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Caged Gorillas

Sandra Dee Holcombe
Old Dominion University

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CAGED GORILLAS

by

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B.A. May 1985, Old Dominion University

B.A. (2nd concentration) May 1985, Old Dominion University

A.A. May 1986, Tidewater Community College

A Creative Project submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of

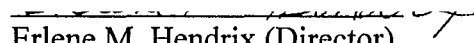
MASTER OF ARTS

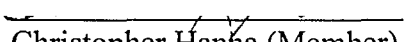
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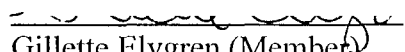
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

August 1997

Approved by:


Erlene M. Hendrix (Director)


Christopher Hanna (Member)


Gillette Elvgren (Member)

ABSTRACT

CAGED GORILLAS.

Sandra Dee Holcombe
Old Dominion University, 1997
Director: Dr. Erlene M. Hendrix

I wrote a full-length comedy/drama for the stage. My purpose in writing this play was to show how people deal with life in their quest for freedom. The play is set in the present, the morning of Christmas Eve, in Norfolk, Virginia. The characters are mildly to extremely eccentric, and the major story line deals with a woman who traps her husband in his mall candy shop. Subplots include the mother waiting for her kidnapped Baby Jesus to return, finding a dead mouse, and freeing a caged mall zoo gorilla.

This play is dedicated to my parents, Katherine and Leo, to my sisters, Dorothy and Theresa, and to my brother, Leo, Jr.--whose collective persevering spirit, love, and commitment to family inspired the play's theme. It is also dedicated to my sisters' and brother's families: Woodie, Rhonda, Dolan, Dolan, Jr., Shelia, David, Nathan, Lucas, Bill, Kimberly, Alyssa, Eileen, Michell, John Paul, Sarah, Lisa, Zachary, Jason, Marie, Michael, and Adam--whose unique and wonderful personalities contributed to the rhythm of the play.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my writing and acting instructors--in particular, Dr. Gillette Elvgren, Christopher Hanna, and Dr. Erlene M. Hendrix--for their insight and encouragement, and for their willingness to share their knowledge and love of theatre. I would also like to thank Dr. Douglas G. Greene for making the study of humanities such an interesting and time-well-spent experience, and for his contagious appreciation of history.

CREATIVE PROJECT STATEMENT

In order to fulfill the requirements for the creative project toward the Master of Arts degree in Humanities at Old Dominion University, I chose to write a full-length stage play (using the Catron style). I wanted to create a story for the stage by using carefully constructed actions and words. My play, a comedy-drama, entitled Caged Gorillas, deals with human emotions and interactions--especially within the family unit--and how people survive and persevere in spite of difficult circumstances. It also incorporates my studies in both theatre and English, and in the required humanities courses. By choosing the disciplines I wished to study, I was able to combine my interests in theatre and creative writing, with the final product being a stage play, work that I can include in a portfolio, and submit to theatres for possible production.

While studying theatre, specifically acting, I learned how to create characters--how to figure out characters' objectives; how to find the tactics those characters use in order to get their objectives; how to use actions and activities in order to reveal inner character; how to create conflict; and how to raise the stakes. Through scene work and improvisation, I gained first-hand experience of what it is like to breathe life into words on a page. Without acting training, I would not have fully understood what contributions actors make to a play.

To give an example of a character's objective, my protagonist, Miriam, wants her mother to say that she, Miriam, can move back home. Her tactic is to bribe--while her action is to houseclean. Her housecleaning shows her desperation (During the play, the mother

reveals that Miriam does not do housework.). Her activity could be the quick folding and unfolding of the dust rag she will use. (I have not specified, on purpose, the activities of these characters. As I wrote this piece, I envisioned what they were probably doing, but wanted the actors to come up with their own ideas--and, thus, have it be a collaborative effort.)

The conflict is created by putting opposites together: Miriam wants to stay; the mother wants her to leave. Raising the stakes is created by taking the situation to the most desperate, dangerous, and/or threatening place for the characters. In Caged Gorillas, Miriam needs somewhere to hide for awhile because her angry husband is looking for her. Raising the stakes creates a pressure cooker type of environment, causes tension, and captivates the audience to want to know what is going to happen next.

Taking theatre directing classes helped me in writing my script by making me aware of how directors view plays--how they break down plays into scenes--into beats--how they analyze them. Directing also reiterates the skills learned in acting, but teaches students how to use those skills in a directorial way. Emphasis is always placed on the playwright's intent--and, as a playwright, it is important to make essential information clear, such as the play's theme. In Caged Gorillas, the main theme is "freedom." (As with specifying activities, I chose only to give stage directions which I thought were necessary. Again, I wanted the director to feel free to create, too, and not to just follow the playwright's directions.)

Another theatre course, a tutorial in dramaturgy, strengthened my research skills (research was also part of the acting and directing courses), and made me pay more attention to detail and accuracy. Although a period piece--such as Gogol's Marriage, for which I was a dramaturg at the Stables Theatre--would warrant research more readily than a contemporary piece, it is always important to make sure the play's environment is not neglected. In doing

so, the play becomes more rich and interesting--another layer is added. For Caged Gorillas, I made sure the time (the present, Christmas Eve) and place (a house overlooking the Chesapeake Bay) were kept in mind.

My English classes were also extremely helpful in the writing of Caged Gorillas. Through the Virginia Tidewater Consortium, I supplemented my theatre classes at ODU with English classes at Regent University. Although ODU offered graduate-level courses in poetry and fiction, there were no script/screenwriting courses. In "Writing Drama" and "Story Structure," I learned, again, how to break down plays, but this time, not as an actor or director, but as a writer, in order to see how a writer would view a script. Important points such as the inciting incident, point of attack, climax, and denouement were all dealt with--as was rewriting.

These courses were in-depth in explaining how to gather ideas; how to use creativity and research; how to develop themes, plots, and subplots; how to create characters; how to write dialogue; and how to construct a play--how to put together all of the play's elements in a structurally-sound manner--in order to tell a story.

When gathering ideas for my play, three newspaper articles captured my attention, and I used them to help develop a story line. In one article, it was reported that a gorilla, who was taken captive as a baby, had spent 30 years in a mall zoo in Tacoma, Washington. I paralleled the gorilla's captivity with my protagonist's life. There is also a subplot in Caged Gorillas, in which the mother is waiting for something wonderful to happen. I used another article describing a woman whose nativity-scene-Jesus was stolen, taken around the world, and then returned, to help with the subplot of the mother. The third article dealt with a life-sized nativity scene, hence, the life-sized manger garden in my play.

After gathering ideas and assimilating information, I was then pushed to use my imagination--to have fun, to keep the editing, critical side of myself away for awhile--and to take risks. Trusting my insights and ideas was difficult at first, but soon, there was a great sense of freedom.

As for research, I made sure everything in my play was plausible (since I wanted to use realism). I also held a reading, where actors read my play out loud. This reading served two purposes: I was able to hear the play for the first time, in order to tell whether or not certain scenes worked, and I was able to get responses from the actors. I took two of their suggestions. One dealt with the ages of the daughters, and the other dealt with breaking up some of the dialogue in a second act scene.

The version of Caged Gorillas that I have submitted as my creative project is the second major rewrite. The initial draft was not as adventurous, few risks were taken, and, as a result, the plot line was thin. Also, I had trouble deciding whether or not I wanted this play to be purely a comedy or drama. By the first rewrite, the plot had thickened, but the second act remained skimpy, and some of the characters and situations were still under-developed. This second draft introduced a new character, Terrence, and cleared-up problems from the first rewrite.

As for my required humanities courses, they were invaluable, in that they opened my eyes to how similar we all are--and how similar we all have been--as human beings. Generations far removed from the Twentieth Century have shown the same needs and wants that present day people have. The desire for freedom, love, and identity, for example, have all been manifested throughout time.

I had hoped to create a work of art which would have universal appeal--something

that would deal with themes associated with basic human needs and wants--something that would transcend time, distance, and culture. I believe that, with the writing of Caged Gorillas, I have succeeded.

I intend to continue pursuing both acting and writing as a career, and have found my graduate studies in humanities to have been an extremely worthwhile part of my education. I now have a deeper appreciation of other times, other lands, the thoughts of other people--and I now have a better sense of hope for the future. One recurring theme I have noticed in studying humanities has been a persevering spirit--that, as a group, humanity continues, no matter what. I want this new insight in my life to permeate my work in the theatre--so that people who feel lost, hopeless, or destroyed will regain their hope, and continue in the great tradition of the people who have gone before them.

CAGED GORILLAS
by Sandra Holcombe

Characters:

Mrs. Beharren

Miriam

Fern

Glory

Denni

Donald

Terrence

voice-over of police on bullhorn

Time:

the present; around 6:30 a.m.--the morning of Christmas Eve

Place:

the Willoughby Spit section of Norfolk, Virginia; a house overlooking the Chesapeake Bay; the living room of MRS. BEHARREN's house

(Lights up on an eclectic living room, a mix of old and new styles. On the walls, around hanging pictures, are strands of silver garland; in a corner stands a small Christmas tree, partially decorated, with a few presents underneath. In another corner sits a life-sized cage with poinsettia flowers attached. There are bowls of simmering potpourri all around, and lots of balloons and banners with "Free Edgar" printed on them. The curtains are drawn back, allowing the early morning sun to paint a gold wash over the room. MRS. BEHARREN, a woman in her late fifties, who's dressed as if she's just come in from a morning sprint around the block, listens to a tape of upbeat Christmas tunes, and hums along. She rummages through an old box of Christmas ornaments and memorabilia, and soon pulls out a bottle with a ship in it. She holds it up to the light, as if offering up a sacrifice. She then takes an armchair

covering and wraps it around neck of bottle, then breaks bottle against wall-- just as her daughter MIRIAM enters, carrying shopping bags--one blue and one purple. MIRIAM is thirty years old, and her appearance suggests ruffled class.)

MIRIAM

Mother!

MRS. BEHARREN

(lets out a little scream. She and MIRIAM stare at each other for a moment.)

Miriam . . .

(turns off Christmas music.)

MIRIAM

Mother, are you--

MRS. BEHARREN

I thought I took that--

MIRIAM

You could've gotten hurt--

MRS. BEHARREN

I thought I took that key away from you--

MIRIAM

Mom--

MRS. BEHARREN

When you got married--

MIRIAM

Are you all right?

MRS. BEHARREN

Of course--

MIRIAM

Well, what are you breaking this time?

MRS. BEHARREN

Any news about my Baby Jesus?

MIRIAM

No.

MRS. BEHARREN

How about Edgar?

MIRIAM

The last I heard, the mall zoo isn't budging.

MRS. BEHARREN

Fern will be disappointed about that.

MIRIAM

She'll find a new campaign. I'm surprised she hasn't found that dead mouse, yet.

MRS. BEHARREN

She keeps looking. Can you still smell it?

MIRIAM

Just a hint.

MRS. BEHARREN

I've got some water boiling for the simmering potpourri. "Cinnamon Snowflakes," they call it.

MIRIAM

Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

I really don't think it's that detectable anymore, but I'm not the only one in this house, so . . .

MIRIAM

How long is Glory staying?

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, since she's having her apartment flea-bombed over the holidays, I'm not sure. Are you really a reporter?

MIRIAM

What?

MRS. BEHARREN

A reporter, you see, would have known about my Baby Jesus--

MIRIAM

Maybe an employed reporter would've--

MRS. BEHARREN

An employed . . . Miriam! Were you fired?

MIRIAM

I quit my job, Mother. Yesterday.

MRS. BEHARREN

Why on earth--

MIRIAM

I was tired--

MRS. BEHARREN

You were tired--

MIRIAM

Yes.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, get some sleep--

MIRIAM

It doesn't have anything to do with sleep. In fact, except for last night, I've been sleeping well and waking up right before the alarm goes off.

MRS. BEHARREN

(after a moment.)

Really?

MIRIAM

Do you believe in coincidences, Mother?

MRS. BEHARREN

Coincidences? No . . . I believe that nothing . . . just happens.

MIRIAM

Hmmm.

MRS. BEHARREN

Why?

MIRIAM

Well, this might sound strange, but a couple of weeks ago I said an off-the-cuff prayer--

MRS. BEHARREN

You said a prayer?

MIRIAM

Yes, I did. Anyway, I asked, not really expecting anything to happen, but I asked for one of His angels to wake me up--

MRS. BEHARREN

That sounds to me like something you'd pray if you were seven years old, not--

MIRIAM

O.K., O.K. Forget it--

MRS. BEHARREN

No, what were you--

MIRIAM

So when's Denni supposed to get here?

MRS. BEHARREN

Oh, Miriam.

MIRIAM

Will she get here by this evening?

MRS. BEHARREN

I believe so. You really quit your job?

MIRIAM

Yes.

MRS. BEHARREN

So, what are you--

MIRIAM

I don't know.

MRS. BEHARREN

You be careful, Miriam. You know idleness breeds crime.

MIRIAM

Crime?

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes. Especially at this time of year. I've always said--

MIRIAM

You really think I could be capable of committing a crime?

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam, anything's possible--

MIRIAM

You mean, you could compare your own daughter to . . . to . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

To Baby Jesus stealers.

MIRIAM

Baby Jesus stealers?

MRS. BEHARREN

Who would've ever thought that someone would steal a Baby Jesus? But it happened. Those kidnappers promised to return him by the next Christmas Eve--and today is the next Christmas Eve.

MIRIAM

It's only 6:30 in the morning.

MRS. BEHARREN

And most people consider this Christmas Eve.

(looks out window.)

But do I see Baby Jesus out in my little manger garden? No. All I see are Mary and Joseph and a bunch of matty-haired-looking old sheep.

(crosses to get a picture from an envelope.)

Look. This is the latest. So far he's been to Portugal, Monaco, and Belgium. Now he's in Spain. See him? There he is posed next to a statue of the Virgin Mary.

MIRIAM

(reads.)

"I've stopped off to see Mom. Will be home soon."

MRS. BEHARREN

Can you believe that?

MIRIAM

I think it would make a good human interest story.

MRS. BEHARREN

No--

MIRIAM

Sure. Maybe I could freelance and submit it to--

MRS. BEHARREN

No. I will not be party to something as sacrilegious as that.

MIRIAM

Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

What are you doing here at 6:30 in the morning?

MIRIAM

You've got glass slivers--

MRS. BEHARREN

I know, all over my surgical hose. I broke some plates before the bottle. Now what are you--

MIRIAM

(finds the ship that was in the bottle.)

You broke the bottle with the ship in it? Daddy's old ship-in-a-bottle?

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes.

MIRIAM

The one I gave him for Christmas one year?

MRS. BEHARREN

The one I bought for you to give to him at Christmas one year. You know, I always told your father it was ridiculous to have a ship stuck in a bottle, but he loved things like that. I'm going to let that little ship float out to sea as soon as the weather's nice enough. I think he would've liked that. Finally, giving it its freedom.

(crosses to box.)

