FOR MASTER OF FINE ARTS THESIS

NATHAN'S SECRET GIRLFRIEND: A Christmas Play

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Characters:
KELLY, 22
STEPHANIE, 26
NATHAN, 28
GEORGE, 55, their father

We are in George Miller’s home in Fort Collins, Colorado. The front entry of the ranch style home is flanked by a dining room and living room. It was decorated in audacious red and green wallpaper by George’s late wife, Leslie. Shelves that once held knickknacks are cleared, making the space empty.

In the living room, a pathetic plastic miniature Christmas tree sits on a side table next to the sofa. Boxes of lights wait to be strung up. There’s a well stocked wooden bar: The Millers are not amateur drinkers.

The dining room table is currently covered in oven racks and baking sheets piled high with hundreds of sugar cookies. Grocery bags of frosting and Christmas themed entertainment supplies clutter the table and the sofa in the living room.
ACT ONE.

KELLY, age 22, wears a ruffled apron as she frosts a snowflake cookie with a tube of store bought icing. Kelly’s older sister, STEPHANIE nibbles on a cookie in disgust.

STEPHANIE
It’s a shame to use artificial, this frosting is disgusting. I want the real thing. Something authentic!

KELLY
Dad even threw out the good china and her recipes. I wouldn’t have agreed to go to Brock’s for Thanksgiving if I knew he was going to trash her decorations.

STEPHANIE
He did a pretty good job throwing out Leslie’s stuff. I would have driven up from Boulder if I knew he was going to dump her possessions, I could have used some kitchen stuff for my apartment.

KELLY
I’m doing the cookies from memory and I don’t know how she made the frosting. You’ll have to deal with the store bought kind. The fake frosting is bright. Like an ornament on the tree.

STEPHANIE
Plastic almost.

KELLY
What’s with you? You’ve been cagey ever since you got here. Another broken heart? Who was it this time: the girl from the co-op, the lady who teaches your pottery class, or the chick who plays Santa’s elf at the mall?

STEPHANIE
I’m happy being single for once.
Then be cheerful.

Kelly, I’m worried about Dad. I was looking on his computer and-

Stephanie! Don’t wipe that frosting on the table. I’m not cleaning up after your messes.

You clean up after George.

Dad can’t clean on his own.

I get that Leslie’s suicide weighs heavily on him, but really, it’s like hammering the nails in the coffin.

Is that her apron?

It’s the only thing I was able to save. Just help me with the cookies, I’ve made twenty dozen batches for the neighbors, but they still need frosting.

You’re mom’s mini-me! You’ve become a manic cookie slave like her. Though she never would have used artificial frosting.

There’s a lot on my plate with school. Store bought icing seemed like a good idea at the time.
STEPHANIE
(Alarmed,) Why are there five place settings? I thought Brock was at his folks? George will like that...

KELLY
Brock’s in Nebraska. Dad will be out of sorts, and I don’t want to give him any reason to have a melt down.

STEPHANIE
Then who’s coming?

KELLY
...I wasn’t supposed to tell you.

STEPHANIE
Who’s coming to dinner?

KELLY
Nathan made me promise. A promise is a promise.

STEPHANIE
Nathan made you promise what? Who is he bringing?!

KELLY
He has a girlfriend.

STEPHANIE
Not Nathan?! A girl? Nathan has a girlfriend and I don’t? How is that possible? Do you think she has big boobs? Do think she’s really old? Who’d pick him? Why’s he bringing her? How rude! What’s her name?

KELLY
I didn’t press him for it.

STEPHANIE
I can’t believe he’d spring this on us on Christmas Eve! What do you know about her?

KELLY
She’s a mystery.
STEPHANIE
There’s no reason he should tell you everything. I should be besties with him, you’re so much younger than us. He doesn’t even follow me on Twitter.

KELLY
Nathan doesn’t use social networks. Who would he network with?

STEPHANIE
He follows you on Twitter. Why does he hate me? He hides his feelings worse than Leslie used to. He’s a reclusive cyborg. He thinks he’s better than us. A superior life form. Why didn’t you tell me?!

KELLY
I shouldn’t have said anything!

STEPHANIE
Does he think I’m not going to be stoked? I’m stoked. Of course I’m stoked. He’s blocked me out of his life since he moved to Jersey. New Jersey ruins people.

KELLY
No he hasn’t.

STEPHANIE
New Jersey ruins people.

KELLY
He’s awkward.

STEPHANIE
When I told him I dropped out of grad school, he didn’t return my voice mail. Has still not acknowledged it.

KELLY
It’s not Nathan I’m worried about. You don’t know how bad he’s gotten.

STEPHANIE
When you said George threw everything out, I didn’t think you meant all the holiday stuff. All the decorations gone.
KELLY
All the fancy cooking stuff gone. There’s not even a
tablecloth or placemat. The house has never been more empty.
I think he’s acting out. You know some depressed people give
away their possessions before they—never mind. I keep a
close eye on him. I’m pretending it didn’t happened,
especially with Nathan’s guest coming.

STEPHANIE
Why tonight?! Not with all the stuff I found out about Dad.
Seeing him float around here gives me the spooks, and when I
was on his computer, I found—

KELLY
-Maybe if you were around the house more...

STEPHANIE
You know George gets worse when I’m here.

KELLY
He’s always like that now.

STEPHANIE
When I got home this afternoon I had to update my blog on
George’s computer and I checked his search history. He’s
been searching stuff like The Hemlock Society. Suicide
resources. No “how to” web sites. Just pages on the
subject.

KELLY
Why didn’t you tell me the minute you found out?

STEPHANIE
I’ve been trying to. George needs to warned about Nathan’s
mysterious girlfriend so he doesn’t implode.

