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**“It’s Beginning to Look a Lot Like a Mystery”
A Christmas Whodunnit**
by
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SYNOPSIS

When the time comes for the Lambert family to place the baby Jesus in the manger, they discover the figurine is missing. With the help of the hilarious Detective Smart, the family members become suspects while clues and motives are revealed. With all the elements of a classic who-done-it mystery mixed with the heart of the nativity story, this easy-to-stage one-act Christmas play is sure to charm audiences of all ages.

CAST

*Some characters can be played by either male or female as indicated in interchangeable names below.

Kelly Lambert- Overly cheerful hostess; female

Jeff Lambert- Kelly's husband; male

Carter Lambert- Their video game obsessed son; approx. 8-14 years old, male

Annie Lambert- Their bossy daughter; approx. 8-14 years old; female

Albert/Alberta- Great uncle/aunt who "just has a little cold"

Jean/Gene- Great aunt/uncle who's scared of animals

Donald/Donna "The Great"- Cousin who is a terrible magician; wears cape and top hat; approx. 18-40 years old

Lydia/Lennie- Cousin who tries to sneak out repeatedly; approx. 16-25 years old

Granny/Grampy- Very hard of hearing

Rocky- Child/Tween cousin who is a troublemaker; approx. 8-14 years old; male

Glenda/Glenn- Neighbor who owns over one hundred religious figurines

Steven/Stella- Twin; Kelly's brother/sister and best-selling author; very competitive

Sarah/Sam- Twin; Kelly's brother/sister also a best-selling author; very competitive

Brad- Cousin who's just there to watch the football game; should wear football jersey; male

Derek- Cousin who's just there to watch the football game; should wear football jersey; male

Mrs./Mr. Winters- Nosy neighbor who keeps snooping around

Walter/Wanda Smart- Cousin who wants to be a detective; wears a trench coat and fedora and has a badge

Carolers (5+)- Can be played by any age. Children's choir or church choir members could perform; all should wear scarves, hats, earmuffs, mittens

Polly- Parrot; offstage voice

PROPS

Bowl of popcorn

Math book

Large nativity set

Tray of hors-de-oeuvres

Handheld video game or phone

Napkins

Plates

Top hat trick

Wand that bends and straightens

Trick wand that turns into a bouquet of flowers

Wrapped box with removeable lid

Bible

Document

Song books for carolers

SOUND EFFECTS

Christmas music plays quietly at start of play.

Doorbell sound effect is heard.

COSTUMES

Modern day, brightly colored Christmas attire. Albert wears pajamas.

SETTING

This play takes place in the interior of the Lambert home on Christmas Eve. This is a simple set but can be as elaborate as the director chooses. A Christmas tree topped with a star is upstage left with presents underneath. A fireplace with mantel is upstage center. Bookshelves are upstage right. Books and a small radio are on shelves. A bird cage with a bright stuffed parrot is near bookshelves. Centered on the mantel is a nativity set. A door is downstage right with a hat rack next to it. A sofa and two wing chairs are center with a coffee table centered between them with a math book on it. Additional seating can also be present, as this is a party. An optional window for Mrs. Winters to look in from could be on one wall.

HOW

This play could be performed using a cast of any age or could be done as a youth performance, with teens playing the older characters and younger actors playing the carolers. Note that this is an ensemble piece, so while some characters such as Kelly and Detective Smart have more lines, most cast members are on stage for the entire show.

Upbeat instrumental traditional Christmas music is heard at a low volume.

Brad and Derek are seated on sofa, sharing a bowl of popcorn, and staring straight into the audience, "watching a football game" which they react to throughout the play. They never look away, even when moving.

Albert is seated in wing chairs closest to Polly's cage, wrapped up tightly in a blanket. Jean stands behind him, patting his shoulder and looking warily at the cage.

Rocky stands near the fireplace trying to light a nativity sheep on fire, Carter sits on the floor near him, playing a game on his phone or other device.

Sarah and Steven stand near bookshelf, sipping punch and looking at copies of their own books.

Lydia stands near hat rack.

Granny sits on the opposite wing chair.

Glenda stands with Jeff near door, showing him some of her figurines from the bag that she brought.

Various conversations are mimed.

Glenda: I got this statue of Mary holding the baby Jesus at a swap meet last week.

Jeff: *(bored)* Oh wow.

Glenda: *(takes out another figure)* And I got this one from the thrift store around the corner. Can you believe someone donated this?

Jeff: *(looking around, seeing if there's a way out of the figurine show-and-tell)* It's a tragedy.

Glenda: And then I got this one— *(reaches into her bag)*

Jeff: *(interrupts)* That's great, Glenda, but I really should see if Kelly needs some help in the kitchen.

Lydia: *(talking on her mobile phone near the door)* I'm trying! You know how holidays are—everyone expects me to be here. *(Pauses to listen)* Yeah, it sounds like you guys are having a lot of fun. *(Pauses to listen)* Maddie's there too? Man, it sounds like everyone's at that party except for me! *(Pauses and looks around, steps closer to the door, then quietly talks into the phone)* Everyone's just sitting around, being bored, doing the same thing we do every Christmas Eve. I don't know why we even get together on Christmas Eve every year. I'd much rather be at that party. I

think I can sneak out. I'll see you guys in a few minutes. *(Ends call and takes hat and scarf and starts donning them)*

Jeff sees **Lydia** standing nearby and takes her by the shoulder and moves her to stand in front of **Glenda**

Jeff: Why don't you show my niece Lydia your statues?

Lydia: Well actually, I was just about to get going.

Jeff: Glenda has over one hundred religious figurines. You really should see them before you leave. It's quite the collection.

Jeff rushes offstage left, mouthing a "sorry" at **Lydia** who scowls.

Glenda: I actually have one hundred and *thirty-six* figures.

Lydia: *(aghast)* One hundred and thirty-six!

Glenda: Don't worry, I didn't bring them all with me tonight.

Lydia: Thank goodness!

Glenda: I only brought ninety-two.

Lydia: I didn't know you were so religious, Glenda. But if you have over a hundred nativity figurines, you must be.

Glenda: Oh no, it's not about being religious. I just like collecting them. They're so pretty. *(Holds a figure up to Lydia's face)* Look at the painting on this shepherd's cute little face!

Lydia: I'm *never* getting out of here.

Brad: Come on!

Derek: That was offside!

Brad: That ref doesn't know what he's doing!

Derek: We could do a better job ref-ing this game.

Brad: You know it! *(They "high five" without looking at one another)*

Jean: How you are feeling, honey? You've been wrapped up in that blanket since we left the house—and we had a three-hour drive just to get here!

Albert: *(grouchy)* I'm fine, Jean. Just leave me alone.

Jean: Don't be such a grouch, Albert. We hardly ever get to celebrate Christmas with the family since we live so far away. And it's actually quite warm in here. In fact, maybe you'd feel better if you were sitting closer to the fire.

Albert: You just want to get away from that birdcage because you're afraid of that darned bird.

Jean: *(inching away from cage)* No I'm not.

Polly: Squawk!

Jean: *(jumping back)* Ah!

Polly: She's afraid. She's afraid.

Jean: I'm sure Granny wouldn't mind switching seats with you. *(Louder)* Isn't that right, Granny?

Granny: *(leaning forward and cupping her ear and saying loudly)* What was that, dear?

Jean: *(louder)* I said, would you mind switching seats?

Granny: *(sitting back in her seat)* Yes, I would like something to eat. Thanks for asking.

Jean frowns and looks at cage as Kelly enters, carrying a tray of hors-de-oeuvres.

Kelly: Don't worry, Granny. I've brought you a little snack.

Granny: Alright, I guess I could use a pillow behind my back. Thank you.

Kelly: *(laughs)* Brad, would you mind handing Granny that extra throw pillow?

Brad: Sure thing. Just try and keep it down. Derek and I are trying to watch this game.

Kelly: But it's Christmas Eve, Brad. Don't you want to visit with everyone?

Brad: But...there's a game! *(Grabs pillow next to him and leans over to hand it to Granny, never looking away from his game)*

Kelly: *(chuckles)* Sorry.

Rocky: *(to Carter)* Wanna watch me burn this little sheep, Carter?

Carter: *(without looking up from his video game)* Sure, Rocky.

Rocky: Cause I'm gonna do it, ya know. I'm going to stick this little sheep I found right in the fire.

Carter: Whatever.

Rocky: Ok, here goes!

Starts to inch closer to fireplace when Annie enters and rushes over to fireplace.

Annie: *(putting her hands on her hips)* What do you think you're doing, Rocky?

Rocky: None of your business. *(Continues inching closer)*

Annie: It is my business if you're planning on burning my house down on Christmas Eve. We still haven't opened presents and I have a lot of good stuff on my list this year.

