the foot of the bed. She gazes at it sadly.)

PAULA

I was hoping to get at least one entire evening out of that formal maternity wear.

DANIEL

Who knows? It may come in handy again someday.

PAULA

(Glaring at him.)

You bite your tongue.

NURSE

Just sit tight, Mrs. Harper. It's Christmas Eve, so we're a little shorthanded tonight, but Doctor Bramble will be by shortly.

PAULA

Where's Doctor Olsen?

DANIEL

I left a message before we left the house. His service is trying to track him down.

NURSE

Do you need anything else?

PAULA

Well, it's Christmas Eve and I'm about to give birth, so I think a trio of wise men is in order.

NURSE

(Grouchily.)

Every year they make the same joke...

(The Nurse exits. Daniel pulls a chair alongside the bed and sits down. He clasps Paula's hand.)

PAULA

Wow, talk about Nurseferatu...

DANIEL

Everything is going to be fine.

PAULA

Sure, you're on *that* side of this.

(She grabs her protuberant stomach with both hands.)
Look what you got me into.

DANIEL

You know, it wasn't *entirely* my fault...

PAULA

It's a shame we had to leave. It was a good party.

DANIEL

(Shrugs.)

It was okay.

PAULA

Uh oh. What's wrong?

DANIEL

It's just...I wish Kevin had shown up.

PAULA

Daniel...

DANIEL

He never even responded to my e-mail. Or my voice-mail. Or the printed invitation.

PAULA

Maybe he's traveling. His semester probably ended a few days ago.

DANIEL

His campus voice-mail didn't say he was out of town.

PAULA

That doesn't necessarily mean anything. And as you pointed out, it may not even be the right Kevin Harper.

DANIEL

I know, I know, but I really want...

PAULA

Daniel, I know where this is going.

DANIEL

A lot of time has gone by. He's about to be an uncle, and I want him in my life. You know, I can't even remember the last time I spoke to him.

PAULA

He was at our wedding.

DANIEL

And that was eight years ago, and even then I don't think we exchanged more than five words.

PAULA

You had someone else you had to exchange words with, dear.

DANIEL

I look at your family—

PAULA

The swarming horde.

DANIEL

Right, and everyone is so close. You and your brother, your sisters, aunts, distant cousins—even people who just drove past the hospital when you were born. I don't even know if *mom* has spoken to Kevin in the past eight years.

PAULA

Dan, you can't drag your brother kicking and screaming back into your life. Some families are closer than others. Some are just dysfunctional. Some put the "fun" in dysfunctional. What did Tolstoy say, "All happy families resemble each other; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way"?

DANIEL

Now you're doing a good job of impersonating Kevin.
(Daniel gets up, walks upstage to the windows and looks out into the darkness.)

DANIEL

It's funny, this Christmas is exactly 20 years after the Christmas that Kevin and I had the fight that started everything. It was the first Christmas after dad left.

PAULA

Time flies when you're having fun.
(Daniel turns around to look at Paula.)

DANIEL

You would have thought both he and I would have grown as people in 20 years.

PAULA

You'd think that, wouldn't you?
(Daniel gazes off into space, lost in thought...)

Act I, Scene 2

The living room of the Harper house, 20 years earlier (i.e., 1989). It is Christmas Eve, early afternoon. The Harper house is a lower-middle-class, suburban affair. The house is done up in extravagant Christmas festoonery, and there is an undecorated Christmas tree in the upstage corner of the living room at stage left. A few wrapped presents of varying size are under the tree. The door to the outside is at stage right. Downstage from the Christmas

tree at stage left is a doorway to the rest of the house. On the upstage wall is a large picture window, in front of which—but pulled out a sort distance—is a sofa, flanked by two end tables. There is an armchair on either side of the room. Boxes of decorations, tinsel, and lights are strewn about the room. There is a card table set up in the middle of the room, topped with wrapping paper, tape dispensers, and other wrapping tools and accoutrements.

Young Christine, 44, is talking on the phone as she wraps presents on the card table. This was before cordless phones, so she totes the phone around as she carries wrapped presents from the table to the tree.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(Talking on phone.)

How can you possibly think of it as Christmas out there? It's sunny and 75...Okay 65, but still... Yes, I know it's 65 here, too, but it's not supposed to be. It's upstate New York. It's supposed to be snowing. Instead it's 65 and sunny. See? Why'd you have to go to L.A.? You could just as easily have stayed here. What does L.A. have that Syracuse doesn't?...

(While Christine is talking, Frank enters from the doorway a stage left. Frank is in his 70s, and is fit and athletic. He examines the bare Christmas tree and smiles. He takes an ornament from a box on the floor and hangs it on the tree. Christine spins around.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(Talking to Frank.)

Take that off. We're not decorating the tree until Kevin gets home.

(Frank removes the ornament and puts it back in the box. He attends to hanging some Christmas lights on the living room window.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(Talking on phone.)

Jeff, I don't want to hear about it...You really are insensitive, aren't you?...I don't care where she works...In television, that's great...Oh, ABC huh? I'm sure she'll learn the rest of the alphabet eventually...Of course I'm hostile. It's Christmas. This is the first Christmas since you had your mid-life crisis, and I'm here trying to keep one kid in college and the other out of jail, and you tell me about some bimchette you're seeing. Could you possibly be a bigger lout?...I don't want to have this argument every time I

talk to you...Well, stop being a jackass...Kevin's bus gets in in about 15 minutes. Dad's going to pick him up shortly.

(Frank overhears a portion of Christine's phone conversation and grunts disapprovingly.)

Jeff, I have to go, I still have some presents for Kevin I have to wrap before he gets here...Danny? He's around somewhere...

(Talking to Frank.)

Dad, where's Danny?

FRANK

Down at Cavello's Auto getting your brakes looked at.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Oh, right.

(Talking on phone.)

He's getting my car fixed... He thought the brakes seemed kind of mushy.

FRANK

Tell him if he's so damn concerned he should get his butt out here and help out.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(Talking on phone.)

Dad says "Merry Christmas."

(Frank grunts.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(Talking on phone.)

Call tomorrow. The kids'll be here...Because it's Christmas Day, you twit...Do you have any sense of time at all out there?...Bye...Merry Christmas.

(She hangs up.)

FRANK

Chrissy...

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Dad, don't even say it.

(Frank holds up his hands and returns to the Christmas lights. Young Daniel enters from the door at stage right. He is 16, tall and thin, though not athletic. His hair is in danger of being a mullet. He has a light coat on. He wears jeans and a long-sleeve heavy

metal concert shirt. He hands a set of keys to Christine.)

YOUNG DANIEL

Tom said your brakes are fine for now but after the holidays you should have them replaced.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

And how much is that going to cost?

YOUNG DANIEL

A couple hundred, is what he said.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Daniel! For crying out loud, how am I supposed to afford that? With Kevin in college, the last thing I need is to pour hundreds of dollars into that car.

YOUNG DANIEL

Don't yell at me. I didn't mess up your brakes.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

You're the one that drives it most of the time. What did you do to the brakes?

YOUNG DANIEL

I used them to stop.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Getting smart with me?

YOUNG DANIEL

I don't know why you're blaming me for something that's not my fault. That car is 15 years old. It's a heap. You're lucky I was able to fix half the things that have broke on it.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Like what?!

(Frank decides to halt the argument.)

FRANK

Danny, do you want to come with me to pick your brother up at the bus station?

YOUNG DANIEL

Do I have to?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Danny...

YOUNG DANIEL

What time does the Christ child get in?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Daniel! He's your only brother.

YOUNG DANIEL

Thank god for that. I'm going to see Deb. What time's dinner?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

We have reservations for 6:30 at Appleton's.

YOUNG DANIEL

Appleton's? Do we have to go there? I hate that place.

CHRISTINE

It's your brother's favorite restaurant and since we haven't seen him in three months, we're taking him there. If you don't like it, you can stay home and have cold pizza.

YOUNG DANIEL

(He lights up.)
Can I?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

No. Be back by 6.

YOUNG DANIEL

Yes, master.

(Singing, à la John Lennon's "Imagine.")
"Imagine there's no Kevin, it's easy if you try..."
(Young Daniel exits through the door at stage right.
Christine sighs.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

What am I going to do with him?

FRANK

Giving him a break might be a good idea.

CHRISTINE

What do you mean?

FRANK

Chrissy, you treat the poor kid like he's a juvenile delinquent.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Isn't he? How many times have the police called because of some trouble he and his friends have got into?

FRANK

Come on, none of it's anything serious. Loitering, underage drinking...big deal. It's not like he killed anyone or robbed a 7-11. Besides, haven't you noticed that he's the only mature one around here?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I don't think—

FRANK

Who gets the car fixed? Who does most of the repairs on this house? Who runs all the errands? All the time going to school *and* working at Grand Union 20 hours a week.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Have you *seen* his grades? I may never have to pay for his college education since he may never actually graduate high school.

FRANK

You never give him any credit for anything, do you?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Well, dad, since Jeff left we've all had to pitch in a lot more around here.

FRANK

I know that. All's I'm saying is that Danny's working harder than both of us combined. You might also want to—

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(Snapping at him.)

What?

FRANK

Stop treating Kevin like...well, like he's the Christ child.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I most certainly do not!

FRANK

Chrissy...

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I treat both my sons exactly the same.

FRANK

Chrissy, you treat Kevin like he's the second coming and Danny like he's the devil.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I may not be June Cleaver, dad, but I'm doing the best I can.

FRANK

I know you are. But so's Danny. Anyway, I'm going to pick up Kevin now.

(Frank exits.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(To herself.)

Of course I treat both my children equally. Now, where are those gift tags?

(She looks around, then exits stage left.)

Act II, Scene 3

The Harper living room, an hour or so later. The door at stage right opens and Young Daniel and Deb enter. Deb is a pretty 16-year-old, one of the "in" crowd. She and Daniel don't quite work as a couple, but they're 16 and can't quite figure that out yet.

YOUNG DANIEL

The coast is clear.

DEB

You're sure?

YOUNG DANIEL

Mom said that when Kevin got in they were going Christmas shopping at the mall. I got a look at the mall parking lot. They'll be gone a good three hours.

DEB

Why is he going Christmas shopping on like Christmas Eve?

YOUNG DANIEL

Because my brother may be a straight-A, honor roll student, but he's a complete moron.

DEB

Unlike you.

YOUNG DANIEL

Unlike— Hey, that was a bust, wasn't it?

DEB

Well, duh.

(They withdraw to the couch.)

YOUNG DANIEL

Now, Christmas comes to Dan Harper...

(They begin to neck. As they do, the door opens and Young Kevin enters. He is 19, thin and pale. He wears glasses and looks nerdy and bookish. Indeed, he carries a thick paperback book. He wears a black overcoat. He immediately spies Daniel and Deb, frowns, and closes the door. He removes his overcoat and is dressed entirely in black. As he passes behind the couch, he tosses his coat over the necking couple.)

DEB

Hey!

YOUNG DANIEL

What the f—

(They struggle and toss the coat to the floor.)

YOUNG KEVIN

If you two are going to go at it like crazed weasels, could you do it where normal people don't have to witness it?

YOUNG DANIEL

Hey, at least we do it.

YOUNG KEVIN

No comment.

YOUNG DANIEL

What are you doing here anyway?

YOUNG KEVIN

I think I live here.

YOUNG DANIEL

No, you live in Boston. You're just visiting here.

YOUNG KEVIN

And I suppose you had the title to the house signed over to you?

YOUNG DANIEL

Why aren't you Christmas shopping?

YOUNG KEVIN

I can only stand the commercialism of capitalist Christmas for so long before I want to vomit copiously. If you'll pardon my alliteration.

YOUNG DANIEL

If you want to move to a Communist country, you'd better hurry up. I can help you pack...

YOUNG KEVIN

Isn't it pathetic that our relationships with people seem to be solely dependent on what we give them for Christmas? As if stupid "things" define relationships.

DEB

(Standing up.)

