

THE NIGHT GIFT

A THREE ACT PLAY
FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

BY
BRUCE HENNIGAN
© COPYRIGHT OCTOBER, 1994
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THE NIGHT GIFT

A THREE ACT PLAY
BY BRUCE HENNIGAN
© COPYRIGHT OCTOBER, 1994
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

CAST:

Victoria Washington, founder and chief executive of greeting card company

Frank Washington, Victoria's husband

Stephen Washington, Victoria's teenage son

Robert Eastfield, Vice President of the company

Nadine Thompson, Executive Secretary to Mrs. Washington

Heather Griffin, Chief Artist and Writer

Ned Portland, Computer Programmer

Homer P. Resnick, Chief Security Officer

Francine Glower, Cleaning Woman

The Guardians: Original Investors in company

Mrs. Partridge

Mrs. Turtledove

Mr. Frenchhen

Mr. Collinbird

The Stalker

The play takes place in an office building conference room. A large table is center stage. A Christmas tree is stage right. A door stage left leads into Mrs. Washington's office, a small room with a window view and a single desk. The main room also has a large picture window overlooking a city scape with visible stars. A door stage right leads onto the stage.

ACT ONE

(Scene opens with Francine mopping the floor. As people enter, they ignore her.)

NADINE: *(Enters carrying a punch bowl filled with egg nog.)* Here's the egg nog.

EASTFIELD: *(With a boorish accent.)* Not with any ethanol, I hope. You know the boss is a Tea Totaller.

NADINE: *(Loud and ditzy.)* Ethanol? You mean gasoline? Why would I put any of that in this egg nog? Don't be silly. Now, I did look all over the grocery store for some nog and never found any. Think anyone will notice it's missing?

EASTFIELD: No more than they would notice that your brain is missing.

HEATHER: *(Enters with a platter of sausage balls.)* Robert, dear, please can the sarcasm. It's Christmas Eve. Where's your holiday spirit?

EASTFIELD: At home. By the fireplace. With my dogs. There was a time when this office party was an occasion to look forward to. But, since Mrs. Washington went on her Tirade of Terror ten months ago, this otherwise gala affair has taken on the semblance of drudgery.

NADINE: What did he say?

HEATHER: The boss has been in a snit for almost a year and he doesn't think this party will be fun.

EASTFIELD: An understatement if I ever heard one. The concept of fun does not coincide with working at the Tranquility Greeting Cards company anymore. Perhaps I should leave now and save myself the inconvenience of putting on a false front of good humor.

HEATHER: No one ever accused you having a good humor, Robert.

NADINE: Mr. Eastfield, you are the Vice President. You can't abandon Mrs. Washington's Christmas Eve party. It's a tradition for all of us to spend the evening together before we go home to our families.

EASTFIELD: My good Nadine, innocent, naive child that you are, have you not noticed that ever since we moved into this abominable building, this company has taken a nosedive. And so has the good humor, as Heather put it. Lord knows, I have tried to improve the morale around here.

NED: *(Ned Portland comes in carrying a tray of snacks. He is wearing a flowery shirt, shorts, sandals and sunglasses.)* Try leaving. That may improve the karma, RE. Excuse me. I have the most awesome and totally tubular snack dish.

NADINE: Oooo! Onion Rings. *(Takes one.)* Chewy. Tastes like fried rubber bands.

HEATHER: *(Eating one.)* I think they're divine. I haven't had these in years.

EASTFIELD: Just what are these delectables?

NED: Calimari, dude.

NADINE: Is that oriental or something? Let's see, French fries are from France, you know, so calimari must be from Tokyo.

HEATHER: As chief artist here, I can tell you that this snack comes from an animal of incredible symmetry and grace. A creature that moves through the azure waters with speed and power.

EASTFIELD: Let's not do a card about them, shall we?

(Note that Francine sneaks in and tries one. She likes it and goes on with her cleaning.)

HOMER: *(Overhears them and enters carrying a platter of snacks.)* You talking about a catfish? Hmm, this isn't a catfish. But, still be careful. Could have bone in it. Once, I got a bone caught right back here *(puts his finger back in his throat and coughs.)* Took my brother Goober three tries with that Highlick maneuver to make me cough it right out. Yep. Three tries.

EASTFIELD: Homer, you are a veritable fount of intelligence and grace. Thank you for sharing that historical tidbit. Our lives have been greatly enriched.

NADINE: Homer, are you saying these things aren't onion rings?

NED: You dudes are truly way out there. On the fringe. In the stratosphere. This is calimari. Fried squid.

HOMER: *(Gags and spits out his calimari.)* You mean like an octopus? With eight arms?

EASTFIELD: Yes, octopi have eight arms. I had no idea you were a marine biologist.

HOMER: Yuck! Who would eat something like that?

NED: Whales do. Squid are one of the favorite dishes of whales.

HOMER: Hee, hee. Eat up Eastfield. Ned has brought you a feast.

EASTFIELD: I refuse to acknowledge your low brow humor with so much as a grin. Have you ever had your IQ tested, Homer? Probably not. The instruments could never be calibrated that low.

HEATHER: Now, gentlemen. *(Pauses and glances at Homer.)* And, Homer. Stop this bickering. It's Christmas Eve. Love is in the air. We are one big happy family and let's not spoil this evening.

EASTFIELD: There has been no love in the air for the last ten months. Only rancor. We aren't the ones who will spoil the evening. It will be Mrs. Washington.

HOMER: *(Hitches up his belt and assumes an authoritative air.)* Where is she? I've got to talk to her about some important security precautions.

EASTFIELD: Oh, are terrorists about to take the building hostage? Let me guess, there is large, bearded man in red khakis in a sleigh pulled by eight herbivores secreting themselves even as we speak on the roof above our heads. He is armed with large, bulky sacks filled with boxes for bludgeoning. In any event, I feel safe knowing you are in charge.

HOMER: Thanks for the vote of confidence, Eastfield. Yep, it must be a relief to know that Homer P. Resnick, Security Chief of the Washington Tower is on duty. And, in charge.

NED: Homer, my man, just what is this important security matter? Since I am in charge of the computer that runs this entire building, don't you think I should know about some kind of threat? Is it a computer virus? I hope it's not like the Methuselah virus that got lose in the system over at Verity Mutual. Changed everyone's birthday. Kids in their teens started getting retirement checks. It was bogus and awesome!

HOMER: No, Ned, this threat is more physical. We're talking reality here and it's not virtual. You see, I had a report from the guards downstairs that a stranger was sighted loitering around the lobby. A stranger with a backpack. And, the backpack had a strange ticking noise.

