

## ACT I

*(The setting is a modest condominium living room complete with a couch, coffee table, and easy chair. Upstage left is a door to the kitchen. Upstage right is a decorated Christmas tree with presents under it, and a box of ornaments. Upstage center is a hallway that leads to the bedroom and bathroom [offstage right], and to a den [offstage left]. There's a dining table covered in a tablecloth stage left near the kitchen. On the dining table is a stack of six plates, six cloth napkins with silverware rolled up in them, and six empty water glasses [not set in their places yet]. Also on the dining table is a plate of Rice Krispies bars. Downstage left is a small bar with liquor bottles and glasses on and behind it. Downstage right is the front door. Next to the door are coat hooks.)*

*(CARL, wearing a winter coat and carrying a computer bag, knocks, then enters the front door. No one is in the living room.)*

**CARL.** Hello, anyone home? ... Mom, it's me, your favorite son!

*(MOM enters from the kitchen.)*

**MOM.** *(Excited.)* Oh, is that you, Michael?

**CARL.** *(Corrects her.)* No, it's Carl.

**MOM.** Oh. Well, it's nice to see you, too, dear.

*(Excited, looking around.)*

Is Michael with ya?!

**CARL.** No, it's just me.

**MOM.** Oh. He'll be here, ya know, with his pretty wife.

CARL. Uh-huh. Merry Christmas.

*(He goes to hug her. It's an arm's-length, pat on the shoulders, awkward hug.)*

MOM. Yeah, Merry Christmas.

CARL. *(Smells something bad.)* Mom, what is that smell?

*(He looks at the bottom of his shoes to see if he stepped in anything.)*

MOM. Oh, that's the lutefisk.

*(Pronounced "LEWD-uh-fisk.")*

CARL. *(Not happy.)* Oh, for cryin' in the beer nuts.

*(He sets down the computer bag by the coffee table and takes off his coat.)*

MOM. You don't like cod fish?

CARL. Well, yeah, but not dried cod fish, fermented in *bye*. Who came up with that?

MOM. It's a tradition.

*(CARL hangs up his coat. GRANDMA comes out of the hallway.)*

GRANDMA. Who's that out there, is it Michael?

CARL. No, it's Carl.

GRANDMA. Well, we can't all be Michael.

CARL. Good to see you, too, Grandma. I didn't know you were gonna be here.

MOM. I didn't either.

*(CARL goes to hug GRANDMA.)*

GRANDMA. Not a hugger.

*(Holds her hand up. CARL stops, steps back.)*

CARL. Okay... So, when did you get in?

MOM. She's been here for three weeks.

GRANDMA. I have not. I got in two days ago.

MOM. Seems like three weeks.

CARL. How's Florida?

GRANDMA. *(Not impressed.)* Florida, huh... God's waiting room.

MOM. Can't beat the weather.

GRANDMA. Too many old people.

MOM. Old age isn't so bad when you consider the alternative.

GRANDMA. Two things happen when ya get old. The first thing is your memory goes.

*(They wait for her to say one more. She doesn't.)*

CARL. *(After a few beats.)* Is there another one?

GRANDMA. Another what?

CARL. *(To MOM.)* Is she joking?

MOM. I have no idea.

CARL. *(Moving on.)* So, how long are ya stayin'?

GRANDMA. Oh, a month or two.

MOM. Say what, now?

GRANDMA. There's nothin' left for me in Sun City right now. I've been through all the men.

CARL. "Been through all the men"?

MOM. Do not engage.

GRANDMA. I've gotta wait for the new crop to come in. It's pretty high turnover there, ya know. Like Hotel California, you can check in, but ya can't check out... Unless it's on a gurney.

MOM. Lovely.

GRANDMA. If ya know any available men, let me know. I'll go younger.

CARL. I didn't know you were so prolific.

GRANDMA. During the war, I used to swim out to meet the troop ships during Fleet Week.

MOM. No, ya didn't, Grandma.

GRANDMA. I visualized it.

CARL. And you're still active.

MOM. Let's talk about anything else.