Okay, I think I'd rather be...doing like *anything* than being here right now.

YOUNG KEVIN

I wouldn't expect *you* to understand.

DEB

I understand that you're a complete dickweed.

YOUNG KEVIN

(Mocking, with a British accent.)
Oh, that was very witty, very witty.

DEB

(To Daniel.)
Don't forget Cal's party tonight at 9.

YOUNG DANIEL

I should be released from prison by then.

DEB

See-ya.
(She exits. Kevin sits on the couch and starts reading his book. Daniel stares at Kevin curiously.)

YOUNG DANIEL

What are you reading?

YOUNG KEVIN

(Not taking his eyes from the book.)
Volume One of Braudel's *Civilization and Capitalism*.

YOUNG DANIEL

Sounds hot.
(He looks at Kevin.)
What's with the black? It's like Christmas and you're dressed like Death.

YOUNG KEVIN

I think you're the last person who should be giving anyone fashion tips. I don't think heavy metal concert shirts are making it on the runways of Paris this year.

YOUNG DANIEL

Whatever. I promised mom I'd clean out the garage this week so we can fit her car in there. I could use a hand taking stuff to the dump.

YOUNG KEVIN

You know, I am home on break. This is the first time off I've had since September. Can't you get one of the burly pituitary cases you call friends to help?

YOUNG DANIEL

(Staring at him uncomprehendingly.)
When's the last time *I* got a break? Fine. Go back your damn Communist book.

(Young Daniel exits stage left. Kevin shakes his head. The front door opens and Young Christine and Frank enter. They are laden with heavy shopping bags. They spy Kevin.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Here's where you are.

FRANK

You could have given us a hand with this stuff. Most of it's yours anyway.

YOUNG KEVIN

This holiday wasn't my idea. And technically it's going to be your stuff in about 12 hours.

FRANK

That's the Christmas spirit.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

If you want to wrap presents, there's wrapping paper and ribbon in the plastic bag behind the tree.

(She sets the bags down next to him. He barely takes his eyes from his book.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

What's that you're reading?

YOUNG KEVIN

Braudel's— uh, a history book.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

You know what I just finished? *Pet Sematary* by Stephen King. What a scary book. If you want to borrow it, you can.

YOUNG KEVIN

No thanks.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I'm going to make a cup of hot chocolate. Do you want anything?

YOUNG KEVIN

No thanks.

(She exits. Frank fusses with some decorations. Young Daniel enters.)

YOUNG DANIEL

Grandpa Frank, where's the best place to rent a van?

FRANK

Why are you renting a van?

YOUNG DANIEL

To do the garage on Friday. I want to get rid of as much of that crap as possible. If we can park mom's car inside before the weather gets bad, we might be able to get a few more years out of it.

FRANK

You don't need to rent a van. I'll take the cap off my pickup. Save yourself a few bucks. Besides, I doubt they'd rent to you. You're not 18.

YOUNG DANIEL

Don't worry about that. I-

FRANK

Danny, I don't want to know if you've got a fake I.D. You got anyone to help?

YOUNG DANIEL

No. I tried. No takers.

(He looks over at Kevin, who has been vaguely paying attention to the conversation behind him. Christine enters carrying two coffee mugs. She hands one to Frank.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Here, dad, I made you some hot cocoa.

FRANK

(Taking the mug.)
Hot cocoa? It's 65 out.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I know, but it just seems traditional.
(She sits down next to Kevin.)
So, Danny, we just met your girlfriend in the driveway. She seems nice. Is it serious between you two?

YOUNG DANIEL

I don't know. I'm trying.

FRANK

Are you two going steady?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

"Going steady"? Dad, I don't think anyone says "going steady" anymore.

FRANK

What do they say?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I don't really know. Kevin, what do they call it these days?

YOUNG KEVIN

(Startled.)
What? Um, I don't know. Screwing like crazed weasels?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Kevin!

YOUNG KEVIN

You asked.
(He returns to his book.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

You're not being very sociable. We haven't seen you in three months. How is school going?

YOUNG KEVIN

(Hesitating.)

It's...going well. I made Dean's List this semester.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I knew you would. How's your roommate?

YOUNG KEVIN

A complete stoner. I avoid him as much as possible.

YOUNG DANIEL

You wouldn't expect Kevin to hang out with someone who was fun, would you?

(Frank smiles.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Daniel!

YOUNG KEVIN

Boy, it's great to be home.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

So what are you majoring in?

YOUNG KEVIN

English.

FRANK

And what do you plan to do with that?

YOUNG KEVIN

Write. Maybe teach.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

You always liked to write, didn't you? I remember when you were six, you found an old typewriter somewhere and you used to type up these three-page—I guess they were stories, and you'd staple them between two pieces of cardboard, draw a picture on the front with crayons, and then ask me to drive you down to the bookstore so you could have them sell it. It was so cute.

(Kevin is quite embarrassed by this.)

YOUNG KEVIN

Thanks for dredging that up. Is that what I have to look forward to for the next three days—random walks down memory lane?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Three days? I thought you were on break until the 16th.

YOUNG KEVIN

I'm going back early. There's some stuff I want to get done before classes start again.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Kevin, I thought you were going to be here for three *weeks*, not three days.

YOUNG KEVIN

I changed my mind.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Since last Thursday?

YOUNG DANIEL

Hey, let's be thankful for small favors.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Daniel! Three days? I'm only going to see you for three days?

YOUNG KEVIN

Sorry, mom.

(Christine is very quiet and sad. She stands up.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Well, we have 6:30 dinner reservations. I'd better get changed.

(She looks at Daniel.)

You're not wearing that, are you?

YOUNG DANIEL

What's wrong with it?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

You look like a slob. Wear those slacks Aunt Jessica gave you. And a clean shirt. That dress shirt I got you for your birthday would be nice. And if you could shave, that would be nice, too.

(She exits. Frank grabs his coat from the rack by the door and puts it on. He stands back and evaluates the decorating job he has done.)

FRANK

Not bad. It's actually starting to look like Christmas around here.

YOUNG KEVIN

(Muttering.)

Joy.

(Frank gives him a dark look.)

FRANK

(To Daniel.)

Tell your mother I'll be back by 6.

(Frank exits through the front door. Daniel stares at Kevin disapprovingly.)

YOUNG DANIEL

Wow, I didn't know it was possible, but college has made you an even bigger jerk.

YOUNG KEVIN

Unlike you, who's completely self-taught.

YOUNG DANIEL

Mom was really looking forward to you coming home. That's all she's been talking about for the past three weeks. "Kevin's coming home! Kevin's coming home!" And you've pretty much treated her like crap since you got back.

YOUNG KEVIN

I've treated her fine. I'm not too fond of being treated like a five-year-old, but that goes with the territory and I endure it uncomplainingly.

YOUNG DANIEL

That's the spirit. I don't think you know just how hard it's been around here since Dad left. Not just money, either.

YOUNG KEVIN

Daniel, I've only been away for three months. Dad left in May. Besides, what do you want from me?

YOUNG DANIEL

A little help. Me and grandpa are the only ones here most of the time.

YOUNG KEVIN

Daniel, I go to college 300 miles away. What am I supposed to do, drop out and work in a damn supermarket for the rest of my life? Take the bus back here every weekend? It's a seven-hour trip.

YOUNG DANIEL

Coming home once in a while would help. *Calling* home once in a while would be nice, too. I asked for help with the garage, and you told me to piss up a rope. Now you're only staying for three days? If you don't want to help *me* out, that sucks, but I can live with it. But at least try to give Mom some support.

YOUNG KEVIN

I'm not a psychologist.

YOUNG DANIEL

No, but you sure as hell need one.

YOUNG KEVIN

I wouldn't expect you to understand.

YOUNG DANIEL

I understand just fine. I understand how lame you are.
(Daniel exits stage left. Kevin shakes his head and goes back to his book. The phone rings. Kevin gets up and answers it.)

YOUNG KEVIN

(Talking on phone.)
Hello?...Hi! You made it back?...Yeah, I just got in a couple hours ago...

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(Shouting from offstage.)
Who is it?

YOUNG KEVIN

(Looking offstage and frowning.)
I'd love to. I have to be back here by 6 but would be eager to flee for a little while...That sounds good. I'll meet you there.

(He hangs up. Young Christine enters. She is wearing a bathrobe and slippers.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Who was that?

YOUNG KEVIN

It was for me. Mom, can I borrow the car?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Where are you going? We're going out to eat soon.

YOUNG KEVIN

Yeah, in two hours. I won't be long. I just have one last bit of Christmas shopping to do.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

When are we going to decorate the tree? We were waiting for you.

YOUNG KEVIN

I don't know. Tonight, after dinner?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(Hesitantly.)

Okay... The keys are in the kitchen.

(Kevin runs out stage left, then runs back onstage. He takes his overcoat and opens the front door.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Be back by 6!

YOUNG KEVIN

I will.

(Kevin exits. Young Daniel enters from the opposite side.)

YOUNG DANIEL

Mom, I'm going to Joey's for a while. I'll be back by 6.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Your brother just took the car.

YOUNG DANIEL

(Pounding his fist on the nearest available surface.)
Damn it! Mom!

YOUNG CHRISTINE

It's my car, Daniel. While your brother's home you're going to have to share it. I know you're used to having the run of the house, but he'll on be here a short time. He'll be gone soon enough.

YOUNG DANIEL

Not soon enough.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Daniel!

(Daniel exits stage left in a huff. Christine exits slowly.)

Act I, Scene 4

Appleton's Restaurant. It's a moderately upscale restaurant, but not exactly the Russian Tea Room. It's basically a steakhouse. There are a half dozen or so tables, filled with patrons. It is about two hours after the previous scene. Young Daniel, Young Kevin, Young Christine, and Frank sit around a table in the center of the stage. They have only just arrived, and look at menus. Christine looks at the wine list.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I know you two are underage but it's Christmas Eve so I think we can all split a bottle of wine.

YOUNG DANIEL

Cool. Can I get a beer?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(Firmly.)
No, it's a glass of wine or nothing.
(Daniel is disappointed.)

YOUNG KEVIN

You'd better let me pick the wine.

YOUNG DANIEL

Let me guess, you're a wine expert now, too?

YOUNG KEVIN

I've learned a few things in the city.

FRANK

We're not complete rubes out here, you know.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I don't want to hear about you drinking.

YOUNG KEVIN

Mom, it's not like we chug a keg every night.

YOUNG DANIEL

Yeah, Kevin party? Get real. They probably all get together, sip wine, read depressing poetry, and fantasize about how superior they all are to everyone else.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Daniel! It's Christmas Eve. Don't you and your brother fight.

YOUNG KEVIN

Don't worry. I never engage in a battle of wits with an unarmed man.

YOUNG DANIEL

Ha ha. I'd kick *your* ass in any other battle.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

There will be no ass-kicking!

(She says this last line a bit too loudly and other restaurant patrons look over at her.)

Dad, any time you want to jump in here...

FRANK

(Wanting to stay out of it.)

I'm busy trying to decide between the steak or the pork chops.

YOUNG KEVIN

Of course.

(Frank glares at Kevin.)

FRANK

You have a problem with that?

YOUNG KEVIN

Eating meat is nothing but pure barbarism.

YOUNG DANIEL

Don't tell me you've become a vegetarian?

YOUNG KEVIN

Of course. It's the only humane way to eat. Typically, there aren't many vegetarian options on this menu.

YOUNG DANIEL

What do you want? This place is a *steakhouse*. I thought it was your favorite restaurant. That's the only reason we came here.

YOUNG KEVIN

Things change. I guess I have no choice but to get pasta.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

You're very thin. Are you eating enough?

YOUNG KEVIN

I'm eating fine.

YOUNG DANIEL

Well, I'm getting a nice thick T-bone steak. Can I get *extra* meat?

(This last line he says especially for Kevin's benefit.)

FRANK

The Porterhouse sounds good. What about you, Chrissy?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I haven't had prime rib in ages, but it's a bit expensive.