I've got some other things in here that belonged to your father. Somewhere stuck in-between the Christmas ornaments. You might want to take a look before I give them away.

MIRIAM

Mother, Daddy's been dead for 15 years. Why are you doing this now?

MRS. BEHARREN

Has it been 15 years already?

MIRIAM

Almost . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

Would you believe this is the first time I've felt like letting go?

MIRIAM

Yes . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

Would you?

MIRIAM

Some things take a long time to deal with.

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes . . .

MIRIAM

(after a moment.)

Have you been outside, yet? It's unusually warm for December.

MRS. BEHARREN

Is it?

MIRIAM

Yes.

(motions for MRS. BEHARREN to look out window with her.)

I don't know if you can tell from here, but up on the bridge, there's a sea gull sitting on top of each street light. Kind of funny-looking, huh?

MRS. BEHARREN

You've never noticed them before?

MIRIAM

No.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, they do that all the time. You just don't look up enough.

MIRIAM

Oh, but I do. More than you know.

MRS. BEHARREN

What?

MIRIAM

Nothing. Mother?

MRS. BEHARREN

What is it, Miriam?

MIRIAM

(after a moment.)

I thought you'd given up breaking things?

MRS. BEHARREN

I feel better when I do something destructive once in awhile. I heard on a talk show once that it's actually healthy to let out all your frustrations. Now, what are you--

MIRIAM

And what frustrations do you have?

MRS. BEHARREN

My children, Miriam. You and the others. I was hoping by now that one of you could send me on exotic vacations.

MIRIAM

Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

But that's all right. After the new year, I'm going to have a few garage sales--and maybe even rent a table at the Church's annual bazaar and sell some of my little crocheted book markers. I'll earn my own way to the world--without my daughters' help.

MIRIAM

You know that if I could--

MRS. BEHARREN

You would. I know. But I can't hope for impossibilities, can I?

(after a moment.)

I'm sorry, Miriam. I was only half-way joking about the trip. I suppose the most frustrating thing is that I've wished for good lives for you all for so long . . . and now, well . . . it doesn't seem likely . . . Why, look at Fern. The only consuming interest she has right now is that darn gorilla. I keep hoping she'll really get serious about dancing, but I'm not sure she has an ounce of the talent you had--or Denni has. Denni changes her mind about things so much, I expect her to give up Broadway any day now. For whatever reason, once she accomplishes something, she changes her mind about it. And then there's Glory. I don't mind her dancing in that go-go bar--as long as it's temporary. She makes good money, you know. But as a career? Can you imagine her dancing at my age? What's she going to do then? Thank goodness you have a husband.

MIRIAM

Yeah . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

The worst that could happen with you is for Donald to lose his business--and then the two of you announce that you're moving back in with me.

(MIRIAM starts to exit to kitchen.)

Where are you going?

MIRIAM

To get a broom and dustpan.

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam?

(MIRIAM stops.)

Donald hasn't lost his business, has he?

MIRIAM

No, mother. Of course not.

(continues into kitchen.)

MRS. BEHARREN

Good. I wouldn't like a surprise like that. Once my children are out of the house, they're out. Visits only.

(after a moment.)

You know what, Miriam?

MIRIAM

(from kitchen.)

What?

MRS. BEHARREN

I really would like to go on a trip.

MIRIAM

(from kitchen.)

Well, then you ought to, Mother. That sounds--

MRS. BEHARREN

Impossible. It sounds impossible. Whenever one of you girls leaves home, you eventually come back for one reason or another--

MIRIAM

(from kitchen.)

For visits, Mother. Just for extended visits.

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes . . .

(looks out window.)

Just like those sky rats.

MIRIAM

(from kitchen.)

Just like what?

MRS. BEHARREN

Sky rats, as your father used to say. Sea gulls. Miriam, bring me a wet paper towel, too, would you? And make sure the water's not boiling over.

MIRIAM

(from kitchen.)

Why didn't you use a tea kettle?

MRS. BEHARREN

Glory read a consumer report that said old tea kettles are infested with micro-organisms.

MIRIAM

(from kitchen.)

So get a new one.

MRS. BEHARREN

(refills bowls with potpourri.)

Miriam?

MIRIAM

(from kitchen.)

Yes, Mother?

MRS. BEHARREN

Hurry up. I think I have glass in my shoe.

MIRIAM

I'm on my way.

(reenters with broom, dustpan, wet paper towels, and pitcher.)

I had trouble finding the dustpan.

MRS. BEHARREN

I always put it behind the diet sodas. They both start with the same letter.

(MIRIAM hands everything but pitcher to MRS. BEHARREN.)

Miriam!

MIRIAM

(pours water into potpourri bowls.)

Just a second.

MRS. BEHARREN

You know, it's too bad that mouse had to go and die before the holidays, isn't it? Would've made a good Christmas mouse. I love to hear little mouse-scrapes on the walls on Christmas Eve. So why are you here exactly?

MIRIAM

It's Christmas time!

MRS. BEHARREN

It's early. Why are you here this--

MIRIAM

No questions. Please.

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes. Questions. This is my house, and--

MIRIAM

Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

And if you--

MIRIAM

All right--

MRS. BEHARREN

And if you don't answer--

MIRIAM

I said I would--

MRS. BEHARREN

Then I'll just have to change the lock on my door.

MIRIAM

Hold still, Mother.

(MIRIAM carefully picks off the few glass slivers from MRS. BEHARREN's surgical hose.)

Been having your veins zapped again?

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes. And in spite of these dreadful-looking hose, the pain was all worth it. Wait awhile and

you will see your mother transformed into a young woman again--at least in the calves. So why this early?

MIRIAM

I've got a surprise for you.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, I should hope so, but this--

MIRIAM

Besides a Christmas present.

MRS. BEHARREN

Really? In one of those shopping bags?

MIRIAM

Hold still.

MRS. BEHARREN

So, what is it, Miriam? What's my surprise?

MIRIAM

O.K. I'm done.

MRS. BEHARREN

You missed one. I see something shiny. Left ankle.

MIRIAM

(after inspecting, picks off the last detectable glass sliver.)

Got it. The next time you decide to free something, do yourself a favor and wrap whatever it is in a blanket or a newspaper--like we used to do when we cracked open walnuts.

MRS. BEHARREN

Speaking of which, I made some walnut-cinnamon bread for breakfast. You know, I've never known you to be out and about so early.

MIRIAM

You don't give up, do you?

MRS. BEHARREN

Not easily, no.

MIRIAM

Actually, I haven't been to sleep, yet--can't you tell?

MRS. BEHARREN

Last-minute Christmas wrapping?

MIRIAM

No. I helped Donald with inventory at the shop, and--

MRS. BEHARREN

And that's what's in those bags? Chocolates?

(starts to cross to bags.)

MIRIAM

Some, yes. And some are--

MRS. BEHARREN

It's so nice to have a daughter who owns her own candy shop--

MIRIAM

Confectionery. And it's Donald's--not mine.

MRS. BEHARREN

You're his wife, so it belongs to you, too.

MIRIAM

I'm--

MRS. BEHARREN

There's an art in candy making, and maybe Donald will make his mark on that industry--

(starts to go through bags.)

MIRIAM

The purple one, Mother.

MRS. BEHARREN

What's in the blue one?

MIRIAM

The chocolates are in the purple bag.

MRS. BEHARREN

I heard you, but I--

MIRIAM

The blue bag's just personal stuff. You know, toothbrush, toothpaste, soap--

MRS. BEHARREN

(pulls out a telephone.)

And a telephone?

MIRIAM

Yes.

MRS. BEHARREN

You should've brought a cellular, at least.

MIRIAM

Mother, which shoe?

MRS. BEHARREN

Did I tell you that I bought Denni a new pair of ballet slippers for Christmas? She's in another Broadway show.

DENNI

I know. Donald saw her on his last business trip. He said she was really good.

MRS. BEHARREN

You could've been on that stage--

MIRIAM

Mother.

MRS. BEHARREN

Denni told me how much she's enjoying it. Told me on a paper towel. Wrote a little note on a Broadway bathroom paper towel. Said she was out of stationery.

MIRIAM

I thought for sure she'd be working over the holidays.

MRS. BEHARREN

You're jealous of your sister, aren't you?

MIRIAM

(as she exits to kitchen.)

No.

(in kitchen. We hear a cabinet open and close loudly, and other kitchen noises.)

I am not jealous of anyone.

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam?

(no response.)

Miriam, what else did you bring me today?

(no response.)

This chocolate is wonderful. If you're getting yourself something to drink, I'd love some hot chocolate with a half a handful of marshmallows--and stick one of Fern's candy canes in there, too.

MIRIAM

(from kitchen.)

I'm getting water. Would you like some water?

MRS. BEHARREN

Fine--that's fine. What do you . . . Is this raspberry liqueur I taste?

(MIRIAM enters with glasses of iced water.)

Is this raspberry--

MIRIAM

Yes, I think so. Which shoe?

(hands water to her mother. Resumes looking for glass slivers.)

MRS. BEHARREN

Denni is dancing in "The Cat and the Fiddle."

MIRIAM

Yes.

MRS. BEHARREN

Do you realize that she is the first person in our family to make it to the Great White Way? That is what they call it, isn't it? Of course, she's only an understudy right now, but--

MIRIAM

An understudy? Donald didn't mention that.

MRS. BEHARREN

I think they call it "swing." And from what I hear, she's had to go on quite a few times.

There is nothing wrong with being an understudy, Miriam. One day, someone's going to get hurt--nothing major--just something to keep them off their feet for awhile--and then my Denni will get discovered.

MIRIAM

Donald's cousin just got accepted--

MRS. BEHARREN

I try to have high hopes for my children--each and every one of you--

MIRIAM

Donald's cousin just accepted into medical school.

MRS. BEHARREN

What kind of cream filling is this?

MIRIAM

And his cousin's uncle is said to have a cure for cancer--

MRS. BEHARREN

A cure?

MIRIAM

Yes. He went up to D.C. to get a patent for it, but they--

MRS. BEHARREN

Do you believe everything you hear--

MIRIAM

And all you have to do is swallow the serum, hold your breath, stare at the North Star, and really believe.

MRS. BEHARREN

(after a moment.)

You shouldn't joke about things like that.

MIRIAM

(after a moment.)

Hey--did you know that Donald's father just got promoted to Chief of Police?

MRS. BEHARREN

Ask me if I believe that one.

MIRIAM

I'm not joking about that.

MRS. BEHARREN

You're one odd duck, Miriam.

MIRIAM

O.K. Fine. Which shoe has--

MRS. BEHARREN

Neither one. I don't feel it anymore. Must have imagined it.

MIRIAM

So. What do you want to do today?

MRS. BEHARREN

What do you mean?

MIRIAM

You were going to tell me what you wanted to do today.

MRS. BEHARREN

Never mind.

(after a moment.)

Donald's cousin's uncle, did you say?

MIRIAM

What?

MRS. BEHARREN

Could have cured your father?

MIRIAM

Donald thinks his cousin's uncle is God, Mother.

MRS. BEHARREN

I don't know about that husband of yours.

MIRIAM

He can only experience the pain of childbirth by way of a kidney stone, Mother.

MRS. BEHARREN

(FERN, MRS. BEHARREN's 15-year-old daughter, enters in robe and a dust mask. She's

reading a book of poetry.)

Good Morning, Fern.

FERN

(she waves as she slowly crosses toward kitchen--pressing the "play" button on tape recorder as she passes by. Once again, Christmas tunes are heard.)

"No more the rising sun shall gild the morn."

MRS. BEHARREN

That's Alexander Pope. She loves Pope's poetry.

MIRIAM

Why are you wearing a dust mask, Fern?

FERN

Because of the mouse, Miriam; why do you think?

MIRIAM

Because of the mouse?

FERN

I've sprinkled the mask with hyacinth perfume. That way, I won't--

MIRIAM

You won't smell the mouse.

FERN

Exactly.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, I don't think you'll need it down here, Fern. I've got lots of potpourri simmering.

(FERN takes off her mask.)

So, what will you close the day with?

(To MIRIAM.)

She wakes up with a poem, and closes the day with--

FERN

With music. With a piece of music. Hello, Miriam.

MRS. BEHARREN

And what will it be today? A Christmas song?

FERN

The Goldburn Variations.

MIRIAM

The what?

FERN

Bach. It's by Bach.

MRS. BEHARREN

It's quite nice, actually. I'm surprised you haven't--

MIRIAM

It's Goldberg--not Goldburn. I used to--

MRS. BEHARREN

Oh, Miriam--

MIRIAM

I used to dance to it--

MRS. BEHARREN

Do you always have to make it known that you're right?

MIRIAM

(hits "off" button on tape recorder.)

O.K. Next time I'll just let my sister go around embarrassing herself.

MRS. BEHARREN

Are you sure it's Goldberg?

FERN

It is Goldberg, Mother.

MRS. BEHARREN

Fern--

FERN

You said yesterday it was Goldburn, and I didn't want to hurt your feelings.

MRS. BEHARREN

And if I said your name was really Michelle, would you start answering to that?

FERN

Oh, Mother.

MIRIAM

(to FERN.)

So what do you fill your day with in-between the poetry and music?

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam--

MIRIAM

Do you know that when I was your age--

MRS. BEHARREN

Don't--

MIRIAM

I had to babysit practically every evening--

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam--

MIRIAM

To earn money for dance classes?

MRS. BEHARREN

It's Christmas break--

MIRIAM

Donald's taking applications--

MRS. BEHARREN

She starts back to school after the Christmas break. You were never really interested in school then anyway, remember?

FERN

Anyway, I wouldn't work for your husband if--

MRS. BEHARREN

Fern!

FERN

Besides, that mall he works in promotes cruelty to animals. Oh, by the way, I think the mouse is in the attic guest room.

MIRIAM

Denni will love that.

MRS. BEHARREN

Then we'll just have to put her in the room over the garage.

MIRIAM

In my old room?

(MRS. BEHARREN offers FERN a chocolate. FERN accepts and takes off her mask.)

FERN

(hits "play" button, then spins around room.)

I'm going to dance just like Denni one day.

(to MIRIAM.)

And just like you used to. I heard you were wonderful. But I'm going to be better than both of you!

(she laughs, spins, then eats chocolate.)

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes, of course you will--

(to MIRIAM.)

I'm sure that, somewhere in there, she's got to have some hidden talent--

(to FERN.)

One year Miriam danced as one of the Marzipan in "The Nutcracker"--

MIRIAM

(has wandered over to Glory's cage.)

And Glory?

MRS. BEHARREN

What about Glory?

MIRIAM

You really think this is connected with talent?

MRS. BEHARREN

Stop--

MIRIAM

(gets in cage.)

Is this how her Christmas dance goes?

(imitates a go-go dancer.)

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam--

FERN

That's pretty good! Show me how you--

MRS. BEHARREN

Fern! Now stop picking on Glory, Miriam.

MIRIAM

Oh, Mother--dancing in a cage with poinsettias everywhere is invigorating--

MRS. BEHARREN

Stop now, Miriam--you're too old to be making fun like that!