Rocky: Ooh, presents! *(Starts to inch closer to tree)*

Annie: *(stops him)* Those aren't for you, Rocky. They're for me.

Rocky: How do you know?

Annie: Because it's my house. Now why don't you give me that sheep and go find a Christmas cookie or something?

Rocky: *(looking around)* There's cookies? Where?

Annie: *(holding out her hand)* The sheep. *(Rocky slams the sheep in her hand)* The cookies are in the kitchen.

Rocky exits as Annie puts the sheep in the nativity set. During the next few lines, he enters, munching on a cookie.

Sarah: Can we get this show on the road? I'm expecting a call from my editor.

Kelly: On Christmas Eve?

Steven: Yeah and I'm expecting a call from my publicist.

Jeff: *(enters, carrying napkins, which he places next to the tray)* Wow, you wouldn't think the publishing world would be so busy this time of year.

Sarah and Steven: It is for us.

Sarah: You have to remember, I'm a best-selling author.

Steven: And one of my novels is being turned into a major motion picture next year.

Kelly: *(excitedly)* Steven, that's great! Is anyone famous going to be in it?

Steven: *(scoffing)* Is anyone famous going to be in it... *(Looks around and smirks but doesn't answer question)*

Kelly: *(after a moment)* Well, is there?

Steven: I would say so. *(Looks around and smirks but doesn't answer question)*

Sarah: *(annoyed, sighs)* Just tell her already—Kelly is our sister after all, even if she's never done anything remarkable.

Kelly: Hey! Just because I'm not an author like you, Sarah—

Steven: I thought we were talking about me right now.

Kelly: Right. You were just about to tell us which famous actor is in your movie.

Steven: *(with a dramatic sigh)* If I must. *(Motions for her to come close, then whispers in her ear)*

Kelly: *(surprised)* Really? Him? I thought he was sticking to television after that terrible scandal.

Sarah: *(bored)* Apparently not.

Steven whispers in Kelly's ear again.

Kelly: *(excited)* Wow! She's in the movie too? Well I'm definitely going to have to see it now!

Steven: You weren't going to see it anyway? Your baby brother wrote it.

Kelly: *(fumbling)* Oh yeah...I mean...of course—

Donald enters in spectacular fashion. Kelly is relieved.

Kelly: Oh look! It's time for Cousin Donald's annual Christmas Eve party magic show.

Donald: That's Donald, the *Great*. *(Crosses in front of fireplace and starts to ready an area)*

Kelly: Right. Donald the *Great*. *(Shrugging her shoulders at Steven)* Better find a good seat.

Steven: *(bored)* I've seen this show every year since I was three-years-old. I can play the entire thing out in my head. I don't need a good seat.

Donald: But I've made improvements this year. I figured it was time.

Sarah: If by *improvements* you mean you won't be setting Cousin Walter's detective hat on fire again... I'd say those improvements are overdue.

Steven: That's probably why Cousin Walter doesn't come over on Christmas Eve anymore—you know how he feels about that detective hat!

Kelly: Actually, I think Walter's been doing some amateur detective work out of state for the last few years.

Jean: I thought I heard that he had moved back home.

Kelly: Is that so. Maybe I should see if he wants to join us. *(Takes her phone out of her pocket and starts scrolling through it)*

Jeff: Come on everyone. Gather 'round! Cousin Donald's about to perform his magic show.

Donald: Donald the *Great*.

Jeff: Donald the *Great's* about to perform his magic show.

Kelly puts her phone away as all turn to face Donald except Brad and Derek. Jeff snatches video game out of Carter's hand.

Derek: That's an interception!

Jeff: You've played enough video games, Carter.

Carter: *(whining)* But Dad!

Carter: *(crossing his arms, angrily)* Maybe I'll just go to my room, then.

Jeff: I don't think so. You can stay right here and enjoy our family Christmas party, or you can start working on that extra credit homework you need to do to bring up your failing math grade.

Carter: But Dad, it's Christmas break! You can't possibly expect me to do math homework.

Jeff: *(points to math book)* The choice is yours.

Carter: *(grumbling)* I guess I'll stay here.

Brad and Derek: Way to go Bears! *(Or whatever football team you want to use)*

They jump up, chest bump, and sit back down, all while keeping their eyes glued straight ahead.

Donald: *(taking out a wand and swirling it around mysteriously)* Prepare to be amazed...stupefied...

Sarah: Bored...lethargic...

Rocky: Ha! He said stupefied!

Annie: You're stupefied, Rocky.

Donald: You're about to go on a journey to the unknown.

Lydia: How about a journey anywhere else but here?

Donald: I will now use my wand to make a bunch of flowers appear out of thin air! *(Holds wand up triumphantly. It wobbles and bends. Looking at wand, confused)* That wasn't supposed to happen. *(Taps his wand on the fireplace during the next couple of lines until it straightens out)*

Granny: *(loudly)* I don't understand, why is his wand all bendy like that?

Glenda: *(loudly)* I think Donald's trick went wrong.

Granny: No, I don't want to hear a song! I want to see a magic trick.

Donald: Let me try another one. *(Takes off his top hat)* Who wants to see me pull a rabbit out of this hat?

Annie: I would! I love rabbits.

Jean: I *hate* rabbits! The way they hop around everywhere...terrifying.

Annie: I can't wait to see this!

Sarah: You might be waiting a while...

Donald: *(holds his hat with one hand and swirls his wand over the top)* I just need to say the magic word and a rabbit will suddenly appear.

Annie: Well say it then!

Donald: Abra-ca-dabba-dabba-dee! *(Points wand inside hat. Nothing happens)*

Granny: What's supposed to come out of there?

Albert: A rabbit.

Granny: You want me to *grab it*?

Albert: *(louder, and annoyed)* I said, a rabbit—like a bunny?

Granny: I'm not trying to be *funny!* (*Points at Donald*) But I think he is. He hasn't done one magic trick yet.

Donald: (*looking down, upset*) Sorry, Granny. I just wanted to put on a good show for my family for once. (*Starts to put his magical supplies away*) I guess the show's over.

Lydia: Then that's my cue to leave! (*Crosses to hat rack and grabs her coat, then holds up her hand*) It's been great everyone! Have a Merry Christmas and I'll see you next year!

Lydia opens door and starts to exit, but before she can, Jeff closes the door.

Jeff: Not so fast, Lydia.

Lydia: (*snaps her fingers*) Darn it! So close.

Kelly: We still need to do our family Christmas Eve tradition!

Sarah: (*turning to Steven, aside*) The nativity set!

Steven: (*aside to Sarah*) It's a family heirloom.

Sarah: It should be mine.

Steven: No! It should be mine!

Kelly: Alright everyone, gather around and I'll remind you how this works.

Carter: (*whining*) But Mom! We do this silly tradition every year. I think we all know how it works.

Kelly: Lydia hasn't done it before.

Rocky: How is that possible? Lydia's here every year. (*Unsure now. Looks up into the air thoughtfully. As he does, Lydia is sneaking back to the door*) Isn't she?

Annie: I'm pretty sure I saw her here last year.

Jeff: She's always here but she usually manages to sneak out before the end of the night.

All except Brad and Derek turn to look at Lydia, who has removed her hat and scarf from the coat rack and has her hand on the doorknob, ready to leave.

Lydia: (*fumbling*) Oh...ah...I was just going out for a bit of fresh air.

Jeff: (*laughing*) Get back in here, Lydia! You'll have a good time, I promise.

Lydia: *(begrudgingly hanging up her scarf and hat)* Alright.

Kelly: So let's fill Lydia in. *(Takes a wrapped box from under the Christmas tree, crosses to center)* As you all know, our nativity set is very special to this family. Our great-great grandparents brought it with them to this country many years ago so that we could all remember the story of Jesus's birth at Christmastime.

Jean: I just *love* that nativity set.

Glenda: *(crosses to nativity and picks up one of the figures)* The figures are so...exquisite.

Jeff takes figure out of Glenda's hand, smiles, and puts it back.

Kelly: We display the nativity set all December long, but as we know, the baby Jesus wasn't actually in the nativity until Christmas Day.

Steven: *(crossing to Kelly)* The figure of the baby Jesus would be kept off to one side until a very special moment on Christmas Eve.

Sarah: *(crossing to Kelly)* One very lucky member of this family would then have the honor of putting baby Jesus in the manger.

Kelly: So, every year, for generations, our family would play a special game to determine who would be the one chosen to put baby Jesus in the manger. *(Crosses to the Christmas tree and picks up a small wrapped box)*

Lydia: Ugh. A game?

Jeff: You bet!

Carter: Do we really have to do this?

Kelly: *(frustrated)* Come on, everyone, this is an important tradition in our family. We don't get to see each other very often. Some of us are busy in their careers.

Steven and Sarah: You got that right!

Kelly: Some of us don't live very close.

