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SF PERUSALS

Avec Schmaltz

by Mart Crowley

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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AVEC SCHMALTZ was originally performed (in an earlier version) under the title ***THE SPIRIT OF IT ALL*** on August 11, 1984, in The New Play Series at the Williamstown Theatre Festival, Williamstown, MA. (Nicos Psacharopoulous, Artistic Director). The play was directed by Steve Lawson. The cast was as follows:

KIT. . . . . . Marsha Mason
NELLIE . . . . . Erica Auerbach
JOSH . . . . . Kiefer Sutherland
NICK . . . . . Frank Hankey
MANNY . . . . . James Naughton
WENDY . . . . . Wendy Kahn
COLIN . . . . . Kevin Spacey

CHARACTERS

KIT – Mid-30s, beautiful, flame-haired, "well-finished" private school girl, divorced mother of a young daughter and teenage son.

NELLIE – 7 year-old freckled miniature of her mother, feisty, glib.

JOSH – 15 year-old, dark-eyed, dark-haired, smart, sensitive, droll.

NICK – Mid-30s, handsome, polished, divorced WASP "rich-boy."

MANNY – Mid-30s, attractive, jokey, Jewish ex-rock musician turned television composer, ex-husband of Kit and father of Nellie and Josh.

WENDY – Late-20s, sexy, savvy TV producer.

COLIN – Mid-30s, nice-looking, well-educated, sophisticated professional violinist.

SETTING

Act One: Christmas Eve at a farmhouse in rural Connecticut.
Act Two: New Year's Eve at a home in Beverly Hills, California.

For Glynnis and Marty [Mr. & Mrs. Mark Snow]

ACT I

(The living room of a Connecticut farm which might be characterized as "under glass." The architecture is dreamhouse American colonial – the ambiance, magazine cover charm. It's about seven p.m. and the room is cheerful with holiday decorations.)

(The front door is upstage in the right wall; when it is opened a wreath of holly can be seen, hanging around a brass knocker. Up center are the stairs which have an evergreen garland, scalloped up the banister. Beneath the stairs is a short closet door. Up center left of the stairs is an open French armoire which serves as a bar, generously stocked with liquor, tumblers, and stemware. On a middle shelf there is a big crystal pitcher of eggnog and an open bottle of white wine in an ice bucket. Up left of the armoire is a swinging door to the kitchen.)

(The left wall has floor to ceiling bookshelves on either side of a stone fireplace which, at present, is not lighted. Two empty needlepoint stockings hang from the mantel. Upstage of the hearth there is a comfortable overstuffed chair with a loose faded chintz slipcover. A rustic table with a tolle Chinese tea canister lamp is beside it. On the downstage side of the table is a Windsor chair.)

(Off center left, angled toward the fireplace is a sofa with a matching slipcover. In front of it, a butler's tray "coffee table" with a silver cigarette box and striker, filled with kitchen matches. There is also a large spherical bowl with goldfish swimming in it. Behind the sofa is a rustic French desk and chair. On the desk is a telephone and a brass student's lamp.)

(Overhead center is an old lantern under which a branch of mistletoe is tied with a brilliant red bow.)

(In the left wall there is a large bay window with a semi-circular seat, heaped with colorfully wrapped presents. Standing in the curve of the window is a tall tree, presently being trimmed by **KIT** *and* **JOSH** *and* **NELLIE**.*)*

(**KIT** *is mid-thirties with strikingly lovely features and glorious red hair. She's dressed in a loose, man's plaid work shirt over a turtleneck and jeans. She wears thick, wooly sox without shoes.* **JOSH** *is a handsome boy of fifteen with dark eyes and dark hair.* **NELLIE** *is seven and has her mother's fair complexion and flaming curls. Both kids have on winter country apparel.)*

(**KIT** *is on a stepladder, stringing ropes of popcorn onto the tree.* **NELLIE** *is by the coffee table, feeding the goldfish in the bowl.* **JOSH** *is seated at the desk, reading a book. It's a very pretty picture. It could be a Hallmark card or a window in Bloomingdale's.)*

KIT. Well? Anybody here conscious? It can't be the triptophan, we haven't had the turkey yet. *(after a moment)* Well…can I have *some* kind of response?

NELLIE. *(looks up from fishbowl, loudly)* Beautifulfabulousgreat!!

KIT. *(laughs)* Now, that's more like it!

NELLIE. Don't ask me to spell it.

KIT. I'll just settle for a little approval, Nellie, dear. *(looks at* **JOSH***)* I'm afraid your brother doesn't seem to share your opinion.

NELLIE. What's the matter, Joshie, don't you like it?

JOSH. *(not looking up; glumly)* It's okay.

KIT. That good, huh? Not beautifulfabulousgreat?

JOSH. *(gets up, crosses to* **KIT***)* I think it was more *human* last Christmas. This year it seems – how shall I put it – so resolutely "happy hands at home."

*(***KIT***'s expressions slides. She comes down the ladder.)*

KIT. *(glares at* **JOSH***)* Come on. You get up there. These "happy hands" have – how shall I put it – so resolutely *had* it!

(She dumps the popcorn ropes into **JOSH***'s arms.)*

JOSH. *(groans)* Oh, god, must we behave as if we're in the colorized version of *It's A Wonderful Life*?

*(***KIT** *raises an eyebrow as* **JOSH** *reluctantly mounts the ladder.* **NELLIE** *crosses to kneel on the window seat and look outside at the falling snow.* **KIT** *finally crosses to the coffee table, takes a cigarette out of a box, starts to light it with a kitchen match from a striker, stops, thinks better of it, blows out the match and returns the cigarette to the box.)*

NELLIE. If you go to all the trouble to put them out in boxes and to play with them, why don't you smoke them?

KIT. *(dryly)* I get a sense of satisfaction out of not being able to enjoy one.

*(***NELLIE** *and* **JOSH** *just stare at her.)*

– Well, it's an answer. I know it makes no sense, but it's an answer.

JOSH. *(after a moment)* Mom…when he gets here – do I have to kiss him?

KIT. *(tries to appear unruffled)* Well…I think that would be very…appropriate….

JOSH. Really?

KIT. Yes, I do. I think that would be a very warm and welcoming thing for a son to…

NELLIE. *(interrupting, crossing to the tree)* Don't put the angel on, Josh! That's what I get to do! Right, Mom?

KIT. Right… *(to* **JOSH***)* After all, you haven't seen him since the summer and, in spite of what you may think, your father loves you very much.

JOSH. That's just it, though.

KIT. *(tonelessly) What's* just it, though?

JOSH. I don't know if *I* love *him.*

(Silence. **KIT** *can't or doesn't choose to speak. Not so,* **NELLIE***…)*

NELLIE. Well, I'm going to kiss him! Not so much because I love him especially, but because I love kissing!

JOSH. *(to* **KIT***)* Can you imagine what she's going to be like by the time she gets her period?

KIT. *(annoyed)* Joshua, really! I've asked you repeatedly to please not…

JOSH. She doesn't understand.

KIT. That's not for you to decide and that's hardly the point!

JOSH. Okay, okay, I'm sorry!

NELLIE. *(to* **JOSH***)* And I understand. And I'm going to sing to him, too!
(bellowing) "SI-E-LENT NIGHT…HO-O-LEE NIGHT…"

JOSH. YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO SING "SILENT NIGHT" *SILENTLY*!!