MIRIAM

Too old?

MRS. BEHARREN

For nonsense, yes.

MIRIAM

But if you do it for a living--

MRS. BEHARREN

Don't--

MIRIAM

I'll bet Glory reigns in her cage--

FERN

If you came over more often--

MIRIAM

Showing all the men--

FERN

If you dropped by more than--

MIRIAM

Showing--

MRS. BEHARREN

You could have been a wonderful dancer! You could've been right where Denni is now--

MIRIAM

No, I couldn't have. I had to help you raise the children, remember?

(silence.)

MRS. BEHARREN

Don't mention that ever again. Do you understand me?

(silence.)

I never forced you to stay.

MIRIAM

Well, what was I supposed to do? I was 15--

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam--

MIRIAM

And you'd just given birth to Fern--

MRS. BEHARREN

I don't want to--

MIRIAM

And Daddy had to go and die--

MRS. BEHARREN

People die--everyone dies--

MIRIAM

He had lung cancer, Mother. He died from cigarettes. Some people would call that an indirect suicide--

MRS. BEHARREN

(MRS. BEHARREN slaps MIRIAM.)

Your father was a good man.

MIRIAM

I know he was . . .

(silence.)

MRS. BEHARREN

Have some candy. Both of you. Isn't this nice, Fern? Miriam bringing me a surprise like this. Raspberry almond chocolates. And that looks like coconut . . . and caramel, maybe. It's nice of Miriam to--

FERN

(takes a piece of candy.)

When will Glory be here?

MRS. BEHARREN

Soon. She worked the early morning shift.

FERN

Is she still having her apartment flea-bombed?

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes.

FERN

I guess that's the price you pay for being kind to too many stray cats. Isn't that right, Miriam?

MIRIAM

Yeah, sure. Right about now, she's probably just getting off work, ready to greet the . . .

(to FERN.)

What did you call it?

FERN

The rising sun.

MIRIAM

No, the other.

FERN

It's, "No more the rising sun shall gild the morn"--take your pick.

MRS. BEHARREN

I think Glory's done very well for herself.

MIRIAM

She should find another job.

MRS. BEHARREN

For now, she makes good money there. You ought to try it.

MIRIAM

I can't believe you said that!

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, it's not like you'd have to take off all your clothes--

MIRIAM

Mother!

MRS. BEHARREN

Since you now don't have a job, I just thought that Glory could put in a good word for you--

MIRIAM

No--

MRS. BEHARREN

And you could at least use your dancing skills again--

MIRIAM

Not that way! Although I bet she does make good money.

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam--

MIRIAM

I bet she makes really good money. And I bet she'll be ready to greet this gilded morn in all her spandex-spangled splendor--

MRS. BEHARREN

Enough.

MIRIAM

With little elves dangling from her--

MRS. BEHARREN

Let me smell your breath.

MIRIAM

Go away, Mother.

MRS. BEHARREN

Come here--you're never usually this cantankerous--

MIRIAM

Let go of me!

MRS. BEHARREN

No, no--you haven't been drinking anything stronger than coffee.

MIRIAM

Gourmet coffee.

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes . . . your father was going to buy me a cappuccino machine.

(crosses to boxes and looks in them, pulls out a mug.)

For our 30th wedding anniversary. Would've been in a couple of months, you know. Ah, well. Such is life, yes?

FERN

A cappacino machine?

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes. To have a cup of that glorious drink before we set sail for Naples for the new year. He had it all planned.

MIRIAM

Would've been nice.

MRS. BEHARREN

We were going to go visit that place where the volcano erupted and preserved all those people.

FERN

Pompeii?

MRS. BEHARREN

That's it. Your father had thoughts of it since the day you were born, on our first

anniversary. Your father came into my hospital room carrying the world.

MIRIAM

The world?

MRS. BEHARREN

A globe. One of those spinning world globes. Does everything have to be so precise and literal with you?

MIRIAM

O.K. Just tell me about the globe, all right?

FERN

Anybody want some orange juice?

MIRIAM

No--

MRS. BEHARREN

No, thank you.

(FERN exits to kitchen.)

I'm worried about that girl. She's consumed by Edgar. I wouldn't be surprised if she somehow found a way to get that gorilla out herself, and lead him back here.

MIRIAM

I thought she had a crush on some boy at school? Terrence--Terrence Whitforth.

MRS. BEHARREN

Short-lived.

MIRIAM

But I thought he really liked her?

MRS. BEHARREN

No . . .

MIRIAM

I'm sure he wouldn't have taken her to the Holly Ball if he--

MRS. BEHARREN

He stood her up.

MIRIAM

What?

MRS. BEHARREN

You should've seen her. All dressed up in a green velvet gown. Even let Miss Owens next door do her hair, make-up, and nails. And then the night came and went. She found out later that he took someone else.

MIRIAM

That's horrible.

MRS. BEHARREN

Poor thing stayed in her room for two whole days, and threw darts at the boy's picture. And when she came out, well . . . that's when she was fixed on getting Edgar out of the mall zoo-- just determined.

MIRIAM

Hmm . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

You know, Miriam, one day I'll turn around, and it won't be you coming through the door, it'll be Fern and Edgar.

MIRIAM

O.K. So. You said Daddy came into your room with a . . . the world.

(FERN enters with a glass of orange juice.)

Fern, Mom made some walnut-cinnamon bread. Did you see it?

FERN

I didn't notice.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, go try a piece and let me know what you think. And eat it in the kitchen. So you don't get crumbs everywhere--

FERN

Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

You heard me.

(FERN exits to kitchen.)

MIRIAM

So Daddy came into your room--

MRS. BEHARREN

Do you think I should make Fern stop working on that campaign to free the gorilla?

MIRIAM

I don't know--

MRS. BEHARREN

I just think it might be unhealthy. Mentally. There are other things to be worrying about.

MIRIAM

So Daddy came into your room with--

MRS. BEHARREN

With a globe. And then he traded holding it for holding you, his firstborn. And he told me to close my eyes, give the globe a good spin, and let my finger land on any place it wanted to.

MIRIAM

And it landed on Naples.

MRS. BEHARREN

No. The middle of the Arctic Ocean. So, I spun again, and that's when I got Naples. It was just something your father did. Said his father did the same thing for his wife, so he wanted it to be a tradition. I don't know; it didn't make sense to me. But it was sweet. His parents never ended up going anywhere, either. So, why did you sneak in here this morning?

MIRIAM

I didn't sneak in; I have a key, and I--

MRS. BEHARREN

I thought I took that key away from you when--

MIRIAM

When I got married, you told me I could still come and go as I pleased.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, I certainly didn't mean at 6:30 in the morning. You would've ripped my heart if I had just bumped into you in the dark, now wouldn't you have?

MIRIAM

Mother . . . I came here this morning . . . I have a surprise for you.

MRS. BEHARREN

The chocolates--

MIRIAM

The chocolates. No.

MRS. BEHARREN

What then?

MIRIAM

It's Donald.

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam, I don't want your husband--

MIRIAM

No, Mother. It's about Donald. I think he's--

FERN

(enters.)

Mother, who ate all the gingerbread cookies I made?

MRS. BEHARREN

Oh, Fern, you're just in time. Miriam has another surprise.

FERN

But who ate the--

MRS. BEHARREN

I gave them to the next door neighbor's dogs. You left something out of the recipe, and they tasted terrible. Now be quiet.

MIRIAM

Mother, I know this isn't going to be easy for you--

FERN

(notices glass on floor.)

Mother, are you going through a new phase?

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes, Fern, I am.

FERN

(to MIRIAM.)

Mother likes to break things when she's going through a new phase.

MRS. BEHARREN

When I'm expecting something new in life, yes, I like to--

FERN

Like a christening.

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes. I christen these old walls in here with new blessings. Christmas blessings for my family. For my daughters--and for the children they will have one day.

MIRIAM

O.K.

MRS. BEHARREN

I know you don't understand--and that's perfectly fine--but Fern understands, and she thinks it's perfectly wonderful.

MIRIAM

Well, you shouldn't have used that old bottle. It's the one I gave Daddy--the one with the ship in it--

(to FERN.)

That one Christmas you ran away to hunt for reindeer tracks on people's roofs.

FERN

It was the Christmas of disillusionment. I resented finding out the truth.

MIRIAM

Funny. It was my favorite one. That's the year Daddy started driving us around to see the lights. Everything all lit up. In all the windows. And around the houses. And stuck in trees. Daddy said they reminded him of fluorescent fish. You know, you really should've asked me whether or not I wanted that bottle before you smashed it--

FERN

(FERN finds the ship and holds it up.)

Oh, look, Miriam! She freed it! How wonderful! Just like Edgar. Soon Edgar will be free, too--

MIRIAM

Fern--

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, I think if anybody can get Edgar out of that detergent-smelling zoo in that old mall your husband works in, it's Fern--

MIRIAM

Mother, just a minute ago you said--

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam, do you know that gorilla is the same one we used to take you to visit when you were a baby? The two of you practically grew up together.

MIRIAM

Mother.

MRS. BEHARREN

It's true. You two are the same age. You both got pink, welcome-to-your-world balloons at the same time.

FERN

Baby blue for Edgar.

MRS. BEHARREN

No, I remember he got pink, too. They even dressed him up in a frilly bonnet and called him Edgarina for awhile. Said more people would be drawn to a cute baby girl gorilla than to a boy--

MIRIAM

It's just a gorilla--

FERN

Poor little guy.

MIRIAM

I'm sure he didn't realize--

FERN

He has spent 30 years in that little cage in that windowless mall--smelling buttered popcorn and chili-dogs, has never played on ropes or swing tires, has never felt the sun on his body, and probably thinks his eyes have horizontal stripes across them.

MIRIAM

You mean vertical.

FERN

No, horizontal--he likes to stand sideways--like this.

(FERN imitates Edgar.)

MIRIAM

(begins sweeping.)

He's in a zoo--he's taken care of for the rest of his life--I see him practically everyday--he looks very content--

FERN

But not alive. Not really alive.

MIRIAM

I would love to be taken care of like he is.

FERN

You've got Donald--

MIRIAM

Like I said, I would love to be taken care of--

MRS. BEHARREN

If I remember correctly, there was a time when you wanted to free that gorilla--

MIRIAM

A long time ago, Mother--

FERN

You tried to free Edgar?

MIRIAM

Yes, Fern--but I grew up--and realized that it was useless.

MRS. BEHARREN

Times have changed, Miriam . . .

FERN

How old were you?

MIRIAM

Almost your age . . .

FERN

Really?

MIRIAM

Yes. Now I don't want to--

MRS. BEHARREN

Show me my surprise, Miriam--this is maddening.

MIRIAM

I've been showing you, Mother.

(MRS. BEHARREN and FERN watch MIRIAM sweep for a moment.)

Well?

(no response. She goes to chair and begins straightening it; goes to dust, etc. No response.)

No guesses?

MRS. BEHARREN

I'm afraid to.

FERN

You're going to clean house for us?

MIRIAM

And maybe even do a little cooking--I even do gardening and yard work now, too, and--

MRS. BEHARREN

My little Miriam does yard work?

MIRIAM

And gardening. Yes.

(MIRIAM shows her hands to her mother. MRS. BEHARREN holds MIRIAM's hands for a moment.)

MRS. BEHARREN

And the surprise is . . .

MIRIAM

I am the surprise, Mother. I've come back home. Just for awhile. I'm afraid that . . . well, I've come back home. Surprise!

MRS. BEHARREN

(after a moment.)

Well . . . Well . . .

MIRIAM

I can plant you a little garden near the patio--

MRS. BEHARREN

Didn't we have a little conversation earlier--

MIRIAM

And grow lavender and basil and thyme--and next to the shed--

FERN

What happened to--

MIRIAM

I can plant rows of green beans and snow peas and--

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam--

FERN

What happened to Donald?

MIRIAM

(to FERN.)

I don't know what happened to Donald.

(to MRS. BEHARREN.)

And if you want a flower garden, how about wisteria and--

FERN

But I saw the two of you last night--

MIRIAM

What?

FERN

You and Donald. I saw you last night.

MIRIAM

Did you?

FERN

Walking through the mall--

MIRIAM

We thought arguing in public would keep us civilized.

FERN

You went into the jewelry store. I was going to say "Hi," but--

MIRIAM

He was going to buy me a ring. To celebrate our fifth wedding anniversary.

MRS. BEHARREN

What were you arguing about?

FERN

You had your arms around each other--

MIRIAM

Even more civilized.

MRS. BEHARREN

Did you get the ring?

MIRIAM

I refused it.

FERN

Cheap ring, I bet.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, what happened to Donald?

FERN

Was it one of those discounted, defected rings?

MRS. BEHARREN

I want to know what happened to Donald--

MIRIAM

I don't know what happened to Donald, damn it! He started looking into the mirror more often and seeing someone much younger and much more attractive. Then he looked at me

and . . . and now he's . . . I think he's with someone else. Don't look at me like that. Life happens. Life just happens. And then you have to deal with it. I have to deal with it. I was getting bored with him anyway.

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam . . .

MIRIAM

It's for the best. I knew it was bound to happen.

MRS. BEHARREN

But on Christmas?

MIRIAM

Christmas, Easter, the Fourth of July. Does it really matter? You know, I worked hard at this marriage. I wanted it to work. He was the one who took my mind off dancing . . . off old dreams, and gave me something new to think about. But he gradually started fighting me, started turning things around to make me feel stupid or inadequate . . . I don't know . . . I almost started believing him. But then one night, right in the middle of one of our usual yelling matches, I went numb. I mean, it was really weird. I couldn't feel anything anymore. No anger, no hurt, no . . . nothing. And I found myself speaking to him. Speaking in this kind of tone. Non-threatening, not loud at all--with no motivation except to communicate . . . not to calm him down, not to do anything for him, it wasn't about him anymore. And he just continued to yell, full-throated, like one of those sky rats out there, and standing this close to me. I honestly felt separated from him; for the first time. That's how I knew it was over. I wasn't tied to him anymore. There was like this glass plate in-between us. Like an invisible shield or something. Where nothing he said or did could get to me . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

(after a moment.)

And then what happened?

MIRIAM

(takes a bite of chocolate.)

I started sleeping in the sun room. And he took our . . . the bedroom.

MRS. BEHARREN

He what?

MIRIAM

Oh, it turned out to be the best thing. Really. On clear nights I'd fall asleep looking up at the stars. I told you I've been looking up more than usual--

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes, but I didn't think--

MIRIAM

And you know what else? I've even sent up a few prayers lately.

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes, you'd mentioned something about--

MIRIAM

Him sending me an angel to wake me up when I oversleep?

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes.

MIRIAM

Yes, well now that I'm thinking a little more clearly, it was probably just a fuzz ball flying around.

FERN

What was just a fuzz ball?

MRS. BEHARREN

If this is something scary, Miriam, you'd better not say it in front of--

FERN

Oh, Mom! I can take anything. What was it, Miriam?

