

ACCIDENTAL CHRISTMAS ROMANCE

A Play in Five Acts

By Michael Zielinski

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Cast of Characters

Deb Marshall: A woman in her 30s

Doris Marshall: A woman in her 60s

Tom Brennan: A man in his 30s

Frank Scott: A man in his 50s

Steve: A man in his 30s

ACT I

Scene 1

The curtain rises with DEB MARSHALL in bed with STEVE.

DEB MARSHALL

Oh, Steve. I just can't get enough of you even if you do frustrate me with your premature ejaculations. My sneezes last longer than you.

STEVE

I try to distract myself by thinking about different passages in Shakespeare's plays.

DEB MARSHALL

Skip Romeo and Juliet.

STEVE

I focus on his tragedies. Hamlet, Othello, King Lear. Macbeth. But to no avail.

DEB MARSHALL

(Bolts to a sitting position while Steve cowers under the covers)

Shit! I just heard the garage door open. Quick, Steve! Hide under the bed.

STEVE

(Jumps out of bed in his boxers and stubs his toe on the nightstand by the bed)

Ouch!

DEB MARSHALL

(Quickly arises and puts on her robe over her bra and panties)

Quiet! Get under the bed. Now!

STEVE

I'm claustrophobic.

DEB MARSHALL

You'll be dead if Tom sees you in here. Don't make a sound.

STEVE

(Gets under the bed)

It's dusty under here. I'm allergic to dust.

TOM BRENNAN

(Calls out from off stage)

Honey, I'm home.

DEB MARSHALL

(Quickly walks toward the bedroom door)

The last three words I wanted to hear.

TOM BRENNAN

(Bursts into the room)

What a wonderful surprise. I come home early from work and find my beloved ready for some afternoon delight. *(Hugs and kisses her, walks her back to the bed and they lie down)* How did you know I was coming home early?

DEB MARSHALL

Uh, women's intuition.

TOM BRENNAN

(Opens her robe)

Dressed for some hot action, I see. *(Leans over to kiss her when a violent sneeze stops him cold)* What the hell was that? WHO the hell was that?

DEB MARSHALL

I didn't hear anything.

TOM BRENNAN

Everybody in this zip code heard that sneeze. *(Gets up, looks under the bed and drags out a quivering Steve)* WHAT THE FUCK! YOUR AFTERNOON DELIGHT IS WITH THIS WEASAL? WE'RE MARRIED A MONTH AND YOU'RE ALREADY CHEATING ON ME?

DEB MARSHALL

(Bolts to a sitting position)

Oh, Tom. I'm so, so sorry. *(Begins crying)* I just couldn't help myself. I hate myself for doing this. But I had no choice. I didn't want to hurt you.

TOM BRENNAN

Didn't want to hurt me? You couldn't have hurt me worse if you had cracked my nuts like walnuts.

DEB MARSHALL

(Sobbing)

Trust me, this hurts me more than you. I know that sounds strange but cheating on you was not exactly a cue-the-rainbow-and-violins experience for me.

TOM BRENNAN

Tell your lover boy to get the fuck out of here before I fuck him up! *(Steve grabs his clothes and shoes from a nearby chair and, without making eye contact with Tom, sheepishly slinks out of the room while Tom glowers at him)*

DEB MARSHALL

It breaks my heart that I cheated on you. You were my whole world, my Christmas fairy tale come true. Until I bumped into Steve.

TOM BRENNAN

The twerp that just slinked out of here? Really?

DEB MARSHALL

You're such a wonderful guy. I never would have imagined cheating on you. Then there was Steve. He's the magnet and I'm the iron filings drawn to him.

TOM BRENNAN

This schmuck couldn't draw flies even if you smothered him in shit. Goodbye, Deb.
You're dead to me!

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(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 2

With the stage still dark, a loud car crash is heard.

DEB MARSHALL

(Voiceover)

Oh my God! I've been petrified about having an accident and now I've had one!

TOM BRENNAN

(Voiceover)

My Porsche! What the hell happened?

The curtain rises with DEB MARSHALL and TOM BRENNAN standing together in the mall parking lot.

TOM BRENNAN

Are you OK? You gave both our cars a good smack. This mall parking lot is an asphalt petri dish for accidents during the holidays.

DEB MARSHALL

(Softly sobbing)

I'm OK. Just angry at myself for hitting your car. It was stupid and careless. Are you OK?

TOM BRENNAN

I'm fine. Which is more than I can say about your mascara. But you still look great. Let's not allow a little accident to spoil the holiday spirit. Why don't we do what we came here for?

DEB MARSHALL

I can't go Christmas shopping now. I just lost my job today as a newspaper advertising salesperson. I wanted to stick pens into my boss' ears and stir when he downsized me because of budget cuts. Or yank on his tie so hard that his eyes would pop out of their sockets.

TOM BRENNAN

The bastard could have waited until after the holidays.

DEB MARSHALL

And now this accident. I have to go home. I have to save my money. They're going to jack up my insurance, I might have to buy a new car, and I have no job. What's next? Santa torching my house?