YOUNG DANIEL

Come on, Mom, it's Christmas. We'll switch to soy burgers and lawnmower clippings after the New Year.

(Kevin is somewhat aghast and is pretending that he doesn't know them at all.)

Act I, Scene 5

Appleton's Restaurant, about 45 minutes later. The four are nearly done with their meals. All but Kevin appear to have enjoyed the dinner. Christine notices that Kevin has only picked at his pasta bowl.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Honey, you need to eat more. Wasn't your pasta good?

YOUNG KEVIN

It was okay. I don't eat that much these days.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I can't finish all my prime rib. Do you want some?

YOUNG KEVIN

Mom, that's *meat*.

YOUNG DANIEL

You can't get anything past him. He made the Dean's List.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Daniel!

YOUNG DANIEL

Sorry, Mom, you know how us mere mortals are.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(Eager to change the subject.)

Kevin, do you remember the first time you ever had a hamburger?

YOUNG KEVIN

Oh, God. Thankfully, no.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

We were at this burger place somewhere in downtown Syracuse. You must have been four or five at the time. And you ordered all by yourself and got a hamburger. And it was this giant burger.

(She is laughing quite strongly.)

And it came and I swear it was bigger than your entire head! You had to eat it with a knife and fork because it wouldn't fit in your little mouth.

YOUNG DANIEL

How things change. Now *nothing* is bigger than his head and you could drive a tractor-trailer through this mouth.

(Kevin is mortified with embarrassment and stares daggers at Daniel. Still, he says nothing.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I'm sorry, honey, I know that these reminiscences bother you. But it was pretty funny. I remember you also had the hardest time saying "spaghetti." "Pisketty," was what you always called it.

(Kevin so wishes he were anywhere else.)

FRANK

I don't know what you're upset about. There's nothing wrong with reminiscing about the past.

YOUNG KEVIN

That's easy for you to say. You have nothing else *but* past.

FRANK

Watch your mouth, kid, or you're not going to have much of a future. Or at least not one with teeth.

YOUNG KEVIN

Of course. The inevitable recourse to threats of physical violence when you have no other options. How very predictable.

FRANK

How about we predict how much longer your face will look like that.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Dad!

YOUNG DANIEL

Yeah, Grandpa, if your face looked like that you'd really like it to be rearranged.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Daniel! This is Christmas Eve! Can't we get along for one night out of the year?

YOUNG KEVIN

Apparently not.

(The Waitress comes over to the table.)

WAITRESS

Can I interest any of you in dessert?

YOUNG DANIEL

(Looking at Kevin.)

Do you have any meat pies?

(Kevin jumps to his feet.)

YOUNG KEVIN

That's it. I'm nothing but a joke around here. Well, fine. Laugh it up. I'm out of here. I'm walking home. Man, I can't wait until I can get back someplace where people treat me like a normal person!

(And with that, Kevin storms out. Everyone else is slightly stunned for a beat or two.)

WAITRESS

Now, about dessert?

FRANK

Hell, I could go for a nice Scotch.

WAITRESS

Sure.

YOUNG DANIEL

Make that two.

(The Waitress looks at Frank.)

FRANK

Come on, it's Christmas Eve.

(The Waitress accedes. Daniel is delighted. The Waitress looks at Christine.)

WAITRESS

For you, ma'am?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(Sadly.)

Just a cup of tea, please.

Act I, Scene 6

The Harper living room, late that night. Most of the boxes of ornaments have disappeared. Young Christine enters from stage left, dressed in bathrobe and slippers and cradling a cup of tea. She glances at the tree, still undecorated, and tries not to get emotional. The front door opens and Young Daniel enters.

YOUNG DANIEL

Mom, what are you still doing up?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Oh, I couldn't sleep...

(She abruptly remembers she is his mother.)

Do you know what time it is?

YOUNG DANIEL

It's about 1:30.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

If you don't get to bed, Santa won't come.

(Daniel rolls his eyes slightly, but Christine lets out a slight sad laugh.)

I know, you're 16. You haven't believed in Santa in—well, at least a few years.

(She sits down on the couch. Daniel hesitates slightly, then sits down next to her.)

YOUNG DANIEL

Were you waiting up for me?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(Trying to cover it up.)

No, of course not. I said I—

YOUNG DANIEL

You haven't waited up for me since...well...

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Since you stopped believing in Santa.

YOUNG DANIEL

Right.

(There is a short, somewhat awkward pause.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Of course, you sometimes *woke* me up. Sometimes *other* people woke me up, like policemen. Usually on your behalf.

YOUNG DANIEL

I know, mom. I'm sorry about all that. It's not like I set out to *look* for trouble, I just seem to end up in it.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I know, Danny, I know. I just wish you'd try to be a bit more...

(She trails off. She can't finish the sentence.)

YOUNG DANIEL

(With only the slightest bit of hostility.)

Like Kevin?

(Christine pauses for a time.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(With some degree of resignation.)

Until today, I probably would have said that.

YOUNG DANIEL

And now?

(She pauses again.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I really don't know, Danny. I'm hoping it's just a phase he's going through. Being away from home for the first time, being in college, being in a city like Boston, meeting all sorts of new people—all of that on top of your father taking off. Maybe I'm just being foolish to think that everyone stays the same, that no one ever grows up and changes.

YOUNG DANIEL

There's a difference between growing up and changing and becoming an ass— a big jerk.

(She smiles at the fact that he can't bring himself to swear in front of her.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I know. I guess I just hope he'll come back to us some day.

YOUNG DANIEL

Was he ever really here to begin with? Even when Dad was around Kevin was always off in his own world, and you could tell he wanted to get away from here.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Well, I wanted him to! I wanted both of you to. That's what parents want, for their kids to grow up and want to leave home and make something of themselves in the world. Be—I don't know—be a doctor, or an astronaut, or a famous writer like Kevin wants. Like he has always wanted. Not that I don't love you both or that I want to get rid of you or anything... I just want something better than *this*.

(She holds her hands up to indicate the house.)

YOUNG DANIEL

I get it, mom. But there has to be a way to grow up and do all those things without completely abandoning your family.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Of course there is. It's just hard to find that middle ground, and in some ways that's what adolescence and young adulthood are—going to one extreme and then the other. By the time he's out of college—and you, too—I'm sure he'll have figured it out.

YOUNG DANIEL

Let's hope.

(He pauses.)

Well, I'm beat, mom, I think I'm gonna go to bed.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Good idea. Santa has been waiting on the roof for 20 minutes for you to go to bed.

(They laugh.)

YOUNG DANIEL

Good night, Mom.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Good night, Danny.

(He starts to exit. Christine stands up and looks again at the undecorated tree sadly. Daniel looks at her, then at the tree.)

YOUNG DANIEL

Mom, you know, if Santa can hit some of the other houses on the block first, we can get that tree decorated.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

We should really wait for—

(He gives her a look.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

You're right. I'll get the box of ornaments.

YOUNG DANIEL

I'll start disentangling the lights. That should take a few hours.

(They exit.)

Act I, Scene 7

The hospital room from Scene 1. We are back in present day. Daniel (older) and Paula are exactly where they were at the end of Act I, Scene 1.

DANIEL

Mom and I were up until four in the morning decorating that tree. And you know what? It looked great.

PAULA

What did Kevin say?

DANIEL

If he even noticed, he didn't say anything. After the episode at dinner, I can't imagine he was all that into it anyway. And, when Christmas Day turned out to be the biggest family disaster we ever had, we realized the extent to which he...well, he seemed to not even like us very much. Until Christmas morning, I thought what Mom said about him just trying to find that happy medium between dependence and independence was a valid point, but it turned out she was very wrong. In any normal family, she

would have been spot on. But in ours, she couldn't have been more wrong.

PAULA

What was his problem?

DANIEL

Nobody knows. To this day, no one has the foggiest idea what my brother is thinking about anyone or anything.

PAULA

What happened on Christmas morning?

DANIEL

Well, we— I've never told you this story?

PAULA

No, never.

DANIEL

Well, get ready.

(At that point, Dr. Bramble enters. He is middle-aged, balding, and a little distracted, in an Attention Deficit Disorder kind of way.)

DR. BRAMBLE

The rumor all through the hospital is that someone is having a baby in this room.

(He walks up to Daniel and immediately places a stethoscope against his chest.)

DR. BRAMBLE

Now, son, is this your first baby?

DANIEL

(Not sure how amused to be.)

Actually, Doctor, it's my wife who's having the baby.

DR. BRAMBLE

(Makes a big play of slapping his forehead.)

That's right, the wife. The wife. You know, I missed one day of obstetrics school and I guess it was the really important one.

(Daniel and Paula exchange "Is he for real?" looks. Dr. Bramble consults her chart, then looks down at Paula.)

DR. BRAMBLE

All right, then Mrs. Harper, let's have a look then.

DANIEL

The story will have to wait, honey.

DR. BRAMBLE

What? I love a good story. Don't let me keep you.

(Daniel isn't quite sure what to do.)

DANIEL

No, it can wait until later.

DR. BRAMBLE

Well, suit yourself. I've got a story, while I examine your wife. It seems that once upon a time, there was this princess and her OB/GYN...

End of Act I

Act II, Scene 1

A bus station. Present day; it is Christmas Eve, about 5:30 p.m. It's not a major metropolitan bus depot, but rather a small station in central New York State. Upstage at stage right is a door to the parking lot. At stage left is a door to the buses. A ticket counter stands upstage. There is a schedule board on the wall at stage left, between the door to the buses and the ticket counter. In the center of the station are two rows of plastic waiting room seats. There are one or two people of dubious character hanging out, and a few couples and other more respectable folk waiting for what is probably the only bus coming through that night.

Kevin and Erika enter from the parking lot. Kevin is 39 (the same character as Act I only 20 years older), tall, thin, and gaunt. He has very short grayish-blond hair. Erika is a few years younger. Although she is seeing him off, they are not a couple; they are just good friends. They come in and approach a row of chairs. He sits down, while Erika walks over to the schedule board.

ERIKA

Kevin? Your bus is about 15 minutes late. That gives you about 45 minutes to wait.

KEVIN

That was very poetic. The bus will board from the B Gate. You and me, it must be fate.

ERIKA

You're in good spirits. That's a good sign. You have your medication?

KEVIN

(Mockingly.)
Yes, dear.

ERIKA

Kevin! You know what happens if you go off the meds. You'll turn back into that large weeping egg from the Zoloft commercial.

KEVIN

Actually, I'm off the Zoloft. He put me on Lexapro a few days ago. I think their commercials feature moping strips

of bacon. Or perhaps a ham sandwich that desperately wants to be eaten.

ERIKA

Hm. How is that going?

KEVIN

As usual, the roster of side effects is basically a to-do list. "Dry mouth"? Check. "Dizziness"? Yep. "Sleeplessness"? I have that scheduled from 10 to 8.

ERIKA

They'll clear up.

KEVIN

At first, I wondered how could something cause both sleeplessness *and* drowsiness? And you know what, it actually is possible. Leave it to modern pharmacology.

ERIKA

Do you need anything else?

KEVIN

A ride home. Right now.

ERIKA

You have to do this. Not only for your brother's sake—he's having a kid.

KEVIN

In three weeks, if I recall the voice-mail I got.

ERIKA

It's not good to be alienated from your own family.

KEVIN

What if they're aliens?
(She gives him a look.)

KEVIN

I could throw myself under a Greyhound bus. Sort of a white trash Anna Karenina.

ERIKA

That's the kind of talk I'm supposed to watch out for.

KEVIN

Fear not. I tried it once and I'm pretty much done with it.

ERIKA

Isn't that what suicides say right before they actually do it for the last time?

KEVIN

If I die, it'll be the last thing I do.

ERIKA

Thank you, Groucho Marx.

KEVIN

Wait a minute. So if I say I'm going to kill myself, *or* I say I'm *not* going to kill myself—they *both* mean that I'm in fact going to snuff it? That defies logic. Modern psychiatry is just making it up as they go along.