MIRIAM

Well, like I said, I'd been oversleeping. So I prayed one of those throw-away prayers, that God would send an angel to wake me. And everyday for the past week I've been waking up, right before the alarm, to what feels like feathers being brushed across my nose.

(MRS. BEHARREN walks away.)

And it won't stop until I sit straight up in bed rubbing my nose like this.

(rubs her nose.)

And then the alarm goes off.

(looks at mother.)

Weird, huh?

FERN

That's pretty stupid--you made that up, didn't you?

MIRIAM

No, I swear--

MRS. BEHARREN

You never finished telling us about Donald.

MIRIAM

Oh. Well . . . I can just say that last night was a night he'll never forget.

FERN

Did you make up?

MRS. BEHARREN

Fern!

MIRIAM

No, we didn't make up--

MRS. BEHARREN

Did you burn your house down, Miriam?

MIRIAM

No, of course not--

MRS. BEHARREN

Did you cause Donald any physical malice?

MIRIAM

Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

It's all because you quit your job, Miriam--

MIRIAM

Mother, don't be ridiculous.

MRS. BEHARREN

Go make me some hot chocolate, Fern--

FERN

Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

Now, please.

(FERN starts to exit.)

And add some marshmallows if you wouldn't mind. Half a handful. And add one of your candy canes--I'll buy you some more.

MIRIAM

(as she crosses to shopping bag.)

Fern, wait a minute.

(hands FERN a little brown bag.)

Here.

FERN

(opens bag.)

Thanks, Miriam!

(exits.)

MRS. BEHARREN

All right, Miriam. Go. Spill it all out.

MIRIAM

Moth--

MRS. BEHARREN

Don't mother me. You've done something to Donald, and I want to know what it is--

MIRIAM

I didn't--

MRS. BEHARREN

I won't be caught for aiding and abetting a criminal, Miriam--that's asking too much of me--

MIRIAM

Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

Tell me now--

MIRIAM

All right! You're right, Mother. Maybe idleness does breed crime. So, I'm a criminal, Mother. You've raised a pathetic criminal--and now Donald's out there somewhere hunting me down for assault and battery--

MRS. BEHARREN

You assaulted him?

MIRIAM

Yes, Mother--I assaulted my own husband.

MRS. BEHARREN

But how--

MIRIAM

With a peppermint jar.

MRS. BEHARREN

With a what?

MIRIAM

A peppermint jar. You see, when I was helping him with inventory after the mall closed, somewhere in the middle of going over the tenth or eleventh shelf of divinity and pralines, he told me he didn't love me anymore. At all. Well, naturally, at that point, I shouldn't have cared--I should've thanked him for giving me that last push to end the marriage. But then he had to say, "Not like I used to." Just like that. "I don't love you anymore--not like I used to." And for some reason, that sent me over the edge. So. In the next second, I found myself throwing the closest thing I could find at him.

MRS. BEHARREN

A jar of peppermints--

MIRIAM

Yes.

MRS. BEHARREN

And you hit him.

MIRIAM

No, I missed him.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, thank the Blessed Virgin Mary, but then how did you--

MIRIAM

When he went to pick up the broken glass, he cut his hand.

MRS. BEHARREN

Oh . . .

MIRIAM

So, when he went into the restroom to bandage it, I grabbed my bags, started for the door, then pulled the--

MRS. BEHARREN

The telephone out. That's why you have a telephone with you . . .

MIRIAM

That's right. And then I took his keys, got out of the shop, and pulled down the iron security bars, and locked him in.

MRS. BEHARREN

You locked him in there?

MIRIAM

Yes. With a cut hand. But I forgot to take his coat. He always carries his cellular phone in his coat. So I'm sure he got out of there right away. He probably got hold of the custodian, and now . . . I don't know what Donald's going to do . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

What he's going to do? He's never hurt you before, has he, Miriam?

MIRIAM

No--but he can be very spiteful.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, I would be, too, if I'd just gotten locked up.

(after a moment.)

So. He and Edgar were trapped in that mall together?

MIRIAM

Well, they weren't in the same cage . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

But they were in there together . . .

(begins to laugh.)

I'm sorry, Miriam, but I can just see Donald--

FERN

(she's snuck back in to listen.)

He probably got his perpetually-flexed biceps stuck in-between the bars!

MRS. BEHARREN

Fern!

FERN

And probably started yelling his little spineless body out--

MRS. BEHARREN

(trying not to laugh.)

That's enough, Fern.

(FERN hands hot chocolate to her now-laughing mother.)

MIRIAM

Mother!

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, now that everything's out in the open, Miriam, I can honestly say that I've never really cared for Donald all that much.

MIRIAM

Mother!

MRS. BEHARREN

I just can't understand why my girls pick men who don't have all their parts together. Why can't you find males who come already-assembled?

MIRIAM

I don't think this is funny--

MRS. BEHARREN

Neither do I. Half-assembled men are dangerous.

MIRIAM

I mean it, Mother. I could be going to jail on assault and battery charges--

MRS. BEHARREN

I don't think Donald would--

MIRIAM

Oh, yes he would! And since his father is now the chief of police--

MRS. BEHARREN

I thought you were kidding about that--

MIRIAM

I told you I wasn't.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, what's to be done now?

MIRIAM

You've got to let me stay here for awhile, Mother.

MRS. BEHARREN

(after a moment.)

No.

(crosses to box and begins hanging ornaments on tree.)

MIRIAM

What?

MRS. BEHARREN

You can't stay, Miriam.

MIRIAM

I can't?

MRS. BEHARREN

No.

MIRIAM

But why?

MRS. BEHARREN

Because--

MIRIAM

Look, I'm sorry I brought up all that about Daddy--

MRS. BEHARREN

That isn't--

MIRIAM

I know it has to be, Mother, and I'm really s--

MRS. BEHARREN

I said that wasn't--

MIRIAM

Then why did you slap me?

MRS. BEHARREN

Because no matter how angry you are with someone, you should still respect that person-- especially if he's dead.

MIRIAM

I'm sorry.

MRS. BEHARREN

I'm glad.

MIRIAM

So it's all right?

MRS. BEHARREN

What?

MIRIAM

For me to stay here.

MRS. BEHARREN

No.

MIRIAM

But--

MRS. BEHARREN

Your apologizing doesn't change my mind. I told you it has nothing to do with your father.

MIRIAM

Then why?

MRS. BEHARREN

You can't stay, Miriam.

MIRIAM

But why?

MRS. BEHARREN

Because my children don't hide from their problems. You can stay here tonight, and Christmas Day, of course, but after that, you'll have to leave--

MIRIAM

But I've just explained--

MRS. BEHARREN

Mir--

MIRIAM

You have to let me stay here, Mother! I have nowhere else to go--

(we hear a loud thud at front door. FERN starts to run to door. MIRIAM runs to stop FERN.)

No, Fern!

FERN

Miriam! It's the newspaper!

(MIRIAM steps out of FERN's way. FERN opens door and gets paper.)

Pretty nice outside.

MRS. BEHARREN

Good sailing weather.

FERN

But it's supposed to be stormy tonight.

MRS. BEHARREN

Hard to imagine that.

FERN

So we won't be able to see the comet. Did you know about the comet, Miriam?

MIRIAM

No . . .

FERN

Well, there's this huge comet that only comes around about every thousand years or so, and--

MRS. BEHARREN

And now we won't be able to see it?

FERN

If it rains we won't. Anyway, it's all just temporary. "No more the rising sun shall gild the morn." Just temporary.

(opens paper and begins reading.)

MIRIAM

What a wonderful thought.

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam, why don't you come with us to Midnight Mass tonight? Think on the eternal.

MIRIAM

No--

MRS. BEHARREN

Mrs. Beharren and her beautiful daughters.

MIRIAM

Oh, Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

You'll make me feel like part of a specialty number again.

MIRIAM

Mom--

MRS. BEHARREN

I used to feel like tap dancing down the aisle. You girls, all my girls were the talk of all the potluck and bingo parties. Still are. And heads would turn when you'd march down for Communion. Miriam, don't look at me like that--you know it's true.

FERN

Oh, Mother, we didn't march.

(begins to move elegantly and provocatively while reading newspaper.)

We sacheted.

MRS. BEHARREN

Oh, you did not--you carried yourselves with modest grace.

MIRIAM

We just walked.

FERN

(dances around them.)

We sacheted.

MRS. BEHARREN

You were in Church for heaven's sake.

FERN

You're the one who said we turned heads.

MRS. BEHARREN

But not like that--

FERN

Of course like that.

MIRIAM

(walks in a new fashion.)

And like this.

MRS. BEHARREN

Oh, stop it, you two.

FERN

(while immersed in newspaper.)

And we turned every boy's head who had good taste.

MRS. BEHARREN

(goes after FERN.)

Fern Abigail, I'm going to smack you silly--

FERN

Wait! Listen! Listen to this! Edgar may soon be free!

MRS. BEHARREN

Is that right?

FERN

It says, "the campaign to free Edgar the mall-bound gorilla may be working. City zoo officials and the owners of the mall zoo should reach a decision by late this afternoon--"

MIRIAM

But, Fern, I really don't think you should--

GLORY

(enters through open door, obviously not happy. GLORY is one of MRS. BEHARREN's middle daughters, in her mid-twenties. She's dressed comfortably in a loose-fitting dress, fishnets, and tennis shoes, and carries a big duffel bag over one shoulder. Her make-up looks left-over, and her hair is unkempt, with a barrette stuck in it.)

Merry Christmas, y'all!

FERN

Glory, guess what?

GLORY

Merry Christmas to one and all!

FERN

Edgar may be out soon, Glory!

GLORY

Really? Well, aren't you glad I signed your little petition? Those city officials probably saw my name and gave you top priority--

MRS. BEHARREN

Glory, what's wrong with you this morning?

MIRIAM

Did you get a snag in your fishnets?

GLORY

No, I did not. What is that I smell in here?

FERN

It's called "Dead Mouse Mixed with Cinnamon."

GLORY

You're sick, Fern.

(begins opening up windows.)

MIRIAM

(goes behind GLORY shutting and locking windows.)

It's December, Glory. You don't--

GLORY

Would you stop it!

MIRIAM

No, we don't need the windows open--

GLORY

It's warm outside--

MIRIAM

Mother!

MRS. BEHARREN

Stop it! Both of you! Now. This is my house, and I believe that I had the windows closed--

GLORY

But Mother!

MRS. BEHARREN

It isn't that warm outside--there's a breeze coming in from the Bay.

GLORY

Fine. Then I'll just--

MRS. BEHARREN

Did you get fired again?

GLORY

Fired? Why do you always think that? No--I didn't get fired. I'm just sick of people having no sense of smell. And no sense of personal hygiene.

FERN

Personal hygiene?

MIRIAM

Did you happen to see anyone outside when you came in?

GLORY

No--

MRS. BEHARREN

No Baby Jesus, either?

GLORY

Not yet.

MRS. BEHARREN

Go on with your story, then.

GLORY

There's not much to tell. I just couldn't take the filth anymore--just one window--how about just--

MRS. BEHARREN

Fine. Just one.

(GLORY partially opens one window; her mother adjusts it.)

MIRIAM

Lots of beer-guzzling men in business suits?

GLORY

I'm not talking about--

MIRIAM

Who reek of body odor--and white onions and cheap mustard from the half-raw hamburgers they're digesting while watching you gyrate?

GLORY

I'm not talking about the clientele. But I am pleased you know the environment. Makes me wonder--

MIRIAM

I have a good, accurate imagination. That's all.

GLORY

Well, for your information, I was talking about proper bathroom etiquette.

FERN

You mean they don't aim well?

MRS. BEHARREN

Fern! Glory, only say what would be appropriate in the presence of your younger sister.

GLORY

During a break this morning, I walked into the women's room--the private one that's supposed to be just for the dancers--and when I entered the stall--

MIRIAM

I don't want to hear anymore--

GLORY

I looked down, and found the toilet seat splattered with liquid excrement. I mean, God--

MRS. BEHARREN

Glory Alexandra--

GLORY

Don't people have any pride to clean up after themselves?

FERN

Edgar throws his little paddies everywhere--

GLORY

And then, after I quickly left the stall, and completely lost the desire to relieve myself, some woman next to me--

FERN

Edgar--

GLORY

I'm trying to talk here--

MIRIAM

Must you continue?

GLORY

This woman lets out this huge sneeze--which partially sprays me--and then she blows her nose and walks out.

FERN

And you just stood there and watched?

GLORY

She didn't even wash her hands. I had to use a paper towel to open the door. I was so sick after that. My dancing, I'm sure, suffered because of it.

MRS. BEHARREN

Did you make good money?

FERN

Edgar used to throw--

GLORY

The money was all right--

FERN

He used to throw his little poo-paddies on people--

GLORY

Why don't you just shut-up--

MRS. BEHARREN

Glory!

GLORY

I don't want to hear about that damn gorilla anymore--and certainly not about his bowel movements.

(there is silence for a moment.)

(to FERN.)

Look, kid. I'm sorry. It's been a really bad night.

FERN

Well, it's been a really bad night for me, too. I had nothing but nightmares all night long.

MRS. BEHARREN

About what?

FERN

About caged animals. Even chipmunks. Caged chipmunks. Here I am trying to do something wonderful by getting Edgar out of his miserable little caged life--and all you can do is--

GLORY

(imitating a chipmunk.)

I'm sorry, Fern. I'm really sorry.

FERN

Stop it.

MIRIAM

(joins in.)

What? You don't like Christmas chipmunks? Huh? Huh?

(while MIRIAM and GLORY continue chattering, DENNI enters, unnoticed by the others. DENNI is the second-to-the-oldest of MRS. BEHARREN's daughters, somewhere in her late twenties. She's dressed in leggings and a big shirt, and her hair is pulled back. There is a natural sadness in her relaxed face, and she watches the others as if she were the last child to get picked for a game of 4-square. She holds a burned-down, lit cigarette.)

FERN

You all are so embarrassing! Am I red, Mother? Tell me I'm red.

MRS. BEHARREN

No, Fern, you're not--

FERN

(MIRIAM and GLORY follow FERN around and then outside--while singing Christmas carols in chipmunk fashion.)

Would you just stop it!

MRS. BEHARREN

Come back in here, girls! I swear! What will the neighbors think?

DENNI

They'll just think we're a little demented.

MRS. BEHARREN

Denni!

DENNI

Merry Christmas, Ma!

MRS. BEHARREN

(crosses to DENNI.)

What are you doing here so early?

(starts to hug DENNI, but DENNI stops her.)

DENNI

Do you have an ashtray?

MRS. BEHARREN

No . . . but you can put it out in one of those potpourri dishes.

(DENNI does so.)

Look at you--you look great--

DENNI

Thanks.

MRS. BEHARREN

It's been awhile since we've all been together on Christmas Eve.

DENNI

Yeah.

MRS. BEHARREN

What made you decide to--

DENNI

I'd really love to hug you right now, but I've got this sharp pain in my side.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, appendicitis is ruled out. Do you remember when--

(DENNI winces in pain.)

Are you all right?