TOM BRENNAN

I doubt our cars were totaled. Besides, in the spirit of the holidays, I'll pay for whatever gifts you buy this evening.

DEB MARSHALL

(Sounds suspicious)

Why would you do that? Nobody is that nice. Are you trying to buy your way into my panties?

TOM BRENNAN

I had an ancestor who was a Knight of the Roundtable and helping a damsel in distress is part of my DNA.

DEB MARSHALL

So, you're a shining knight and not a creep taking advantage of the situation?

TOM BRENNAN

No strings attached. We shop while we share war stories about this accident. And since we both need a ride home, I'll call a cab that we can share. Consider this a Christmas present.

DEB MARSHALL

(Her cell phone rings)

(Into the phone) Mom, I'll call you back. I can't talk right now. I bumped into a guy in the parking lot. No, mother. I don't think he's about to rape me. *(Clicks off phone)* My mother told me a long time ago not to accept rides from strangers.

TOM BRENNAN

Not strangers anymore. Hi, I'm Tom Brennan. *(Smiles, extends his hand and she extends hers. He kisses her hand)*

DEB MARSHALL

That doesn't suddenly make us bosom buddies. But what the hell. I'm Deb Marshall. *(Smiles, extends her hand and kisses his extended hand)* I've had a horrid day, one that threatens to ruin my favorite time of year. So, I will accept your offer in the spirit of the holidays. But don't try to take advantage of me. I carry a can of pepper spray.

TOM BRENNAN

Trust me. You can trust me.

DEB MARSHALL

That's redundant. (*Laughs*) Are you sure you won't be bored while I shop for my mom? I don't want to waste your time when you could be shopping for your things.

TOM BRENNAN

Don't be silly. Shopping together will be fun. I just have one item to buy. A gift card at Sparkle Jewelers.

DEB MARSHALL

Something for your wife?

TOM BRENNAN

I'm not married. It's for my secretary.

DEB MARSHALL

What do you do?

TOM BRENNAN

Believe it or not, I own an employment agency. I have a strong empathy for people who lose their jobs. That's why your situation, compounded by the accident, struck a chord with me.

DEB MARSHALL

You own your own employment agency? That's amazing, considering what happened to me today.

TOM BRENNAN

There must be something aligned in the stars. I will help you find a job, but employers generally don't hire during the holidays. Too busy throwing office Christmas parties and trying to get their female employees to photocopy their bottoms.

DEB MARSHALL

(Giggles)

Are you for real?

TOM BRENNAN

Where are we going first?

DEB MARSHALL

Boscov's. I need to do a little shopping for my mother. I'm all she has in the world since my father passed away from cancer. My mom has terrible arthritis, herniated lumbar discs, hammer toes and carpal tunnel in both wrists so I moved back in with her. But she seldom complains. She's worried that we're going to wind up eating toothpaste since I lost my job.

TOM BRENNAN

Our parents take care of us, then we take care of them. It's the cycle of life. It must be nice to be back home with her.

DEB MARSHALL

Except she keeps asking why I'm not seeing anybody. My last serious relationship lasted almost a year. When I broke it off, I decided to take some time off from the dating scene.

TOM BRENNAN

Do you want to know whether I'm seeing someone? (*Smiles*)

DEB MARSHALL

Since you brought it up, yes.

TOM BRENNAN

Not for three months. It sucks not dating anyone during the holiday season. I've gone alone to three Christmas parties and felt like a fifth wheel with loser stamped on my forehead.

DEB MARSHALL

I went to two parties by myself and I know exactly what you mean. People think you're either a leper or on the prowl. Women immediately hate you if they spot their husbands checking you out. If you go near the onion dip, suddenly four guys are hovering next to you, wanting to dip you in the onion dip and lick you. You know everybody there is wondering why you don't have a date. One lady had the gall to ask me if had a flatulence problem.

TOM BRENNAN

I'll never go to another Christmas party alone. If I have to, I'll bring along a blow-up sex doll.

DEB MARSHALL

If you dress up the sex doll like Mrs. Claus, you'll be the hit of the party!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 3

The curtain rises with DEB MARSHALL and TOM BRENNAN standing in a department store. He carries several large bags of Christmas presents.

DEB MARSHALL

I can't believe you talked me into allowing you to purchase these gifts for my mother.

TOM BRENNAN

You agreed to the deal. *(Smiles)* Now let me add the second part.

DEB MARSHALL

The cab?

TOM BRENNAN

That's the third part. The second part is you let me buy you dinner.

DEB MARSHALL

No way. You are way too generous.

TOM BRENNAN

Dinner is on me. OK, which store is next?

DEB MARSHALL

I got all I needed. Let's go to the jewelers and then dinner.

TOM BRENNAN

Great. I'm glad we bumped into each other tonight. (*Smiles*)

DEB MARSHALL

So am I. But I may change my mind if my insurance company drops me. (*Laughs*)

TOM BRENNAN

Where do you suggest we eat?