ERIKA

You're not making it any easier.

KEVIN

Come with me, Erika. I need you. I...don't want to do this by myself.

ERIKA

You know I can't. I have my own family I have to spend time with. It is Christmas, you know.

KEVIN

Is that what it is? I thought the Christmas carols they've been playing in all the stores was part of some new horrible musical trend that I was unaware of.

ERIKA

'Fraid not.

KEVIN

Well, it's not out of the realm of possibility. Come with me anyway. It's not like there won't be another Christmas next year. They never end.

ERIKA

Sorry.

KEVIN

What if we were married. Then you'd have to come with me. There would be vows involved. Erika, marry me.

ERIKA

No! You're my best friend and I think that's just the way we should keep it.

KEVIN

There won't be any sex.

ERIKA

Well, now, how could I possibly refuse?

KEVIN

We could try, but another one of the side effects is loss of sex drive. An entire phalanx of supermodels could file in naked and start rubbing baby oil on their breasts and I'd be more interested in the snack machine.

ERIKA

Now there's a personal ad to set the heart a-fluttering.

KEVIN

God, do you think my mother is going to be there?

ERIKA

Well, she's going to become a grandmother for the first time, so I can't imagine why.

KEVIN

Are you mocking me? Because I'm in questionable mental health.

ERIKA

There's no question about it. It's writ large with exclamation marks.

KEVIN

"Writ large with exclamation marks." Damn writers.

ERIKA

Oh, and what are you, then? Didn't you just have that story accepted by *McSweneey's*?

KEVIN

All I can focus on is that when I sent my pitch letter to the editor there were two typos and a misused word. It's a miracle they even responded.

ERIKA

The things you obsess about. It was a great story! And your first publication in, what, 15 years?

KEVIN

It was the first time I submitted anything to anyone in 15 years. It was the first time in 15 years that something I wrote didn't make me retch.

ERIKA

There's a pitch letter no editor could refuse.

KEVIN

Why did they have to have their baby so close to Christmas?

ERIKA

I would imagine it had something to do with having had sex last April.

KEVIN

Ha ha. I'm not good with Christmases. It was a Christmas that started off this whole thing.

ERIKA

I don't think that was what did it.

KEVIN

Oh, crap. That was 20 years ago today. Well, tomorrow, actually. You know they're going to talk about it. It's going to be awful.

ERIKA

Yes, it probably will. But you know what? The best case scenario is that it will clear the slate, reset the counter—

KEVIN

Quote the hackneyed phrase...

ERIKA

I'm serious. Whatever it was that happened 20 years ago—and you've never actually told me what it was, by the way—whatever happened has never been discussed by you guys at all. And it's been festering ever since. The sooner you confront your family and talk about it, the sooner all of you can move on. You in particular.

KEVIN

I never told you about it?

ERIKA

No. Never.

KEVIN

That situation will continue.

ERIKA

Kevin!

KEVIN

Oh, all right. How much time do we have?

ERIKA

Your bus gets here in about half an hour.

KEVIN

It was my freshman year in college. I went back home for the first time since the semester started, and I was a complete jackass and got everyone pissed off at me. There. Now how much time until the bus?

ERIKA
Kevin!

KEVIN
Karen!

ERIKA
Huh?

KEVIN
Uh oh.

ERIKA
Who's Karen?

KEVIN
Oops. Sorry. I think memory lapses are another side effect. *Erika*. Karen, actually, was the first in a long series of female friends who never wanted to sleep with me.

ERIKA
And all this time I thought *I* was your first.

KEVIN
Nope. I used to have a map of Boston on which I highlighted all the places I regained my virginity. Anyway, Karen was my best friend freshman year in college, and was sort of a mentor. Or mentoress. Mentorene?

ERIKA
You're stalling.

KEVIN
Anyway, she also lived near Syracuse, and had left for break a day earlier. It was Christmas Eve and I had just gotten in. I was dragged Christmas shopping by my mother, alienated everyone in record time, then managed to break free and hang out with Karen who I felt at the time was "the only person who understood me." You know, the kind of BS-y statement you can only ever really get away with before the age of 20. We arranged to rendezvous at a bookstore in the mall...

(Kevin gazes off into space, lost in thought.)

Act II, Scene 2

A bookstore, 20 years earlier (i.e., 1989). It is several minutes after the events of Act I, Scene 3. Karen, 20, is standing in front of a bookshelf, reading. She is tall, thin, and bookish, with a late-1980s bohemian air about her. Young Kevin enters. He smiles mischievously and sneaks up behind her.

YOUNG KEVIN

What'cha readin'?

(He says this right in her ear, startling her. She spins around and playfully slaps him on the chest.)

KAREN

Well, being home with your family has made you playful, hasn't it?

YOUNG KEVIN

Oh, it so hasn't.

(They browse through the rows of books as they talk.)

KAREN

Is it as bad as you thought it would be?

YOUNG KEVIN

Worse. There's this strange reversion back to childhood. I'm on my own, living a reasonably mature life and suddenly I'm five again.

KAREN

I told you. I first got to experience that last year. It's a big adjustment your mom has to make. It'll take a while.

YOUNG KEVIN

How long?

KAREN

I don't know. Twenty years?

(She holds a book up to him.)

Have you ever read him?

YOUNG KEVIN

No, I haven't.

KAREN

You should. You'd like him. If you like Calvino, you'll like him.

YOUNG KEVIN

Plus my brother resents my presence. Which is fine. In fact, unless I miss my guess, he's pissed as hell right now that I took the car.

KAREN

I thought you and your brother used to get along really well.

YOUNG KEVIN

When we were 10 we did. In the past couple of years, we just—I don't know—stopped having anything in common. I'm into more intellectual pursuits, he prefers juvenile delinquency. But, whatever. I only have to endure it for three days.

KAREN

Three days? Kev, we're on three-week break. Ooh, I've been looking for this.
(She plucks another book from the shelf.)

YOUNG KEVIN

I'm going back to Boston on Saturday.

KAREN

And do what? You'll be the only one in the dorm.

YOUNG KEVIN

I'll be in downtown Boston. I think I'll find something to keep me occupied. Besides, it'll give me uninterrupted time to work on my novel.

KAREN

Don't they turn the heat off in the dorm when everyone's on break?

YOUNG KEVIN

It's 60 degrees out. Besides, I'm sure someone will be around. We've got students from India and China living there. Surely not all of *them* are going home.

KAREN

Are you sure you're not overreacting? They're your family, Kevin. You should be with them around the holidays.

YOUNG KEVIN

Why?

KAREN

"Why"?

(She takes another book from the shelf and hands it to him.)

KAREN

When you're done with the Braudel, read this next. You'll be an expert on the socioeconomic history of Europe.

YOUNG KEVIN

Oh, that'll get me laid.

KAREN

You'd be surprised.

YOUNG KEVIN

Great. My appeal will be limited to hairy Bolshevik women who bench press tanks.

KAREN

Who says that's not who you appeal to now?

YOUNG KEVIN

Figures. Since the Berlin Wall came down last month, I can't imagine there are many Bolshevik women left.

KAREN

You'd better hurry up then.

YOUNG KEVIN

Exactly. I should hop a flight to East Berlin tonight.

KAREN

Better make it West Berlin. East Berlin will probably be about as empty as the dorm during Christmas break. You need to spend time with your family. Trust me.

YOUNG KEVIN

I can't say I'm particularly enamored of the idea of family right now. Do you know that my dad hasn't even called me since I went to school?

KAREN

He sends you those postcards.

YOUNG KEVIN

Yeah, scantily-clad California bikini babes with some impersonal greeting like "wish you were here" scrawled on the back. He probably has a box of them and he sends them randomly to everyone he knows in the northeast.

(She stops looking through the books and faces him.)

KAREN

Kevin, listen to me. You're my best friend and I love you dearly, but you're being a schmuck.

YOUNG KEVIN

And Merry Christmas to you.

KAREN

I can understand that you're upset about your dad. But don't, don't, *don't* take it out on the rest of them. It's not fair. This is not the time to abandon them—either physically or emotionally. What have you been doing?

YOUNG KEVIN

"Doing"?

KAREN

Let me guess—you've had your nose stuck in a book and you've hardly said word one to any of them. Right?

YOUNG KEVIN

How—?

KAREN

How did I know? I may have only known you for three months, but you're a quick study. I know how moody you can be, and I know how you think that not talking to someone is somehow punishing them, and that they can psychically figure out what they've done to displease you. That whole "denying

people your essence" thing is really irritating and it's got to stop.

YOUNG KEVIN

(Laughs.)

"Denying people my essence"?

(He does a Peter Sellers impression from *Dr. Strangelove*.)

"Sgt. Bat Guano, if that is your name."

KAREN

I'm glad you got the reference, but don't change the subject.

YOUNG KEVIN

I don't really care about my dad leaving.

KAREN

Kevin!

YOUNG KEVIN

Well, okay, I care. But what makes you think I wasn't moody *before* he left?

KAREN

Were you?

YOUNG KEVIN

What's it to— Look, it doesn't matter. I got out of here. I left home. It was time to change my life, because I hated the one I had. I needed to get away from all of this crap, and I did! And just when I thought I was making progress, I'm sucked back into the vortex.

KAREN

I can't help but wonder if your father felt the same way.

YOUNG KEVIN

He probably did. But he had a wife and kids. I have nothing. I'm free to take off and leave all this behind.

KAREN

You're really not. Your mom and your brother are still your responsibility. You're the older brother. They both need you right now.

YOUNG KEVIN

No, they don't. I'm the last one they—or anyone—would ever need. And how did this suddenly become the Spanish Inquisition?

KAREN

All right, all right. I'm sorry. But, Kevin...

YOUNG KEVIN

Hm?

KAREN

You know I say this as your friend. Maybe you should see...someone.

YOUNG KEVIN

I've been trying. Hairy Bolshevik women are hard to come by in downtown Boston.

KAREN

Actually, they're not. But that's not what I meant. I meant, maybe you should seek some kind of...I don't know...therapy or something.

YOUNG KEVIN

What, a *shrink*?

KAREN

You spent six weeks reading Freud and Lacan and suddenly you have some kind of problem with psychotherapy?

YOUNG KEVIN

Well, that's different. *I'm* not crazy.

KAREN

Of course you're not. But I think you have some issues.

YOUNG KEVIN

Great. My mother thinks I'm Jesus Christ, my brother thinks I'm the antichrist, and my best friend thinks I'm a looney.

KAREN

I don't think you're a looney! I just think you've got some problems and it might help you to talk to a disinterested third party.

YOUNG KEVIN

(Getting angry.)

Sure, I'll go call 1-800-IM-NUTS. Listen, I have to go. I have to get back. The sooner I get this torture over with the sooner I can get out of here.

(He turns to leave.)

KAREN

Wait, don't leave like this.

YOUNG KEVIN

Like what?

KAREN

Mad at me.

YOUNG KEVIN

I'm not mad at anyone. I just want to be alone. And you know what? I could really go for a hamburger!

(He exits.)

KAREN

(Calling after him.)

Don't eat meat!

(She stares after him sadly.)

Act I, Scene 3

Young Kevin's bedroom. The door (which is closed) to the rest of the house is on the stage right wall, far upstage. Next to the door, along the wall downstage is a small desk—Kevin's childhood desk. Elsewhere in the room is a small twin size bed, a bureau, and other disused remnants of Kevin's youth. Atop the bureau is a model airplane, covered with dust. Empty rectangles on the walls indicate where posters once hung. It is Christmas Eve evening, a few hours after Act I, Scene 5. Young Kevin is sitting at the desk staring at a piece of paper in an old (even by 1989 standards) electric typewriter. He types a sentence, looks at it, seems vaguely content, then types another sentence. He reads it over, shrugs, and continues typing. He types a

long paragraph-length stream, then stops. He looks at it, sighs, then rips the paper out of the typewriter. He crumples it up and throws it across the room.

YOUNG KEVIN

No talent whatsoever.

