

The House on Mulberry Lane



By Sebastian Timpe

Cast of Character

Liam Fabianski: A transgender man in his 30's, resident of apt. 303.

Dawn Fabianski: Liam's 12 year old daughter, resident of apt. 303.

Ruby Bellwether: Daughter to the town's founder and landlady to the house in her 60's, resident of apt. 307.

Blue Bellwether: Ruby's wife, resident of apt. 307.

Jade Abbots: 24 year old owner of a local store, resident of apt. 305.

Kevin Cable: Jade's biological teenage brother come to live with her for the first time.

James Peterson: High School teacher in his late 30's, resident of apt. 301.

Kate Kampskie: Jame's girlfriend in her late 30's, resident of apt. 301.

Amber Murphy: Jame's star pupil, 17, live across the street.

Meredith Fabianski: Liam's estranged mother, 60's.

Time

December 2010

Scene 1
Dec 4, Saturday 7:30PM
21 days till Christmas
New Moon

(Spotlight on RUBY.)

RUBY

It's 7 PM and a woman goes into labor. Jade, my tenant, rushes to cover her shift leaving me to retrieve her brother from the airport. They haven't seen each other since their parents died 14 years ago. He's 17 now, abandoned by his foster parents and sent to live with the sister he never knew. I understand his pain, that longing for a family you'll never have.

(RUBY exits. Lights up on the front yard of a colonial house divided up into apartments 301, 303 (leading upstairs), 305 (leading upstairs), and 307. DAWN, in PJs, scans the night sky with a telescope, there is no moon and the stars are bright. BLUE enters from apt. 307)

BLUE

Dawn, be careful with Kate's equipment.

DAWN

She said I could set it up.

BLUE

Can you see Orion yet?

DAWN

No, but the Seven Sisters are out.

BLUE

I promised your father I'd put you to bed if he had to work late.

DAWN

He'll be home soon.

(The sound of a car pulling up is heard. KATE enters from the driveway.)

KATE

(to BLUE)

Beautiful night, Ms. Bellwether.

BLUE

I hope you don't mind Dawn using your equipment.

KATE

Not at all.

(to DAWN)

How was school?

DAWN

We're studying genetics.

KATE
How about your math test?

DAWN
Oh look Orion!

KATE
Get it pointed in the right direction and I'll grab my notebook.
(KATE approaches Apt. 301, but before she can get her keys out, JAMES swings the door wide open.)

JAMES
My love!

KATE
I thought that meeting was going to go on forever.
(They exit into Apt. 301. LIAM enters from the driveway, looking disheveled in his grocery store apron.)

DAWN
Daddy!
(She runs up to him and jumps in his arms.)

LIAM
My little ray of sunshine, did you wait up for me?

DAWN
Of course!

LIAM
I told you I might have to work late.

BLUE
Don't tell me the Christmas rush has already started?

LIAM
They had us putting decorations up all day long.

BLUE
Ruby and I haven't even finished the turkey from Thanksgiving.

LIAM
That's capitalism for you.

DAWN
Come, look at Orion.

LIAM
Have you had dinner?

BLUE
I tired to get her to eat some of Ruby's stew but she wouldn't budge.

DAWN
Kate says I can stay up because it's a new moon and that's the only time you can *really* see the stars in town!
(KATE enters with a pile of notebooks. JAMES trails after her with a big picnic blanket.)

LIAM
Did she now.

KATE
Guilty as charged.

DAWN
There's no school tomorrow.

LIAM
And what happened with your math test today?

DAWN
I didn't fail.

LIAM
Okay, you can stay up on one condition. You have to eat some vegetables.

DAWN
But Ruby doesn't even salt her stew!

LIAM
Then it's straight to bed.

BLUE
Perfect. You'll have some too, Liam dear.
(BLUE exits into Apt. 307)

LIAM
I already ate!
(LIAM and JAMES execute a complex handshake and spread out the blanket. There's the sound of blaring opera music and squeaking tires as a car pulls up. RUBY enters hauling a giant suitcase. KEVIN, with backpack and duffle bag, trails in after her)

RUBY
What did you pack, bricks?

KEVIN
It's only my whole life.

RUBY
You're not one of those Buddhists are you?

KEVIN
Huh?

RUBY
Ridding yourself of material possessions.

KEVIN
No, that's just all there is.

RUBY
Oh.
(Everyone eyes KEVIN awkwardly.)
I'll get you an extra key.
(She leaves the suitcase in the middle of the yard and exits into Apt. 307.)

DAWN
(calling to KEVIN)
Want to see Orion?!

Who?
KEVIN

The stars. It's a new moon you know.
DAWN

Nah I'm good.
KEVIN

You're Ms. Kampskie's brother right?
DAWN

Yeah, I guess.
KEVIN

She's always working late.
DAWN

I've heard.
KEVIN

But I'm sure she'll be here soon, she's excited about you coming to live here.
DAWN

(BLUE enters with a tray of bowls.)

We all are.
BLUE

(She hands one to KEVIN.)

Thanks.
KEVIN

(DAWN, LIAM, JAMES, and KATE take theirs.)

Thank you.
LIAM/DAWN/KATE/JAMES

(LIAM grabs the salt and vigorously shakes it over his stew. KEVIN awkwardly puts his backpack down. RUBY enters from Apt. 307 with a tray of champagne glasses.)

It's a night for champagne.
RUBY

(RUBY passes out glasses to the other adults, and then heads over to KEVIN.)

He's underage.
BLUE

(BLUE grabs the glass meant for KEVIN from RUBY.)

It's a special occasion.
RUBY

(RUBY snatches the glass back from BLUE. KEVIN then quickly snags the glass from RUBY.)

Does that mean I can have some!
DAWN

Well-
RUBY

LIAM

You can try some of mine.

(He gives RUBY a warning look. KEVIN takes a sip of his stew and makes a face. LIAM passes him the salt.)

KEVIN

Thanks.

(JADE enters looking haggard.)

KEVIN

Hi.

JADE

You must be Kevin?

KEVIN

Yeah, suppose I've grown a little.

JADE

You probably don't remember me-

KEVIN

I remember.

(beat)

JADE

I see you've met the neighbors.

KEVIN

They're chill.

(JADE takes the champagne glass from KEVIN'S hand and shoots a look at RUBY.)

JADE

This better be sparkling apple juice.

(KEVIN grabs it back from her and downs the glass.)

KEVIN

(coughing)

Yep, just apple juice.

JADE

I'm sure you're tired from the flight.

KEVIN

Wide awake.

(KEVIN and JADE exit into Apt. 305.)

RUBY

What an exhausting day!

BLUE

Get some sleep dear, I'll join you in a moment.

(RUBY gives BLUE a quick kiss and exits into Apt. 307 and comes back out with blankets.)

RUBY

Can't have you catching a cold right before the holidays.

(She drapes it over BLUE'S shoulders and exits.)

KATE

There's a beautiful view of Uranus!

(LIAM chokes on his stew. DAWN peers through the telescope.)

Such a clear night, James would you be a dear and-

JAMES

You want Big Betsy?

(KATE nods, JAMES exits into Apt. 301. DAWN goes to sit by her dad)

DAWN

Hey Dad?

LIAM

Yeah?

DAWN

Can I ask you about homework?

LIAM

Of course, but if it's math I'm sure Kate would have a better answer.

DAWN

We're learning about genetics. Like how Ruby's red hair is a recessive trait. And because Kate and James both have blue eyes their baby will probably have blue eyes.

LIAM

You can't blame me for your nose, kid. You got that from my old man.

(beat)

DAWN

Does your mom have hair on her knuckles?

LIAM

This is for homework?

DAWN

We're supposed to make this family tree thing to trace our genetics.

LIAM

Oh.

(beat)

DAWN

You never talk about them.

LIAM

What do you want to know?

(beat)

DAWN

Do I have a grandma? Aunts? Uncles? Cousins? What are they like? where do they live?

LIAM

Well ... I've got a dad and mom, Robert and Meredith. I didn't have any siblings but I had cousins growing up that we saw every Christmas.

DAWN

No uncles or aunts for me?

LIAM

No, but plenty of great uncles and great aunts. My dad had a brother, Cole, who passed and my mom has two sister, Annabel and Abigail.

DAWN

Do you think I'll ever get to meet them?

(JAMES enters with a large telescope.)

JAMES

A little help here!

(LIAM jumps up to help him. Lights down.)

Scene 2
Dec 6, Monday 5:30PM
19 days till Christmas

(Spotlight on LIAM.)

LIAM

October 1998. I sat my parents down to tell them three things. One, I had come to terms with the fact that I was transgender and I had planned to start taking testosterone but two, I got knocked up by 'he whom we shall not name' so three, I'm dropping out of college.

(LIAM exits. Lights up on the house, BLUE sorts through a stack of mail. The sound of a car pulling up is heard and KATE enters.)

KATE

Anything yet?

BLUE

It's only been a week, I'm sure they haven't even started reviewing applications yet.

KATE

I'm overqualified.

BLUE

NASA will see that.

KATE

They should be jumping at the chance to have me.

BLUE

It'll be sad to see you leave us. Hawaii is so far away.

(beat)

And you've told James?

KATE

It won't matter if I don't get the job.

BLUE

You're overqualified.

KATE

I'm just waiting for the right moment.

BLUE

Honey, sometimes there isn't a right moment.

(KATE waves her off and exits into Apt. 301. BLUE delivers the mail to the other apartments and exits into Apt. 307. Beat, JADE enters from Apt. 305 with KEVIN in karate gear trailing after her.)