NELLIE. THEN HOW COULD YOU *HEAR* IT?! THAT'S DUMB!

KIT. Shhhshhh!…quiet!…Your brother means *softly*, sweetheart. *(musically)* You should sing it *softly*.

NELLIE. *(quickly, to* **KIT***)* I love Daddy even if Josh doesn't!

JOSH. *(loudly)* I never said I *didn't*, I said I didn't *know*!

(He snatches at a rope of popcorn which shakes the limbs, causing some of the ornaments to clatter. **NELLIE** *screams.)*

NELLIE. NO, NO! YOU'RE RUINING IT! STOP IT, STOP IT!!

JOSH. WILL YOU SHUT UP?!!

*(***KIT** *sticks her fingers in her mouth and whistles loudly. The kids quiet.)*

KIT. *(crossing to center) TIME OUT!* Back to your corners! Or should I say, cages! *(softly, to* **NELLIE***)* Ready to put the angel on top, sweetie?

NELLIE. *(excitedly; then, for* **JOSH***'s sake)* I'm ready to bust some bozo's nose!

JOSH. That would be me.

KIT. Now, now, Nell. *(to* **JOSH***, re: ladder)* Come on, down, Josh. It's time for *It's A Wonderful Life,* The Sequel.

*(***JOSH** *comes down the ladder and goes to slump into the Windsor chair.* **NELLIE** *mounts the ladder,* **KIT** *minding her.)*

NELLIE. I just love Christmas! It's so red and green!

*(***KIT** *smiles.* **NELLIE** *takes the angel and places it on top of the tree.)*

NELLIE. There! How does she look?

KIT. *(softly, looking at* **NELLIE***)* She looks…beautiful, fabulous, great…

NELLIE. *(privately, to* **KIT***)* I hope Daddy thinks so, too.

*(***NELLIE** *comes down the ladder into* **KIT***'s arms.)*

KIT. *(kissing* **NELLIE** *on the cheek)* He will, darling. I know he will.

JOSH. He doesn't like Christmas at all. He's Jewish.

*(***KIT** *sets* **NELLIE** *down, turns to* **JOSH***, fed up.)*

KIT. *(flatly)* He likes Christmas just fine! He just never celebrated it as a child so it doesn't mean that much to him. But he likes it…*evah* so much! *(turns to* **NELLIE***, sweetly)* Especially angels. *(to* **JOSH***, through her teeth)* And *we're* going to like it, too!

JOSH. *(groans loudly)* Oh, it's some wonderful fucking life, all right!

KIT. *Joshua!* I will not have you using such thoroughly appalling…

JOSH. SOR-*REEEE*!!

NELLIE. Are you gonna kiss him when he gets here, Mommie?

KIT. *(lightly)* Don't I always when he comes to see us?

*(***KIT** *"nonchalantly" hangs the remainder of the ornaments on the tree.)*

JOSH. *(grimly)* You kiss him on the cheek.

KIT. *(with an edge)* Well, *that's kissing,* is it not?

NELLIE. *(hanging an ornament)* You kiss Nick on the mouth.

JOSH. Yeah. Great big wet toilet plungers.

KIT. *(to* **JOSH***, dryly)* Exquisitely put.

*(***JOSH** *makes a rude popping sound with his lips.* **KIT** *throws a Christmas ball at him.* **JOSH** *is pleased to get a rise out of her.)*

NELLIE. Does that mean you love Nick and you don't love Daddy anymore?

KIT. *(with a certain "great lady" air)* No, that does *not* necessarily mean that I love Nick at all. Though I do love him in a *certain* way – which is not to say that I don't still love your father in a *certain* way, too, but…well, we *are* divorced and although I will always have a *certain* kind of…well, *loving feeling* for him, it's certainly not at all what I feel for Nick, whether you call it love or not. Does that make sense?

NELLIE. *Certainly not.*

JOSH. Yeah, Mom, it needs work. And I don't mean the tree.

*(***KIT** *gives them both a look, sighs with a modicum of defeat.)*

NELLIE. Is that why you're not still married? Is it because Daddy doesn't love you anymore?

KIT. You'll have to ask *him* that.

NELLIE. Is it because he loves Wendy now?

KIT. You'll have to ask him that, too.

JOSH. I bet he doesn't kiss *her* on the cheek. I bet he gives her a big wet…Well – something *ex*quisitely put.

NELLIE. He gives her jewelry, too. Well, I guess he does. She's got it, anyway. I saw it in the picture he sent. The blurry one where everything looks like stars, including the middles of her eyes.

KIT. *Everybody* named Wendy has jewelry.

NELLIE. Not in *Peter Pan.* Of course, that Wendy's wearing a nightgown, so it could be in the vault.

*(***NELLIE** *drapes a rope of popcorn around her neck as if they were pearls.* **JOSH** *catches* **KIT***'s eye…)*

JOSH. My sister, the material midget. I'll bet she's gonna have jewels. Big, *angry* jewels like Grandma Corinne.

NELLIE. I'm *not* a midget! I'm petite. Grandma Corinne says so!

*(***KIT** *freezes at the mention of the name.)*

KIT. Come on, Nell, you've got to be in bed so Santa Claus can come.

NELLIE. There ain't no Santa Claus.

KIT. Oh, there ain't, ain't there? Where'd you get that idea, as-if-I-didn't-know.

*(***KIT** *looks at* **JOSH***.)*

JOSH. I never said a word!

KIT. *(calmly, to* **NELLIE***)* Go on up and get started with your bath – I'll be there in a minute. Not too much water.

NELLIE. I hope you're gonna say something to Josh about his language.

*(***KIT** *glares at* **NELLIE***…* **NELLIE** *goes to* **JOSH***, throws her arms about his neck…)*

(too adorably) 'Night, 'night, Joshie darling.

JOSH. Bitch.

*(***KIT** *gives him a barely tolerant look, scoots* **NELLIE** *up the stairs, laughing "wickedly." After she is out of sight,* **KIT** *and* **JOSH** *lock eyes.)*

I *never* said a word! Besides, do you honestly think she doesn't…

KIT. *(matter-of-fact)* Well, I hope not. It's probably the last Christmas she'll even *wonder* about *anything*! Where babies come from. Whether there's a God or not. And, oh, God, Josh, I *do* wish you wouldn't use such unnecessary, ghastly…

JOSH. I know, I know. What I said just slipped out.

KIT. Well, try to get a little more traction on the four-letter words.

JOSH. Yeah, yeah.

KIT. And I wish you'd get a little yuletide spirit! It wouldn't kill you to go along with things for a little while.

*(***KIT** *takes a cardboard box which the decorations were in and begins to deposit the clutter in it…* **JOSH** *goes to the stepladder, folds it, stops…)*

JOSH. Mom, is he gonna sleep with you?

KIT. Who, Santa Claus?

JOSH. You know who I mean.

KIT. He's going to sleep in the guest room like last time.

*(***JOSH** *takes the ladder to the closet beneath the stairs, puts it inside.)*

JOSH. I guess Nick won't be staying overnight as long as *he's* here.

KIT. *(mildly irritated)* Nick has never stayed overnight in this house ever, and you know it!

