

SUFFER THE LONG NIGHT

By

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CAST

Donna Malone	50s, the chairwoman of the Merrillville Merry Art Players
Vera Burling:	40s, attractive well-groomed housewife
Bob Burling:	40s, powerful, self-assured, handsome.
Rosie Burling:	10, a cute little tomboy (played by a large tall woman in her 30s)
Mary Burling	19, a young Donna Reed (played by a very sick woman.)
Detective Carson	60s, authoritative
Detective Beck	30s, sporting an obviously fake mustache
Chops Carmichael	50s, the leader, a short squat convict
Louie DeFazio	20s, the follower, a convict
Dirk Sorrel	21, a collegiate All-Star (played by a fey guy)
Stage Manager	A tiny, young, painfully shy, high strung woman with large thick glasses. She plays multiple fill-in roles, along with her SM responsibilities.
Orderlie #1	
Orderlie #2	

Scene: The City of Lancaster, Ohio

Time: Christmas, 1950

ACT ONE

5:30 Christmas Eve

ACT TWO

Later.

The action throughout the play shifts between three sets, with a few scenes requiring a tight spot-lit area. The BURLING LIVING ROOM, the principle set, is center stage. Stage Left is the DETECTIVE OFFICE, which later morphs into the DETECTIVE'S SQUAD CAR. Stage Right is a corner of the BURLING CELLAR.

The Burling Living Room requires a door leading to outside, an archway leading to an unseen kitchen, a staircase leading to an unseen second floor, a closet, and a largish picture window. It is furnished as a 1950s suburban home through the filter of an amateur community theater production. It is pleasant but undistinguished, with the warm, cozy draping of Christmas, including STOCKINGS and a TREE.

The Detective Office is simply suggested; bare, drab. A DESK, a PHONE, a RADIO a CHAIR, a MAP OF SOUTHERN OHIO.

The Burling Cellar is simply suggested, perhaps a corner with a bit of DIRT scattered about.

The action of this production starts as the audience is entering the theater. They are handed programs which contain the fake biographies of community theater actors involved in the production, including some whom we never see in the play.

The STAGE MANAGER is assisted by a bumbling STAGE HAND (Later he will be playing the character of DIRK.) They are scurrying about on the unlit stage, setting props and getting ready. The Stage Manager is peeved that someone has opened the house before she's ready.

The bumbling stage hand, about to place a BOTTLE OF BOURBON on a TABLE in the Burling Living Room, drops it. It shatters. Exasperated, the Stage Manager pulls money out of her pocket and sends him off. He races through the house.

Sound checks. Light checks. One of the actors works on the closet door.

Prior to Curtain, while the house lights are still up, DONNA MALONE walks out and addresses the audience.

DONNA MALONE

Hello, I'm Donna Malone, chairwoman of the Merrillville Merry Art Players board of directors, and on behalf of all of us, I want to warmly welcome all of you to the first show of our exciting 22nd season, that well-loved classic tale of suspense, Suffer The Long Night. I have just one short announcement before we get started. Due to the flu epidemic, 19 of our 23 original cast & crew members are out sick. We've had a few last minute replacements, but in the tradition of the theater, the show must go on. So on we'll go. And now, please enjoy Suffer The Long Night.

Just before the lights go down, the bumbling Stage Hand races onto the set, pulls a second BOTTLE OF BOURBON out of a PAPER BAG and places it on the table.

ACT I

BURLING LIVING ROOM

VERA BURLING enters, vacuuming. The DRONE is loud. The actress acknowledges the audience, as if she's, say, a beloved star making an entrance. She steers under CHRISTMAS TREE. After a moment she turns off the VACUUM.

BOB BURLING enters, carrying a ladder which he sets down by the tree.

BOB

Vera darling, have you seen my red cashmere?

VERA

Oh, that's the perfect thing to wear to the Christmas pageant and midnight mass tonight!

BOB

I'm really looking forward to it.

VERA

As am I, dear.

BOB

May I say how lovely you look tonight, Mrs. Burling?

VERA

Why thank you, Mr. Burling.

ROSIE enters. Rosie is a 10-year-old played by a largish adult woman. She's wearing a WHITE GOWN and carrying a pair of FOIL WINGS.

ROSIE

Mother, is it time to put my wings on? Is it? Is it?

BOB

Not so fast, pip squeak. How will we fit you in the sedan with those wings?

ROSIE

Awe, dad. Do you mean I have to wait until we get to the church to put my wings on?

BOB

Unless you're planning to *fly* to Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

ROSIE

Fly? Whoopeeeeeeee!

Bob chuckles and “picks up” Rosie for a little pretend flying.

ROSIE

Fly me to the moon and hurry!

BOB

Hey kiddo, you’re getting awfully big for these shenanigans.

VERA

Yes, our little angel has certainly grown!

BOB

Mom, do you think maybe she’s tall enough to put the star on top of the tree this year?

VERA

I think so, she’s a big girl now.

ROSIE

Doesn’t Mary always put the star on the tree?

VERA

I think she’d be happy to pass on the family ritual to you, dear. Mary has other fish to fry these days.

ROSIE

You mean that Dirk Sorrel. Gosh, this is going to be the best Christmas Eve ever!

A PHONE RINGS.

VERA

I’ll get it! It’s probably —

She stops dead, realizing there is *no phone on the SMALL TABLE*. As the PHONE CONTINUES TO RING, no one is sure what to do.

VERA

(Ad-libbing)

I’ll get it! It’s probably ...do you think maybe it’s Father Quimbly about my...holly wreath cookies for the...Oh! I just remembered I was...dusting the phone and it’s – it’s in the – why, it’s in the kitchen, so I’ll just...

Vera exits. We hear FRANTIC WHISPERING BACK STAGE. We see Vera appear on the DARK DETECTIVE'S OFFICE SET and grab the PHONE off the DESK. She then re-enters from the Burling kitchen.

VERA
(Ad-libbing)

...I have to be less careless when I'm cleaning the phone in the future.

She sets the phone on a SMALL TABLE and answers it. It continues to RING. She quickly hangs up and answers it again. It CEASES RINGING.

VERA
(on phone)

Burling Residence, Vera speaking. Oh, hello Father Quimbly, Merry Christmas. Yes, I've made platefuls for the Christmas Pageant bake sale! Why, Rosie is so excited she's almost forgotten Santa Claus comes tonight.

ROSIE

Oh Mom!

VERA
(on phone)

6:30 sharp! We'll be early! Bye, bye, Father Quimbly. See you in an hour!

She hangs up as Rosie flies into Bob.

VERA
Now cut that out, you two. We don't want any disasters before the pageant! This is going to be a night to remember. Look at the time! Come on, Bob. Let's see about finding your red cashmere.

ROSIE

Hey! What about the star?

BOB

We'll do it the minute we return from midnight mass. And then to bed — we don't want Santa catching us awake!

Vera and Bob exit. Rosie turns on the RADIO. We hear a MOMENT OF VACUUM DROANING, then ♪ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH♪. Rosie dances. The music is interrupted by a RADIO ANNOUNCER, played by THE ACTOR PLAYING DIRK. He's speaking in an awful British accent, from BACKSTAGE MICROPHONE.

ANNOUNCER

We interrupt this program with an urgent police bulletin. Authorities have requested all citizens be on the lookout for a 1949 Buick sedan...green...bearing Ohio license plates. The car was stolen by 2 dangerous escaped convicts from Belmont Correctional Institute.

ROSIE

Wow!

ANNOUNCER

These men are armed and dangerous. Repeat.

The lights are supposed to go down. The actress playing Rosie hesitates, not knowing whether to exit or not.

ROSIE

Wow!

The LIGHTS FINALLY GO DOWN ON THE BURLING LIVING ROOM And up On the BURLING CELLAR. Pause. The LIGHTS GO DOWN ON THE BURLING CELLAR AND UP ON...

DETECTIVE OFFICE

Carson and Beck sit grimly, listening to the news bulletin on a RADIO. Beck sports an obviously FAKE MUSTACHE.

ANNOUNCER

...These men are armed and dangerous. Repeat.

Beck snaps off the radio. There is a LARGE MAP OF OHIO hanging behind them.

BECK

It's gonna be a helluve Christmas Eve. Just as well, I ain't even got a present for my old lady. You know a place open a guy could pick up a pair of silk stockings?

CARSON

Beck, we got a more pressing situation here than silk stockings. Namely, Chops Carmichael and his sidekick Louie DeFazio. Two rank bottom dwellers.

BECK

What're they in for?

CARSON

Problem is, Beck, they're out. And that means Ohio and the rest of the country isn't safe.

BECK

That Defazio kid — could be he's just took a wrong turn down a one way alley.

CARSON

And Chops Carmichael is a dead end. He's trouble 50 different ways.

BECK

Oh yeah? What do you know about him?

CARSON

...Nothing. It's all in the past.

Carson studies the map.

CARSON

What I don't know is where he is, Beck. Yet.

The PHONE RINGS.

BECK

I'll get it.

Beck reaches for the phone. It's not there. The RINGING CONTINUES. After an agonizing minute, we see the Stage Manager entering the Burling set and grabbing the phone, and hear her scamper backstage towards the Detective Office.

BECK

...You know, that's the problem with...all the tax dollars we pay. They should have more phones in police stations

CARSON

...you got that right.

The Stage Manager crawls onto the set and places the phone on the desk. She stays hidden behind the desk.

BECK

Oh – there it is. I'll get it.

He answers it. THE RINGING CEASES.

BECK
(on phone)

Detective's office.

CARSON
(to himself, at the map)

Question gnawing at me is why're they headed north? The prison is in St. Clairsville – a hop, skip, and jump away from the West Virginia border.

BECK
(on phone)

Roger that.

Beck hangs up and steps awkwardly over the Stage Manager to get to the map.

BECK
Somebody spotted a green Buick in Logan.

CARSON
Logan. That's north of Nelsonville. When?

BECK
Hour ago. Think they're headed for Columbus?

CARSON
Can't say. Get on the phone. Put out an APB for a Myra Templeton in Columbus, Ohio. But easy, Beck. Nobody touches her. We just watch her, see? Everybody lies low, got it?

BECK
Who is Myra Templeton?

CARSON
Carmichael's dame.

Beck backs up and steps on the Stage Manager.

STAGE MANAGER
Eeeh!

BURLING LIVING ROOM

Rosie is anxiously looking out the PICTURE WINDOW. MARY BURLING, a wholesome ripe Donna Reed of a 20-year-old, is played by an actress who clearly has the flu: she speaks with a stuffy nose which she frequently needs to

blow, she has a terrible cough, and a feverish glow about her. She enters through the FRONT DOOR carrying a CHRISTMAS PARCEL. A large uneven amount of FAKE SNOW (Puffed Rice? Styrofoam popcorn?) falls down upon her. She calls out the door to her friends:

MARY

Good-bye Donna, Cindy! Here's hoping we all get exactly what we want for Christmas, girls! Bye-bye!

ROSIE

Quick! Lock the door!

Mary brushes off the fake snow, which accumulates in a mound by the door. This mound will grow throughout the play.

MARY

Santa Claus comes down the chimney, pip squeak.

ROSIE

Two convicts escaped from Belmont Correctional Institute!

MARY

Uh-huh. Look at the time! Jeepers, I've got to get this present wrapped!

Mary goes over to the CLOSET and struggles to open it — IT STICKS.

ROSIE

All citizens are to be on the look out!

MARY

And then I have to get ready!

She's tugging mightily.

ROSIE

They're armed and they stole a green sedan!

MARY

Who did what?

ROSIE

That could be them coming down the street now!

MARY

Dirk? He's here? Oh, why is he consistently early?!

Finally the closet door flies open. She takes out GIFT WRAPPING and settles on the COUCH, opening her parcel and pulling out A LONG THIN GIFT BOX. She opens it – there is nothing in the box.

ROSIE

Not Dirk, the escaped convicts!

(calling towards the kitchen)

Mom!

MARY

You have an overactive imagination, pip squeak.

ROSIE

(calling towards the kitchen)

Dad! Daddy! Come quick! And bring your pistol!

MARY

How do you like this tie?

Vera and Bob enter, each carrying a LARGE TRAY OF HOLLY WREATH COOKIES.

BOB

Mom's laid down the law: No sampling before the bake sale!

ROSIE

Mom! Dad! The escaped convicts – I think I see them!

BOB

What are you going on about, angel?

Vera and Bob set the trays down on the COFFEE TABLE.

MARY

Mom...what do you think? I hunted all afternoon for it. You don't think it's too...

Mary sneezes violently.

