

ACT ONE

SCENE

It's December 22 in the living room of GARY and MICKI Rose's small apartment. The furnishings are thrift-store-bought at best. Thirty-five years of family photos clutter the walls and horizontal surfaces. A couch, center, faces downstage. An old, artificial Christmas tree sparsely decorated with bulbs, lights, and garland stands in an upstage corner. There are no presents under it. There are exits to the kitchen and hall and the front door to the home.

At rise, GARY, in his jacket, sits on the couch talking on his cell phone.

GARY

Whadaya mean I don't understand? Of course I do, Honey. ... Yes, I do understand. ... Well, I just think you'd be better off. ... Okay then. See you soon. ... Love you too, Sweetie.

GARY hangs up and sulks. MICKI enters from the kitchen carrying a dish of fresh-baked cookies. She's the picture of Christmas cheer, humming a carol as she enters.

MICKI

(Offering GARY the cookies)

Here Mr. Sour Puss. How 'bout testin' these cookies. Maybe they'll cheer you up some.

(GARY groans)

C'mon, take'em. They're still warm.

GARY

I thought they were for the kids.

MICKI

There's plenty for the kids. I got another batch in the oven a'ready.

MICKI (cont.)
(GARY groans again, takes the
cookies, eats one.)

Well, how are they?

GARY

Fine.

MICKI

Good Gracious! Chill, will ya! You get all worked up like
that, you'll give yourself a heart attack.

(A piercing glare from GARY)

Oh get over yourself Gary. It's been eight months.

GARY

Easy for you to say. You're not the one who can't work.

MICKI

Really? Can't work? So, where you been wanderin' off to
three days a week in your cute little Shop'n'Go outfit?
Don't tell me! It's another woman, ain't it? I was afraid
this'd happen. Some gals just can't resist a man in
uniform.

GARY

You know what I mean.

MICKI

How could I not know? I been listenin' to you moanin' and
groanin' ever since they wheeled you outa surgery. If I'da
known they were gonna cut out your sense of humor while
they were pokin' around in there, I'da talked you outa that
bypass. At least then you'da died happy.

GARY

I'm overwhelmed by your compassion.

MICKI

You should be. Sometimes it's the only thing that keeps me
around.

GARY

So now you wanna leave me? Now that I'm a cripple, you're
just gonna up and -

MICKI

Don't be ridiculous, Gary. I don't wanna leave you. But
sometimes, I just wanna leave you alone for a while.

GARY

Maybe you should. In fact, I wish you -

MICKI

Oh, no! I'm not leavin' you alone to waller in self pity.
Bad 'nough you wastin' the whole summer, then poutin'
through Thanksgivin' at Bobby and Janice's -

GARY

I didn't pout through -

MICKI

Now you wanna sulk through Christmas? News flash,
Sweetheart: you ain't a cripple!

GARY

Look at me, Micki! I'm almost sixty. I've worked my whole
life. Pulled my weight since I was fourteen. And for what?
(*Gesturing to the room*)

This?

MICKI

There ain't nothin' wrong with
(*Mimicking GARY's gesture*)
this!

GARY

Not if you're poor.

MICKI

Well, Darlin' we ain't rich.

GARY

That's the problem. We should be. I spent my entire adult
life building a successful business. I worked hard.

MICKI

I know you did. Baby, do we really have to -

GARY

And what do I have to show for it? A shoebox of an
apartment and a so-called job selling gas, beer, and
cigarettes at the Shop'n'Go.

MICKI

Don't forget lottery tickets. You sell lots of lottery
tickets.

GARY

Excuse me if I don't laugh loud enough for you to hear.
(Beat)

We were on our way!

MICKI

I know that, Baby. But -

GARY

A successful business, a big, beautiful home, vacations every summer, holidays with the kids ...

MICKI

We still have the -

GARY

Now look at us. We've got nothing.

MICKI

Nothin'?

GARY

No money. No TV. No computer. We've got nothing to do but sit here and listen to each other talk.

MICKI

Oh, the humanity!

GARY

I sit here all day and think about all the things I'd like to be doing but can't. That and the fact that it's freezing in here because we can't afford to turn the heat above sixty-five.