KELLY
You don’t know how things have been here.

STEPHANIE
You’re a saint for dealing with George, alright? I don’t like
seeing him full of ennui, those weepy eyes like a puppy.
KELLY
He stares out the window watching the snow for hours a day. The only pants he wears when he gets home from work are his old sweatpants with the holes in them. Grown men shouldn’t wear sweatpants with holes in them. Brock and I got home from our Thanksgiving trip and he was tearing down the wallpaper. Trying to at least. Do you think he’s a danger to himself? I barely recognize him. But, maybe Nathan coming home will be a good thing. We need a Christmas miracle. A surprise will cheer him up.

STEPHANIE
Or it could send him over the edge.

Suddenly, GEORGE, 55 year old patriarch of the Miller family, appears from the hallway. They turn to see him.

KELLY
Why are you sneaking?

GEORGE
I’m not sneaking. It’s my house.

George grabs a few cookies and sits on the couch. The girls are awkward.

KELLY
I put bourbon in the cookies. Like mom always did.

GEORGE
Gee... I never noticed the booze before. Too bad you girls never learned how to cook.

KELLY
I cook for you daily. I’m cooking Christmas dinner as we speak.
STEPHANIE
Nathan has a surprise. He told Kelly. Not me. ...He’s bringing home a woman.

GEORGE
Nathan?

STEPHANIE
Is bringing a woman. For Christmas. They’ll be here any moment. ...Like a significant girlfriend.

KELLY
Nathan told me to keep it a surprise.

STEPHANIE
Why didn’t Nathan tell us? Hoboken has ruined him.

KELLY
He’s nervous. It’s not like he has experience in this department.

STEPHANIE
Who would date Nathan? He’s such a freak, why would he bring someone without telling us, especially tonight?

GEORGE
Your brother must have his reasons.

STEPHANIE
You treat Nathan differently than me and Kelly.

GEORGE
You’re different people and deserve to be treated as such.

STEPHANIE
What exactly did he tell you about this chick?

KELLY
Nothing.

GEORGE
Then it will be a surprise.
George nibbles another cookie.

You’re sure your mother put Bourbon in her sugar cookies? I don’t remember them being such alcoholic confections. When she baked the house filled up with that smell, that sweet Christmas smell. I miss that smell, sugar and nutmeg and a promise of deliciousness to come.

Nathan enters from the front door with two bags.

NATHAN
Season’s greetings.

KELLY
Nathan! You’re early!

Kelly rushes to embrace him.

NATHAN
Steph, It’s good to see you.

GEORGE
Nathan.

STEPHANIE
Merry Christmas, bro.

George takes the bags from his son as they look at Nathan expectantly.

KELLY
So you got here alright?

NATHAN
The flight from Newark was great.

STEPHANIE
I would have picked you up in Denver on my way into town.

NATHAN
The rental is nice. Compact. We get a little more freedom. Hi Dad. (Pause.) Smells good.
STEPHANIE
Doesn’t it? Kelly’s been cooking a big meal for everyone to share.

GEORGE
Where is she?

KELLY
Dad!

NATHAN
You told?

STEPHANIE
Of course she told.

NATHAN
Figures.

KELLY
It came out at the last second. Steph wanted to tell Dad.

NATHAN
I wanted it to be a surprise.

STEPHANIE
It’s still a surprise.

KELLY
I had to tell.

NATHAN
I know, it’s only, I dunno.

KELLY
Nathan, we’re eager to meet whomever you’ve brought.

NATHAN
About that...

STEPHANIE
Where is she?
Give me a second.

It’s cold.

I need to explain.

Did she dump you?

She wouldn’t dump me.

Get her in here.

There are some things you should know...

Did you leave the car on?

No, but it’s warm enough.

It’s freezing out there!

She’ll be fine. I promise.

It’s super cold.

Don’t be an ass, go get her!

Will you please listen to me for a minute. This is hard to explain...

STEPHANIE
Spit it out!

GEORGE
Get on with it.

KELLY
We’re waiting patiently.

NATHAN
Thanks. I know it’s been too long since I came home. I wish I could pull away from work, but things have been going so well and I can’t always get away. I should have been here last year. I should have. But I’m here now. The thing is.... Although it’s unconventional, and although I know the holidays are important, and this one in particular is a milestone for our family, I have to share something with you, and I need you to know more about what is important to me. Because who knows, it could be important to you too. Therefore, I need your patience... You might freak out. I’ll understand if you do. But please don’t judge this.

KELLY
Nathan, we love you.

NATHAN
Maybe that’s why this is extra hard. OK. So... I brought someone home with me. Dad, I’m especially excited for you to meet her. She’s someone special.

STEPHANIE
That someone special is going to catch hypothermia out there. She’s going to freeze her nipples off.

KELLY
It always has to be about nipples, doesn’t it Steph?

GEORGE
When do we meet her?

NATHAN
Hold on. First you have to promise something. All of you.
Promise?

NATHAN
So... she’s been an important figure in my life.

KELLY
Awesome.

NATHAN
...But it might take you a while to get used to her.

KELLY
We can’t wait!

NATHAN
...She’s different.

STE PHANIE
Different is good.

NATHAN
She’s not what you’d expect. And your first reaction will likely be strong. You might be confused.

KELLY
Don’t worry about us.

NATHAN
It’s only... seriously now, I’m asking you to promise to not judge the situation right off the bat.

KELLY
Of course.

NATHAN
You’ll judge her at first maybe...

KELLY
We won’t.
She’s been with me for three years, and I probably should have mentioned her before now, but here she is.

Three years?

You haven’t mentioned her in three years?

It’s serious. I’m serious, Ok?

We’re serious too.