EASTFIELD: Some wayward schoolchild probably meeting his parents. Or, perhaps the backpack contained a gram of uranium and a physics book. Perhaps this stranger was planning to build an atomic bomb.

HOMER: Hey, not bad thinking there, Eastfield. Wait a minute! How do you make an A bomb from a geranium?

EASTFIELD: I give up.

HOMER: Anyway, I need to report to the boss, immediately.

NADINE: Well, she's been in her office for the past hour with her husband. And, *(she leans over conspiratorially)* I heard them hollering at each other.

(Francine goes to office door, opens it and goes into Victoria's office with her cleaning supplies. She begins sweeping and dusting in the background. No one seems to notice her.)

SCENE 2

Takes place in Victoria's office. Victoria is facing the audience looking out a "window" while her husband, Frank paces behind her. Francine enters behind them and cleans. They do not notice her.

FRANK: Victoria, I don't know what's gotten into you. We can't just call off this party. You've had the annual Christmas Eve Executive party ever since you formed this company fifteen years ago.

VICTORIA: Frank, I don't want to talk about it. I just want all those people to go. Go tell them the party has been canceled.

FRANK: I can't do that. Those people are your friends. Your family.

VICTORIA: I don't have a family anymore, Frank.

FRANK: Victoria, it's been ten months . . .

VICTORIA: I don't want to talk about it.

FRANK: You have to, dear. This bitterness is eating you alive. Danielle is dead.

VICTORIA: You're so callous. Go ahead and rub my face in it. Go ahead and bring up old hurts.

FRANK: Victoria, it's time to face reality. Our daughter has been dead for ten months. And Stephen has been gone for three months. . .

VICTORIA: I know how long he's been gone. *(She returns to her desk and picks up a picture of a boy and an older sister.)* I don't know why we ever had children, Frank. Danielle went off against my wishes and died in some foreign country. Alone. Without you or me by her side. And then the agony of waiting for weeks to get her body back and then it was . . . mutilated beyond recognition. . . *(She becomes emotional.)*

FRANK: *(Tries to comfort her by putting his hands on her shoulders.)* You should have come to the funeral.

VICTORIA: *(Victoria angrily shrugs him away)* What good would it have done?

FRANK: It would have gotten rid of your anger. It would have helped you grieve. You could have said goodbye.

VICTORIA: I want to say goodbye to this office. Those people out there.

(Knock on door. Homer sticks his head in.)

HOMER: Mrs. Washington, I got to talk to you. It's urgent.

VICTORIA: What is it, Homer?

HOMER: *(Comes into room.)* Well, Mrs. Washington, there's a stalker in the building and I'm concerned about your safety. And, he could have a bomb.

VICTORIA: A stalker? Who would want to stalk me, Homer?

HOMER: Mrs. Washington, you are the founder and boss of one of the largest greeting card companies around. And, we just moved into this fancy new building. Very visible profile you've developed here. Kidnappers sitting up and taking notice. Dollar signs running through their evil little minds.

And, we haven't gotten all the bugs worked out of the security system, yet. With the right kind of approach, someone could infiltrate the building. Why, someone could kidnap you and take you out to some cabin in the woods and tie you up with duct tape. Imagine what would happen when they jerk that duct tape off your face. Why, it would take your lips right off cause duct tape sticks to everything. You know, duct tape can be used in so many ways. You can even fix a radiator hose with it. Or . . .

FRANK: We get your point, Homer. I'm sure Victoria will be fine.

HOMER: Boss lady, at least wear this vest. *(Pulls out a bullet proof vest.)* It's bullet proof.

VICTORIA: And how is a bullet proof vest supposed to protect me from a bomb?

HOMER: Well, uh, you got me there. Still, we can't take any chances. He may have an Uzi in case the bomb is a dud. These kidnappers can be real crafty. Can't take any chances. That's my motto: Never take any chances. Always be prepared.

VICTORIA: *(Hands him back the vest.)* Homer, I'm not wearing that vest. I'm not concerned about a supposed stalker. Since it seems that I have to go on with this party against my better wishes let's get started so I can get all of you out of my hair.

FRANK: That's no way to talk, Victoria. Why don't you just sit down here at your desk and relax for a few minutes. I'll get the rest of the party ready and we'll call you when we're ready. And, I'm going to run down to my car. I have a special surprise for you. I guarantee it will cheer you up. Let's go, Homer.

SCENE 3

(They leave office. Francine glances back at Victoria and shakes her head. She closes the door behind her as she leaves the office.)

HOMER: What's eating her grapes, Mr. Washington?

FRANK: A sour spirit, Homer. And, I hope this special present will cheer her up. *(He looks at rest of group.)* Please try to make the best of this situation. Victoria is not in the Christmas spirit, to say the least. She's not herself. When I get back, maybe she'll be in better spirits.

NADINE: Don't worry, Mr. Washington. We understand. I'll do my best to cheer her up. Maybe sing her some Christmas carols.

HEATHER: Good idea, Nadine! We'll all sing outside her office and maybe she'll come out.

EASTFIELD: *(To Nadine.)* And then again, she may jump out the window. I've heard you sing.

(Frank leaves. As he is leaving, the Guardians enter the room.)

MRS. PARTRIDGE: *(Very pompous.)* I tell you Penelope, it is the most atrocious think I have ever seen.

MRS. TURTLEDOVE: Trudy, dear, you're overreacting.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: I am not. When Mr. Frenchhen showed the dreadful thing to me, I almost swooned.

MR. FRENCHHEN: Sure did. It took four people to catch her. I was afraid if she hit the floor, she'd crack the tiles.

MR. COLLINBIRD: Good one, Frenchy. Good one, hee, hee.

HEATHER: Oh, no. It's the Guardians. The original founding mothers and fathers of the company.

EASTFIELD: Don't act so surprised. They come every year.

NED: I thought they were dead.

HEATHER: They'll never die, Ned. Especially Mrs. Partridge. She's too mean. *(Goes to meet them and takes each by the hand as she says their*

names.) Mrs. Partridge, Mrs. Turtledove, Mr. Frenchhen, and Mr. Collinbird.
How nice of you to come.

MRS. TURTLEDOVE: We've never missed one of Victoria's parties. It's our annual tradition. And my, what a beautiful penthouse office you have. This is the first time we've been in the new building.

EASTFIELD: The company has been so lucrative that constructing the building was the wisest choice I ever suggested. It has allowed us to expand production and increase throughput.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Well, I want to talk to you about some of her (*She points to Victoria's office*) throughput. If I had known what this company was up to, I would have boycotted this party.