VERA

(ad-libbing)

boring?

MARY

...boring, do you?

VERA

Why Mary, it's lovely.

ROSIE

(out the window)

Ah nuts. It's just grumpy old Mr. Porter pulling into his driveway.

MARY

I would have picked one with a little more pizzazz but, well, Dirk isn't that kind of fella.

Mary clumsily begins to wrap the empty gift box. (Clearly, the actress has not rehearsed this.)

ROSIE

Nuts. I thought it was the escaped convicts.

VERA

Oh, you'd be surprised what kind of pizzazz you can slip on a man *after* he slips that ring on your finger.

MARY

Mom!

ROSIE

Nothing exciting *ever* happens here on Haviland Road.

BOB

(To Rosie)

If we had any more excitement on Haviland Road, we'd be a circus!

MARY

Dad, what do you think of this tie?

BOB

And here I wanted to be surprised on Christmas morning!

VERA

Oh silly, it's not for you, Bob -

BOB

Oh?

ROSIE

It's for that Dirk Sorrel, that's who it's for. Kissy mushy kissy!

MARY

Oh Rosie, you're such a —

She inhales to sneeze.

VERA

— child. Is that what you meant to say?

Mary sneezes. There's a brief flicker of annoyance on her face, aimed at the actress playing Vera.

MARY

Uh-huh.

BOB

Just wait, pip squeak. It won't be too many years until you get a Dirk Sorrel of your own!

MARY

Oh. Dad! I don't *have* Dirk! Sometimes... I'm not even sure if I want Dirk.

VERA

Oh Mary. Dirk is wholesome and solid and dependable. When he gets out of college, he'll be a great provider. And he's a safe driver, honey.

MARY

(sighs)

Yes. He's all that.

VERA

Mary... do you think you'll get a ring in your stocking?

BOB

Uh-oh!

ROSIE

Kissy mushy kissy.

MARY

Mother, you're too much. Good grief, I'm only...

Mary inhales to sneeze.

VERA

19!

Mary looks perturbed at Vera and sneezes.

BOB

Your mother and I were 18. Why I can remember the day we got engaged like it was yesterday —

ROSIE

Oh, here we go again. The Buckeye Lake story -

Vera glances out the window.

VERA

Bob, honey, there's a strange green Buick just pulled in our drive.

BOB

(mainly to Rosie)

I took your mother out in a row boat —

VERA

Do we know anyone who drives a green Buick?

MARY

Oh! Look at the time! I've got to get ready!

BOB

She insisted on doing the rowing. Your mother had spunk, I'll give her that!

(To Vera)

What's that honey?

ROSIE

(To Mary)

Hey – aren't you going to come see me be an angel at the Christmas Pageant?

MARY

Where do you think Dirk and I are going tonight?

BOB

We got out to the middle of that lake and —

VERA

Two men are getting out. I — I don't recognize either of them.

ROSIE

It's gonna be the best Christmas pageant ever. That's what Father Quimbly says. Too bad you've got to bring Dirk Sorrel.

BOB

And your mother loses one of the oars, and —

MARY

Well then maybe I should skip the Christmas pageant all together!

VERA

Perhaps they're collecting for a Christmas charity. They look clean shaven enough —

ROSIE

No, you shouldn't. But, if you ask me, Dirk Sorrel is as bland as a glass of milk.

Pause. They're waiting for the door bell...nothing. Finally —

VERA

(loud ad-lib)

Yes sir, a glass of milk!

Pause. Nothing happening.

VERA

(loud ad-lib)

Was that the door bell? Did anyone else hear...

BOB

I did.

ROSIE

It could be the escaped convicts!

VERA

(To Bob)

What will she think of next!

ROSIE

It was on the radio! All citizens are to be on the look out!

VERA

Rosie, it's Christmas Eve, honey.

ROSIE

But Mom!

Vera finally just opens the door. DRAMATIC MUSIC as CHOPS CARMICHAEL and LOUIE DEFAZIO stand in the doorway. FAKE SNOW CLUMPS DOWN UPON THEM. They sport ILL-FITTING STREET CLOTHES.

CHOPS

Excuse me, Mrs....

VERA

Burling. Vera Burling.

The DOORBELL FINALLY RINGS. They ignore it.

BOB

What can we do for you fellas?

CHOPS

Me and my associate here are collecting canned goods for some poor orphans so that they can have a nice Christmas.

VERA

Oh, how kind and thoughtful of you gentlemen. Let me see what I have in the pantry ☒

The convicts shoulder their way in. Chops struggles to pull a GUN out of his POCKET.

CHOPS

Nobody move.

One by one, the Burlings put their hands up in the air. Louie helps Chops get his gun.

CHOPS

Hands up.

He struts around, in a menacing fashion.

Now. We can do this the hard way or the easy way...

BOB

All right fellas, just take it easy. There's no reason for any one to get excited. What is this? What do you want? You can't just barge into a man's home —

CHOPS

Yeah, Mr. Burling, as a matter of truth, we can. You got a garage out back?

Bob says nothing.

CHOPS

You got a car in it?

(threatening)

I Asked You A Question.

VERA

We've a blue Plymouth out in the garage.

BOB

Vera!

VERA

Bob, it's not my intention to undermine you. But it's just an automobile, if they want it, let them have it.

CHOPS

Gimme the keys.

VERA

We'll get another automobile. A better one. We're insured.

Bob considers Vera's words, pulls the KEYS out of his POCKET and relinquishes them to Chops. Chops tosses the keys — meaning to aim for Louie who is downstage, but he overthrows them out into the house. Pause as everyone takes this in.

CHOPS

(To Louie)

Go outside. Pull the Plymouth into the drive way and ditch that Buick in the garage.

VERA

Oh!

BOB

Now see here — take our car, but leave. That's all we ask. We don't want any trouble here.

CHOPS

It's Christmas Eve, shouldn't you folks be a little hospital?

Louie detours around Mary, who is in the process of blowing her nose. He longingly checking her out and exits out the front door.

BOB

Who are you?

ROSIE

They're the escaped convicts, aren't you?

CHOPS

Who wants to know?

ROSIE

I do! I heard about you on the radio.

(To Vera, Bob, Mary)

I tried to tell you, but nobody ever listens to a little kid.

CHOPS

You're right about that, squirt.

MARY

I'm sorry I didn't believe you, Rosie.

ROSIE

It's okay. Besides, this is the most exciting thing that's ever happened on Haviland Road! I never seen a prisoner before! Hey mister, do you think they'll catch you and put you back in prison?

CHOPS

I'll never go back to that place. Not alive, anyways. Now sit down, all of yous. Mr. Burling. You wouldn't be a man prone to lying, would you?

BOB

Of course not.

CHOPS

It would look bad, if you lied in front of these two young ladies here, yeah?

BOB

...I never lie, particularly in front of the *children*.

CHOPS

You got a firearm in the house, Mr. Burling? Something to protect your family with?

The family exchanges sideways glances.

BOB

No. Of course not. We've never felt the need for protection...until now.

MARY

If only we had been more suspicious.

VERA

I don't regret trusting in the goodness of mankind. Most men have some goodness in them. It's circumstances that sway men to take the wrong path.

Chops studies her. She look back, defiant.

VERA

Have I hit a nerve?

Chops looks away and begins scoping out the living room.

ROSIE

Are you going to spend the night here?

MARY

Rosie!

ROSIE

Aw, I'm just asking.

CHOPS

Nice place. Fancy. How long you folks lived here?

ROSIE

6 years.

Louie comes in through the front door, battling the FAKE SNOW.

VERA

That's right, Rosie was a mere toddler when we moved into the house 6 years ago.

LOUIE

Yeah – 6 years. That would be about right, huh, boss?

CHOPS

SHUT YOUR TRAP!

ROSIE

I've lived here practically my whole life. And this is the most exciting thing ever!

VERA

Rosie!

LOUIE

Boss – when're we gonna look for the...

The actor is waiting for Chops to cut him off. Finally —

CHOPS

Quiet!

What're you looking for?
ROSIE

Rosie!
VERA

Aw, I'm just asking.
ROSIE

Louie realizes he's not supposed to be there, quickly exits out the front door.

Nice place. Fancy. How long you folks lived here?
CHOPS

6 years.
ROSIE

Once again, Louie comes in through the front door, battling the FAKE SNOW.

That's right. Rosie was a mere toddler when we moved into this house 6 years ago.
VERA

Yeah – 6 years. That would be about right, huh, boss?
LOUIE

SHUT YOUR TRAP!
CHOPS

I've lived here practically my whole life. And this is the most exciting thing ever!
ROSIE

Rosie!
VERA

Boss – when're we gonna look for the...
LOUIE

The actor is waiting for Chops to cut him off. Finally —

Quiet!
CHOPS

What're you looking for?
ROSIE

MARY
Rosie!

ROSIE
Aw, I'm just asking.

Again, Louie realizes he's not supposed to be there, quickly exits out the front door.

CHOPS
...Nice place. Fancy. How long you folks lived here?

The actors are aware of the dejavu loop.

ROSIE
...6 years.

Once again, Louie comes in through the front door, battling the FAKE SNOW.

VERA
That's right. Rosie was a mere toddler when we moved into this house 6 years ago.

LOUIE
Yeah – 6 years. That would be about right, huh, boss?

CHOPS
SHUT YOUR TRAP!

ROSIE
I've lived here practically my whole life. And this is the most exciting thing ever!

VERA
Rosie!

LOUIE
Boss – when're we gonna look for the...

Chops gets it right and immediately cuts him off.

CHOPS
Quiet!

ROSIE
What're you looking for?

MARY
Rosie!

ROSIE
Aw, I'm just asking.

Vera pokes at Bob, who doesn't know why.

CHOPS
...Nice place. Fancy. How long you folks lived —

VERA
(pointedly to Bob)
Here here!

BOB
What?

VERA
Here, here.

BOB
Oh. Here, here. Why don't you men just take our automobile and leave?

The actors are greatly relieved.

CHOPS
And have you callin' the cops 2 minutes later?

BOB
You have our word we won't.

CHOPS
Your word ain't nothing to me. Besides, a person could get comfortable in a house like this. Louie -

He hands the gun to Louie.

CHOPS
Watch 'em. I'm gonna take a little tour of the estate.
(To the Burlings)

Now young Louie here – he's the nervous type, see? So everybody best stay put.

Chops exits through the kitchen.

LOUIE

Nobody get no ideas.

BOB

Now see here, how long do you intend on staying?

LOUIE

As long as the boss says.

ROSIE

Could I put the star on top of the tree now?

BOB

Not now, Rosie.

ROSIE

Aw, it was just something to do...hey! What about the Christmas pageant? Mother? Father? We're going to be late.

MARY

There, there Rosie.

ROSIE

It was keen to have these bad men here, but mister, we've got to get going!

BOB

(To Louie)

My daughter is right. We've a commitment this evening.

VERA

That's right. We've a commitment. And people will become concerned if we don't appear.

ROSIE

Father Quimbly will be angry if we're late!

MARY

People will wonder.

BOB

Someone may even come to the house to check on us.

Vera checks her watch.

VERA

Bob. Your mother —

MARY

And Dirk!

The family exchanges worried glances.

MARY
(whispering)

He's due here and he's always punctual.

LOUIE

Stop the chattering. Otherwise, I might have to use this.

A threatening black out line but alas...no black out. Finally — LIGHTS DOWN ON THE BURLING LIVING ROOM AND UP ON THE BURLING CELLAR. Pause. The LIGHTS DOWN ON THE BURLING CELLAR AND UP ON —

DETECTIVE OFFICE

Carson studies the map. Beck enters.

BECK

Myra Templeton works at a cocktail lounge in East Columbus.

Carson whirls around.

CARSON

Call the guys over in East Columbus. Have them send a couple of undercover agents to the cocktail lounge. Chops Carmichael might be bold enough to just walk in there. But tell them to lie low – just watch her and see who comes to visit her. If she leaves, they should tail her, see? She's the bait that's gonna lead us to the king fish.

LIGHTS DOWN ON THE DETECTIVE OFFICE AND UP ON THE BURLING'S CELLAR. No matter. The show must go on. Unlit, the drama continues in the —

BURLING LIVING ROOM

Chops comes down the STAIRS carrying (Bob's) PISTOL.

CHOPS

Well, well, well. Look what I found in a shoe box in the closet of the master bedroom. Mr. Burling, I thought you said you weren't no lying man.

Chops pistol whips Bob (bad stage combat.)

VERA/MARY/ROSIE

Oh!

CHOPS

For shame, Mr. Burling.