You have to promise. Promise to not judge her.

Promise.

Dad, you promise?

Sure.

We all promise.

Go get her. She’s got to be cold!

Poor thing.

Nathan, it’s negative out there.

Ok. Ok. Ok. I’ll get her. I wanted to preface—
Nathan.

KELLY

NATHAN

Just-

STEPHANIE

Quit stalling and bring her in.

You all promise?

NATHAN

GEORGE/KELLY/STEPHANIE

We promise.

NATHAN

Ok. Good. Thanks. We’ll be right back.

Nathan exits through the front door.

KELLY

Three years?

STEPHANIE

Do you think she’s a Mormon?

KELLY

Let’s hope not.

STEPHANIE

She could be black. What if she’s black? Or Asian?

KELLY

We’re not a racist family.

STEPHANIE

You obviously don’t read my blog, or you’d know I’m a rights activist. I took two semesters of African American studies.

KELLY

At the University of Colorado.
An African American studies class can still be legitimate if taught by a white person. I loved those classes.

I hope so, I paid for them.

Bet she’s a he. Some guy dressed in drag. That would actually be cool.

What’s taking them so long? I can’t see her from the window.

This chick must have antennae or an extra boob if Nathan’s this worked up.

They’re coming! They’re coming! (They clear away from the door.) Nathan’s nervous. I’m sure she’s a very nice girl.

Nathan enters carrying a life sized, anatomically-proportionate, plastic doll dressed in a lovely dress and winter clothing.

This is Jiao Yi.

The family checks in with each other. Pause.

She’s a girlfriend doll.

Longer pause. No one quite knows how to react. The tension is thicker than fruit cake.

...Don’t worry. I know she’s a doll, an inanimate object. It’s a companionship thing.
KELLY
Can I take your coat, Nathan?

NATHAN
Will you take Jiao Yi’s coat too, Kelly? I don’t want to wrinkle it. It was expensive. Might as well make ourselves comfortable.

STEPHANIE
Do we have to talk to her like she’s alive? Cuz, that will make me uncomfortable.

NATHAN
Of course not.

STEPHANIE
Praise be!

NATHAN
Does this have to be a big deal?

KELLY
Did I see this in a movie once?

STEPHANIE
What are you doing?

NATHAN
Introducing my family to an important part of my life. I hope you can appreciate the awkwardness on my end.

STEPHANIE
What does one of these plastic prostitutes cost ya?

NATHAN
I’ll have you know Jiao Yi is a doll that improves a person’s quality of life. She provides a sense of stability, companionship, and intimacy. Mock me all you want, but you’re being close minded.

The family stands around as Kelly collects the coats.
STEPHANIE
And she’s your girlfriend?

NATHAN
Essentially.

STEPHANIE
Like an imaginary girlfriend? I’m only trying to understand.

NATHAN
She’s a real doll.

STEPHANIE
You talk to her?

NATHAN
Sometimes.

STEPHANIE
You know she’s never going to talk back?

NATHAN
Duh, Stephanie. She’s a doll. She can’t talk. But she’s valuable. Respect her. Please make the effort? It’s important.

STEPHANIE
Tell us Nathan, How did you two “meet?”

NATHAN
I found her online. I hadn’t done anything like it before. But I took the plunge, and here we are. Three fulfilling years later. Couldn’t be happier.

KELLY
We want you to be happy.

GEORGE
I’d be happier with a drink.

George pours himself and Nathan a glass of Scotch.
NATHAN
I know you never expected this. But having a companion has made my life better. And it’s not as uncommon as you think.

STEPHANIE
I feel like it’s pretty uncommon.

NATHAN
In Colorado. And in most parts of the United States. But it’s not uncommon in China or Japan.

KELLY
Lots of people do this in China and Japan?

NATHAN
A big enough population that there’s a market for it.

STEPHANIE
There’s a market for everything.

NATHAN
You can Google it.

GEORGE
Where did you find out about this opportunity?

NATHAN
I read an article in an airplane magazine. And it got me thinking. And then when I was in Beijing on business I saw some guys out with their companions. On public transit. In a restaurant. They seemed happy. Fulfilled. Comfortable.

STEPHANIE
You take her out in public?

NATHAN
Not before this trip.

STEPHANIE
This doll is offensive to humanity. She’s an object of orientalism and her breasts are like Christmas hams!
NATHAN
If she doesn’t affect you, why does she concern you? She doesn’t hurt anyone. Artificial companions are helping people across the world in myriad forms. In fact, my selection is modest on the scale of dolls available. Visionary engineers are even crafting robotic companions to help people in need. It’s where things are headed, believe it or not. I have a constitutional right to pursue my happiness, don’t I?

STEPHANIE
You’re proud.

NATHAN
There was an adjustment period when I first brought a companion into my life. But over the past three years I’ve become a new man. More confident in myself, more savvy in the boardroom, more decisive in my success. Dating women is expensive. Albeit I’ve made some sacrifices, but I’m saving money in this economy. I wouldn’t have made the professional progress I’ve accomplished without her, that’s a fact. Do you have questions? Ask anything.

STEPHANIE
Does she have a working cooter?

George spit-sprays his Scotch.

KELLY
Stephanie!

NATHAN
It’s no big deal.

KELLY
I don’t want to know.

Kelly cleans George’s mess.

NATHAN
Jiao Yi has a complete female anatomy. With working sexual parts.
Like silicone?

Eww!

He said ask anything.

No use putting it off. I’m not uncomfortable.

I’m uncomfortable.

Having someone like Jiao Yi, it isn’t, all about, sex. It’s only a fraction of it. Some artificial companions don’t even have sexual anatomy. There’s far more to it than sexual recreation.

You take her to dinner and a movie first?