(He puts his head down on the typewriter and wraps his arms around his head. He is quiet for a moment. He sighs again, then lifts his head abruptly and feeds another sheet of paper into the typewriter.)

YOUNG KEVIN

What are dead horses for but flogging?

(There is a soft knock at the closed door. Kevin stops typing, makes an unhappy face, and looks at the door.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(From behind the door.)

Kevin?

(The door opens and Young Christine enters. Kevin goes back to typing and pays scant attention to her.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Did you walk all the way back from Appleton's?

YOUNG KEVIN

Apparently.

(Throughout this conversation, Kevin rarely looks up from his typing at his mother. When he is finished with one sheet of paper, he feeds another in.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

What are you working on?

YOUNG KEVIN

(Obviously lying.)

Homework.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Even when you're on break?

(Kevin shrugs. Christine walks around the room silently, looking at some of the artifacts of his youth.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I'm sorry if I embarrassed you at dinner. It wasn't my intention. You're *not* a joke, you know that. You know how extremely proud I am of you.

(Kevin freezes for a moment and struggles to betray no emotion. He immediately starts typing again.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I know you're at that age where you don't want to be reminded of when you were a kid. I remember those days. Believe it or not, I was your age once. A long time ago. When the dinosaurs lived.

(That almost gets a smile out him. Christine smiles herself.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

As you get older you'll learn that sometimes it's...nice to reminisce about happier times.

YOUNG KEVIN

Were there any?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Of course there were! Weren't you happy?

YOUNG KEVIN

(Shrugs.)

I guess.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

You were never outgoing and happy-go-lucky like a lot of the other kids in the neighborhood—or even like your brother. Although he's more happy-go-unlucky these days. But you never seemed unhappy. You were always very smart, and I know smart kids aren't always popular in school.

YOUNG KEVIN

There's the understatement of the century.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Anyway, I know this is a difficult Christmas, what with your father gone and all.

YOUNG KEVIN

Oh, come on, ma. Even when he was here he was never...*here*.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

That's true enough, I suppose.

YOUNG KEVIN

It's very true.

(Christine absentmindedly picks up the model airplane from atop the bureau. She blows a layer of dust off it.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

You used to love making model airplanes.

(Kevin is not happy to be reminded of this.)

There was one really big one you made and when it was all put together, the wings fell off. And no matter what you tried, you couldn't keep those wings from falling off. And then your father showed you how to put wire hangers in the wings to give them support.

YOUNG KEVIN

Actually, Dad's contribution to that project was to shake his fist and curse at it, then give up. It was *grandpa* who showed me how to use wire hangers. Dad never showed me how to do much of anything.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I suppose you're right.

(She looks at him intently for a moment.)

We still have to decorate the Christmas tree. I told your brother to be home by midnight.

YOUNG KEVIN

What are the odds *that'll* happen? Or that he'll be sober enough to not fall into the tree?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I can always hope. After all, his friends have families to get home to, as well.

YOUNG KEVIN

They do? I thought they all lived in cardboard boxes under a highway overpass.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Kevin, be nice. He's your *brother*.

YOUNG KEVIN

Don't remind me.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

What did you get him for Christmas?

YOUNG KEVIN

Nothing he'll like.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Well, it's the thought that counts.

YOUNG KEVIN

Uh-huh.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I got him a—

YOUNG KEVIN

Mom, I really don't care what you got Dan for Christmas. It's a miserable holiday based on the assumption that buying useless crap for other people can make up for an entire year of bad behavior. Count me out of your orgy of capitalism.

(After that tirade, he goes back to typing more furiously. Christine stares at him again for a moment.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Do—

(She begins, but thinks better of what she was going to say and stops herself short. She smiles sadly, and exits, closing the door behind her. Kevin stops typing, sets his head down on his typewriter and starts to sob.)

Act II, Scene 4

The Harper living room, the following morning, Christmas Day. The tree is fully decorated. There are a few more wrapped presents under the tree—including one rather large box set in the corner behind the tree. It is about 10 a.m. The front door opens, and Frank enters, carrying a large bag. Young Christine enters from the doorway opposite.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Santa, you're late!

FRANK

The reindeer are in the shop.

(They chuckle a bit, then kiss good morning.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Merry Christmas, Dad.

FRANK

Merry Christmas, Chrissy.

(Frank notices the decorated tree.)

Hey, at last! When did you do that?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Last night when Danny got home.

FRANK

Did Kevin help?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

No. I made coffee. Do you want eggs or anything?

FRANK

No, thanks, Chrissy.

(He reaches into his bag and puts a few boxes under the tree. He hands one small box to Christine.)

I don't think the kids'll mind if you open this one without them?

(She takes the box, holds it up to her ear, and shakes it.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I don't hear car keys.

FRANK

Open it.

(She carefully unwraps it to reveal a velvet ring box. She opens it.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Oh, Dad! Where did you find it?

(She takes out a ring.)

This is that ring that mom used to wear all the time when I was growing up.

FRANK

Which you always loved.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I thought she lost it.

FRANK

She thought she *had* lost it on that trip we took to Atlantic City in, what was it, '78? But a few months ago I was cleaning out her sewing room because I wanted to rip out that old carpeting and I found it underneath the leg of that big dresser that's in there.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

How on Earth did it get there?

FRANK

Damned if I know. So I had it repaired, cleaned and resized, and, well...Merry Christmas.

(She slips it on and admires it.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Thanks, Dad!

(She kisses him. Young Daniel enters. He has just woken up; his hair is a bit tousled, and he wears sweatpants and a black concert T-shirt.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Merry Christmas, Danny!

YOUNG DANIEL

Merry Christmas, Mom, Grandpa.

(He kisses his mother, then makes for the tree.)

YOUNG DANIEL

Boy, this tree looks good! Whoever decorated it?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Santa's helpers must have snuck in during the night.

YOUNG DANIEL

Can we open presents now?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Not until Kevin gets up.

(Daniel is visibly disappointed.)

YOUNG DANIEL

Do we have to wait? He's only going to rag on everything anyway.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Danny... Okay, you can open *one* present now, and then we wait.

(She goes to the tree, fishes around a bit, and hands him a largish box.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Here, you can open your present from your Great-Aunt Helen.

YOUNG DANIEL

She still goes Christmas shopping? Isn't she like 200 years old?

FRANK

At least. She was old when *I* was your age.

(Daniel tears off the wrapping paper to reveal a white department store box. The lid has been thoroughly and meticulously taped to the bottom. Daniel struggles to get his fingernail through the tape. Christine goes to a table and picks up a camera.)

YOUNG DANIEL

She may be old, but she sure can tape a box. Grandpa, can I borrow your saber saw?

(He finally gets it open, and removes the lid from the box. He looks inside with a stunned expression on his face. He pulls out a pair of red leather pants. Christine snaps a picture of it, before entirely realizing what it is.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Oh, my God.

YOUNG DANIEL

Just...what I always wanted...leather pants.

FRANK

Red leather pants.

YOUNG DANIEL

Red leather pants. These'll be perfect when I go on tour with Motley Crue.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I guess that's what Great-Aunt Helen thinks 16-year-olds are wearing these days.

FRANK

I'm just trying to picture a 97-year-old woman *buying* red leather pants.

YOUNG DANIEL

Mom, you know that thank-you-note policy you have where we include pictures of us wearing our gifts...

YOUNG CHRISTINE

You can just send a note.

YOUNG DANIEL

Thanks.

(He folds the pants messily and puts them back in the box. He replaces the box under the tree.)
I'd exchange them but I don't even know where she would have gotten them.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

What did she get you last year?

YOUNG DANIEL

Man, I don't remem- Wait that's right. A leather thong.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

(Laughs.)
Oh, my God, that's right! Did you ever wear it?
(Daniel just gives her a look.)

FRANK

The woman likes leather.

(Young Kevin enters. He also has just awakened. He is not entirely happy.)

YOUNG KEVIN

I see you've all gotten an early start.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Merry Christmas, sweetie.

(She goes over and kisses him.)

YOUNG KEVIN

Has the orgy begun?

YOUNG DANIEL

We were waiting for you.

YOUNG KEVIN

You didn't have to do that.

YOUNG DANIEL

It wasn't my idea.

(Christine stands back and starts snapping pictures.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Dad, why don't you hand the presents out?

(Frank kneels down in front of the tree and starts pulling out wrapped gifts and handing them to the appropriate party. Daniel is on his knees nearby, while Kevin has taken a seat in an armchair and is not quite as enthusiastic as his brother. He is sitting just out of Christine's camera frame.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Kevin, I can't get you in the picture.

YOUNG KEVIN

That's a shame.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Move closer to your brother.

YOUNG KEVIN

Do I have to?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Yes.

(He scootches the chair closer to the tree, which wasn't entirely what Christine had in mind.)

FRANK

(Reading gift labels and handing out packages.)
Here's one for...Danny.... One for...Kevin... One for Christine from Jeff... That should be good... One for Frank... Ah, finally!

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Wait, I know what we need!

(Christine goes offstage briefly, then comes back with a boom box. She sets it down and presses play. Holiday music plays as we see the characters open gifts. In between opening her own gifts, Christine takes pictures. Daniel receives some clothes, record albums, other items; Frank receives sporting goods, fishing gear, power tools and accessories; Christine receives clothes, jewelry, household items; Kevin receives books, clothes, and school supplies. All the characters display great excitement about their booty—except for Kevin who simply opens a gift and then drops it to the floor beside his chair without paying much attention to it. This sequence lasts only about as long as a single holiday song. When the song is over, the music cuts out, and everyone looks at the carnage. Christine excitedly moves toward the large unopened box behind the tree.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I wanted to save the best for last.

(All eyes are on Christine as she takes the box from the back of the tree and sets it down next to Kevin. Kevin is more than shocked to discover that it is for him.)

YOUNG KEVIN

Um, Mom, what—

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I know that this may seem a bit extravagant, and I know we should be on a bit of a budget this year. But I see you with that crummy old typewriter...Go ahead, open it.

YOUNG KEVIN

I like my crummy old typewriter...

(She is far more excited than Kevin is, and even Daniel and Frank, who know what it is, are eager to see him open it. Kevin is orders of magnitude uncomfortable, and hesitates before sliding the wrapping paper off the box. As the wrapping comes off, it is revealed that the box contains a top-of-the-line personal computer [by 1989 standards]. Kevin is speechless.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I asked Carol's son, who's a software programmer, what the best, top-of-the-line computer is, and this is what he told me.

YOUNG KEVIN

Ma, you, um— What do I— I really don't *need* a computer. I mean, this is wasted on me.

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Nonsense. I bet everyone at school has one.

YOUNG KEVIN

Not really. Um, can you return it?

YOUNG CHRISTINE

Return it? Why, don't you like it?

YOUNG KEVIN

I don't really *like* computers. They're dehumanizing. They're an example of how technology is taking over the world, and not for the best.

YOUNG DANIEL

I told you.

(Christine is crestfallen.)

YOUNG CHRISTINE

I guess I can exchange it for something you like. But I really wanted you to like it.

YOUNG KEVIN

Well, I, um, don't, really....

(There is a bit of awkwardness. Daniel looks around.)

YOUNG DANIEL

Hey, did you even get *us* anything?

YOUNG KEVIN

Oh, right.

(Kevin gets up and walks offstage. Christine is upset but is trying to put on a happy face. Kevin returns with a shopping bag. He reaches in and pulls out, in turn, three items, wrapped in newspaper. He hands one to Daniel, one to Frank, and one to Christine. He sits back down in his chair. There is a smirk on his face. Frank regards the "wrapping paper.")

FRANK

Yesterday's *Post-Standard*. You went all-out, didn't you?

YOUNG KEVIN

Hey, this holiday wasn't my idea.

(Daniel shakes his head. He unwraps his present. It is a clear plastic bag filled with Styrofoam packing noodles. Daniel looks at it with confusion.)

YOUNG DANIEL

What the hell is this?

YOUNG KEVIN

(Amused.)

Packing peanuts.