Jean: Yeah, Albert and I do have a long drive.

Kelly: And some have plans with friends or are busy with other social commitments.

Lydia: Some of us have social commitments right now!

Kelly: We all get so busy in our lives and with the hustle and bustle of Christmas that I think we forget why it is we all come together on this special day.

Annie: Presents?

Rocky: Christmas cookies?

Donald: Magic shows?

Kelly: No, not any of those things. Maybe once we play the game everyone will remember why our family started this tradition in the first place.

Lydia: What kind of game?

Kelly: *(holding up the box)* Inside this gift box is the baby Jesus from the manger.

Annie: Because Jesus is the greatest gift of all, isn't that right, Mommy? *(Looks at Kelly expectantly, maybe fluttering her eyelashes)*

Kelly: Yes, Annie. *(Annie looks around smugly)* Now Jeff will play a special Christmas carol as one by one we carefully pass the wrapped gift. Whoever is holding the box when the music stops has the honor of placing baby Jesus in the manger.

Jeff: Does anyone have any questions?

Albert: Just one—can I keep this blanket on for the game?

Jean: I told you, it's warm in here. I don't know why you insisted on wearing that blanket since the minute we got in the car. You're just coming down with a cold, you big baby.

Kelly: Is everyone ready?

Derek: They're ready alright!

Brad: Ready to take that ball all the way to the end zone!

Derek: Go Bears!

Brad and Derek high five without looking away.

Kelly: Then let's do it!

*All gather in a semi-circle, making sure that **Granny, Albert, Brad and Derek**, who are all still seated, are able to participate.*

Jeff takes out his phone or tablet and selects a song—an upbeat Christian Christmas carol of your choosing—which plays, possibly out of a speaker on the table.

The following lines are said during the passing of the gift as each actor is handed the box. The lines should not be said one right after the other. The box should travel across a few sets of hands before the next line is said but keep this in mind when lining up your actors.

Glenda: I hope I get to put the baby Jesus in the manger. I'd love to just hold the figurine, if only for a few minutes. *(Passes box)*

Rocky: *(shaking box)* Is this breakable?

Annie: *(taking the box from Rocky)* Give that to me! You just don't know how to handle precious heirlooms, Rocky. *(Passes box)*

Steven: I can't believe Mom gave this nativity set to Kelly. It should be mine. *(Passes box to Sarah)*

Sarah: No, it should be mine. *(Passes box)*

Donald: Maybe next year we could incorporate this tradition into my magic show! I could make the baby Jesus magically appear in the nativity. *(Passes box to Jeff)*

Jeff: Yeah, I don't think that's such a good idea, Donald. *(Passes box)*

Carter: I could be playing Mine Crushers 2 right now if it weren't for this silly game. *(Passes box)*

Albert: Can someone please take this from me? I don't want to come out from under this blanket.

Jean: *(takes box from Albert)* Be nice, Albert. It's Christmas! You don't have to be such a grouch.

Polly's: Squawk! He's a grouch!

Jean: *(jumps, nearly dropping the box)* Ah! I hate that bird. *(Passes box)*

Lydia: So, I can go after we're done with this game? *(Passes box)*

Granny: You're off to find fortune and fame? *(Passes gift)*

Derek: *(holding up gift like a football)* The quarterback looks for an opening. He sees one. He's getting ready to pass—

Annie: *(rushes over and takes box from Derek)* That is *not* how we handle precious heirlooms, Cousin Derek. *(Hands box to Brad)*

Brad: *(tucks the box under his arm and holds out his other hand, like he's about to run with the ball)* The field is clear. The endzone is in sight! *(Stands and holds box high up in the air!)* Touchdown! Bears take the lead.

Kelly: *(taking box)* And I'll take the box. *(Passes the box)*

A moment later the music ends, and Annie is holding the box.

Annie: Ha! I knew I would get it. The best girl wins.

Jeff: It's not that kind of game. We all win because Jesus was born to save us from our sins.

Kelly: That's right. And tonight, Annie has the honor of putting Jesus in the manger. Go ahead. Open the box.

Annie: Don't mind if I do.

Lydia: *(crossing to door and taking her hat and scarf from the coat rack)* Alright everyone, it's been a blast. See you next year.

Lydia starts to open the door as Annie shrieks.

Annie: It's empty!

Sarah: What?

Kelly: That can't be right.

Annie: *(turning the box for all to see, then turning it upside down)* It's true! There's nothing inside! Baby Jesus is gone!

Rocky: *(rubbing his hands together in excitement)* Ooh! It looks like we have a mystery on our hands—the case of the missing baby Jesus.

Jeff: *(closing the door)* Stop right there, Lydia.

Lydia: So close! *(Lydia hangs scarf and hat back up)*

Kelly: That can't be! I put Jesus in there myself! *(Takes the box from Annie and looks inside)*

Carter: Where is it then?

Donald: It disappeared!

Steven: Let me see. *(Gets closer to box)*

Sarah: No, let me! *(Gets closer to box as all others start to close in on box)*

Brad: All the players huddle up.

Kelly: Can you all give me some space?

Everyone steps back to their original positions.

Derek: And the huddle breaks.

Rocky: Well, what do we do now?

Jean: We have to find Jesus!

Glenda: How do we do that?

Lydia: And how long will that take?

Kelly: I don't know. Let's all take a few minutes and look for it.

*All except for **Granny, Albert, Brad** and **Derek** look around the room. They shout out the next few lines as they do so.*

Rocky: It's not over here.

Carter: Not here, either.

Steven and Sarah: *(barely making an effort)* We didn't see it.

Glenda: It's not here.

All stop looking.

Jeff: *(putting his hand on Kelly's shoulder)* Honey, maybe we should call the police.

Kelly: *(upset)* The police? On Christmas Eve?

Jeff: This is a precious heirloom and it's gone missing. *(Holds out his phone)*

Kelly: *(with a smirk)* Actually, I have a better idea. *(Takes phone from Jeff and dials)* Hello? *(Pause)* This is Kelly. I know, it's been awhile since we've seen you. Are you still doing that amateur detective work? *(Listens)* Great! Then I think we have a case for you. We have a family heirloom that's gone missing. *(Listens)* What is it? Well, it's the baby Jesus. Yes, *the* baby Jesus. The one from our nativity set. *(Listens)* Then you'll come by? That would be wonderful. We will wait right here for you. Thanks again. *(Disconnects call)* We all just need to stay put. The detective should be here any minute.

Jeff: The detective? Who was that, honey?

Kelly: *(smirking)* You'll see.
Sound of doorbell ringing is heard.

Annie: Well, that was quick.

Lydia: *(putting on her scarf and hat)* I'll get it. And then maybe I'll just step out for a bit.

Jeff: *(taking Lydia's scarf and hat)* No one's going anywhere. *(Shooing Lydia away from the door)* I'll get it.

Steven: *(standing behind Sarah)* Hide me. I don't want the paparazzi to get a shot of my face.

Jeff opens door. Mrs. Winters is standing there, holding a document.

M. Winters: *(looking upset, in a sharp tone)* Hello neighbors.

Jeff: *(sighing)* Hello, Mrs. Winters.

M. Winters: As president of the Homeowner's Association I feel that it's my duty to inform you that you have three more cars parked outside your house than what is allotted in article B of section 132 of the Homeowner's Association Agreement. *(Mrs. Winters holds out document, showing them a page)* See?

Kelly: Yes, I do see that, and I apologize. But we always have this many cars parked at our house for our annual family Christmas Eve party.

M. Winters: *(tries to look around Kelly into the room)* I see Glenda is here. She's a neighbor. She's not part of your family.

Kelly: Yes, but sometimes neighbors can become just like family. I'm sorry for the number of parked cars. Would you like me to have my guests move them?

M. Winters: *(sighing)* I suppose I could let it go just this one time.

Kelly: Thank you, Mrs. Winters.

Tries to close the door, but Mrs. Winters stops her.

M. Winters: But don't let it happen again!

Exits as Kelly closes the door. If there is a window on your set, perhaps she crosses to it and is seen looking in from the outside.

Jeff: I thought she would never leave.

Kelly: Me too.

Sound of doorbell is heard. Mrs. Winters has dropped out of sight from the window. Jeff is exasperated.

Jeff: Not again!

Opens door. Standing there are Carolers.

Kelly: Mrs. Winters, I told you— *(Stops when she sees Carolers)* Oh!

Caroler1: We're members from the local Christian Church around the corner.

Caroler2: We've come to carol for you.

Caroler3: *(turning to other Carolers)* And a one, and a two and a—

Blows into pitch pipe or holds up hands to start conducting Carolers, who hold up song book, ready to sing.

Kelly: It's so sweet of you to share your songs with us, but it really is a bad time.

Caroler4: Would you like us to come back later?

Kelly: That would probably be for the best.