DENNI

Yeah. It'll go away in a second.

MRS. BEHARREN

(starts to cross to phone.)

Maybe we can find a doctor--

DENNI

I already have an appointment. Day after Christmas.

MRS. BEHARREN

But you--

DENNI

I'll be fine--

(the other SISTERS enter, still singing carols, then stop when they see DENNI.)

FERN

Denni!

(starts to run to DENNI.)

MRS. BEHARREN

(stops FERN.)

Denni's not feeling well, Fern.

DENNI

Just a cold, probably. So no hugs--I don't want you sick for New Year's.

GLORY

Catch an early flight?

DENNI

Yeah. The airports are horrible. Thought I'd get here as soon as I could.

MIRIAM

Well, Merry Christmas, Denni.

DENNI

Merry Christmas, Miriam.

GLORY

You don't sound sick.

DENNI

Well, I--

GLORY

Can you smell anything funny in here?

DENNI

Well, now that you mention it--

FERN

Isn't this wonderful? The Beharren sisters--back together again!

GLORY

So when did you--

DENNI

I got in around three this morning and didn't want to wake anybody, so--

MRS. BEHARREN

You know, I thought I heard something--

DENNI

I used my old key. Surprised you never changed the locks.

MRS. BEHARREN

Where did you--

DENNI

The room over the garage. I didn't think you'd mind.

MRS. BEHARREN

Of course not.

GLORY

I thought you'd be working over the holidays?

DENNI

Merry Christmas to you, too, Glory.

FERN

Are you still in "The Cat and the Fiddle"?

DENNI

Look, I don't mean to be rude, but I'm not awake, yet, so could we--

(telephone rings.)

GLORY

(answers phone.)

The Beharren battle zone. May I help you? Sure, just a minute. Miriam.

MIRIAM

For me?

MRS. BEHARREN

(to DENNI.)

I would've picked you up from the airport.

GLORY

(to MIRIAM.)

Yes, for you.

MIRIAM

I'm not here--

MRS. BEHARREN

Why didn't you call me?

GLORY

(to MIRIAM.)

What?

DENNI

Let me wake up first, O.K.?

MIRIAM

(starts to go toward phone. Stops.)

Take a message, would you?

GLORY

(into phone.)

I'm sorry, but she can't come to the phone right now. She's bleaching her upper lip--

MIRIAM

Glory!

GLORY

Can I take a message?

FERN

(to DENNI.)

Do you know about the comet?

GLORY

(on phone.)

Uh-huh.

DENNI

I saw it.

FERN

Really?

DENNI

Saw it when I got here. The sky was so beautiful. All the stars . . . And the comet--you could see its tail it was so bright--like there was really something wonderful about to happen. And then there was a total eclipse of the moon, and it turned into this big, reddish--

MRS. BEHARREN

I wish I had seen it--

DENNI

And the comet won't pass this way again for another thousand years.

FERN

Another thousand years or so.

GLORY

(on phone.)

I'll let her know. Goodbye.

(hangs up.)

MIRIAM

Well? What is it, Glory?

GLORY

It's your husband.

MIRIAM

That was Donald?

GLORY

No. No, it wasn't Donald. It was the custodian at the mall.

FERN

She's not married to the custodian--

GLORY

It's about her husband--

MIRIAM

Let's go outside--

GLORY

He just said--

Do you mind? MIRIAM

Yes-- GLORY

She has allergies-- FERN

This isn't allergy season. MIRIAM

GLORY
It was no big message. This guy just said that he, the custodian, had let your husband out, and wanted to warn you.

Let your husband out? DENNI

(to GLORY.) MIRIAM

That's all he said?

That's it. GLORY

Oh. MIRIAM

And that he will never forgive you. GLORY

Good. MIRIAM

Forgive you for what? DENNI

He wants out of the marriage. MIRIAM

FERN
If he wants out, why was he trying to buy you a new ring?

DENNI

He was trying to buy you a ring?

MIRIAM

Look, I--

FERN

And why did he have the custodian call?

DENNI

I thought you've been in the process of getting a divorce?

MIRIAM

No. I never said that.

GLORY

Isn't it a bit early for all of this?

MIRIAM

Why did you think that we were getting a divorce?

DENNI

(everyone looks at DENNI.)

On Donald's last visit he--

MIRIAM

Last visit?

DENNI

He said you wanted a divorce . . .

MIRIAM

Said that I wanted a divorce?

DENNI

Yes, that's what he--

MRS. BEHARREN

Maybe we should discuss this another--

MIRIAM

So, what else did Donald say?

DENNI

Miriam--

MRS. BEHARREN

Fern, leave the room.

FERN

Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

Do it now!

FERN

But--

MRS. BEHARREN

Go find that dead mouse or something--and don't let me catch you eavesdropping!

(we hear FERN stomp upstairs. GLORY crosses to polish her cage.)

MIRIAM

I'm waiting, Denni--

DENNI

I don't know what to say, Miriam . . . I . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

Wait a minute! Listen!

(they all listen.)

Do you hear that?

GLORY

No . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

Shh! There!

MIRIAM

(whispers.)

I heard something!

GLORY

It's the Baby Jesus stealer!

(starts to peer out window.)

I bet they're returning your--

(as she peers out, someone in a gorilla head peers in. They all scream. The "gorilla" waves.)

MIRIAM

It's Donald!

(the "gorilla" shakes his head in agreement.)

MRS. BEHARREN

What do you mean it's Donald?

MIRIAM

I recognize his bandaged hand.

MRS. BEHARREN

What's he doing in a gorilla head?

GLORY

(the gorilla-headed Donald disappears from view.)

He's going for the door--should I--

(there is a knock at door.)

DENNI

(crosses to door.)

I'll get it--

MIRIAM

(runs after DENNI.)

No!

DENNI

Miriam!

MIRIAM

He's after me!

DENNI

He's what?

MIRIAM

I--

(there is another knock at door. Everyone freezes for a moment.)

DENNI

Miriam, I have to talk to you about something--

MRS. BEHARREN

Just open the door--

MIRIAM

Open the door?!

(DENNI tries to open the door as MIRIAM tries to stop her.)

DENNI

You're being ridiculous--

MIRIAM

Am I?

DENNI

Stop it, Miriam!

MRS. BEHARREN

Move out of the way, Miriam!

MIRIAM

No, Mother!

MRS. BEHARREN

Your sister's not feeling well.

GLORY

(looks out window and peephole.)

It's O.K. He's gone.

(they slowly back away from door.)

MIRIAM

(to DENNI.)

Well, maybe if you're not feeling well--

DENNI

I'm pregnant, Miriam.

MIRIAM

What?

MRS. BEHARREN

Denni . . .

DENNI

It's true.

MIRIAM

Well . . .

DENNI

It just happened.

MRS. BEHARREN

I can't believe--

DENNI

I'd like to talk to you, Miriam--

MIRIAM

How about later--

DENNI

Miriam--

MIRIAM

Look, my husband is somewhere out there, and--

DONALD

(DONALD, a man in his mid-thirties, enters from kitchen. He has a heavily bandaged hand, is still wearing the gorilla head, and sports a trench coat, carrying it in such a way as to suggest his own importance--a claim made by way of being related to successful people.)

Merry Christmas, everyone!

MIRIAM

Donald!

DONALD

You really should remember to lock the kitchen door--

FERN

(FERN runs down stairs, holding a partially decomposed mouse by the tail with tissue paper.)

I found it! I found it! I don't know how I overlooked it--but when I opened the attic door, I--

(notices DONALD.)

MRS. BEHARREN

Fern, get that mouse out of--

FERN

Donald, why are you wearing that gorilla head?

DONALD

(takes off mask.)

I picked it up on the way over, Fern.

(hands it to her.)

Thought you might appreciate it.

FERN

Why?

DONALD

So you can keep it as a memento of your noble attempt to save the famous mall zoo gorilla.

FERN

Attempt?

DONALD

Haven't you heard? The latest news is that your gorilla-friend lost the battle. You lost, Fern. So sorry.

FERN

(FERN drops the mouse and the gorilla head.)

What did you do, Donald?

DONALD

Why thank you very much for your confidence in my abilities, Fern. But the sad fact is, I had nothing to do with it.

MIRIAM

Donald, how can you stand there and--

DONALD

Not now, Miriam. You see, all you Beharrens always think you can win everything you attempt to conquer. But you can't--

FERN

(starts to go after DONALD. GLORY stops her.)

You're lying, Donald! You're lying about Edgar!

(DONALD begins to laugh. GLORY goes after him--MIRIAM and DENNI stop her.)

MIRIAM

You don't want to get your hands all dirty, Glory!

DONALD

You ought to listen to your sister, Glory, and save it for your cage--

MRS. BEHARREN

(shoves DONALD.)

Get out of here.

DONALD

You shouldn't have done that.

MRS. BEHARREN

I'll do more if you don't--

DONALD

And I'll sue you for--

DENNI

You won't sue anybody--

DONALD

Oh, yes, I will!

DENNI

You do, and so help me . . .

DONALD

What? What could you possibly do? What? Do you have everyone in this house believing--

DENNI

(crosses to DONALD.)

You do anything to this family, and I'll--

DONALD

Have you told them about the baby, yet?

DENNI

You do anything--and you'll never see your child again.

(DONALD laughs.)

DENNI

He had me believing that--

DONALD

I had you believing that you were the most beautiful, special thing in the whole world. What's wrong with building someone's self-esteem?

DENNI

Miriam, if I could go back--

DONALD

If you could go back, you'd do it all over again--

MRS. BEHARREN

I told you to get out of my house!

MIRIAM

So all those candy convention meetings were . . .

DONALD

Were exactly that. Candy . . . convention meetings.

DENNI
Donald!

DONALD
As sweet as divinity, Denni.

MIRIAM
(to DENNI.)
How could you?

DONALD
Oh, leave her alone, Miriam. She was just a little diversion. Something to mask our real problem.

MIRIAM
Which is . . .

DONALD
You bore me, Miriam.

MIRIAM
I what?

DENNI
Stop it, Donald!

DONALD
(to DENNI.)
Look, hon. With all the guys you go out with in Manhattan, what makes you believe that that child is really--

(FERN lets out a yell, and lunges at him with dead mouse--and stuffs mouse down his shirt.)

Get it off of me! Get it off, you little--

(FERN steps on his foot.)

Ow! Ow!

(GLORY grabs the gorilla head and throws it to MIRIAM--who then puts it on backwards over DONALD's head.)

DONALD

Hey! You little--I'll get you for this! I'll get all of you!

MRS. BEHARREN

(opens door, ready to push DONALD out, when FERN goes running out first.)
Fern! Where are you going?

(DONALD knocks off gorilla head, while still trying to get mouse out of shirt. DENNI puts gorilla head back on him.)

FERN

(sticks her head back inside house.)

If I find that it's true, Ma, if we lost our campaign, I'm going to go free Edgar myself!

(exits.)

MRS. BEHARREN

But Fern! Come back!

(DONALD manages to untuck his shirt, and the mouse falls out.)

MIRIAM

Fern! I'll get her! I'll bring her back--don't worry! Fern, wait! Fern!

(runs after FERN.)

GLORY

(DONALD takes mask off and goes for his cellular phone. Just as he's about to dial, DENNI puts the mask back on him, and GLORY takes his phone away. MRS. BEHARREN gets mouse and takes it outside. GLORY starts to spin DONALD around.)

You want to leave now?

DONALD

What the hell do you think?!

(DENNI prevents DONALD from taking off his mask.)

GLORY

Then come on, Donald. This way.

(GLORY leads him into her cage, then locks it. He takes off his mask.)

DONALD

What are you doing?! What the hell--

MRS. BEHARREN

Donald, we don't use words like that--

GLORY

Merry Christmas, Donald!

(GLORY hits "play" button on tape recorder, and as carols play loudly, GLORY and DENNI dance around cage as DONALD yells at them. MRS. BEHARREN crosses to box, picks out something else to break, and, as lights start to fade, she smashes it against wall . . .)

end of ACT I

ACT II

(In very dim light, before ACT II really begins, the audience can see the silhouette of FERN dropping a popcorn trail--with Edgar following her--all the way up the stairs. MIRIAM follows EDGAR. Then lights go out--ready to come back up for the top of ACT II.)

(It's a few hours later. It's overcast--the sun coming through the windows isn't lighting the room as well as earlier. MIRIAM sleeps on one end of the couch, snuggled up in the Christmas tree skirt; MRS. BEHARREN, DENNI, and GLORY string popcorn and cranberries. DONALD sleeps in the cage, his gorilla head costume beside him; Christmas carols play softly.)

MRS. BEHARREN

So what do you think we should do with Donald?

GLORY

I'm not sure. Pass me a cranberry.

DENNI

You're not sure?

GLORY

No. No, I'm not. Besides, it should be up to Miriam.

MRS. BEHARREN

Poor girl's been up all night. But you're right--it should be up to her.

GLORY

Anyway, I'm the one who thought of the cage--now it's your turn.

MRS. BEHARREN

I'm too tired after setting that little ship in a bottle free.

DENNI

Did it really sail away?

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes. That's why I'm so tired. I watched it disappear. I sat on the edge of the pier until my back started hurting.

GLORY

(looks at DONALD.)

Too bad we can't make him disappear.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, we can't keep him here forever--

GLORY

Thank God.

MRS. BEHARREN

Glory, I swear--I really wish you wouldn't--

FERN

(FERN starts down stairs.)

He's asleep--

MRS. BEHARREN, GLORY, DENNI

SHHH!

(MIRIAM wakes up.)

FERN

(whispers.)

He's asleep in the guest room.

MRS. BEHARREN

You'd better not have him on Granny Beharren's afghan!

FERN

No, he's not on Granny Beharren's afghan. You all want to go up and peek in at him?

GLORY

No--

MRS. BEHARREN

(to MIRIAM.)

Do you feel better after your nap?

MIRIAM

What nap?

MRS. BEHARREN

Could you feel feathers tickling your nose again?

GLORY

What?

MIRIAM

No, that only happens when I start to oversleep.

GLORY

What are you--

FERN

You should go up and look at Edgar. He's so sweet--he's got a smile on his face--like this is the best sleep he's ever had. He looks like a big ol' baby.

MIRIAM

(looks at DONALD.)

He looks like a big ol' baby, too, when he's asleep.

MRS. BEHARREN

I can't believe you snuck some of my sleeping pills and put them in his drink. He's been out for a long time now.

GLORY

We needed time to think, Ma.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, that didn't help much, did it?

(they all think for a moment.)

O.K. Let's concentrate on Edgar first--since he'll probably wake up before this one. What are our options?

GLORY

Beats me.

FERN

I have a new plan in the works to find him a new home. Or maybe we could adopt him--

MRS. BEHARREN

Oh, no we can't!

FERN

But Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

If you don't have Edgar out of here by the time we go to Midnight Mass tonight, you're going to force me to call the S.P.C.A.

DENNI

The S.P.C.A.?