Bob rubs his head.

BOB

Shame? I have no shame when it comes to protecting my family. I would do anything to protect them — even lie — do you hear?

ROSIE

My dad got that pistol in the army. My dad took it off a Nazi. My dad is a war hero!

CHOPS

Tell it to someone who cares, squirt.

ROSIE

I bet *you* aren't a war hero. You're nothing but a coward.

Chops threatens to pistol whip Rosie.

The LIGHTS FINALLY COME UP ON THE BURLING LIVING ROOM.

CHOPS

I bet you're right. Now, the only problem with this here gun is, it ain't got no bullets. Where's the bullets, Mr. Burling?

BOB

I haven't any.

CHOPS

I said where's the bullets.

A CELL PHONE RING TONE PLAYS ICE ICE BABY. Everyone continues with the scene.

BOB

I told you.

ROSIE

It's true. That's the only way Mama would let Dad keep the gun!

CHOPS

SHUT UP!

ROSIE

Ask her.

VERA

(To Bob)

I'm sorry I made you dispose of the bullets, dear. Who ever would have thought.

BOB

It's all right, dear. It was a wise decision...at the time.

CHOPS

A gun with no bullets. What's the point?

THE RING TONE CEASES.

VERA

We reasoned that, if anyone ever broke in, why just the mere sight of a gun would scare them off.

Chops laughs.

CHOPS

Yeah, good reasoning.

(To Bob)

You. Up.

Bob rises.

CHOPS

I need bullets.

Again we hear a CELL PHONE RING TONE PLAYING  ICE ICE BABY 

BOB

I told you, we haven't any!

CHOPS

Well, then I guess you'll have to go out and get some.

The actors start eyeing Louie, from whom the ring tone is emanating. It prompts him to turn upstage and answer his CELL PHONE.

LOUIE

(muffling his voice on the phone)

Hello?

ROSIE

(whispering)

Do it Dad, and go straight to the police!

CHOPS/LOUIE

(on the phone)

And here I was thinking you were on the smart side, squirt / I can't talk — this is not a good time — I'll call you back. I'll call you back.

BOB/LOUIE

But it's Christmas Eve. Where would I find bullets on Christmas Eve? / Soon. I'm in a play.

CHOPS

Not my problem.

BOB/LOUIE

(on the phone)

I won't go, I tell you! I won't! / *A play. A play!*

CHOPS

Oh, you will, Mr. Burling. And you won't be talking to no one, see?

LOUIE

(on phone)

Because I wanted to. Oh shut up...

Vera — appalled.

Awkward staging as Chops grabs Mary who should be next to him but is on the other side of Bob. Chops holds Bob's pistol to Mary's head. Everyone Ohs!

CHOPS

You don't got no say in the matter, Mr. B. Not if you love your family.

VERA

Do as he says, Bob. For the love of God —

CHOPS

Smart lady. Louie — give him the keys.

LOUIE

(on phone)

I'll call you later.

Louie hangs up.

CHOPS

Louie, give 'em the keys. *The keys.*

Louie retrieves the keys from the audience. Maybe he says "thanks." He returns to the stage and hands the keys to Bob.

LOUIE

Okay boss, and then can we.

Louie waits for Chops to interrupt.

CHOPS

SHUT YOUR TRAP!

Chops takes his gun from Louie.

CHOPS
(To Bob)

Get going, Burling.

Bob hesitates.

VERA

Do as he says, Bob. We'll be fine, won't we girls?

The girls nod.

BOB

If you harm any of them, I'll...I'll...you'll have God to answer to, mister.

CHOPS

I'll remember that.

Bob exits, reluctantly.

CHOPS
(calling after)

And get me some cigarettes, while you're at it.

(To Louie)

Check around – see if you can find some rope or duct tape or something.

Louie exits into the kitchen.

CHOPS

(to the women)
Well, ain't this cozy. Me n' the three of you broads.

ROSIE

Hey, I'm only 10 years old.

(whispering)

Don't worry mom. I'll think of something!

VERA

(whispering)

You'll do nothing of the kind, Rosie Burling.

CHOPS

(To Mary)

You. Cupcake. C'mere.

Vera — on mama alert. Mary rises slowly.

CHOPS

I need you to do me a favor.

MARY

(sneering)

I'd rather suck gas.

CHOPS

Playing the tough girl, huh? But inside? Your J-ello.

Chops digs a scrap of paper out of his pocket.

CHOPS

(To Mary)

Get over here. I need you to call this number and ☒

Everyone realizes there's no phone on the set. WE HEAR BACKSTAGE SCRAMBLING. During the following bad ad-libbing, we hear the Stage Manager race from the booth through the lobby, get back stage, retrieve the phone from the Detective Office, race back stage to the Burling Living Room.

CHOPS

Ask for Myra. Say you're a good friend, got it?

MARY

And if I don't?

CHOPS

Oh, that's easy Miss Smarty Pants.

He gestures with his gun. Mary takes the scrap of paper. She looks at the phone-less table.

MARY
(ad-libbing)

...all right. Who am I asking for?

CHOPS
(ad-libbing)

You're asking for Myra. Say you're a good friend, got it?

MARY
(ad-libbing)

...Myra. Right.

CHOPS
(ad-libbing)

Because otherwise I...shoot. Yep. Just dial those numbers...you get me, right? You've got to dial the number and...

MARY
(ad-libbing)

...ask for Myra. Her name is like mine only the letters are...flipped. Okay. I'll make that call.

CHOPS
(ad-libbing)

Good, because like I said, if you don't...

He gestures with his gun.

MARY
(ad-libbing)

Right. You'll shoot. So, like I told you. I'll make the call.

CHOPS
(ad-libbing)

Good.

Painful pause.

VERA
(ad-libbing)

She said she would make the call and she will. She'll make the call. Isn't that right, Mary?

MARY
(ad-libbing)

Yes. Yes, that's right, Meredith. Vera. Mother.

The Stage Manager's arm, holding the phone, sticks out from the kitchen doorway. Vera retrieves it and puts it on the table.

MARY
(ad-libbing)

Well, I guess I'll make that call now.

She dials the number from the scrap of paper.

MARY
(on phone)

Yes, hello. May I speak to Mary – Myra.

(louder)

MAY I SPEAK TO MYRA? A GOOD FRIEND.

(To Chops)

Someone's getting her.

(On the phone)

Yes, hello, someone would like to speak to you. Here he is.

She hands the phone to Chops.

MARY

I could vomit.

CHOPS

SIT DOWN!

Mary goes back to the couch.

CHOPS
(on phone)

Is that you baby? Yeah, it's me. Yeah, I'm free. I can't wait to see you either. You got the address, right? I'm here, waiting for you.

He hangs up.

MARY

It was a Columbus number, mom. I think it was a bar. Myra sounded rough.

VERA
(whispering)

You did well, dear. *Columbus...*

CHOPS

SHUT YOUR TRAPS!

Out of nowhere, the VACUUM DROAN ERUPTS, then CEASES. Pause.

ROSIE

Oh, someone's at the door!

CHOPS

There ain't no way Myra could make that good of time...

Louie returns from the kitchen, holding A ROLL OF DUCT TAPE.

LOUIE

What do we do, boss? Let's sneak out the back —

CHOPS

SHUT YOUR TRAP!

(To Vera and Rosie)

You. You. Get over here.

(To Louie)

You – in the closet. If you hear any funny stuff, you jump out and grab 'em. I'll use this if I got to.

LOUIE

Nobody's supposed to get killed. It's the chair for sure if we get caught —

CHOPS

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

LOUIE

You are.

CHOPS

And don't forget it. Now get in the closet.

Vera and Rosie come over. Louie struggles to get the closet door open: it sticks. Probably the whole wall shakes as he attempts to get it open.

CHOPS

(To Vera)

Get rid of whoever it is. Otherwise —

Chops grabs Rosie and pulls her into the kitchen hallway.

CHOPS

Your little angel gets it between the peepers.

ROSIE

Mom!

VERA

It's all right, Rosie. Stay perfectly calm.

The closet door flies open, Louie hides. Vera opens the front door. A HUGE DOWNPOUR OF FAKE SNOW. GRANDMA BURLING, played by BOB, has clearly had to do a quick change. He enters bearing A STACK OF GIFTS. Note: He sort of knows Grandma's lines, but is less sure about the blocking. Vera, Mary, and Rosie steer him around the stage.

GRANDMA/BOB

Merry Christmas everybody!

(To Mary)

Help Grandma Burling with these presents, dear.

VERA

Grandma Burling —

GRANDMA/BOB

Here, take this tin. It's my famous heavy fruitcake. Oh Rosie, don't you look just like a real angel. And Mary, you're pretty as a peacock.

ROSIE

We think you should leave.

GRANDMA/BOB

Pardon me?!

VERA

For your own sake. We wouldn't want you to catch — we're not feeling well.

GRANDMA/BOB

But we're off to the Christmas Pageant! Where's my son?

VERA

In bed.

MARY

Dad's sick.

GRANDMA/BOB

Oh dear. He was fit as a fiddle this afternoon, when he picked me up at church after I set up for midnight mass. Well, a mother's love will set him right —

Vera steers Grandma/BOB up the stairs.

MARY

Grandma!

VERA

Don't go up those stairs!

We hear Louie trying to open the closet door. Everyone hovers, waiting.

VERA

(ad-libbing)

...Don't go up those stairs! Really! If you go up those stairs, you too might get sick and that...well, that would be unfortunate because you're Grandma Burling and...and you've made fruitcake with fruit and nuts and well, whatever else is in fruitcake —

LOUIE

(from inside the closet)

Freeze!

VERA

and what we all need to do is stay calm and focused and get through this as best we can and ...

GRANDMA

Did somebody tell us to freeze?

Vera continues to blather on as the door continues to be stuck. Louis knocks softly. The actor playing Mary goes to the door and tries to nonchalantly tug at it. The wall shakes.

VERA

(ad-libbing)

Is someone in the closet? Yes, Mary, why don't you open the closet door ...

Mary can't get the door open.

VERA

(ad-libbing)

Oh, yes. Well, yes. Grandma Burling, it would be inconvenient for you to go up the stairs and see Bob at this particular time because well, he's not well, and we'll just have to wait until...until he's better, and...maybe we should all sing Silent Night ...or Deck the Halls, that's a nice one, too. Because it's Christmas and we're ...

The noise in the closet ceases. Suddenly Louie charges through the front door.

LOUIE

Freeze!

GRANDMA

Oh!

LOUIE

(ad-libbing)

...I went through an air vent...

GRANDMA

(To Louie)

Who are you? What were you doing hiding in the...front yard?

Grandma/Bob remains still.

LOUIE

Stop! One more step towards me and I'll – I said stop. Stop, I say!

Chops comes from the kitchen, with Rosie in tow, his gun pointed at her.

CHOPS

One more step old lady, and your little angel takes her last breath.

GRANDMA

Rosie! Oh! Is that a gun? What is happening? This is all highly unusual —

CHOPS

Shut your trap old lady, or the little girl gets it, see?
Now everybody sit down.

Everyone sits but Grandma/Bob.

CHOPS

I said sit.

GRANDMA

I'm going to call the police!

Grandma/Bob heads towards the phone.

CHOPS

Listen, you old geezer —

VERA
(to Chops)

Please – she has a bad heart!

GRANDMA
(picking up the phone)

I'm reporting you —

Chops threatens Grandma/Bob with his gun.

GRANDMA

Oh! Oh! My heart! Oh!

Grandma/Bob drops the phone.

ROSIE

Grandma!

GRANDMA

Oh! Oh!

Grandma/Bob falls. All the ladies shriek. Louie checks on Grandma.

LOUIE

She's dead.

The ladies gasp. DRAMATIC MUSIC. A perfect black out moment but...no black out. They hold their shocked poses for an absurdly long time. Finally LIGHTS OUT, LIGHTS UP ON —

DETECTIVE OFFICE

As the lights go up, Beck sits at the desk whilst Carson studies that map again. The PHONE RINGS.

BECK

I'll get —
No phone. Agonizing pause.

CARSON
(ad-libbing)

Why don't you get the phone from that room where, ummm, we put the... prisoners.

BECK

The prisoner room?

CARSON

The prisoner room.

BECK

I'll be right back.

He bolts off the Detective Office set and WE HEAR HIM RACING BACK STAGE and appearing on the Burling Set, grabbing the phone, and racing back. Meanwhile, Carson stands awkwardly, examining the map, the desk, the map again...he can't bear it and turns to exit as Beck comes in with the phone. They collide in an awful way . Beck drops the phone and grabs his nose. Blood squirts out from behind his hands and dribbles down his face.