I treat her well and she treats me well. When I get home from work, I might turn on the TV for a little. Catch up on the news. A rerun of The Daily Show. Jiao Yi watches TV with me. She loves Jon Stewart.

At least she’s not a Republican, am I right?

Stephanie punches her brother on the arm.

You don’t have to punch me, we’re not children.

Waiting for the day you’ll learn to hit back.
NATHAN
I wouldn’t it a girl. I have respect for women.

STEPHANIE

GEORGE
What else do you do with her, besides watching TV?

NATHAN
I take care of her. Shop for her. Brush or braid her hair. Doodle her name as I do the crossword puzzle. I make itunes playlists with her in mind and I absolutely love to dance with her! My girlfriend doesn’t get in the way of work. She doesn’t distract me from business and she’s there when I need her.

KELLY
So, she’s a companion, that you take care of?

GEORGE
You don’t mind that she’s plastic?

NATHAN
Have you ever had someone in your life whom you just had to lavish attention on? Someone you couldn’t help but cherish, indulge, and caress. Someone in whom you saw a reflection of yourself, through the care you gave them? What you get out of love is what you put into it. I’m glad I could finally introduce her to you. I think you’ll warm up to her.

GEORGE
What’s her name again?

NATHAN
Jiao Yi.

GEORGE
Jow Wee. What an unusual name.

NATHAN
Jiao Yi. It’s not uncommon in China. That’s where she’s from.
GEORGE

Interesting.

STEPHANIE

Is she using him to get a green card?

KELLY

Steph!

GEORGE

(Bowing seriously,) It’s a pleasure to have you in our home, Jow...

STEPHANIE

I need some wine.

Stephanie retreats to the kitchen on her phone. Nathan is getting upset.

KELLY

Welcome home, Nathan. I washed your sheets and made your bed.

NATHAN

You didn’t have to go to that trouble.

KELLY

You don’t come home often.

NATHAN

You’ll have to come visit Jersey. No mountain top views, but man, that skyline. Hoboken is perfect, close enough to the city to feel a part of it, but far enough from the mayhem to be apart from it. A great place to call home when I’m not traveling for business. But I’m glad to be back in Fort Collins, I figure it’s important, since Dad didn’t want any of us to come to Thanksgiving.

GEORGE

You missed last Christmas and the past four Thanksgivings. Glad you could clear your schedule.
NATHAN
It’s hard with work. Money doesn’t take a holiday. Global business doesn’t cease just because the Christians are busy stuffing their faces. But it’s important, I’ve been worried about you, so I’m glad to be here. And so is Jiao Yi.

Nathan squeezes Jiao Yi affectionately. Kelly plasters a smile on her face. George is bewildered.

NATHAN
I’m going to freshen up and put the suitcases in my old room. Unless you object to Jaio Yi staying in my room?

GEORGE
No. No, it’s fine.

Nathan escorts Jiao Yi through to the hallway.

KELLY
You never let my boyfriend stay over in my room.

GEORGE
It’s a little different.

KELLY
Why? Because I’m a girl? Or because Brock is a human being?

Stephanie barges in.

STEPHANIE
What are we going to do?

KELLY
Play along.

STEPHANIE
You want me to pretend it’s not crazy he lugged that thing all the way from New Jersey?! What’s wrong with him?
GEORGE

I don’t get it.

KELLY

He knows it’s a doll. When he called and told me– I never thought– he seemed so, happy. This is so weird.

STEPHANIE

He’s spitting in our faces and dancing on mom’s grave. He’s more bonkers than Leslie was!

Kelly comforts her father and pours him another drink.

KELLY

You will not speak about her in that way!

STEPHANIE

I don’t want that trash in the house. Do you think he’s on drugs? He’d have to be on drugs to think this doll is real.

GEORGE

I don’t get it.

KELLY

Something must really be wrong. Maybe we should call my therapist and see if she can recommend something?

STEPHANIE

Nathan must be in need of help we can’t give. He’s toting around an inanimate object as his romantic companion on Christmas Eve. I don’t want that thing in this house! Not tonight!

GEORGE

I really don’t get it.

KELLY

Imagine what people were thinking when they saw him on the plane, and in the airport...

STEPHANIE

Would she count as a carry on?
He must have bought her a ticket.

What a waste of money! Get that thing out of here!

Keep your voice down.

What? Is Nathan’s plastic geisha going to hear me?

Dad, I’m worried.

Don’t look at me. I don’t get it. It’s... strange.

Strange? It’s flippin’ unbelievable. This shit’s crazier than Herman Cain. He has an imaginary girlfriend. He brought a sex doll with him all the way from Hoboken. Disgusting. Plastic cooch.

Make her stop!

It’s probly got a tight little ass hole too.

Two of my three children are perverts.

Don’t use vulgar language on Christmas.

Would you rather I bring a life-sized Barbie? I know it hurts because it’s family, but there is obviously a legitimate psychiatric concern on the table.

All I want on the table is Christmas dinner.
KELLY
If we handle this wrong we’re going to have an even bigger problem on our hands. Nathan’s last Christmas, two years ago, he had a melt down when Mom pushed him about getting a girlfriend. He went berserk, and left for the airport a sniveling mess without saying goodbye to her. It’s why he didn’t come home last year. If we ever want to see him again, we’ll have to treat this with some semblance of respect. He’s sensitive.

STEPHANIE
You’re as crazy as him. I’m not a psychoanalyst, but maybe Nathan’s brain chemistry is imbalanced. These things are hereditary, right? He could be crazy. I hope he’s not dangerous too.

KELLY
If we confront Nathan, and freak out, he’ll go nuts.

STEPHANIE
It’s all pretty nutty to me.