GLORY

The S.P.C.A. won't take him. He's too big.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, for one night, they'll just have to move one of those big dogs out of its big cage and let Edgar use it 'til they find another place for him.

(everyone is quiet.)

FERN

But even a big dog's cage would be too small for Edgar.

MRS. BEHARREN

(after a moment.)

Well . . . he'll just have to sit with his knees scrunched up for one night.

(no one says anything. MRS. BEHARREN hits the "stop" button on tape player.)

Now don't you all start. You're reminding me of the time we found that little injured blue bird in our yard, and after we nursed him back to health you wanted to keep him and fix him up in little Barbie dresses. You remember that? Well, I won't have it this time. I let you keep that bird for one day and you almost choked it to death trying to get Barbie's mink stole to stay around its neck. Not this time--No!

FERN

Edgar's too big for Barbie clothes, Mother.

(DONALD starts to stir.)

Oh, wonderful.

GLORY

We could give him some more sleeping pills--

MRS. BEHARREN

No! O.K., Miriam, any bright ideas?

MIRIAM

None that you'd approve of. Pass the popcorn, please.

MRS. BEHARREN

Oh, for goodness sakes! We've got a napping gorilla upstairs and a caged man down here and no one has a plan! C'mon, Fern. Let's leave these popcorn and cranberry strings for awhile, and see if we can't get some last minute things done--

FERN

Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

I'll go start fixing our Christmas Eve dinner, while you go out and polish the sheep dog statue.

FERN

I don't want to polish the sheep dog--

MRS. BEHARREN

Fern, some bird went and dropped spots on him, and now he looks like he's got white measles.

FERN

Oh, no--

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes--and we've got to clean him up before the Baby Jesus arrives.

FERN

O.K.

MRS. BEHARREN

Use the cleaner and the cloth that are in the shed.

(FERN exits.)

Now, you three can help by cleaning up this mess--

GLORY

Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

Just do it--I've got this feeling that Baby Jesus is almost here!

(exits to kitchen.)

GLORY

What if he doesn't come back--I mean, what if those kidnappers decide they want to keep him?

DENNI

Then we can just run down to Tweedles Department Store and buy another.

GLORY

This isn't any ordinary Jesus, Denni. You haven't seen it, have you?

DENNI

No, what's wrong with it?

GLORY

Nothing's wrong with it. It's just big--

MIRIAM

Life-sized--

GLORY

And dressed up in fancy clothes.

MIRIAM

It's actually an old doll. A big old china doll that Mother won at a bingo game.

GLORY

She said it went well with the life-sized statues in the manger garden.

DENNI

(DENNI looks out window.)

That's some garden.

GLORY

You should've seen the one she had for All Saints Day. Pictures of all our dead relatives posted on the trunk of that maple tree. And angel wings she'd made out of taffeta attached to every branch.

MIRIAM

(hands GLORY a string of cranberries.)

Help me put these on the tree.

GLORY

(to DENNI.)

C'mon, Denni.

DENNI

No, you go ahead. I'll finish straightening up over here.

MIRIAM

(puts a strand of cranberries on tree.)

Here, Glory. Grab this end and tie it to the popcorn strand.

GLORY

O.K.

(to MIRIAM.)

You ought to talk to her.

MIRIAM

No.

(starts to eat some of the leftover popcorn--GLORY stops her.)

GLORY

Don't!

MIRIAM

Glory, what's the matter?

GLORY

You don't want to eat that.

MIRIAM

Yes, I do.

GLORY

It's infested.

MIRIAM

(drops popcorn.)

With what?

GLORY

Micro-organisms.

DENNI

What?

MIRIAM

Oh, Glory!

GLORY

(to DENNI.)

After we popped that popcorn, we put it in a grocery bag.

DENNI

So?

GLORY

So, the inside of grocery bags are full of micro-organisms. Think about it. You bring it home from the store with your little cans of corn, and lima beans, and imported artichoke hearts, or whatever, and there, undetected by the human eye, are little bugs crawling around. And where did they come from? From the last person to pick up one of those cans. The indecisive person. Or the inventory clerk. And you don't know where their hands have been--

MIRIAM

Glory, please--

DENNI

Have you talked to anybody about this problem?

GLORY

I don't think the store manager would be very receptive--

DENNI

I didn't mean--

GLORY

So that's why everyone just needs to be aware--to look out for herself.

DENNI

And how did all of this . . . awareness get started for you?

GLORY

I started reading consumer reports.

DENNI

Oh.

(DONALD stirs again. They all look at each other.)

MIRIAM

I don't suppose anyone has a new idea, yet?

(there is silence for a moment. Then GLORY begins laughing.)

What is it, Glory?

GLORY

Oh, this crazy thought came to me.

MIRIAM

Well, what is it?

GLORY

No . . . no, not yet . . . it probably wouldn't work . . .

MIRIAM

Glory, any idea at this point is worth--

GLORY

Well, this isn't it . . . but . . . well, I could take him to work tomorrow.

DENNI

To the go-go bar?

MIRIAM

Oh, I'm sure he'd love that--

DENNI
But tomorrow's Christmas.

GLORY
Yeah, but we're only open half a day.

DENNI
Oh.

GLORY
Can't you just see it, though? He'd wake up inside the cage to bright lights, bawdy music, and beer-scented floors.

MIRIAM
But how about you, Glory?

GLORY
Me?

MIRIAM
How can you stand working there?

GLORY
Don't start--

MIRIAM
I'm not. Really. I just . . . Well, how can you work in a go-go bar and still be a germ-freak?

GLORY
I work as a dancer in a restaurant that sells alcohol.

MIRIAM
Whatever. I don't think it's the cleanest place in town.

GLORY
I'll have you know that my stage name isn't "Marlene" for nothing.

DENNI
Marlene?

GLORY
Yes.

MIRIAM
I thought it was "Buttercup"?

GLORY

I changed it last month. And this time, this is the name that's going to stick. It's after Marlene Dietrich, you know.

DENNI

How did you ever--

MRS. BEHARREN

(sticks her head out from kitchen.)

Would anyone like an appetizer? I made some snowballs.

DENNI

Some what?

MRS. BEHARREN

You know. Those sticky popcorn balls. I used some leftover popcorn.

(they all say they don't want any.)

Well, all right. Don't say I didn't offer.

(goes back in kitchen.)

GLORY

Anyway, Glen-Billy started it. Calling me Marlene.

DENNI

You're still seeing Glen-Billy?

GLORY

Oh, Yeah. He even got a job as a bouncer where I work, so he could be closer to me, he says. He considers himself to be my personal bodyguard.

MIRIAM

Really?

GLORY

Uh-huh. Even brings me flowers sometimes. And sometimes he even pays all of the bill when we go out for nachos.

MIRIAM

Guess he's finally trying to be a gentleman, huh?

GLORY

No, not really. In fact, lately, I'm getting kind of tired of the guy.

DENNI

Why?

GLORY

Because he's always around. Sticking to me. Like when you boil milk and you have that stuff on top that you have to scoop off. That's what he's become. And.

(whispers.)

All he ever wants to do now . . . is jump in the back of his pick-up truck and roll around under a moth-eaten blanket.

DENNI

Oh--

GLORY

But we never do much. I can't take all the germs. There's lots of germs in the back of an old pick-up truck. So that's why Glen-Billy's being so nice. Hoping I'll change my mind. But I won't. I've decided that I want an honorable man. Except I don't believe that there are any of those left . . . And that's why he calls me Marlene. After I told him I wanted somebody honorable, he said I was getting kind of stuck-up, like a movie star.

DENNI

And he still hangs around?

(GLORY nods.)

I think I'd change my name back to "Buttercup" if I were you. "Marlene" doesn't seem to be any term of endearment--

GLORY

Oh, oh, I forgot to tell you--the reason I like it so much is because Marlene hated germs, too.

DENNI

She did?

GLORY

Yes. One night I was watching the old movie channel with Glen-Billy, and they happened to have a special on about Marlene Dietrich. Said that she cleaned her dressing room until it was spotless--and cleaned it herself, with nobody's help, because she wanted to make sure that every square-inch was germ-free.

MIRIAM

That's something. So Glen-Billy thinks you're stuck-up now, huh?

GLORY

Yeah. You know, I think my old stray cats have more class than he does.

MIRIAM

Then why stay with him?

GLORY

I've got no one else . . .

MIRIAM

Don't you think you could?

GLORY

(after moment.)

Don't you think you could?

FERN

(FERN enters from outside, pushing a boy in with her. She has his arms pinned behind his back. The boy is TERRENCE WHITFORTH, FERN's 15-year-old friend. His appearance is one of forced class--as if whoever buys his clothes has been trying to mold him into someone else. His own style, though, comes through in spite of it all.)

I caught him, Mom! I caught him for you!

TERRENCE

You're crazy!

DENNI

What are you doing, Fern?

(MRS. BEHARREN enters.)

FERN

Here's the Baby Jesus stealer!

TERRENCE

I didn't--

MRS. BEHARREN

Good work, Fern!

DENNI

Mother!

MRS. BEHARREN

Fern caught him! She's brought back the spoils of war just like one of Glory's cats with a mouse!

TERRENCE

I didn't steal--

FERN

I was right there when he was about to pick up Joseph!

TERRENCE

I wasn't--

MRS. BEHARREN

You were going to steal Joseph, too?

TERRENCE

No!

FERN

I was right there!

TERRENCE

But I wasn't going to--

FERN

I was hiding behind the manger, after I'd cleaned the spots off the sheep dog statue, lying in wait for whoever stole Jesus, when all of a sudden I heard somebody approaching. And then I saw him, hands outstretched, ready to pick up Joseph!

TERRENCE

That's a lie! I'm no thief!

MIRIAM

But you are a stander-upper, aren't you?

TERRENCE

What?

MIRIAM

Fern, isn't he the boy who stood you up for the Holly Ball?

FERN

I don't know . . .

GLORY

Of course you know.

MRS. BEHARREN

Terrence? Terrence Whitforth?

FERN

Mother--

GLORY

Yeah, that's Terrence--that's the one whose picture's upstairs with all the darts stuck in it.

MRS. BEHARREN

I thought so--

TERRENCE

(to FERN.)

You threw darts at my picture?

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, young man, do you have anything to say for yourself?

TERRENCE

No . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, then, I'm going to go call your--

TERRENCE

Wait. Yeah. Yeah, I do have something to say. I'm Terrence--I'm Terrence Whitforth all right. And, yeah, I stood your daughter up. So what?

MRS. BEHARREN

So what?

GLORY

Terrence, you better be glad you're not old enough for me to get ahold of, 'cause I'd squeeze those little cherub cheeks of yours and throw you from here all the way to the Dismal Swamp!

DENNI

And I'd make sure you'd never get into another Holly Ball for the rest of your teen-aged

years!

MIRIAM

How dare you treat our sister like she doesn't matter! Weren't you taught any manners?

TERRENCE

(starts for door.)

You all are crazy!

MRS. BEHARREN

(MRS. BEHARREN blocks door.)

Where's Baby Jesus?

TERRENCE

You are--

MRS. BEHARREN

You tell me, and I'll let you go peacefully. Where's Jesus?

TERRENCE

(after a moment.)

Running late?

MRS. BEHARREN

Don't get smart with me--

TERRENCE

I don't know what you're--

FERN

Tell the truth, Terrence! And give him back to us!

TERRENCE

I don't--

MRS. BEHARREN

All year long, I've been waiting for Jesus to come back--and now you're going to pretend you--

MIRIAM

Mother, maybe he is telling the truth.

TERRENCE

I am!

MRS. BEHARREN

Are you really?

TERRENCE

I swear!

FERN

But I saw you going for Joseph!

TERRENCE

That doesn't mean I stole Jesus--

GLORY

So you admit you were going to steal--

TERRENCE

No! Well . . . Not all of him, anyway. Just his walking stick.

GLORY

His what?

TERRENCE

That thing he carries.

MRS. BEHARREN

You mean his staff?

TERRENCE

Yeah. Yeah, that's it. But I was going to bring it back.

DENNI

Why?

TERRENCE

Because . . . I . . . needed it . . .

GLORY

Oh . . . That makes sense. Every boy like you should carry a staff. Never know when one of those damn sheep might get loose.

MRS. BEHARREN

Do you want me to have you arrested for attempted robbery?

TERRENCE

No, ma'am!

MRS. BEHARREN

Then get off my property and never show your face here again--

FERN

Mother!

MRS. BEHARREN

My daughters are precious to me--they're all I have in this world that's good and beautiful, each one of them, and I won't have you nor anyone else trying to hurt them--do you understand?

TERRENCE

But I wasn't trying to hurt anyone!

MRS. BEHARREN

You weren't?

TERRENCE

No ma'am! Like I said, I was only going to borrow the walking stick--the staff. See, it looked like a big candy cane to me--so I got the idea of wrapping it up in red and white ribbons--

GLORY

Oh, please!

TERRENCE

It's true! Look!

(pulls out red and white ribbons from his pockets.)

FERN

Why, Terrence?

TERRENCE

To apologize to you, Fern.

FERN

To apologize?

TERRENCE

Yeah. I didn't want to stand you up that night. But my mom and dad said they'd already made arrangements for me to take someone else.

FERN

Why?

TERRENCE

(after a moment.)

‘Cause they said you didn’t come from . . . good stock . . .

FERN

What?

MRS. BEHARREN

What are you saying?

TERRENCE

Well, with one of your sisters dancing in a cage, and one up dancing like a cat in New York, and then your other sister, a used-to-be dancer, who’s married to a . . . candy man . . . well . . .

FERN

But that doesn’t have anything to do with me, Terrence--I’m my own person. I’m into . . . campaigns and stuff like that--like your dad.

TERRENCE

Yeah, but your campaign’s to free a gorilla, Fern.

FERN

Well, I know, but--

TERRENCE

Yeah, well, then there’s your father.

FERN

What about my father?

MRS. BEHARREN

You watch your tongue, Terrence Whitforth.

TERRENCE

My parents didn’t say anything really bad about him--just that he smoked a lot, and died relatively young. Said that wasn’t very responsible of him. But, Mrs. Beharren, they have the utmost respect for you--keeping together a family of this sorts--but they just . . . see me mingling . . . with kids from . . . other . . . families . . .

FERN

Oh . . .

TERRENCE

But I told them we were friends, Fern. And that we'd always be friends. And I just wanted to decorate that staff like a candy cane . . . 'cause I know how much you like candy canes.

(pulls out a card.)

I was even going to attach this card to it--so you'd know it was from me.

(hands card to FERN, then turns to leave.)

Oh--one more thing.

FERN

Yes, Terrence?

TERRENCE

I don't think that statue of Joseph is really Joseph.

FERN

What?

TERRENCE

I don't think Joseph carries a staff. I think that's only the shepherd.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, what do you know . . .

TERRENCE

Just thought I should tell you . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

Thank you, Terrence.

TERRENCE

Well, I better . . . I . . . Well . . . I better go.

(starts to leave.)

MRS. BEHARREN

Terrence?

TERRENCE

Yes, ma'am?

MRS. BEHARREN

(after a moment.)