BECK

Oh crap.

The PHONE STOPS RINGING as Beck stumbles about in agony, unable to see straight. Carson hesitates, picks the phone off the floor and offers it to Beck, who is in no shape to take it. Carson answers it.

CARSON
(On phone)

Hello? He can't talk right now, he's ah...okay, thanks.

He hangs up and turns to Beck, who is still gripping his nose and bleeding.

CARSON
...Okay, ah, Myra Templeton just left that bar, in a black Ford and she's ah...heading south on Route 33. So we should alert the State Troopers and follow her...

BECK
(behind his hands)

I have a bad feeling about this, boss.

DRAMATIC MUSIC. LIGHTS OUT ON THE DETECTIVE OFFICE AND UP ON the...

Burling Living Room

The women weep on the couch. Chops paces, studying a hand drawn map.
Louie comes down the stairs.

LOUIE

I laid out grandma on the kid's bunk bed.

Rosie cries and cries.

LOUIE

You want I should tie up these ladies, boss? You say it, I'm on it. We can't go digging until we tie them up. Why don't I tie 'em up, huh?

CHOP

Can't you see I'm reading?! We'll tie 'em up when I'm good and ready.

Louie slumps to the window.

MARY

Poor Grandma. I wanted her to see me get married.

VERA

She's in a better place now.

ROSIE

Grandma really wanted to go to the Christmas pageant. And I'm Angel #2, how will they do it without me?

VERA

There will be other Christmas pageants, Rosie dear. This is just an unfortunate situation, but together we'll survive. Adversity makes us stronger.

LOUIE

Boss, there's a big linebacker of a guy coming up the walk.

MARY

(whispering)

Dirk!

Chops — gun cocked — races to see.

LOUIE

I don't like the look of this guy, boss.

CHOPS
(To Mary)

You. This your boyfriend?

MARY
Maybe.

CHOPS
(To Mary)
Get over here. I SAID GET OVER HERE.

Mary reluctantly goes over. The doorbell actually rings. It surprises the actors.

CHOPS
(To Mary)
You tell the boyfriend that you decided to stay home tonight. Got it? If you try any funny stuff —

He gestures with his gun.

Louie looks apologetically at Mary and then hides behind the door. Chops grabs Rosie and again backs her into the kitchen hallway. Mary cracks open the door.

MARY
Hello Dirk —

An enormous amount of FAKE SNOW blows in, eventually revealing DIRK SORREL. The actor playing him is the antithesis of an All Star Linebacker, and he's wearing clothes meant for a much bigger actor.

DIRK
I'm sorry, Mary, can you forgive a guy? There was a roadblock set up and the cops were checking licenses and registration. Something's going on – maybe they're looking for some criminal. I thought I'd just hightail it over here. I'd like to get my hands on him and flatten him like I did to those Akron State boys. What a game! BAM! POW! BAM!

MARY
Dirk —

Dirk hasn't seen Louie.

DIRK

Merry Christmas Mrs. B. Say, I would have thought you ladies would have left by now. Apparently I'm not the only one running late.

Dirk — MARY

Where's the squirt? DIRK

Dirk — I can't — MARY

Suddenly Dirk sees Louie

Oh say, buddy, I didn't see you there. DIRK

Dirk, this is ...this is our cousin Louie from Detroit. MARY

I didn't know you had a cousin Louie from Detroit. Put 'er there, pal. DIRK

He extends his hand.

Dirk. Dirk Sorrel. Collegiate All-Star at OSU. Defense. DIRK

Louie shakes Dirk's hand.

Yes, Louie surprised us. Unexpectedly. VERA

And so we've decided not to go to the Christmas Pageant tonight. ROSIE

I'm terribly sorry, Dirk. I know how much you were looking forward to it. MARY

Dirk looks oddly at Mary, and then around the room. Something fishy, he just can't put his finger on it...

Say, what gives? DIRK

VERA

We're just going to catch up on old times. I've asked Mary to stay.

DIRK

Well say, Mary, I've got your Christmas present in the car.

(To Louie)

You wouldn't mind if I stole your cousin Mary away, just for a little while?

MARY

Dirk — I think you should just go. Why don't we...why don't we exchange presents tomorrow. It's Christmas Day, after all.

She's heading him towards the door.

DIRK

Oh. But Mary — well, okay sport. Tomorrow then.

He opens the door.

DIRK

(To Louie)

Nice meeting you, and enjoy your visit, buddy.

LOUIE

Yeah, I'll do that.

Dirk tries to peck Mary on the cheek, but she resists. Surprised, he takes one last look around, still unable to put his finger on a fishy suspicion.

DIRK

Merry Christmas, everyone. Merry Christmas, Mary.

MARY

Merry Christmas, Dirk.

Dirk exits. Louie locks the door behind him. Chops comes out, still holding Rosie.

CHOPS

Well done, cupcake.

Mary whirls at him.

MARY

That was cruel! He came over here to spend Christmas Eve with me, and instead I turn him away! What must he be thinking! You're heartless! Heartless.

CHOPS

Sounds to me like the beauty queen here is in love with her All-Star.

MARY

Maybe I am, maybe I'm not. But either way, he deserves to be treated with common human decency.

Mary breaks down.

LOUIE

Boss, did you hear what he said? Roadblocks! What are we gonna do, boss? We got a stolen car and not a driver's license between the two of us, seeing as how we're...jay birds on the run —

Rosie bites Chops on the arm and races to the door.

ROSIE

Dirk! Dirk! Come Back!

CHOPS
(To Louie)

Get her!

Louie races out the door.

VERA

Rosie! No! Please, please, whatever you do, don't hurt my baby! Please!

Louie comes back half "carrying" Rosie.

ROSIE

Put me down! Put me down!

VERA

Rosie!

CHOPS

I oughta...

VERA

Please! Please! She's just a tiny child.

MARY

She didn't know any better!

CHOPS

Tie her up. Tie her up tight.

LOUIE

God, how did it get to this point? Things are unraveling, what are we gonna do —

CHOPS

Be a man! Pull yourself together. Do you want to go back to the joint? Do you? Do you?...

Louie waits for a third “DO YOU?”

CHOPS

Do you?

LOUIE

(immediately)

No.

CHOPS

Then pull yourself together, see?

He pulls Louie downstage, out of earshot of the women.

CHOPS

Myra has a driver’s license *and* a registration. We find that mother lode of jewels and breeze outta this state, see? Those jewels are worth 20 Gs — enough to live like kings the rest of our natural born days. Just think of all the floozies you’ll be able to buy.

LOUIE

I don’t want floozies. I want...I want a respectable woman.

CHOPS

You want a respectable woman, you’ll be able to buy one.

Louie looks longingly at Mary.

CHOPS

What — that one? We’ll take her with.

LOUIE

Geez, Chops, it don’t work like that.

CHOPS

Why not Romeo, we gotta take 1 of 'em hostage, see? In case we end up in a shoot out.

Bob enters – more FAKE SNOW. He is wearing Bob clothes, but Grandma's lipstick. Chops aims his gun at him.

VERA

Don't shoot! For God's sake!

Bob raises his hands. Chops motions for Louie to shut the door.

CHOPS
(To Louie)

Search him. Make sure he didn't come back with any surprises.

Louie pats down Bob and tries to nonchalantly wipe the lipstick off Bob's face.

LOUIE

He's clean.

Chops hands Louie his gun.

CHOPS

Cover him.

Louie hold's Chop's gun while Chops holds out his hand towards Bob. Bob reaches into his pockets and pulls out BULLETS. Chops grabs them and begins loading the bullets into Bob's gun.

CHOPS

You did well, Mr. Burling.

BOB

Well? I had to break into a gun shop to get the bullets! That makes *me* a criminal.

Bob reaches into his top pocket. Chops almost shoots him. Bob pulls out CIGARETTES.

CHOPS

Smokes!

Chops grabs them.

You got matches?

Bob searches his pockets and pulls out a pack of MATCHES.

CHOPS
(To Bob)

Sit down.

Chops puts Bob's gun in his jacket pocket, and then takes his gun from Louie.

CHOPS
(To Louie)

Gimme that.

LOUIE
But boss, I was thinking I could hang on to this one —

CHOPS
Hand it over.

Bob sits next to Vera. Chops pulls out a cigarette and offers it to Louie, who puts it behind his ear.

VERA
Bob — your mother. She —

BOB
My mother? She's here?

ROSIE
(crying)
She's dead. Grandma's dead!

MARY
Dad, that beast threatened her with a gun and she had a heart attack.

VERA
She...she felt no pain, Bob.

BOB
No. Mama.

Bob breaks down, over-emoting.

BOB
(To Chops, Louie)
How could you? You...you animals!

Chops puffs on his cigarette.

CHOPS
(Threatening)

If I was you I'd keep a lid on it, Mr. Burling.

Bob jumps up, ready to pounce. Vera leaps up.

VERA

Please Bob, think of the children!

They sit. Bob crumbles, Vera consoles him.
Mary observes Louie and Chops talking.

LOUIE
(To Chops)

Boss [W] his gun...

CHOPS

What about it?

LOUIE

Well, I guess I was figuring you'd give it to me.

CHOPS

Oh. You figured wrong.

Louie turns to see Mary looking at him.

CHOPS
(To Louie)

Tape up the squirt.

Louie begins duct taping Rosie to a chair.

BOB

What are you doing? Leave her alone!

LOUIE

She bit Chops and tried to make a run for it.

Louie does a thorough job of taping Rosie into the chair.

ROSIE

And I almost made it!

BOB

For God's sake, she's only a child. Tie me up instead.

CHOPS

Why? You thinkin' you want to bite me?

BOB

I'll have you know, I'm not a violent man, but I have my limits.

CHOPS

You hear that kid, he's got his limits.

Bad stage laugh from Louie.

VERA

Bob! Keep your emotions in check — darling, you'll be no better than this animal if you can't reign in your temper —

BOB

I'm sorry sweetheart, a man can only take so much!

Bob threatens Chops ☒ they engage in a skirmish (bad stage combat.) Chops clunks him with his gun.

BOB

Ah!

CHOPS

Restrain him. Upstairs. With his dead mama. And then get down here: We got us a little excavation project in the cellar to attend to.

Chops pulls out the handmade map as Louie rough houses a stumbly Bob up the stairs.

CHOPS

X marks the spot.

Lights down on the Burling Residence and up on the...

DETECTIVE'S OFFICE

Beck sits, head tilted, holding a rag over his face. He's been bleeding the whole time, his shirt is blood drenched and clearly he's still in agony. Carson studies the map.

CARSON

You a betting man, Beck?

BECK

(over the rag)

I've been known to play a little poker.

CARSON

Myra Templeton is headed south on 33. Now last time that green Buick was spotted was Logan. What's between Logan and Columbus?

BECK

Lancaster? So are you thinking the dame is headed to a rendezvous with Carmichael in Lancaster?

CARSON

Call it a hunch.

BECK

But boss, Lancaster is —

CARSON

A pretty damn big berg. I know.

BECK

Not much open on Christmas Eve in Lancaster. A bar? A gas station?

CARSON

Too public.

BECK

Yeah — somebody would spot them for sure. Where would Chops Carmichael hole up, waiting for a dame to rescue him?

Carson — deep in thought.

BECK

Tell me about him.

CARSON

What do you mean?

BECK

You put Carmichael away?

Carson — mum.

BECK

You seem to know how his mind works and what makes him tick.

Carson — mum.

CARSON

Stefanaski!

BECK

Huh?

CARSON

Bogie Stefanaski.

Beck lowers the rag to see if his nose is still pouring blood. The rag is totally blood-drenched. His nose is purple and swollen and crooked. Carson spins around – and spots Beck’s nose. It’s appalling.

BECK

The jewel thief? We put Stefanaski away 6 years ago.

Carson winces at Beck’s gross face.

BECK

We put Stefanaski away 6 years ago.

CARSON

...Yeah, yeah. We put Stefanaski away, but what didn’t we ever find?

Beck feels his nose, puts the rag up to it again.

BECK

Well, if I recall, boss, we never did get him to cough up those ancient jewels he pilfered from that Cleveland museum.

CARSON

Exactly. And where down the river did we send Mr. Stefanaski, Beck?

BECK

Belmont Correctional —

A LARGE STAGE LIGHT falls from the ceiling and knocks Beck unconscious. Carson goes over and pokes at Beck and then looks off stage. We hear frantic whispering off stage, and then the houselights come up. Donna Malone pokes her head out from back stage, unsure what to do. She looks into the wings and then walks on stage.