**GRANDMA.** (*Gesturing to her "milk cartons."*) These milk cartons have not expired.

**MOM.** (*Changing the subject. To CARL.*) Can I get you something? We have krum kaka.

(*Pronounced "kroom kabkakah."*)

**CARL.** Ya know, I think I've had enough "kaka" for today.

**GRANDMA.** Crumb cake. You need to get back to your roots.

**MOM.** Would you like some?

**CARL.** I think I'll just start drinkin'.

(*He heads to the bar.*)

**GRANDMA.** Oh, say, would ya take a look at my mole.

(*Lowers her blouse to CARL.*)

**CARL.** (*Looking away.*) Oh, no, see, I'm not the doctor. That's Michael. He's the doctor.

**GRANDMA.** Would ya look at it anyway?

**CARL.** Can I have a few beers, first?

**GRANDMA.** Your dad was a doctor, ya know.

**CARL.** Yeah, I know.

**GRANDMA.** That Michael sure is a chip off the old block.

**CARL.** He's a chip off of *something*.

**MOM.** Carl is a...

(*Thinks.*)

What do you do again, dear?

**CARL.** I'm a writer.

**GRANDMA.** A waiter?

(*Laughs.*)

See what I did, there?

**CARL.** Haven't heard that one before.

(*CARL gets himself a beer.*)

**GRANDMA.** Oh, I got a lot of 'em.

**CARL.** Great. Actually I'm a journalist.

**GRANDMA.** Ya couldn't get a job as a waiter?

(*Laughs, does a verbal "rimshot."*)

Ba dump bump. A two-fer. You're welcome.

**MOM.** Are you still writing for that newspaper?

**CARL.** The *Star Tribune*.

**MOM.** How's that goin' for ya?

**CARL.** Well, newspapers are taking a hit because of the internet, and they've been layin' off people, and I'm afraid I might be next. Which reminds me, I gotta call the office. Sorry about this. It'll just be a minute.

**MOM.** C'mon, Grandma.

(*Gestures to her to go in the kitchen.*)

(*CARL takes out his cell phone and hits speed dial.*)

**MOM** and **GRANDMA** head to the kitchen.)

**GRANDMA.** It's Christmas and he's workin'. Just like Scrooge.

**CARL.** I'm not Scrooge, Grandma.

**GRANDMA.** (*As she disappears into the kitchen, skeptical.*) Uh-huh.

**CARL.** (*Into phone.*) Oh, hey, John, Merry Christmas... Thanks... You called? ...Yeah, I'm at my mom's having a nice family Christma—

(*He laughs, knowing it's not going to be "nice."*)

I'm sorry, I couldn't land it... Sure, what kind of story? ...Christmas with my family? Oh, wow, yeah, I don't think anyone's interested in that story... They are? ... Well, that's sad... Yeah, I just don't know if they'd be okay with that... Yeah, I know I've been in a dry spell, I just need a good hook...

(*Looks toward the kitchen.*)

How about old traditions versus the new. I'll see what I can do. Have a good one... Thanks. See ya.

(*He hangs up.*)

**MOM.** (*Coming out with a plate of tiny wiener appetizers.*) Who was that?

(She sets the plate on the dining table.)

CARL. My editor.

(He takes out his computer.)

MOM. What did he want?

CARL. Oh, he just wants me to write a story.

(He sits on the couch, puts the computer on the coffee table and opens it.)

MOM. Oh, well, that's nice.

(MICHAEL knocks, then enters. Wearing a winter coat with a sport coat and bow tie underneath, and nice slacks.)

MICHAEL. Knock, knock.

MOM. (Excited, she runs to him.) It's Michael!

CARL. The boy wonder.

MOM. (Giving MICHAEL an awkward, arm's-length hug.) Merry Christmas.

MICHAEL. Hey, Mom, Merry Christmas.

(He sees CARL on the couch. Indifferent.)

Carl.

CARL. (Indifferent.) Michael.

MICHAEL. (Indifferent.) How's it goin'?

CARL. (Indifferent.) Good. You?

MICHAEL. (Indifferent.) Good.

(After an awkward moment, they realize they have nothing else to say to each other.)

CARL. Okay, then -

MICHAEL. Yeah.

(Taking his coat off, smells something bad.)

Whoa, it smells like burning tires.

MOM. That's the lutefisk.

MICHAEL. (Not happy.) Oh, for rice cakes.

GRANDMA. (Entering.) Oh, there's Michael. Will you take a look at my mole?

(She lowers her blouse, showing MICHAEL some cleavage.)

MICHAEL. (Gags.) Ohh!

(CARL smiles, then types a few more lines.)

(MICHAEL composes himself.)

Hey, Grandma. I didn't know you were gonna be here. MOM. I didn't either.

GRANDMA. It's your lucky day.

