

THE REGIFTERS

A CHRISTMAS COMEDY

By Robert Lynn

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SYNOPSIS: When a couple "regifts" a not-so-great Christmas present, then finds out it's worth a fortune, they will stop at nothing to get it back. But they're not the only ones who rewrapped it...In the mad pursuit to reclaim the gift, everyone who gave it away learns about friendship, real wealth, and the value of a gift truly given.

CAST OF CHARACTERS (FOUR MEN, FIVE WOMEN)

LORAS HENSHAW.....A 50-something, absent-minded
businessman.

BRIDGET HENSHAWThe plump wife of Loras, 50's.

TOM MULLIGANA blustery accountant who never stops
accounting. 50's.

MARY MULLIGANTom's wife, 50ish.

JEFF CUNNINGHAMA momma's boy caught in the middle of
loyalty to his wife and to his mother. Late
30's.

LAUREN CUNNINGHAM....Wife of Jeff. Late 30's.

MRS. CUNNINGHAMJeff's mother. Mid-60's.

KURT WEISS.....A poor, humble, blue-collar worker, 20's.

KATIE WEISS.....A quiet, playful woman with a big heart.
Early 20's.

SETTING

For Act One, the stage contains three playing areas: The well-to-do but sterile living room of Loras and Bridget Henshaw, a moderately wealthy family striving to be excessively wealthy; the living room of Tom and Mary Mulligan, the frugal accountant and his office worker wife have a large

writing pad on a stand in the back of a room occupied by discarded office furniture; the impeccably Christmas-decorated living room of Jeff and Laura Cunningham.

Act Two uses the living rooms of the Mulligans and Cunninghams, as well as the kitchen of Kurt and Katie Weiss. They are poor, and their house reflects their lack of material belongings, but still glows with welcoming warmth.

TIME

Present day. Christmas Eve.

THE GIFT [LIEBESGESCHENK]

The gift is a lacquered, rectangular, light-colored wooden box with an open bottom. On top the box is gold-colored and brown-colored metal formed in a non-descript fashion. It looks well made, but does not look like anything specific.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE, SCENE 1: The Henshaw living room

ACT ONE, SCENE 2: The Mulligan living room

ACT ONE, SCENE 3: The Cunningham living room

ACT ONE, SCENE 4: The Henshaw living room

ACT ONE, SCENE 5: The Mulligan living room

ACT ONE, SCENE 6: The Cunningham living room

ACT ONE, SCENE 7: The Henshaw living room

Intermission

ACT TWO, SCENE 1: The Mulligan living room

ACT TWO, SCENE 2: The Cunningham living room

ACT TWO, SCENE 3: The Weiss kitchen

THE REGIFTERS

PRODUCTION HISTORY

***THE REGIFTERS** was first produced by Main Street Players at Bell Tower Theater in Dubuque, Iowa on November 9, 2006, with the following cast:*

(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

- Loras Henshaw Terry Hoefflin*
Bridget Henshaw..... Molly Huerta-Hoefflin
Tom Mulligan..... Matt Kittle
Mary Mulligan Jan Haverland
Mrs. Cunningham Melissa McGuire
Jeff Cunningham Robert Lynn
Lauren Cunningham Margaret Ruf
Katie Weiss..... Dee Dee Timmerman
Kurt Weiss..... Mike Timmerman

Directed by Matt Zanger

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

Loras Henshaw sits on the sofa, reading a newspaper. Bridget Henshaw enters from the kitchen and begins tidying up. She knocks a book off the table. Loras doesn't notice. Bridget clears her throat. Loras doesn't flinch. Bridget drops the book from waist level. Loras reads on. Bridget repeatedly slaps the book against the table.

LORAS: Do you need to make so much noise?

BRIDGET: Do you need to read the financial section on Christmas Eve?

LORAS: I suppose you think we should just leave everything to our investment advisor.

BRIDGET: It's Christmas Eve.

LORAS: That guy will rob us blind if he gets the chance. You have to stay on top of these people.

BRIDGET: Then why don't we find someone we can trust?

LORAS: They're all alike. You can't trust anyone these days.

BRIDGET: That's encouraging.

LORAS: It's the truth. That guy down at the club—the one who parks the car—the one time I give him the regular key and not the valet key, and the next thing I know, the jumper cables are gone from the trunk!

BRIDGET: The jumper cables are in the garage. Mr. Levinson borrowed them last week.

LORAS: You loaned out my jumper cables without telling me?

BRIDGET: You were in the shower. I forgot to tell you. Now, you were saying about the carpark?

LORAS: My point is still valid. You can't trust people. Things aren't like they used to be. *(Bridget looks at him long and hard.)*

BRIDGET: No, they sure aren't. *(Beat.)*

LORAS: Are we going out to dinner tomorrow?

BRIDGET: What for?

LORAS: Hmm. Point taken. Well, aren't we going to do anything to celebrate Christmas?

BRIDGET: What do we have to celebrate?

THE REGIFTERS

LORAS: Why, the birth of St. Nicholas, or some such nonsense. I forget all the details.

BRIDGET: I don't know...

LORAS: Everyone else will be home with their families. We'll have the whole restaurant to ourselves. That's cause for celebration right there. *(Beat.)*

BRIDGET: I was thinking of buying another Fabergé egg.

LORAS: Listen, my credit-happy cuddle bunny, our financial situation, while not critical, is what I would deem "precarious." Besides, why on earth would you need another Fabergé egg?

BRIDGET: I don't need it. I just...want it. I like them. They make me happy...somewhat. *(Loras returns to the newspaper.)*

LORAS: Did you see some jackass put twelve Krugerrands in a Salvation Army bucket downtown?

BRIDGET: Krugerrands?

LORAS: Oh, come on. Krugerrands! South African gold bullion coins, my little springbok. *(Bridget sighs in disgust.)* Ostentatious show-off...

BRIDGET: They did it anonymously, didn't they?

LORAS: Oh, sure. But there's an article in the paper all about it. They know who they are. *(The doorbell is heard. Loras gets up to answer it. He opens the door and finds a package at his feet. He picks it up and moves to the table. Bridget sits on the couch.)* What is it with these delivery people? They used to wait for you to answer, hand you the package, and exchange some pleasantries before leaving. Now, no matter how quickly I get to the door, they're running back to their truck. I half-expect to find a flaming bag of dog poo at my feet. I tell you, civility is dead.

BRIDGET: What's in the package? *(Bridget rises and walks to Loras.)*

LORAS: Well, I haven't opened it yet, now, have I?

BRIDGET: Maybe instead of yapping about flaming dog poo, you could open the package. *(Loras thrusts the package at Bridget.)*

LORAS: *(Sarcastic.)* Merry Christmas, sweetheart. *(Bridget thrusts the package back at Loras.)*

BRIDGET: *(Sarcastic.)* Merry Christmas, darling. *(Bridget walks to the couch and sits. Loras looks at the return address.)*

LORAS: Oh, it's from the Kleinschmidts.