YOUNG DANIEL

Gee, just what I always wanted. Grandpa, what did you get?

(Frank unwraps his gift. It is a telescope stand.)

FRANK

I have no idea.

YOUNG KEVIN

(Even more amused.)
It's a stand for a telescope.

FRANK

Great. All I need now is a telescope.
(Kevin laughs.)

YOUNG DANIEL

Sure, *now* he's having a good time. Mom?
(Christine is still upset about the computer and has not really been watching Daniel and Frank open their gifts. She looks down at her own bundle, and slowly and unhappily unwraps it. She pulls out a piece of blue ceramic tile.)

YOUNG KEVIN

(He's really quite enjoying himself.)
That's a piece of tile I found in the bus station parking lot.
(Nobody says anything for a moment.)

YOUNG KEVIN

My point was that if we're just going to give each other "things," why not make them completely random, and the more useless the better?
(Both Frank and Daniel roll their eyes. Christine is on the verge of tears.)

YOUNG DANIEL

Jesus Christ...

YOUNG KEVIN

Hey, didn't you say it was the *thought* that counts?
(That does it for Christine. She bursts into tears and runs off stage. Frank glares at Kevin and runs after her.)

FRANK

Chrissy...
(That leaves Kevin and Daniel alone. Daniel glares at Kevin. Kevin shrugs and looks down at the pile of books he had unwrapped. He ignores Daniel and sorts through the titles. He picks one up and smiles derisively. He holds it up to Daniel.)

YOUNG KEVIN

How to Write a Damn Good Novel. Oh, brother. Like this guy would even know.

YOUNG DANIEL

I got you that book.

YOUNG KEVIN

(Noncommittally.)

Oh.

(He begins flipping through it. His expression does not suggest that he will find it useful.)

YOUNG DANIEL

What's wrong with you?

YOUNG KEVIN

I don't understand the question.

YOUNG DANIEL

Could you be a bigger jackass?

YOUNG KEVIN

(Looking through the book rather than at Daniel.)

Sure. I could be you.

YOUNG DANIEL

Oooh, that must be your superior wit and intelligence.

(Kevin shrugs.)

I suppose those...gifts, if that's what you want to call them, that you got everybody. I suppose you thought that was *funny*?

YOUNG KEVIN

I thought it was hysterical, actually.

YOUNG DANIEL

Then you are one sick, twisted puppy.

YOUNG KEVIN

Thank you.

YOUNG DANIEL

I think you should get out of here. I think you should walk out that door, and go back to Boston, and all your supposedly sophisticated friends, and never come back here again.

YOUNG KEVIN

Sorry, but I do not recognize your authority in this house. I'll stay as long as I please, and leave whenever I damn well feel like it. You will no doubt be happy to learn that I have no desire to stay here any longer than I absolutely have to.

(Kevin stands up and tosses the book back down on the pile. Daniel gets in his face.)

YOUNG DANIEL

What did Mom—or anyone else here—ever do to you? Huh? Why do you hate everyone here so much? All Mom has ever done was worship you. So did Dad. I did, too, for a while. And now I have no idea why.

YOUNG KEVIN

Is that what this is about, you're jealous of me?

YOUNG DANIEL

Hell, no. What's there to be jealous of? If anything, I feel sorry for you.

YOUNG KEVIN

Oh, that's rich. You feel sorry for *me*. Good one. Maybe you do have a sense of humor after all. Which one of us is going to stay in this miserable town flipping burgers in McDonald's for the rest of his life? Which one of us is going to be the loser, stuck in this loser town with the rest of the losers in this loser house.

(At that point, Daniel belts Kevin. Kevin drops to the floor.)

YOUNG KEVIN

That's exactly what I would expect from you.

(Daniel is enraged and pulls Kevin to his feet, only to belt him again. Kevin drops to the floor again. He is not able to get up again easily.)

YOUNG DANIEL

I don't know what your problem is, but you know what? We have enough problems around here. And since you don't want to help solve any of them, the last thing we need is you creating more.

(Kevin struggles to his feet. Daniel watches him red hot with rage. Kevin staggers toward the front door.)

YOUNG KEVIN

That does it. I'm out of here. I will never set foot in this house again in my life.

YOUNG DANIEL

Good. Don't let the door hit your ass on the way out. No, on second thought, let it. Maybe it'll knock sense into you. After all, it's where you keep your brain.

(Kevin opens the front door and leaves. Daniel runs over and slams it shut behind him. He Sighs heavily, then runs offstage in the other direction.)

Act II, Scene 5

The bus station, present day, as in Act II, Scene 1. Kevin (older) and Erika are sitting down. Kevin has just finished relating his story.

KEVIN

And true to my word, I never set foot in that house again.

ERIKA

Where did you go?

KEVIN

I walked to Karen's house and got cleaned up. Then I went back to Boston. I never went back to Syracuse again.

ERIKA

I can't believe your brother beat you up. Your *younger* brother.

KEVIN

Erika, I was an English major. My Great-Aunt Helen could have beat me up. She probably still could.

ERIKA

She's still alive?

KEVIN

I have no earthly idea. I wouldn't put it past her. You know what's funny, and ironic in a way is that for all my calling my brother a loser, which one of us ended up the loser?

ERIKA

I wouldn't call you a loser.

KEVIN

I would. But whatever. Anyway, my brother convinced my mother to hang on to the computer and he began to learn how to use it and, ultimately, that's what got him out of the world of juvenile delinquency and into computer science. Not that I'm entirely convinced there's much of a difference. But it did lead him to write what became a highly successful software application and started his vast empire.

ERIKA

Wow.

KEVIN

Then there's me, who barely finished college after my mother decided to stop paying for it, who was homeless for two years, and who can barely keep a teaching job at a community college here in the middle of Nowhere, New York.

CONDUCTOR

(Over P.A. system.)

Attention, please. All passengers waiting for the 6:20 bus to Albany. It has just arrived and will now start boarding at Gate 1.

KEVIN

That's me. Sure you won't change your mind?

ERIKA

About...?

KEVIN

I don't know. Anything, really. Coming with me, driving me back to my apartment, marrying me, throwing me under a bus...

ERIKA

(Smiles.)

No. But if you need me, if you're in trouble, please call me. Any time, day or night. Preferably day, though, if it can be helped.

KEVIN

I'll see if I can schedule my breakdowns accordingly. I think have your cell phone number on me some place.

ERIKA

In case you don't, I got you something for Christmas...

KEVIN

Uh oh. It's not a computer is it?

(She reaches into her coat pocket and takes out a cell phone. She hands it to him.)

ERIKA

I know how you feel about cell phones, but take it. It has my cell, my parents, and Doctor Howland already programmed into it.

(He takes it tentatively.)

KEVIN

Thanks.

(He picks up his bag.)

Wish me luck.

ERIKA

Good luck, but I don't think you'll need it.

KEVIN

Damn optimist.

(They kiss, and she watches as he shambles out the door.)

End of Act II

Act III, Scene 1

Hospital room as before, Christmas Eve, present day. It is a couple hours after the end of Act I. Paula is lying in the hospital bed, Daniel (older) sits next to her. They are bored.

PAULA

There are worse ways to spend Christmas Eve, actually.

DANIEL

I'm sure there must be. For example, being in this hospital with something life-threatening.

PAULA

Like me.

DANIEL

Your pregnancy isn't life-threatening.

PAULA

Not for me, but you're going to be living on borrowed time unless this child is born soon.

(Dr. Bramble breezes into the room.)

DR. BRAMBLE

And how are we doing? Still percolating along, are we?

PAULA

Yes. Still. Are you sure it's coming tonight? I'm technically not due for another three weeks, and this could be a false alarm.

DR. BRAMBLE

Nope, he, she, or it will in fact be your little Christmas miracle. Trust me on that one. When they want out, they get their way. You would be surprised to know half the places I have delivered babies.

DANIEL

Probably in the back of a cab.

DR. BRAMBLE

Oh, my, yes, but that was one of the more prosaic places. Let's see, there was the New York City subway, and at rush

hour, too. The Downtown Broadway local. Labor started right around Penn Station, and he came out in Soho.

DANIEL

Wow.

DR. BRAMBLE

Indeed. Then, let's see, there was one delivery at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, one at the top of a Ferris wheel...oh, and one in the lion's cage at the San Diego Zoo.

DANIEL

In a lion's cage? You're sure it wasn't the lion?

DR. BRAMBLE

No, no, it was a human female, all right. There was quite the story behind that. But, I must check on another lucky mother-to-be. Remind me when I get back and I'll tell you all about it.

(Dr. Bramble breezes out. Daniel and Paula look at each other.)

PAULA

I wonder if he's ever actually delivered a baby in a hospital.

DANIEL

I wonder if he's actually a doctor.

(Christine [older] enters and knocks softly on the open door.)

CHRISTINE

Knock, knock.

DANIEL

Mom! We're glad you made it.

(He and his mother embrace and kiss. She walks over to the bed and looks down at Paula.)

CHRISTINE

Hi, Paula. How are you? Other than the obvious, I mean.

PAULA

I'm not sure that there is anything other than the obvious right now.

CHRISTINE

Do your parents know?

PAULA

Danny called them a little while ago. It'll take them a few days to get here from Seattle.

DANIEL

You stopped at the house first?

CHRISTINE

Yes. Trevor told me where you were. So I was torn between grabbing an *hors d'oeuvre* and maybe a glass of wine first, but I thought that might be tacky.

DANIEL

You would have had time. We're playing the waiting game right about now. I was just telling Paula about the Christmas 20 years ago.

CHRISTINE

(She tries to remember.)

20 years ago...Was that the Christmas with the live turkey in the bathroom?

DANIEL

No, it was—

PAULA

A live turkey in the bathroom?

CHRISTINE

It was a Christmas dinner idea that didn't pan out as well as we would have liked.

DANIEL

No, this was the Christmas when Kevin and I had that fight...actually, the last Christmas we ever had with Kevin.

CHRISTINE

Oh, right, I remember. Oh, god. With the computer and the Styrofoam noodles. What a disaster that was.

DANIEL

When's the last time you spoke with Kevin?

CHRISTINE

Oh, boy, I have no idea. Your wedding, maybe? And then before that...oh, maybe once or twice since he stormed out that Christmas. I tried calling him, even *writing* to him and never got any response. I was upset for a long time, but you eventually reach a point where you just have to move on.

DANIEL

And then you met Greg.

CHRISTINE

And then I met your stepfather.

DANIEL

Kevin wasn't at dad's funeral.

CHRISTINE

Well, I can't blame him for that. *I* didn't even want to go to your father's funeral. And I didn't expect him to come to your grandfather's funeral. Anyway, I reached out as best I could. My address and phone number haven't changed in 20 years, so he knows exactly how to get in touch with me if he ever wants to.

DANIEL

I had invited him to my Christmas party.

CHRISTINE

You found him?

DANIEL

I think I did. I did a Google search and found a Kevin Harper who is on the faculty of a small community college near Cortland. The outgoing voice-mail message *sounded* like it was him. I never got any response.

CHRISTINE

Then you found the right Kevin Harper.

DANIEL

Mom!

CHRISTINE

I should call Greg and let him know I got here safely and see how his own odyssey is faring. Last I heard he was trapped in O'Hare Airport.

PAULA

See? There are worse places to spend Christmas Eve.
(Dr. Bramble returns. He looks at Christine, then over at Paula.)

DR. BRAMBLE

Oh, dear, have I missed it? Have you already had your baby?
(Christine, Daniel, and Paula look at him uncomprehendingly for a moment.)

DANIEL

Uh, no, um...Dr. Bramble, this is my mother, Christine Garrison.

DR. BRAMBLE

Ah, I see, yes, you are the grandmother-to-be. And *not* the baby. I will have to remember that. I'm very bad with faces and names...it's rather difficult to keep everyone straight.

(Christine has an "Is this guy for real?" expression on her face. She takes out her cell phone and starts dialing.)