Caroler5: Onward, Carolers!

Holds arm up as the Carolers all march off, exiting as Jeff closes door.

Jeff: I don't remember the last time our doorbell rang this much. *(Sound of doorbell ringing is heard. Jeff is agitated)* You've got to be kidding me! *(Opens door, angrily. Detective Smart is standing there)* We said we didn't want any carols right now!

Smart: It's a good thing my name isn't Carol, then.

Kelly: *(stepping around Jeff)* Cousin Walter! Thank you so much for coming.

Smart: The name is Smart—Detective Smart. I was told there was a mystery here that needed solving?

Kelly: *(playing along)* Yes, Detective, thank you. Come right in. *(Moves aside to let Smart enter)*

Steven: Oh no! Not cousin Walter. I thought you said he moved out of state.

Kelly: *(smiling)* Aunt Jean was right! He moved back recently.

Sarah: It looks like he's still playing detective—just like when we were kids.

Jeff: *(holds out his hand)* Can I take your coat and hat?

Smart: *(stepping back)* Most certainly not.

Jeff: But we have a fire burning in the fireplace.

Smart: Ah, so you think you're a detective too? Only you're pointing out the obvious.

Brad: And it looks like he should've just gone for the punt.

Jeff: I only meant that you might get too warm with your coat on.

Smart: I'll be just fine, I assure you.

Granny: Is that little Wally Smart? I haven't seen you in ages! Still playing detective, I see. Come and give your granny a big kiss. *(Holds out her hands)*

Smart: *(aside, to **Granny**)* Not now, Granny! Can't you see I'm trying to work here?

Granny: You don't need to lurk dear. We're all family. You can just join in on the party like the rest of us.

Smart: *(turning to **Kelly**)* Now, what, precisely, is the mystery I've been called here to solve.

Annie: Baby Jesus has gone missing.

Smart: Is that so? I find that hard to believe since he was born a few thousand years ago.

Annie: Not the *real* baby Jesus... *(Crosses to the nativity)* The baby Jesus from our nativity.

Smart: I see. And where was it last spotted?

Kelly: *(picks up the box)* I put it in this box this morning. You might remember that it's a tradition in our family to pass around a gift box on Christmas Eve. Whoever gets the box when the music stops, opens it to find the baby Jesus. They get the honor of placing Jesus in the nativity that year.

Smart: How... *(thinks)* traditional.

Jean: It's actually a lot of fun.

Lydia: *(sarcastically)* Oh yes—definitely worth waiting around all night for.

Smart: *(crossing to Lydia and leaning in, nosily)* It doesn't seem as if everyone enjoys this tradition.

Lydia: I didn't take the figurine if that's what your implying.

Smart: *(starts to walk away)* I'm not implying anything. *(Leans back in)* Yet. *(Crosses to center)* Before we get started, it's been awhile since I've attended one of these gatherings. Why don't you help me get acquainted with the assembled guests?

Kelly: Of course. *(She crossed to each person as she says their name)* You already know my husband, Jeff. And these two lovely young people are our son and daughter, Carter and Annie.

Carter: *(barely interested)* Hey.

Annie: Pleasure to meet you.

Kelly: And of course, you remember my brother and sister, Steven and Sarah.

Steven: Hey Walter.

Smart: That's Detective Smart to you.

Steven: A method actor, I like it!

Kelly: And this is Jeff's Aunt Jean and Uncle Albert.

Albert: I think you brought a draft in here with you.

Jean: Albert! How rude!

Kelly: And these two are Jeff's cousins, Brad and Derek. They pretty much just show up here to watch the game.

Derek: What a catch! *(Holds up his hand, which Brad high fives)*

Kelly: Of course, you know Granny.

Granny: I don't need a nanny.

Kelly: And this is Cousin Rocky.

Indicates Rocky who is just about to stick the toy car in the fireplace again.

Rocky: *(stops abruptly)* I wasn't doing anything, I swear!

Smart: And who is this woman with what appears to be a bag full of nativity figurines?

Kelly: That's Glenda. She's a friend of the family. Those figurines are hers from home.

Glenda: I have one hundred and thirty-six!

Smart: *(giving Glenda a scrutinizing stare)* We'll see about that. *(Turns to Donald)* That just leaves you. *(Looks Donald up and down)* Tell me, why would someone wear a magician's costume to a Christmas party?

Donald: It's not a costume.

Smart: *(lifting up the hem of Donald's cape)* Magician' cape. *(Taps his hat)* Magician's hat. *(Walks around, thoughtfully)* If it's not a costume, then what explanation do you have for wearing this getup?

Donald: I'm wearing this because I *am* a magician. I'm Donald the Great!

Smart: So, tell me Donald... *(long pause)* Are you a talented magician?

Donald: *(shyly, with a smile)* I'd like to think so.

Sarah: We'd all like to think so, but we've seen your magic shows, so we know better.

Donald: I only destroyed the Christmas tree *one* time.

Carter: There's that one spot on the sofa Mom tried to repair unsuccessfully.

Brad: Did you see the running back hit that hole!

Albert: Don't forget about my toupee!

Smart: So maybe you're not as talented as you think.

Donald: Well, I—

Smart: *(walking around Donald, contemplating)* And maybe...just maybe you were sick and tired of your magic tricks not working out as you had hoped.

Donald: I don't know about that.

Smart: And maybe this year you thought, "wouldn't everyone be impressed if, instead of the baby Jesus being pulled out of that gift box, I pulled him out of my magic hat?"

Donald: *(excitedly)* That would be a very neat surprise!

Rocky: The surprise would've been if it had actually worked.

Polly: Squawk! Surprise!

Jean: Ah! I really hate surprises. *(Glares at parrot)*

Sarah: It's a good thing the Mary and Joseph didn't agree with you.

Steven: Mary and Joseph?

Sarah: You know, Mary and Joseph were two people, just like you and me, who were just living their lives when one day they were each visited by the angel Gabriel.

Steven: That's right. Gabriel told them that Mary was pregnant with a baby, who was the son of God.

Sarah: Now *that* was a surprise.

Jean: Yeah, I guess that would be a pretty good surprise. And much better coming from a host of heavenly angels than this silly parrot.

Smart: That's a great story, but angels are not going to appear in this room and tell us where your missing figurine is. Luckily, Detective Smart is on the job.

Granny: Who is Detective Smart?

Smart: *(dramatically)* I am!

Granny: I thought your name was Walter.

Annie: If you are so smart, shouldn't you know your own name?

Smart: I know my name. And I also know the name of our first suspect.

Donald: You do? *(Looks around)* Who is it?

Smart: It's you—Donald the Great!

Everyone draws in a deep breath of surprise.

Brad and Derek: Touchdown!

They stand, high five without looking at one another, then sit down.

Donald: It's not me, I swear!

Kelly: If that's true, then you'll let us look in your hat.

Donald: Be my guest.

Donald takes off his hat and hands it to Kelly, who feels around inside it, looks inside, tips it upside down, shakes it, etc.

Kelly: There's nothing in here.

Donald: I told you! All I ever wanted was to put on a good magic show for my family on Christmas Eve, but no matter how hard I've tried, I've never managed to make anything appear inside my hat. There's no way that baby Jesus was going to appear inside it now.

Kelly: We love your magic show!

Sarah: Well, some of us, anyway.

Kelly: We look forward to it every Christmas Eve, even if it doesn't turn out the way you want it to. Don't be so hard on yourself, Donald.

Donald: Thanks, Kelly. *(Thinking)* You know what, the real magic of Christmas isn't during my show anyway. *(Looks at nativity set)* Maybe it has something to do with what happened in those stables so long ago.

Kelly: Maybe you're right.

Annie: Well if it wasn't Donald, then who took the figurine?

Smart: We haven't proved it wasn't Donald. But I think there's another obvious suspect among us.

Jeff: Who is that?

Smart: When detectives look for suspects, one of the most important factors we have to consider is motive. *(Crosses to Glenda)* And who has a better motive than your good friend Glenda? *(Takes Glenda's arm and drags her to coffee table)*

Glenda: Hey! What's the meaning of this?

Smart and Glenda are now blocking the view of the "television" from Brad and Derek, who try and see around them. Smart takes Glenda's bag without looking away from the game and brushing the contents of the table onto the floor.

Kelly: *(annoyed)* Really?

Brad: Hey, man, get out the way!

Derek: Can't you see there's a game on?
Smart: And there's a mystery I'm trying to solve!
Brad: Ugh. Fine.

Brad and Derek each lean comically to opposite sides of the sofa in order to see the game. In between them, Smart takes Glenda's bag.