JADE

Are you sure you're going to be okay here on your own?

KEVIN

I'm an adult.

JADE

There's leftovers in the fridge if I don't make it home for dinner.

KEVIN

Okay.

(beat)

JADE

I'm sorry things have been so hectic lately but there's no one else to close up the store.

KEVIN

I get it, it's fine.

(JADE turns to leave, but then turns back.)

JADE

I'm happy to have you here, you know that right?

KEVIN

Sure.

(JADE exits. KEVIN starts half-heartedly practicing karate in the front lawn. JAMES and AMBER enter. A tennis bag is slung over AMBER's shoulder.)

AMBER

Did you see that Windsor girl? She called *all* my shots out.

(Seeing AMBER, KEVIN doubles his effort.)

KEVIN

HAI-YAAA!

JAMES

Your form was a little off but most of your shots were in.

AMBER

You going to talk to her coach or something?

JAMES

If she plays like that during regionals it will be immediate disqualification.

AMBER

They can get away with *anything* because they do it with a smile on their faces!

JAMES

Use that anger but don't let it control you.

AMBER

How come it doesn't get to you, the way the other teams treat us like crap?

JAME

I know karma will pay them back in the end.

AMBER

Whatever, thanks for the ride, Mr. Peterson.

JAMES

Don't forget your paper on the Civil War is due first thing tomorrow!

AMBER

I won't.

KEVIN

HAI-YAAA!

(AMBER stares at him and starts to walk away. KEVIN dejectedly keeps practicing. AMBER turns back. LIAM emerges from Apt. 303 and gives JAMES a pat on the back.)

AMBER

(to KEVIN)

You're that new kid.

KEVIN

And you're the most beautiful girl in algebra.

AMBER

Must be hard transferring in the middle of the school year.

KEVIN

My old school just couldn't handle all this.

(He attempts to execute a complicated karate move but it just looks he's flailing his limbs. AMBER laughs.)

AMBER

See you around I guess.

KEVIN

Yeah, see you.

(she exits)

LIAM

How'd the match go?

JAMES

Horrific.

LIAM

I've still got a few beers stowed away from thanksgiving.

JAME

You got any cigs on you?

LIAM

Thought you gave them up?

(LIAM hands him a cigarette and a lighter.)

KEVIN

Can I bum a smoke?

LIAM

You want cancer, kid?

(LIAM lights his own cigarette.)

JAMES

How are you finding life at Brook High?

KEVIN

Same shit, new place.

JAMES

Some of us are working hard to make sure you kids get an education whether you want it or not.

KEVIN

When am I ever going to use algebra?

JAMES

It's not about formula memorization, it's about developing a mathematical way of thinking and applying problem solving-

(KEVIN exits into Apt. 305.)

-fucking imbeciles every single one of them.

LIAM

Rough day, huh?

(beat)

JAMES

I heard about Dawn's family tree.

LIAM

Dawn talked to *you* about *that*?

JAMES

Ruby's worried.

LIAM

Ruby and her big mouth.

JAMES

Whatever you decide to do I'm here for you.

LIAM

Thanks.

(beat)

What if I get back in contact with my parents and they want nothing to do with me?

JAMES

I'm sure they'll want to see Dawn.

LIAM

I figured between you and Kate, Ruby and Blue she'd have enough family.

JAMES

She's just curious, anyone would be.

LIAM

If they'd changed their minds they would have said something, right?

JAMES

Liam, they're your parents, of course they should be the first ones to make amends. But that doesn't mean just because you haven't heard from them they aren't waiting to hear from you.

LIAM

Thanks.

(We hear blasting opera music and squealing tires before DAWN and RUBY enter, arms full of Christmas decorations. BLUE peeks her head out the door of Apt. 307.)

BLUE

Oh no! You didn't!

RUBY

Yes, I did.

(RUBY dumps the pile of decorations on the front lawn.)

And I see there's two strong men just waiting to help me.

(JAMES and LIAM share a look.)

JAMES

I'll grab the ladder.

(JAMES exits around back of the house.)

LIAM

I was wondering where you two had gotten off too.

DAWN

Ruby said it was a surprise and I wasn't supposed to tell you!

RUBY

I needed someone with a scientific eye, you know my color schemes can be all over the place.

(KEVIN peeks his head out the upstairs window.)

KEVIN

(enthusiastically)

Can I help?

(clearing throat, as if to save face)

I mean if you, like, want, y'know.

RUBY

Get down here young man.

(LIAM picks up three packages of house lights.)

LIAM

I thought the ones from last year still worked?

RUBY

These, my dear, sparkle!

(JAMES enters with a ladder. He begins stringing lights and LIAM holds the ladder steady. KEVIN comes bounding out.)

RUBY

Here.

(RUBY hands DAWN a large box advertising a light-up reindeer and hands KEVIN the instructions. DAWN and KEVIN begin laying out and organizing the many pieces.)

DAWN

Has Jade made her famous pot pie for you yet? It's a family recipe, she makes it for us whenever Dad's sick so we don't die from Ruby's cooking.

KEVIN

I haven't had the pleasure.

(BLUE begins sorting through the remainder of the Christmas stuff.)

BLUE

Surely we own enough ornaments.

RUBY

Don't be a Scrooge.

BLUE

Liam must be sick of hanging decorations.

LIAM

I'm happy to do it for our house.

RUBY

What's the big deal?

BLUE

Never mind.

RUBY

Blue.

BLUE

I'm sure I can find a place in the attic for all this.

RUBY

It's going to be a perfect Christmas.

BLUE

You'll have to knit everyone those hideous sweaters again.

RUBY

What's gotten into you?

BLUE

I'm just not in the Christmas spirit.

RUBY

Fine. When you feel like telling me who put coal in your stocking I'll be here.

(BLUE picks up the decorations and marches inside.)

LIAM

Go easy on Blue.

RUBY

What?

JAMES

Sometimes the holidays bring back bad memories.

RUBY

We all had messed up childhoods, you make new memories and you move on.

(LIAM looks at JAMES for help, JAMES just shrugs.)

JAMES

My family always went caroling so they wouldn't be trapped in the house together.

RUBY

That's an idea!

(RUBY's eyes light up and she rushes inside Apt. 307.)

LIAM

Now you've done it.

DAWN

(to KEVIN)

Jade has to take you to the museum, they have a dinosaur named Fred so big it could eat you all up in one big chomp!

KEVIN

Sounds frightening.

DAWN

I used to be scared of Fred but Kate took me one day, put me up on her shoulders and from there you can see that Fred has really kind eyes, he couldn't hurt a soul.

KEVIN

Is Kate like your mom or something?

DAWN

No but she's lived here as long as I can remember.

(beat)

KEVIN

I never knew my parents.

DAWN

Blue said I shouldn't ask you about that.

KEVIN

She's just trying to be polite.

DAWN

My dad says we're better off without my other father.

KEVIN

So it's just you and your dad?

(DAWN looks around to make sure no one is listening.)

DAWN

I don't think the rest of his family likes us.

KEVIN

You seem like perfectly tolerable people.

DAWN

Dad doesn't like to talk about it. Whenever I ask, he gets sad and I don't want to make him sad.

KEVIN

You've never met any of them?

DAWN

One day we're all going to get together and it will be the greatest Christmas ever!

KEVIN

Last year my parents- foster parents- got all the extended family together and we rented a house by the lake.

DAWN

Do you miss your parents?

KEVIN

I don't know what's worse, never having known them, or at least having some memory to hold onto that isn't just photographs.

(DAWN gives him a big hug. JAMES climbs down the ladder and plugs the lights in, standing back to admire his handiwork.)

JAMES

Look at that, they do sparkle.

(lights down)

Scene 3
Dec 8, Wednesday 9:30PM
17 days till Christmas

(Spotlight on JAMES.)

JAMES

I opened up the paper this morning to see some kid killed himself. Took me till 3rd period to realize he was one of my students. American history, always sat in the back, had that kind of look where if you pushed him down he just wouldn't get back up. His name was Nathan.

(JAMES exits; lights up on the house. LIAM sits on the porch, drinking.)

JADE

(off)

OUT!

KEVIN

(entering from Apt. 305)

You're not my mom!

JADE

(entering behind KEVIN)

You're lucky she isn't here to see you like this!

KEVIN

I'm sure she's rolling in her fucking grave over me smoking a little fucking pot.

JADE

Watch your language!

(LIAM enters gripping a beer.)

KEVIN

Don't act like you give a crap about me!

(He gives her the finger and exits.)

LIAM

Long day?

(JADE starts to walk away but comes back to sit down next to LIAM.)

JADE

Trade you?

(She holds out a joint. LIAM passes her a beer. Beat.)

LIAM

Good shit, where'd you get it?

JADE

I didn't.

LIAM

Kevin?

(JADE nods.)

At least it's just weed.

(beat)

So Ms. Kampskie, are you going to tell me why you're drinking my beer?

JADE

Am I required to?

LIAM

No.

JADE

Then no.

(Long pause. JAMES comes stumbling in drunk from offstage.)

JAMES

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!

LIAM

James?

JAMES

I come to bury James!

LIAM

Keep your voice down.

JAMES

...and on his grave it will read 'Here lies an unremarkable man'!

(He stumbles and LIAM rushes to catch him.)

LIAM

What happened to you?

JAMES

Can't a man drown his sorrows in peace?!