DONNA

Folks, there will be a 10 minute intermission.

We watch several actors carrying Beck off stage. Someone sops up the blood and someone else drags the fallen light off.

On the Burling set, Rosie remains stranded, taped to her chair throughout the intermission.

INTERMISSION

ACT II

THE DETECTIVE'S OFFICE

Bob is now playing the role of Beck, script in hand. He wears Beck's costume, and his blood-matted fake mustache, which he struggles to keep on for the remainder of the act. He is more or less glued to the script. Carson and Beck are in the same positions before the light fell.

BECK (Bob)
(reading from script)

We put Stefanaski away 6 years ago.

CARSON
Yeah, yeah. We put Stefanaski away, but what didn't we ever find?

BECK (Bob)
Well, if I recall, boss, we never did get him to cough up those ancient jewels he pilfered from that Cleveland museum.

CARSON
Exactly. And where down the river did we send Mr. Stefanaski, Beck?

BECK (Bob)
Belmont Correctional Institute. But he ain't on the loose, boss. Only Louie DeFazio and Chops Carmichael got out, right?

CARSON
Right. Right. But men in prison, men confined, they got a lot of time on their hands. They get a little bored, see? They get to talking.

BECK (Bob)
Are you saying Bogie Stefanaski spilled the beans about the whereabouts of Cleveland jewels to Chops Carmichael at Belmont?

Beck, following the stage directions in the script, gets up, leaving the script on the desk, and goes to the map.

CARSON
And where was Stefanaski residing when we nabbed him?

Pause. Beck walks back to his script, finds his place.

BECK (Bob)
With his mama. In Lancaster.

Carson swings into action.

CARSON

Call Mimi over in records. Find out the last known address for the Stefanaskis in Lancaster. Meanwhile, let's say we hightail it down to Belmont and have a little chat with the jewel thief.

A SPOTLIGHT ON DIRK, ON A PHONE.

DIRK

I tell you, officer, the whole family was acting strange. There was a fella there, didn't look quite right. They said he was a cousin Louie from Cleveland, but I never heard mention of a cousin Louie from Cleveland before...it just seemed fishy. I — no, sir, I haven't had a spat with my girl! Nothing like that! I — no, I haven't had too much eggnog. I'm tellin' you — wait 24 hours? That could be too late. I — listen — hello? Hello?

He hangs up. He punches his fist. A citizen about to take matters into his own hands....

LOUD SUSPENSE MUSIC as the HOUSELIGHTS COME UP. (This is where the actual intermission is supposed to happen.) Donna comes out, confused. She looks in the wings.

DONNA

Are we...oh, okay.

(To the audience)

Never mind. Enjoy the play.

The HOUSELIGHTS GO DOWN. Pause. The LIGHTS GO UP ON —

THE BURLING LIVING ROOM

During this scene, we're aware that the tiny Stage Manager is struggling with fierce determination to change over the Detective Office to the DETECTIVE'S CAR (A FRONT SEAT and A STEERING WHEEL.) This involves dragging off the (heavy) desk, the (squeaking) map wall, and the chair off and pulling the car unit on. The quieter she attempts to be, the more she draws attention to herself.

MARY

(To Chops)

You beast. Picking on a poor defenseless little girl.

ROSIE

Yeah, a *tough* guy picks on someone his own size.

CHOPS

You're about one syllable away from being gagged.
(To Mary)

You. Up.

Mary rises.

CHOPS

(To Louie — winking)
You might need some assistance down in that cellar.

LOUIE

But Boss, I don't even have a gun.

CHOPS

(To Louie)

I think you can handle her.

(To Mary)

You even think about trying anything , cupcake, could be mom and sis both get snuffed, see?

ROSIE

Snuffed! I know what that means. It means —

The actress playing Rosie gets a peculiar look on her face.

ROSIE

It means —

She looks at Vera and Mary, appalled .

ROSIE

It means you're gonna kill us!

CHOPS

Sharp as a tac, squirt.

(To Mary)

You heard the kid. Now go on — make yourself useful.

LOUIE

But boss —

CHOPS

I'm giving you a Christmas present, kid. Take her.

Louie and Mary exit.

CHOPS

Sit tight, ladies. Let's make it a silent night. A long silent night.

ROSIE

♪ Silent Night. Holy Night.

CHOPS

Can it kid.

ROSIE

♪ All is calm, all is bright.

Chops grabs some DUCT TAPE and sticks it over Rosie's mouth. Vera weeps.

CHOPS

I hate that song.

As the LIGHTS GO DOWN, DRAMATIC MUSIC PLAYS.

THE DETECTIVE CAR

The Stage Manager, out of breath with exertion, is dragging THE CAR on as the lights come up. The actor playing Bob continues to pinch hit as Beck, and both he and Carson stand awkwardly until she scurries off before they get in the car. Throughout the scene Beck/Bob drives, but he never looks at the road, he's dependent on the script sitting next to him on the seat.

BECK (Bob)

(reading)

So Bogie Stefanaski is Chops Carmichael's bunk mate and he's found dead in his sleep the morning Carmichael and Defazio escape? Coincidence?

CARSON

I think not, Beck.

BECK (Bob)

(reading)

Can't wait to see that autopsy report.

A doorbell rings. Beck/Bob and Carson look sideways at each other. Beck/Bob checks his script. The doorbell ceases. We hear an OFF STAGE VOICE: (Dirk) *Car 78, Car 78, come in.* Carson picks up a 2-way radio.

CARSON

Car 78. Carson. Whadya got?

Off Stage Voice: (Dirk) *Mrs. Mae Stefanaski passed away 6 years ago. Last address: 2100 Haviland Road. Lancaster.*

CARSON

Roger that. As I recall, that address is in a fairly tony suburb right outside town.

BECK (Bob)
(reading)

Should you alert the Feds and get some squad cars over there?

CARSON

Not so fast, Beck. Not so fast. Chances are Carmichael and DeFazio are holed up in that house, waiting for Myra Templeton and...locating those Cleveland jewels.

BECK (Bob)
(reading)

So shouldn't we nab 'em now, before Templeton gets there and they take off?

CARSON

Mae Stefanaski died 6 years ago.

BECK (Bob)
(reading)

So?

CARSON

So I'm saying a house in a tony area of Lancaster isn't likely to sit idle for 5 years. Someone – a family perhaps – is residing in it.

BECK (Bob)
(reading)

Whistles. Oh.

Beck/Bob whistles.

BECK (Bob)
(reading)

So we're looking at a hostage situation?

CARSON

Don't you think we better find out, before we race in and slaughter a lot of innocent people in a shoot out with 2 of the most ruthless miscreants ever to escape prison? Let's get back on Route 33 and head up to Lancaster before Myra Templeton beats us.

Carson braces himself and leans to and fro as Beck does a U-turn, Beck's eyes never leaving the script. FAKE SIREN SOUND MADE BY A HUMAN VOICE.

BURLING CELLAR

During this scene, we're also aware of a situation happening on the Burling Living Room. The actress playing Rosie, duct taped to the chair, is desperately trying to signal for help from off stage.

Louie, shirt off, "digs" with a LARGE SHOVEL. He's incapable of doing this business and speaking at the same time. Mary sits on an UPSIDE DOWN PAIL. She coughs violently and snuffles her nose.

LOUIE

Miss, I'm sorry your family got mixed up in this.

MARY

Mary. My name is Mary. (Bary, By nabe is Bary)

LOUIE

Mary. That's a pretty name. I was named after my old man, Louis.

MARY

Tell it to someone who cares.

LOUIE

I understand how you must be feeling. This can't be easy for you.

Pause.

MARY

I'm sorry. Tell me about your...old man.

LOUIE

He was all right, most of the time. Except when he was drinking. Then he used to beat me with this thing he called his Cat O' Nine Tails.

MARY

That's terrible.

LOUIE

When I was 12, he got sent to federal prison. Truth be told, I was glad.

MARY

What about your mother?

LOUIE

She ran off with the gas meter guy when I was still in diapers.

MARY

I'm so sorry. I think Louis is a nice name. A man's name. You've had a hard life. Louis, how did you...

LOUIE

What?

MARY

What did you do? To land in jail?

LOUIE

I was stupid, is what I did. Fell in with the wrong crowd. Thought they were my ticket out of hell, but turns out, they landed me right straight in it.

MARY

Tell me. Please.

Louie sets down the shovel, pulls the cigarette out from his ear, pulls matches from his pocket and attempts to light the cigarette, but the matches don't work.

LOUIE

I was the driver, but I didn't know it was a heist, see? I didn't know it until my pals come running out of the bank with their guns cocked and a bag a cash. A guard got killed.

MARY

You were duped.

With mounting frustration, Louie is still trying to light the cigarette.

LOUIE

Tell it to the judge. I'm sorry. A pretty girl such as yourself doesn't need to be hearing my sad tale.

MARY

I never...I never met anyone like you before. Most of the boys I know have lived sheltered lives, as have I.

He gives up and pretends to light the cigarette and takes a drag off the unlit cigarette.

LOUIE

Sounds nice.

MARY

Sounds boring. Care to share that?

LOUIE

You're a little young, aren't you?

MARY

Not really.

He hands the unlit cigarette to Mary, who puff on it throughout the scene.

MARY

Nice. I like it.

She exhales luxuriously.

LOUIE

How grown up you look behind that veil of smoke.

MARY

Louis - tell me —

LOUIE

Yes, Mary?

MARY

What are you digging for? You don't have to tell me. Maybe you shouldn't, maybe it'll get you in trouble with...I don't know his name.

LOUIE

Chops.

MARY

He's awfully short tempered. And nasty. Not just to us – but to you, also.

LOUIE

Yeah, well —

MARY

He bosses you around —

LOUIE

Yeah, but —

MARY

Why, if I were you, I wouldn't put up with it!

LOUIE

I had a hard time in prison, being so young. But Chops, he got behind me. He's like the big brother I never had. And he picked me! Do you hear? Of all the guys he could have picked, Chops picked me to break out of jail with!

MARY

But Louis, he didn't do you any favors!

LOUIE

What would you know about it?

MARY

You could be caught —

LOUIE

Nobody is gonna catch Louie DeFazio. Not alive anyway.

MARY

Louis, don't you want to live?

LOUIE

No. No, I don't want to live. Not if it means going back to that place.

MARY

But Louis —

LOUIE

I got a life term, do you hear?

MARY

Oh! I'm sorry, I didn't know.

LOUIE

Life in prison. No parole! I got nothing to lose!

MARY

That seems harsh. That seems unfair. You didn't know what your pals were doing —

LOUIE

So don't go badmouthing Chops, hear? He's the only one ever cared a hoot about me.

MARY

Someday someone will care about you a lot more than that Chops does. Don't give up hope.

LOUIE

Hope.

MARY

Hope, yes hope. Without hope, we are nothing.

She sneezes. Louie recoils.

DETECTIVE CAR

Carson and Beck/Bob - parked. Beck/Bob is allegedly looking through a pair of BINOCULARS, but really he's glued to the script on the seat next to him. Throughout the scene he struggles to keep his mustache in place, while dealing with binoculars and a script.

CARSON

What's going on?

BECK (Bob)

Hard to tell. Not a lot of movement through the window.

He picks up the script and holds it by the BINDER CLIP at the top of the script with the same hand he's steering with.

CARSON

...The lights are on, someone is definitely home. The Plymouth is parked in the driveway...

Beck (Bob) accidentally squeezes the binder clip and the stack of pages falls to the floor. He retrieves it, frantically leafs through. Carson waits.

BECK (Bob)

(reading)

So Bogie Stefanaski is Chops Carmichael's bunk mate and he's found dead in his sleep the morning Carmichael and Defazio escape? Coincidence?

Carson shakes his head.

BECK (Bob)

(reading)

I'm invited to a party but I can't seem to find the house, ma'am.

(realizes he's on wrong page)

Ah, no....

Beck still can't find the scene and proceeds to do the scene without the script.

CARSON

You're probably wondering...what my personal connection to...you're wondering if he mugged my wife?

Beck nods hesitantly.

BECK

— mugged your wife, right.

CARSON

Robbed my mother? Me. Did Carmichael rob me? Well, drop it Beck. I know you think I have some connection to him...you're also probably wondering if I think he's going to ax that kid —

BECK

Yeah —

CARSON

— he's holed up with? The kid.

BECK (Bob)

Right, that kid.

Carson closes his eyes, trying to fend off a memory.

CARSON

He'd ax him in a heartbeat. But we're not gonna give him the chance. Check on the current status of Myra Templeton's car, Beck. Pick up the...the talky thing there.