DR. BRAMBLE

I am terribly sorry, but I'm afraid they don't allow cell phone use on this floor. You'll have to go out to the waiting room on the first floor. Something about invisible death rays from cell phones affecting DNA and turning all the patients into genetic mutants. Humans with the head of a rabbit or giant crab or something like that. I haven't seen these studies myself, but this is what they tell me. Surely you understand.

(Christine stares at him for a moment.)

CHRISTINE

I think I do, yes.

(To Daniel.)

I'll be downstairs. Back in a few minutes.

DR. BRAMBLE

Thank you, and I do apologize for the inconvenience.

(Christine exits, shaking her head. Suddenly, Paula starts wincing, as she experiences a contraction.)

DR. BRAMBLE

Well, then, I guess it's nearly showtime. Let's get you to the delivery room.

(Dr. Bramble rolls a wheelchair over to the bed. Daniel helps Paula into it.)

DANIEL

I guess it's really going to happen.

PAULA

I guess so.

DR. BRAMBLE

Mr. Harper, why don't you let me take your wife...please! Ha ha. Seriously, though, let's get her all set up and settled in and I will send for you as soon as, um, things get started.

DANIEL

Okay. Take care, honey.

DR. BRAMBLE

Thanks. You, too.

(Daniel shakes his head, and he and Paula kiss. Dr. Bramble wheels her out. Daniel watches them for a while, then sighs heavily, and sits down. He loosens his tie a little. A few moments later, Kevin enters and knocks on the door. Daniel looks up.)

KEVIN

(Noticing Daniel's formal attire.)

I'm sorry, I didn't know this hospital had a dress code. Can I borrow a jacket at the nurse's station?

(Daniel stands up. Their exchange is a little awkward and uncomfortable, as you can well imagine.)

DANIEL

Kevin?

KEVIN

Danny? I stopped by your house, which is full of people, by the way, and they said you were here.

DANIEL

Those were my Christmas party guests.

KEVIN

You should see what they're doing to the place. Remember *Risky Business*?

DANIEL

The thought of my sales manager in his underwear is not a mental image I really want.

KEVIN

I wouldn't think.

(He pauses for a moment.)

You're looking good.

DANIEL

Thanks, so are you.

KEVIN

(Noticing the empty hospital bed.)

So...is there an impending child somewhere, or is this one of those hysterical pregnancies I've heard about? Funny, though, I've never heard of the father suffering from it.

DANIEL

No, Paula is in the delivery room now. I hope.

KEVIN

You hope? Maybe you need to have her tagged, like they do polar bears so they can keep track of them.

DANIEL

No, we've got this lunatic doctor. Or at least he says he's a doctor. I think he escaped from a mental hospital.

KEVIN

They're actually not easy to escape from.

(Daniel looks at him quizzically.)

I spent some time in one a few years ago.

DANIEL

I'm sorry. I had no idea.

KEVIN

It's probably not the most surprising news in the world. In fact, you probably recommended I get myself to one more than a few times, if memory serves. I should have taken your advice. About a lot of things.

DANIEL

Kevin, I didn't invite you to— I don't want to reopen old wounds. That wasn't my intention.

KEVIN

Well, we're in the right place if they do get opened.

DANIEL

I guess so. What happened happened, it was a long time ago, we were both dumb kids, and it was a very difficult time for everyone. I invited you here—

KEVIN

After tracking me down like a bloodhound.

DANIEL

Well, after doing a five-second Google search.

KEVIN

I think they're training dogs to use the Internet now. So if you have housepets, you might want to password-protect your computer. Those doggie porn sites are not pretty.

DANIEL

(Laughs.)

I'll keep an eye on them. Anyway, Kevin, my point is that we've been strangers for way too long and, if it's possible, I'd like to have you back in my life. I want to be a part of yours. And I want my son or daughter to have an uncle.

KEVIN

You know, I've always aspired to be a crazy uncle.

DANIEL

And now here's your chance. Anyway, I know all this is not going to happen overnight, but I'd at least like to make a start.

(Kevin nods repeatedly.)

KEVIN

That's exactly...that's what I was hoping, too. I know you said you didn't want to dredge up the past or open old wounds, but one of the things I need to do to close that whole episode in my own psyche—to suture up the wounds, to keep the metaphor going—is to...to just apologize. To just say that there were a lot of weird things going on in my head back then and I ran away when I should have stayed. I was a lousy brother, a lousy son, and, well, just a lousy human being in general. I'm not sure I could ever explain it, or that I even really need to. You had every right to beat the crap out of me. I'm only surprised it took you so long to do it. I wish I could say that it knocked some sense into me, and I'll spare you the details of what ultimately did—assuming it could be said that I have any sense at all. The jury is still out on that.

DANIEL

I'm perfectly happy to forgive and forget. But I'm not the one you should apologize to.

KEVIN

I know. Is she...?

DANIEL

I believe she's downstairs. You're not allowed to use cell phones up here. For reasons that are...unclear.

(Speak of the devil: Dr. Bramble enters. He looks at Kevin.)

DR. BRAMBLE

No, you're not the wife. I've just left the wife. That sounds funny... Nor are you the grandmother-to-be. She was an older women. Oh, and a woman.

(Kevin gives Daniel an "Is he for real?" look. Daniel smiles sheepishly. Dr. Bramble looks at Daniel.)

DR. BRAMBLE

Ah, you're the father, if I remember correctly.

KEVIN

Or if his wife remembers correctly.

DR. BRAMBLE

Yes, well, that's a bit outside my purview as the doctor delivering this baby. Anyway, things are beginning, so if you want to see your son and/or daughter, he and/or she will be arriving shortly.

KEVIN

Please make sure your tray tables and seatbacks are in their full, upright position.

(Dr. Bramble gives Kevin a nasty look. Daniel is actually quite amused.)

DR. BRAMBLE

Are you mocking me?

KEVIN

I wouldn't dream of it.

(Dr. Bramble heads toward the door, giving Kevin a threatening glance as he does so. Finally, he exits.)

DANIEL

(Jokingly.)

You do have a knack, don't you?

KEVIN

The more that things change, the more they stay the same.

(They both exit.)

Act III, Scene 2

The hospital waiting room, a few minutes after the previous scene. A door on stage right leads to the rest of the hospital; a door opposite leads outside. Several rows of chairs occupy the center of the room. A few moments after the previous scene. Christine is walking up and down the empty waiting room talking on a cell phone.

CHRISTINE

(Talking on phone.)

...No, he's surprisingly calm. You'd think he becomes a new father every day...They have this doctor, though, who...I really don't know what to make of him. I hope he's remotely competent...

(As Christine talks, Kevin enters from stage right as Christine is walking in the opposite direction, her back to him. She turns around, looks up, sees him, and stops short. She stares at Kevin.)

CHRISTINE

(Talking on phone.)

Oh, my god!...It's the Ghost of Christmas Past. Greg, I'll try to give you a call when there's news, but I hope you get airborne by then....Love you. Bye.

(She snaps the phone shut. She stands and stares at Kevin, who awkwardly stares at her in return. They are silent for a few moments.)

KEVIN

Hi, Mom—

CHRISTINE

"Hi, Mom"?! After 20 years, all I get is a "hi, Mom"?
(Kevin looks down repentantly. Throughout all of this, he is penitent. As she speaks, she circles around him repeatedly.)

KEVIN

I'm sor—

CHRISTINE

No. Don't you *dare* try to apologize to me. Your brother may have mellowed in his old age, and while I'm not one to carry a grudge, I do have a long memory. You broke my heart, Kevin. End of story.

KEVIN

I know. I—

CHRISTINE

And for what heinous crime did you have me punished? What was it again? Oh, that's right, supporting you, and giving you everything I could, and loving you. Call Child Support! Lock me away for being such a rotten mother.

KEVIN

No, mom, you weren—

CHRISTINE

All I ever wanted, all I ever wanted, was the best for you. I was so proud of you. How I used to brag about you all the time at work, to my friends, to random people online at the supermarket. You were, quite literally, my pride and joy.

(She pauses. Kevin is quiet, but in great emotional pain. Still, this is exactly what he needs to hear.)
And then something happened. At first, I thought it was the growing pains of adolescence. But you were different. This seemed like outright contempt. For me, for your brother, for your grandfather. For everyone who ever...*praised* you. I had thought, mistakenly I guess, that by giving you all that praise and support that it would help you. Instead it seemed to have turned you into a self-absorbed monster.

(She pauses.)

No matter what happens, a mother always has to love her child. That's just a law of nature. But nowhere does it say that she has to *like* her child. For a few weeks after you stomped out, I did a lot of soul-searching, and thinking, and crying. And the more I thought about it, the more I realized that...I just didn't like you. Isn't that a terrible thing to have to say? Still, I tried my damndest to get you back. I tried calling, I tried writing.

(She shrugs.)

Eventually, I stopped beating my head against the wall, and I moved on. I was a single parent, after all, and Danny was, to be frank, a handful. So I didn't have the luxury of being able to wallow in my own self-pity. I always assumed at some point you'd come back. But you didn't. And while I thought, "Well, if that's the way he wants it, fine," I still had—still have—the question: what did I ever do to you?

(She pauses; he is on the verge of tears.)

I don't know if this is some rare appearance, like Bigfoot or the Loch Ness Monster, and that after tonight or tomorrow you'll disappear again. I don't know if I should even try to make any kind of emotional reinvestment in you or not. Either way...whatever. All I still really want to know is what on God's green Earth did I ever do to you?

(They are both quiet for a few beats. Christine is still staring at him, but she has stopped circling. Kevin is trying to organize his thoughts as best he can.)

KEVIN

I...wasn't... I...couldn't...

CHRISTINE

Couldn't what?

KEVIN

I couldn't be all the things you wanted me to be. Expected me to be.

CHRISTINE

What things? What did I ever expect you to be?

KEVIN

I could never be the model son you had made me out to be. The...the golden child. It was all a fiction. And by the time I graduated high school, I knew perfectly well that I had a colossal set of expectations I had to meet and I knew, I *knew*, that there was no way I was ever going to meet them. I was never going to be the...shining success you thought I was going to be. Like Danny is now. Every expression of pride, every encouraging word was another twist of the knife, another reminder that I was going to fail you.

CHRISTINE

What are you talking about? You got straight As all through high school. I saw the report cards myself. I hung them on the refrigerator. You were a very smart kid.

KEVIN

Sure, in a lousy public school in a one-horse suburb of a two-horse upstate New York City. That didn't translate to college. I was completely out of my depth in college. I never made Dean's List. Hell, I had to struggle to even get a B or even a C in anything. There's a line in a Kurt Vonnegut book that always stuck with me, "They can spot phonies in the real world." And that's exactly what I was. Sure, I tried to hide it with all sorts of pseudo-intellectual posturing. And when Dad left, I knew what my responsibilities should have been. I should have been there. I should have helped.

CHRISTINE

I never would have wanted you to give up college.

KEVIN

I know, but there are other ways I could have helped. I was the older brother, the "man of the house," if you want to be cliched about it. Another expectation. But it never occurred to me that I ever would have been a help in any way. I only would have screwed things up. And it seemed...safer, and better for everyone involved if I just stayed away.

CHRISTINE

Kevin...

KEVIN

At the same time, I was hoping that going away to college would let me break with my past. Erase it. Start over again fresh. Ha. Do you know how many times over the years I have abandoned one life and tried to move on to another? Finally, about five years ago, I...caught up with myself, and had the realization that I was trapped in this "too too solid flesh."

CHRISTINE

Kevin, I-
(Kevin sits down.)

KEVIN

I never called you, I never stayed in contact because I...didn't want you to see what a disappointment I was. I never wanted you to see just how badly I had failed to meet any expectation you ever had for me. I never wanted you to be ashamed of me...as ashamed I was of what I had become.

(He puts his head in his hands and starts weeping.)

Christine looks at him with concern, processing it all. After a moment, she sits down next to him and puts her arm around him.)