(A light in Apt. 301 turns on.)

LIAM

Kate is going to kill you.

JAMES

Let her.

(KATE opens the door to Apt. 301 and peeks her head out.)

KATE

James?

JAMES

My love, I seem to be a bit (burp) intoxicated.

KATE

Did you two go drinking?

LIAM

He just showed up like this.

(KATE takes JAMES from LIAM and starts walking him towards their apartment.)

JAMES

Wait, wait.

(trying to clear his head)

Liam?

LIAM

Yes?

JAMES

Phone your parents.

LIAM

Get some rest, James.

(KATE and JAMES exit into Apt. 301)

JADE

He hates me.

LIAM

James?

JADE

Kevin.

LIAM

I'm sure he doesn't *hate* you.

JADE

You're right, he doesn't know me enough to hate me.

LIAM

Give him time.

JADE

I can still remember when we were a family.

(long pause)

LIAM

I'm sorry.

JADE

Not your fault.

LIAM

I feel like an idiot sitting here trying to decide if I should get back in contact with my parents when you'd probably kill for that opportunity.

JADE

Wishful thinking won't bring them back.

(JADE finishes the beer.)

Thanks.

LIAM

No problem.

(JADE exits into Apt. 305. LIAM pulls out his phone and stares at it hard.)

LIAM

Hello mom and dad, remember that pregnancy thing well you have a grandkid and she has this school project and... aaaaaagh what am I doing?

(He paces, gathers himself, and types a number in. We hear a dial tone.)

LADY

(off)

We're sorry; the number you are trying to reach has been disconnected.

(LIAM deflates. We hear a car pull up. BLUE enters from offstage carrying groceries. LIAM rushes to help her.)

LIAM

Are you trying to feed an army?

BLUE

Ruby's request.

LIAM

Ruby's cooking Christmas dinner?

BLUE

I stocked up so when it turns out all wrong I can whip something up.

LIAM

Thanks for that.

BLUE

It's late, you haven't just come home have you?

LIAM

Couldn't sleep.

BLUE

Me neither, the wonders of 24-hour stores.

LIAM

I need your help.

BLUE

Anything dear.

LIAM

My parents.

BLUE

You're not thinking of-

LIAM

I just want to make sure I've given them every chance before I shut them out of Dawn's life.

(Beat; BLUE deliberates.)

I know you kept in contact with them. I think they got rid of their landline and I don't have any way to ...

I only have mailing addresses.

BLUE

Addresses. Plural?

LIAM

They never told you?

BLUE

Divorce? My parents?

LIAM

I'll dig it up.

BLUE

(LIAM picks up the groceries.)

I've kept family contacts for everyone in the house in case ... well just in case.

(BLUE exits into Apt. 307. LIAM stares at the cards. KEVIN enters, hands stuffed in his pockets.)

LIAM

Where'd you run off to?

KEVIN

Nothin' to do in this dead end, dried up, stupid town.

LIAM

You shouldn't be smoking weed at your age.

KEVIN

Tell me you weren't doing it at my age and I'll stop.

LIAM

I wasn't.

KEVIN

Liar.

LIAM

It's a bad habit. Think of your health.

KEVIN

Sometimes that shit is the only thing that keeps me from booking the next train out of here.

LIAM

Where would you go?

KEVIN

What does it matter? No one wants me here.

LIAM

Your sister cares about you.

KEVIN

She's only been my sister for 6 days and she already can't stand me.

LIAM

Things get busy around the holidays, especially for independent shop owners.

KEVIN

Stop making excuses for her!

LIAM
You're right, talk to her yourself.
(KEVIN turns around ready to walk off again.)
She's your family, that means something.

KEVIN
Not to you apparently.

LIAM
If you want to say something to me say it to my face.

KEVIN
Talk to your daughter man, she just wants to know who her family
is and she has that fucking right so suck up whatever beef you
have with them and grow a pair!
(KEVIN storms into Apt. 305, slamming the door. DAWN
peeks her head outside the door of Apt. 303.)

DAWN
Daddy?

LIAM
Why aren't you in bed?

DAWN
I heard shouting.

LIAM
Just some drunk across the street.

DAWN
It was Kevin.

LIAM
Come on, let's get you back to bed.

DAWN
Is Kevin okay?

LIAM
Kevin is going through a hard time right now, but he's going to
be okay.

DAWN
Could Mr. Fuzzy Pants help?

LIAM
I think Kevin is too old for -
(But DAWN has already run back inside. She rushes out
again with a well-loved stuffed reindeer. DAWN marches
over to Apt. 305 and knocks on the door. JADE yanks
the door open.)

JADE
Yes?

DAWN
I wana see Kevin.

JADE
It's late-

(KEVIN pushes his way past JADE. DAWN rushes him and gives him a big hug.)

DAWN

Here.

(She shoves Mr. Fuzzy Pants into KEVIN's arms.)

Whenever I'm sad he always helps.

KEVIN

Thank you.

(He hugs DAWN.)

DAWN

Now off to sleep with you.

(KEVIN laughs tearfully but exits into Apt. 305.)

JADE

(to DAWN)

Thank you.

(She shuts the door.)

LIAM

How about you run off to bed.

DAWN

Promise you'll sleep too.

LIAM

Soon, I promise.

(DAWN hugs him tightly and runs back into Apt. 303.)

LIAM paces.)

Dear Mom and Dad, I know it's been a while, I don't apologize for anything I said and I want you to know nothing has changed. I am transgender, I'm a man, I'm living with people who love and accept me for who I am. But I also have a daughter, your grandchild. I guess I just want you to know that my door is open.

(KATE pokes her head out of Apt. 301.)

KATE

He's asking for you.

LIAM

What happened?

KATE

You need to hear it from him.

(They exit into Apt. 301. Lights down.)

Scene 4
Dec 11, Saturday 7:30PM
14 days till Christmas

(Spotlight on Amber.)

AMBER

My mother always told me in matters of sex it's the man's job to push and the woman's job to resist. Friday night, Brody's parents are out of town and he throws a party. I never get invited to these things but my boyfriend convinced me to go. Between the drinking and the other couples making out it felt like all this pushing had to lead somewhere, right?

(She starts to walk away, but rushes back into the spotlight.)

I didn't say no but I sure as hell never said yes!

(AMBER exits and lights go up on the house. KEVIN, in karate gear, enters from offstage carrying DAWN on his shoulders.)

KEVIN

We'll be making our descent now. Thank for choosing to fly Air Kevin.

(He tries to get DAWN down gracefully but they tumble to the ground laughing and knock over the reindeer. JADE pokes her head out from the upstairs window.)

DAWN

You need to check your landing gear.

KEVIN

Next time you can walk home alone.

(JADE opens the door to Apt. 305.)

DAWN

You wouldn't!

KEVIN

(Noticing JADE, he dusts himself off.)

You're home early.

JADE

I made dinner if you're hungry.

DAWN

Pot pie!?

JADE

There's some for you too.

DAWN

Yes!

(She rushes into Apt. 305 exiting.)

JADE

Thanks for letting Dawn hang out at your practice.

KEVIN

No biggie.

JADE

I know things have been ... strained between us.

KEVIN

I get it, you're an adult with responsibilities and I'm just some kid that got dumped on you.

JADE

You're my brother.

KEVIN

And the minute I turn 18 you won't have to worry about me.

JADE

That's not-

(KEVIN exits into Apt. 305.)

...what I want.

(JADE exits after him. Beat. BLUE enters from Apt. 307 with a broom and starts to sweep. KATE enters from Apt. 301 in workout gear.)

KATE

Anything?

BLUE

It's too early.

KATE

Well, just keep me in the loop.

BLUE

But it's not too early to tell James.

KATE

We're adults.

BLUE

Then start acting like it.

KATE

Why are you getting on me about this?

BLUE

Communication is the key.

KATE

I'm sure there's things you've kept from Ruby.

BLUE

When it concerns your future you two should be in conversation.

(JAMES enters carrying shopping bags.)

KATE

It's not a big deal.

BLUE

You're talking about moving.

KATE

For the dream job, there's high schools all over the country, he can teach anywhere.

(JAMES hears this.)

It's not like there's any reason he needs to stay at *this* high school.

BLUE

You know James works very hard for his students.

(BLUE tries to signal to KATE that JAMES is right behind her, but KATE is oblivious.)

KATE

You can't tell me you really think any of his kids are going to look back and say he's what changed their lives.

(JAMES clears his throat. KATE turns around, surprised. JAMES exits into Apt. 301, slamming the door. LIAM enters shrugging off his work uniform.)

James!

(KATE rushes after JAMES and exits.)

LIAM

What did I miss?

BLUE

It's not my place to gossip.

LIAM

Fine, keep your secrets. Anything for me?

(BLUE pulls a letter out of the stack.)

BLUE

I'm sorry.

(She hands him the letter.)

LIAM

"Return to Sender"? He doesn't live there anymore?

BLUE

I don't think that's it, honey.

LIAM

This is his answer?

BLUE

Maybe he just needs some time. You reached out, that's the important thing.

LIAM

What do I tell Dawn?

BLUE

She's a smart kid, if you try to BS her she'll see past it.

LIAM

That's not helpful.

BLUE

Fine fine, I'm just some rambling old lady who no one need pay attention to.

LIAM

I'm sorry. It's the stress talking.

BLUE

Stop worrying about making the perfect Christmas for her and make sure she knows she's loved.

LIAM

Thanks for the advice.

BLUE

Thank me by taking it.