Beck picks up the 2-way.

BECK (Bob)

Um... I need the current status of the Templeton car. Over.

OFF STAGE VOICE (Dirk in a bad English accent) *Templeton's car is approaching the outskirts of the city of Lancaster from the north. Repeat. Templeton's car is approaching the outskirts of Lancaster from the north.*

Beck hangs up. Then remembers and picks it up again —

BECK (Bob)

Thanks. Bye.

He hangs up again.

CARSON

We don't have much time. I need you to do something, Beck. Something I can't risk doing myself.

BECK
(clueless nodding)

...okay.

Carson looks meaningfully at Beck. The LIGHTS GOING OUT startles Beck. We see the Stage Manager frantically run on and hands him her LARGE STAGE MANAGER BINDER.

BURLING LIVING ROOM

When the lights come up, the actor playing Rosie is distressed, desperately trying to get someone's attention.

Chops picks up the BOTTLE OF BOURBON.

CHOPS

Hello beautiful. I've sure missed this. It's going to taste fine.

He struggles to crack open the UNBROKEN SEAL. He brings it to his lips, notices the smell. Perplexed, he looks around at Vera. Vera indicates "drink it." He takes a slug. Ooh-boy. We feel his bliss as it runs down his gullet. In fact, it's so nice, he drains about a third of the bottle.

CHOPS
(husky voiced)

Maybe I'll spend the rest of my life dead. But I'll tell you what, I ain't goin' out without a drink, see?

Vera looks sharply at him.

CHOPS

A fight. I ain't goin' out with out a —

WE HEAR AN ELEPHANT ROAR. IT STOPS. All eyes on the door.

CHOPS
(To Vera)

You expecting company?

Vera shakes her head no.

CHOPS

Peak out the window.

VERA

I've never seen him before. It's a man with a mustache.

CHOPS

Get rid of him.

He takes another swig and hides behind the door. Vera opens it. It's Beck (Bob), with the large stage manager's binder and no mustache.

During Vera and Beck's exchange, Chops wanders into full view and take swigs of the bourbon. Vera's attention is split between Beck and Chops.

BECK (Bob)

Excuse me, ma'am. I hope I'm not interrupting you on Christmas Eve.

VERA

What can I do for you?

BECK (Bob)

You're sure I'm not interrupting anything?

VERA

Why no. My family...my family is still at Christmas Eve services at the church.

BECK (Bob)

I see.

VERA

My daughter plays an angel in the pageant. I expect them home shortly.

BECK (Bob)

I'm invited to a party, but I can't seem to find the house, ma'am. I have the phone number, would you mind if I came in and called them?

VERA

I know most of the families around here. Whose house are you looking for?

BECK (Bob)

The Doyles.

VERA

The Doyles. I know the Doyles. The Doyles live one block over. 2100 Nayland.

BECK (Bob)

Isn't this 2100 Nayland?

VERA

No. This is 2100 Haviland. Nayland is one block over.

BECK (Bob)

Is that so? Why, I'm on the wrong street! Would you mind - I'd still like to call my friends and tell them I'm on our way.

VERA

Well, I'm afraid that won't be possible. Our phone is out.

BECK (Bob)

Out.

VERA

Dead. Our phone is dead and so...I'm sorry, you won't be able to use it.

BECK (Bob)

Well, in that case, I'll just have to surprise my friends. Thank you ma'am. And Merry Christmas.

VERA

Merry Christmas.

She closes the door on Beck (Bob) and turns to find Chops mid-swig. When he sees her, he quickly puts it down.

Meanwhile, Beck (Bob) goes over to the Detective Car set, still holding the binder. The Stage Manager creeps in and indicates that she needs her binder back. Bob doesn't want to give it to her. They fight over it, and she grabs it and runs off.

CHOPS

You'd make a good con artist, lady.

VERA

...Vera. My name is Vera.

CHOPS

You'd make a good con artist, Vera.

Vera casually makes her way towards the bourbon bottle and smells it. She's horrified. Chops grabs it out of her hand.

During the following detective scene, we see the actress playing Vera quietly haggling with Chops over the bottle, whilst the actress playing Rosie tries to untape herself.

DETECTIVE CAR

As the lights go up, Carson is handing Beck his mustache, and he immediately puts it on. Once again, he's scriptless.

So. Did everything look normal?
CARSON

...yep. Pretty normal.
BECK (Bob)

So the family went to church, right?
CARSON

To church. Right.
BECK (Bob)

Wrong! Let me ask you, Beck. Would you be sitting at home alone if your daughter was playing an angel in the Christmas pageant?
CARSON

Beck/Bob nods yes, then no.

...maybe?
BECK (Bob)

No, you wouldn't. Not unless you came up with a clever way to get out of it.
CARSON

Pause.

And you're right to be suspicious about the phone going out.
CARSON

That does seem suspicious.
BECK (Bob)

She's a hostage, Beck.
CARSON

BECK (Bob)

Umm-hum.

CARSON

And her phone is most certainly not “out.” I’m not a betting man, but if I was, I would wager Myra Templeton was called on the phone in that house.

Beck (Bob) starts to reach for the radio, checking with Carson.

CARSON

No, you’re not going to make a call. No time. No need. I’d wager my life that Chops Carmichael and Louie DeFazio are in that house.

BECK (Bob)
(nodding)

Uh-huh.

CARSON

Her answers were a series of chess moves, clear and simple. The poor woman is probably terrified, the rest of her family bound and gagged in the basement or the attic....what do you see?

Carson gestures for Beck (Bob) to pick up the binoculars.

CARSON

Well? What do you see?

BECK (Bob)

...lots of stuff.

CARSON

Do you see any suspicious man outside the window?

Beck (Bob) nods.

BECK (Bob)

Yes, I do.

BURLING RESIDENCE

Vera and Chops are caught mid-haggle as the lights go up. Chops defiantly takes a swig. Vera shoves him into position - a chair where his back is towards the picture window. The actress playing Rosie — distraught.

Dirk appears at the picture window.

Rosie and Vera “spot” Dirk, who puts a finger to his lips — *be quiet*.

CHOPS

I wish Vera would get here.

VERA
(through gritted teeth)

Myra?

CHOPS

I wish Myra would get here.

Dirk attempts to open the window. It's locked. He reaches through and unlocks it. Then he starts to inch it open, it's extremely resistant and squeaks loudly. Vera engages Chops to distract him from seeing Dirk.

VERA

What is she like?

Chops is starting to feel the effects of the liquor.

CHOPS

Who? Oh. She's like...a female. She got a lot of class for an ex...shall we say, a *retired* lady of the night. Sleek. Geglegant.

The window frame crashes loudly into the Living Room. Chops turns and looks at him.

VERA

How did you and this Miss Templeton meet?

CHOPS

Who? Oh. How do you think?

VERA

Well, there must have been something besides the physical attraction. Physical attraction is fleeting, and it seems this woman has stuck with you, even when you've been indisposed.

CHOPS

All I know is me and Myra, we've had ourselves some good times in the future....no, we had ourselves some good times in the *past*, and we're gonna have a lot more past in the future.

Dirk eases himself through the hole in the wall where the window used to be.

VERA

How long have you —

CHOPS

Are you my mother?

Dirk is sneaking up on Chops when Louie and Mary come up from the basement. Louie is tired and dirty.

Dirk goes to closet, intending to hide, but the door won't open. He panics and stands against it, closing his eyes and trying to be invisible. Louie momentarily forgets to speak when he sees Dirk.

LOUIE

...so far I haven't found the box, boss.

MARY

(To Chops)

Let me get Louis a glass of water.

CHOPS

OH! IT'S LOUIS NOW, HUH? HUH?

MARY

Please.

Vera signals for Chops to not talk so loudly.

CHOPS

(To Mary)

You wanna come with us, cubecake? Young Louie here will satisfy you a lot better than that binelacker foybriend...that foyliner backfend...that linefucking boffiend —

Mary waits for her cue to go out to the kitchen but it's not coming.

VERA

(interrupts the rest of his line)

My Mary will never ever go off with the likes of you!

Vera directs Mary off to the kitchen.

LOUIE

I hope I'm digging in the right spot. I think I am. If we could talk to Stefanaski —

Waiting for the cut in.

LOUIE

If we could talk to Stefanaski —

Waiting...

If we could talk to Stefanaski

LOUIE

I forgot my line.

CHOPS

It's a little late for that, kid.

VERA
(mumbles)

It's a little late for that, kid.

CHOPS

What are you saying? You rubbed out Bogie? You killed a fellow convict?

LOUIE

Mary returns with a GLASS OF WATER.

He ain't never gonna spill about nothing ever again.
(To Vera)

CHOPS

Right? Is that right?

Vera glares.

WHY?

LOUIE

Why what? Oh - are you questioning me? ME?!

CHOPS

Aw Chops, you shouldn't have gone and done that. Not to Bogie. He was a pal.

LOUIE

Chops looks at Vera. She indicates the glass of water. Chops grabs the water from Mary and intends to throw it in Louie's face, but he hits Dirk instead. Dirk sputters. Everyone pretends not to notice.

He was a loose end.

VERA
(mumbles to Chops)

CHOPS

He was a loose end!

LOUIE

He was a buddy. I played chess with him. Geez Chops —

CHOPS
(mocking)

Geez Chops. Shut up!

LOUIE

Maybe I don't know you at all, boss.

CHOPS

And maybe I don't know me at all.

MARY
(To Louie)

Are you going to let him talk to you like that?

Chops cracks Mary across the face. (A terrible fake stage slap.)
Dirk opens his eyes, pretends to open the closet door and effects a tiger-like leap at Chops. More bad stage combat, worsened because of the inebriation of the actor playing Chops.

DIRK

You leave her alone!

Chops smacks Dirk for real.

DIRK

Ow!

Chops and Dirk fight. Chops aims his pistol and...click — nothing. Chops fires again...click — nothing.

CHOPS

Pow! I shot you!

Dirk falls to the ground, pretending to be shot. Chops "blows the smoke" off his gun just as the actual gun fire sound effect occurs, making it look like he shot himself in the face. Chops ignores this. The actress playing Mary cracks up, and Louie follows, and Vera silences her with a stare.

DETECTIVE CAR

Beck (Bob), still scriptless, is putting his mustache back on his face.

CARSON

Did you hear that?

Beck nods no, and then yes.

CARSON

Well, I agree with you if you're thinking that it's going to be a blood bath.

We see Beck frantically searching his dropped script pages as the LIGHT GOES OUT.

BURLING RESIDENCE

VERA

Dirk! Are you all right?

DIRK

I think I'm okay. I feel sleepy and I can't feel my arm...

Pause. Vera looks expectantly towards the stairs.

VERA

(ad-libbing)

Bob! Bob...Wait! I think I hear my husband Bob! Is that him? Is that Bob coming down the stairs?

MARY

(ad-libbing)

Dad?

VERA

Bob?

From the detective car, Carson elbows Beck. We see Beck (Bob) drop the pages and race from the car and run backstage. We see him frantically hopping and changing his pants as he runs past the fallen picture window. We hear enormous commotion as he makes his way.

VERA

(ad-libbing)

I think I hear my husband coming...and if he does, which he will, any moment now. He must have chewed through his duct tape when he heard the gun fire! I hope he doesn't do anything rash!

Bob, still sporting the Beck mustache, is trying to get into his red cashmere sweater as he tears down the Burling stairs and panics, not certain where they are in the script.

BOB

I chewed my way through the duct tape when I heard the gun fire!

VERA

(ad-libbing)

I thought as much.

Louis pushes him on the couch.

VERA

Bob [W] you did a magnificent thing, charging down the stairs to save us, and I love you. But you must never be brave like that again.

Bob [W] getting his bearings [W]

VERA

Listen to me — you can't save us if you die. Do you understand? Please darling, say you understand?

BOB

Oh. I do. I do understand, Vera darling.

CHOPS

You better understand, Mr. Burling, or your whole family is gonna end up in the morgue.

Dirk groans.

MARY

(To Chops)

You beast. Dirk! Dirk!

CHOPS

(To Louie)

That little tart ain't so loyal to you's after all.

LOUIE

Let's lam it outta here, boss!

Pause...

VERA
(mumbling to Chops)

Don't tell me what to do —

CHOPS
I *know* the line, Meredith. I was taking a pause.
(To Louie)
Don't tell me what to do! Or you'll end up like Bogie.

LOUIE
Are you threatening *me*, Chops? *Me*?

BOB
By God, he'd kill even his own kind!