JOSH. But you do sleep with him, don't deny it.

KIT. *("grandly" defensive) Not in this house!*

JOSH. At his place? Or in motels?

KIT. Just in motels. Just in wretched little fleabag motels. And when one isn't available, the odd sordid flop-house.

JOSH. How does Nick compare to Dad? In the sack, I mean.

*(***KIT** *stops, puts down the box, faces* **JOSH** *directly.)*

KIT. *(evenly)* Look, I don't like this conversation. I don't like your smutty, smug impudence – the relentless way you've been trying your best to spoil this holiday.

*(***JOSH** *turns away from her.)*

I know we've been having a rocky time lately. Are you furious at me and your father because we broke up? Because we wrecked something for *you*? Well, I can understand that. It was a big disappointment for us,

too. A *very* big one. And it wasn't anybody's fault but your father's and mine. Not your's. Not Nell's. Just the two people who happen to be your parents. The two people who happen to love you the most!

(A moment, then **JOSH** *hurls a box of ornaments across the room and runs upstairs.* **KIT** *releases a deep sigh, slowly goes to pick up the scattered ornaments. The phone rings, she moves to the desk to answer it…)*

KIT. Hello? *(dully)* Oh, hello, Mother. Ohh…decorating. I was just watching Josh finish off the ornaments. Yes, the tree's lovely. Maybe a tad too "Hallmark card-ish" this year but… No, nothing's the matter, I'm fine – is it snowing in the city? The weather man on TV said it might. I don't know which one – just somebody with a good haircut in front of one of those big, swirling maps which are fascinating but tell you nothing. *(She picks up the instrument, brings it around to the sofa and sinks back in its cushions.)* No, nary a flake here, neither. Oh? Is that a double negative? Sorry. No, he hasn't arrived and I haven't heard from him. No, I haven't heard from Linda, yet, either – *neither*? I don't know what's correct but no calls from Paris. But you know how that goes with my dear sister… Yes, mother, I know she's a very, very busy person with very, very important things on her mind like the fate of the world and all, but…no, I'm not being catty and, yes, I *do* have the Christmas spirit. Listen, what time are you coming tomorrow? Oh, I don't know, I suppose we'll eat around four so come anytime you like…*after three.* Is Lucky driving you up or did you give him the day off? Oh. *(suddenly sits bolt upright)* No, Mother, *don't*! I do not need any extra help so *do not* bring Rolando and Arlene! Didn't you let them off, either? *Neither* one of them – I mean, *none* of them? They must all have the Christmas spirit, too! *(change of tone)* Oh, so sorry – no, for heaven's sake don't let me keep you! Whose party? Un, well, give everyone at Gracie Mansion my seasons greetings. Yeah, see you tomorrow… *(quickly)*

– and Mother, please…*one* request in advance: *(takes a deep breath, then rattles off a litany)* Try to like my hair, my clothes, my children's hair and clothes, my house, my hospitality and my ex-husband. No, I'm not trying to be snide, I'm just trying to *lay it on the line for you.* Yeah, have a good time at the Mayor's. Uh-huh, to you, too. *(She hangs up, says to herself through clenched teeth…)* I hate her. Oh, god, how I hate her.

*(***KIT** *reaches for the cigarette box on the coffee table, opens it, removes one, stops, thinks, tosses it back into the box, thinks…suddenly picks up the whole box and crosses to the fireplace to throw the entire contents onto the hearth.)*

NELLIE. Building a fire?

*(***KIT** *looks up to see* **NELLIE** *leaning over the banister, wearing a nightgown which could be out of Peter Pan.)*

KIT. Yes, darling, with Mommie's old cigarettes.

*(***KIT** *strikes a match and lights the little pile, picks up a poker.* **NELLIE** *descends the stairs.)*

NELLIE. You've been doing real good. Those patches seem to work – but they aren't very pretty.

KIT. You don't see them under my clothes.

NELLIE. I know. But I know they're there. *(She crosses to* **KIT**.*)* Are we going to light the tree?

KIT. *(not letting the last remark faze her)* We sure are, but we have to call Joshie first. My, my, don't you smell divine.

NELLIE. *(sheepishly)* I cheated and opened my present from Grandma Corinne. Bath oil. Gardenia. I knew it would be.

KIT. *(grimly)* Mmmm, you seem to know an awful lot of stuff. Well, thank her when she comes tomorrow and be sure to write her a little note, too. That means a lot to her. Like the difference between life and death.

*(***KIT** *pokes hostilely at the fire and it flames up.)*

NELLIE. Grandma Corinne says I take after her.

KIT. *(bluntly)* Don't even *think* it!

(The doorbell rings.)

NELLIE. *(runs toward the front door)* Oh, Daddy's home! Daddy's home!

*(***KIT** *straightens, replaces the poker and crosses to the front door, nervously smoothing her hair. She pulls the front door open to reveal* **NICK.** *He's about her age, very handsome, dressed in a good business suit, a cashmere overcoat, and silk scarf. His arms are full of presents.)*

KIT. Oh, Nick, it's you! We thought you were an ex-husband but we'll settle.

NICK. Is that a compliment? I can't tell.

NELLIE. Hiya, Uncle Nick!

KIT. Looks more like *Saint* Nick, I'd say. Here, let me help you.

NELLIE. You're looking mighty handsome.

NICK. Well, thanks. *(to* **KIT***)* Someone wouldn't be softening me up for their present, would they?

KIT. *(sardonically)* Whatever would give you that idea? It's just an evening of *relentless* good cheer, that's all.

*(***NELLIE** *has intervened to take a couple of packages and go to put them under the tree.* **KIT** *searches the darkness outside the house before closing the front door.* **NICK** *moves into the room.)*

KIT. *(to* **NICK***)* Want a drink? There's eggnog and white wine and…

NICK. Wine sounds good.

NELLIE. Want some fruit cake? We have some left from last year.

NICK. No, thanks.

NELLIE. I'd hate to drop it on my toe.

*(***KIT** *has gone to the armoire to pour the wine into a stem glass.)*

KIT. Bourbon or brandy will soften it up.

NELLIE. Soften it, maybe, but not sell it.

KIT. *Sell* it? You can't *give* fruit cake away. Why is that?

NICK. *(shrugs)* I don't know, but even drunks don't want it.

KIT. *(brings* **NICK** *the drink)* I thought you had to play Santa at the club tonight.

NICK. So I'll be a little late. *(takes the drink, gives* **KIT** *the remainder of the presents)* Thanks. I wanted to play Santa here first.

NELLIE. Hooray for our side!

(The swinging door pops open and **JOSH** *enters.)*

JOSH. *(bluntly)* There *is* no Santa Claus, didn't you hear?

NELLIE. YES THERE IS!!

KIT. Quiet, Nell! *(to* **NICK**, *irritated by* **JOSH***)* You've met my son, Ebaneezer somebody.

NICK. *(holding out a hand)* Merry Christmas, Josh.

*(***JOSH** *does not shake hands.* **NICK** *self-consciously puts his hand in his pocket.)*

JOSH. *(to* **NICK***)* Are you spending the night?

KIT. *(levelly)* If you can't be civil, Josh, be good enough to leave us in peace.