Smart: Glenda, you more than anyone here seem to have a fascination with nativity figurines, which makes you a suspect.
Glenda: I do love them. They are so pretty and fun to collect, but I would never take one that doesn't belong to me.
Smart: That remains to be seen, doesn't it? *(Turns bag over and carefully dumps the figurines onto the table)* I believe you said you had one hundred and thirty-five figurines in this bag?
Glenda: I have one hundred and thirty-six figures in my collection, but only ninety-two here in this bag.
Smart: Very well. *(Points down to the pile)* Count them.
Glenda: Count all of them? Right here? Right now?
Smart: Yes.
Glenda: But that will take forever!

Kelly crosses to Glenda and puts her arm around her.

Kelly: Glenda's right. Is this really necessary?
Smart: We will never know for sure unless we get an accurate count.
Annie: *(rushing over to the table)* You should line them up by type of figurine. *(Picks up a figure)* Shepherds over here. *(Places figurine as Lydia crosses over)*
Lydia: *(picks up another figurine and places it)* Josephs could go over here.
Annie: *(picks up figurine and places it)* And Marys over here.
Glenda: *(chuckling)* I feel like a census taker. *(Starts arranging figures)*
Lydia: What do you mean? *(Organizes figurines with Annie and Glenda)*
Annie: *(picks up figurines of Mary and Joseph and looks at them)* When Mary was pregnant with Jesus, Caesar Augustus decreed that everyone must

travel to their hometown to be registered for the census. That meant that Mary and Joseph had to make the long trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted.

Glenda: Oh! So that's why Jesus was born in Bethlehem? *(Looking at figure)* Who knew there was such a wonderful story behind all of these figures I've been collecting?

Kelly: That's right.

Glenda: That must've been a big job for the census takers to count all those weary travelers. I guess I can count these figures to clear my name. *(Starts to count)* One...two...three....

Lydia counts too.

Brad: Are you guys almost done here?

Derek: Yeah, it's hard to watch the game like this. All the plays are sideways.

Brad: Even the sidelines are sideways!

Derek: *(confused, scratches his head)* That makes my brain hurt.

Brad: *(rubbing his neck)* Sitting like this makes my neck hurt!

Glenda: *(finishes counting)* Eight-nine...ninety...ninety-one...ninety-two! *(Looks up, triumphantly)* There are ninety-two figures in my bag. I told you I didn't take it.

Lydia: She's right. I double checked her count.

Kelly crosses and looks at the figures.

Kelly: And my baby Jesus is not here.

Smart: That still doesn't prove Glenda didn't take it. But I'll move on for now. There are plenty more suspects to investigate right here in this room. Watch and learn.

*During the next few lines, **Smart** starts walking around the room, looking at various people suspiciously, then walking to the next one. As he moves around the room, the following characters begin to follow him, one at a time, and subtly mimic his movements: **Rocky, Carter, Jeff, Annie, and Lydia** on the end.*

*As he does, **Kelly** cleans up any of the items **Smart** brushed off the coffee table and puts them back on the coffee table. **Smart** approaches **Donald**.*

Smart: The baby Jesus may not have magically disappeared... *(Pauses to get close to Donald's face, giving him a suspicious look, which causes Donald to jump back. Smart then moves on to Glenda and does the same after he says the next line)*...or have become number one hundred and thirty-seven in a collection... *(Glenda shrinks away from his gaze. Smart starts walking in a wide circle while others follow him)*...but one of you took that figurine and I'm going to find out who it was! *(Stops abruptly. Because they had been moving in a circle, Smart is now face to face with Lydia. She jumps, startled)* Let's start with you. Lydia, was it?

Lydia: Yes, but I didn't take the baby Jesus.

Others step back from Smart while Kelly crosses to Lydia.

Kelly: Lydia only found out about the tradition this year. *(Smirks at Lydia)* She usually finds a way to sneak out before we start passing around the box.

Smart: *(rubbing his chin, thoughtfully)* So what I'm hearing is...you are sneaky.

Lydia: *(nervously)* No I'm not...well, maybe... I don't know...I guess a little.

Annie: All she does is hang out by the door, lurking until it's time to leave.

Lydia: That's not true!

Jeff: Well, it's kind of true. I myself had to stop you from leaving a couple of times tonight.

Smart: I need to see this in action. *(Takes Lydia's arm and drags her to the door)* So she was standing at the door like so?

Jeff: *(getting caught up in the moment)* That's right. Although she would've had on her hat and scarf too.

Smart: Like this? *(Takes hat and scarf from coatrack and puts them on Lydia comically, covering her face)*

Lydia: Um. I can't breathe.

Smart: *(making a small opening)* Better?

Lydia: *(sarcastically)* Oh yes. Much better.

Smart: Then what happened?

Jeff: *(with increased excitement)* When I saw she was trying to make a break for it, I ran over and slammed the door shut.

Smart: *(building the excitement)* So she had the door open and everything?

Jeff: *(with increased excitement)* Oh yes! She had one foot out the door and everything!

Smart: *(practically shouting)* Like this?!

Smart flings the door open. Standing there is Mrs. Winters, document under her arm, and a cup up to her ear, clearly trying to listen at the door. Maybe she even falls into the room as the door opens, because she has been leaning at the door.

Jeff: Mrs. Winters?

M. Winters: *(sharply)* Hello again, neighbors.

Jeff: Were you using that cup to listen at the door, Mrs. Winters?

M. Winters: *(quickly hides cup behind her back)* Not at all. Besides, I wouldn't need a cup to listen—not with all the noise emanating from your party.

Jeff: Noise? We're not making any noise.

M. Winters: I beg to differ. *(Opens document and starts leafing through it)* As president of the Homeowner's Association I feel that it's my duty to inform you that you are several decibels over the allotted noise level allowed under Article H of section 196 of the Homeowner's Association Agreement. *(Holds out document, showing them a page)* See?

Jeff: Yes, I do see that, and I apologize. But let me ask...how exactly are you measuring the decibel level of my party? *(Tries to look around her)* With that cup?

M. Winters: My cup? *(Scoffing)* Well, that's just silly!

Jeff: *(smirking)* Yes, it is. *(Starts to close the door)* We'll do our best to keep down the noise, Mrs. Winters.

M. Winters: You'd better. *(Stops the door from closing)* And don't let it happen again!

Jeff shuts the door in Mrs. Winters' face, who pops back up in the window as Jeff turns back to Smart.

Jeff: Now, where were we?

Smart: Lydia was trying to escape.

Lydia: No I wasn't!

Smart: Then why were you standing by the door? *(Looking at her thoughtfully)*

Lydia: *(struggling to find an answer)* I was just...making sure everyone stayed inside.

Smart: So you were *keeping* everyone *in*?

Rocky: *(laughing)* That means Lydia's the innkeeper! *(Laughs hysterically)*

Annie: What's so funny?

Rocky: You know? Like the innkeeper in Bethlehem? The one who didn't have any room for Mary and Joseph?

Annie: Oh yeah! Once they arrived in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph looked for an inn to stay in, but all the rooms were full. They finally found an innkeeper who let them sleep in the stables out back.

Steven: Sleeping out in a barn with the horses and sheep. Can you even imagine?

Sarah: I won't even stay in a hotel that doesn't have at least one thousand thread count sheets.

Rocky: I'd love to sleep in a barn!

Annie: I'm sure you'd feel right at home, Rocky.

Rocky: Hey!

Annie: I believe the word you are looking for is, *neigh*.

Lydia: Okay fine, you got me. I *was* trying to leave. But I just wanted to hang out with my friends at a really cool party. Is that a crime?

Smart: No, but stealing is.

Lydia: So am I a suspect or not, seeing as I didn't even know about the figurine until tonight?

Jeff: *(proudly)* And I did thwart her many attempts to escape after all.

Smart: Your motive is unclear. I will admit that. *(Unwrapping Lydia from the scarf)* You are free to go—for now.

Lydia: Great! *(Wraps herself up and starts to open the door)* See everyone later.

Jeff: *(closes the door and stands in front of it with his arms crossed)* I don't think so.

Lydia: *(somewhat dramatically, as in earlier tone by Jeff and Smart)* Foiled again!

Smart: So if the figurine didn't simply "walk out the door" then it must be somewhere in this room. *(Starts to look around the room. As he does so, he moves people out of the way, throws pillows, lifts things up and hands them to others, etc., all in a very comical way. He does this as he says the next few lines)* Maybe it's over here?

Brad: *(standing up, mad)* Is he blind?

Smart: Or here?

Derek: That ref needs glasses.

Smart: *(looking behind Uncle Albert)* Maybe you're hiding it?

Brad: Look at all the defenders flock to the ball like a bunch of sheep!

Derek: *(standing)* Looks like we need some shepherds up in here! *(They give each other a high five without looking at one another)*

Smart: *(looking at Brad and Derek and approaching them)* Or maybe it's right in plain sight?

Brad: And the Bears have possession of the ball.