BRIDGET: Oh, how nice.

LORAS: Yes...who are the Kleinschmidts?

BRIDGET: Oh, come on. The Kleinschmidts! The couple we met in Germany a year ago last May.

LORAS: Which couple?

BRIDGET: (*Sighs.*) We were in Munich, at the Hofbräuhaus. We shared a table with them and really hit it off. We ended up spending three days at their house.

LORAS: It's coming back to me now. It was during Oktoberfest.

BRIDGET: No. Oktoberfest is not in May. We went to Oktoberfest ten years ago, and it was in Milwaukee.

LORAS: Oh.

BRIDGET: Their son Christoph stayed with us for a semester at the beginning of the year...?

LORAS: In our house? Are you sure?

BRIDGET: Quite.

LORAS: Hmm.

BRIDGET: Reinhold Kleinschmidt is the CEO of the biggest telecommunications company in Germany. (*Loras stares at her blankly.*) They're multi-millionaires...?

LORAS: The Kleinschmidts! Of course. Why didn't you say that?

BRIDGET: Say what?

LORAS: I love the Kleinschmidts. Boy, they had quite an estate, didn't they?

BRIDGET: Yes, they did. Why don't you open the package? They were extremely grateful we let their son stay with us.

LORAS: Yes, of course. (*Loras opens the package.*)

BRIDGET: Maybe it's a Fabergé egg! I remember telling Greta how I love them.

LORAS: Fabergé is French. These people are German. They wouldn't get you a French gift. Maybe it's a BMW.

BRIDGET: A BMW? In that box?

LORAS: Maybe the keys are in here, and the BMW is waiting outside with a big ribbon on it. (*Bridget opens the door.*)

BRIDGET: (*Sarcastic.*) Ah, yes. The FedEx man is pulling it into the driveway right now... (*Loras ignores her. She shuts the door.*)

THE REGIFTERS

LORAS: Okay. Let's see here. It's a—it looks like it's a—I have no idea what this is.

BRIDGET: What do you mean? (*Bridget goes to the table to look in the box.*) Why, it's a—wait, I've seen these in—what is this?

Bridget pulls the gift out of the box, as Loras grabs a card from inside the box.

LORAS: (*Reading.*) "You have our eternal gratitude for the kindness you have displayed to our family. Fröhliches Weihnachten." I'll Fröhliches Weihnachten them!—if I knew what that meant. Ooh, would I like to give him a piece of my mind. He'd be one sour kraut when I got through with him.

BRIDGET: (*Astonished.*) That was a joke. You tried to make a joke. I don't know the last time that happened. (*Aside.*) That you did it in anger says a lot.

LORAS: Out of the goodness of our hearts, we let their son stay here rent-free for five months, and this is the thanks we get. He stays in our house, he eats our food...you made him potato pancakes, for heaven's sake!

Loras paces the living room wildly. Bridget turns only her upper body to watch her ranting husband.

BRIDGET: Until a second ago, you had forgotten the whole thing.

LORAS: Ungrateful little

BRIDGET: He fixed your pocket watch...

LORAS: I don't care. This is an insult!

BRIDGET: Yes, my darling poinsettia. Let's take another look at this. Maybe it's...something. (*Beat.*) Maybe it's a TV antenna.

LORAS: A TV antenna?

BRIDGET: Sure. Reinhold is the head of a telecommunications firm. It makes perfect sense.

LORAS: I don't think so.

BRIDGET: Well, you figure it out, then.

LORAS: It could be a shoeshine box.

BRIDGET: A toaster?

LORAS: There's no plug.

BRIDGET: Well, I don't know, then.

LORAS: A piece of worthless junk is what it is. *(Bridget starts toward the kitchen door.)*

BRIDGET: I'll send them a thank you card, anyway. It's the thought that counts.

LORAS: What thought? "Hey, I'm a multi-millionaire. Here, have some of my garbage for Christmas." That's gratitude for you. The cheap—foreigner. *(Bridget stops, turning to Loras.)*

BRIDGET: He's a German living in Germany. He's not a foreigner, my jingle bell.

LORAS: Well, he's still cheap.

BRIDGET: I'll send the card. *(Bridget turns to leave.)*

LORAS: No! I forbid you to send a thank you card. *(Bridget turns to Loras again.)*

BRIDGET: Then I'll send a Christmas card.

LORAS: I forbid you from *all* card sending. The postage on a card is worth more than this piece of debris.

BRIDGET: How's it going to look if we don't acknowledge their gift?

LORAS: I don't care how it looks. They're half a world away. They don't know anyone we know. It's not like they're going to tell all our friends that we failed to say thank you for their lump of indistinguishable rubbish!

BRIDGET: Fine. No card. I'll send them a Fabergé egg.

LORAS: Are you out of your mind, woman?

BRIDGET: No, I think you're out of your mind for thinking you can tell me what to do. If I want to send them a card, I will send them a card.

LORAS: Fine! Send them a card, then.

BRIDGET: What? For that piece of crap? *(Bridget turns from Loras, smiling slyly.)*

LORAS: I don't want to send them a card. *You're* the one who wants to send them a card. *(Beat.)* You do this...

BRIDGET: Do what?

LORAS: You do this— this...nonsense all the time. You play these little verbal games to deliberately get under my skin. I feel like I'm

THE REGIFTERS

serenely driving my car down the freeway, and then you reach over and throw it into reverse.

BRIDGET: I don't know what you're talking about.

LORAS: Oh, yes, you do. Don't play innocent with me. You intentionally do or say things to frustrate me, and then you pretend like you haven't a clue as to what you've done.

BRIDGET: Give me an example.

LORAS: Well, I can't think of anything right now, but—

BRIDGET: I do this "all the time," but you can't think of one example?
Hmm.

LORAS: Don't "Hmm" me. I'll think of something.

BRIDGET: If you say so.

LORAS: Yes, I say so.

Loras forces a sarcastic smile at Bridget, then walks to the window and stares out. Crossfade to...

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

The living room of Tom and Mary Mulligan. An easel supports a large easel pad. Mary sits on the couch. Tom approaches, carrying two drinks.

TOM: Here's your Christmas cocktail. *(Mary takes a sip.)*

MARY: Ooh. What's in it?

TOM: Jack Daniel's, Jim Beam, and Johnnie Walker whiskey.

MARY: And you call this...?

TOM: Three Wise Men.

MARY: But, of course.

TOM: The perfect accompaniment to this beautiful view. *(Tom gestures to the window.)* Look at those Christmas lights.

MARY: Just beautiful...

TOM: Those Murphys really know how to set up a display, don't they?

MARY: It must have taken them hours.

TOM: Two days in the freezing cold. Idiots...

MARY: Evelyn asked me if we were going to put up lights this year.

TOM: Ha!

MARY: I told her, why would we put up lights, when we can look out our window and see yours? I told her if they wanted, Ken could put lights on our house so they would have something to look at, too. *(Beat.)*

TOM: Well, I convinced everyone down at the office not to exchange gifts this year.