HEATHER: Why on earth would you want to do that?

MRS. PARTRIDGE: It's these new line of Christmas cards. They're horrible! An abomination!

HEATHER: The new line of cards?

MRS. TURTLEDOVE: I personally see nothing wrong with them. But, Penelope finds them quite offensive.

MR. COLLINBIRD: Quite. Hee, hee.

MR. FRENCHHEN: Offensive. Hee, hee.

HEATHER: Why?

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Have you seen them?

HEATHER: I designed them. Remember, I'm Heather Griffin, head artist and writer?

MRS. PARTRIDGE: So you're responsible for this atrocity.

HEATHER: Which atrocity?

MRS. TURTLEDOVE: (*Pulls out a card.*) She's referring to this.

HEATHER: I see nothing wrong with this card. In fact, I'm very proud of this card. It's one of our best selling products.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: No wonder. It's pure pornography.

HEATHER: Pornography?

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Yes.

EASTFIELD: What seems to be the problem, Heather?

HEATHER: Mrs. Partridge is protesting the new card line. She thinks it is pornography.

NADINE: *(Takes the card out of Heather's hands.)* Oh, how sweet. Isn't his bottom so cute and rosy?

MRS. PARTRIDGE: *(Begins to fan and stumble.)* Oh, my. Oh, my. Did she just say what I thought she said?

MR. FRENCHHEN: Sure did.

MR. COLLINBIRD: Hee, hee. She just said that baby Jesus' bottom was cute.

MR. FRENCHHEN: And rosy.

HEATHER: Mrs. Partridge, this is a picture of baby Jesus.

MRS. TURTLEDOVE: We are aware of that, Ms. Griffin. Mrs. Partridge objects to Jesus being in the nude.

MR. FRENCHHEN: In the buff.

MR. COLLINBIRD: Nekid.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: I can't believe that this firm, of whom I am an original investor, would stoop to such low levels. We are a Christian greeting card company. Not some girly magazine publisher.

MR. FRENCHHEN: *(To Mr. Collinbird.)* Think she's seen a girly magazine?

MR. COLLINBIRD: She sure ain't been in one!

HEATHER: Mrs. Partridge, this picture shows Jesus lying in Mary's lap. Look, He's laughing and cooing just like any other baby. The fact I showed his bare bottom demonstrates his innocence, his perfection. I would hardly call it pornography.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Well, I'm taking this up with Victoria. Immediately.

MR. COLLINBIRD: *(Takes out his wallet.)* I've got a picture of me as a baby in the nude. Want to see it?

MRS. TURTLEDOVE: Mr. Collinbird, restrain yourself.

MR. FRENCHHEN: Oh, Penelope needs to stop being such a prude. Loosen up. It's Christmas. Let's have a little fun. Want to dance?

MRS. PARTRIDGE: I'll have you know that I am a Southern Baptist and I do not dance.

(Eastfield comes over and Francine places herself where she can overhear the conversation. No one notices her.)

EASTFIELD: Ladies and gentlemen, perhaps I can settle this without bothering Mrs. Washington.

NADINE: Yeah, she's not in too good of a mood.

EASTFIELD: Nadine, be a sweetheart and go get these good folks some punch, will you?

NADINE: Sure.

EASTFIELD: And, Heather, why don't you let me try to calm Mrs. Partridge down.

HEATHER: All right. *(she exits.)*

EASTFIELD: *(Takes the group away from the snack table and is obviously being quite devious.)*
Mrs. Partridge, I can assure you that your concerns are of great importance to me. As Vice President of operations, I will attend to your concerns immediately and I will do everything in my power to smooth over this situation.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: I always said hiring you was the smartest thing Victoria ever did.

EASTFIELD: Thank you, Mrs. Partridge. Under my guidance, this company has shown a significant upward climb in sales.

MR. FRENCHHEN: And downward slide in fun.

EASTFIELD: I beg your pardon.

MR. FRENCHHEN: Eastfield, you're a stuffed shirt.

MR. COLLINBIRD: A clipboard, hee, hee.

EASTFIELD: Good sirs, I am merely doing the job I need to do to keep this company afloat. Lord knows that Mrs. Washington hasn't been doing her part. (*Feigns regret, placing his hand over his mouth.*) Oops, I didn't mean to let that slip.

MRS. TURTLEDOVE: (*Suddenly concerned.*) What do you mean?

EASTFIELD: Oh, really, it's nothing. Just a slip of my tongue. I would never insinuate that Victoria can no longer handle her job.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: But you just did.

EASTFIELD: I did? Just a Freudian slip.

MR. COLLINBIRD: Bought one of those for my wife once. Hee, hee.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Get serious Mr. Collinbird. I've been trying to tell the three of you that this company is sliding into the gutter. But, you wouldn't listen. Now, what Mr. Eastfield has said confirms my worst fears.

EASTFIELD: Well, I suppose I can be honest with the four of you. After all, you were part of the founding fathers. The four of you are on the board of directors. You practically run the company. I've noticed a definite change in Mrs. Washington's personality since the death of her daughter. She's been in a terrible temper. She's made bad business decisions. I've tried my best to bolster up sagging morale and a downward slip in sales. I'm afraid that a company is only as good as it's leader.

MRS. TURTLEDOVE: What can be done?

EASTFIELD: Of course, I'm very concerned about Victoria's mental health and I suggest she consider a brief period of incarceration in a behavioral modification clinic. For her own good, of course.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Oh, my. I didn't know it was this serious.

MR. FRENCHHEN: Get a grip, Penelope. Victoria's not crazy.

EASTFIELD: I agree with your assessment. But, you are not a professional counselor. She's not insane. But, I do believe she is depressed.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Why, who is going to run the company?

EASTFIELD: That decision, of course, is up to the board of directors. And it will be a very difficult decision to make simply because, as vice president, the

task would fall on me. But, under the difficult circumstances I would be more than willing to make the sacrifice.

MR. COLLINBIRD: And take the salary increase, hee, hee.

MRS. TURTLEDOVE: Maybe he has something here, Mr. Collinbird. What do we need to do?

EASTFIELD: Well, in my capacity as vice president, I must cover all contingencies. So, I took the liberty of having some papers drawn up. As you know there are eight members of the board of directors. Mr. and Mrs. Washington. Danielle, Victoria's deceased daughter. Myself. And the four of you. All it takes is a majority vote to relieve Mrs. Washington of her dreadful duties and make me Chief Operating Officer of the company.