VERA
Bob, stay out of it.

CHOPS
We ain't goin' nowhere till you find those jewels, DeFazio.

MARY
Dirk's bleeding, can't you see? He needs a hospital! Have some semblance of kindness and human decency!

CHOPS
(To Mary)
Can it, cubecake.

LOUIE
Things are spinning outta control! I can't think straight! Nothing is going as planned!
Things keep happening, things I got no power over!

DIRK
Oh, Mary! I'm terribly sorry sweetheart. I'm guilty of the same heroics as your father here. That rat made me see red, accusing you of pilfering jewels and calling you a... cubecake. I should have waited for the proper time to surprise them. But Mary, I'm a man of muscle. I acted on impulse. Forgive me, Mary, can you?

MARY
There's nothing to forgive, Dirk.

DIRK
Mary — I love you. I love you, sweetheart.

Mary shoots a look at Louie, who turns away.

DIRK
Mary, Mary — will you marry me?

MARY
Dirk —

DIRK
(To Bob)
Mr. Burling, I'd very much like your daughter's hand in marriage.

Louie bites his fist.

BOB
Well son, hopefully when this nightmare is over, that may come to pass.

MARY
Dirk — this is all so sudden.

DIRK
No it isn't, Mary. I had planned on giving you a ring tonight.

MARY
Oh. I don't know what to say.

DIRK
Say yes. All you have to do is say yes.

Mary shoots Louie a look.

LOUIE
Stop it! Stop pressuring her!

Dirk studies Mary and then Louie.

DIRK
So that's the way it is. Boy, what a yegg I've been.

MARY
Dirk — no, it's not what you think!

DIRK
And here I risked my life to save you. *Maybe you are a cubecake.*

BOB
Here, here, Mary. What's going on?

MARY

Nothing is going on, Dad!

LOUIE

Nothing happened between us down in the basement!

BOB

Now see here, no daughter of mine —

MARY

Dad! Dirk! I swear before God — I wasn't trying to be seductive!

DIRK

What are you going to do? Run off with the likes of him?

MARY

No, I —

BOB

And what kind of life would that be, Mary Burling?

DETECTIVE CAR

As the lights come up the Stage Manager is sitting in Beck's place. She reads from her big Stage Manager Binder. Bob charges on – stops when he sees her ☹ a bit peeved ☹ he hands her the mustache and walks off. Throughout this scene and subsequent scenes, the Stage Manager suffers from terrible stage fright, and is barely audible.

CARSON

Get on the radio, Beck. I wanna know exactly where that Templeton dame is.

BECK (Stage Manager)
(on radio)

Car 78 requesting a patch through to Car 19, and keep it open.

CARSON

Now Beck, I've seen you in these tense situations before, and I just want to caution you, when we get in there, you'll need to reign in your brute force. You're a big man and you don't know your own strength. We don't want any innocent people at the receiving end of your powerful fist, see?

BECK (Stage Manager)

I'll do my best, boss.

From the Burling Living Room Set, we hear Dirk, who is still laying on the floor:
Car 19 here.

BECK (Stage Manager)

Where's she now, Car 19?

Dirk: *Myra Templeton is heading south on Haviland Road. Repeat. South on Haviland Road.*

Carson looks out the window.

CARSON

Duck Beck!

BURLING LIVING ROOM

Rosie is making grunty noises, with a look of awfulness on her face. Chops is enjoying his inebriation, the empty bottle nearby. Dramatic music plays during Vera's inspiring monologue. Vera gives an Oscar winning performance.

VERA

Rosie, we'll get through this somehow. We'll see this sorry episode through to conclusion. Haven't we taught you to persevere in the face of insurmountable difficulties?

Chops, bored and hot, gets up and starts fanning himself. He's muttering about the heat and takes his coat off and throws it behind the couch and starts rolling up his sleeves. Vera's attention becomes split between her performance and Chops upstaging her.

VERA

We must fortify ourselves against an onslaught of unforeseen circumstances and be tenacious in our resolve. There will be a morning after. God never gives us more than we can handle. It won't go on like this forever. This will end, do you hear me?

CHOPS

(under his breath)

Let's hope so.

He winks at someone in the audience.

VERA

And we'll look back on this and marvel at our own strength and creativity. Why, we'll even laugh, laugh like soldiers, who, returning from war, look back and laugh.

CHOPS
(under his breath)

Hee-hee-hee.

VERA
Yes. We were supposed to have a special night, but instead, it has become the most nightmarish night of nights, a desperate night, full of strife and unpleasant surprises.

She shoots a dagger of a look at Chops.

CHOPS
(muttering)
Uh-oh. I'm so in trouble when I get home...

Banging at the door. Pause.

LOUIE
Ah...should I open the door, Chops?

CHOPS
Oops, someone at the door. Go ahead and answer it.

Louie opens the door. MYRA TEMPLETON (the terrified Stage Manager) grips her big binder and "saunters" in. She's dressed partly as an ex-lady of the night, sporting a blonde wig, but still wearing her large thick glasses.

MYRA (Stage Manager)
Avon calling, baby.

She opens her one free arm to embrace Chops.

MYRA (Stage Manager)
Long time no see, big boy.

CHOPS
Long time no see, doll.

She attempts to give Chops a peck and he gives her a big sloppy French kiss that goes on way too long. She gags in disgust and pulls away.

MYRA (Stage Manager)
Thought I'd never have that pleasure again.

Chops becomes very amorous and she slaps him off. She looks over at Vera, who acknowledges the situation.

CHOPS

Anybody follow you?

MYRA

Nobody follows Myra without her knowing it, baby.

She looks around.

MYRA

If this joint were any more wholesome it'd be milk. Let's get the hell outta here.

Chops tries to embrace Myra/Stage Manager again. She slaps him away.

VERA

(mumbles angrily)

Einstein ☒

CHOPS

I know!

(To Myra)

Einstein here hasn't found the rocks yet.

MYRA

What?!

CHOPS

(To Louie)

You heard the stage manager ☒ get down there and dig.

Mary rises.

MARY

I'll go with you.

BOB

Here, here.

DIRK

Mary!

MARY

What do you care? I'm nothing but a cubecake.

She walks towards the basement stairs with Louie.

MARY

(whispering)

Mom, Dad, Rosie... Just remember. *I love you.*

Pause. Myra (Stage Manager) frantically signals to cut the lights.

DETECTIVE SQUAD CAR

Carson is alone in the passenger seat.

CARSON

Okay. Okay. I think I'll get on the radio and call in the troops. I'll tell them to get into position, but keep everything out of sight of the windows. And I'll say for God's sake, keep the press out of it! We don't know how many innocent people are in that house. If we don't do this right, it could end up in a blood bath.

Carson just sits there for a moment, and picks up the two-way.

CARSON

Headquarters, this is Car 78. Repeat. Beck here. Repeat. Hello? Hello? Is anybody there?

Carson puts the radio back and just sits. He looks off into the wings.

THE BURLING LIVING ROOM.

Lights up, catching everyone in the act. Vera is arguing with Chops, Rosie is unhappily trying to communicate with Bob who doesn't get it...lights down.

THE BURLING BASEMENT

Mary sits on her pail, blowing her nose. Louie digs.

MARY

We'll all be dead in an hour.

LOUIE

It ain't gonna go down like that.

MARY

Sure it is.

LOUIE

Not if I have anything to say about it.

MARY

But Louis, you don't.

LOUIE

This isn't playing out the way I thought it would.

MARY

This night is not what any of us had in mind.

LOUIE

I just want it to be over already.

MARY

Chops isn't going to have any use for you either.

LOUIE

What are you saying?

MARY

Sure he needs you now, because you're young and strong and able to dig for hidden treasures. But Louis, as soon as you find those jewels and hand them over to him — don't you see — you will be expendable. He didn't even give you a gun, Louis. Why? Why I ask you?

Louie clamps his hands over his ears and paces like a wild animal.

MARY

I don't say these things to hurt you.

LOUIS

Stop it! I can't take it! I can't take it! My head is spinning!

MARY

Louis, look at me.

LOUIS

No, you confuse me.

MARY

Look at me, Louis.

He does.

MARY

There now, that's not so bad, is it?

LOUIS

You're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

Unnerved, he grabs his shovel and begins to dig, striking something. He sets down the shovel and "unearths" the box. He looks at Mary and then opens the box. They peer in at the breathtaking jewels.

MARY

Louis — I don't know if I could ever grow to love Dirk, but I know I don't love him tonight. And tonight is all we have.

She's attempting to seduce him, but the actor is torn because he so doesn't want to catch her flu that he's backing away from her.

MARY

I have such feelings for you. And no, it's not just pity, pity for the raw deal you've been dealt. Oh certainly, that's part of it. Call it a motherly instinct, I don't care. No — let me finish. Let me get this out because we've only this moment. Louis, what I feel for you is —

LOUIS

I don't know what's happening. I've never felt like this before.

MARY

Nor have I.

She grabs him and French kisses him. They start to pull apart and she sneezes right in his face. He's appalled.

MARY

Louis — we have very, very little time. Could you find it in your heart to trust me?

LOUIS

I'm so confused —

MARY

Trust me, Louis, trust me.

LOUIS

...yes! Yes I trust you, Mary Burling.

He throws the shovel in order to embrace Mary. The shovel flies into the Burling scene and clatters.

MARY

Louis. Let's find the jewels and run for it. Let's run away together.

LOUIS

Guns. We'll need the guns.

MARY

He put my dad's gun in his right jacket pocket.

LOUIS

So this is the plan: I'll get your dad's gun out of his jacket pocket and force Chops to give you the other gun.

MARY

I've never held a gun before...hold me!

A great black out moment...Louis sneezes and glares at Mary. The LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE as Mary tries to kiss Louie, and he's avoiding her. Finally, LIGHTS UP ON —

BURLING LIVING ROOM

Myra paces. Vera and Bob sit on the couch. Rosie still on the chair. Chops no where near the window – starting to doze off. Myra gives him a poke.

CHOPS

I'm not looking the likes of things out this window. There hasn't been a car come down that street in a long time.

MYRA

Relax, baby. It's after midnight on Christmas Eve. Ain't nobody up but Santy Claus. Soon as the kid strikes gold, I'll go warm up the car while you...tidy up in here, yeah?

CHOPS

We cotta take one of 'em with us.

MYRA

What the hell for?

Chops looks blank.

MYRA

Let's take the football player. He's easy on the eye.

CHOPS

Whoever we take is who I say is who we'll take.

MYRA

To hell with that — it's my car. I say who comes, see?

CHOPS

Let's get one thing clear, baby!

He blanks. He looks to Vera to help him out, she looks away.

MYRA
(mumbling)

I'm running the show.

CHOPS

No you aren't! *I'm* running the show!

He gets up unsteadily and considers which Burling to take.

CHOPS
(To Bob)

You. Untape the squid.

VERA

No!

BOB

Now see here — if you harm one hair on her head, by God, I'll track you down to hell and [X]

VERA

Bob — control your emotions!

While Vera pleads, Chops sits back down and starts to doze. Vera keeps poking at him to keep him up.

VERA
(To Chops [X] emotionally)

Please, I beg you, if you must take a Burling, take me. Do whatever you want with me, but leave my daughter alone. I beg you. I'm a mother. I live for my children and by all that's right and just in the world, I'll die for my children. Die, do you hear? Because life without my children would be death. Please, I beg of you, leave my daughter. Take me, me, me [X]

MYRA

You give me a pain in the ear.

Myra cuts Rosie's tape and rips the duct tape from her mouth.

VERA

Oh!

The actress playing Rosie is full of dread. Vera pokes Chops.

CHOPS
(To Rosie)

Get up.

Rosie rises, careful to face forward. It's important that Myra and Bob are standing behind Rosie. They see her backside – something is amiss.

ROSIE
(unenthusiastically)

Oh please don't let them take me.

BOB

She's just a child. Take me instead.

VERA
(To Chops, on her knees)

Take me. Take me. I beg of you, as one human being to another. I'm sure you had a mother, you must have some dim memory of a mother's love. Please. I'll do whatever you ask.

CHOPS
Ah, what the hell. All right. We'll take the mama.

VERA
Oh, thank you, thank you!

Vera goes over to Rosie, who is extremely careful to continue facing front.

VERA
Oh thank you, thank you. Oh Rosie! Now darling, I don't want you to worry about mommy, mommy will be just fine.

ROSIE
I don't want you to go! Don't go mom! Don't let them take you.

BOB
We love you, Vera. We'll always love you.

VERA
I love all of you with my whole heart and soul.