Brad and Derek: *(cheering loudly and pumping their fists in the air)* Hallelujah! *(They sit)*

Smart: Maybe just maybe this figurine has been right our noses...or your cousin, this entire time!

Grabs a sofa cushion and dumps Brad off the couch. In doing this, he also brushes everything off the coffee table again.

Kelly: *(more annoyed)* Really?

Brad: *(looks away from the game for the first time)* Hey! What are you trying to do?

Smart: Perhaps it's under this cousin.

Picks up sofa cushion and dumps Derek off the couch.

Derek: Not cool, dude.

Smart: *(looking in sofa)* I guess I was wrong. *(Puts cushions back on sofa)* Sorry, fellas. I guess I just heard all that talk about shepherds and sheep and

thought maybe you had more interest in this missing baby Jesus than you were letting on.

Brad: The baby Jesus is missing?

Derek: Shepherds and sheep?

Albert: You know, the shepherds who were out watching their flocks when the angels appeared to tell them of the birth of the Messiah.

Jean: *(with a disgusted look on her face)* Why anyone would choose to look after those filthy beasts all day, I'll never know.

Albert: The shepherds were out in the fields, tending to their sheep and minding their own business when suddenly a chorus of angels appeared and proclaimed the good news, singing, Hallelujah.

Polly: Squawk! Hallelujah!

Jean: *(jumping)* Ah! *(Upset)* I'll be singing Hallelujah when someone gets this bird away from me!

Brad: But what's all this about the baby Jesus being missing?

Kelly: We're missing the baby Jesus from our nativity set.

Derek: You have a nativity set?

Kelly: Yes of course. And every year, as part of our family tradition we pass around a box to see who gets to put the baby Jesus in the manger?

Brad: We have a family tradition?

Kelly: Haven't you guys been listening to anything I've been trying to say. Christmas is a lot more than a football game.

Derek: I thought football *was* our family tradition.

Brad: Heck yeah it is!

They high five and then sit and resume watching the game. Kelly crosses and puts items back on coffee table.

Annie: Annnnnndddd...we've lost them again.

Smart: That's alright. They weren't strong suspects anyway.

Carter: Then who is?

Smart: *(turns to Kelly, then paces with his arms behind his back)* Tell me this, Kelly, is there anyone here who you think would deliberately steal the baby Jesus?

Kelly: No, of course not! Who would do such a thing?

Smart: Perhaps someone who has long admired the nativity set? Someone who feels the same attachment to it as you do?

Kelly: The nativity set has been in my family for generations. The only people who could possibly feel the same attachment to it are— *(pauses for a moment, then looks at Steven and Sarah in shock)*—my brother and sister!

Steven: *(shocked)* Us?

Sarah: *(annoyed)* You have *got* to be kidding me.

Steven: Why would we steal that old nativity set? We're both famous authors. We could buy brand new nativity sets if we wanted to.

Smart crosses to Sarah and Steven and takes Sarah's arm.

Smart: But isn't it true that you have been heard saying that the family nativity set should've been yours?

Sarah: How would you even know that? You only arrived here like twenty minutes ago.

Smart: *(tipping his hat)* I have my ways. *(Continues holding Sarah's arm but takes Steven's arm on the other side)* And isn't it true that you both consider yourselves the real *stars* of the family?

Steven: Well it's true, isn't it? I can't help it if Kelly stayed home while Sarah and I followed our dreams. My book alone went on to sell millions of copies.

Sarah: *(tugging Smart's arm, in order to pull Steven closer to her)* My book sold millions of copies too, you know.

Steven: *(tugging Smart's arm, in order to pull Sarah closer to him)* Yes, but did yours get optioned for movie rights?

Sarah: *(tugging back towards her)* No, but it will.

Steven: *(tugging back towards him)* Doubt it. Even If it does it's not as if you-know-who-will be starring in it!

Steven and Sarah continue tugging over the next few lines.

Granny: *(to Donald)* Starring in what?

Donald: Steven's movie.

Granny: Little Stevie's going to be in a movie?

Donald: No. His book is going to be made into a movie. Someone famous is going to star in it.

Granny: Who? Clark Gable?

Donald: No, Granny.

Granny: *(turning away from Donald and smiling smugly)* I bet it's Clark Gable.

Sarah: *(tugging back towards her)* So what you're saying is, you think you're a bigger star than me?

Steven: *(tugging back towards him)* I can't help it if the light's shining on me and not you!

Sarah: *(tugging back towards her)* Why you—

Kelly crosses to Sarah and Steven and removing their arms from Smart, who is now exhausted from being pulled back and forth and crumbles to the ground.

Kelly: Would you two cut it out? It doesn't matter who the biggest star in the family is.

Jean: *(crossing to nativity set on the mantle and touching the creche)* Kelly's right. It shouldn't matter who has the most money or fame. On Christmas, the most important star is the one that shone over the place where Jesus was born—the star that guided weary travelers to pay their respects to the newborn king.

Sarah: Yeah. I guess you're right. Sometimes it's hard being a twin—everyone always sees you as part of a pair and forgets that you have your own identity.

Steven: Maybe that's why we've both been so consumed with being the star in the family.

Sarah: *(to Steven)* We've been so busy trying to steal the spotlight that we've both completely forgotten how much we used to love this tradition on Christmas Eve.

Steven: That's right! We used to fight over who got to put baby Jesus in the manger.

Smart: *(standing up)* And if memory serves, I somehow always ended up in the middle of those fights. *(Now standing in between them again, looking back and forth from Sarah to Steven)* Kind of like now.

Sarah: So, are we still suspects?

Smart: I'm not ruling the two of you out yet, although I doubt either of you could tear yourselves away from your own books long enough to steal the baby Jesus.

Steven: That's right! *(After a moment, indignantly)* Hey, wait a minute!

Carter: *(chuckling, indicating Steven)* He might be the biggest star in the family, but he's not the brightest bulb.

Steven: You're a real wise guy, aren't you Carter?

Smart: Yes, he is. And he's also my next suspect.

Smart crosses to the coffee table where he knocks everything over and picks up the math book. Kelly scowls and cleans it up.

Kelly: *(upset)* Really?

Smart: When I arrived, I first surveyed the room to see what clues I could gather. And one of the best ways to find a clue to is find something that is "out of place" in a room. *(Opens up math book)* And a math book in the middle of a Christmas party is definitely out of place.

Jeff: It wouldn't be out if Carter would just do his homework.

Smart: That is an explanation for the presence of this math book—and it's also a motive.

Carter: A motive?

Smart: You clearly didn't want to do your math homework, but your dad wasn't letting you off the hook. What better way to distract your family than to steal the baby Jesus?

Carter: Ha! That's pretty smart. I'll have to remember that.

Smart: *(crossing to the nativity set and picking up a Wise Man figure)* Yes. It's a very wise plan indeed.

Jeff: *(pulling the video game out of his pocket)* Oh really? Well I guess you won't be playing this video game anytime soon.

Carter: *(whining)* But Dad!

Jeff: Looks like you've cracked the case of Carter's failing math grade, Detective Smart.

Smart: *(tipping his hat)* You're welcome. *(To Carter)* Now tell us, Carter, where is the baby Jesus?

Carter: I don't know! That math book is mine, but trust me, dude, I didn't steal the baby Jesus.

Annie: *(crossing to the nativity and picking up a Wise Man figurine)* Carter is hardly wise. The Wise Men were scholars of science and mathematics. They studied the stars and used a bright star in the night sky to guide them so that they could bring gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the newborn Messiah. *(Putting the Wise Man figurine down)* Carter can't even tell you what five times five is.

Carter: That's where you're wrong, sis. Five times five is ten. *(Throws his hands up)* Boom!

Annie: I rest my case.

Smart: *(righting his hat again and crossing to Annie)* Well there were three Wise Men, and you seem like a little know it all.

Annie: Sorry, Detective Smart, but I live here and can see the nativity set anytime I want, so I don't have a motive for stealing it. Besides, I couldn't care less about the nativity set. *(Looks over at presents)* Not when there's all those presents under the tree, just waiting for me!

Brad: That's a fumble.

Smart: Very well. *(Crosses to Rocky)* What about you, smart guy?

Annie: *(laughing)* Smart guy? Rocky? I don't think so. Just before you arrived, I had to stop Rocky from trying to burn toys in the fireplace. *(Stops laughing and thinks)* Come to think of it, Rocky might be a great suspect. Maybe Rocky was messing around with the nativity set and broke the baby Jesus!

Smart: *(puts his detective hat on Annie)* Looks like we have a future detective here! *(Turns to Rocky as Annie smiles)* So, Rocky, what do you have to say for yourself?

Rocky: I was playing with the nativity set earlier—

Smart: *(interrupting)* So you *do* admit it!

Rocky: But I didn't break it, I swear! I was too busy eating Christmas cookies.

Smart: *(getting in Rocky's face)* Or is that just what you *want* us to think?