Now, we can't count on Mr. and Mrs. Washington's vote. And, poor Danielle is gone. So that leaves the five of us. Of course, I will reluctantly sign these papers. That leaves the necessity of three more votes to make a simple majority of four. If the four of you would sign it, we could help Victoria with her problems.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Where's your pen.

MRS. TURTLEDOVE: I guess I'll have to sign. Victoria has always been like a daughter to me. And, I want her to get help as soon as possible.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: *(Looks at the men.)* Come on, weasel brains, sign the form.

MR. FRENCHHEN: I'm not signing. I think moneybritches here just wants to be boss.

EASTFIELD: Mr. Frenchhen, that's not true. I'm only concerned about Victoria's mental health. Mr. Collinbird?

MR. COLLINBIRD: Sure, I'll sign. I'm going to enjoy watching Victoria chew you up and spit you out the window, hee, hee.

EASTFIELD: Mr. Collinbird, you are doing the right thing. Even if it is for the wrong reason.

(Victoria comes out of her office and warily appraises the office staff. They all fall silent. Eastfield hurriedly stuffs his papers back into his coat pocket.)

VICTORIA: Good evening. Welcome to our annual Christmas Eve party. I regret that I've been in a bad mood, lately. I won't lie to you and tell you I'm happy to be here. It's just that I have had a lot on my mind these

past few months. I hope all of you understand. Please, don't let me interfere with this evening's festivities.

NADINE: *(Trying to lighten the mood.)* Thank you, Mrs. Washington for having this party. As all of you know, I have been Mrs. Washington's secretary for ten years. And, I've never regretted a day of it. Except for that day you screamed real loud. . . *(She suddenly falls silent as an awkward silence descends.)*

HEATHER: *(Interrupting her.)* Never mind, Nadine. Mrs. Washington, what she's trying to say is that we want you to have a good evening, too. We want this party to celebrate the family feeling we have here at Tranquility Greeting Cards.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Oh, spare me the balderdash, porno lady! *(She interrupts.)* Victoria dear, I hear you've been in a snit in the past few months. I hear you've been abusing **our** employees?

VICTORIA: A snit? What are you talking about? And they are not **OUR** employees. They are **MY** employees.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Must I remind you that we put up the money when you came to us asking for investors in your greeting card company? You wouldn't be here if it wasn't for us. That's why we have appointed ourselves as guardians of Tranquility Greeting Card Company. Someone has to look over your shoulder.

VICTORIA: I agree I couldn't have started without your help. But, I am the driving force behind this company. I am the source of ideas, inspiration, creativity. I am the one who saw a need for Godly greeting cards. I am the one who build this company from the ground up with my hard work.

NADINE: Excuse me, Mrs. Washington. I thought I was more than just an employee to you. I thought I was your friend.

EASTFIELD: Now, Nadine, let's not be inflammatory. It is patently obvious that Mrs. Washington has had a rough year. Perhaps she needs a respite from her duties as president of the company.

VICTORIA: What is wrong with you people? You act as if I have become Ebenezer Scrooge. Well, when you've lost your only daughter then you can cast stones at me. Until then, I suggest you keep your feelings to yourself. And, Nadine, you are just my **employee**. Do you understand?

NADINE: *(Tears forming in her eyes.)* Yes, Ma'am.

VICTORIA: Now, everyone here had better have fun! I spent a lot of money and time on this party and I expect you to laugh a little bit.

(An awkward silence descends interrupted by Homer suddenly bursts into room.)

HOMER: Everybody relax. I'm on the case. I've got everything under control. Mrs. Washington, it's time for the vest.

VICTORIA: What now, Homer?

HOMER: The main security just left for the day and I reviewed the video logs of the stairwells. That stalker is someone in the building. I don't know how he got past the security downstairs, but he's on his way up. And, I am the only thing standing between you and certain death.

EASTFIELD: I'm sure she feels safe, Homer. Why don't you wear the vest and throw yourself in front of her when Rambo comes bursting through the door.

HOMER: *(Suddenly cowardly.)* Well, uh, the vest is too small for me. I really can't wear it . . .

NED: Hey, you righteous dudes are too worried. Nosh on this. The new security system will protect us from any intruder.

HOMER: Oh, yeah. Well, I can outprotect a computer any day. Yep, the vigilance of the lonely lawman can never be matched by a box of circuits.

NED: Homer, my man, you are deluded. Wake up and smell the transistors, man. This is the twentieth century. Like, this isn't the OK corral. Look, there are diodes and magnetic switches installed in every window and door on the penthouse floor. Now these relays are synced into a redundant fail-safe loop. You key the sequence and the whole gestalt is like, wired into the security loop in the mainframe. And, when the perp comes creeping in, it interrupts the carrywave. The whole sequence like, flares through the wires, creating this powersurge that slams down every relay in a partydown lockdown. Nothing gets in. Nothing gets out. Foolproof.

NADINE: What did he say?

EASTFIELD: If someone tries to get in or out of the building once his security system is armed, all the doors and windows are locked.

HOMER: I knew that. I was a consultant on the security system. I practically programmed it myself.

NED: In that case, I had better check out the program.

HOMER: Oh, ye of little faith. Ned, I'll have you know that I took a college graduate course in BASIC programming back in 1979. I have a working knowledge of computers. In fact, I am intimately acquainted with every nuance... *(He looks at Eastfield.)* How do you like that word, dictionary mouth? I am intimately acquainted with every nuance of this security system. I know that the entire sequence can be keyed by pressing one button.

NED: Oh, yeah. Which button?

HOMER: This one. *(He presses a button on the compute console. Alarms sound, red lights flash and the lights go out.)*

NED: You're right. That's the one, man.

ACT TWO

The stage is dim with light supplied by candles and dim lighting. Outside the window, the buildings and stars gleam with bright lit.

NADINE: What happened to the lights?

EASTFIELD: It would appear the power is out.

NADINE: Ooops. I stumbled over a loose cord. It's the Christmas tree lights. We never plugged them in. Why don't I just plug in the Christmas tree lights.

(She plugs them in as Eastfield protests.)

EASTFIELD: Nadine, the power is out. Plugging them in will not do any . . .

(The Christmas tree lights up.)

NADINE: Oh, isn't it beautiful? I just love those little bubble lights.

NED: Awesome work, babe. You found an emergency outlet.

EASTFIELD: Then let's all remain calm and find a lamp to plug in.

NED: No way, dude. Let me plug in my computer terminal.

EASTFIELD: Ned, we are not going to sit here in the dark and watch you play Pacman.