GEORGE
I don’t get it, but I want to know what he thinks he’s doing. I’m going to put this on some ice.

George exits to the kitchen with his drink.

KELLY
He made us promise to be considerate. Let’s get through dinner. He seems relaxed, it could be fine, right?

STEPHANIE
You think we should treat this like its acceptable?

KELLY
What else can we do? He made us promise.

STEPHANIE
I didn’t know what I was promising to. That’s not fair.
KELLY
Be patient and open minded. At least til we know more.

STEPHANIE
I said this was an awful idea from the beginning.

KELLY
Will he try to bring her to church with us tomorrow morning?

STEPHANIE
We’re going to church?

KELLY
We go every year.

STEPHANIE
Didn’t go so well last year...

KELLY
It’s not up for discussion.

STEPHANIE
Mom made us go to Church so she could end herself. Faked a migraine and swallowed her pills while we were taking communion on Christmas morning.
STEPHANIE
With or without the China doll, I’m not churchin’ it tomorrow. Got it?

KELLY
Church on Christmas morning is an important family tradition.

STEPHANIE
It appears we’re throwing tradition out the window. Or have you not noticed that Nathan’s girlfriend is polycarbonate? He’s a delusional jerk-off. Bringing that thing in this house shows how much he despises us. It’s filthy and offensive.

Nathan and his girlfriend return from the hallway.

NATHAN
Sorry you feel that way Steph, but I know what I’m doing. You’re being close minded. This is for the best.

KELLY
Nathan, I’m worried about dad.

NATHAN
Me too. He barely looked me in the eye.

STEPHANIE
I think that’s because of your companion, dipstick.

KELLY
Be civil! Tonight is hard enough.

NATHAN
...So Steph, you dropped out of school?

STEPHANIE
So Nathan, you stopped dating humans?

NATHAN
Why do you have to be like that? Always picking fights.
STEPHANIE
I want that thing out of the house. Why haven’t you been home in a year? Why weren’t you here last Christmas? Why did you bring a sex toy home on the anniversary of mom’s suicide? What are you thinking?

KELLY
Stephanie, if you don’t shut your mouth, I’m sending you to your room.

STEPHANIE
You can’t do that.

KELLY
I run this house. I’m in charge of Christmas this year. And you promised Nathan respect. We have bigger fish to fry than you two being petty.

NATHAN
If you feel uncomfortable, it’s your problem.

KELLY
Maybe she could stay in your room while we warm up to the idea?

STEPHANIE
Perfect, he can screw her while you cook dinner.

NATHAN
You’ll come around. You’ll learn to like her.

KELLY
Nathan, listen. Dad might be in trouble. ...Like mom was.

STEPHANIE
George has been googling suicide resources. I don’t know what to make of it.

NATHAN
You haven’t confronted him about it?

KELLY
You want to try to bring that up with him?
NATHAN
I don’t know how to talk to him.

STEPHANIE
It’s not unreasonable for him to be depressed since Leslie passed. Maybe he’s finally dealing with his feelings. Keep tabs on him.

NATHAN
Kelly, I thought you said you had everything under control with Dad. I thought you said he was getting better.

KELLY
Apparently I don’t have the snooping capabilities Stephanie has. I don’t know what goes on in his head.

NATHAN
He must be lonely. Do you spend enough time with him?

KELLY
I’m here every day, what are you insinuating?

NATHAN
You’re obviously not enough, Dad needs another solution to make a break through. You can’t raise him out of depression on your own. You didn’t even catch these web sites.

KELLY
You think I’d let Dad kill himself?

STEPHANIE
I don’t want a repeat holiday funeral. What are we going to do with George?

George returns.

GEORGE
You and your doll settling in?

KELLY
Don’t spoil your dinner with drinks.
GEORGE
I’m not spoiling anything, I’m getting in the holiday spirit with some spirits.

NATHAN
Dad, it really is great to see you. You look good. And the house looks cleaner than ever. Kelly and you seem to be getting along nicely.

GEORGE
It’s good you could be here. I enjoyed Thanksgiving by myself. Wouldn’t have gotten so much done around the house had we been occupied with Thanksgiving.

KELLY
I should have stayed home and stopped you from throwing Mom’s stuff out.

GEORGE
I thought you supported my cleaning spree.

KELLY
Whatever makes you happy.

STEPHANIE
I was shocked when I came home and saw how empty this place is. The basement is like a gymnasium, or a mausoleum. Did you have to get rid of everything?

KELLY
If you kept the holiday stuff, I wouldn’t have had to get new chintzy decorations from the Dollar Tree and Target.

NATHAN
The decorations look great, not like Mom’s annual extravaganza, but it’s still nice.

STEPHANIE
Kelly’s cookies are great. You have to try Kelly’s cookies, Nathan. Boozy cookies.
GEORGE
They’re not as good as Leslie’s. Those cookies could convert you to Christianity. Home made frosting. The real deal.

KELLY
I tried to remember her recipe.

Kelly serves Nathan a cookie.

NATHAN
With a little bit of Brandy baked in?

KELLY
Bourbon.

NATHAN
Brandy. Just a dash, along with the vanilla extract.

STEPHANIE
That explains it.

KELLY
Brandy, not Bourbon?

NATHAN
Afraid so.

KELLY
Screwed that up...

NATHAN
Cocktail cookies. Unique.

GEORGE
Is there anything wrong with wanting to live simply? I got rid of some clutter, so?

KELLY
Nothing got moved or changed for ten months and then poof, gone without warning. To a dump, not Goodwill! I couldn’t put up any of her things, the garlands, nativity scenes, quilts, stockings! The only remnants of her are these ugly walls. Like our family moved out.
GEORGE
What’s done is done.