CARL. Where's Jill?

MICHAEL. Oh, she's spending Christmas with her folks.

MOM. I thought she was comin' over here.

MICHAEL. Oh, well, things changed.

(Hangs his coat up.)

GRANDMA. I don't like change.

MOM. That Jill is just the prettiest thing.

(To MICHAEL.)

How did you ever get her to marry you?

CARL. We all wonder that.

MOM. Not the best cook, though.

MICHAEL. Well, she tries.

MOM. When are you two gonna have a baby?

MICHAEL. We're still working on it, Mom.

MOM. Well, it's so good to see you. I hardly ever do, ya know. I mean you only live twenty minutes away and God forbid you come over more than once a year. I mean, I breast fed ya till you were five!

(To GRANDMA.)

Those little teeth were sharp!

MICHAEL. Okay, Mom, I'll come by more often.

MOM. Good.

**MICHAEL.** Things have been a little busy.

(**MICHAEL** sees **CARL** typing.)

What's he writing?

(*He looks over to see.*)

**CARL.** (*Closing the computer.*) Oh, it's just an assignment for work.

**MOM.** You still use that little tape recorder when you come up with ideas for your articles?

**CARL.** Actually, I'm goin' back to using a notepad.

(*He takes out a small notepad and a pen and shows her.*)

**MICHAEL.** Old school.

**MOM.** That's nice.

(**STACY** opens the front door and enters, wearing a winter coat, shirt, slacks, comfortable shoes, and carrying a purse.)

**STACY.** Hey everyone.

(*Everyone ignores her, like she's invisible. She takes her coat off and hangs her purse on a hook. MOM starts setting five plates around the dining table.*)

**GRANDMA.** (*To MICHAEL.*) I just adore your wife, what's-her-name.

**MICHAEL.** Jill.

**GRANDMA.** No, that's not it... It'll come to me. Anyway, she's like a model, without the throwing up or the crack.

**STACY.** Merry Christmas.

(*Hangs her coat up.*)

**MOM.** Carl, when are you gonna get married?

**CARL.** Oh, gosh, umm, yeah, I don't know.

**STACY.** Happy New Year.

**MICHAEL.** How are things with Rita? I thought she might be here.

**CARL.** Oh, well, she's at her folks'.

**GRANDMA.** When is your sister comin'?

**CARL.** She's already here.

**GRANDMA.** Where?

**STACY.** I'm right here.

**GRANDMA.** Oh, yeah. You always were the quiet one.

**MICHAEL.** It's the "youngest child syndrome."

**CARL.** Always the doctor.

**STACY.** (*Going to GRANDMA.*) It's good to see you, Grandma.

(*Goes to hug her.*)

**GRANDMA.** (*Holds her hand up.*) Don't cross the bubble.

**STACY.** (*Stopping.*) Oh. Okay...

(**GRANDMA** holds her hand out to shake. **STACY** shakes her hand.)

I love you.

**GRANDMA.** Whoa, easy! We're not gettin' married.

**STACY.** Okay.

**GRANDMA.** Oh, look at you, Stacy, you have gotten so...

(*Can't think of anything to say.*)

Yes, you have.

**STACY.** Thanks?

**GRANDMA.** Never give up.

**STACY.** (*Uncertain how to take that.*) O-kay.

**MOM.** (*To STACY.*) Hi, hon.

**STACY.** Hi, Mom.

(**MOM** gives **STACY** an awkward, arm's-length hug.)

**MOM.** Where's the baby?!

**STACY.** Oh, she's with the sitter.

**GRANDMA.** Limit her exposure to her crazy family, right?

**STACY.** Exactly.

**GRANDMA.** When do I get to see her?

STACY. Tomorrow morning. She'll be over to open presents.

MOM. She's gotten so big.

GRANDMA. Don't we open presents tonight?

MOM. We're changing things this year.

GRANDMA. Seems like a lot of things are changing around here.

MOM. We might open one or two after dinner.

(MOM starts placing five napkins with silverware rolled up in them by the plates on the dining table.)

STACY. How are you, Grandma?

GRANDMA. I'm good. Your mom told me you got a divorce.

STACY. She did, did she?

GRANDMA. Did he cheat on ya? Your grandfather never cheated on me. I kept garden shears next to the bed.

(After a beat, she continues.)

That's 'cause if he cheated, I would...

(Motions like she's snipping something with shears.)

