

Scene Two

(1990. Same living room. This time it features a few Christmas decorations...well, as many as we can add with the time available: A Christmas tree, a wreath on the door, lights, centerpieces, maybe festive pillows, and like that. Music is playing, it's "Have a Holly Jolly Christmas!" RUTHIE bustles in with a tray of Swedish meatballs and places them on the coffee table.)

RUTHIE. Honey, come on! The kids will be here soon. Is the eggnog all done?

BILL. *(From off.)* Almost. How many cups of brandy does it take?

RUTHIE. Oh, just do it to taste.

BILL. OK. My taste or yours?

RUTHIE. Mine.

BILL. OK.

(The doorbell rings.)

RUTHIE. I got it!

BILL. You got it?

RUTHIE. I got it.

BILL. OK.

RUTHIE. OK.

(She opens it. It's MADDIE and RICHARD. This time he's dressed in 90s hip style. In this and every succeeding scene, he's got a growing gut that he doesn't quite admit to, e.g. wearing the same size pants as ever, just lower, things like that. He might be wearing one of those long "J. Peterman" cowboy type dusters that were cool back then, Ray Bans, a mullet, a rock band T-shirt, parachute pants, and other chronologically correct apparel. He carries a wrapped bottle of booze. MADDIE might be wearing stirrup ski pants or leggings with a chenille yarn sweater tunic or an oversized shoulder-padded shirt. Her hair is frizzy on top and tight on the sides. Or something else that says the late eighties. She's not overweight at all just not thin as a rail. She carries a suitcase and a wrapped present. They are arguing.)

MADDIE. No Ricky, you shut up!

RICHARD. Take a chill pill, will ya? We're here, we're fine. Merry Christmas for God's sake...

MADDIE. We're here because there's a merciful God!

RICHARD. It's no big deal!

MADDIE. I bet that mailbox we sideswiped has a different opinion...

RICHARD. That was the ice. There was black ice on the road. Come on, nobody died! I bent it back.

RUTHIE. What's going on?

MADDIE. Ask "breakfast beers" here.

RUTHIE. What?

RICHARD. I had some drinks earlier with some friends, it's Christmas Eve, I'm celebrating. People do that!

MADDIE. Oh please...

RICHARD. They do! Some people have Mimosas at breakfast, I had beer and Clamato juice!

RUTHIE. Beer?

RICHARD. Yes.

RUTHIE. And Clamato juice?

RICHARD. Yes.

RUTHIE. Beer and Clamato juice. What do they call that?

MADDIE. Alcoholism.

RICHARD. Shut up!

MADDIE. You shut up!

RUTHIE. We interrupt this fight for Christmas at your mother's house!

MADDIE. Sorry, hi, Mom. Got you something.

(They hug. Again it's minimal, chilly. RUTHIE takes the wrapped present.)

RICHARD. Hi Mom. Here.

(He gives her the bottle. Same sort of chilly hug.)

RUTHIE. Yeah, Merry Christmas... HONEY!

BILL. *(From off.)* Yeah!

RUTHIE. The kids are here!

BILL. Hang on!

(BILL enters in a Christmas sweater carrying a punch bowl full of eggnog.)

MADDIE. Hi Dad!

RICHARD. Hi Pop! Is that eggnog?

MADDIE. Easy, easy, whoa Flicka...

BILL. It is indeed. Not sure if I got the mix right. Anyone care to be my guinea pig?

(MADDIE looks at RICHARD meaningfully.)

MADDIE. Gee, where are we going to find a volunteer...?

RICHARD. Why don't you do it?

MADDIE. Why don't you do it?!

RICHARD. Shut up!

MADDIE. You shut up!

RUTHIE. All right! Enough! Now we're going to start over. Go out and come back in only this time not fighting.

MADDIE. Mom...

RUTHIE. March.

RICHARD. Mom, we'll be...

RUTHIE. I've been working for days to make everything perfect and you are not messing it up. Now go out and try again. March!

BILL. Hup two three four.

(They exit. A beat. The doorbell. The bell rings again.)

RUTHIE. Coming!

(Doorbell again.)

RUTHIE. Coming!

(RUTHIE opens the door. MADDIE and RICHARD enter using phony British accents as if she had just stepped out of the happy resolution of a Dickens story. RICHARD is on his knees to look like Tiny Tim.)

MADDIE. Mamma, Pappa, it's GLORIOUS to see you.

RICHARD. *(Only half trying:)* Yeah, it's great. Merry Christmas...

MADDIE. Deck the halls with boughs of 'olly, fa la lalala...la lalala!

RICHARD. Oh if only every day were Christmas day...

BOTH. God bless us everyone!

(They hug like a Christmas card. A beat.)

RUTHIE. Much better. Let me take your coats.

(She takes their coats.)

MADDIE. OK. Hey, no bedazzling!

RUTHIE. Why do you always bring that up? It was no big deal...

BILL. Eggnog?

RICHARD. Absolutely.

MADDIE. Ditto.

(They take the eggnog and sit down. A beat.)

MADDIE. OK, now that's got some nog to it!

RUTHIE. Maddie, what is this outfit you've got on?

MADDIE. What?

RUTHIE. Well, it's not very flattering.

RICHARD. She's right, that outfit is ridiculous.

MADDIE. *(A beat.)* Maybe some more eggnog?

RUTHIE. I'm only trying to help. Can't a mother help?

(She leaves. BILL whispers to MADDIE.)

BILL. Act helped.

MADDIE. Oh yeah. How's it going, Dad?

BILL. Oh, it's going. It's going.

MADDIE. How long till you can retire now?

BILL. Four years, three months, two weeks, six days, thirty minutes and...forty-four, forty-three, forty-two... *(To his watch:)* ...HURRY! HURRY!...

RICHARD. I can tell you're going to miss it down there.

BILL. It's really not that bad. It's just that they're making us learn all about this computer stuff. Everything is automated and you know what, the same amount of letters get lost, the same amount of stamps get sold. The same people come up to my window and complain about the cost of the mail and how things should go faster. Customers want everything automated and faster now... I tell 'em, "Why don't you see if you can send mail with your computer if you like it so much?" That shuts 'em up.

MADDIE. Dad...you can...