MARY: How did you get them to do that?

TOM: It was easy. They're accountants. I broke it down into financial terms. Everyone spends more money than they want, and no one gets anything they like.

MARY: You should have done it years ago.

TOM: What? And miss out on the Mickey Mouse shoehorn I got last year? *(Beat.)*

MARY: You know what I like best about Christmas?

TOM: What?

MARY: Waiting till the last minute to send out Christmas cards.

TOM: Why the last minute?

MARY: Because by that time, everyone else has sent out their cards. Then when the people who didn't send us a card get ours, they have no time to send one before Christmas. So they either send it late, and feel foolish, or don't send one at all, and feel guilty.

TOM: Well, that isn't exactly the spirit of the season— *(They clink glasses.)*—but I like it. *(They drink.)*

MARY: The spirit of the season...Christmas is a hodgepodge of pagan and Christian beliefs so muddled by time and by leaders pushing their own agendas that no one even knows what the spirit of the season is anymore.

TOM: Hey, you're preaching to the choir here.

MARY: Santa Claus, Jesus' birth, the Winter solstice, St. Nicholas— It's all just a convenient excuse to accumulate more stuff.

TOM: I like stuff.

MARY: I like stuff, too. *(Tom holds up his glass. Mary clinks hers to it. Tom drinks.)* But let's be honest about it. Every decision that is made in society today is made on the basis of money.

TOM: I like money.

THE REGIFTERS

MARY: I like money, too. *(Tom clinks his glass with Mary's, and drinks.)* That's not the point.

TOM: What's the point, if it's not money?

MARY: Look across the street.

TOM: Across the street... *(Tom raises his glass to clink with Mary's. Mary scowls at him. He shrinks, then shrugs and drinks.)*

MARY: You've got Santa Claus standing next to baby Jesus. What sense does that make? Do people even think about what Christmas means? It's all just a big excuse to sell stuff.

TOM: And?

MARY: *(Struggling.)* And...I...need more stuff.

TOM: That's my girl. *(Tom clinks glasses with a reluctant Mary, and drinks.)*

MARY: Yeah, well...you want another drink? *(Mary gets up and moves to the bar.)*

TOM: I'm good...are we done with all our gift giving?

MARY: Well, let's look at the chart. *(Mary walks to the easel and flips over the page, exposing a chart of gifts received and given.)* The Cunninghams gave us a gift this year. I wasn't expecting that.

TOM: What did they give us?

MARY: A ham.

TOM: A ham?

MARY: Yeah, a ham.

TOM: What's with that? Did they think that that's clever? "Hey, our name is Cunningham and we're giving away hams. Isn't that cunning? Get it? Cunning? Ham? Cunningham?"

MARY: *(Calm.)* I don't know what they were thinking.

TOM: Who gives canned meat for Christmas?

MARY: It's better than a fruitcake.

TOM: They ARE fruitcakes if they think they're getting something good from us.

MARY: We never give anything good, anyway.

TOM: At least a fruitcake requires some effort to make. But a ham?

MARY: Nobody makes fruitcakes anymore. They buy 'em. It's as easy as buying...a canned ham.

TOM: What's our retaliatory gift?

MARY: We don't have one.

TOM: We always have a gift on standby in case we get an unexpected present.

MARY: We used it on Loras and Bridget Henshaw.

TOM: (*Looking at chart.*) But they haven't given us a gift.

MARY: Well, not yet, but they did last year. So, I went preemptive this year and gave them the retaliatory gift we've been sitting on for years now.

TOM: What was it again?

MARY: Assorted cheese basket.

TOM: Eeow. That cheese has gotta be bad by now.

MARY: Your point?

TOM: What if they try to eat it?

MARY: Nobody eats those things. They're for show. I thought you would be happy to be rid of it.

TOM: I am. But now we have to buy another retaliatory gift.

MARY: I think we still have that bottle of wine you swiped from your office party. I'll give them that.

TOM: But that's a good gift. You can't give a good gift when they gave us a bad one. (*Aside.*) I can see I need to write these rules down...

MARY: Well, what do you want me to do then?

TOM: Can't you make something?

MARY: I'm making myself another drink. Now drop it.

Mary fixes herself another drink. Crossfade to...

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

The heavily Christmas decorated living room of Jeff and Lauren Cunningham. Mrs. Cunningham, Jeff's hypocritical, hypercritical mother, is staring out the picture window. Jeff enters the house.

JEFF: How's that, Mom?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: No. That's still not right. The lights on that evergreen are all crisscrossed. It looks like illuminated barbed wire. It's all wrong. Didn't you see me waving at you to move them?

THE REGIFTERS

JEFF: Oh. I didn't know you were waving at me. I thought maybe you were having a heart attack or something.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: And you just came in here now?

JEFF: Well, Lauren would have heard you once you hit the floor.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Go fix the lights.

Jeff exits. Lauren, Jeff's neat-freak wife, enters from the kitchen, frantically arranging Christmas decorations as she walks. She rearranges some ornaments on the tree.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: What are you doing, Lauren? I moved those.

LAUREN: That's not where they go.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: They look better where I put them.

LAUREN: In your opinion...

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: The whole tree is crooked. *(Lauren steps back from the tree and looks.)*

LAUREN: Oh, yeah. It is leaning a little to the right.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: No! To the left.

LAUREN: From where I'm standing, it's leaning to the right.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: You're confused by the cathedral ceiling. Come over here and look. It's leaning to the left.

Lauren walks to where Mrs. Cunningham is standing.

LAUREN: It's leaning right.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Maybe you should go get your glasses.

LAUREN: I don't wear glasses. You know that. The tree is leaning to the right, and I will have Jeff fix it when he comes in.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Suit yourself. If you feel it's proper to have a crooked Christmas tree, far be it from me to say anything. If it were my house, I wouldn't be caught dead with a crooked Christmas tree. It's an insult to the baby Jesus.

LAUREN: An insult to baby Jesus? How is a leaning Christmas tree an insult to baby Jesus?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Despite what you may believe about Santa Claus and presents and sleigh rides, the baby Jesus is the reason for the season.

LAUREN: And?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: And Jesus died for your sins, so I think the least you can do is put up a straight Christmas tree.

LAUREN: That doesn't make any sense.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Maybe not to you, it doesn't. But it does to me...and the baby Jesus. *(Mrs. Cunningham picks up her teacup from the coffee table.)* Have you even seen the inside of a church since your wedding?

LAUREN: What does that have to do with anything?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: It has everything to do with everything. You may have turned my son away from his Christian roots, but you're not going to pull the wool over my eyes.

LAUREN: I am every bit as Christian as you claim to be. Do you forget that we've taken *you* into our home? I mean, what could be more of a Christian act than that?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Oh, is that it? You want me to leave? You want to put a helpless old lady out into the cold on Christmas Eve? *(Lauren pauses, staring off into space, smiling.)* Why are you taking so long to answer? *(Lauren snaps out of her trance.)*

LAUREN: Of course I don't want you to leave— *(Aside.)* —tonight. *(To Mrs. Cunningham.)* I just want you to respect me, and to respect our marriage and our home. OUR home.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Fine.