Snip off his hoo hah -

MICHAEL. We got it, we got it.

STACY. Yeah, actually, I didn't get a divorce.

GRANDMA. Oh, well, where's your husband?

STACY. (To MOM.) You didn't tell Grandma?

MOM. I didn't think we'd ever see her again.

STACY. So, she's hearing it for the first time?

MOM. It's all yours. Good luck.

STACY. There's no husband.

GRANDMA. Did he die?

STACY. (After a beat.) I'm gay.

GRANDMA. (Reacts like a cat coughing up a hairball.) Kah! ...Kah! ...Kah!

(Composing herself.)

But you're so quiet.

STACY. I'm not sure what that has to do with it.

GRANDMA. Well...when did you decide to be gay?

STACY. It's not something you decide.

MICHAEL. It's hereditary, Grandma.

GRANDMA. Hereditary? ...Must be from your dad's side.

STACY. That's what Mom said.

GRANDMA. Okay, wait, so, how did you have your baby?

STACY. Oh, you know, the usual way.

GRANDMA. With a man?

STACY. No, with a turkey baster.

MICHAEL & CARL. (Groaning.) Ohhh.

STACY. Yes, with a man.

GRANDMA. So, you were married.

STACY. No, I had the baby before I realized I was gay.

GRANDMA. With some random guy?

STACY. Well, he wasn't completely random.

GRANDMA. What a delightful Christmas story.

STACY. We were friends. Still are.

GRANDMA. We didn't have gays when I was growin' up. We had men that liked other men. And it was okay, because they were manly men. Manly men with manly desires for other manly men.

MOM. Okay.

GRANDMA. My how things have changed.

(CARL types a few lines.)

STACY. They really haven't, Grandma.

MOM. Carl, are you gonna be writing the whole night?

CARL. (Stops typing.) Sorry, I'll stop.

MOM. (Changing the subject.) Anybody want anything?

STACY. We're talkin' about getting married.

GRANDMA. Oh, how wonderful. Who's the lucky guy?

MOM. I have Rice Krispies bars.

STACY. No, see, I'm gay. We just went over that.  
MOM. And Christmas cookies.

GRANDMA. Well, who would ya marry, then?  
STACY. My partner.

GRANDMA. What's his name?

STACY. No, it's not a he. It's a she.

MOM. I've got a cheese ball.

GRANDMA. So, you'd marry a woman?

STACY. Yeah.

MOM. And crackers.

(GRANDMA starts to hyperventilate, contorting her face, looking like she's having a seizure.)

CARL. Are you okay, Grandma?

GRANDMA. Yeah, I just need a minute to process this whole thing. Excuse me.

(She calmly goes into the kitchen. From the kitchen.)

CRAP!

(She calmly comes out of the kitchen, smiling.)

I think I understand, now. So, what's her name?

STACY. LaKeesha.

MOM. (Holding up the plate of wieners.) Wieners anyone?

GRANDMA. LaKeesha. That's a pretty name.

(Thinks.)

Is she Swedish?

STACY. No.

GRANDMA. Danish?

STACY. No.

GRANDMA. Finnish?

STACY. No.

GRANDMA. Well, is she a N-

ALL. Grandma!

GRANDMA. Norwegian?

STACY. No.

(MOM whispers into GRANDMA's ear.)

Why is she whispering?

GRANDMA. (Re: What MOM told her. Calmly.) Oh, I see... One second.

(She goes into the kitchen.)

MOTHER F-

ALL. GRANDMA!

(GRANDMA calmly comes out of the kitchen.)

GRANDMA. (Smiling.) I'm very happy for you.

STACY. Thank you.

GRANDMA. Is she Lutheran?

STACY. Catholic.

GRANDMA. (Like she's coughing up a hairball, puts her right hand over her heart like it's a heart attack, bends over.) Kah! ...Kah! ...Kah!

CARL. She's havin' a stroke.

MICHAEL. Stay with us, Grandma.

(Checking her pulse.)

STACY. Come to the light, Grandma. Follow my voice.

MOM. I'll get you some water, Grandma.

(She goes to the bar.)

CARL. It's interesting that "Catholic" would set her off.

MICHAEL. Are you okay, Grandma? You seem a little off.

MOM. Have you been snorting Metamucil again?

GRANDMA. Don't judge me.

MICHAEL. Your pulse is a little high.

CARL. Ya think?

GRANDMA. I miss the days when our only concern was Nazis.