JOSH. *(continuing to* **NICK***)* Tonight might not be a good night to stay. We're expecting someone. And I *don't* mean down the chimney.

NICK. Yes, I thought your dad might have arrived already.

NELLIE. You never can be too sure with the Christmas rush, you know.

KIT. *(amused by* **NELLIE***'s remark)* Come on, Nell, time for bed.

NELLIE. *(petulantly)* But I have to stay up to see Daddy!

KIT. *(dryly)* Well, with the Christmas rush he may have to come on skates. You can see him in the morning.

NELLIE. But I'm not at all sleepy.

KIT. When are you ever? You're the original party girl! I wonder who you get that from?

NICK. Your mother probably.

KIT. *(to* **NICK***)* I had a sinking feeling you were going to say that.

JOSH. Well, Nell certainly doesn't get it from you.

KIT. *(indulgently)* Heavens, no, I'm just old "Happy-Hands-At-Home," the shut-in.

NELLIE. Nick, when are you going to take me sailing on your ship?

NICK. *(pleasantly)* In the spring, if you like. But you don't call it a ship, Nell, you call it a sloop.

NELLIE. Oh. Does it have a living room?

NICK. Uh-huh, but you call that the cabin.

NELLIE. And a kitchen?

NICK. *(nods, laughs)* Uh-huh, but you call that the galley.

NELLIE. *(thinks, after a moment)* What do you call a tomato on a boat?

*(***NICK** *is nonplussed, stops laughing.* **KIT** *laughs. Even* **JOSH** *snickers.)*

KIT. *(to* **NELLIE***)* Say goodnight to Nick.

*(***NICK** *bends to one knee.* **NELLIE** *goes to him, puts her arms around his neck, kisses him on the mouth.* **NICK** *is chagrinned.)*

NELLIE. Goodnight, old Nick. Is my present expensive?

JOSH. Little bitch!

*(***KIT** *takes* **NELLIE** *by the hand…)*

KIT. *(re:* **JOSH***'s remark)* If the charm gets too thick in here, there's an ax in the woodbin.

*(***KIT** *takes* **NELLIE** *up the stairs. When they are out of sight,* **NICK** *turns to* **JOSH***.)*

NICK. Now, come on, Josh, don't tell me you don't have the Christmas spirit?

JOSH. Oh, we've got the Christmas spirit by the gallon. But *you* seem to be fresh out. Let me fill you up again.

*(***JOSH** *takes* **NICK***'s empty wine glass from him, goes to the armoire, pours him another.* **NICK** *eyes him curiously.)*

JOSH. *(cont.)* How come your first marriage failed?

NICK. *(smoothly)* Married the wrong girl, I guess.

JOSH. Now you've found the right one.

*(***JOSH** *crosses to* **NICK** *with his refilled glass, hands it to* **NICK**.*)*

NICK. *(takes drink)* Thanks. I think so. And I hope she feels the same.

JOSH. How would you like it being our father, Nick?

NICK. How would *you* like it?

JOSH. You go first.

NICK. *(without hesitation)* I'd like it. Your turn.

*(***NICK** *takes a big swallow of wine, watches* **JOSH**.*)*

JOSH. Well…Grandmother would *really* like it. "Old money," WASP, all the right cliques and all the right clubs. "Good goods," is how she refers to you. Did you know that? Did you know you were "good goods."

NICK. You didn't answer my question.

JOSH. *(bluntly)* I think you want to marry my mother but I think you'd prefer it if she didn't have us – my sister and me. I don't think you really give a shit about the two of us, no matter how many presents you bring. Now, in answer to your question…

*(***KIT** *comes down the stairs.* **NICK** *and* **JOSH** *turn toward her…)*

KIT. She's like something shot out of a cannon – going to be awake all night. We'll have to be extra quiet putting out the toys… *(realizes…)* Oh, am I stepping on the punchline?

NICK. The one before you came in had the wallop.

*(***JOSH** *starts for the stairs.* **KIT** *has reached the bottom and catches him in her arms and hangs on to him for a moment, even though* **JOSH** *resists and pulls away.)*

KIT. Hey, where're you going? We don't want privacy.

JOSH. *I* do. I've got presents to wrap.

KIT. Well, bring them down when you're finished and put them under the tree. I'm counting on you to help me out with the toys. You know I never know Tab A from Slot B.

JOSH. You're Slot A, he's Tab B. Any kid can figure that out.

*(***JOSH** *starts to run up the stairs.)*

NICK. Josh.

*(***JOSH** *stops.)*

(directly, but gently) You have every right to be suspicious of me, but that just isn't true – what you said. I'm *very* fond of you. And Nellie, too. More than you know. I hope you believe that. I want to try and be a good father to you both.

*(***JOSH** *doesn't respond, turns and runs up the rest of the stairs and off.* **KIT** *looks at* **NICK** *quickly, goes over to the fireplace, stokes the fire which is now burning beautifully.)*

KIT. I don't even want to think what all of that was about.

NICK. I'm afraid he feels that if we get married, it will officially put an end to his ever having Manny as a father.

KIT. *(flatly)* I thought that was what that was about.

NICK. Josh doesn't think I like him and Nellie – that I only want you and they'll be left out in the cold. That isn't true. You know it isn't.

KIT. *(distressed)* I know, Nick. Oh, I know.

NICK. Of, course, I botched it the first time, but there were reasons. And thank god, there weren't any kids to suffer from my mistakes.

KIT. I botched it, too, the first time – and, I'm afraid, there *are* kids to suffer from my mistakes.

NICK. It couldn't have been all your fault.

*(***NICK** *puts down his wine glass, crosses to her.)*

Darling…this may be the last few minutes of the holiday we have together. I want to give you my present – *(takes a small plush box from his pocket)* Now, please don't say, "Oh, Nick, you shouldn't have."

(He hands her the box. She goes to take it, but when she sees what kind of a box it is, she draws her hand back as if it were red hot.)

KIT. *(grimly)* Oh, Nick, you shouldn't have.

NICK. You don't even know what it is!

KIT. I know mittens don't come in a tiny plush box.

NICK. It's not a ring, if that's what you think.

KIT. *(brightly)* Oh, it's not? What is it?

NICK. Just a little trimming of my own, you'll be relieved to know. Open it.

*(***KIT** *opens the box.)*

KIT. *(dazzled, gaily)* Oh, Nick, you really shouldn't have but I'm *sooo* glad you did! They're absolutely exquisite! The most beautiful earrings I've ever seen!

NICK. They were my mother's. My father gave them to her at Christmas time, too – when he asked her to marry him.

KIT. *(Her face slides.)* Ohhh, you really shouldn't have.

NICK. *(re: the earrings)* Put them on, Kit. I want you to have them. I can wait. I'm good at that. I've waited a long time. Put them on. Please.

KIT. *(puts her head in her hands)* Oh, I'm so confused, Nick. About so many things. About Manny. About me. You. Us.

NICK. I know you are. But I love you, Kit. I honestly am in love with you. And I think it's for always.

KIT. *(sincerely)* Nick, you're such a fine man. You're thoughtful and attentive and generous and…well, decent. And you don't hardly meet none of them no more.

NICK. "Good goods." Isn't that what Corinne calls me?