NATHAN
You know, I never realized Mom’s wallpaper was so garish.

STEPHANIE
It’s bad.

GEORGE
She had bold taste.

KELLY
With so many Tchotchkes everywhere, you could barely see the wallpaper. It blended in.

NATHAN
This paper should go, Dad.

KELLY
I’m not ready to part with the wallpaper. We have nothing to remember her by, since Dad destroyed everything. Why erase every trace of her?

GEORGE
It’s my house. I’ll do what I see fit.

KELLY
I have to take care of things in the kitchen. Steph?

STEPHANIE
Off to do women’s work. You boys behave.

Stephanie follows Kelly into the kitchen.

NATHAN
You know what one of my favorite things to do with Jiao Yi is?

GEORGE
Do I want to know?
NATHAN
She’s a great dancer. Come here. Stand up.

He grabs Jiao Yi and gestures for his father to join him in the middle of the room. Nathan bends her arms into waltzing position.

NATHAN
Here. Put your hands around her waist.

GEORGE
Like this?

NATHAN
Hold her like a woman.

GEORGE
Tai Chi’s pretty sturdy, isn’t she?

NATHAN
Hold Jiao Yi like you really mean it.

GEORGE
(Trying to hand the doll back to his son,) I have two left feet.

NATHAN
She won’t mind.

GEORGE
Son, I’m not comfortable.

NATHAN
Show me your moves.

GEORGE
I don’t have any moves, it’s been decades.

NATHAN
Go back to when you were twenty and you wanted nothing more than to sweep mom off her feet.
I dunno...

Find the romance inside of you.

(He gets into position.) Like this?

Pull her in close to you, so she knows she’s in good hands.

I feel ridiculous.

Dance your troubles away.

Nathan plays “Baby Its Cold Outside” from his iPhone and cajoles his father into swaying back and forth with the doll.

I haven’t danced since my wedding night.

You can do it.

Leslie was a worse dancer than me, but she made us practice and practice, we met with a dance coach so we would look perfect at the reception. Leslie wanted us to look perfect. I look foolish.

Don’t think about that. Just enjoy dancing.

I don’t feel right about this.

You can do it, Dad.
GEORGE
(Throwing Jiao Yi on the ground,) I don’t want to!

NATHAN
(Picking her up and tending to her,) I didn’t mean to-

GEORGE
I didn’t mean to throw her on the floor. But you-

NATHAN
I shouldn’t have forced you.

Stephanie enters, concerned about the commotion. Nathan straightens out Jiao Yi’s appearance.

STEPHANIE
Everything Ok in here?

GEORGE
Fine. Just having some fun.

STEPHANIE
What’s with the music, Nathan?

GEORGE
Your brother was about to waltz with Chai Tee. Go ahead, son, dance.

NATHAN
Forget about it.

GEORGE
Show me how it’s done.

Yeah?

STEPHANIE
Freaking ridiculous.

GEORGE
Show me how you dance.
NATHAN

Here goes.

Stephanie gets out her phone to video record the dance number as Nathan gets into position, holding Jiao Yi firmly, but with gentility. His face lights up with her in his arms. He begins swaying.

GEORGE

Look at you.

NATHAN

We’ve had a lot of practice. And she’s a good partner.

Nathan spins her around, careening through the living room with romantic sweeps. He grandly dips Jiao Yi and then tenderly brings her in close to him. George claps gleefully. Stephanie can’t believe her eyes. Nathan spins her once more and then kisses her on the cheek with intensity, like a sad goodbye kiss. Stephanie puts her phone away. Nathan turns to his speechless father and sister.

NATHAN

What do you think, Dad?

GEORGE

You could be in White Christmas.

STEPHANIE

You dance with her often?

NATHAN

When we’re in the mood.

Kelly returns.
KELLY
We should sit down for dinner. What did I miss?

STEPHANIE
I’ll show you later.

Kelly starts frantically cleaning.
George pours a drink.

KELLY
Sorry for the state of the house, Nathan. Wish I could have finished decorating. It got away from me. The stupid tree isn’t even decorated, how hard is that?

NATHAN
We can decorate it together.

STEPHANIE
Before or after dinner? I’m famished!

KELLY
You wouldn’t be hungry if you ate meat like rest of us. Do you know how hard you are to cook for?

STEPHANIE
Vegetarianism is one of my convictions, guys. Learn to accept me for who I am.

The girls exit with the cookie accoutrements. The men sit on the couch with Jiao Yi between them.

NATHAN
Mom would be proud of Kelly’s cooking.

GEORGE
Though the food won’t ever be as delicious, Leslie would have applauded the effort.
NATHAN
I’m glad Kelly’s been here for you. I wouldn’t want you to be lonely.

GEORGE
I’m holding up.

NATHAN
You worry about me, don’t you? Same as I worry about you.

GEORGE
It’s Kelly who we should be concerned about. Encourage her to look at her options. Leslie always felt Brock was a numbskull, I think he’s a pretentious jerk. Fortunately Brock’s at his aunt’s house for the holidays, so we won’t have to see him. Let’s count our blessings.

Kelly enters wearing oven mitts that hold a casserole dish in each hand. She is pursued by Stephanie, who carries a big salad bowl in her hands and a wine bottle under her arm.

STEPHANIE
I can’t believe you put hot dogs in the macaroni! Bitchy move, sis.
KELLY
Mom’s Midwestern tradition. Let’s get along.

STEPHANIE
I apologize for bickering in front of company. Wouldn’t want to upset or offend Nathan’s manufactured girlfriend.

NATHAN
She doesn’t mind. I warned her ahead of time that you’re the outspoken one.