LAUREN: Fine. *(The two stand there, silently miffed. Jeff reenters.)*

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Jeffrey, does it look to you like the tree is leaning?

LAUREN: Yeah, Jeff, does it?

Jeff sees that each of the women has her head subtly leaning to her favored side. He looks at the tree, looks at his mother, at his wife. Both grow more emphatic. Jeff subtly jerks his head back and forth, confused.

JEFF: Yeah...yeah...

LAUREN: Well, which is it?!

THE REGIFTERS

JEFF: I think it's leaning a little to the...rear. (*Mrs. Cunningham and Lauren turn away in disgust. Mrs. Cunningham looks out the picture window.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Jeff, I've noticed your lawn display has a snowman and a Santa Claus. Do you really think that that's appropriate?

JEFF: It's Christmas, Mom.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: There's no nativity scene.

JEFF: I'm aware of that.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: How can you have that other stuff and not have a nativity scene? It's practically blasphemous.

JEFF: We had a nativity scene last year, but somebody stole the baby Jesus.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Stole the baby Jesus? What kind of a sick person would steal the baby Jesus?

JEFF: I don't know, Mom. A kidnapper...?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: That's a sin. It has to be. I just don't know if it would be a venial or mortal one.

JEFF: I don't know, either, Mom.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: I hope whoever did that rots in hell.

JEFF: I'm sure baby Jesus has it under control.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: I'm going to say a prayer right now for Jesus to punish them.

JEFF: That's great, Mom. Why don't you go pray for a smiting while I straighten the tree? (*Jeff moves to the tree and adjusts it.*)

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: I think I will. And don't think I don't notice your snotty attitude.

JEFF: Snotty?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: I don't know what you two are thinking, but you can't just do whatever you want in this world and expect to get away with it. Jesus is watching. And he's taking notes.

Mrs. Cunningham storms offstage. Jeff and Lauren look after her.

JEFF: Is it me, or does Mom's Jesus seem a lot like Santa Claus?

LAUREN: Would it ever occur to you to stick up for me once?

JEFF: Look, if it's something that really matters, you know I'll—

LAUREN: Your mother is constantly criticizing me, and you either agree with her or you just let her talk. Just once I'd like you to stick up for me.

JEFF: You're talking about the tree? I wasn't about to get in the middle of that.

LAUREN: So you thought it was leaning?

JEFF: Well, yeah, but—

LAUREN: Which way?

JEFF: To the right.

LAUREN: Well, why didn't you say something? I'm standing here arguing with your mother for five minutes, and then I get no support from you.

JEFF: I didn't know which way you thought it was leaning.

LAUREN: Okay—always assume that I have come down on the side of reality, and your mother holds the insane position.

JEFF: I don't like being in the position of choosing between the two of you.

LAUREN: No, no, no. I'm not asking you to do that. I'm asking you to tell the truth. To be honest and tell the truth, that's all.

JEFF: Look, I know Mom can be a little hard to deal with at times—

LAUREN: Jeff, your mother is craaaazy. I agreed to have her live with us because she's your mother and her husband had just died, but she's craaaazy.

JEFF: She's a little over-the-top sometimes—

LAUREN: No, Jeff, she's craazy. Really, really craazy. I'm not being hyperbolic here—like she usually is—I really mean it. She's crazy, and mean, too. When she's done knitting, she plunges her needles into a doll she calls "Lauren." She tells me I can't cook and refuses to eat what I make, then eats all the leftovers. She folds the napkins into little crosses. She follows me around the house, criticizing everything I do, and if something goes wrong, she tells me that Jesus is punishing me for my sinful ways. I really—I can't take her anymore.

JEFF: What do you want me to do? I can't just—

Jeff walks to the table and takes a mint out of a candy dish.

THE REGIFTERS

LAUREN: Don't touch that!

JEFF: What?

LAUREN: Do you know how long it took me to arrange those mints?

JEFF: Arrange the mints?

LAUREN: We're having company tomorrow and I want everything to look nice.

JEFF: You arranged the mints?

LAUREN: Yes, I arranged the mints. And I ironed the tree skirt and measured the distance between the stockings to make sure they're even, if you must know.

JEFF: Okay. Who's craazy?

LAUREN: That's not funny.

Crossfade to...

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

The Henshaw living room. Loras stares out the window.

LORAS: Well, it looks like we'll have a white Christmas after all.

BRIDGET: Oh?

LORAS: We could see up to seven inches tonight.

BRIDGET: It's been awhile since I've seen anything close to that...

LORAS: What are you talking about? Last week it snowed—
(*Realizing.*) There. Right there! That's exactly what I'm talking about.

BRIDGET: What?

LORAS: Your thinly veiled insult.

BRIDGET: I was talking about snowfall.

LORAS: You were not. You were insulting my...manhood.

BRIDGET: You're imagining things, my little pine needle.

LORAS: (*Pointing; aghast.*) Again!

BRIDGET: I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about.

LORAS: The subtle little jabs, the insults—why don't you just put your hostility on the table?

BRIDGET: I'd like to, but your shoeshine box is in the way.

LORAS: OUR shoeshine box, sweetheart.

BRIDGET: Shouldn't you be reading the paper? (*Loras huffs, then returns to the sofa and resumes reading the paper. Bridget studies the gift. Beat.*)

BRIDGET: Maybe it's a nutcracker.

LORAS: Don't be ridiculous.

BRIDGET: Why is everything I say ridiculous, and everything you say brilliant?

LORAS: There are no moving parts. How could it possibly be a nutcracker?

BRIDGET: You can't even remember that someone lived with us for five months THIS YEAR! How is *that* brilliant?

LORAS: (*Ignoring her.*) A doorstep is more like it. It's drafty in Germany.

BRIDGET: It's four o'clock on a Saturday, and you're wearing a suit. How's that for ridiculous?

LORAS: It's perfectly logical that I wear what I feel comfortable in.

BRIDGET: A suit. You feel comfortable in a suit?

LORAS: Yes. I like how it makes me appear. I care about how I look.

BRIDGET: And I don't? Is that it?

LORAS: No. That's not what I'm saying.

BRIDGET: You don't think I look good?

LORAS: You look fine.

BRIDGET: You don't even look at me anymore.

LORAS: That's nonsense. Of course I look at you.

Bridget stands behind the couch and covers Loras's eyes with her hands. Loras puts down the paper.

BRIDGET: All right. What am I wearing?

LORAS: Oh, this is ridic—

BRIDGET: Answer the question.

LORAS: (*Nervous.*) You're wearing...your clothes.

BRIDGET: Which clothes?

LORAS: A blue and white dress.

BRIDGET: A blue and white dress?

LORAS: You know...the one you wore to the club last weekend. The one that's a little snug around your...body.

THE REGIFTERS

Bridget removes her hands from Loras's eyes.