DEB MARSHALL

You're paying the bill. Your choice.

TOM BRENNAN

How about Mama's Place? They have delicious Italian cuisine and make the best drinks in town. It's quite intimate but I promise not to make you an appetizer.

DEB MARSHALL

I love that place. It is small. People at adjoining tables can hear your conversation.

TOM BRENNAN

We'll just have to be careful not to talk dirty. Mister Rogers and Mary Poppins out on a first date.

DEB MARSHALL

Mister Rogers never had your shoulders.

TOM BRENNAN

Mary Poppins never had your looks. Suddenly the jewelry store sounds like a waste of time. I can go tomorrow. Let's go straight to dinner before you realize that Mister Rogers was a regular stud compared to me.

DEB MARSHALL

Or that Mary Poppins was a lot sexier than me.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 4

The curtain rises with DEB MARSHALL and TOM BRENNAN sitting at an intimate table over dinner and drinks in a restaurant.

TOM BRENNAN

I am smitten by you. I want to spend more time with you. That is, of course, whether you still want to see me after tonight.

DEB MARSHALL

I do. *(Smiles broadly)* But it will have to wait until after the holidays. My cousin is stopping over for dinner tomorrow night and I have plans to see a movie with a couple girlfriends the next night. Then it's Christmas Eve.

TOM BRENNAN

Probably best we ease into this. *(Pulls out his wallet and hands her his business card)* Call me after the holidays, even if it is only about finding you a new job.

DEB MARSHALL

I absolutely will do that. I would love to see you again.

TOM BRENNAN

I'm happy to hear you say that. That's my Christmas present from you.

DEB MARSHALL

Thanks for an exquisite evening. You helped smooth out the dents in my day. I promise I will call you about a job and our next date.

TOM BRENNAN

Tonight was quite special for me.

DEB MARSHALL

I feel like you and I are starring in a Hallmark Hall of Fame movie. We already have enough chemistry to fill a Harvard Medical School textbook. Promise me you won't pinch me in the back seat of the cab.

TOM BRENNAN

I had something else in mind.

DEB MARSHALL

How about a long, slow, deep, soft, wet kiss?

TOM BRENNAN

I think I just died and went to heaven.

DEB MARSHALL

God, are we smitten or what?

TOM BRENNAN

My testicles dance a Bulgarian polka whenever I'm near you.

DEB MARSHALL

I'll take that as a yes.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 5

The curtain rises with DEB MARSHALL and DORIS MARSHALL sitting in their living room, which is filled with the large presents that Deb just brought home from the mall.

DORIS MARSHALL

I didn't realize that the mall was open past midnight. Your face is sparkling like a red Christmas bulb. You look too damn happy for somebody who just lost their job. Have you been out drinking?

DEB MARSHALL

Yes. And no.

DORIS MARSHALL

Don't play games with me, young lady. You've got a bigger grin than a jack-o-lantern sitting on an air hose.

DEB MARSHALL

I had two drinks. We also had a huge meal at Mama's Place after we were done Christmas shopping.

DORIS MARSHALL

And just who is we?

DEB MARSHALL

I met a guy. An unbelievably nice guy. A very generous guy.

DORIS MARSHALL

The guy you bumped into in the mall parking lot? You weren't dumb enough to let him pick you up, were you?

DEB MARSHALL

I was hurrying to grab a parking spot. I smashed my Honda into his Porsche.

DORIS MARSHALL

Smashed your Honda the same day you lost your job. Then you go out with a stranger. Bad things do travel in threes. Who is this guy?

DEB MARSHALL

He owns an employment agency and said he would help me find another sales job after the holidays. He also offered to go shopping with me and pay for my presents.

DORIS MARSHALL

You're damn lucky you didn't wind up getting raped. Some men are wolves dressed in sheep's clothing. He knew you were in a vulnerable state. Sounds like a predator.

DEB MARSHALL

I really like him. And I could tell he really likes me.

DORIS MARSHALL

So, this handsome hunk of an altar boy who just had his Porsche demolished by you instantly falls in love with you and you with him?

DEB MARSHALL

Exactly. I think I've met the man I'm going to marry and have kids with, the man of my wildest dreams.

DORIS MARSHALL

You're either drunk or insane. You're grounded you until you come to your senses. Love at first sight is a total crock. I told you to lay off those paperback romance novels.

DEB MARSHALL

I told him I wouldn't see him again until after the holidays. I want to give this a little time.

DORIS MARSHALL

At least you're not completely off your rocker. You need some tough love from me to straighten you out. But first I'm going to bed and have nightmares.

DEB MARSHALL

I undoubtedly will have sweet dreams tonight.

DORIS MARSHALL

If I hadn't cremated your father, he'd be rolling over in his grave right now. Are you sure you didn't suffer a concussion in that accident?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT I)

ACT II

Scene 1

The curtain rises with TOM BRENNAN on the speaker phone in his office.

TOM BRENNAN

So how is my favorite lady behind the wheel this morning?