Merry Christmas.

TERRENCE

Merry Christmas, ma'am.

(exits.)

MRS. BEHARREN

(after a moment, FERN runs upstairs. Her sisters start to go after her.)

Leave her be. She needs time. Let's finish trimming the tree.

GLORY

I don't quite feel up to it right now.

MRS. BEHARREN

Now, don't any of you listen to what that young man's parents had to say.

MIRIAM

At least he didn't put us all down . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

No, no, he didn't put us all down.

GLORY

(to mother.)

Not you at all.

DENNI

And not Fern.

MIRIAM

Just the three of us.

GLORY

Well, there's one good thing I can say about that kid's father.

MIRIAM

What's that?

GLORY

He tips well.

DENNI

Oh, that's disgusting. That kid's father . . . ?

GLORY

Comes in every Tuesday or Thursday.

MIRIAM

I wish you'd find another job, Glory--

GLORY

And I wish you'd stop saying that.

MIRIAM

I just think you could do a lot better for yourself, and--

GLORY

Stop right there. I get my rent paid. I'm not out there begging for money--and I don't come running home--except when I have my apartment flea-bombed--

MIRIAM

Glory--

GLORY

And you're one to be talking. Mother told me that you are no longer employed. Is that right?

(no response.)

MRS. BEHARREN

This is Christmas Eve . . .

GLORY

And I apologize, Mother. But some things just have to be said.

(gets duffel bag and starts to exit upstairs.)

MRS. BEHARREN

(to GLORY.)

We haven't finished decorating the tree.

GLORY

Well, save me a piece of tinsel--

MRS. BEHARREN

Where are you--

GLORY

No questions. This is Christmas-time. I'm working on a surprise.

(exits upstairs.)

MRS. BEHARREN

Oh, no. I don't think I can take any more surprises. Especially after finding out that Baby Jesus really doesn't have a daddy.

DENNI

Sure he does. That shepherd statue out there is fine. Not many people would notice he wasn't the real father.

MIRIAM

Besides, Joseph wasn't Baby Jesus' biological father.

MRS. BEHARREN

You are right . . . But still . . . Well, I'll be in the kitchen if you . . . I'll be in the kitchen.

(exits to kitchen.)

MIRIAM

(crosses to Christmas tree.)

Well.

DENNI

Well . . . This is some Christmas Eve, isn't it?

MIRIAM

One of the more . . . energetic ones that I remember.

DENNI

That's funny. I remember them all as being energetic.

MIRIAM

Yeah.

DENNI

Miriam--

MIRIAM

Would you pass me an ornament?

DENNI

(does so.)

(after a moment.)

I don't know . . . what to--

MIRIAM

Don't get me started, Denni. I've been trying to avoid you, since it's Christmas and all, so don't--

DENNI

But Glory's right. Some things just have to be said.

(MIRIAM stops and looks at her for a moment, then continues trimming tree.)

I'm not carrying his child, Miriam. I just said that so he'd leave you alone. Only it didn't quite work out that way.

MIRIAM

I believe you.

DENNI

Good. Good, because I--

MIRIAM

He had a vasectomy a couple of years ago.

DENNI

I didn't realize . . .

MIRIAM

Nor was I supposed to have.

DENNI

I don't understand . . .

MIRIAM

I had a friend who was doing temp work in a doctor's office. Said she saw him in there.

DENNI

Oh.

MIRIAM

My friend overheard the nurses wondering why on earth a handsome man like that would want to deprive the world of a little carbon copy. Said it must be because of his wife.

DENNI

What?

MIRIAM

That either she was dead-set against children for some odd reason, or that she was just too . . . plain.

DENNI

I can't--

MIRIAM

I mean, can you imagine nurses saying something like that? Not many people are really what they seem, are they?

DENNI

Well, maybe they didn't mean it. Maybe they'd had a bad day.

MIRIAM

Yeah.

DENNI

Besides, if they had seen you, they would've known they were wrong.

MIRIAM

Anyway. I tried bringing up the subject of having children--tried to get him to confess--only instead of being against it, Donald was all for it. He pretended to be all for it.

DENNI

Are you sure your friend was telling you the truth?

MIRIAM

Yes. I had it all confirmed.

DENNI

Oh.

MIRIAM

But not by him. He had enough nerve to start blaming me. Said I wasn't able to get

pregnant.

DENNI

He what?

MIRIAM

And in my confusion, or depression, or whatever the hell it was, I went to the doctor, just to ease my mind. And he confirmed that I . . . wasn't able to have children.

DENNI

What? But you just said--

MIRIAM

I know. That's the ironic part. Donald really did have a vasectomy . . . and I really was unable to have children . . .

DENNI

Oh, Miriam . . . I'm so s--

MIRIAM

So, you see? I knew all along your baby wasn't Donald's.

DENNI

I'm really s--

MIRIAM

No. No, don't say you're sorry. Not for that.

(walks away from DENNI.)

You know, it's funny. Just today, Mother told me that I was jealous of you--and I denied it. But she was right.

(after a moment, holds ornaments up to tree.)

What do you think? The purple star, or the gold harp?

DENNI

I don't know . . .

MIRIAM

I think the star looks better here.

DENNI

(after a moment.)

It only happened once, Miriam.

MIRIAM

And that's supposed to make it all right?

DENNI

I didn't say that--

MIRIAM

Then what are you--

DENNI

I want you to forgive me--

MIRIAM

No.

DENNI

Miriam, we're sisters--

MIRIAM

That's right. We're sisters. And sisters shouldn't betray each other--even if the one sister's husband is a jerk.

DENNI

I'm s--

MIRIAM

Don't.

DENNI

Listen to me--if I could go back, I'd fix things. I'd never have . . .

MIRIAM

You'd never have what? Made love to my husband?

DENNI

I wouldn't call it love.

MIRIAM

Well, I suppose that's some sort of consolation--

DENNI

Mir--

MIRIAM

You know, why don't we just leave each other alone--and stay out of each other's way while we're both here. How's that?

DENNI

I won't pretend--

MIRIAM

Neither will I.

(MIRIAM crosses away.)

DENNI

(after a moment.)

You're my sister, Miriam. You were always . . . my idol growing up. You were. Why do you think I got into dance?

MIRIAM

Because you wanted something I had?

DENNI

No! Because you made it seem like the most wonderful thing in the world--and I was so proud of you. Oh, my God, you were such a fantastic dancer. I used to take your pictures from newspaper articles in for show-and-tell, and then all week long I'd hear whispers: "Oh, look, that's Miriam Beharren's sister!" One girl even asked me to sign her program from one of your concerts: "Love from Denise--Miriam Beharren's sister"--

MIRIAM

All right, all right. Stop. That was a long time ago.

DENNI

Yeah . . .

MIRIAM

(after a moment.)

So what are you going to do now?

DENNI

I want to keep dancing. It's like breathing for me. I think I'd die if never danced again.

MIRIAM

Yeah . . .

DENNI

I don't know. I've got some really good friends up in New York. I think I'll be all right.

MIRIAM

What about the baby's father?

DENNI

He left me when he found out I was pregnant.

MIRIAM

That's awful.

DENNI

It's O.K. He was a musician.

MIRIAM

Oh.

DENNI

Said he wasn't ready to be a parent. As if I am.

MIRIAM

I'm sure--

DENNI

He had dark hair, green eyes. A wonderful laugh. I, on the other hand, wasn't as faithful as he was--although he never knew that. But people thought we were the happiest couple in the world. He said he was going to ask me to marry him . . . by Christmas . . . You never know about a person, do you? Not even yourself, sometimes . . .

MIRIAM

No . . . you don't . . .

(DENNI gasps. She is obviously in some physical pain. MIRIAM crosses to her.)

Denni, what's wrong?

(leads her to couch.)

What's wrong?

DENNI

Oh, sometimes I'll just get a sharp pain. It goes away. Pretty soon, it'll go away. There. There . . . it's easing up . . . I don't know how Mother did it--giving birth to Fern at 43.

MIRIAM

I don't think Fern was planned.

DENNI

No . . . I definitely don't think she was planned. Just happened.

MIRIAM

Have you been to the doctor--

DENNI

Not yet.

MIRIAM

You mean you haven't--

DENNI

No I haven't--

MIRIAM

Well, don't you think--

DENNI

Women have babies all the time, Miriam. It's no big deal--

(after a moment.)

You know, maybe your doctor was wrong. You should--

MIRIAM

How long have you had these pains?

DENNI

Look, it's probably nothing more than indigestion--I heard that can be a wonderful side-effect of pregnancy--

MIRIAM

You should still have it checked--

DENNI

I don't need your advice, Miriam.

(after a moment.)

I have a friend in New York who had the same kind of side pain, and it turned out to be just a cyst.

MIRIAM

Just a--

DENNI

Cysts are very common in women, Miriam--

MIRIAM

Yes, but--

DENNI

If it turns out to be a cyst, then the doctor will remove it, and that will be that.

MIRIAM

You make it all sound so . . .

DENNI

Cut and dry?

MIRIAM

Yes.

DENNI

It is.

MIRIAM

So you are going to--

DENNI

After Christmas. The day after Christmas I have an appointment.

MIRIAM

Good.

(after a moment.)

You know, Donald's cousin's uncle is really one of the best--

DENNI

I have a doctor.

MIRIAM

I know, but--

DENNI

Daddy's old doctor's son.

Pokey Webber? MIRIAM

Yes. DENNI

But he-- MIRIAM

Yes. DENNI

Why? MIRIAM

Because I want to keep dancing. DENNI

(after a moment.)

It's just a consultation . . . I haven't decided . . .

Oh. MIRIAM

Aren't you going to try to talk me out of it? DENNI

Thought you didn't want my advice? MIRIAM

What happened to you? DENNI

What do you mean? MIRIAM

What happened to the strong-willed, wiser, more-talented sister that I used to know? DENNI

It's been a long time since we've all been together, Denni. MIRIAM

Oh, so you've been this way for quite some time then, huh? DENNI

MIRIAM
Why are you--

DENNI
I slept with your husband--

MIRIAM
Denni--

DENNI
I'm as fertile as a frigging rabbit--

MIRIAM
Would you--

DENNI
And I'm the one with the successful dancing career.

MIRIAM
(starts to leave room.)

I don't have time for this--

DENNI
I took your place, Miriam. Now all the little kids say, "That's Denise Beharren"--

MIRIAM
Yeah, I heard you were a great understudy.

DENNI
Well, it's true that I'll never be as good--

MIRIAM
You are pathetic--

DENNI
So why did you stop dancing, Miriam? Why does everyone in this damn family end up going down a dead-end road?

MIRIAM
Stop it--

DENNI
And don't give me that crap about how you had to help raise your sisters--

MIRIAM

(grabs DENNI's arm.)

Don't you dare! Don't you even try to presume what it was like, you stupid little . . .

(after a moment.)

You shouldn't drink when you're--

DENNI

I haven't been--

MIRIAM

I can smell it on your breath.

(starts to exit.)

DENNI

What am I going to do, Miriam?

MIRIAM

Why don't you stop trying to destroy yourself.

(starts to exit.)

DENNI

(after a moment.)

How?

MIRIAM

I'm trying to figure that out myself, Denni.

MRS. BEHARREN

(MRS. BEHARREN enters with a tray of snowballs.)

Just in case you change your mind . . .

(after a moment.)

What's wrong with you two? It's Christmas, for goodness sakes!

DENNI

We were just--

MRS. BEHARREN

Did Donald wake up?

MIRIAM

No . . . we were just . . .

DENNI

Contemplating . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

(GLORY enters--unnoticed by the others.)

Well, then, I suppose you've come up with a new plan?

MIRIAM

No---

GLORY

(is wearing an alluring bathrobe, bright red lipstick, and a poinsettia stuck in her new hairdo.)

But I have.

MIRIAM

Glory?

GLORY

I'm not mad at you, Miriam. I was at first. But not anymore.

MIRIAM

Why--

GLORY

Because I make more money than you.

MIRIAM

Oh, Glory--

GLORY

Now, as for this egotistical little creep, I've got a plan which will--

FERN

(runs downstairs carrying a box.)

It worked! It worked!

MIRIAM

What worked?

DENNI

Are you all right now, Fern?

FERN

Oh, sure. I took all the darts out of Terrence's picture. He can't help it if he's got creeps for parents. But forget about that right now. Go look out the window!

MRS. BEHARREN

(MRS. BEHARREN and GLORY cross to window.)

Could it be--

FERN

It isn't who you think it is, Mom.

GLORY

Why, Fern's got an army camped around our house!

MRS. BEHARREN

(MIRIAM and DENNI cross to window.)

What in the world!

MIRIAM

Who are all those people?

FERN

Animal rights activists!

DENNI

I don't believe it--

GLORY

When did you--

FERN

As soon as I got Edgar up to the guest room today, I made a few phone calls and sent out messages over the computer. That's all it took!

GLORY

You're something else, Fern!

FERN

I expect the reporters to arrive any time now--and you know what else?

MRS. BEHARREN

Heaven help us--

FERN

The more I kept thinking about that Joseph statue, the more convinced I was that we were right all along--that he did carry a staff. So I crawled into the attic and found this little, old manger scene you used to use--you know, the one that Daddy willed to us kids. And look!

(pulls out Joseph statue.)

This one has a staff!

MRS. BEHARREN

Let me see that, Fern!

(FERN hands statue to mother.)

FERN

And see here:

(pulls out the shepherd's statue.)

This is the shepherd's statue--no staff--just a sheep slung around his neck.

DENNI

You mean, we were right?

GLORY

Isn't that something . . .

MIRIAM

Isn't it, though . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

Or maybe Terrence's family has a staff-less Joseph.

FERN

I'm sure that has to be it, Mother.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, what about . . .

(looks in box.)

FERN

Here he is.

(pulls out Baby Jesus statue.)

MRS. BEHARREN

(carefully holds Baby Jesus statue.)

Your father used to wait 'til after Midnight Mass--and after all you kids were asleep--to set this little guy out . . .

DENNI

I remember . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

I stopped using this old creche after . . . It's funny . . . after I start letting go of things, they come back.

MIRIAM

Good things always come back, Mother.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, just in case Baby Jesus gets stuck in Sweden or somewhere else, I suppose I could use this one . . .

FERN

The real Baby Jesus will come back home, Mom--I just know he will!

GLORY

Yeah--besides, you can't use that one.

MRS. BEHARREN

Why not?

GLORY

Because out in that garden he'll look like one of the seven dwarves.

MRS. BEHARREN

(crosses to window.)

I suppose you're right. Oh, where, oh, where can my Baby Jesus be?

MIRIAM

Have you checked the mail? Maybe--

MRS. BEHARREN

(runs to door, flings it open, gets mail, sorts through it.)

No . . . no no No. Just Christmas cards and bills. No postcards from Jesus.

MIRIAM

Oh, well . . .

FERN

In the meantime, we have some good news, at least.

MRS. BEHARREN

She's right.

FERN

Sure I'm right! Soon Edgar will never have to go back to that old mall zoo!