KIT. You're better than that. Much better than anything my mother would ever take you for. So good, in fact, I know we could make it work. I know I'd work at making it work.

NICK. That doesn't sound like much fun – all that work.

KIT. Oh, Nick, don't say another syllable. Not tonight. I don't want to spoil it. I don't even know what it is I don't want to spoil, but I know I don't want to do it tonight. It's just that I'm…

NICK. Still in love with him.

KIT. …confused.

*(***NICK** *nods understandingly.* **KIT** *takes the earrings out of the box and he helps her put them on. She puts her arms about his neck.)*

(They kiss. A moment…and the swinging door to the kitchen is pushed open and **MANNY** *enters. He's in his late thirties with a lean, athletic body, dark eyes and dark hair. He has a decidedly impish quality, something devilishly attractive about him. He is dressed in cords and an expensive sweater and car coat. He has a duffel bag slung over his shoulder.)*

MANNY. Pardon me, but aren't you suppose to be standing under the mistletoe for that sort of thing?

*(***KIT** *and* **NICK** *break apart, startled.)*

KIT. Manny!

MANNY. I guess you might say you *missed* the mistletoe. About ten feet and several toes. God, I hate that. I hate that like poison. *(extends a hand to* **NICK***)* Hello, I'm the alimony man.

NICK. *(formally)* I'm Nick…

MANNY. *(brightly)* "Good goods"!! *(to* **KIT***)* Isn't that what you mother calls him? *(to* **NICK***)* You should hear what her mother calls me!

KIT. *(seething)* Why did you come in the back?! Trying to sneak up on us?

MANNY. How'd I know you and loverboy were being kissy-wissy in front of the fire? I put my car in the garage next to yours – *(to* **NICK***)* Such a pretty picture – just like slippers under the bed.

NICK. *(looks at his watch. To* **KIT***)* Sorry, darling, but I'm late. You're sure there's no way for you to get away?

KIT. *(shakes her head)* Even if there were, you know me and parties.

MANNY. *(to* **KIT***, going on)* I love that old VD of yours.

KIT. VW.

MANNY. *(to* **KIT***)* What did I say?

KIT. *(stonily)* Nevermind.

MANNY. *(to* **NICK***)* Kit used to pick me up in it. Yes, sir, whenever I was suicidal, we'd get in the back seat and she'd make my spirit rise.

KIT. *(to* **NICK***)* Manny's the most interesting teller of dull tales I know.

MANNY. *(to* **KIT***)* The first time we met you picked me up. And I don't mean in your Volkswagen.

KIT. *(to* **NICK***, nervously)* He was playing with some rotten rock group in some wretched disco and…

MANNY. And you asked me if I had hair on my back.

KIT. *(to* **MANNY***, irritated)* I seriously doubt that, but, yes, I was the first to speak. *(to* **NICK***, lightly)* Terrified he was going to be turned down. Manny seriously can't handle rejection.

NICK. *(to* **MANNY***)* Then I hope you won't be distressed by my saying goodbye.

MANNY. *(to* **NICK***)* I'll walk you out.

KIT. *(to* **NICK***) I'll* walk you out. *(to* **MANNY***) If* you don't mind.

*(***KIT** *takes* **NICK***'s arm, they turn for the front door…)*

MANNY. *(dreamily)* I just ran my hand over your seat – of your VW – feeling-it-up sorta, remembering those lip-smackin', finger-licking good ol' times! *(to* **NICK***)* Did she pick you up, too?

NICK. Well, she's helped me manage lift-off.

KIT. "Tira Mi Su" is my middle name.

*(***NICK** *turns and crosses to the front door.)*

MANNY. Nice little baubles on your ears, Kit. Who's been stuffing your stocking?

*(***KIT** *fumes, turns and hurries after* **NICK**.*..)*

KIT. We're just lucky he didn't pull down his pants and moon for us! That's one of his specialties!

NICK. You mean, show us what an asshole he is!

*(***NICK** *and* **KIT** *exit, leaving the door open.* **MANNY** *rushes to the open door...)*

MANNY. *(yells) Would you like me to do that?! (starts to unbuckle his pants)* I'd be happy to... *(suddenly stops)* Son-of-a-bitch! He's giving her a...a big wet toilet plunger!!

*(***MANNY** *stands back and slams the door loudly. He crosses the room, takes off his car coat, throws it on the arm of the sofa.* **KIT** *enters...)*

KIT. *(slamming front door)* Well, I must say, *that* was attractive!

MANNY. *(pleading whine)* Don't yell at me, *pleeese.*

KIT. Don't whine! And just let me tell you what I am not going to put up with this trip! Not one more minute of your goddamn stupid, fucking infantile behavior! It's Christmas for Christsake! So let's just call a truce and goddamn well try to relax and fucking enjoy it!

(silence)

MANNY. *(calmly, quietly; comic righteousness)* Kit! I've been meaning to talk to you about your language! Who've you been hanging around with?

KIT. Our son.

MANNY. *("saintly")* Well, you know how I hate scenes. How I hate confrontations.

KIT. Now I suppose you'll sulk for the duration!

MANNY. *(softly angelic)* If I've done something wrong, I'm sorry.

KIT. *(furiously)* You're always sorry after you've provoked everyone into a frenzy!

*(***MANNY** *is silent, hangs his head.)*

KIT. Better not pout, Manny. *You-Know-Who's* coming to town.

*(***JOSH** *has come midway down the stairs.* **KIT** *quickly pulls off the diamond earrings before* **JOSH** *can see them and unceremoniously plops them in the fishbowl.)*

JOSH. *(to* **MANNY***)* I figured you must have arrived from the sound of the artillery down here.

(Both **MANNY** *and* **KIT** *turn toward* **JOSH***.)*

MANNY. *(tentatively, but with great warmth)* Hi, handsome.

JOSH. *(tonelessly)* Hi.

MANNY. Do I get a kiss?

*(***MANNY** *crosses to the bottom of the stairs, holds out his arms.* **JOSH** *looks at* **KIT***. She doesn't move or react. Finally,* **JOSH** *comes down the remainder of the stairs and kisses* **MANNY** *on the cheek and* **MANNY** *hugs him.* **KIT** *restrains a smile, looks away.)*

MANNY. How've you been?

JOSH. Okay.

MANNY. How's school?

JOSH. Okay.

MANNY. You're looking great.

JOSH. So do you. How do you keep a tan in December?

MANNY. It's easy in California. There's a tanning salon on every corner.

(Feebly laughs at his joke. **JOSH** *doesn't.)*

– Do you watch the show?

JOSH. It comes on too late for a school night.

MANNY. Well, I have all of them on tape. You can see them when you come to visit. Or I can send them to you. That is, if you want me to. *(an awkward pause)* Hey, I have some presents for you. They're out in the kitchen…

*(***MANNY** *starts for the swinging door.)*

JOSH. I'll open them tomorrow, with Nell.

MANNY. *(stops)* Okay. Where is my Nellie?

JOSH. Asleep. If you can believe it. *(looks at* **KIT***)* And you have the nerve to talk about *my* language.

*(***JOSH** *turns and starts up the stairs.)*

MANNY. *(to* **JOSH***)* Goodnight.

*(***JOSH** *doesn't answer, continues up.* **KIT** *watches him disappear, looks a bit worried.* **MANNY** *turns to her.)*

MANNY. How are they?