DEB MARSHALL

(voice from off stage)

I'm sorry that I smacked your car but thrilled that the accident may have us hitch a ride through life together. *(Giggles)*

TOM BRENNAN

I feel that way exactly so let's buckle our seatbelts and put the pedal to the metal.

DEB MARSHALL

Perhaps we should become mechanics with all these automotive terms.

TOM BRENNAN

I'll see if there are any job openings for mechanics. By the way, do you have whiplash today?

DEB MARSHALL

Thankfully not.

TOM BRENNAN

One of the billboard companies needs a salesperson. Do you want to talk about it over lunch today?

DEB MARSHALL

Absolutely. I need a job – and health insurance. If I was an actor, I couldn't even afford to break a leg.

TOM BRENNAN

Noon at Austin's work? You got wheels?

DEB MARSHALL

Perfect. I have a rental. I'm keeping both hands on the wheel.

TOM BRENNAN

Can't wait. You can keep both hands on me during lunch!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT II

Scene 2

The curtain rises with DEB MARSHALL and TOM BRENNAN sitting at a restaurant table in dim lighting.

DEB MARSHALL

Where do you live?

TOM BRENNAN

Wyomissing.

DEB MARSHALL

In one of those big mansions that are bigger than Rhode Island?

TOM BRENNAN

It's modest. Only as big as Providence.

DEB MARSHALL

There are no modest ones. You had to be married at one time to buy a house that huge.

TOM BRENNAN

Never been married. I look at it as a real estate investment. When I find the right girl to marry, we'll keep it if she likes it or sell it if she doesn't.

DEB MARSHALL

What's not to like? Mansions are awesome -- if you have a cleaning lady.

TOM BRENNAN

You might want something newer. You never know. I have a strong feeling that someday soon that is going to be your decision.

DEB MARSHALL

I was hoping and praying that you would say that. I feel as if I'm addicted to you.

TOM BRENNAN

Works for me.

DEB MARSHALL

Do you feel the same overwhelming connection that I do?

TOM BRENNAN

I do.

DEB MARSHALL

Before I embarrass myself and get completely naked in here, let's talk business.

TOM BRENNAN

It's so dark in here few people would notice.

DEB MARSHALL

A good thing. (*Giggles*) We now are officially dating, correct?

TOM BRENNAN

Absolutely.

DEB MARSHALL

Exclusively?

TOM BRENNAN

Most definitely.

DEB MARSHALL

Tell me, would you care to have Christmas Eve dinner with my mother and me?

TOM BRENNAN

I usually see my folks over the holidays. They live in San Diego. But this year they are spending the holidays on a cruise to the Hawaiian Islands. So, I would love to have Christmas Eve dinner with you. And let me invite you and your mother to have Christmas Day dinner at my house.

DEB MARSHALL

Christmas dinner at our house is a tradition. Having Christmas dinner at your house wouldn't work for my mother unless I bind and gag her and drag her there. Plus, she thinks I'm insane for rushing things with you.

TOM BRENNAN

So why is she inviting me for Christmas Eve dinner? Should I bring along a food taster in case she wants to poison me?

DEB MARSHALL

She hasn't invited you. I have.

TOM BRENNAN

What? You are going to have me just show up and likely ruin Christmas Eve for her, you and me. It will be a disaster. You might as well have invited Scrooge, too.

DEB MARSHALL

Or it will be a delightful Christmas surprise and your charm and kindness and palatable love for me will win her over.

TOM BRENNAN

Either we skip it or you let her know first.

DEB MARSHALL

If I do, she will say no. She means well but she always has been overprotective of me. When I was little, I'm surprised she never bubble wrapped me.

TOM BRENNAN

If I come, I have to come bearing gifts. What should I get your mother?

DEB MARSHALL

She already thinks your generosity has an ulterior motive.

TOM BRENNAN

If I buy you an engagement ring and buy her a mansion in Wyoming she wouldn't even let me stick around for appetizers?

DEB MARSHALL

She'd kill both of us with a butcher knife. *(Laughs)* It would mean the world to me if you came. And if dinner is more awkward than wrestling with a crab claw, we're all adults and we'll survive. Besides, where's your sense of adventure?

TOM BRENNAN

I'm no match for a mother protecting her cub. But for you I'll do it. *(Leans over the table and kisses her)*

FRANK SCOTT approaches their table.

FRANK SCOTT

You sure know how to seal a deal with a kiss, Tom. *(Laughs and exchanges high fives with Tom)*

TOM BRENNAN

Be the first to meet my new girlfriend, Frank. This is Deb.

FRANK SCOTT

Charmed to meet you. Hang onto this guy. He's a great catch. I never could understand why he wasn't married long ago.

TOM BRENNAN

Never found the right girl. But sometimes the right girl runs right into you.

DEB MARSHALL

We shall see if he passes the audition in satisfying my desires.

FRANK SCOTT

No pressure there, Tom. (*Laughs*) How did you meet?

TOM BRENNAN

Our cars collided in the mall parking lot. (*Laughs*)

DEB MARSHALL

It wasn't so funny at the time. Our relationship literally started off with a bang. I thought he'd kill me. Instead, he started dating me. It's nice to meet you, Frank.