Sarah: Aren't you being a little hard on the kids, Walter? It's Christmas, after all.

Smart: Yes, it is. And all these kids seem to care about are video games, *(crosses to Carter and touches his shoulder)* presents, *(crosses to Annie and puts a hand on her shoulder)* and cookies. *(Crosses to Rocky and touches his shoulder)*

Rocky: Cookies are awesome!

Smart: They seem to have no care at all for our family tradition and what it all means, which makes them prime suspects in my opinion.

Kelly: I saw Rocky playing with the nativity figures and took them away from him myself. He's telling the truth.

Polly: Squawk! The truth! The truth!

Jean: *(jumping)* Ah! I will never understand why people choose to keep animals as pets.

Smart: Then maybe it was you who took the baby Jesus. *(To assembled guests, as he runs over to Jean)* Check the parrot's cage!

Carter, Annie, Lydia, Sarah and Steven cross to the cage and look through it.

Jean: What do you mean? I didn't take the figurine. And why are you having them check the parrot's cage?

Smart: You've been going on all night about how much you hate animals. Perhaps you stole the baby Jesus and put it in Polly's cage to frame the parrot!

Polly: Squawk! Frame the parrot! Frame the parrot!

Jean: *(jumping)* Ah! I don't hate all animals—just obnoxious noisy ones that make me jump out of my skin.

Albert: She's telling the truth. Jean doesn't hate all animals. In fact, she has a real affection for animals.

Jean: Except sheep. I don't like how they let their wool get all dirty. Yuck.

Albert: But horses, donkeys, and cows—she loves them.

Jean: *(swooning)* I just love it when cows moo! It's so sweet...like a lullaby.

Carter: Wow. I did not see that coming.

Jean: I've always thought that's why God chose to have Mary give birth to Jesus in the stable instead of in an inn. The warmth of the animals, nestled in the hay, and the sound of the cows mooing must've been a peaceful place for Jesus to come into the world.

Jeff: *(picking up Bible from bookshelf, opening it and dramatically reciting)*
And lo, the cows mooed the newborn king to sleep. *(Closes bible)*
Yeah...I don't think that's in here.

Lydia: There's no baby Jesus in Polly's cage.

Jean: See! I told you I didn't frame that silly bird.

Smart: Perhaps you didn't frame the bird, but you seem to know a lot about the nativity story.

Jean: I do. I love it.

Smart: Then maybe *that's* why you stole the baby Jesus.

Jean: I didn't, I promise. *(Crosses to Jeff and takes his arm)* Albert and I live three hours away and rarely get back here to see the family. I would never do anything to ruin such a special day.

Jeff: You know you can come visit whenever you like, Aunt Jean.

Jean: I know. Family is important. When God sent his Son to earth, he gave him a wonderful family in Mary and Joseph, full of love from the day he was born. *(Squeezes Jeff's arm)* We have a lot of love in this family too.

Jeff: *(squeezing her arm back)* We sure do.

Kelly: Detective Smart, you've questioned nearly everyone here and we are no closer to finding the missing baby Jesus!

Smart: I still have one more suspect I want to question.

Kelly: Who is that?

Smart: There's one person here who has created a clever disguise in which to hide the figure.

Donald: I thought we already established that this isn't a costume!

Smart: Not you, Donald. The suspect I'm referring to has mostly sat there quietly, only exclaiming every so often about how cold it is in here, even though we can all agree that it is quite warm.

Albert: It *is* cold in here!

Smart: *(dramatically)* Or is that what you want us to think? Perhaps you are choosing to stay wrapped up in that blanket so you can hide the baby Jesus?

Jean: Albert, no!

Albert: I didn't steal the baby Jesus.

Smart: *(dramatically)* Then unwrap yourself from those swaddling clothes and prove your innocence!

Carter: *(aside to Annie)* Swaddling clothes? Is it just me, or are these nativity references going a little bit too far?

Albert stands and drops his blanket. Underneath he is wearing onesie pajamas or some other funny pajamas/outfit.

Albert: There! Happy now?

Jean: *(shaking her head, looking at pajamas)* Albert...no.

Derek: That's out of bounds!

Donald: *(laughing)* And you guys thought I looked silly.

Albert: Fine, you got me. I wasn't cold. I just didn't want you to see my silly pajamas. I was taking a nap before we came and didn't have time to change. Sorry.

Smart: Trust me, Albert, no one's sorrier than me. *(Picks up blanket and hands it to Albert)*

Kelly: You said Albert was your last suspect, and we still haven't found the baby Jesus. What do we do now?

Smart: Now we recap.

Jeff: Recap?

Smart: Every detective knows the best way to sort through the evidence is to recap what you already know.

Brad: It's a hail Mary!

Kelly: How do we do that?

Smart: Follow me.

All line up behind **Smart**, except **Brad** and **Derek**, who remain seated on the couch over the next few lines.

Lydia: *(holds out her arm)* Come on, Granny. Take my arm.

Granny: I don't want to go to the farm! I may be old, but you aren't putting me out to pasture just yet. *(Shoo's away Lydia's arm and slowly joins the group)*

Smart: Walk me through the events of the evening.

Kelly: Everyone came in and got settled. Glenda was showing off her bag of nativity figures.

Smart: Who was she showing the figures to?

Jeff: She was showing me, over there, near the door.

Smart: Right over here?

Smart crosses to the spot where **Jeff** and **Glenda** stood at the start of the play. All follow.

Jeff: Yes.

Glenda: I was showing him a few of my favorites from my collection. *(Opens bag and looks inside)*

Smart: *(pulling out two figures)* So Glenda was over here talking to Jeff. *(Showing figurines to Jeff, and imitating Glenda)* "This shepherd's the best. No, this one is!" Is that about right?

Glenda: *(nods, laughing)* Yep. That looks right to me.

Smart: And then what happened?

Kelly: Then I brought Granny a snack.

Smart: And where did she have this snack?

Kelly: *(points to the chair)* In her chair.

They all follow **Smart** over to the chair.

Smart: Great. And what was the snack?

Kelly: Just some crackers and cheese.

Granny: Why yes, I do feel a breeze! *(Takes blanket off of **Albert's** shoulders)*
Thank you, Albert. *(Looks at **Albert's** pajamas)* What in the world are you wearing?

Smart: What happened next?

Kelly: Then Donald started his annual magic show.

Smart: And where did that take place?

Kelly: Over by the fireplace.

Smart: Then let's go to the fireplace! *(Rushes over to the fireplace with everyone following)* So Donald did a magic show here?

Donald: Donald, the *Great!*

Smart: Right, Donald the Great. *(Takes **Donald's** hat and puts it on his head. He takes **Donald's** wand and imitates **Donald** doing a magic trick)* So Donald's over here, waving the magic wand around, saying, Abra-ca-dabba-dabba-dee! *(Flowers pop out of end of wand)* And out pops the flowers.

Carter: Not exactly.

Donald: *(shocked)* How did you do that? *(Takes wand from **Smart** and looks at it, mystified)*

Smart: Then what happened?

Jeff: Then I noticed Lydia trying to leave, so I stopped her.

Smart: I'm assuming you ran over to the door?

Jeff: I guess so.

Smart: Then let's go! *(Runs over to the door with all following)* And then what?

Jeff: I think Lydia had the door open.

Lydia: I did not.

Jeff: You did! It was just like this.

Jeff opens the door. Mrs. Winters is standing there, holding document.

M. Winters: *(sharply)* Hello again, neighbors. *(Opens up document)* When I was here earlier, I noticed your Christmas decorations are out of compliance in

regard to Article J of section 247 of the Homeowner's Association Agreement. *(Holds out document, showing them a page)* See?

Jeff: Yes, I do and we'll take care of it right away, Mrs. Winters. *(Starts to shut the door, pushing her out as he does)*

M. Winters: *(as the door closes)* Don't let it happen again!

Door shuts on Mrs. Winters.

Kelly: That wasn't very neighborly, Jeff. It is Christmas Eve after all.

Jeff: I'm sorry, Kelly, but she's the worst! *(Doorbell rings. Jeff is exasperated)*
You have got to be kidding me!

Jeff opens door. Carolers are standing at the door.

Caroler1: *(with a huge smile, enthusiastically)* You guys ready for that Christmas carol yet?

Jeff: *(yelling)* No!

Jeff slams the door in Carolers surprised face.

Smart: *(unphased)* So what happened next?

Kelly: Then we played the game to figure out who would place the baby Jesus in the manger.

Annie: *(looking at the clock)* Mom, we have to hurry! If we don't find the baby Jesus soon, it will be the first time in years we haven't put him in the manger on Christmas Eve!

Derek: Looks like he's running out the clock!

Smart: Then show me how you play the game.