MRS. BEHARREN

O.K. One down--

(looks at DONALD.)

One left to go.

GLORY

(trying to imitate Marlene Dietrich.)
If you all would retire upstairs, please.

MIRIAM

What do you have in mind?

GLORY

What does it look like, darling? A surprise.

(she spins.)

MRS. BEHARREN

Glory!

GLORY

A little game of deception, Mother. Where we're all the winners. Now scoot!

MIRIAM

Glory--

GLORY

If this works out, I'll give up dancing--and take up acting.

(hands them what's left of cranberries and popcorn.)

Here--string some more cranberries and popcorn while you're up there.

(DONALD stirs. She pushes her family toward stairs.)

Go! And don't come out 'til I call for you! Quick! Quick! Go!

(DONALD stirs some more as MRS. BEHARREN, FERN, MIRIAM, and DENNI go upstairs. GLORY then gets ribbon off Christmas tree, then crosses to cage. She sits, outside of cage, next to Donald. She runs the ribbon over DONALD's forehead and neck. He begins to giggle, and slowly awaken.)

Hey, Donald! Hey, big guy! My hero, my little caged love boy! Donny! Wake up!

DONALD

What . . . Who's there?

GLORY

Open your eyes.

DONALD

I can't . . .

GLORY

Yes, you can . . .

DONALD

I'm so tired . . .

GLORY

I know . . . but you're waking up now, huh?

DONALD

No, Denni . . .

GLORY

No, Donald. This isn't Denni.

Miriam?
DONALD

Guess again . . .
GLORY

DONALD
(struggles to open eyes and to scramble to other side of cage.)
You stay away from me!

Oh, Donald . . .
GLORY

DONALD
I mean it! You're the one who put me in here!

I'm sorry.
GLORY

Yeah.
DONALD

Really, Donny--
GLORY

Don't call me that.
DONALD

O.K., sweet thing--
GLORY

DONALD
Not that, either--I don't want you calling me anything.

GLORY
Well, you're much more awake now, aren't you?

DONALD
Out of fear for my life you . . . you . . .

GLORY
Now, Donald. You're not going to make this easy for me, are you?

DONALD

What are you talking about?

GLORY

Look at me!

(he looks as best as he can.)

Do I look like someone out to do you harm? No! Just look at me! I don't put poinsettia flowers in my hair for just anyone!

DONALD

You don't?

GLORY

No, I don't!

DONALD

Well . . .

GLORY

I have to tell you something, Donald.

DONALD

What?

GLORY

Come closer . . .

DONALD

I . . . don't . . .

GLORY

You can trust me, darling--

DONALD

Glory--

GLORY

Oh! The way you say my name! It's just like poetry! Say it again!

(DONALD doesn't say anything.)

Please, Donald! Say my name again!

(after a moment.)

Glory.

Again, Donald, again!

Glory . . .

Over and over and over again--

Glory, Glory, Glory . . .

Oh, thank you, Donald! I've never heard such sweet music since I played the tone-ette in grade school!

What's happened to you, Glory?

Love has happened to me, Donald. Or should I say: unrequited love.

(he scoots closer to her.)

Really?

Yes--my, you have gorgeous eyes! It may not be right of me to speak this way, but--

No, go on--it's all right.

I see you're even more awake now, aren't you?

I guess I am . . .

GLORY

Well, what you are about to hear, my dear Donald, is one heart to another. So listen closely.

DONALD

Yes?

GLORY

I have loved you ever since I first laid eyes on you at Pokey Senior's pig roast.

DONALD

Really?

GLORY

Oh, yes. And I knew I shouldn't have feelings that way, but I couldn't help it.

DONALD

I know, I know--

GLORY

There you were with Miriam, and inside I felt like that little porker on the spit.

DONALD

Yes--

GLORY

Turning round and round and round--

DONALD

Oh, Glory!

GLORY

Yes, Donald, that's how it was!

DONALD

Glory! Glory!

GLORY

And all these years I've been longing to tell you how I really felt, but honor kept me from doing so . . .

DONALD

I never knew . . .

GLORY

My sisters are horrible women, Donald. Horrible and stupid. If I were the woman you loved

I'd . . .

DONALD

Yes?

GLORY

I'd . . .

DONALD

Tell me, Glory!

GLORY

I'd make wild, passionate love to you so that you'd never want to leave me!

DONALD

Oh, Glory!

GLORY

Is that what you'd want, too, Donald?

DONALD

Yes! That's exactly what I'd want!

GLORY

And you don't think less of me for having said it?

DONALD

Not at all, not at all . . .

GLORY

(she draws him into a kiss through the bars, then unlocks cage.)

Come on, then, Donald. Follow me upstairs before someone finds us down here.

(DONALD starts to step out of cage. GLORY bares one shoulder.)

I've been waiting for this for quite some time . . .

(she does one of her dance moves, then crosses to stairs and looks back at him. He groggily crosses toward her.)

DONALD

So have I, Glory--so have I!

GLORY

(she leads him up the stairs.)

Oh, Donald--

(noises can be heard coming from guest bedroom. DONALD stops.)

I hope you don't mind . . . I invited a friend to join us . . .

(DONALD starts up stairs again. Once they reach the door, she kisses him--in order to lead him into the room. Once he's in, she closes the door and holds it shut.)

I got him, everybody! I got him!

(her sisters and mother now crowd around the door. We can hear DONALD yelling, and things being thrown around room.)

FERN

You trapped Donald in there with Edgar?!

GLORY

Yes!

FERN

Well, that's not safe for Edgar--let him out of there!

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes, Glory, I think you should let him out, now.

(GLORY looks to MIRIAM for approval. MIRIAM looks at DENNI. They both shake their heads "no".)

Girls!

MIRIAM

Just kidding, Mother. Let him out, Glory!

GLORY

Stand back, everybody!

(everyone stands back as GLORY opens door.)

DONALD

(DONALD staggers out of guest room, looking a little beaten up.)

I'm going to get you! I'm going to get all of you!

GLORY

Just try, Donald! Just you try you stupid--

DONALD

You really think I fell for your vow of love? I am not that gullible--nor would I ever be that desperate--although I know that deep down inside you, you secretly wished I wanted you--

GLORY

You disgust me!

DONALD

Where's my coat? Where's--

FERN

I'll be glad to get it for you.

(gets coat.)

MIRIAM

No, Fern!

FERN

It's O.K., Miriam--

MIRIAM

But, Fern--

FERN

The sooner he's out, the better for all of us--

(throws coat to DONALD.)

There.

DONALD

(as he pulls out a cellular phone.)

Thank you so much.

(dials.)

Dad? Dad? Yeah. Yeah, all ready. Go!

(sirens are immediately heard, and red lights start flashing.)

MRS. BEHARREN

I guess it helps to have the chief of police for a father.

DONALD

You bet it does, my lovely, sweet, soon-to-be-ex-mother-in-law.

MRS. BEHARREN

Thank Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! Now out of my house!

(opens door.)

DONALD

Oh, I'm going all right. But you'll see me again. In the police car. As I help escort you down to the station.

GLORY

How gentlemanly of you.

DONALD

(to DENNI.)

And you--you lost out, hon. You could've had me every weekend--

DENNI

Oh, shut-up.

DONALD

Be warned--all of you--especially you, Miriam. You are all wanted for

(starts to exit.)

assault and battery, and I'm suing you for everything you have--

(as he exits, he trips over the Baby Jesus--which is sitting on the welcome mat in front of the door.)

What the--

MRS. BEHARREN

Oh!

(FERN laughs.)

MIRIAM

Look, Mother!

MRS. BEHARREN

(realizes it's Baby Jesus.)

My Baby Jesus!

(crosses to pick up Baby Jesus.)

FERN

Jesus tripped him up!

DONALD

You think you're funny--putting that doll where I could trip over him--well, just you wait!

(exits.)

MRS. BEHARREN

Baby Jesus came home! He really came home!

MIRIAM

Is there a note attached?

MRS. BEHARREN

No, I don't see one. Wait--yes--a little one--

FERN

What's it say?

MRS. BEHARREN

It says, "I'm home in time for my birthday--Merry Christmas!"

GLORY

That's all it says? No apology? No signature?

MRS. BEHARREN

Oh. Yes. It says, "Love, Jesus."

GLORY

No, I meant--

MIRIAM

It doesn't matter who took him--he's back! All of us are back--and I'm so glad!

MRS. BEHARREN

What's got into you?

MIRIAM

(yells out door.)

Turn your sirens off! Hey, you! I said, turn your sirens off--and I'll come out peacefully!
You hear me?!

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam, you can't--

(the sirens and flashing lights stop.)

You can't go out there--

MIRIAM

Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

I won't let you!

MIRIAM

Neither will I!

DENNI

Nor I!

FERN

Me, neither!

MIRIAM

No, no. I'll be all right. What can they really do to me, huh? Donald cut his own hand on the candy jar--and as for everything else--he knows I'd get him for being an unfaithful husband.

GLORY

There's got to be something else we can do--

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, if Fern hadn't of stolen that gorilla--

MIRIAM

Mother, if Fern hadn't of gotten Edgar out of that cage, I think I'd be the same person I was when I came running in here this morning. Trying to get away--trying to hide--from

everything. Now, I don't care. Throw problems my way--

MRS. BEHARREN

Miriam, don't tempt--

MIRIAM

I mean it, Mother! I feel like an Amazon queen! Give me all my problems--and let me fight them! I'm sick of being run over and slapped down. Do you understand? Each and every one of you--all of you are so wonderful. I don't care what anybody says--we are "good stock"! Do you realize . . . Do you realize that this is the first time we've all pulled together for something? Without any doubts, we all just jumped in and . . .

GLORY

Well, I'd say that Edgar's the one who jumped in.

(they all laugh.)

FERN

He got that Donald, didn't he?

MRS. BEHARREN

Now, you know I don't condone violence--

FERN

Oh, ma, Edgar would never really hurt anybody--

MIRIAM

The bruises Donald had were probably from him bumping into things trying to get out of the room.

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, just the same . . . It was kind of gratifying, wasn't it?

MIRIAM

Most definitely.

MRS. BEHARREN

Of course, now we'll have to go to confession first thing in the morning.

FERN

On Christmas Day?

VOICE FROM BULLHORN

Come out with your hands up!

MIRIAM

Oh, for goodness sakes!

VOICE FROM BULLHORN

Every person in the house!

FERN

All of us? Are we really all going to jail?

MIRIAM

No. It's me he really wants--

(starts for door; DENNI stops her.)

DENNI

I won't let you--

MIRIAM

Let go of me, Denni--

(GLORY and FERN drag cage toward front door to barricade it.)

MRS. BEHARREN

Mir--

MIRIAM

Please! All of you! This is one of his games. Trust me. Let me do this. For my family. Look, if I walk out there now, he'll let all of you go. I know him--

DENNI

But Miriam--

VOICE FROM BULLHORN

Come out, now!

MIRIAM

(opens door quickly.)

Just a minute!

(slams door and regains composure.)

As for the gorilla . . . well . . . Edgar helped me realize something today . . . he helped me see how short-sighted I am. I helped Fern coax him out of that cage. There we were giving him his freedom, but do you know it took so long for him to let go of those bars?

FERN

That's when I had the idea of the popcorn.

MIRIAM

Yes. That's when Fern dropped pieces of popcorn for Edgar to follow, and, sure enough . . . he followed us all the way to the door leading outside. He was so used to people, that he didn't mind all the shoppers--and they didn't seem to mind him.

FERN

We told anyone who was interested, that we were taking him home for the holidays.

MIRIAM

Yeah. Anyway, when we opened the door, his face took on this astonished look. And I realized he was listening to a bird for the first time. There was a bird in a tree outside the door--some beautiful, December bird. And that was the first time Edgar had ever heard him. He'd been in that cage in that mall for 30 years and had never heard that kind of music before. I know I saw tears in Edgar's eyes. And then, after a few minutes, he was ready to step out further. And pretty soon, he was in the sun. And I watched him close his eyes, lean his head back, and take a deep breath, and let the sun warm his body. And then I saw Edgar smile. And I knew then that you were right, Mother. When you said that Edgar and I practically grew up together. We really did. And now I feel as free and alive as Edgar. And I'm ready for life now, too. I'm ready. For the first time in many years. So, you see? I have to go out there.

DENNI

(after a moment.)

Would you mind if I went with you?

GLORY

Hell, I'm going whether you want me to or not!

MRS. BEHARREN

Glory--

FERN

I'm going, too--

MRS. BEHARREN

Oh, no you're--

MIRIAM

Look, everybody! This isn't necessary--

DENNI

Yes, it is.

MIRIAM

(after a moment.)

All right. All right, then. We'll all go--

MRS. BEHARREN

Wait a minute, Miriam.

MIRIAM

Mother--

MRS. BEHARREN

You're forgetting something.

MIRIAM

I am?

MRS. BEHARREN

All of you. This is Christmas Eve, and you're all forgetting.

GLORY

Oh, no . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

We haven't all been together on Christmas Eve for quite some time.

(makes them take hands and form a straight line.)

MIRIAM

If only Daddy were here with us, too.

MRS. BEHARREN

Oh, he is Miriam. I wasn't sure if I should tell you this or not, but now I'm sure. You know how you told me about your angel waking you up?

MIRIAM

Yes . . .

MRS. BEHARREN

Well, that angel was your father.

MIRIAM

What?

MRS. BEHARREN

When you were a little girl, he'd wake you up by brushing a feather across your nose.

MIRIAM

(after a moment.)

Really?

MRS. BEHARREN

Yes. God answered my prayer, too. I've been praying that my whole family would come together one day. I guess your Daddy's been praying the same thing.

FERN

You want me to find something else for you to break, Mom?

MRS. BEHARREN

No, Fern. I think enough's been broken today. I think it's time to start mending. Grab hands tightly, you all.

GLORY

Oh, Mother!

(MRS. BEHARREN starts to lead them in a dance.)

FERN

But I was too little--I don't remember!

DENNI

It's O.K., Fern--Just follow us.

MRS. BEHARREN

But get the music first!

(FERN quickly changes tape and hits the "play" button on tape player. Upbeat Christmas tunes are heard.)

You ready? Here we go!

(in sing-song fashion.)

And tap, tap, grapevine left. And tap, tap, grapevine right. And heel step, heel step, turn around and now our family won't make a sound. 'Cause Santa Clause comes our way this

night--and so does Jesus under stars so bright!

(music gets louder as lights start to fade, and the Beharrens continue to dance, laugh, and sing.)

end of play

###

VITA

Sandra Dee Holcombe, a native of Norfolk, Virginia, received a Bachelor of Arts in English, and a second concentration in Theatre Arts and Dance, from Old Dominion University in May 1985. She studied both at ODU and, through the Virginia Tidewater Consortium, at Regent University to earn a Master of Arts in Humanities (Institute of Humanities, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia 23529-0084) in August 1997. Sandra has worked professionally in the theatre as both an actress and dancer, and in radio and television as a voice-over artist.