FRANK SCOTT

Not as nice as it is for me to meet you.

TOM BRENNAN

Frank is my best friend only because I beat him regularly in golf and tennis. He owns an electronics store.

DEB MARSHALL

Good to know. I could use a new iPad.

TOM BRENNAN

Frank, I'll stop by later today and buy two iPads for Christmas gifts, one for Deb and for her mother.

DEB MARSHALL

Oh no you won't.

TOM BRENNAN

If you want me there for Christmas Eve, they come with the deal. I'm not showing up without gifts.

DEB MARSHALL

All right. But you must teach my mother how to operate an iPad. And good luck with that.

TOM BRENNAN

Deal.

FRANK SCOTT

I'm glad I bumped into you two. (*Chuckles*) By the way Tom. If you let this lovely young lady get away, I'm going to dip you in seal butter and drop you in a polar bear's cage.

DEB MARSHALL

And I thought getting dipped in the onion dip was harsh.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT II)

ACT III

Scene 1

The curtain rises with DORIS MARSHALL and DEB MARSHALL preparing Christmas Eve dinner in their kitchen.

DORIS MARSHALL

Why did you get a bigger ham this year? It's just the two of us and you could land a plane on this ham. When I lifted it my prolapsed bladder almost fell out.

DEB MARSHALL

With me home for lunch everyday right now, I will be eating ham sandwiches. I absolutely love them.

DORIS MARSHALL

And why more potatoes? You could develop carpal tunnel peeling all these.

DEB MARSHALL

I can heat up the leftover potatoes and have them with my ham sandwiches.

DORIS MARSHALL

You're going to eat that big of a lunch? Soon you won't fit through our doorways.

DEB MARSHALL

I'll be working up an appetite working around the house instead of sitting at a desk.

DORIS MARSHALL

What are you going to be doing to work up that big of an appetite? Putting hardwood flooring in every room of the house, remodeling all three bathrooms, finishing the basement and putting on a new roof?

The doorbell rings.

DORIS MARSHALL

Who the hell is that on Christmas Eve? *(Walks to the door and opens it)* Who the hell are you? Oh, I get it. Since you're balancing a bottle of wine, two bouquets of roses and two wrapped presents, you must be Mr. Deep Pockets, the love of my insane daughter's life. I don't want you here, trying to buy your way into her heart. Money can't buy you love.

TOM BRENNAN

(Says from off stage)

I'm a Christmas caroler. With Bing Crosby, Andy Williams and Nat King Cole all unavailable, they sent me. Do you want to hear "Silent Night" this evening?

DORIS MARSHALL

The only thing I want to hear from you, sir, is good night. *(Slams the door shut)*

DEB MARSHALL, alarm on her face, runs into the living room.

DEB MARSHALL

Who was that?

DORIS MARSHALL

Some clown posing as a caroler. He probably was here to rob us. If he rings the doorbell again, call 9-1-1.

DEB MARSHALL

Don't be silly. (*Opens the door*) Merry Christmas, Tom. Please come in.

DORIS MARSHALL

You invited him to Christmas Eve dinner without asking me?

DEB MARSHALL

(*Sobbing*)

I wanted you to meet Tom and see for yourself why I have fallen in love with him.

DORIS MARSHALL

Tell the poor bastard to put down his gifts, take off his coat and sit down. You two can have dinner by yourselves and be all lovey-dovey like two junior high kids, I'm going upstairs to my room. I've lost my appetite. His gifts come with a price. I want no part of that transaction.

DEB MARSHALL

Mother, please don't spoil Christmas Eve. At your age you don't know how many more you have left.

DORIS MARSHALL

You already have me dead and buried? You sound like I'm in the fourth quarter of my life and I'm out of timeouts. I guess with me out of the way, you two can run around the house naked and frolic in béarnaise sauce.

TOM BRENNAN

(Laughing as he removes his coat and puts down the presents)

That's funny. It's a shame I won't get to spend more time with a lady who has that great a sense of humor. I wish my mother did.

DORIS MARSHALL

You left your mother on Christmas Eve to have dinner with your girlfriend's mother? What kind of a son are you? You should be ashamed of yourself.

TOM BRENNAN

My parents are spending the holidays in Hawaii.

DORIS MARSHALL

So, Mr. Deep Pockets, if you're being so damn generous why the hell don't the three of us spend the holidays with your parents in Hawaii? On your dime, of course.

DEB MARSHALL

(Shrieks)

Mother!

TOM BRENNAN

A wonderful idea. Consider it done. But here's the deal. The three of us have to dine together this evening and again tomorrow at my house. The day after Christmas I will have my travel agent book three flights to Honolulu.

DORIS MARSHALL

How damn rich are you?

DEB MARSHALL

Tom, we can't expect you to take us to Hawaii.

TOM BRENNAN

Accept my offer and I promise you, Mrs. Marshall, that after spending Christmas Eve and Christmas with me and then time in Hawaii, you will see just how perfect Deb and I are together.