NED: Pacman is, like, an entry level game, Mr. Eastfield. I prefer RPG. You know, role playing games. With 3-D graphics and stereo sound. At home, like, I have this awesome setup with a new G3 chip in a Mac 10000 AV with an interface for a virtual reality helmet. Like, I can surf the clouds of Jupiter . . .

EASTFIELD: Enough, Ned. You've made your point.

NED: Anyway, if I can get the terminal running, I can probably hack into Homer's security program and get the lights back on.

(Homer returns through the main door. He has donned several guns and is wearing camouflage with his face painted for night combat.)

HOMER: Man, those doors are locked up tighter than a tick! This new security system is one humdinger!

EASTFIELD: So I take it we are trapped here in this office?

HEATHER: The phones are dead, too. Why is that?

NED: *(Sits in front of computer and screen lights up his face.)* This security system must have been programmed by a real dweeb. It shut down the phones, the electricity and locked all the doors.

HOMER: Thank you, Ned. The phones were my idea. Brilliant, isn't it? Why just imagine a burglar, trapped in the penthouse suite, totally helpless. At the mercy of the law enforcement agency breathing down his neck. He picks up a phone and discovers he can't even call for help.

EASTFIELD: Who would he call?

HOMER: Why, the police, . . . Uh, oh. Well, we need to take the phone shutdown out of the system. Make a note of that, Ned.

NED: Listen man, I tried to tell you not to let some hacker program this system. You needed a channel surfer, you know, someone who knows how to cruise the information highway.

VICTORIA: Will someone tell me what is going on? Are we trapped here?

NED: Listen, boss lady, Barney Fife here pressed the activation key and set off the new security system. We're stuck here behind these closed doors until the system resets itself.

VICTORIA: When will that be?

HOMER: Next working day. That would be . . .

VICTORIA: Day after tomorrow. The day after Christmas.

NADINE: Oh, no! That means my little boys will have to spend Christmas without me! What about the presents? What about Santa Claus?

HEATHER: My fiance is waiting for me right now beside a roaring fireplace. What will he think?

EASTFIELD: Oh, dear. This is not the way in which I intended to spend my Christmas holidays. Stuck in a dark office with Homer and Ned.

HOMER: Ladies and gentlemen, just calm down. Homer P. is on the job and I guarantee your safety. Remember, there is still a stalker in the building.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Oh, my. This means I won't be able to take my ten o'clock medicine. My feet will swell up twice their size.

MR. COLLINBIRD: That'll be a sight, hee, hee.

MRS. TURTLEDOVE: Mr. Collinbird, it is not funny. I don't relish the idea of being stuck in this penthouse during Christmas.

(The group disintegrates into chaotic discussion. Francine Glower slowly walks over to Victoria who is deep in thought.)

FRANCINE: Mrs. Washington? Mrs. Washington?

VICTORIA: Oh, Francine. What is it?

FRANCINE: You had better get this group under control.

VICTORIA: Get them under control? Why me?

FRANCINE: You are the boss, aren't you?

VICTORIA: Technically, yes. But, I haven't been doing well dealing with crises.

FRANCINE: You ain't no different now than you were a year ago. You still the boss. They are going to be at each other's throats before long unless you stop them.

VICTORIA: I suppose you're right. Everybody, listen up. Listen up.

(The group falls silent.)

VICTORIA: Now, we have to remain calm.

EASTFIELD: Remain calm? How can you expect us to remain calm when we're surrounded by idiots?

VICTORIA: Robert, shut up! Whether you like it or not, we're stuck in this thing together. Now, everybody sit down. Have some snacks. Give Ned a chance to reprogram the security system. Remember, Frank went downstairs and was supposed to return. He's bound to be in the building somewhere. He can get us help.

HOMER: Unless he ran into the stalker.

VICTORIA: Homer, shut up about this stalker business. We don't know if there is anyone left in the building, much less a stalker.

NED: Cowabunga, I've got something! Yeehaw! Take that you computer nerd! I've gotten into a part of the security system. It seems to be a security camera subsystem. Yeah, I've got visual of all the security cameras in the building. *(Falls silent as he studies the images.)* Oh, oh. Not good! Not good at all.

VICTORIA: What is it?

NED: I've found your husband. He's in one of the elevators.

VICTORIA: What?

NED: Looks like he's trapped but at least he has emergency lights.

VICTORIA: Can I talk to him?

NED: No phones, remember.

EASTFIELD: Well, there goes our only salvation.

NED: Wait, the cameras are cycling randomly. Maybe we can find someone else to help us. There's the main security booth. Empty. No surprise. The building cleared out an hour ago. Here go all the stairwells. Wait! What's that?

HOMER: Let me see! Clear the way. *(Suddenly quite proud of himself.)* Well, boss lady. Would you looky here. I think that there shadowy figure lurking in the stairwell isn't exactly Santa Claus.

VICTORIA: Wait. What happened to the picture?

NED: It cycled on to another camera. Sorry, Mrs. Washington. I can't control the program.

VICTORIA: It could have been anybody.

HOMER: Looks like I had better get ready.

EASTFIELD: Good idea, Homer. See if you can find your bullet.

VICTORIA: Enough of that, Robert. I don't want anybody to panic. Now, everyone just sit down. Let's eat and try to remain calm.

EASTFIELD: *(Turns to the Guardians.)* See what I mean? She panics under difficult circumstances. If she were smart, she would stop telling me to shut up and put me in charge.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: I believe you, Robert, dear. I'm quite frightened and I feel much safer knowing you are here.

(The guardians come and sit around the table.)

HOMER: Well, what are we going to do now?

NADINE: Let's play charades.

EASTFIELD: The room is dark, Nadine. How are we going to see each other?

NADINE: OK. Let's play pictionary.

HEATHER: We can't see to draw, Nadine.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Let's play the quiet game, shall we.

NADINE: Mrs. Partridge, I am not your child. I'm trying to think up something fun to do to pass the time. It hasn't been fun around here in a long time. Oops, I'm sorry, Mrs. Washington. I didn't mean to say it hasn't been fun for the past ten months. I mean it hasn't been as much fun as it used to be before you . . .

HEATHER: I think you should leave well enough alone, Nadine.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: No, let the girl talk, Mrs. Griffin. What have things been like around here the last year?

NADINE: *(looks questionably at Victoria . Tries to defend her.)*
Not bad. Mrs. Washington has just had a lot on her mind.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: And most of it wasn't the business of this company, was it?