(She exits into Apt. 307. LIAM knocks on Apt. 305;
JADE answers.)

LIAM

Dawn and Kevin back yet?

JADE

They're eating, I pulled out an old marble set from when I was a kid and they took over my living room.

LIAM

She's not bothering Kevin is she?

JADE

I'm just happy he's making friends. Do you want to come in?

LIAM

I don't want to intrude, just send her back before bedtime.

JADE

Will do.

LIAM

And if it's ever too much for you I'd be happy to take Kevin some days.

JADE

Actually if you're home early Tuesday, June went into labor this week and things at the store-

LIAM

It's my day off, don't even worry about it. I'll pick up the kids, feed them and make sure Kevin gets his homework done.

JADE

That's ... thank you.

(JADE hugs LIAM tightly; LIAM freezes, not sure what to do, but hugs her back anyway. JADE quickly exits back into Apt. 305, and LIAM knocks on Apt. 301. KATE answers.)

LIAM

How's he doing?

KATE

About as good as can be expected.

LIAM

Mind if I take him off your hands for moment?

KATE

See if you can snap him out of it.

(KATE exits into the apartment and comes back with
JAMES, who is clutching a newspaper.)

KATE

Honey, why don't you get some air.

JAMES

Have I been getting on your nerves?

KATE

No, of course not.

(She pushes him out the door and closes it.)

LIAM

How you holding up?

JAMES

I though maybe I dreamed it all.

(He unrolls the newspaper.)

I haven't drunk like that since college.

LIAM

There's nothing you could have done.

JAMES

Bullshit. If he'd had bruises we'd have sent CPA to his house,
just cause they didn't hit him doesn't mean there was nothing we
could do.

LIAM

This kid is what, second year of college? I'm sure a lot
happened to him after he left Brook High.

JAMES

Maybe.

LIAM

You teach at least a hundred kids a year James, you can't save
them all.

JAMES

But I saw him Liam, I saw he was miserable and I did nothing.

LIAM

We were all miserable back then, it's like a teenager's natural
state of being.

JAMES

That's what Kate said.

LIAM

And you should listen to her.

JAMES

She thinks just because she's the one with the big degree,
working at the fancy college, that she can look down on me.

(LIAM's phone rings. Startled, he takes it out.)

LIAM

Telemarketers.

(LIAM starts to put the phone away.)

JAMES

What if it isn't?

(LIAM picks up the phone. MEREDITH appears in a spotlight on the other side of the stage.)

MEREDITH

Tracey?

LIAM

Mom?

(JAMES wanders offstage.)

MEREDITH

I wasn't sure you'd pick up, you know young people these days don't pick up if it's a number they don't recognize and I got rid of my landline which I suppose is why you wrote me a letter.

LIAM

I tried the home number.

MEREDITH

You've heard about me and your father?

LIAM

Divorce?

MEREDITH

How have you been? How's my granddaughter? What's she like? When can I see her?

LIAM

I haven't thought that far ahead.

MEREDITH

Of course, I'm sorry.

LIAM

Nothing to be sorry about.

MEREDITH

I thought this letter meant you want me to be a part of her life.

LIAM

That's a conversion I'd rather have in person.

MEREDITH

When? Where? I see you're in Bellwether?

LIAM

Yes.

MEREDITH

I have your address, I can be there on Monday?

LIAM

That works for me.

MEREDITH

Wonderful. I'll see you around 2 then?

LIAM

Okay.

MEREDITH

Okay.

LIAM

And um, Mom?

MEREDITH

Yes?

LIAM

I go by Liam now.

MEREDITH

Oh.

LIAM

See you Monday?

MEREDITH

Monday, 2 PM. House 36 on Mulberry lane?

LIAM

See you then.

(He hangs up, MEREDITH exits. LIAM pulls out a pack of cigarettes and lights one. DAWN comes bounding out of Apt. 305.)

DAWN

Daddy! Jade said you just got home.

(LIAM stubs out the cigarette.)

LIAM

I didn't want to interrupt, I heard there was a construction project.

DAWN

Kevin has homework to do.

LIAM

Dawn, when you asked me about Grandma and Grandpa-

DAWN

It's okay! I explained everything to the teacher and she said I could just make one up.

LIAM

Oh.

DAWN

Come on, Jade said I could borrow her marble set. We're going to build one that goes through the whole building!

(DAWN drags LIAM into Apt. 305. Lights down.)

Scene 5
Dec 13, Monday 1:55PM
12 days till Christmas

(Spotlight on MEREDITH.)

MEREDITH

Liam. We had Timothy if it was a boy and Tracy if it was a girl. Every mother has to realize one day that their child is no longer their little girl, it's a process. Hearing about her first crush, taking her to her first dance, being there for the first break-up. With my child it was a sheer cliff edge. One day she was in college with a promising career, and the next I didn't know her.

(Lights up on the house, LIAM tidies up the front porch as KEVIN enters.)

LIAM

(checking the time)

What are you doing home early? School isn't out yet.

KEVIN

None of your business!

(He marches into Apt. 305. Beat.)

JADE

(off)

Suspended!?

(We hear a car pull up before JAMES and AMBER enter.)

AMBER

You didn't have to drive me home.

JAMES

We've got to get you feeling better before regionals, besides I hardly ever get work done in my free period.

AMBER

Well thanks.

(She starts to walk away.)

JAMES

You can talk to me you know.

AMBER

Huh?

JAMES

About anything.

AMBER

It's just a stomachache.

JAMES

I know you have a lot on your plate but if there's anything I can do to help-

AMBER

There's nothing you can do.

(MEREDITH enters, looking around for the right house.)

JAMES

Don't shut me down like this, I know there's something going on.

AMBER

You don't know me!

JAMES

Talk to me.

AMBER

You only ever see one side of me. You think I'm this perfect student, that I stay home on Friday nights and pour my entire being into getting that perfect grade!

JAMES

Amber, I know you're more than a grade.

AMBER

I got drunk Mr. Peterson, I'm not sick I have a hangover.

JAMES

Amber!

AMBER

I don't need a lecture from some stuck up flop of a teacher who couldn't cut it in the real world!

(AMBER runs offstage, LIAM approaches JAMES.)

LIAM

Rough day?

(JAMES pulls him in for a tight hug, sobbing. MEREDITH clears her throat; LIAM looks up, noticing her for the first time.)

LIAM

Mom!

MEREDITH

Tracy darling, is now a bad time?

LIAM

No no, not at all, Let me just-

(He gestures towards JAMES, MEREDITH nods as LIAM escorts JAMES to Apt. 301.)

Are you going to be okay for an hour?

JAMES

Go. I know this is important to you.

LIAM

Tell me I can do this.

JAMES

You got this, bro.

(JAMES exits into Apt. 301, LIAM comes back over to MEREDITH.)

LIAM

Sorry about that.

MEREDITH

He isn't the father is he?

LIAM

James? No, he lives next door.

MEREDITH

Ah.

LIAM

So I don't know if you saw in the letter I sent you, but I go by Liam now.

MEREDITH

You're still doing that whole... transgender thing?

LIAM

There's a little cafe across the street, we could-
(Shouting comes from upstairs, KEVIN bursts out of Apt. 305.)

KEVIN

You can't ground me!

JADE

If you're going to stay in this house there will be rules!

KEVIN

You're not my mom!

JADE

I am your legal guardian-

KEVIN

If you don't want me around just fucking say it!

JADE

Watch your language.

KEVIN

May 5th, 2002. You promised me the second you turned 18 you'd come for me and we'd be a family again!

(Beat. RUBY sticks her head out the window sensing drama.)

JADE

You remember that?

(KEVIN runs offstage.)

RUBY

Keep it down! Blue's trying to get some shut-eye.

(RUBY spots MEREDITH.)

MEREDITH

Interesting neighborhood.

LIAM

It's a long story.

(JADE exits into Apt. 305.)

I think some strong coffee is in order.

(RUBY enters from Apt. 307 with BLUE trailing her.)

RUBY

Liam dear, this better not be who I think it is.

LIAM

Oh God.

BLUE

Ruby, don't do this.

RUBY

I would have words with if you are indeed Ms. Meredith Fabianski.

MEREDITH

Another neighbor?

LIAM

Ruby-

(BLUE throws her hands up and exits back inside the apartment.)

RUBY

You abandoned your child in his time of need and then you come crawling back here-

MEREDITH

Excuse me?!

RUBY

What do you think would have happened to your son if Blue and I hadn't been there for him?

(KATE enters and give LIAM a questioning look.)

MEREDITH

Who are you?

RUBY

Blue and I, the lesbian couple who took your son in, who paid his medical bills, who were there when he went into labor.

MEREDITH

I beg your pardon.

(Sensing drama, KATE slips into Apt. 301, exiting.)

RUBY

You should be begging his forgiveness!

LIAM

Ruby, enough.

RUBY

No. I want to know exactly what you were thinking then you let your pregnant child leave with no support network and didn't even bother to contact him for 13 years!

MEREDITH

I didn't come here to be judged by someone who doesn't know anything about the life I've lived.

RUBY

I won't have you anywhere near Dawn!

LIAM

Ruby that's enough!

(RUBY stares at him, stunned. MEREDITH turns to LIAM.)

MEREDITH

Does this woman speak for you?

LIAM

Look, lets just go to the cafe and-

MEREDITH

Do you have any intention of letting me see my granddaughter?

LIAM

I think we should talk first, it's been a long time and a lot of things have changed.