KELLY
Let’s eat before it’s cold. Let’s go. Chop chop! Dinner time!
GEORGE
You got it, Leslie.

George exits, but the girls turn around before going to the kitchen. Stephanie mouths “Leslie?!” to her siblings.

KELLY
I know, that was weird.

STEPHANIE
(Whispered) Did Dad just call you Mom?

KELLY
I think so.

NATHAN
You did say “Let’s go. Chop chop. Dinner time.” Like mom used to.

KELLY
Oh god, that’s why! Whhooo.

STEPHANIE
If he had Alzheimer's, we could commit him, right?

Nathan leaves Jiao Yi on the couch. They exit to the kitchen.

A moment later, George enters with a basket of rolls. He double takes on Jiao Yi, places the rolls on the table and saunters over to the couch. As he’s about to touch her Nathan enters. George snaps to attention.

NATHAN
Want to give me a hand with Jiao Yi? Bring her over here and we’ll sit her down. Just pick her up.
George hands the doll over to Nathan. He sits his companion down at the table. This requires considerable work and bending of limbs.

NATHAN
She’s remarkably flexible. The design is fantastic.

GEORGE
Engineers are doing amazing things these days.

Nathan gets the plate settings in order as his father drinks. The girls return with the remainder of the Christmas bounty.

KELLY
Pick around the hot dogs.

STEPHANIE
How many times do I have to tell you? I’m not interested in wieners.

KELLY
Do you want to say prayer?

GEORGE
I don’t feel like...

KELLY
I can say it.

NATHAN
Mom would like that.

Kelly dims the lights to make dinner more special.

KELLY
Could we hold hands?
STEPHANIE
That would be nice.

GEORGE
(Grabbing hands,) Great idea, Kelly.

STEPHANIE
Hit us with your best prayer.

They hold each other’s hands.

KELLY
Dear God, we thank you for Christmas Eve night, a holy night that comes only once a year, to bring us together. A night in December. We’re sorry we don’t pray often enough, but here we are on the eve of the birth of your lord, calling unto you. We thank you for letting us be here safe and sound, whether we live across the country, less than an hour away, or in this very house taking care of our father. We harken thanks for this food, that was very expensive, and very arduous to make, especially considering the ill-equipped kitchen after Dad’s purge, but God, we thank you for what we have. It’s all we have, we’re stuck with it, and we are thankful. Stephanie, your hands are clammy, let go.

STEPHANIE
Forgive me.

KELLY
That’s better. Thank you, holiest Lord, for reminding us what’s important, a family dinner with lots of food. We thank you Lord, for bringing Nathan home. We miss Nathan so much. We want him to visit Colorado more often or at least Skype or something. And we thank you for the Christmas tree. It may be small and plastic. But it’s our small-

GEORGE
Wrap it up.
KELLY
We thank you most of all, for this moment together remembering one of the most beautiful and amazing women the world has ever known. We ask that you put the holidays in our hearts, especially this one. Her favorite. Amen.

GEORGE/NATHAN/STEPHANIE
Amen.

KELLY
I shouldn’t have prayed so long. Now the food’s cold.

STEPHANIE
Could we nuke it?

KELLY
It’s that bad? You need a microwave? Christ!

GEORGE
Luke warm like the rest of our lives...

NATHAN
The rolls are perfect.

KELLY
They come in a cardboard tube. Hard to mess up.

George fixes a drink.

STEPHANIE
Pour one for me while you’re at it. At least Kelly Belly didn’t put hot dogs in the wine. You couldn’t even make the pasta course vegetarian?

NATHAN
Does the blue box count as a pasta course?

KELLY
It’s Dad’s favorite. That’s how we do things.

NATHAN
For Kelly’s sake, let’s be cheerful and celebrate.
STEPHANIE
Why should this be a celebration? Because you brought “company?” Let’s celebrate our delusions! I’m having so much fun! I hope you’re girlfriend is having as much fun as I am. None of you are facing it. Dealing with it. We need to talk about her in order to move on.

KELLY
Let’s talk about normal things.

NATHAN
How was school this semester?

KELLY
Crazy stressful. I’ve been home with Dad more than studying. Brock was in two of my classes, which was totes sweet of him because he took them as electives.

NATHAN
What are your options when you graduate?

KELLY
Brock’s uncle has an advertising firm in Denver. He has a great job waiting for him. I think we’ll be happy together.

GEORGE
You wouldn’t be happy in a big city.

KELLY
What am I going to do here in Fort Collins?

GEORGE
What would you do in Denver?

KELLY
Teach preschool. Be a tele-marketer. Walk dogs, sit on babies, I dunno.
NATHAN
Get out and see the world, Kelly. You could also teach preschool in Seattle, or Miami, or Paris, or Beijing. Set your sights higher.

STEPHANIE
Go live with Nathan and his girlfriend and teach the ABCs to the children of Hoboken. Who says you need a job? Jiao Yi over here is sitting pretty. Be a housewife. Look how well dressed Jiao Yi is. I bet her clothes cost more than mine.

NATHAN
I’m sure they did. (Nathan adjusts Jiao Yi’s dress.) Kelly, Mom would want you to continue your education. In today’s world a Bachelor degree doesn’t get what it used to. She wanted us to have master’s degrees so we can be successful.

STEPHANIE
Is that a jab about me dropping out? Not everyone needs an MBA. Mom never had a job.

GEORGE
Do whatever you want.

KELLY
Except move in with Brock?

GEORGE
You two are young.

KELLY
We’ve dated for five years.

STEPHANIE
Remember your prom dress? You were the cutest heteronormative prom couple ever.

GEORGE
Dig up those pictures. Remind Brock how fit he used to be.