DORIS MARSHALL

I may not love you yet but I'm starting to like you a lot. You're the real deal to make an offer of that magnitude. I didn't expect you say to yes. But you are not taking us to Hawaii. I was just testing the parameters of your generosity to see how far you would go to win my daughter -- and me -- over. I was very cynical of your motives. But now I realize you are sincere in your feelings for Deb. (*Smiles*) Welcome to the family! (*Extends her hand to Tom, who kisses it gently*).

DEB MARSHALL races over to the both of them and they share a warm group hug.

TOM BRENNAN

Mele Kalikimaka. That's Merry Christmas in Hawaiian. I insist we all spend the rest of the holidays there. Deb and I won't be getting married on Waikiki Beach next week. But I have a gut feeling that I will see Deb the same way I do now even when I develop cataracts.

DEB MARSHALL

From the moment we first locked eyes I knew.

DORIS MARSHALL

Promise me you will wait for our second Christmas together to get married in Hawaii. That will give you a year to check out all the warts and find out if you still want to do each other or would rather do in each other.

DEB MARSHALL

We can say our vows on the beach while the sun kisses the Pacific at sunset.

TOM BRENNAN

The Mai Tais are on me.

DORIS MARSHALL

Can we please sit down and eat Christmas Eve dinner before Lent rolls around and the ham is dryer than British humor?

TOM BRENNAN

Mrs. Marshall, I will have to check if there are any job openings around here for standup comics.

DORIS MARSHALL

Look for sit-down comics. My back stiffens up if I stand too long.

TOM BRENNAN

Mrs. Marshall, I'm also falling in love with you.

DORIS MARSHALL

Keep an eye on him, Deb. (*Laughs*) If he's falling for me, there's got to be a problem.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT III)

ACT IV

Scene 1

The curtain rises with DORIS MARSHALL, DEB MARSHALL and TOM BRENNAN sitting in the Marshall living room.

DORIS MARSHALL

I am so sorry to hear about your parents. How tragic. And on Christmas Day. If I were you Tom, I would turn Jewish to get Christmas out of my life.

DEB MARSHALL

I can't believe they were both killed by sharks.

TOM BRENNAN

My parents loved the water and adventure. What were the odds that two sharks would breach their shark diving cage? My parents were so full of life. And now, just like that, they're gone.

DEB MARSHALL

There are no words.

TOM BRENNAN

Speaking of words, I have to tell you that my parents were multimillionaires. As their only child, I will inherit their entire estate. If I'm married before their bodies are buried.

DORIS MARSHALL

Why would they make a provision in the will like that?

TOM BRENNAN

My parents felt that America is falling apart because the traditional nuclear family is disappearing. They have wanted me to get married for years.

DEB MARSHALL

Did they ever tell you that you would be cut out of the will if you were still single?

TOM BRENNAN

Never. I was shocked when I found that out this morning.

DORIS MARSHALL

How much money are we talking about?

TOM BRENNAN

If I'm married before they are buried, I inherit 200 million dollars. If I'm still single, I don't get a cent. Then all the money goes to charity.

DORIS MARSHALL

Sweet Jesus! What a freaking waste if all that money went to charity.

DEB MARSHALL

So, you want me to marry you before the funeral?

TOM BRENNAN

Yes.

DEB MARSHALL

Our wedding would be a financial transaction. Not exactly the stuff of romance.

DORIS MARSHALL

For God's sake marry him before he picks somebody else to marry for the money.

DEB MARSHALL

He would be marrying me for the money.

TOM BRENNAN

I've wanted to marry you since the first instant I saw you. I would be marrying you for you. What's so wrong about moving up the timetable to inherit 200 million dollars?

DEB MARSHALL

It's tacky and tawdry.

DORIS MARSHALL

Are you nuts? You're crazy about this guy. Do you expect him to turn down that kind of money just because you want a fairy tale wedding? He's not Prince Charming and you're not Cinderella.

DEB MARSHALL

Could you have your parents' bodies cryonically frozen in a tank of liquid nitrogen for a year and then we get married?

TOM BRENNAN

Delaying the marriage is not an option. Their will stipulates that they must be buried within seven days of their demise and I must be married by then.

DORIS MARSHALL

Talk about a shotgun marriage. But nothing is too weird for 200 million dollars. You've got to be flexible. When you have arthritis like I have, you come to value flexibility.

DEB MARSHALL

Mother, you are trying to sell your daughter into marriage.

TOM BRENNAN

I'm not marrying anybody until I marry you when you are ready, even if it takes five years.

DORIS MARSHALL

If you both don't come to your senses, I'll box your ears. You're deeply in love. Get married now, take the money and live happily ever being wealthy!

TOM BRENNAN

I will inform my parents' attorney that they can contribute every penny of the 200 million dollars to charity. It will make me feel good to be so generous.

DORIS MARSHALL

It will make me feel sick.

DEB MARSHALL

You really would do that Tom? You really must love me.