MEREDITH

You left us Tracy, you walked out of that door.

RUBY

His name is Liam!

MEREDITH

Why does that even matter?

RUBY

It's 2010 Meredith, get over yourself. Gender is a social construct and in this house we respect people's identities.

LIAM

Stay out of this!

RUBY

Your child is a beautiful, accomplished, and loving father I hope one day you can see that.

(She exits into Apt. 301.)

LIAM

I'm sorry. Ruby is very defensive and I know that this is all very hard to understand-

MEREDITH

Let's get one thing straight, I'm here for Dawn not you.

(LIAM is crushed. There is a long silence. Finally, bereft of words, he just points her offstage. Glaring at him, she heads for the exit. LIAM collapses with his head in his hands. DAWN enters with her school backpack humming to herself. DAWN and MEREDITH pass each other, not knowing who they are.)

DAWN

Daddy?

LIAM

(trying to compose himself)

How was school, darling?

DAWN

I passed my math test!

(She shoves the test in his face.)

LIAM

I'm so proud of you.

(His voice cracks.)

Let's go put this up on the fridge.

(They exit into Apt. 303. BLUE enters from Apt. 307 and wanders over to the mailbox. She pulls out a single large packet and scrutinizes the label. Excitedly she rushes over to Apt. 301.)

BLUE

Oh Kate dear!

(KATE pokes her head out of her apartment.)

KATE

Yes?

BLUE

(handing her the envelope)

Open it!

(KATE tears open the envelope and scans through the material.)

Well?

KATE

They want me to fly out for an interview.

BLUE

I knew you'd get it!

(JAMES appears behind KATE.)

KATE

God I haven't done a job interview since-

JAMES

Job? What job?

(Seeing JAMES, BLUE slinks back into her apartment.)

KATE

It's wonderful! I applied to a position at NASA and can you believe it they want me-

JAMES

I thought you liked your teaching job.

KATE

It was always temporary.

JAMES

And this job is in-?

KATE

The Keck Observatory, Hawaii, it's the dream!

JAMES

I can't do this right now.

(He walks over to Apt. 303 and knocks on the door. LIAM answers and seeing the look on JAMES' face, he lets him inside, closing the door. Lights down.)

Scene 6
Dec 15, Wednesday 9:00PM
10 days till Christmas
The Geminids Meteor shower

(Spotlight on KEVIN.)

KEVIN

At 4 years old my parents died. I can remember small things. I'm almost falling down the stairs but an arm reaches out to catch me. A trip to the snow, but I don't know if that's a memory or a photograph. I was adopted by a nice couple who'd been trying for years but couldn't conceive. When I was 7, a miracle happened; they had a child and they no longer needed me.

(KEVIN exits, lights up on the house. KATE and JAMES are sitting outside looking up at meteors shooting across the sky.)

KATE

There goes another one.

JAMES

Hawaii?

KATE

Can you believe I could be working there?

JAMES

And you want me to come with you?

KATE

Of course, why wouldn't I?

(beat)

JAMES

I need to finish out the year here, at least.

KATE

6 months?

JAMES

I made a commitment to these kids. I know you don't understand that-

KATE

I understand it's important to you.

JAMES

Thank you.

(beat)

6 months.

KATE

I never saw us going long-distance.

JAMES

I guess that's what it would be.

KATE

If I pass the interview.

JAMES

I can't believe they're making you fly out there during the holidays.

KATE

They want me there for the total lunar eclipse. I couldn't say no. Besides, I'll make it home for Christmas.

JAMES

Are we still in love?
(beat)

KATE

What?

JAMES

6 months, when we were first in love we wouldn't have even thought of being apart for 6 months.

KATE

We can call, text, Skype. Nothing has to change.

JAMES

Why aren't you fighting this?

KATE

You said it's important for you to stay, I know it's important for me to go.

JAMES

So that's it then.

KATE

It's only 6 months.

JAMES

Every time you say 6 months, it gets longer.

KATE

I believe in us, don't you?

(Silence. DAWN enters from Apt. 303 dragging KEVIN behind her.)

DAWN

Did the meteor shower start yet?

KATE

There goes one.

DAWN

Did you see that?!

(She points up and KEVIN looks up with her.)

JAMES

I'll leave you to the stars then.

KATE

You can stay.

JAMES

We got demolished in regionals, I have strategizing to do.
(He exits into Apt. 301.)

DAWN
Can we use Big Betsy? I want to show Kevin.
KATE
Alright.
(She exits into Apt. 301.)
KEVIN
I have homework to do.
DAWN
Homework can wait, look at the sky!
KEVIN
I might not be around for much longer.
DAWN
Are you going back home?
KEVIN
I don't have a home. At least not one where anyone wants me.
(DAWN hugs him.)
DAWN
Your home is here.
KEVIN
She doesn't want me.
DAWN
Then you can come stay with us.
KEVIN
I don't think your dad would agree to that.
DAWN
I'll make him.
(beat)
What about Jade? Isn't she family too?
(KEVIN shrugs)
It's Christmas, Christmas is a time for family.
KEVIN
Did you see your grandma?
DAWN
When?
KEVIN
She was here, or at least I think-
DAWN
You saw her? What was she like? What was she doing here?
KEVIN
I don't know.
(DAWN's shoulders sink.)
DAWN
They're not coming, are they?
(pause)
KEVIN
It's not your fault.

DAWN

I know. It's not your fault too.

KEVIN

Three broken homes feels like a pattern and the common denominator is me.

DAWN

What's a denominator?

KEVIN

Math.

DAWN

Eww.

KEVIN

Look, there goes a meteor.

DAWN

And another.

(They settle down to watch. KATE enters with a large telescope. Lights dim on the house. JADE and LIAM enter from the other side of the stage, stumbling drunk, walking home.)

LIAM

He just sent the letter back, no explanation, he's a stone fucking wall, nothing ever gets to him!

JADE

Screw him!

LIAM

You wanna (burp) hear a joke?

JADE

Enough, enough! If I have to hear one more pun-

LIAM

Further is for physical distance— no wait *farther* is for physical distance and *further* is for metaphorical distance. And father is for emotional distance!

(JADE cracks up.)

JADE

You know at least Kevin got to have parents, I was too old for that shit when...

(She trails off.)

LIAM

I'm sorry, I'll shut up.

JADE

I haven't heard anyone talk real talk in years. It's like at the store I can't be myself. I'm their boss so I can't be their friend.

LIAM

Oh my god do you have a Jack? Because we have a Jack and he's always trying to get me to go drinking with him on the weekends. And it's like I don't shit where I sleep, you know?

JADE

Jane invited me to her baby shower.

LIAM

Ewwwwwww.

JADE

I should have gone.

LIAM

You don't have many friends do you?

JADE

Fuck off.

LIAM

Oh no you have Kevin to worry about now, can't be teaching someone so young and impressionable curse words.

JADE

How'd you do it, clean up your act for Dawn?

LIAM

Well let's just say it's a good thing she doesn't remember the first couple of years.

(Lights up on the house, LIAM notices they have reached their destination.)

Shush, we can't let them know where we've been. Bad example. Dawn! My light! It's past your bedtime.

(In his rush LIAM stumbles and crashes into the light-up reindeer, breaking it. JADE and DAWN rush forward to help him up.)

DAWN

Daddy?

LIAM

Oh no. I'm so sorry Dawn.

(He looks around at the mess he's made. JADE pulls him up and deposits him on the steps.)

DAWN

Why don't Grandma and Grandpa want to see me?

LIAM

Oh Dawnie, it's not like that.

DAWN

But... but it's Christmas.

LIAM

It's not your fault, we had an argument and then Ruby and... I'm sorry Dawn, I think I really messed things up.

(beat)

Anyways lets get you tucked into bed, snug as a bug in a rug!

DAWN
I want to watch the stars.
(LIAM looks up.)

LIAM
Hot cocoa and blankets then?
(DAWN and LIAM exit into Apt. 303. JADE sits down close to KEVIN.)

JADE
Wow, the sky is so clear tonight.

KEVIN
Yeah.

JADE
How was school?

KEVIN
Fine.

JADE
Maybe tomorrow we could go see a movie together? Robots Versus Giant Cat People?
(KEVIN shrugs. A meteor goes by.)
I wish they were here.

KEVIN
Mom and Dad?

JADE
They'd know what to do.

KEVIN
What were they like?
(beat)

JADE
Mom collected butterflies.

KEVIN
Butterflies?

JADE
I hated it, creepy little fuckers pinned to boards, she kept them in the attic. I never went up there.

KEVIN
And Dad?

JADE
He could cook. Learned everything I know from him. We'd spend every Sunday morning cooking while Mom was at church. Pancakes, fresh bread, anything we wanted.

KEVIN
Will you teach me?

JADE
I'm so sorry, for everything.

(They hug and exit into Apt. 305. LIAM enters with blankets and two steaming mugs; he wraps DAWN in a blanket and hands her the mug.)

LIAM

You could meet them, if you want.

DAWN

Grandma and Grandpa?

LIAM

I could get James, or Kate, or Blue to go with you.

DAWN

But I want *you* to come with me.

LIAM

They don't want to see me.

DAWN

Why?

LIAM

Sometimes people have a hard time accepting who I am.

DAWN

Like when people say you're my mother not my father?

LIAM

Yes.

DAWN

Are Grandma and Grandpa like that?

LIAM

Unfortunately they are.

DAWN

Then I don't want to meet them.