Vera prepares to leave. She glances around. Her eyes fall on the tree.

VERA
(To Chops)

I have one last request. Every year, here at the Burling household, it's a Christmas tradition that one of our children put the star up on the tree. This might be my last memory of my family, I ask that you allow our little angel to put the star up on the tree.

CHOPS

Just make it fast.

VERA
Go ahead, Rosie, darling! Put the Star of Bethlehem up on the tree!

All eyes on Rosie. Rosie shakes her head no.

ROSIE
Uh-uh.

VERA
(ad-libbing, forcefully)
Rosie, put the star up on the tree before mommy has to go off with the bad men.

Rosie shakes her head no.

ROSIE
Uh-uh.

CHOPS
(To Rosie)
It's in the script

Vera, clueless, steering Rosie towards the tree, where she's supposed to climb up the ladder, back-to-the-audience.

VERA
(ad-libbing)
The star is very important. It's a tradition in the Burling household. Climb up the ladder, and *put that star on the very top of the tree.*

Vera keeps thrusting the star at Rosie, who backs away.

VERA
(under her breath)
What the hell is your problem, Joann?

BOB

(ad-libbing)

I'll do it — why don't I put the star on the tree this year.

Vera slaps him away.

VERA

(ad-libbing)

Rosie is going to *put the star on the tree!*

Vera forces Rosie to take the star. Just as she's about to turn towards the tree, the actress playing Rosie breaks character. She begins addressing the others on stage, but then brings it down to the audience.

ROSIE

Look — this is not my fault. Okay? Okay! I'm not supposed to be up here! I signed up to make the damned holly cookies, okay? That's all I was supposed to do. Make the damned holly cookies! I wasn't supposed to be in the play! Did I go to any of the play practices? Yes, to pick up my daughter! My daughter Caitlin was supposed to be the angel. I'm supposed to be out there in the lobby setting up for the party!

Louie and Mary cross the boundary of the cellar set and watch. Louie holds a treasure box.

ROSIE

But like all Women Who Do Too Much, taking on too many responsibilities and ...I'm a nurse. Of *course* I'm a nurse. I work in dialysis down at Mercy. So. At 4:30 this afternoon my daughter *presents* with the flu and I volunteer to take her role which I know from practicing with her! Mom to the rescue. Give, give, give, give, give. This is my life. Do you think I don't feel like an idiot standing here in an angel costume? And *you* audience people don't even know the half of it.

She turns around, revealing a BIG RED MENSTRUAL BLOOD STAIN.

Huh? Yes, people, I've got a big red menstrual blood stain covering my angel ass. Is it my fault that my period struck in the middle of this play? It's not even my time, I'm not even supposed to be *having* a period right now. And some women start out slow...but I've always been a gusher. I am — under normal circumstances — *prepared*. Being tied up and gagged in front of an audience is not a normal circumstance. I'm assuming — because it's not my time — that it's stress related. Then again, maybe I'm peri-menopausal ...And just so you all know, there is no one out in that lobby getting ready for the opening night party, so I don't know where that leaves us. So anyway,

(To Vera)

Give me the star. Here we go.

She unceremoniously climbs up the ladder, her backside towards the audience, plunks the star on the tree top, climbs down.

ROSIE
(To Vera)

Happy now, bitch?

She walks off the stage. Pause.

VERA
Oh look Rosie, look how beautiful our Christmas tree is. God is with us, darling. God is on our side.

(To Chops)

I'm ready to go now.

Mary and Louie enter, he is holding the JEWEL BOX.

MYRA
Finally.

LOUIE
(To an almost sleeping Chops)
Boss...boss...the jewels. I found the jewels.

Louie places the jewel box on a table. Myra kicks Chops awake.

MYRA (Stage Manager)
(ad-libbing)
Louie just found the jewels.

CHOPS
Ah, jewels –

Mary and Louie get Chops standing and steer him towards the jewel box.

MYRA
Hello Paradise.

CHOPS
I told you baby. Did I say?

Mary gestures to Louie to get Bob's gun out of Chop's jacket. Louie makes the move and realizes Chops is not wearing his jacket. The actor playing Louie doesn't know what to do, looks around and can't find the jacket. In desperation, he pretends to grab the gun out of Chop's pocket and uses his fingers as a gun.

LOUIE

Okay Chops – *freeze!*

MYRA

Hey – what is this?

Louie — holding out his finger gun.

LOUIE

Don't do anything stupid Chops. Give your gun to Mary or I'll let you have it. I swear to God, I will.

CHOPS

You double-crossing rat.

LOUIE

Just do it!

Chops gives Mary his gun. She points it at Chops. Vera and Bob gasp.

LOUIE

(To Chops)

You killed Bogie, and you were going to kill me! And now I've got something you ain't never gonna have: Love. I got the love of an honest woman, and a chance at a new life.

MARY

Mom, Dad, I'm leaving with Louis.

DIRK

NO!

VERA

Oh dear God ☹

BOB

Mary! Have you taken leave of your senses?!

This is too much for Dirk to bear. Despite his injury, he jumps up and wrestles Louie for the finger gun. Dirk emerges from the scuffle with Louie's "gun" and points his fingers at Louie and "shoots". We hear a perfectly time cue: GUN SHOT. Everyone looks up, astounded at the cue. Then Louie falls to the ground.

MARY

LOUIS!

Mary races to cradle him in her arms.

LOUIE

We'll always have the cellar.

Louie dies.

MARY

No! No! No!

(To Dirk)

You brute! You swine!

DIRK

I DID IT FOR US! FOR US, DO YOU HEAR?

He puts his finger gun down on the floor. Mary points the (real) gun at Dirk. Myra works her way over towards Dirk's "gun".

VERA

Bob — do something —

BOB

(To Mary)

Give me the gun, darling.

VERA

Give daddy the gun, sweetheart.

MARY

No, I'm going to kill! Kill! Do you hear me! He killed the man I love!

VERA

(ad-libbing)

And I'm sure if your baby sister Rosie was here, she's ask you to drop that gun and not shoot Dirk.

Myra picks up Dirk's finger-gun.

VERA

(ad-libbing)

Because she wouldn't want you to go to jail. She'd say jail is not a nice place!

Mary looks at Vera and Bob and breaks down, lowering her gun. Bob takes it from her. Myra immediately raises the finger gun and points it at the back of Bob's head.

MYRA

I'll take that, bub.

Bob reluctantly hands the real gun to Myra. Myra tosses it on the lap of a new passed out Chops.

MARY

(To Dirk)

I'm sorry Dirk, but I'll never marry you.

Myra leans over as if to be getting a whispered edict from Chops.

MYRA

(ad-libbing)

Chops says nobody, but nobody is getting out of here alive.

Chops snores.

OUTSIDE THE BURLING LIVING ROOM

Carson in a SPOTLIGHT.

CARSON

Beck, if we want to avoid a blood bath, our only option is the element of surprise.

Pause. Bob comes running in from SR, securing his mustache, and the Stage Manager comes running on from SL carrying her binder and a large MEGAPHONE. They look at each other. Bob gestures that he has the mustache. The Stage Manager gestures she has the megaphone. Carson doesn't know who to talk to.

ORIGINAL BECK

(shouting from the back of the house)

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE BEST WAY TO SURPRISE THEM IS, BOSS?

The Original Beck, sporting a jacket, an open backed hospital gown (with no undergarments) and an enormous bandage over most of his nose and head, makes his way through the house and walks right into the scene. He stands next to Beck (Bob) and Beck (Stage Manager.)

CARSON

...I can best provide that element. And all I have to do is walk through that front door. So give me 3 minutes before you -

The Original Beck grabs the megaphone from the Beck (Stage Manager) and then rips the mustache off of Beck (Bob's) face and sticks it on his face bandage. They both leave.

CARSON

...so give me 3 minutes before you announce that the house is surrounded.

ORIGINAL BECK

You got it, boss. Are you sure that 3 minutes is Kleenex?

Pause

CARSON

...I think 3 minutes should give me enough time. Let's just say, Beck my showdown with Chops Carmichael has been a long time coming. You wait right here for 3 minutes and then make the announcement that the house is surrounded. I'm going in. God help me.

ORIGINAL BECK

Popcorn!

Carson exits. Original Beck walks into the Living Room.

THE BURLING LIVING ROOM

No one knows what to do about the wandering Original Beck. He spots the holly wreath cookies and starts eating them. Chops completely passed out, drooling on the chair. Myra – gun still aimed at the family.

VERA

WILL THIS NIGHT NEVER END?!

The door falls open and Carson appears. He's surprised to see Beck standing there.

MYRA

Well, well, well. Look what the cat dragged in.

CARSON

Hello Myra.

(To Chops)

Hello Charlie.

MYRA

Looks like we got us a family reunion, Chops.

CARSON

Why don't you come easy, Charlie, nobody gets hurt.

Again, Myra leans over, pretending to listen to the unconscious Chops.

MYRA

He says it seems like you've said that to me before, huh, brother?

BECK

Did I miss my cue?

(rubbing his head)

I've got a heckuve elephant.

No one acknowledges Beck.

MYRA

(ad-libbing)

I think Chops would say...

Two LARGE ORDERLIES come charging in from the house.

ORDERLY #1

(pointing to Original Beck)

There he is!

ORDERLY #2

We got 'em.

They look back at the audience....

ORDERLY #2

Excuse us, folks –

ORDERLY #1

Okay Mr. Vincent, we're going to take you back to the hospital, buddy. Just take it easy.

The Original Beck starts backing away. He holds up his megaphone.

ORIGINAL BECK

No! No! Keep away!

Original Beck makes a quick exit through the kitchen. The orderlies come charging onto the set and follow him off. We hear backstage commotion.

MYRA

He says there must be a God because this is a divine retribution. He says ain't it funny how the past got a way of catching up with you. He says —

Original Beck charges back on, pursued by the Orderlies who are ad-libbing to grab him. Beck knocks the Christmas tree as he runs by. Beck and the Orderlies are all over the sets, the house. At one point one of the Orderlies grabs Beck's jacket.

Carson attempt to go on with the play.

CARSON
(To Chops)

Brother, long time no see. What I want to say is —

ORDERLIE #1

Grab his arm! Grab his arm!

ORIGINAL BECK

Get off me! Help! Help! Somebody!

MYRA

Chops says —

VERA

Oh for fuck's sake! THIS IS INSANITY!!!

Everyone, including Louie, Original Beck, and the Orderlies, look at Vera.

VERA

I'M DISGUSTED WITH ALL OF YOU! WE CAN'T DO THIS SCENE – WE CAN'T FINISH THIS PLAY.

MARY
(whispering)

But Meredith, we're so close

VERA
(indicating Chops)

HE'S PASSED OUT!

(To Stage Manager)

HOW COULD YOU GIVE HIM REAL BOOZE? THE MAN'S BEEN IN AA FOR FOURTEEN YEARS!!

STAGE MANAGER/MYRA

It's not my fault —

VERA

ARGHHHH!

BOB

Here, here —

VERA

SHUT UP BECK OR BOB OR GRANDMA OR WHOEVER YOU'RE PLAYING!

BOB

I was stepping up to the plate, Meredith.

VERA

SHUT UP! EVERYBODY OUT HERE! NOW!

The actress playing Rosie comes in wearing a pants suit. Donna Malone, dressed in Father Quimbly's priest's garb, with a white beard, wanders in from the side.

VERA

That's right. Get out here.

(To audience)

Here's how this damn thing ends: Chops holds a gun to my head and makes Carson confess about how they were *brothers!* And how Carson beat the living crap out of Chops and

CARSON

Hey. What are you doing? You can't just — I've waited patiently during this whole play for my big scene — watching all of your amateurs making complete asses out of yourself —

VERA

Who the hell are you calling a —

CARSON

Amateur, Meredith, *amateur*. I've been in regional theater, you know.

VERA

(To audience)

Anyway. Chops gets hold of Mary's gun and shoots Carson down, but not before Carson apologizes for abusing him and explaining that's why he went into law enforcement and has tried to do good in the world, blah blah blah, and then Bob shoots Chops, Myra shoots Beck, Myra shoots herself, Mary and Dirk —

The vacuum drones. We see Vera's lips moving but we can't hear what she's saying. By now all the actors are barking at each other...the vacuum stops.

VERA

...And The Burlings lived happily every after.

The Stage Manager gestures to the back of the house.

STAGE MANAGER

Curtain.

Mary and Louie sneeze simultaneously.

CHOPS
(awaking)

Is it over?

BLACK OUT

The cast takes their bows while we hear Ethel Merman's version of There's No Business Like Show Business.