KIT. Ohh, Nell's a wonder.

MANNY. Yeah…and Josh? *Not* so wonderful?

*(***KIT** *has gone to the foot of the stairs to look up. She gestures silently to* **MANNY***.)*

KIT. *(quietly)* Later.

MANNY. *(nods, shrugs, changes the subject)* Well…you look nice.

KIT. *(sweetly)* Thanks. You look nice, too.

MANNY. Nice is such a nice word, isn't it?

KIT. Isn't it though. But that's how you always wanted things, right?

MANNY. Right. Just always wanted everything to be nice.

KIT. *(re: the house)* How does the house look?

MANNY. Like something out of Currier and Ives. *(thinking he may have said the wrong thing)* Only *cozier.* Warm and homey. Even…sexy.

KIT. Thanks.

MANNY. You could always make a place look cozy and warm and homey and sexy and…nice.

KIT. *(after a moment)* How's Wendy?

MANNY. Fine.

KIT. And you?

MANNY. Fine.

KIT. Fine is such a *nice* word.

MANNY. Isn't it, though. But that's how you always wanted everything. I wanted everything to be *nice* and you wanted everything to be fine. And how are *you?*

KIT. Fine – *what else*?! It's what nice people answer no matter what. People say it when they're falling apart inside – although that is not necessarily the case at the moment.

(A pause. They look at each other.)

MANNY. Wendy's pregnant. And that's not nice. And she wants to get married. And that's not fine. And I'm falling apart inside.

KIT. *(seriously)* I'm sorry you're not happy, Manny.

MANNY. Oh, I'm happy! I didn't say I wasn't happy. I said I was…

KIT. I heard you. What are you and Wendy going to do?

MANNY. Well, I don't want to get married and she doesn't want an abortion so, I don't know – a double suicide, I suppose.

*(***KIT** *is silent.)*

MANNY. *(after a moment)* But everything's gonna be just fine. Life's good. I like myself – most of the time. I like Wendy, most of the time – like my house, like my Mercedes.

KIT. A Mercedes…well. I hear there're as common as avocadoes out there.

*(***MANNY** *lets that pass.* **KIT** *goes to the sofa, sits down.)*

MANNY. Bernie's blossomed, really. Got color. Gets exercise. Gone Hollywood.

KIT. And the lady with the hat?

MANNY. The lady with the hat is a different story. As you know, Mable never wanted to move out there in the first place. She *loves* the city. Loves the streets, adores the filth, craves the noise, can't get enough of the violence.

KIT. I like your mother so much more than I like mine.

MANNY. All she ever wanted was to live in a building with a doorman on Park Avenue. That's all I've heard ever since I was a kid in Brooklyn. Well, a building with a doorman she got.

KIT. She wrote me you bought them a condominium.

MANNY. Yeah, and it has a pimply-faced kid with a funny hat who *sometimes* opens the door. But it's not on Park Avenue in Manhattan – it's on Ocean Avenue in Santa Monica. And Mabel doesn't give a fuck-all for the climate or the cleanliness or the security of it all! She's starved for some pissing freezing cold muggins, some sky-high garbage, a few blistering insults. The lady in the hat wants *action*! They both make me nuts!

*(***KIT** *laughs.* **MANNY** *moves to the sofa.)*

MANNY. How's Corinne?

KIT. Still making *me* nuts. Still complaining. Always about the heaviest of issues like…they've stopped making satin lingerie cases in her color of champagne beige.

MANNY. Your mother is sort of champagne beige head to toe. Her hair, her skin, her clothes. In fact, Corinne is sort of a champagne beige name.

KIT. No wonder my father was an alcoholic.

MANNY. Do you suppose our kids are going to feel the same about us? Love us. Hate us.

KIT. They already do.

MANNY. *(mild panic attack)* Oh, god, oh, god, I'm going to faint!

KIT. *(not indulging him)* No you're not. Take a deep breath and you'll be fine.

MANNY. Oh my god, I left my blood-pressure machine in the car!

KIT. Do you still have that stupid thing?

(Slight pause as **MANNY** *inhales, exhales deeply, then sits down beside her, resting his head on the back of the sofa, feeling his pulse.)*

(after a moment) Why is it that you still go out of your way to insult anyone in whom I have the least bit of interest?

MANNY. *(sits up)* Oh, well, you can't be serious about *him*! He looks like he's been delivering balloons all his life!

KIT. When you used to do it on the road, I'd flatter myself that you were being the jealous husband – though why I was ever fool enough to make you breakfast when you stumbled in after fucking some little groupie all night, I'll never know.

MANNY. *(mock sweetly, almost batting his eyes)* I always came home though, didn't I? Didn't I, *darling*?

KIT. You did it when you were here this summer – with that fellow on the Yale faculty I was seeing.

MANNY. Oh, well, he was a joke! I mean, do you know he actually said to me that rock and roll was *declasse*?! God, am I glad you dumped *him*!

KIT. *(laughs)* You know what? I am, too.

MANNY. *(laughing at himself)* Declasse, that's me. Can you believe this rock and roll schmuck is now an honest-to-god Hollywood composer?

KIT. I knew you'd make it. *(sweetly)* I hope you get everything you want, Manny. I want you to be happy.

(He smiles warmly at her, brushes her chin with his fingertip. She takes his hand – at first it is to discourage his being too intimate…then, she looks at his hand thoughtfully, holds on to it a second before letting it go.)

You always had the most beautiful hands – graceful as a dancer's. I always loved the curve in your wrists, the way your long, slender fingers stay together, cupped ever so slightly – like the head of a swan. Music just has to come out of them.

*(Sight pause…***MANNY** *is entranced.)*

MANNY. *(hushed)* What can I tell you, Kit, I'm jealous. When I see you with someone else I just hate it like poison.

*(***KIT** *looks into* **MANNY***'s eyes.)*

KIT. You've done well for yourself, Manny. Maybe the divorce brought you luck.

MANNY. *(horrified)* Oh, Kit, don't say that!

(A pause as they continue to look at each other. Finally, she gets up, moves away. He tries to break the mood, too, gets up and heads for the swinging door.)

(en route) There are presents from my folks, too – for the kids and for you. And some things from me, of course.

(He exits to the kitchen. She goes over to the fireplace, and with the poker fishes out an unburned cigarette, puts it in her lips, lets it rest there a moment, then jerks it out and hurls it back in the fire.)

KIT. *(loud enough for* **MANNY** *to hear)* I hope they didn't buy me clothes. They always buy me things I have to take back – and then I always feel so guilty and unappreciative.

*(***MANNY** *re-enters with an armful of wrapped presents and his garment bag.* **KIT** *goes to help him.)*

MANNY. Here, this one's for you from them.

(He hands her a large hexagonal box.)

KIT. *(anxiously)* Oh, god, you don't suppose it's a hat, do you? This looks like it could be a hatbox.

MANNY. *(dismissively)* Oh, they've learned their lesson. They said they've never seen you wear a thing they've given you so this year they were getting you something very "blah." Mabel's exact word.

KIT. What's blah that could come in a hexagon box? Oh, I just know it's a hat. An *eight-sided* hat!