(RUBY enters from Apt. 307 in a robe, curlers in her hair, carrying soup.)

RUBY

I see someone's made quite a mess of things.

LIAM

Don't start, not after what you pulled.

(She shoves the soup at him.)

RUBY

I've come bearing apologies.

(LIAM takes it and glances at the reindeer.)

LIAM

I've made quite a mess of things haven't I?

(RUBY pulls a roll of tape out of her pocket.)

RUBY

Nothing a little duct tape can't fix.

(She gathers the pieces of the reindeer and helps LIAM start to put it back together. Lights down.)

Scene 7
Dec 18, Saturday 3:00PM
7 days till Christmas

(Spotlight on JADE.)

JADE

The day I turned 18 I thought about reaching out to him. I knew legally I could raise a fuss and get visitation rights or even custody. I convinced myself he wouldn't remember me. That he wouldn't want a stranger to come into his life and wreck his perfect family. I convinced myself that at least one of us could have a normal family.

(JADE exits, lights up on the cafe across the street— a table and two chairs isolated from the house by a spotlight. MEREDITH sits looking around. RUBY enters and sits down opposite her.)

RUBY

I'm not here to apologize.

MEREDITH

Then what more is there to say?

(She stands to leave.)

RUBY

Stay, please.

(MEREDITH sits back down.)

What I said was harsh. True, but harsh. Liam never let himself get angry at you so sometimes I feel like I need to be angry for him.

MEREDITH

I don't see why angry has to be brought into this. I simply want to have a relationship with my granddaughter.

RUBY

Anger is a part of this because to have a relationship with your granddaughter you need to heal that rift between you and your son.

MEREDITH

This is my family, what right do you have to keep me from them?

RUBY

You gave up any right to be a part of his life when you threw him out.

MEREDITH

She walked out on us.

RUBY

You didn't chase after *him*.

(beat)

MEREDITH

I've made mistakes.

RUBY

Don't tell me that, tell him that.

MEREDITH

This is ridiculous.

RUBY

If it was up to me you wouldn't even know Dawn exists.

MEREDITH

Then you're just here to scare me off.

RUBY

I'm here to talk some damn sense into you.

MEREDITH

I don't have to listen to this.

(She stands up.)

RUBY

Liam will never say it out loud but he's waiting to see if you'll accept him as your son before he brings you anywhere near his daughter.

MEREDITH

She walked out on me! She gave me one chance and when I didn't react just the way she wanted me to, she walked out!

RUBY

13 years and you never bothered to educate yourself on what your son was going through? Transgender, it's in the dictionary, look it up.

(MEREDITH exits in a huff. RUBY sighs and exits in the other direction. Lights up on the house. JADE is assembling a grill, LIAM enters in his work apron.)

LIAM

Little late in the season to be grilling.

JADE

How is anyone without an engineering degree supposed to put this thing together?

(LIAM studies the instructions.)

LIAM

Ah, it might help if we had the right instructions.

(He scrutinizes the pieces in front of him and starts re-arranging them.)

JADE

Thanks for getting me home last night.

LIAM

What kind of friend would I be if I let you sleep on a stranger's lawn?

JADE

I suppose you are my friend.

(beat)

You were right, you know.

LIAM

I'm right about many things.

JADE

I don't have friends.

LIAM

Yeah, I get that. I knew a lot of people in college and when we all graduated we said we'd keep in touch and suddenly years and years have passed without a word.

JADE

We were roommates, we saw each other every day, and now I'm lucky just to get a Christmas card.

LIAM

Where's platonic Match.com when you need it?

JADE

Did we ever actually like our friends from school or were we just friends because it was convenient?

LIAM

There's a Christmas party at my work, you could be my pretend date. I take Dawn every year and there's always so many questions about her "mother".

JADE

Promise not to let me get drunk?

LIAM

I promise.

(KEVIN enters from his apartment in karate gear.)

JADE

I thought classes were over for the holidays?

KEVIN

Got to keep in shape.

(KATE enters from her apartment with JAMES trailing after.)

JAMES

We could stop at Nino's on the way.

KATE

I want to get to the airport early.

JAMES

I still can't believe you're flying back Christmas Day.

KATE

It'll be first thing in the morning; you'll wake up and I'll be home.

LIAM

Have a good flight! Bring back souvenirs!

(JAMES and KATE exit.)

KEVIN

What have you got there?

JADE
A grill, or at least pieces of it.

LAIM
I think it's time to consult the internet.
(JADE and LIAM exit into Apt. 303. AMBER enters.)

KEVIN
Amber!

AMBER
Is Mr. Peterson around?

KEVIN
He just went out.

AMBER
Oh.

KEVIN
Anything I can help you with?

AMBER
Never mind.
(She turns to go. KEVIN continues practicing, she stops to watch.)
How does that work?
(gesturing to his karate moves)

KEVIN
Wanna learn?
(He executes the complex move better this time.)

AMBER
Can you teach me how to hurt someone?

KEVIN
Is there someone you'd like me to beat up for you?

AMBER
I can handle myself.

KEVIN
I know how to knock a guy out with one punch.

AMBER
Show me.
(KEVIN mimes karate chopping someone in the neck.)

KEVIN
The first thing is getting your footwork right.

AMBER
But I want to punch people.

KEVIN
When you punch people, a lot of your strength is actually going to come from your hips.
(He takes a wide stance.)

AMBER
Okay.
(She copies him.)

KEVIN

Our fingers are made up of tiny little bones and you can hurt yourself more than the other person if you just take a swing at them. But if you hit them with the side of your hand...

(He demonstrates, AMBER copies.)

...it's going to have more impact and do less damage to you.

AMBER

You got any cool kicking moves?

(LIAM enters from his apartment carrying a bin of full alcohol bottles and goes to put them out.)

KEVIN

(watching LIAM)

What a waste.

LIAM

Don't let society fool you kid, this can mess your whole life up.

KEVIN

Whatever old man.

(LIAM exits into his apartment.)

AMBER

I don't like alcohol.

KEVIN

Yeah it's kind of lame.

(beat)

So who you planing to use this on?

AMBER

Boyfriend, ex-boyfriend, if he ever comes anywhere near me ever again.

KEVIN

He seems like a douchebag.

AMBER

You don't know the half of it.

(RUBY enters with wreaths.)

RUBY

Perfect, I was hoping I'd find some young hands out here!

KEVIN

More decorations?

RUBY

Every home needs a good wreath.

(She hands KEVIN the wreaths and AMBER takes the hammer. BLUE pokes her head out the door of Apt. 307.)

BLUE

Not more decorations!

RUBY

What's gotten into you?

BLUE

They're just going to wither up and die.

RUBY

So your childhood Christmases weren't so great, why does that have to stop us from having a good time now?

BLUE

Last Christmas it was just you and me, we watched a movie, we made egg nog and we went to bed early. Why does it have to be a big thing this year?

RUBY

Why shouldn't it be a big thing this year?

BLUE

Just don't come complaining to me when it all goes south.

(She exits back into the apartment.)

AMBER

Who put coal in *her* stocking?

RUBY

I have the perfect plan.

(RUBY pulls out a stack of papers, AMBER takes one.)

AMBER

Christmas carols?

(RUBY hands KEVIN two of them.)

RUBY

Make sure you and your sister learn them by Christmas Day but keep it quiet. It's going to be a wonderful surprise!

(RUBY exits back into her apartment. AMBER and KEVIN share a look.)

KEVIN

Sounds like you're invited if your family gets too... family.

AMBER

Thanks.

(She hands him back the hammer.)

I'd better get going.

KEVIN

Come by any time you like.

AMBER

I will.

(She exits, KEVIN watches her go before exiting into Apt. 305.)

RUBY

(off)

Where are you going now?

(BLUE enters.)

BLUE

I could use some fresh air from your burnt cooking.

(BLUE marches out of the apartment, looking around to make sure no one is watching she kicks over the reindeer. Lights down.)

Scene 8
Dec 20, Monday 3:00PM
5 days till Christmas

(Spotlight on BLUE.)

BLUE

We'd begin the week with greetings— "You've grown so much, we haven't see you in so long, we should this more often"— but slowly old grudges would emerge, raging childhood battles where a winner was never declared. When all the adults had yelled themselves hoarse and left us to our own devices we'd run up and down the big empty house and break our new toys. That's what Christmas is to me.

(BLUE exits. Lights up on the house where LIAM and JAMES sit smoking. The grill is set up.)

LIAM

6 months. That's a long time.

JAMES

If she gets the job.

LIAM

It seems pretty likely.

JAMES

I've never thought a lot about the future but anytime I do she's right there by my side.

LIAM

You can get through this, plus you'll be living in Hawaii.

JAMES

It's already over.

LIAM

Don't say that!

JAMES

She applied for the job without even telling me. I get that we're independent people, and of course I'm happy for her, but it feels like something we should have talked about.

LIAM

Then talk about it, tell her that.

(KEVIN, JADE, and DAWN enter from Apt. 303 with trays full of food to grill.)

Are we feasting?

JADE

I thought everyone could use a good home-cooked meal.

(LIAM comes over to investigate and JADE smacks his hand away with a spatula. AMBER enters, JAMES sees her.)

JAMES

Amber?

AMBER

I wanted to talk to you.

(KEVIN starts towards them.)

Alone.

(KEVIN backs away and JAMES pulls her aside as KEVIN, LIAM, and JADE fuss around the grill. BLUE enters and joins in the fray.)

JAMES

What's going on?