KELLY
He put on weight once he stopped football. So?
GEORGE
It’s not good for a young man to be obese. It’s bad for his heart, I’m looking out for the big lug.

KELLY
You’re rude.

GEORGE
He’s belittling towards this family. Leslie never liked him.

KELLY
She doesn’t get a say anymore, does she?

GEORGE
Why don’t you bring Brock over? You spend so much time with him and never bring him here!

KELLY
How’s he supposed to interact with you? With us? You can’t fault him for being uncomfortable. It’s a lot to handle. He tries. He tries very hard, but our family makes him squirm. No one in his family kills themselves. No one in his family brings a doll home for the holidays. It’s not normal.

GEORGE
Let go of him if he disapproves of your family so much.

KELLY
That’s not going to happen.

GEORGE
Kelly, your mother would want you to reconsider Brock. He’s a judgemental jerk.

KELLY
I won’t! I’m marrying him! We’re engaged!

GEORGE

STEPHANIE
Why didn’t you tell me? You never tell me anything!
KELLY
You’d blab it all over the internet like you do with everything else!

GEORGE
You’re not ready for that commitment. You can’t get married young like I did. You couldn’t. He’s slick and shifty, he drains your energy. You want to marry an out of shape linebacker who’s too slick for his own good?

STEPHANIE
If you marry Brock you’ll be like a sex-doll housewife to him.

KELLY
He’s knows what he wants out of life, unlike you, he doesn’t waste all his time smoking pot and bouncing from fling to fling. Brock is stable.

NATHAN
It’s a big commitment. He’ll hold you back. He’ll hold you down.

KELLY
Like a doll doesn’t hold you back? You’re stuck in arrested development! You don’t know what love is, Nathan!

NATHAN
All you people do is judge, and criticize, and dismiss the things that make me happy.

STEPHANIE
Because you’re as insane and imbalanced as Leslie was!

GEORGE
We’re not enough for you, Nathan!? You’re ungrateful!

KELLY
You can’t put my relationship and your toys in the same category. I love Brock and he loves me. His family loves me. He proposed in front of his whole extended family at Thanksgiving! They supported and congratulated me!
GEORGE
I won’t let you marry Brock!

KELLY
You won’t LET me?! It’s not up to you!(Retreating to her room in tears,) Forget it. Dinner is over. Merry Christmas!

GEORGE
Kelly!

STEPHANIE
This is your inflatable slut’s fault.

GEORGE
Stephanie, apologize to your brother this instant! His girlfriend doesn’t deserve your ridicule!

STEPHANIE
What the fuck Dad? You have to defend Nathan every time? Where’s my defense? Oh yeah, I don’t need you to fight my battles because I’m self-sufficient.

NATHAN
I’m more than self-sufficient, I’m self-reliant.

STEPHANIE
You have a giant plastic doll. You’re too self-reliant.

NATHAN
You promised you would respect my life choices. I asked for understanding. Where is it? You of all people should know how hard it is to reveal a socially unaccepted secret to your family. It’s important you support me.

STEPHANIE
You can’t equate my sexuality and this fantasy life of yours. No way. I have a world telling me I’m wrong for loving another person. Your situation is a one sided relationship with an inanimate object. My actions and natural human preference are scrutinized by oppressive systems of prejudice.
NATHAN
You’re selfish and cruel and that’s why you’ll always be alone!

STEPHANIE
I’m going to bed too. Happy mother truckin’ Holidays, Bitches!

She exits.

GEORGE
Merry Christmas, Nathan.

NATHAN
Dad, I haven’t been entirely honest.

GEORGE
Who has?

NATHAN
Dad, There’s more to Jiao Yi. I’ve given all of myself to my companion doll over the past three years, but I realized it was time to move on. I embarked on my journey with Jiao Yi knowing it would come to an end. And, I’m ready to graduate, if you will.

GEORGE
What are you talking about?

NATHAN
Jiao Yi's name means "Beautiful Gift." When I christened her, I knew I was giving myself a gift of time and simplicity, but I didn't imagine what a gift she would end up being. I've loved my companion passionately, and through her discovered a capacity for profound commitment I never thought myself capable of. And now it's time to pass that gift on to you, Dad.

GEORGE
Nathan, what are you getting at?
NATHAN
I want you to take Jiao Yi. She'll comfort you. Kelly's told me how dejected you've been. You never leave the house. This could help you.

GEORGE
I don't think I'm interested, son.

NATHAN
Won't you hear me out?

GEORGE
I'm not taking your used doll.

NATHAN
She's not used. I bought a new one for you.

GEORGE
I don't understand.

NATHAN
I parted with my Jiao Yi earlier this month. I donated her to an Asian charity that unites dolls with low-income disabled people. I said my good-byes to her, and I'm ready to start dating. I purchased this doll for you. Jiao Yi Two. I want you to have her. She'll be a beautiful gift. Let me do this for you.

GEORGE
You're a strange person, Nathan.

NATHAN
Dad, this is what you need.

GEORGE
I need to be left alone. Facing you kids... It's a mess, and Leslie isn't here to pick up the pieces.

NATHAN
Hold on to her, here, take her. Tell me it's not comforting to hold her in your arms.
George throws the doll on the couch.

GEORGE
Nothing will replace Leslie.

NATHAN
You don’t have to give me an answer right now. I’m going to my room. Promise me you’ll consider it. Mom can’t be replaced, but you need something to move on.

Nathan leaves George and Jiao Yi alone. George slams another drink. He looks around the empty room, searching for something. His eyes land on the doll. He scoops her into his arms and begins to sway. His eyes light up with memory and sadness. He looks toward the ceiling and the torn wallpaper.

GEORGE
Am I perfect enough for you?

END OF ACT ONE.
ACT 2.

...

See the author for complete text.