VICTORIA: Mrs. Partridge, I've heard enough. Until you've lost a daughter, don't try to second guess how I run this company. If you are determined to ramble on then talk about something constructive.

NADINE: Why don't you tell us about your most memorable Christmas.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Balderdash! That's the silliest suggestion I've ever heard.

NADINE: Then, let me. Please let me.

VICTORIA: Ok, Nadine, tell us.

NADINE: My most favorite Christmas. Oh, this is easy. Back when I was twelve, they closed the schools because of the flu epidemic. We were out for Christmas for three whole weeks. And then this ice storm came through Blanchard and knocked out all the electric wires. We didn't have electricity for ten days.

I was so sad, at first. I thought how can I enjoy my new Christmas gifts? But, then Momma started lighting up the candles and the lanterns. And the whole house kind of changed. It took on this soft, radiant glow. We went out to the woods and cut down this pine tree and covered it with bits of foil and cellophane so they would twinkle in the firelight.

It was just so beautiful! Momma had to clean out the freezer cause the meat was melting so we had a feast so big we invited the neighbors from down the road for Christmas dinner. I'll never forget that Christmas. My favorite present was a book. I remember snuggling up next to the fireplace so I could read it by the firelight. I don't think I was ever as close to my Momma and Daddy as I was that Christmas. Seems like all the world just got shut out.

I remember that fine, clear Christmas night when all the stars blazed from the sky like fireflies and the air was sweet and cold. And, there wasn't any sounds from the house like TV or radio. I could hear people singing Christmas Carols from way over Buckley subdivision. That's what Christmas should be like.

VICTORIA: Looks like we may be having that kind of Christmas here. It's quiet and dark. What about you, Homer?

HOMER: My most favorite Christmas was when I was seven. Yep, my daddy got me this fine Cowboy's suit. It was red and black with silver studs on the chaps. And, I had a red Cowboy hat to match. Got me a brand new holster with two shiny, silver guns. Pearl handles, too.

Yep, I'll never forget it. Got up the next morning and Santa had brought me this bright green pedal car. I didn't tell daddy what I was doing, but I took off down the sidewalk to downtown. Found a car parked by an expired parking meter. Wrote that sucker up and put the ticket on the windshield. Out of the store walks this man taller than Paul Bunyan. He looked at the ticket and then looked at me.

"Son" he said. "That's real good work. You'll be a lawman someday." You see, I had done gone and wrote a ticket for the sheriff. Yep, never forget it.

That was my first step down the long, winding pathway to becoming an upholder of law and order.

NED: Listen, dudes, my favorite was one Christmas when I was in college, you know. Like, I took all my dad and mom's frequent flyer miles and worked a computer deal so that I wrangled a round trip ticket to Hawaii. I got to Oahu and head to the North Shore on this rented moped.

Ah, the babes and dudes up there. All over the beach. And the waves, they were awesome! There was this dude, tall and skinny with a thousand tattoos. Said he had ridden every wave from Big Sur to Australia. Told me he would lend me his board, man. Totally tubular! Like, I caught this wave bigger than Diamonhead. There I was, suspended between heaven and earth on the most awesome wave God ever made.

EASTFIELD: What happened?

NED: I busted it. The board caught a rooster tail and it threw me thirty feet through the air. I landed on this hunk of lava rock. Spent ten days in the hospital while my bones healed enough for me to fly home. But, that wave! What a trip!

EASTFIELD: Well I can certainly relate to a Christmas where everything goes wrong. I recall the year the labels came off my presents and we had to open them in random order.

HEATHER: You had to open your presents in random order? That's must have been a tragedy.

EASTFIELD: You must understand, Heather. Our family has always celebrated Christmas in the same way. Every Christmas eve, I journey to my parent's house. Late at night, I might add. Then, we arise early Christmas morning. All of the presents are arranged according to age and person. Then, each person opens his presents in alphabetic order. It is the only way to avoid turmoil and confusion.

HOMER: I guess you open the presents without tearing the paper.

EASTFIELD: Doesn't everyone? That's part of the ritual. And then, after we have opened all of our presents, we line up and give each family member a holiday hug and a kiss. Which isn't too demanding until I get to Aunt Beulah. You see, she is the family renegade. She has whiskers and refuses to undergo electrolysis. Imagine my distaste at having to kiss a bearded woman.

MR. COLLINBIRD: Don't knock it, 'til you've tried it, hee, hee.

EASTFIELD: And then, we sit down at the dining room table and my father reads the Christmas story. And so, last Christmas, Aunt Beulah decides to play with our minds, so to speak. She came in early Christmas morning and switched the names on all the presents. Imagine my dismay at opening a present from my sister Elizabeth and finding a set of women's lingerie inside.

NED: Did you try them on?

EASTFIELD: I did not! I immediately discerned the truth and we reprimanded Aunt Beulah. It took us all morning to straighten out the gifts. We missed our brunch and father had to read the Christmas story after lunch. It was a disaster!

MR. COLLINBIRD: You don't know what disaster means, sonny. 1941. I was 13 when the Japanese invaded Pearl Harbor. My momma worked hard to get a decent meal on the table that day after everyone was devastated by the news. We stayed glued to the radio all day for details. You see, my daddy was in the Navy. And, we knew he was out there somewhere on a ship.

Momma waited everyday by the mailbox for news. The days passed and I finally convinced momma to let me go cut down a tree. You see, that was always daddy's job.

So, I went out into the woods way back to where our pond lay frozen and covered with frost. Back there in a little clearing was the tree my daddy planted for me on the day I was born. He never told anyone about it except me.

He told me that one day, I could cut it down for a Christmas tree when I became a man. I didn't know it, but 1941 was the year.

I took my axe and I found the tree just where I had seen it last. It had been a couple of years and I didn't remember it being so tall. It must have been 8 feet high. Just right for our high ceilinged living room.

I whacked into the trunk. The smell of pine oil wafted over me. And I continued to hit it, harder each time as if I was trying to send a message all the way around the world to my daddy. Daddy always warned me about felling a tree. Bout how it could kick back on you. I forgot all that and sure enough, the tree suddenly popped over and the butt of the trunk hit me right between the eyes.

(Staging note: During the production, have a man dressed as the father in World War II uniform and blood on his chest come out onto stage. Have Mr. Collinbird "regress" to his childhood and play out the scene as if the father was there. Have the father deliver his lines. Do not allow the actors and

actresses to look at the father. Have them keep their attention on Mr. Collinbird.)