AMBER

I need your help with something.

JAMES

What is it?

AMBER

You have to promise you won't judge me.

JAMES

Okay.

AMBER

Or tell my parents.

JAMES

If you're doing anything to hurt yourself or others I have to tell your parents, legally and morally.

AMBER

No one's going to get hurt. I need someone to help me do this.

JAMES

Alright, what do you need me to do?

AMBER

Take me to the police station and don't ask questions.

JAMES

I think I can do that.

(to LIAM)

Save me a burger!

LIAM

Okay.

(JAMES and AMBER exit.)

Stupid thing won't light.

(He fiddles with the grill.)

JADE

Let me.

(She grabs the lighter from LIAM's hands and manages to light the grill, a puff of black smoke comes out.)

LIAM

Don't worry, that's how you know it's working.

(He fans the smoke away from the group.)

BLUE

Oh these look wonderful.

KEVIN
Jade's been teaching me all the tricks.

BLUE
It'll be good to have another cook around.

DAWN
I wanna try I wanna try!

LIAM
It has to warm up, honey.

KEVIN
We have to do this every weekend!

JADE
I'm not sure we can manage every weekend but every once in a while it'd be nice.

LIAM
God this brings me back to family reunions.
(KEVIN and DAWN start messing around with the grill.)

JADE
Those were the worst.

DAWN
(to KEVIN)
Make it heat up faster.

BLUE
Mine always managed to get through the first meal before they'd start tearing each other apart.

JADE
Dad would just chain himself to the grill. You don't want to mess with the man cooking your food.

LIAM
I'm afraid I was the kid who'd instigate the food fights.

JADE
You and I would not have gotten along.
(KEVIN reaches out to test how hot the grill is and yanks his hand away.)

BLUE
My father put me over his knee once just for breaking my new pair of sandals.

LIAM
Mom would always make me wear dresses, but my rule was, I had to be able to run in them and do a roundhouse kick.

DAWN
Daddy?!

(DAWN and KEVIN make a run for it.)

BLUE
Essential skills when male cousins are around.
(The grill explodes; all the adults turn around.)

LIAM

Dawn?!

JADE

Kevin!

(JADE and LIAM rush to DAWN and KEVIN to check them over for damage. BLUE grabs the picnic blanket and starts stomping the fire out.)

BLUE

What happened?

DAWN

It was getting really hot. We didn't know what to do. Kevin tried to turn it down but-

JADE

(to KEVIN)

What did you do?

KEVIN

Nothing!

(JADE approaches the ex-grill.)

BLUE

It feels like a bad omen.

LIAM

It was just poorly put together, I'm sure we simply missed something in the instructions.

JADE

What a piece of-!

(she glances at the kids)

...poorly made consumer good.

LIAM

Come on, let's get this food back inside before the flies eat it.

(LIAM, JADE, and BLUE pick up the food and exit into Apt. 303.)

KEVIN

(to DAWN)

That was awesome.

(DAWN elbows him in the side, grabs the last of the food, and exits into Apt. 303, KEVIN following behind her. JADE and LIAM come back out.)

JADE

Can just one thing go right?

LIAM

Cheer up, could have been worse.

JADE

I wanted to show Kevin what it was like when we were still a family.

LIAM

I think he got a pretty authentic experience.

JADE

I wish I could give him those happy memories.

LIAM

Just be here for him now.

JADE

I want to forget those happy times. If I didn't know how good it could be I wouldn't know what I was missing.

LIAM

Just be here for him now.

(Lights down on the house, JAMES and AMBER share a spotlight on one side of the stage; they are at the police station.)

JAMES

I'll kill that son of a bitch with my own hands.

AMBER

I thought you believed in karmic justice.

JAMES

Sometimes karma needs a little help.

(beat)

How are you holding up? I know it's a stupid question but-

AMBER

Better, I thought I could just go to school like nothing's changed but I just... couldn't.

JAMES

It's okay to not be okay.

AMBER

I thought if I acted like there was nothing wrong there would be nothing wrong.

JAMES

You're going to get through this.

AMBER

And you'll help me with my parents?

JAMES

I'll be there every step of the way.

(They exit together, lights down.)

Scene 9
Dec 22, Wednesday 9:24PM
3 days till Christmas
Total Lunar Eclipse

(Spotlight on KATE.)

KATE

He'll change his mind. Three weeks into it and he'll change his mind. The school will find him a replacement. I'll find us an apartment with the most spectacular view. He'll love it.

(KATE exits. Lights up on the house, the full moon is out. DAWN enters from Apt. 301 lugging a small telescope and JAMES trails after her.)

DAWN

Come on! I don't want to miss it.

JAMES

Careful with the equipment.

DAWN

Do you think Kate's watching?

JAMES

We're all under the same moon.

(The earth's shadow enters the moon. Lights dim on the house, the table and two chairs of the cafe are set up on the other side of the stage. MEREDITH sits down, looking around. LIAM enters. She stands up.)

LIAM

You have something you need to say to me?

MEREDITH

Please sit.

LIAM

Make it quick.

MEREDITH

We got off on the wrong foot.

LIAM

You made yourself very clear.

MEREDITH

I let my emotions get to me.

LIAM

What were you planing to do? Trick me into thinking you'd accept me just to get to my daughter?

MEREDITH

I didn't think it would be this hard.

LIAM

After you abandoned me you thought I'd take you back in a heart beat?

MEREDITH

When you left us-

LIAM

You wouldn't accept me!

MEREDITH

You didn't give me a moment to!

LIAM

You shouldn't need a moment! I was your child, I was going though hell and you weren't there for me!

(He stands up to leave.)

MEREDITH

You wouldn't listen to reason!

LIAM

You haven't changed your mind so why are we even here!

MEREDITH

I've got 13 years worth of things to say, you owe me a moment of your time.

(LIAM sits back down.)

When you left us- just hear me out- I never thought it would be permanent. I told myself you just needed some space, a few days and you'd come to your senses, a few weeks and you'd see reason, maybe a month at most and you'd come back because you should realize you needed me more than your pride. A year passed, every day I thought about reaching out to you it felt like was already too late.

LIAM

I was waiting for you, I left the ball in your court and when you never got back to me... I thought you wanted nothing to do with me.

MEREDITH

I thought about you ever day.

LIAM

And you think it wasn't the same for me?!

MEREDITH

The way this Ruby friend of yours tells it, you quickly replaced me.

LIAM

You're jealous of Ruby?

MEREDITH

Clearly you've moved on, built a better family.

LIAM

Because I had to, not because I wanted to.

MEREDITH

We were right here! Just a call away, Tracy!

LIAM

If you had just stopped for one second to consider maybe I wasn't your perfect little girl I would have stayed. But you never gave it a chance. You put me in this box and any time I tried to step out of it you'd act like I wasn't your child.

MEREDITH

Tracy.

LIAM

My name is LIAM!

(He storms out, exiting. MEREDITH exits in the opposite direction. Lights back up on the house. The earth's shadow covers half the moon. JADE pokes her head out of Apt. 305.)

JADE

You don't look ready to go to a party.

DAWN

We're watching the eclipse.

(JADE steps out in respectable Christmas party wear and looks up.)

JADE

Kevin, you have to see this!

(KEVIN enters in a horrible Christmas sweater.)

KEVIN

I can't believe you're making me go to this stupid—

(he looks up)

Wow!

(LIAM storms in.)

JADE

Well now I really feel like I'm the only one ready.

LIAM

Rough day, give me two seconds.

(He exits into Apt. 303.)

JAMES

It's almost at totality.

JADE

I've never seen anything like this.

DAWN

It's beautiful!

(LIAM re-enters, pulling a Christmas sweater over his head.)

LIAM

Let's go!

KEVIN

I want to stay and watch.

LIAM

You can ride in the back of the truck.

DAWN

Yes!

KEVIN

Sweet!

(JAMES' phone rings; he waves at LIAM, DAWN, KEVIN, and JADE as they exit and then picks it up. KATE enters and is isolated by a spotlight on the other side of the stage.)

KATE

James!

JAMES

Kate? Honey? I'm sorry, I can barely hear you.

KATE

I got the job!

JAMES

What?

KATE

The job, I got it.

JAMES

Oh, that's wonderful.

(The moon is fully red now.)

KATE

You should have seen all the equipment they have, I can't wait to get my hands on the Keck.

JAMES

That sounds fun.

KATE

You're going to love the climate here, and the view!

JAMES

I'll have to schedule time to come visit you.

KATE

We're on top of a mountain miles from anything, there's almost no light pollution.

JAMES

You're really doing this? You're going to take the job?

KATE

Yes!

JAMES

I'm happy for you.

KATE

Be happy for *us*, you can't even imagine what our income is going to look like.

JAMES

Then I'm happy for us.

KATE

(looking around)

I've got to go, God the view of the eclipse is like nothing I've ever seen from here.

JAMES

It's pretty nice here too.

(beat)

What time does your flight get in?

KATE

3 PM sharp. But don't come pick me up, I want you to enjoy Christmas with everyone else, not be stuck in an airport.

JAMES

I don't mind-

KATE

It's settled then, see you at home!

(She exits and JAMES puts the phone down. RUBY comes rushing out of Apt. 307.)

RUBY

Blue! We've nearly missed it!

(BLUE enters with blankets.)

BLUE

We're just in time.

RUBY

Wow. It's beautiful.

BLUE

Yeah it is.

(Beat. JAMES exits into Apt. 301.)