BRIDGET: What?!

LORAS: What what?

BRIDGET: Snug around my body? You think I look fat in that dress?

LORAS: (*Squirming.*) I wouldn't say "fat"...

BRIDGET: No, of course, you wouldn't.

LORAS: ...a little...man-ish, maybe, but not—

BRIDGET: You think I look like a fat...man?!

LORAS: ...Not all the time.

BRIDGET: Oh, you really know how to sweet-talk a lady.

LORAS: It's just that sometimes you wear clothes that are not exactly...flattering to your figure.

BRIDGET: My fat, manly figure... (*Bridget walks away. Loras pursues.*)

LORAS: No. I mean—if you wear—if you cover up your...slim...girlish figure, then you...can't really tell what you've got there. (*The gift catches Loras's eye, and he rushes to it.*) Like this gift...you can't really tell what it is, so, nobody would want it.

BRIDGET: So now you're saying that nobody would want me? (*Beat. Loras looks a little sick.*)

LORAS: ...I was talking about the gift...

BRIDGET: Uh-huh...

Bridget walks away again.

LORAS: So...are we going to come to some sort of consensus on what this thing is?

BRIDGET: Do we need to?

LORAS: Well, if we figure out what it is, we'll have a better idea what to do with it.

BRIDGET: What difference does it make? Whatever I say, you scoff at. You don't want a consensus; as usual, you just want to make me wrong.

LORAS: It's not a nutcracker.

BRIDGET: What do you know?

LORAS: Listen, Bridget, I've had a little more experience in worldly affairs. Believe me, you're wrong.

BRIDGET: Oh, worldly affairs, huh? You think because I don't sit around an office all day slapping my buddies on the back for a job well done, that I'm stupid? That I don't know that the springbok antelope is the national animal of South Africa and its likeness appears on the back of Krugerrands?

LORAS: (*Stunned.*) The national animal? I didn't know— (*Bridget moves to the gift.*)

BRIDGET: And by the way, Fabergé is Russian, not French.

LORAS: Really? Well—

BRIDGET: It's a nutcracker!

LORAS: Impossible!

BRIDGET: You're impossible!

LORAS: Nevertheless—

BRIDGET: I say it is.

LORAS: Isn't.

BRIDGET: Is!

LORAS: Isn't! (*Bridget grabs a walnut, places it on the table, and slams the gift down on it, sending shards of walnut everywhere. She stares at Loras. Beat.*) Well, that solves that puzzle.

BRIDGET: (*Sighs.*) Look at us, Loras. We sit here night after night sniping at each other, pretending everything is okay.

LORAS: Everything is okay. All couples fight from time to time. You're overreacting.

BRIDGET: I AM NOT OVERREACTING! Everything is not okay. We live in the same house, but—this house is filled with— (*Bridget picks up a knickknack.*) —"stuff." Cold, miserable stuff that we think makes us happy but inside we're—Christmas is just another day to us!

LORAS: We could sing carols...?

BRIDGET: I give up.

LORAS: Bridget, so we don't have a perfect marriage. We're better off than most, and we're better than most. I feel that we're on the verge of turning the corner here.

BRIDGET: (*Sighs.*) You're talking financially?

THE REGIFTERS

LORAS: Yes. But once we're on our way financially, everything else will fall into place. What's the number one thing couples fight about?

BRIDGET: Their children?

LORAS: No.

BRIDGET: Their sex lives?

LORAS: No.

BRIDGET: Of course not. How can you fight about something that doesn't exist?

LORAS: I'm going to ignore that one for now...money. Couples fight about money. Believe me, my sweet dewdrop, things will get better soon.

BRIDGET: Are you sure?

LORAS: I'm sure. And to get things started, tomorrow morning, I will serve you Christmas breakfast in bed.

BRIDGET: Really?

LORAS: Yes, I'll make you a big plate of scrambled Fabergé eggs.

They both laugh.

BRIDGET: So, what are we going to do with this..."thing"?

LORAS: Let's give it to the Mulligans. They'll absolutely hate it.

BRIDGET: Are you sure you want to do that? I mean, the Mulligans gave us a wonderfully inedible basket of expired cheese.

LORAS: I'm sure they consider it "properly aged." Last year they gave us a petrified loaf of pumpkin bread.

BRIDGET: Now *that* was a doorstep.

LORAS: Let's drop it off in person. I want to see the look on Tom's face, the skinflint. Surely, he'll appreciate the fine craftsmanship, the attention to detail—

BRIDGET: The utter uselessness...

LORAS: All right, then. You wondered if we should celebrate Christmas. Well, wonder no more. This should put some joy into the season.

BRIDGET: Ho, ho, ho...

Crossfade to...

ACT ONE, SCENE 5

The Mulligan living room. Mary makes herself a drink.

MARY: Tommy called today.

TOM: Oh, yeah? How's our perpetual grad student doing? Don't tell me he's going for his doctorate. We'll have to tap into our retirement accounts pretty soon. Is he coming home for Christmas day at least?

MARY: No. He says that he would if we really celebrated it.

TOM: What does that mean? We celebrate Christmas. Didn't we celebrate last year, when we spent less than a hundred dollars on gifts, and we took in nearly two-fifty when we sold the stuff people gave us on eBay?

MARY: I don't think he quite looks at it in those terms.

TOM: Well, he oughta'.

MARY: Apparently he's been talking to his sisters, and they all still think it would be great if we renewed our wedding vows.

TOM: Renew our—? And who's going to pay for that little shindig? Forget it. There's no reason for it. I stand by the vows I made the first time.

MARY: I told him...

TOM: I don't know what these kids think. They're all full of ideas, as long as dear old dad is paying for 'em. That was our mistake, I guess. We didn't do a good enough job teaching them the value of money. They have no idea what's really important in life.

Mary joins Tom on the couch.

MARY: I told him we weren't interested. If we wanted to participate in meaningless gestures we'd...put up a Christmas tree.

TOM: Exactly. If he wants all that sentimentality, he can come sit here and look out the window like the rest of us. *(Beat.)*

MARY: Ya' know, sometimes I think it might be nice to give each other presents.

TOM: Now, don't tell me you're going soft on me.

MARY: It could be nice.

THE REGIFTERS

TOM: Anything I want, I can buy for myself. If you buy something for me, it's usually the wrong thing anyway. And then I have to waste time and gas driving back to the store to return it. It's just so much easier to get what we want ourselves.

MARY: Yeah, I know. But, still...

TOM: Well, why don't we just renew our vows then, and have a big party?

MARY: Oh, no. Not me. We haven't been to church in years. How phony would that be? Besides, our marriage—

TOM: What, are you unhappy? What's wrong with our marriage?

The doorbell rings. Mary turns the easel pad back over to the blank first page.

MARY: Nothing...much. I just don't think we really need to go through all that pomp and ceremony, when all we really need is a— *(Mary opens the door to see the smiling faces of Loras and Bridget.)* Merry Christmas!