*(***MANNY** *has hung his garment bag on the newell post, taken the other presents over to the tree…)*

MANNY. Listen, they know how hard you are to please.

KIT. *(incredulously)* Hard to please?

MANNY. *(quickly)* I mean, how *precise* you are. How you like things your way.

KIT. *(glares)* My way?

MANNY. You know what I mean – "just so."

KIT. We just have very different taste, that's all!

MANNY. Yes, that's true – but you must admit, you can be very rigid.

KIT. *(tightly)* Yes, I admit I *can* be. *Could* be. I'm different than I used to be!

MANNY. Good! How?

KIT. I'm actually trying. Can't you see how there're coffee stains on the slipcovers? And I never run around fluffing up the down cushions every time they're sat on.

MANNY. Well, congratulations.

KIT. I'm not quite out of the woods yet, but I'm working on it. Actually, it's my New Year's resolution: to be more flexible – less rigid about everything.

MANNY. Great! God, how I hated it when you'd get a case of the "perfects."

KIT. The "perfects?"

MANNY. Just like your mother.

KIT. What a thoroughly shitty thing to say to me!

MANNY. And when the holidays rolled around it really would be nuclear family launchpad!

KIT. You hated the holidays long before you ever met me!

MANNY. Right. I'd like to mow down shoppers! I'd like to slaughter reindeer! I'd like to detonate the North Pole!

KIT. Well, I happen to love the holidays! *All* of them! I always have!

MANNY. Yeah, who needs a calendar with you around – homemade Valentines, satin hearts and paper lace. And pretty soon it's Easter baskets and Easter bunnies and bunnysuits and dyed eggs and dyed chicks and dead ducks and chocolate-covered everything but chocolate-covered crucifixes!

KIT. *(defensively)* I just love getting in the spirit of things! I see nothing wrong with that!

MANNY. *(hardly drawing breath)* And bammo! Before you know it, it's homebaked birthday cakes with special sayings and party hats and pin-the-tail on the donkey, and lookout, folks! It's fireworks for the fourth of July, bakeoffs and cookouts and hoop-dee-do and *hello*, it's Halloween! Pumpkins stabbed into jack-o-lanterns and funny faces and trick or treat, and before-you-know-it, *tahdahmm*! it's a turkey for Thanksgiving, and a *goose* for Christmas and *whoops*, thank-you-very-much!

KIT. Cynical bastard!

MANNY. *(really rolling)* …And Ho, ho, ho, it's Christmas cards and a Christmas tree, hand-picked and hand-hewn, and wreathes and garlands and boughs and bows on boxes stacked to the ceiling! And enough food for a famine, and none of that sto' bought business for you, oh, no, your little oven's sayin' lovin' morning, noon, and night with pies and puds and nogs and grogs, and gimme a break! – and god-almighty when and where does it ever for fuckin' sake end??!!

(a pause)

KIT. So I overdid it.

MANNY. And you wonder why I tried to pretend the holidays didn't exist – tried to look the other way?!

KIT. *(flaring)* Okay! Overdone! Overdecorated! Over-the-top! I wanted a home.

MANNY. Oh, was that it?!

KIT. It's all I ever wanted! All my life! A real home with a real family – a family that looks at each other and speaks to each other and *screams* at each other! One that doesn't just take each other for granted and shut each other out. One that's *alive*! Not like the dead thing I grew up with. Not like what I had with you: nobody at home, nobody ever in! *(pause; calmly)* What's your New Year's resolution?

MANNY. *(calmly)* Ohh, I don't know, I haven't thought about it. Let's see…try to thaw the Wall-Of-Silence, I guess.

KIT. *(applauds)* Congratulations to you, too!

MANNY. Well, I'm still working on it. Not quite there yet, either. But I'm *trying* to communicate. Trying not to shy away from confrontations, trying not to tune out, tune off…

KIT. The trouble is that you think saying what's on your mind is always a confrontation. You think talking to each other has to turn into a war. All I ever wanted was a simple exchange of thoughts and word – so that some molehill wouldn't turn into some Mont Blanc which you could misunderstand and sulk about!

MANNY. *(after a moment)* Well, with a little luck, maybe we'll both come through. Change is possible. Growth is possible. I believe that.

(Pause. He stares at her. She looks away.)

(simply) It's good to see you.

KIT. *(looks directly at him)* It's good to see you, too. *(slight, awkward pause, then)* Let me help you put your things upstairs. In your room.

(She goes to take the garment bag. He picks up the duffel bag and joins her at the stairs.)

MANNY. You know Mabel and Bernie tell me everytime they speak to you.

KIT. That reminds me, I owe them a call. Oh, god, how I despise Alexander Graham Bell.

MANNY. Every time you call *them*, they call *me*.

KIT. Well, I do try to make an effort on birthdays…and special occasions. I want the kids to know their grandparents.

*(***KIT** *has turned and started up the stairs but* **MANNY***'s next speech stops her midway.)*

MANNY. My mother said you told her, "Just because Manny and I are divorced, it doesn't mean *we* can't be friends." – That meant a lot to them. They love you, you know.

KIT. And I love them.

MANNY. I hope we can be friends, too.

KIT. *(sincerely)* We are friends, Manny. We always have been. Let's just try to be better ones. For everybody's sake.

MANNY. *(sincerely)* It's a deal. Shake it like you mean it?

(He hold out a hand. She holds out her hand. But **MANNY** *doesn't take it. Rather, after a beat, he sticks out his rear end and shakes it.)*

*(***KIT** *doesn't react, just silently stares at him and lowers her hand.* **MANNY** *stops, realizes his joke has fallen flat.)*

(apologetic plea) Sorry! I'm going to try to stop acting like a clown, too! Honest, I am – but, oh, Kit, I just hate being so goddamn solemn about it. I hate it like "pois*son*" – French for poison.

KIT. *(coolly)* "Pois*son*" is French for fish.

MANNY. Well, pardonez-moi for living.

(A moment, then **KIT** *silently extends her hand again. He leaps upon it, shaking her hand vigorously and gratefully.)*

(ecstatically) Christ, this new year's not going to be *long* enough or *wide* enough or *tall* enough to contain our mental health!

*(***KIT** *laughs, turns and goes upstairs and* **MANNY** *follows.)*

(The stage is empty for a moment. Then, the swinging door is slowly pushed open and **JOSH** *comes into the room. He looks toward the stairs, then turns to see* **MANNY***'s coat lying on the arm of the sofa. He slowly crosses to it, picks it up and tries it on.)*

*(***JOSH** *walks about, getting the feel of the coast, obviously not disliking it. He spots the presents* **MANNY** *has brought which were put under the tree. He crosses to pick them up and look at the cards until he finds the one that's meant for him. He holds it a moment, shakes it, and then puts it back.)*

(Now **JOSH** *reaches for the switch and turns the tree on and it illuminates with a spirited glow.)*

(There is an offstage sound – voices and footsteps at the top of the stairs. **JOSH** *snaps his head in that direction, quickly jumps up and takes off the coat and puts it back where it was, then runs out the swinging door.)*

(Momentarily, **MANNY** *comes down the stairs, pausing in the center of the room, sensing that someone has just been there. He looks to see that the tree is lit as* **KIT** *comes downstairs.)*

MANNY. *(cont.)* Is it my imagination or was the tree not lit when we went upstairs?