RUBY

See, even the moon is in the Christmas spirit.

(pause)

BLUE

Sometime it feels like you don't take the time to really understand me.

RUBY

Maybe if you'd come out and just say what you mean-

BLUE

I do, you just won't listen to it if it's something you don't want to hear!

RUBY

Fine, I'm listening now.

(beat)

BLUE

I don't want a big Christmas, I was perfectly happy when it was just you and me and a pitcher of home made eggnog.

RUBY

Is it so wrong of me to want a little bit more this year?

BLUE

It's going to be a disaster.

(Earth's shadow starts moving away from the moon.)

RUBY

Only if we turn it into one.

BLUE

Big gatherings like this, they never work out, you put people with unresolved problems under pressure playing nice because it's Christmas, and all they do is find other ways to fight with each other.

RUBY

I know your family was dysfunctional-

BLUE

Whose isn't?! That just the natural state of family.

RUBY

What if we moved the party to James' apartment. We'll do all the cooking and decorating there and if things get too much for you all you have to do is say the word and we'll come back here and drink eggnog by the fire.

BLUE

You'd miss out on all the fun? For me?

RUBY

I'd be lying if I said that I wouldn't miss it just a little bit, but Blue darling I'm in this for you. I want you to see what a real family Christmas can be.

(beat)

BLUE

Twenty minutes. I'll give it twenty minutes but if anyone starts shouting I'm leaving.

(RUBY pulls her in for a big hug. They watch as the earth's shadow moves away from the moon. Lights down.)

Scene 10
Dec 25, Saturday 7:00PM
Christmas Day

(Spotlight on DAWN. She holds a poster board with pictures of her family.)

DAWN

This is my family tree. My father's name is Liam. I have an aunt and uncle named Kate and James. I have two grandmothers, Blue and Ruby. And now I have a brother, Kevin!

(DAWN exits. Lights up on the interior of Apt. 301. A large table takes up much of the living room, the entryway and door are visible. The apartment is decked out in Christmas decorations. A tree towers in one corner with a heap of presents at its feet. RUBY slumbers in an armchair. JAMES enters from the bedroom.)

JAMES

Shit!

(Seeing RUBY he rushes to the kitchen. He reappears with a smoking and burnt turkey. The phone rings. KATE appears on the opposite side of the stage; JAMES picks up the phone.)

JAMES

Hello?

KATE

James, honey.

JAMES

Where are you? I've been worried sick.

KATE

I'm stuck on the island.

JAMES

You're not going to make it home.

KATE

It's okay, we can have our own little Christmas tomorrow.

JAMES

Doesn't look like it will be much of a Christmas here.

KATE

I've never had a white Christmas before! I wish you were here.

JAMES

Are we still in love?

(beat)

KATE

It's over when I say no, isn't it.

JAMES

Yeah.

KATE
So this is it?

JAMES
I wish it didn't end this way.

KATE
I'm kind of glad you can't see my face right now.
(She wipes away tears.)

JAMES
I'm sorry.

KATE
It's not your fault.

JAMES
It's not yours either.
(There's a knock at the door.)
I gotta go.

KATE
Marry Christmas.
(He hangs up and opens the door. Lights down as KATE exits. KEVIN and JADE enter carrying trays of food.)

JADE
I bring stuffing.

KEVIN
And I bring dessert!
(He waves the pie around.)

JAMES
Thank God.
(BLUE enters with them.)

BLUE
Your kitchen hasn't been set on fire yet, has it?

JAMES
Your wife seems to be enjoying my armchair.
(BLUE enters, seeing RUBY and then the turkey.)

BLUE
Not to worry.
(She exits out of the apartment. LIAM enters with a stack of presents.)

JAMES
You didn't.

LAIM
There's a little something for everyone.
(They hug.)
When's her flight get in?

JAMES
Not today.

LIAM
Delayed?

JAMES
Guess they got snowed in.

LIAM
She'll be here.

JAMES
It doesn't matter, I've got all of you.
(DAWN rushes through the door carrying a genetics kit.
She's wearing reindeer antlers on her head.)

DAWN
Look what Daddy got me!

JAMES
Genetics, huh?

LIAM
I'm ashamed to admit I don't even know where all our ancestors
come from.
(BLUE enters with a store-bought turkey and dumps the
burnt one in the trash.)

JAMES
You've saved Christmas, Blue.
(DAWN runs over to show KEVIN her present and BLUE
goes to wake RUBY up.)

BLUE
Wake up, darling.

RUBY
Five more minutes.

JAMES
(pulling LIAM aside)
I'm not moving to Hawaii.

LIAM
What? Why?

JAMES
I can't, my life is here.

LIAM
You're just having cold feet, I know how you are about planes.

JAMES
It's been over between me and Kate for a while now.

LIAM
Don't say that.

JAMES
She's coming back, but only to pick up her stuff.

LIAM
It can't be. You're the model couple.

JAMES
It's over.
(beat)

LIAM

I'm so sorry, man.

(He pulls him into a tight hug.)

BLUE

I forgot the best part.

(She exits out of the apartment. KEVIN pulls out a present from under the tree.)

KEVIN

This one's for you.

DAWN

Daddy can I open presents?

LIAM

Go for it.

RUBY

Come over here where I can see what you've got.

(She tears into the wrapping paper. BLUE enters and pulls LIAM aside, out of ear shot of RUBY.)

BLUE

Liam dear, Meredith is here, do you want me to tell her to go?

LIAM

I can handle it, just keep Dawn out of sight.

(LIAM goes to the door. DAWN takes a small knitted sweater out.)

KEVIN

For Mr. Fuzzy.

DAWN

I love it!

(MEREDITH enters through the doorway.)

LIAM

I thought we were done with this.

MEREDITH

I've been thinking about what you said, about never trying to understand what you were going through.

LIAM

Now's not a good time.

MEREDITH

I'm not asking for forgiveness, I'm not even asking to see Dawn right now. I just ... I've been reading up on things, reading stuff from people like you. I can't say I understand this ... transgender thing but I'm willing to try.

DAWN

Daddy? Who's at the door?

BLUE

It's just someone from work, come on.

LIAM

No, it's okay Blue. Come over here Dawn, there's someone I'd like you to meet.

(BLUE peaks at MEREDITH from behind LIAM.)

Dawn this is your grandmother, Mom this is Dawn.

(MEREDITH gets down to DAWN's level with her hand outstretched.)

MEREDITH

Hi Dawn, it's a pleasure to finally meet you.

DAWN

This is my *father* and his name is Liam.

(DAWN gives MEREDITH a hard look.)

MEREDITH

Yes he is.

(DAWN shakes her hand.)

DAWN

Then it's nice to meet you too.

MEREDITH

This is for you.

(She hands DAWN a present.)

DAWN

Can I?

LIAM

Go ahead.

(She rips the wrapping paper off.)

MEREDITH

And this is for you.

(She hands LIAM a small gift bag.)

DAWN

(studying her present)

A book?

MEREDITH

It's a family picture album. Look-

(She opens it.)

That's your father when he was younger.

(LIAM opens his present, it's a ring.)

LIAM

Thanks, but I don't think I'm getting married any time soon.

MEREDITH

It's my mother's, I know it's nothing great, my father made them himself and even then he wasn't the greatest smith. I just thought... you're our only child, you should have it.

LIAM

Thank you.

MEREDITH

(wiping a tear from her eye)

Well I can't stay, I just wanted to drop by and say hello.

LIAM

Why don't you come over for New Year's, if you don't have other plans that is.

DAWN

Please! Kate always makes fireworks!

MEREDITH

I think I can manage to drop by.

DAWN

And we have to show you Fred the dinosaur.

MEREDITH

I'd love that.

LIAM

Thank you.

MEREDITH

No, thank you.

(beat)

I'd better get going.

(She turns to go but DAWN runs up and gives her a big hug. MEREDITH hugs her back and LIAM smiles at them. MEREDITH exits.)

DAWN

I like her.

LIAM

Good.

RUBY

More presents!

(LIAM rushes over to the tree and hauls out the biggest box.)

LIAM

If Jade and Kevin would please report to the tree.

JADE

This is too much.

LIAM

Just open it.

RUBY

Yes, open it.

(JADE opens the present, it's a new grill.)

JADE

You shouldn't have.

LIAM

They were on sale, plus I figured I was partly responsible.

(RUBY hauls a suspiciously guitar-shaped present out from the tree.)

RUBY
Liam dear.
LIAM
You didn't.
RUBY
Oh yes I did.
(They all gather around as LIAM opens the present. He pulls out a rainbow-colored guitar and runs his hands along the surface.)
LIAM
It's exquisite.
RUBY
It's been too many years since I heard you play.
DAWN
Play, play, play!
(There's a knock at the door. KEVIN jumps up to answer it. AMBER enters through the door.)
JAMES
Amber?
AMBER
Kevin said something about carols?
RUBY
It's time!
(Everyone stares at her.)
Come on, that was your cue.
(Everyone except BLUE pulls out their booklets.)
BLUE
You didn't.
RUBY
(RUBY holds a carol book out to BLUE.)
I promised you a perfect Christmas.
(BLUE takes the book.)
BLUE
What are we singing?
RUBY
Your choice.
(BLUE flips through the book.)
BLUE
This one.
RUBY
Alright everyone, page 10!
ALL
Oh, the weather outside is frightful, but the fire is so delightful! And since we've no place to go, let it snow, let it snow, let it snow!
(Lights down. CURTAIN.)