LORAS/BRIDGET: Merry Christmas!

MARY: Look, honey, it's the Henshaws. *(Mary waves them in. They enter. Tom does not react.)* And they brought us a gift.

Tom springs to his feet and rushes to the Henshaws.

TOM: Well, come in. Come in. Loras... *(Tom shakes hands with Loras, kisses Bridget on the cheek.)* Bridget...how are you?

BRIDGET: Couldn't be better.

MARY: Well, you look great. Do you ever feed this lady, Loras? She's as thin as a rail. *(Bridget gives Loras a sarcastic look.)*

LORAS: Any thinner and there'd be nothing left. *(Loras forces a laugh, looks at Bridget as his smile quickly fades.)*

TOM: Well, take your coats off. Stay awhile. Can I get you a drink? We have water, and ice water and—

LORAS: Oh, no. We really must be going.

MARY: Getting ready for midnight mass, are you?

BRIDGET: Us? No. We—

LORAS: We avoid church religiously. *(Forces a laugh.)* We just wanted to wish you a merry Christmas in person and drop off a little something.

TOM: Yes, of course. The present.

MARY: Did you like the cheese basket?

BRIDGET: Oh, yes. It's almost...too pretty to eat. I just find myself...looking at it. We've got it in the car right now.

MARY: Wonderful.

TOM: Well, let's see what we've got here. *(Tom places the gift on the table and opens the box. He takes out the gift and turns it in his hands.)* Oh, hey! Would you look at that!

MARY: Isn't that...something?

TOM: Wow. I'm...speechless. I am...without speech. I, uh—

MARY: Thank you. Thanks so much. It's really...something.

BRIDGET: When I first saw it, I turned to Loras and I said, "Tom and Mary."

LORAS: I was thinking the exact same thing.

TOM: Really? Because when I look at this—

MARY: Thanks, again. It was really...thoughtful of you.

TOM: Loras? This—

LORAS: Well, gotta run. Merry Christmas, again.

MARY: Yes, merry Christmas to you, too. Take care now. *(The Henshaws exit. Tom and Mary return to the gift, lifting it, turning it, looking under it.)*

TOM: What—?

MARY: The heck if I know.

TOM: This is payback.

MARY: What do you mean?

TOM: They must have tried the cheese.

MARY: I'll write it on the board if you tell me what it is. *(Mary flips the easel pad to the gift chart.)*

TOM: Well, in my opinion, it is...an astrolabe.

MARY: An astrolabe? What's an astrolabe? I bet you just made that up.

TOM: Don't worry. I know what an astrolabe is.

MARY: Well?

TOM: It's an astronomical computer, of sorts.

THE REGIFTERS

MARY: This? This is a computer?

TOM: It could be. An old one. It's used to tell your position by looking at the stars.

MARY: Why would they give us that?

TOM: We gave them rotten cheese!

MARY: Good point. *(Beat.)* Could it be a squirrel trap?

TOM: Squirrels are too smart for this. A squirrel would have to really want to get caught to be trapped by this thing.

MARY: Not all squirrels are as smart as the one you saw waterskiing on the news, ya' know.

TOM: Maybe it's a sextant.

MARY: It's too small. Who could have sex in there?...Squirrels, maybe...

TOM: No, *sextant*. Ya' know, the thing seamen use to—

MARY: Save your smut talk for your poker buddies.

TOM: I mean mariners! Get your mind out of the gutter.

MARY: Can we focus on the task at hand, please? *(Tom studies the gift.)*

TOM: Okay. Now, there's no plug on it, or electronic gadgetry of any kind.

MARY: There are no moving parts. *(Tom and Mary stare at the gift for several seconds in silence.)*

TOM: Well, hello eBay.

MARY: We can't sell it on eBay.

TOM: Why not?

MARY: We can't categorize it. We can't describe it.

TOM: "An indescribable treasure."

MARY: Oh, come on...

TOM: It's, uhhhh, "Miscellaneous."

MARY: It won't sell.

TOM: It looks well made. *(Mary gestures like it's a headline.)*

MARY: "Well-made miscellaneous."

TOM: All right. Let's think about this. Loras and Bridget gave this to us. What does that mean? We gave them stinky cheese.

MARY: Stinky ROTTEN cheese.

TOM: Stinky rotten cheese. What would they give us in return? It would have to be cheap.

MARY: Which is perfect for you.

TOM: Hey, the Henshaws gave us this. Why are you taking cheap shots at me?

MARY: Because you're cheap.

TOM: I am not cheap. I may be considered frugal by some...

MARY: Oh, come on, Tom. Are you forgetting who you're talking to? I've been with you since we were teenagers. You're cheap. Get over it.

TOM: No. Hang on a minute. I resent that. I'm careful with money, sure, but—

MARY: Careful? Ha! You pinch pennies so hard Lincoln cries.

TOM: Name one cheap thing I've ever done. *(Mary counts on her fingers.)*

MARY: You used to iron paper towels so you could reuse them—

TOM: That was in college. I was broke then.

MARY: —You stuff your pockets with ketchup packets and napkins at McDonalds so we won't have to buy any for home. The Henshaws come here, and you offer them water, or ice water. You go through the lost and found at work and you take anything that fits you. You make long distance personal phone calls from the office of the guy who just quit. You write the wrong room number on hotel bar tabs. You pick the neighbor's flowers and give them to me as if you bought them. And when we were dating, you broke up with me right before my birthday and got back together with me right after Christmas so you wouldn't have to buy me any presents. *(Beat.)*

TOM: Okay. But besides that...

MARY: *(Sarcastic.)* Besides that? I can't think of a thing. *(Tom waggles his finger at Mary.)*

TOM: Ya' see? And need I add that you have benefited immensely from my attention to detail over the years?

MARY: No, you need not mention it. In fact, if you do mention it again, I'm gonna take that finger of yours and shove it up your astrolabe.

TOM: *(Pointing.)* So, you admit it's an astrolabe?

MARY: You are insufferable!

THE REGIFTERS

Mary grabs Tom's finger, twists his arm and wrestles him onto the couch.

TOM: Get offa' me! Are you crazy? *(Mary has Tom pinned face down on the couch, with his arm twisted behind him.)*

MARY: Yes. Yes, I am. *I'm* crazy. But you're cheap!

TOM: Frugal!

MARY: Cheap! Say it.

TOM: No.

MARY: Say you're cheap.

TOM: You're gonna break my arm!

MARY: Say it!

TOM: All right! I'm cheap. *(Mary gets off of Tom.)*

MARY: Now, was that so hard?

TOM: You're a lunatic. You know that?

MARY: Oh, relax, would you?

TOM: And this is the woman the kids want me to renew my vows with... I think my shoulder is dislocated.

MARY: Don't be such a sissy.

TOM: We get a strange gift, and the next thing I know, Xena the Warrior Princess is attacking me. Sane people don't do this.

MARY: I warned you about pointing.

TOM: I was pointing at the gift.