MICKI

I'm not cold. Maybe you oughta try menopause. You sure seem to have PMS down pat.

GARY

Oh, you're just hilarious.

MICKI *kisses GARY. He doesn't respond.*

MICKI

C'mon, Baby, it's Christmas. Can't you turn off the poutin' and mopin' for just a little while?

GARY

(Crossing to the Christmas tree)

This is supposed to be the happiest time of the year. The kids coming with the grandbabies. Playing, sharing, laughing. All the food and presents. Creating memories. Will you look at this tree? We've always had a real Christmas tree. One that fills the room with the smell of fresh pine. Now all we've got is a plastic tree that we bought for six bucks at the Goodwill. It smells like somebody's wet basement.

MICKI

I'll Fabreze it. Better yet, I'll hit it with Pine-Sol.

GARY

Great. Then it'll smell like our bathroom.

MICKI

(Muttering to herself)

Lord, how many times do we gotta have this discussion?

(Embracing GARY)

So we lost the business. So we lost the house and some of our stuff -

GARY

Most of our stuff.

MICKI

Most of our stuff.

GARY

Almost everything.

MICKI

Whatever! I know! I've been right here, Darlin'. Remember? So what? We're dealin' with it - or at least I am. I miss the house, too. I miss the big kitchen. My sewing room. The garden. I even miss the big screen TV sometimes. All that was nice and I sure wouldn't mind havin' it all back. But, I wasn't thinkin' 'bout any of that when they had you opened up on that operatin' table. All I could think about then was, God, please don't let'im die! Baby, all that's really important is that you're alive. There's nothin' I wouldn't've given up for that. Nothin'. I'd live in a cardboard box in the woods to be with you.

GARY

Let's hope it doesn't come to that.

MICKI

It ain't gonna come to that. An' so what if it does? You're what's important to me. An', trust me, that goes for the kids, too. They don't care about all that superficial stuff. They care about spendin' time with us. And since they'll start showin' up in a few hours, you can at least pretend to be happy about that.

GARY

I wish they weren't coming.

MICKI

Garrison Frederick Rose!

GARY

Here we go with the middle name thing.

MICKI

How can you say that? They're your children. Your grandchildren. How can you not want'em around?

GARY

I didn't say that. I said -

MICKI

You just said you wish -

GARY

I know what I said. I said I wish they weren't coming. For their sake. I love having them around, Micki. You know that. I just hate to see them travel across the country just to spoil their Christmas.

MICKI

Spoil their Chris -

GARY

They're used to coming to the old house and having such a great time. Watching movies and football together. Playing air hockey and video games in the rec room. Having a big spread on the dining room table with turkey and ham and all the fixin's, like a banquet. We don't even have a dining room now.

(Address the tree)

Look at this. This isn't Christmas. They're used to having gifts under the tree - the real tree. And lots of room for stretching out and getting comfortable - no one sleeping on the floor or at a hotel across town. That's what the kids

GARY (cont.)

are used to. How are they going to enjoy

(Addressing the room)

this? We're having spaghetti for cryin' out loud.
Spaghetti! For Christmas dinner! Who in the world has
spaghetti for Christmas dinner?

MICKI

I bet some very happy folks in Italy eat spaghetti at
Christmastime.

GARY

And you make jokes.

MICKI

'Cause I'm happy, Gary. In spite of havin' no dinin' room
or rec room. In spite of a tree that smells like a
basement. In spite of spaghetti and in spite of you! So
you're upset about the money -

GARY

What money?

MICKI

About not havin' none. Big deal. We're no worse off than we
were when the kids were little. We barely got by then and
we were happy. You were happy, remember? I don't know why
you think we have to have a lot of money to enjoy
Christmastime now.

GARY

We were young then. We didn't know any better.

MICKI

Oh, so now that we're older and wiser, we know better than
to be happy with what we have?

GARY

That's not what I meant. You know what I -

MICKI

Whatever you meant, the kids ain't comin' to watch football
or eat turkey and you know it. They're comin' to see us.

GARY

That's the problem.