TOM BRENNAN

I do

DEB MARSHALL

I will marry you before your parents are buried so you can collect the 200 million dollars.

DORIS MARSHALL

I didn't raise a fool after all, thank God!

TOM BRENNAN

I promise you that you will never regret it. (*Leans over and kisses her*)

DEB MARSHALL

But there are two provisions. One, after we are married we change our last name to Christmas, so we will always remember our accidental Christmas romance.

TOM BRENNAN

What? And order all new business cards? (*Laughs*) What's the other provision?

DEB MARSHALL

You buy the newspaper that fired me and name me CEO and publisher.

TOM BRENNAN

Mrs. Christmas, we'll get married in San Diego and honeymoon in Hawaii after the funeral.

DORIS MARSHALL

If I agree to change my name to Merry Christmas, can I go along on the honeymoon?

TOM BRENNAN

If you change your name to Hannah Hanukka!

DORIS MARSHALL

Can I bring along my new boyfriend?

DEB MARSHALL

New boyfriend?

DORIS MARSHALL

George and I met the other day when our shopping carts collided at the grocery store while I was checking out the cucumbers. It was love at first bite, uh, I mean sight. I even let him buy my cherries.

TOM BRENNAN

Like daughter, like mother.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT IV

Scene 2

The curtain rises with DEB MARSHALL, TOM BRENNAN and STEVE standing in the bedroom.

TOM BRENNAN

Tell your lover boy to get the fuck out of here before I fuck him up! *(Steve grabs his clothes and shoes from a nearby chair and, without making eye contact with Tom, sheepishly slinks out of the room while Tom glowers at him)*

DEB MARSHALL

It breaks my heart that I cheated on you. You were my whole world, my Christmas fairy tale come true. Until I bumped into Steve.

TOM BRENNAN

You gave me your heart as a Christmas gift. Then you took it back and re-gifted it to a loser like Steve.

DEB MARSHALL

Emily Post said it's OK to re-gift a Christmas present if it's brand new. And since our marriage was so brief, I'm good.

TOM BRENNAN

Your heart was no longer in its original packaging since I had unwrapped it. And you are the polar opposite of good from my perspective.

DEB MARSHALL

You were a Christmas return and I exchanged you for Steve within 45 days, compliant with many stores' return policies.

TOM BRENNAN

The Deb I knew was into romance, not retail.

DEB MARSHALL

Retail is why I love Christmas so much.

TOM BRENNAN

I shouldn't have paid for your gifts the night we met. Sooner or later, we pay for every good deed.

STEVE sheepishly walks back into the bedroom.

STEVE

Pardon the interruption, but I forgot my bedtime pet panda.

STEVE retrieves the panda from the bed and walks out of the bedroom.

TOM BRENNAN

Do you have to diaper him after sex?

DEB MARSHALL

Thankfully no. But I once got his pacifier stuck up my ass just as I was ready to come. Ruined a perfectly good orgasm.

TOM BRENNAN

Do you hate me that much?

DEB MARSHALL

Hate you? I love you. But you were then, and Steve is now. He and I are closer than a second coat of paint.

TOM BRENNAN

Here's hoping it's lead-based paint that poisons both of you.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT IV)

ACT V

Scene 1

The curtain rises with DORIS MARSHALL and DEB MARSHALL sitting in the Marshall living room.

DORIS MARSHALL

Tom filed for divorce after only a month of marriage! He set you up to collect the inheritance. He never loved you. Never trust a man trying to buy his way into your heart.

DEB MARSHALL

Tom did love me. It was me who broke his heart.

DORIS MARSHALL

You weren't comfortable with being filthy rich and being a newspaper publisher?

DEB MARSHALL

Just filthy. I cheated on Tom and he caught me in bed with Steve.

DORIS MARSHALL

Jesus, Mary and Joseph! You were screwing around on Tom?

DEB MARSHALL

I just couldn't help myself. (*Sobbing*) And there's more. Our prenup had an infidelity clause that negates me from getting one dime of Tom's money.

DORIS MARSHALL

You literally screwed yourself. You lost a man who loved you. And you lost a fortune. So, tell me about this Steve guy. Was screwing him worth it?

DEB MARSHALL

He's a playwright. It doesn't pay very well. Fortunately, he lives with his mother, who supports him. His plays only have been produced in little theatres.

DORIS MARSHALL

He sounds so far away from Broadway he might as well live on a different planet. He should get a real job and write his silly plays after work. I won't have to worry about Steve trying to buy your affection like I did with Tom.

DEB MARSHALL

He's going to hit it big on Broadway.

DORIS MARSHALL

If you and Steve get married, you will support him forever. Assuming your overactive sex drive affords you the time to go job hunting.

DEB MARSHALL

I will never forget the look on Tom's face when he walked into our bedroom and found Steve hiding under the bed.

DORIS MARSHALL

What in the name of Satan had you screwing another guy in your husband's bed? Was Tom that lousy in bed?

DEB MARSHALL

It had nothing to do with Tom. He's a fine lover. I just couldn't help myself.