MARY: Ah, yes. Back where we started. *(Mary looks at the easel pad.)* Well, Cunninghams. Your "cunning ham" has merited the well-made miscellaneous gift from the Mulligans, in a stunning display of swift and ruthless regifting. *(Mary writes on the easel pad at the cross-section of "Cunninghams" and "Gift Given": "The gift.")*

TOM: You are ruthless. You are completely without ruth. I'm a little scared...and a little turned on...

Crossfade to...

ACT ONE, SCENE 6

The Cunningham living room. Lauren adjusts the decorations. Jeff works on the tree. Mrs. Cunningham enters.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Is that what you're wearing?

LAUREN: What do you mean, is this what I'm wearing? Do you see these clothes on me?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Yes.

LAUREN: Then this is what I'm wearing.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: I just thought you were wearing that while you cleaned up, and would change into something a little decent for dinner.

LAUREN: What's wrong with what I'm wearing?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Nothing...if you're doing some sort of mortification penance...which maybe you should.

LAUREN: There's nothing wrong with this outfit.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: If you say so, dear.

LAUREN: Jeff— *(Jeff looks over to the glares of Lauren and Mrs. Cunningham and tries to hide behind the tree.)* Jeff! *(Jeff steps out from behind the tree.)*

JEFF: Yes?

LAUREN: Is there anything wrong with these clothes?

JEFF: *(Cautiously.)* No.

Lauren turns, walks past Mrs. Cunningham, and makes a scoffing, 'Hmph' sound. Mrs. Cunningham makes a 'Hmph' sound, then glares at Jeff. Lauren, still looking at Mrs. Cunningham, stubs her toe on a table.

LAUREN: Ow! *(Mrs. Cunningham points at the table, then at Lauren, eyes wide, and speaks in an I-told-you-so, "Gotcha" inflection.)*

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Jesus... *(Lauren sighs.)*

LAUREN: Jesus did not make me stub my toe.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Oh?

LAUREN: Nor does Jesus smite the stealers of lawn ornaments because you prayed to him to do so.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: That's what you think. Maybe the stealer wasn't the only one I asked Jesus to smite. *Hmph. (Lauren gasps.)*

JEFF: Mom, that's uncalled for.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: All right. All right. Don't mind me. You've made me painfully aware that I'm just a guest here.

Mrs. Cunningham snuffles, exits. Lauren glares at Jeff.

JEFF: I stuck up for you...

LAUREN: Your mother prays for my smiting.

JEFF: She doesn't mean it.

LAUREN: Smiting!

JEFF: She's had a hard time since her husband died...

LAUREN: It's the third one she's buried! I think they're dying on purpose.

JEFF: Lauren...she's still grieving.

LAUREN: Oh, well, excuse me, but just because you lose your husband doesn't mean you have to invoke the wrath of the Lord on your daughter-in-law's head.

JEFF: I know. She's not—

LAUREN: Smiting! Who calls for a smiting anymore? That's soooo...Old Testament.

JEFF: She says things that—

LAUREN: And she doesn't even have it right. Jesus doesn't smite. God smites. And He does it when He feels like it, not when some crazy old lady asks him to. And He hasn't felt like it in a long time. There have been no recorded smitings in thousands of years.

JEFF: Clearly, she was wrong to call for your smiting—

LAUREN: My god is a loving god. That angry god, hell and damnation, fire and brimstone stuff is not for me...dammit. *(Lauren turns away. Jeff lays his hands on her shoulders, massaging them.)*

JEFF: Okay. I get it...I get it. All I'm asking is that you please *make an effort* to see her as a person. Get to know her a little better. Okay?

LAUREN: Okay. *(Jeff kisses Lauren's neck.)*

JEFF: All right?

LAUREN: All right. *(Jeff turns Lauren to him.)*

JEFF: Can you do that for me?

LAUREN: I SAID ALL RIGHT, OKAY?! *(Lauren pulls away, angry.)*

JEFF: Great... *(Lauren swats a decoration off the table. It makes a loud sound as it hits the floor.)*

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: *(Offstage.)* Jesus...!

LAUREN: I DID IT ON PURPOSE!

A knock on the door is heard.

JEFF: Are you okay?

LAUREN: I'm fine. Answer the door.

Jeff steps to the door and opens it. The Mulligans step in. Lauren picks up the decoration.

MARY/TOM: Merry Christmas!

JEFF: Mary, Tom! Merry Christmas. C'mon in. How are you?

TOM: Fine. Fine.

LAUREN: We got your Christmas card...today. Thank you.

MARY: Oh, you're welcome. Yeah, we were cutting it close with getting them out again this year. *(Beat.)* We didn't get your Christmas card.

LAUREN: Oh? I don't know what could have happened...

JEFF: So, what brings you by?

TOM: Well, it's the darndest thing. We thought we had done all our gift giving, but I looked under the tree today and saw that our gift to you had somehow been placed with all the family presents.

LAUREN: I thought you guys didn't give each other presents?

MARY: We don't.

TOM: That's what I'm saying. It was sitting there all by itself under the tree, and I thought, "That's not right."—

LAUREN: I thought you don't put up a tree?

MARY: We don't.

TOM: Tree? No. No tree. But where the tree would be if we had a tree.

LAUREN: I see.

THE REGIFTERS

TOM: Anyway, there it was, and here we are. So, merry Christmas.

JEFF: Well, thank you.

MARY: How are things working out with your mother moving in?

JEFF: We've been blessed to have her here. *(Lauren forces a tight smile.)*

LAUREN: Yes, "blessed"...

TOM: Hey, thanks for the ham.

JEFF: Oh, don't mention it.

TOM: It was really...cunning of you. *(Mary elbows Tom.)*

LAUREN: Did you eat it already?

TOM: No. We've got it chilling in the car. But soon... *(Mrs. Cunningham reenters.)*

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Oh, I thought I heard some friendly voices!

TOM: How are you, Mrs. Cunningham? *(Mrs. Cunningham gives Tom a hug.)*

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Tom Mulligan, and his beautiful wife, Millie—

MARY: Mary.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: How are you? I haven't seen you in ages.

Mrs. Cunningham picks up a plate of cookies and offers them to Tom and Mary. Tom takes a cookie, bites it, then takes a handful of cookies and stuffs them in his pocket as the conversation continues.

TOM: We're good, thanks. Everything is great.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Well, what brings you out on Christmas Eve?

TOM: We just stopped by to say merry Christmas and to bring over this gift.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Oh, isn't that nice? Jeffrey, what did you give them? Not one of those free hams you got from work, I hope. *(To Tom and Mary.)* Those things are so salty, they'll give you the gout just smelling 'em.

JEFF: We gave them a ham, Mom.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Oh. Well, I'm sure we just had a bad one. So, what's in the box?

JEFF: I don't know.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Well, open it up, honey. I'm sure Tom and Margie—

MARY: Mary.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: —want to see your faces when you open it.