KIT. *(not getting the question)* Ohh, it looks lovely! Did you turn it on?

MANNY. I didn't touch it.

KIT. Who, then? Some little elf?

MANNY. Yeah, some little fifteen year-old elf.

KIT. *(comprehending)* Ohh. Want a drink?

MANNY. Got any club soda?

KIT. No egg nog? Or fruit cake?

MANNY. Fruit cake?!

KIT. Forget I said that.

(She goes to the bar, opens a bottle of soda and puts it over ice.)

MANNY. *(re: playing Santa)* So where do we begin?

KIT. The closet. Behind the coats and ladder and stuff…

*(***MANNY** *goes to the closet door under the stairs, opens it, removes the stepladder, pushes coats aside, removes several pieces of luggage to reveal an old steamer trunk, plastered with hotel stickers.)*

MANNY. *(pulling out the trunk)* Oh, you've still got this great old trunk of your dad's.

KIT. *(crosses to hand him the soda)* The toys are inside.

*(***MANNY** *takes the soda, drinks, sets it down. He opens the trunk to reveal some toys – some in boxes, some unwrapped.* **KIT** *starts to place some of them around the room.* **MANNY** *does likewise.)*

KIT. How's your friend? And I don't mean Wendy.

MANNY. Who?

KIT. The violin player. Colin – ?

MANNY. Oh! Well, now, Colin is probably the first close friend I've had in my life. I mean, other than you. He's fine now. What's this?

(He holds a long, narrow, soft carrying case made of a synthetic material.)

KIT. *(looks up)* Josh's BB gun. And his friend died?

MANNY. *(shakes his head)* Yeah. AIDS. Terrible. He was *my* age! I never really thought of anyone *my age* dying. His death really shook me up.

KIT. *(sardonically)* Not to mention what it must have done to Colin.

MANNY. Oh, he was a mess. I must say – and I say this in all modesty – if it hadn't been for me, I think he would have cracked up.

KIT. I'm glad you were there for him.

MANNY. Yeah, I'm a much more generous person than I used to be.

KIT. I'm glad to hear that.

MANNY. How's your sister?

KIT. She got married again. To the same guy.

MANNY. The Frog?

KIT. *(nods)* The rich, powerful, socially correct Frog.

MANNY. I wonder what it is that draws two people back together again and makes them get married all over.

KIT. *(looks at him directly)* Masochism. Sadomasochism.

*(***MANNY** *gives her a look, wheels out a miniature baby carriage, then removes a kite-shaped object in a felt cloth bag, gathered with a drawstring at one end. He unties the sack to peer inside.)*

MANNY. What's this wicked looking thing? *(He starts to remove it from the sack…)*

KIT. *(looks over)* Josh's crossbow.

*(***MANNY** *takes out a modern steel version of the medieval variety…)*

MANNY. Hmmmmm. *(hangs the crossbow on the armoire door)* You know, I knew. I knew from the first time I saw you.

KIT. Knew what?

MANNY. From the first moment I laid eyes on you, I knew we were gonna get in some trouble together. And I think you knew it, too.

KIT. I did. And I think that about says it: "get in some trouble together." Why not, "support, extend, enrich each other?" Rather than cause each other some trouble.

MANNY. I don't know. I wonder what it is? There was this tremendous physical attraction, of course, but there was something behind your eyes, something that let me know…*here's the one.*

KIT. *(stops, says softly)* Yes, Manny, I saw something behind your eyes, too.

(They look at each other for a moment. She turns away, begins to gather up some wrapping and put it into a cardboard box.)

*(***MANNY** *has removed a baby doll and two other items. He holds one up to* **KIT**…*)*

MANNY. This, I take it, is Josh's hunting knife.

*(***MANNY** *puts the doll under his arm and pulls the knife from its scabbard, flashing the blade…)*

KIT. That's right.

MANNY. And this?

*(***MANNY** *brandishes the second item.)*

KIT. …is his foil for his fencing lessons.

MANNY. You don't think it means anything, do you, that he only requested weapons for Christmas?

KIT. Listen, I drew the line at the Do-it-Yourself W.M.D. Kit.

(She pulls out a baseball bat, hands it to him.)

– Here. Add this to the arsenal.

MANNY. I'm serious!

KIT. I'm so glad you are. Because it *is* serious.

MANNY. What is? What is going on?

*(***KIT** *has moves to the stairs, looks up.)*

KIT. *(looks back to* **MANNY***, softly)* Later.

MANNY. *(picks up her hushed tone)* You keep saying, "Later. Later." Why not *now, now*?

KIT. *(hushed)* He's still up. I can hear him. And he can hear us.

*(***MANNY** *sighs, nods, goes to get a particular present he has brought – something that looks like a dress box from an expensive store.)*

MANNY. This is for you from me.

KIT. Shouldn't I wait for the kids?

MANNY. *(shakes his head)* Uh-uh.

KIT. *(takes the package, looks at label)* Oh, my, Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills, no less!

MANNY. No smart, East Coast cracks, please.

(She opens the box to remove an expensive, hand-made black satin bra and pair of black satin panties, trimmed with sheer black lace.)

KIT. Oh, my, they're…they're lovely.

MANNY. The lace – blind nuns or something.

KIT. At the very least. Thank you. They're…well, they're *stunning*. I'm truly…*stunned*.

MANNY. You really mean it? You don't hate them?

KIT. I really mean it, Manny – and I don't mean to sound ungrateful, but do you think they're appropriate?

MANNY. Appropriate? You mean, for the climate? I figured you had enough longjohns.

KIT. I mean isn't it the sort of thing you ought to give to Wendy rather than me?

MANNY. I only know it's probably something I wouldn't have given you when we were married. *(thinks; after a moment)* Maybe I've learned something from Wendy.

KIT. Yes, maybe you have. *(puts the lingerie back in the box)* I hope you don't mind, but I think I'm actually more interested in hearing about Colin than I am about Wendy.

MANNY. Oh. Okay. He's, well…he's a terrific musician. He and his fiddle are very much in demand. I always use him on the recording dates for the show. He does "avec schmaltz" great.

KIT. Avec what?

MANNY. Schmaltz. The lovey-dovey string stuff. That's how all those European composers who wound up in Hollywood used to mark the romantic passages in their scores. Especially the violin solos. Colin's fingers are more sentimental than Mother's Day.

KIT. Can we leave mothers out of this?

MANNY. *(shrugs)* I love Colin. We have lunch at the studio and play tennis sometime and schmooze about our careers and, of course, the life and times of Manny Boy.

KIT. *(dryly)* Mmmm. Well, who else?!

MANNY. You'd like him. You have a lot in common. You could talk about music and books and old movies… and you could talk about me.

KIT. You're so endlessly fascinating, I can't see how we'd have much time to cover anything else.

MANNY. You two have the same sort of sensitivity toward "*The Rules.*"

KIT. What rules would those be?

MANNY. You know, *The Unwritten Rules.* He would never come over without calling first. He would never cancel at the last minute, and if he were going to be late, he'd call to say he was going to be late. And he always calls the next day to say, thank you – or worse, writes a note. And he never forgets holidays, birthdays or anniversaries. He's just brimming over with all them there decent, humane, civilized qualities I never heard of.

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