DORIS MARSHALL

Is this Steve character so impossibly handsome and so sexually magnetic that you can't control yourself? I want to see this guy.

DEB MARSHALL

He's ordinary looking and doesn't have much of a personality.

DORIS MARSHALL

And you just had to have sex with a guy who blends in with the furniture? Are you a deranged nympho?

DEB MARSHALL

I have a different sort of problem. I had another car accident. I T-boned Steve's car. But I didn't care. All I could think of was having sex with him. I just had to have him.

DORIS MARSHALL

God, please take me now! I should have died before my daughter went crazy. Accidents are aphrodisiacs to you. Smack some guy's car bumper and suddenly he's riding your bumper. You need a psychiatrist. Give up your driver's license. With your penchant for accidents, you risk going through more boyfriends than I do tissues when my allergies are bad.

DEB MARSHALL

The fact that I fell instantly in love with both Tom and Steve after having accidents with them wasn't coincidence. It's time you knew the truth.

DORIS MARSHALL

Playing bumper cars suddenly makes you hot for the guy you hit?

DEB MARSHALL

Yes. I saw a psychiatrist and he told me I have PTSD and Stockholm syndrome.

DORIS MARSHALL

You contracted a sexually transmitted disease in Stockholm? When the hell were you in Stockholm?

DEB MARSHALL

STD is a sexually transmitted disease. PTSD is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. While I was not injured in either accident, I suffered trauma from both. My falling instantly in love with Tom and then Steve was a combination of PTSD, which triggers increased sexual arousal for the guy I hit, and an aberration of Stockholm syndrome, a psychological phenomenon when hostages express empathy, sympathy and positive feelings toward their captors. Or in my case, fellow accident victims.

DORIS MARSHALL

Freudian bullshit!

DEB MARSHALL

It's not bullshit. It's a shared traumatic experience, like being in battle. But instead of sharing a foxhole, I share a bed.

DORIS MARSHALL

Your vagina becomes a foxhole?

DEB MARSHALL

Sadly, yes.

DORIS MARSHALL

Ahhhhh! If all this is true you did fall in love with Tom AND Steve. You're certifiably nuts.

DEB MARSHALL

But my condition now has me bonded to Steve like Super Glue. I can't help myself.

DORIS MARSHALL

What happens if you're in accident with another guy? Will you drop Steve and hook up with that guy? What happens if you ever get into a multi-vehicle accident? Will you then have your own posse of lovers?

DEB MARSHALL

The trauma of each accident had me fall in love. Mother, please tell nobody about this. Tom didn't know about this and neither does Steve. I prefer to keep it that way. PTSD is a mental illness, but I don't need to wear a straitjacket in a loony bin.

DORIS MARSHALL

Just a chastity belt. Are you screwed for life? Literally?

DEB MARSHALL

My psychiatrist tells me that with loving support, expert guidance and patience, my condition can be cured.

DORIS MARSHALL

If you are cured, will you drop Steve and go back to Tom?

DEB MARSHALL

In a heartbeat!

TOM BRENNAN walks into the room.

TOM BRENNAN

Deb, I came here to see you and find out what the hell got into you. I didn't mean to eavesdrop on your conversation with your mother, but one of your windows was open a crack. I heard everything.

DEB MARSHALL

(Groans).

TOM BRENNAN

Now that I know what happened, I forgive you.

DEB MARSHALL

You do? You don't think I'm some sort of crazy bimbo?

TOM BRENNAN

I knew there had to be some rational explanation for your bizarre behavior. Now I know why you have such an insatiable sex drive. I miss the steamy breath of your Inner animal!

DORIS MARSHALL

Someone please jam bamboo slivers under my fingernails! I can't take this!

TOM BRENNAN

You mentioned that your doctor says you need loving support. I will give you loving support and buy your newspaper for you -- if you stop seeing Steve immediately.

DEB MARSHALL

My God, I do love you. But because of my condition, I'm not sure that I can pry myself away from Steve.

DORIS MARSHALL

You need your head examined.

DEB MARSHALL

I am. Weekly.

TOM BRENNAN

I will make Steve a generous offer to stay away from you. I will even give him the seed money to start his own repertory theater. I will hire you a personal chauffeur, so you don't risk running into someone else. You and I will start the Deb Christmas PTSD Foundation that will help veterans and bad drivers such as yourself. All you have to do is return home with me. Deal?

DORIS MARSHALL

Deb, if you don't say yes, I will hit you in the head with a frying pan and hopefully unscramble your scrambled brain. You're giving me such bad PTSD I may need LSD.

DEB MARSHALL

Mr. Christmas, you're as generous as our new last name. *(Sobs)* So yes! I will accept your offer and come home with you. I love you, Tom!

STEVE suddenly walks into the room, looks sheepishly at Tom and then longingly at Deb. Tom glowers at Steve and then questioningly at Deb, who nervously glances back and forth at both of them as if she were watching a tennis match and then finally stares straight ahead -- looking totally conflicted.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)