MARY: We sure do. *(Jeff opens the box.)*

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: You know, a lady down at my church makes the cutest ceramic rosaries. I'd like you to have one. *(Mrs. Cunningham pulls out a rosary and gives it to Tom.)*

MARY: Oh, that's perfect for us. *(Tom looks at it closely.)*

TOM: It says "Made in China"...and it's plastic.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: What?! She told me she made those herself. Well. I guess I have to pray for more smiting... *(Jeff lifts the gift out of the box.)*

JEFF: Here we go...

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Well, would you look at that...

All stare at the gift in silence. Beat.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: What the devil is it?

JEFF: Mom!

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Well, I'm just saying— Tom and Maggie—

MARY: Mary.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: —went to all the trouble of getting you a gift; you should know what they gave you. I mean, I'm not familiar with all the new-fangled contraptions that you kids use nowadays, so maybe it's just me, but—

MARY: Well, we better be going.

Tom grabs a handful of the carefully arranged mints and stuffs them in his pocket.

TOM: Yeah, we gotta run.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Well, okay then. So long, Tom, Marcy...

MARY: It's Mary. Like in "Merry Christmas."

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Oh, I'm sorry, Christy. You take care, now. Bye-bye.

All ad-lib goodbyes. Tom and Mary exit.

THE REGIFTERS

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: You two know what this is?

LAUREN: I have no idea.

JEFF: Got me.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Maybe it's an old-fashioned toaster. The kind you put on top of your wood burning stove.

LAUREN: That would be an...odd present.

JEFF: A towel warmer?

LAUREN: It's too small. And how would you warm it up?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Why, on the wood burning stove, of course.

LAUREN: I don't think so.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: It was a good guess, Jeffy.

LAUREN: *(Sarcastic.)* Yes it was...Jeffy.

JEFF: A potato peeler?

LAUREN: A bookstand? *(Beat.)*

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Oh, good heavens!

LAUREN: What?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: It's not one of those— those “things” that women use when they want to...sin, is it?

LAUREN: What things?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: You know...

LAUREN: No, I don't.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: One of those things that women use, um— instead of a husband. *(Jeff stares at his mother, then at the present. Finally, he realizes what she's talking about.)*

JEFF: *(Embarrassed.)* No, Mom. It's not one of those.

LAUREN: Not even close... *(Jeff and Mrs. Cunningham look at Lauren.)*

LAUREN: Uh, not that I would know anything about them...

JEFF: It's definitely not that, Mom. And the fact that you even know those things exist, really gives me the creeps.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Well, your mother knows about a lot of things that you don't know she knows.

JEFF: Well, please, don't ruin Christmas by telling me about them. It took me two weeks to get over my hysterical blindness when you told me about the birds and the bees.

LAUREN: Well, I'd like to hear about them.

JEFF: Lauren, no!

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: Well, on the farm where I grew up, we had rabbits—

Mrs. Cunningham continues to talk. Jeff grabs two candy canes and puts them in his ears.

JEFF: Stop!

LAUREN: *(Smiling; to Jeff.)* I'm making an effort, sweetie... *(Lights slowly fade.)*

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: —We started with four. But by the end of the summer, we had over a hundred—

JEFF: Don't!

MRS. CUNNINGHAM: So I asked my mother—

JEFF: Baby Jesus, smite me deaf!

Crossfade to...

ACT ONE, SCENE 7

The Henshaw living room. Loras studies the financial section of the paper, as Bridget reads a book. The phone rings.

BRIDGET: I'll get it. *(Loras ignores her. Bridget answers the phone.)* Hello?...Oh, Reinhold! Hello!...Yes, yes. Merry Christmas...yes, we received your gift. That was very nice of you...what's that?...Sure, we know what it is. It's a— *(Bridget covers her mouth and mumbles unintelligibly.)* ...I said it's a— *(Bridget crumples a piece of paper next to the receiver.)* ...Oh, we must have a bad connection. Darn American telecommunications companies...It's a what?...Say that again...uh-huh... *(Beat.)* Oh, it is, is it? Well, we certainly knew that about it the moment we opened it...okay, then...yeah, Fröhliches Weihnachten and, uh, Fahrvergnügen to you, Greta and Christoph, too...okay, goodbye. *(Bridget hangs up the phone. She pauses, in shock.)* That was Reinhold.

LORAS: What?

BRIDGET: That was Reinhold.

THE REGIFTERS

LORAS: What was Reinhold? (*Bridget sits on the edge of the couch.*)

BRIDGET: On the phone...the foreigner.

LORAS: You called Germany?

BRIDGET: Didn't you hear the phone ring? Or me talking for the last five minutes?

LORAS: No.

BRIDGET: Put the paper down.

LORAS: But I was—

BRIDGET: Put the paper down!

Bridget rips the paper out of Loras's hands and throws it to the floor. Loras recoils.

LORAS: All right!

BRIDGET: Reinhold called.

LORAS: What did he say? Did he tell you what that thing was?

BRIDGET: It's a Liebesgeschenk.

LORAS: What?

BRIDGET: A Liebesgeschenk, you idiot.

LORAS: A Liebesgeschenk? Hmmm... What's a Liebesgeschenk?

BRIDGET: He said it's priceless.

Loras jumps to his feet, panic setting in.

LORAS: He said that?

BRIDGET: He said that.

LORAS: Priceless?

BRIDGET: Priceless.

LORAS: The Liebesgeschenk?

BRIDGET: The Liebesgeschenk!

LORAS: Well, what is it?

BRIDGET: He didn't say.

LORAS: He didn't say?

BRIDGET: I just said he didn't say.

LORAS: But we don't know what a Liebesgeschenk is.

BRIDGET: Well, I'll tell you one thing, it's no German shoe polisher!

LORAS: Doorstop...?

BRIDGET: You gave away our Liebesgeschenk.

LORAS: But, I didn't know.

BRIDGET: —our extraordinarily valuable Liebesgeschenk.

LORAS: Did he say extraordinarily valuable?

BRIDGET: No. I'm saying extraordinarily valuable. He said something like "its value is incalculable."

LORAS: Incalculable?

BRIDGET: Incalculable.

LORAS: I'm sure *somebody* could calculate its value. Sotheby's or Christie's, Lloyd's of London—

BRIDGET: Incalculable, you moron! Do you understand you gave away something that is priceless?

LORAS: No. No, I don't.

BRIDGET: Well, you did. You regifted a fortune right out of our hands. (*Beat.*)

LORAS: We can get it back.

BRIDGET: What?

LORAS: We can get it back. We have to. It was a mistake. We didn't know what we were doing. We were temporarily insane from eating rotten cheese. We meant to give them, uh, a basket of fruit.

Bridget stares off into space, considering the scheme.

BRIDGET: Yeah. That's right. A mistake...

LORAS: They won't mind. It's nothing they want.

BRIDGET: We can't tell them what we gave them. Just *pray* they're not using it as a Yule log by now.

LORAS: You know how I feel about prayer...

BRIDGET: Just do it! Let's go. (*Blackout.*)

THE REGIFTERS

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