I don't know how long I lay there. I woke up all cold and stiff. And, there was sticky blood between my eyes. And then, I promise you, the most amazing thing happened. I looked over at the tree lying on the ground and there stood my daddy. He was wearing his fatigues and there was this red stain over his heart.

Daddy, I said. When did you get home?

He just smiled. "I ain't home yet, boy. I had to come tell you goodbye."

"What you talkin' bout?" I said.

He pointed to the tree. "I guess this means you're a man, now. That's good cause you gotta take care of your mother and your brothers. I won't be coming back. But, I know you are a good and strong man, now. I know that you can take good care of them cause this war's gonna be tough. Gotta go now. Jesus is waitin' for me. Goodbye, son. I love you."

Daddy never came home. They never found his body there in the rubble of Pearl Harbor. I told momma about what I saw. She'd said it was the tree hittin' me upside the head. But, I knew it was my daddy come to tell me goodbye.

That was the worst Christmas we ever had. The one's after got better as time healed the hurt. But, it was the best and brightest Christmas tree we ever had.

(Everyone is silent until Heather speaks.)

HEATHER: Last year I met a little girl. Amelia. Pretty thing with long, curly blonde hair. Eight years old. I met her under the bridge down by the river. I went down there with my sketch pad and my camera to find some inspiration for a card illustration. Did you know there is an entire village of cardboard and tin houses down there? I counted thirty people living in the shadow of that bridge.

(Production note: Have a young girl in tattered clothing come out and sit on the edge of the stage with a drawing. Have Heather talk to this child.)

Amelia lived by herself with her grandmother. She was dirty, and smelly and she wore a torn jacket with the stuffing hanging out. I tried to ignore her at first. You know what I mean. Maybe if we don't see the nastiness around us it won't exist. But Amelia begged for acknowledgement of her existence. She kept asking me what I was drawing on my pad. I told her the bridge. She laughed and asked why anyone would want to draw that nasty old thing.

I asked what she would like for me to draw. She said angels. Angels, I asked. Why do you want angels? She pointed up toward the bridge.

“They come and talk to me at night. They tell me I won’t have to suffer too much longer and that soon, I can come see Jesus.”

I sat there in silence and wonderment and I began to draw angels. I don’t know where the images came from. I don’t know how they got from my brain to the paper, but they were the most beautiful things I’ve ever drawn. When I finished Amelia smiled.

“You’ve seen them, too.” She said and nodded her head. I didn’t have the courage to tell her I’d never been blessed enough to see angels. I gave her the drawing and she left me sitting there alone under the bridge.

I went back in the spring, around Easter time. Amelia and her grandmother were gone. I asked one of the people where they were. He pointed to a collapsed tin shack. The inside was empty. The angel picture hung on one wall. I learned later that Amelia and her grandmother had died during one of the coldest nights of winter.

I took that angel picture home with me. I look at it every day. It reminds me that in my stubborn selfishness and blindness to those in need around me, God still sends his angels to watch over us.

VICTORIA: Where were the angels when Danielle died?

(Everyone is quiet.)

ACT THREE

(Victoria gets up and takes a candle, going to her office.)

HEATHER: What did I say?

FRANCINE: Maybe it's time you listened to me.

(Everyone reacts in amazement. They look at Francine as if she were from another planet.)

FRANCINE: You all have wonderful Christmas stories. I was happy to get a stocking full of oranges or nuts. I didn't have much. Look at this room. Look at that city out there. We got too much today. Christmas is too overloaded. It needs to be simple. The reason Victoria left was because you were talking about a little girl. She don't have her little girl this Christmas. She'll never have her again. And, her son ran away from home over all the stress they been under.

EASTFIELD:How do you know all of this?

FRANCINE: Mr. Eastfield, I hear everything that goes on around here. To you people I don't exist. But, I hear everything. Have any of you tried to reach out to her in the last ten months? Have any of you been able to take your eyes off your own selfish problems long enough to think about hers? I didn't think so. Maybe the good Lord is trying to make you stop for a spell and examine where you are in life. We don't stop and look at the stars on Christmas enough. Now, Heather, you get up and go in there and talk to Mrs. Washington. She done spent her whole life building up this company for the likes of you. It's time you gave something back to her.

(Heather goes into office. Victoria is standing in front of her open office window. The cool wind is blowing in her face.)

HEATHER: Mrs. Washington? *(A pause, then.)* Victoria?

VICTORIA: The city is so beautiful at night, don't you think? How high up are we, Heather?

HEATHER: Twenty five floors.

VICTORIA: What must it be like to fly? Just to launch myself out into the cold winds. To soar on the night air like some diaphanous butterfly. To fly through the air like an angel.

HEATHER: Victoria. You can't fly.

VICTORIA: I know that. Don't worry, I'm too much of a coward to jump.

HEATHER: Victoria, you've got so much to live for . . .

VICTORIA: I do? Let's count the reason, shall we? My daughter is dead. My son has run away from home because I don't pay any attention to him anymore. My husband is trapped somewhere in this office building in an elevator. I've got an incompetent security chief, a surf ninja computer expert, the original dingbat for a secretary. And, let's not forget the Guardians. Always breathing down my neck about production, profits, demographics. And, of course, Captain Bly himself, Mr. Eastfield.

HEATHER: What do you think about me?

VICTORIA: You're the only sane person in the bunch.

HEATHER: Victoria, I know this is going to sound corny. But, I want you to think about Bethlehem.

VICTORIA: Bethlehem?

HEATHER: Think about who was there at the manger. Smelly, dirty shepherds. Animals with all of their fleas and ticks and smelly fur. Three Magi who had left their countries following a star, of all things. People must have thought them insane! And don't forget a simple carpenter who loved his wife so much, he believed her story about her pregnancy and married her. Pretty strange bunch, weren't they? Just think how Mary must have felt. Pregnant from the Holy Spirit, facing a life of possible exile or even death. She must have looked at all the strange people around her and wondered why God chose to let things happen the way He did.

VICTORIA: At least when her son died, He died for a reason. His death was not pointless, Heather.

HEATHER: Even Jesus had to search for the answers to his questions.

EASTFIELD: *(Sticks his head in the door.)* Victoria, could you please come out here.

(Victoria and Heather go out into office.)

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Mrs. Washington, after due consideration of your performance in the last year, the founding members of this company have chosen to vote in Mr. Eastfield as new Chief Operating Officer and we are asking for your resignation.

VICTORIA:What?

NADINE: How could you? Nobody could replace Mrs. Washington.

MRS. TURTLEDOVE:I was a reluctant part of this, Victoria. I'm only doing it for your own good. You need professional help.