Kelly crosses to the tree and picks up the wrapped box, as before. Unseen by audience, she places the baby Jesus in the box. All line up, as before. Kelly joins them, with box.

Kelly: You want us to pass the box?

Smart: Yes, please.

They all pass the box as before, while Smart looks on, commentating the following lines at intervals as they do.

Smart: I see. And then he takes the box. Oh, she passes it very quickly. And then who had it last?

Annie: I did! *(She now has the box)*

Smart: And is it safe to assume you were the one who opened the box?

Annie: Yes, I was.

Smart: And what did you see when you opened the box?

Annie: It was empty.

Smart: Very well. Then open the box.

Annie: *(opens the box and looks inside. She is shocked)* But...how can this be?

Sarah: What is it?

Rocky: What's in the box?

Polly: Squawk! What's in the box? What's in the box?

Annie: *(pulls out the baby Jesus figurine)* It's the baby Jesus. *(Looks at the figurine, then looks around at the others, then back at Smart)* It wasn't here before, Detective Smart. I swear.

Smart: I know.

Annie: *(puts the figurine back in the box)* Then how did it get here now?

Smart: *(crosses to Annie and takes the box from her)* If I'm not mistaken, our thief put it back in the box himself. *(Crosses to the Kelly)* Or should I say, herself. *(Hands Kelly the box)* Well done, Kelly.

Kelly: *(smiles)* Thank you, Detective Smart.

Jeff: *(shocked)* Wait. What?

Carter: Mom, did you steal the baby Jesus?

Kelly: *(smiling)* I did.

Annie: But why?

Kelly: *(steps forward)* We've had this tradition in our family for many years. We gather in this house. We eat cookies and drink punch. We look at Glenda's figurines and watch Donald's attempt at a magic show. We bicker over who is the star in the family, Brad and Derek watch a football game while we wait to open presents.

Rocky: And we eat cookies! *(Takes a big bite out of a cookie)*

Kelly: We've just been going through the motions of Christmas Eve, doing the same thing year after year, growing bored with our traditions and forgetting why we do them in the first place. *(Crosses and puts her hands on Granny's shoulders)* Granny's lucky she's nearly deaf. At least she doesn't have to listen to all the bickering and complaining.

Granny: Oh, I've heard it alright.

All: *(shocked)* You have?

Granny: I sure have! And Kelly's right, we've forgotten the meaning of Christmas and what it means to be a family gathering together on this day. *(Takes the box from Kelly and takes out the baby Jesus figurine and puts the box on the table)* When I was a little girl, my grandmother, *(turns to Kelly)* your great-great grandmother, saw this nativity set in a shop window. She saved every nickel and dime she could until she had enough to purchase this set. You see, even in those days, as we all got busier and busier, my grandmother could see that we needed something to help us all remember why we gather together on Christmas.

Lydia: And why is that?

Granny: To celebrate the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ, of course.

Lydia: *(crossing to Granny)* We all know Christmas is about Jesus's birth, Granny. I still don't see why his birth means I have to miss going to the biggest party of the year with my friends.

Granny: *(taking Lydia's hand)* When we come together as a family to honor the gift that God gave this world—his one and only Son—it helps to remind us of the love God has for each and every one of us—and the love we have for one another.

Lydia: Yeah, I guess you're right. *(Looking around at everyone and smiling)* I guess I have forgotten how special this family can be.

Steven: We've been so wrapped up in ourselves.

Sarah: We forgot the message of peace and love that remembering Jesus's birth brings.

Jeff: *(putting his arm around Kelly)* And how coming together to honor Jesus on Christmas helps spread that peace and love throughout the world.

Kelly: There are so many special events of Jesus's birth to remember.

Donald: *(crosses to the nativity and picks up angel)* Like the angel Gabriel surprising Mary and Joseph with the news that Mary was expecting the Son of God.

Glenda: *(crosses to the nativity and picks up Joseph)* And how Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted for the census.

Lydia: *(crosses to the nativity and picks up Mary)* They looked for a room at the inn, but there were none to be had.

Jean: *(crosses to the nativity and picks up cow)* So they went to the stables out back where Mary gave birth to Jesus amongst the animals.

Albert: *(crosses to the nativity and picks up the manger)* Mary wrapped him in swaddling clothes and placed him in the manger.

Granny and Jeff *cross to the nativity and each take a shepherd and sheep.*

Jeff: Meanwhile in the fields, the shepherds were tending to their sheep.

Granny: Until a chorus of angels appeared, proclaiming the good news of Jesus's birth.

Steven and Sarah: *(crosses to the nativity and picks up the creche)* A star shone in the sky over where the baby Jesus lay.

Annie, Carter and Rocky *cross to the nativity and each pick up a Wise Man.*

Carter: The three Wise Men saw the star and traveled across the land, bearing gifts for the newborn king.

Annie: Is that right, Mom? Is that what you wanted us to remember?

Kelly: *(smiling)* Yes, it is.

Granny: *(taking Kelly's hand)* I think your great-great grandmother would be very proud of how you've honored the tradition she started so long ago, Kelly.

Kelly: Thanks, Granny. *(They embrace. Kelly turns to Smart)* Thank you, Detective Smart, for helping solve the case...and helping us all remember the true meaning of Christmas.

Smart: *(smiling)* Thanks for letting me play detective, and for helping me remember too.

Annie: It's still Christmas Eve. Let's put baby Jesus in the manger!

Kelly: Let's get this nativity scene put back together.

All rush over to the coffee table. Any other items from the nativity set can be picked up by any character. Kelly brushes items off the coffee table onto the floor.

Jeff: *(looking at Kelly)* Really?

Kelly: *(smiling)* Really.

All work together to reassemble the nativity scene. After a few moments, it is put back together, except for the baby Jesus. Smart is walking towards the door, his job finished.

Annie: So, who has the honor of putting the baby Jesus in the manger this year?

Kelly: I have an idea. *(Crosses to the door, which Smart is just about to open)*
Not so fast.

Smart: This case is closed, Kelly. Is there something else you need from me?

Kelly: Just one thing. *(Holds out the baby Jesus)* You might only be an amateur detective, Walter, but you're still a part of this family. And you're the one that found Jesus today. You should be the one to put him safely in the manger.

Smart: It's been so long since I've done this—since I was a child. *(Smiles, looking down at the baby Jesus)* I'd be honored. *(Puts the baby Jesus figurine in)*

Derek: And it's the Bears for the win!

Derek high fives Brad. Brad picks up the remote and "turns off" the television.

Brad: So, did we find the missing baby Jesus or what?

Kelly: *(smiling)* Yes, we did.

Annie: How is it you two are watching football this late on Christmas Eve? There are no games on right now.

Derek: It's a recording of the state football championships from our senior year in high school.

Brad: We watch it every year.

Annie: So you knew what was going to happen in the game all along?

Derek: Yep. We're smart like that.

Brad: Chest bump! *(They bump chests and high five as the doorbell rings)*

Jeff: Not again!

Lydia: I'll get it.

Jeff: *(rushing to the door)* No way! You're just using it as an excuse to leave.

Lydia: Not anymore. I realized that if I left early, I'd be missing out on some pretty special traditions, *(embraces Granny)* and a very special family.

Kelly: That's right. And I think we have enough room to open our door, and our home to others who might want to share in the tradition too.

Jeff: Even Mrs. Winters?

Kelly: Even Mrs. Winters.

Jeff: Alright. *(Opens door to find Mrs. Winters standing at the door)* What is it this time, Mrs. Winters?

M. Winters: *(faltering, flipping through her document)* Well, actually it says in article T of section 432 that—

Jeff: *(interrupts)* Do you have any plans tonight for Christmas Eve, Mrs. Winters?

M. Winters: *(stops looking through document)* No, I don't. Why do you ask?

Jeff: *(opens the door wide)* Because we'd love to have you join our family Christmas Eve party.

M. Winters: *(surprised)* But...I'm not family. I'm just your neighbor.

Kelly: *(crossing to Mrs. Winters and putting her arm around her)* The great thing about neighbors is that sometimes they become just like family.

Guides her into the room. As she does, Jeff picks the Homeowner's Association document out of her hand and tosses it into the fire, unnoticed by Mrs. Winters.

Kelly: Now let's find you a seat by the fire.

Granny: I love the church choir! I always say, the best way to end a Christmas Eve celebration is with some good old-fashioned Christmas music sung by a church choir.

Doorbell rings.

Jeff: What now?

Jeff opens the door to find the Carolers.

Caroler2: Are you ready for that Christmas carol now?

Granny: *(excitedly)* And here they are! Right on time!

Jeff: *(turning to everyone)* What do we think, guys?

Kelly: The more the merrier. Let's hear it!

Carolers stand in door or enter. They sing a Christmas carol. Perhaps all the others join in as lights out on the scene. An optional spotlight can shine on nativity scene before lights fade to black.

The end.

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