CHRISTINE

That's what this was all about? That you thought you were going to be a disappointment to me? Kevin, it doesn't work like that. I'm sorry if you felt that I had created these huge expectations for you, but all you ever had to do to make me happy was to just be there. To just come home every once in a while. To *call* home every once in a while. Anything else was unimportant.

KEVIN

Sure, now I find out.

CHRISTINE

If you were having trouble in school, or trouble in *anything*, you could always have come to me. That's what mothers are here for. Sure, we'll boast and brag at the drop of a hat, but ultimately we're here for our children. Did you think I was going to love you any less if it turned out that, by god, Kevin Harper wasn't Superman?

KEVIN

I guess I did, yes.

(She smacks him on the back of the head.)

CHRISTINE

Ninny!

(They sit in silence for a moment.)

KEVIN

You know, we've probably got some time. I saw a coffee shop down the street that I think was still open. If you're up for it, we could go, sit, and catch up... I'm sure they'll call you if there's any news.

CHRISTINE

(She pauses.)

Yeah, I think I'd like that.

(They get up and head toward the exit at stage left.)

CHRISTINE

Did you meet that doctor?

KEVIN

I think using the term "doctor" is a bit charitable. "Loon" would be more apt.

CHRISTINE

This is true.

(They exit.)

Act III, Scene 3

The waiting room, as before. It is about an hour later. Kevin and Christine enter from stage left. Daniel enters from the opposite side, followed by Dr. Bramble. Daniel is beaming with excitement.

CHRISTINE

Well?

DANIEL

I'm a father.

KEVIN

Congratulations!

CHRISTINE

What is it?

DR. BRAMBLE

It's a baby!

KEVIN

A baby. Oh, good. It beats the alternative, I guess.
(They all sit down, save for Dr. Bramble. Daniel is excited yet exhausted, as if he had been the one giving birth.)

KEVIN

You didn't videotape the birth?

DANIEL

I had suggested it some time ago but Paula strongly vetoed the idea.

DR. BRAMBLE

We have some stock video you can use.

DANIEL

What?

DR. BRAMBLE

I mean, you zoom in close enough it could be anyone, really.

(They all look at him rather horrified.)

KEVIN

We really shouldn't be keeping you. If you have other patients...

(Dr. Bramble narrows his eyes at Kevin.)

DR. BRAMBLE

I can tell, you're trouble.

KEVIN

You have no idea.

DR. BRAMBLE

I should see if I can find some cigars for you folks.

(He exits hurriedly.)

KEVIN

They're probably exploding joke cigars.

CHRISTINE

So what *is* it?

KEVIN

Yeah, do I have a niece or a nephew?

DANIEL

You have a niece. Seventy pounds, two ounces.

CHRISTINE

Seventy pounds?!

KEVIN

Wow, poor Paula. Did she give birth to a German shepherd?

CHRISTINE

Dear, they must have told you *seven* pounds, three ounces.

DANIEL

(Thinks about that.)

That would make more sense. Hey, give me a break, it's been a rough night!

(He smiles tiredly.)

KEVIN

It being Christmas Eve, I feel we should have brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold's a bit out of my budget right now, though.

CHRISTINE

Greg has the James Bond movie *Goldfinger* on DVD.

KEVIN

There you go. Now, what's frankincense?

DANIEL

I have no idea. It's probably...well, like incense.

KEVIN

I bet that doctor has a ton of *that*. And myrrh. It's hard to find good myrrh these days.

DANIEL

That, I have no idea.

KEVIN

There's probably a myrrh.com. "For your everyday myrrh needs."

CHRISTINE

Have you picked out a name?

KEVIN

Myrrh Harper?

CHRISTINE

Kevin!

DANIEL

Now it's like old times!

(Laughs.)

Since grandpa was the one who really helped me get my business going, we were originally thinking of Frank.

KEVIN

She'll be teased mercilessly in school.

DANIEL

Actually, we were going with Francis with an "i" if it's a boy, and Frances with an "e" if it's a girl.

CHRISTINE

So, it's Frances? With an "e."

DANIEL

Yep. Frances Christine Harper.

(Christine is choked up by this. They sit and contemplate that a moment.)

By the way, Kevin, you're welcome to stay with us as long as you want.

KEVIN

Well...about that...

(Daniel looks at him with concern.)

CHRISTINE

Kevin lost his job a few days ago.

DANIEL

Right before Christmas? Who do you work for, Ebenezer Scrooge?

KEVIN

There's a wide range of Dickens characters to choose from.

DANIEL

Well, you know, I do need someone to write Web site copy, documentaton, and other odds and ends. I've been hiring out for it, but I'd be willing to give you a shot. It's not literary fiction, but if you're interested...

KEVIN

I know nothing about computer software.

DANIEL

I'm sure you can figure it out. And you can stay with Paula and me until you find your own place. It'll give you a chance to bond with Frances.

CHRISTINE

And babysit.

DANIEL

And babysit.

KEVIN

Oh, I don't know, I—
 (Christine gives him a look.)
 All right, I'll give it a try.

DANIEL

Excellent.
 (Dr. Bramble returns.)

KEVIN

Uh, oh.

DR. BRAMBLE

Mr. Harper, and the rest of you, who I assume are Harpers, as well, but one doesn't like to make these kinds of assumptions. What's in a name, really? I mean, I'd be all in favor of assigning everyone numbers. It would—

DANIEL

(Getting a little fed up with this guy.)
 Doctor, is there something you wanted?

DR. BRAMBLE

Wanted? Not really. But I felt I ought to tell you that your wife and daughter and back in the room and are eager to receive you. Well, probably not *eager*, all things considered, but they will see you at any rate.

(Everyone rises and files past Dr. Bramble and exits stage right. Kevin trails. Before he leaves, he stops in front of the doctor.)

KEVIN

You've had a long night. Feel free to knock off. We'll manage.

(Kevin exits.)

DR. BRAMBLE

(Shouting after him.)
 I'd watch it if I were you. I happen to be a qualified vivisectionist.

(Dr. Bramble exits.)

Act III, Scene 4

Paula's hospital room, as before. A few minutes after the previous scene. Paula lies in the bed, holding the infant, Frances. Daniel, Christine, and Kevin file in. Christine coos.

CHRISTINE

Oh, Daniel, she's beautiful.

DANIEL

Kevin, want to hold her?

KEVIN

Um...sure. As long as she's not actually 70 pounds.

DANIEL

Ha ha.

PAULA

Use the Purell first.

KEVIN

That's a good idea; I don't know where I've been.

(Kevin goes to a wall-mounted dispenser of sanitizing lotion and slathers some on his hands. He walks over, takes the baby from Paula, and sits down in the chair. He is not the most comfortable or natural baby-holder.)

CHRISTINE

Make sure you support her head.

KEVIN

Ah.

(He pauses, then, to Frances.)

Hi. I'm your Uncle Kevin.

(To the others.)

I never quite know what to say to babies.

DANIEL

She's less than an hour old, so a dissertation on comparative literature is probably beyond her. She probably has no idea what you're saying anyway.

KEVIN

Story of my life.

(To Frances.)

Hey, um...I know you can't process this, but, who knows, maybe it will sink in subconsciously. I admit that I'm probably the last person who should ever tell anyone how to live their life, and there's no doubt that you will be given a seemingly endless series of dos and don'ts for the next, oh, 70 years or so. But I do have one bit of...neonatal advice. Just a very simple rule for getting along in this world, with family and friends. Or even strangers, for that matter. And that is...whatever you do, just try not to hurt anyone. And I don't mean only physically, but emotionally, too, which, let's face it, can often be worse. A lot worse.

(The others seem to concur.)

Anyway, that's all I have to say right now. I'm sure I'll have more to say when I can force myself to use baby talk without feeling ridiculous, or you turn 30, whichever comes first.

(To Christine.)

Mom, want to hold her?

CHRISTINE

Sure.

(Christine slathers on some of the Purell.)

We never did any of this stuff when you kids were born. Your father could have been coated in mud and no one would have thought twice about letting him hold you.

KEVIN

That explains a lot.

(Kevin stands up and hands off Frances to Christine, who then sits.)

CHRISTINE

Hi, little Frances! Goo goo goo.

(Christine treats Frances to some baby talk.)

KEVIN

Maybe there's a course I can take on that like those Rosetta Stone foreign language discs.

DANIEL

Nah, you can't learn it. It has to come from within.

KEVIN

Is that that "inner child" I've heard about?

DANIEL

More like the "inner parent."

CHRISTINE

(To Frances.)

I don't have a speech prepared like your Uncle Kevin did—

KEVIN

I didn't prepare it. I didn't memorize a set of index cards on the bus.

DANIEL

I was waiting for a PowerPoint presentation.

CHRISTINE

(To Frances.)

Anyway...the only piece of advice I want to give you right now is this...*call your mother*. Not calling is really the *only* way you can disappoint her.

(Dr. Bramble enters.)

DR. BRAMBLE

I hate to break up this charming tableau, but we've been fairly lax about visiting hours this evening, what with it being Christmas and all. But mother and child need their rest.

KEVIN

Child? What child? Is there a child in here? I don't see any child.

DR. BRAMBLE

You again. All I can say is that I hope you never end up as my patient.

KEVIN

I hope so, too. For a bewildering variety of reasons.

DR. BRAMBLE

Harrumph. At any rate, the nurse will be in in a moment to take the child to the nursery. You are welcome to come back in the morning. And with that, I bid the happy parents a

hearty congratulations, and the rest of you a very happy Christmas.

(To Kevin.)

Except you.

KEVIN

Gee, thanks.

DANIEL

Merry Christmas to you, Dr. Bramble. And thanks for everything.

(Dr. Bramble bows dramatically, then exits. Christine gets up and hands Frances to Paula.)

CHRISTINE

I guess we'll go. You'll be back tonight, Daniel?

DANIEL

Yeah, I won't be here much longer. Paula's going to kick me out shortly.

PAULA

What do you mean, shortly? I was trying to get you to leave 20 minutes ago.

DANIEL

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KEVIN

Mom, can I glom a ride with you? I think my taxi budget is tapped out.

CHRISTINE

(Jokingly.)

Well, I don't know...

(To Paula, kissing her good night.)

Congratulations, Paula. Get a good night's sleep and we'll see you in the morning. Merry Christmas.

(Christine kisses Frances on the head.)

PAULA

Merry Christmas to you. Good night.

CHRISTINE

(To Daniel, kissing him good night.)

We'll see you back at the house.

DANIEL

Sure.

KEVIN

Good night.

(Kevin and Christine exit. Daniel and Paula breathe sighs of relief.)

DANIEL

Busy night.

PAULA

You had the easy part.

DANIEL

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like making up with my brother was easy.

PAULA

It seemed to go well.

DANIEL

Well, maybe we have grown as people in the past 20 years.

PAULA

It happens.

DANIEL

And maybe our daughter had something to do with it.

PAULA

You think?

DANIEL

And on that note, I will wish my wife and my daughter a good night and a Merry Christmas.

(Daniel kisses them both, and exits.)

PAULA

(To Frances.)

Look at that, my young friend. You're less than two hours old and you've already patched up one long family feud. Maybe you're destined for a career in diplomacy.

Act III, Scene 5

The waiting room, as before. It is a few minutes later. Kevin and Christine enter. They walk across the room, making for the outside door. Kevin abruptly stops.

KEVIN

Oh, Mom?

(Christine stops.)

I'll meet you outside in a minute, I just want to make a quick phone call.

CHRISTINE

Okay. I'll bring the car around front.

(Christine exits. Kevin takes a cell phone out of his pocket and dials a number.)

KEVIN

(Talking on phone.)

Erika? Kevin....Actually, I have no earthly idea what time it is...No, everything is perfectly fine. I'm officially an uncle....Yeah, she was early, it took everyone by surprise...Listen, I'm going to be staying here for a while. A long while, if all goes well....Yes, I think everything is going to be all right....I'll call you tomorrow....Merry Christmas to you.

(Kevin snaps the phone closed, pauses thoughtfully for a moment, smiles, then exits.)

THE END