MR. FRENCHHEN: Well, I'm not a part of this. I still believe in you.

MR. COLLINBIRD: Me, too. But I wanted to see the fireworks, hee, hee.

VICTORIA: Wait a minute. There are eight members of the board of directors.

EASTFIELD: And since the untimely death of your daughter, there are now only seven voting members. I have four votes for me. That leaves only three possible for you. I'm sorry, Victoria, but it really is for the best.

VICTORIA: You can't take my company away from me.

EASTFIELD: Your company? Mrs. Washington, I would like to remind you that in the past ten months you have been hibernating in your office indulged in the depths of despair while this company languished in the doldrums. If it had not been for my heroic efforts to bolster up sales, this company would have gone belly up long ago.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Well, it seems the truth finally comes out. While you were having a pity party, everything went to shambles. And it all started with her (*pointing to Heather*) and her child pornography.

VICTORIA: This is absurd. You cannot have my company, Eastfield. I founded this company because I saw a need for inspirational greeting cards. Cards put together by Christians.

EASTFIELD: I am a Christian, Victoria. But, I am also a business man. You can't mix the two very well and expect unlimited success. But, your lack of performance has nothing to do with your religion.

VICTORIA: If I were judgmental, I would question your first statement. But, I won't. I let God take care of that judgment when you see Him at the Great Throne of Judgment. As for you vote, I will not let it defeat me. As you know, in the case of a tie, I can make the final determination. And, I have my daughter's proxy vote in all company matters.

EASTFIELD: Oh. And just where is this proxy? Do you have a notarized piece of paper giving you power of attorney?

VICTORIA: Yes.

EASTFIELD: Where is it?

VICTORIA: (*Looking anguished.*) The last time I saw it was . . . Oh, dear. Nadine help me.

NADINE: Yes Ma'am. I remember typing it up for you and then Danielle signed it right before she went on that trip to Europe. She put it in her Bible. That's where it is. In her Bible.

VICTORIA: Her Bible? I never found her Bible. She took it with her on the trip. The authorities never sent me her personal belongings because they were unable to identify her for weeks. Why did I let her go to Europe alone?

EASTFIELD: See, this is what I am talking about, Mrs. Washington. You need counseling, professional help. You can't run this company while wallowing in grief.

VICTORIA: I can run this company. And I'll fight you all the way to the Supreme Court, if I have to. I can see I've checked out on reality for too long. Yes, I miss my daughter. Yes, my family is in a shambles. But I will not give up, Robert Eastfield. I will not give up!

(*Just then the door to the office explodes open and a flashlight flares over them.*)

HOMER: Get down everybody, it's the stalker. (*Homer tackles the person and they roll around on the floor.*) OK, get up and put your hands on the wall.

FRANK: Homer, it's me. Frank Washington. Put that toy gun away before someone gets hurt.

VICTORIA: Frank, is that you? (*She rushes over and hugs him.*)

FRANK: Well, what got into you while I was gone?

FRANCINE: She got her spit and vinegar back, Mr. Washington. Old whale lips here (*Pointing to Eastfield*) and his shark herd got her dander up.

VICTORIA: Frank, how did you get here? Are the doors open?

FRANK: No. I climbed up the elevator shaft.

VICTORIA: What?

FRANK: But, I had help. Stephen?

STEPHEN: *(Enters room.)* Mother. It's me, Stephen.

VICTORIA: Oh, Stephen. Where did you come from?

FRANK: That was my surprise. I met Stephen down in the parking lot and we were going to surprise you. But, we got stuck in the elevator when the power went out. He climbed up the shaft a ways and came back and got me.

VICTORIA: That's why we didn't see you on the cameras. Oh, Stephen, it is so good to see you.

STEPHEN: Mom, I've done a lot of thinking. I ran away because all you thought about was Danielle. But, I shouldn't have done that. I should have stayed to help you deal with her death. I want to come back home.

VICTORIA: Oh, Stephen, it's me that's to blame. I've been paralyzed by my grief. I forgot I still have a family. Not only my immediate family but the family of my employees . . . I mean, my friends. Nadine, I'm sorry about what I said earlier. You are more than just my employee.

EASTFIELD: Very touching. But, it doesn't change the facts, now does it?

FRANK: What's he talking about?

VICTORIA: Eastfield has gotten enough votes to oust me from the company.

FRANK: Oh, he has. Well, we'll see about that. This company has been in the family for years. No one is going to take it away.

(A noise sounds out in the hall and a shadowy figure appears in the doorway backlit by the red emergency lights.)

HOMER: This time it really is the stalker, everybody down.

(He rushes over to tackle the figure. A struggle ensues and suddenly the lights come back on.)

NED: Cowabunga dudes! I did it. I broke the code!

(We see Homer lying on the floor with his hands around his own ankle.)

HOMER: I've got him. I've got him.

(A short haired woman with a backpack in her hands is standing in the doorway.)

VICKI: Hello, is Mrs. Washington here?

HOMER: *(Recovering.)* Wait a minute. Just step back there and put that backpack down real careful like.

VICTORIA: Homer, put your gun away.

HOMER: Not until she empties the backpack. On the table.

VICKI: *(Dumps backpack on table. An alarm clock spills out along with a red Bible.)* All I have in here is a Bible and an alarm clock. I have another bundle outside . . .

VICTORIA: *(Recognizes Bible.)* Wait! This is Danielle's Bible. How did you get this?

NADINE: Danielle's Bible. Then your proxy is in there, Mrs. Washington.

VICTORIA: You're right. Here it is. *(She takes out a folded piece of paper.)* OK, Eastfield. I have the proxy. You've welcome to look at it. But, I think you'll find it all in order. In fact, I would like to take a vote right now. All those in favor of demanding Mr. Eastfield's resignation raise their hands.

(Everyone but Mrs. Partridge raises their hands.)

VICTORIA: The majority wins. Goodnight, Robert. I think you'll find the doors are open now and don't let one of them hit you in the rear on your way out.

MRS. PARTRIDGE: Don't you worry, Robert, dear. I have lots of money. We'll make our own company.

EASTFIELD: *(Jerks his arm out of her grasp.)* I don't need your help, you crone. And you'll regret the day you fired me, Washington. You haven't heard the last of Robert Eastfield. *(He storms out of room and Mrs. Partridge follows him.)*

VICTORIA: Now, please tell me where you got this Bible.

VICKI: Well, my name is Vicki. And, I've been trying to get in touch with you for months. I never knew your daughter personally. Well, it's so complicated.

I was an American traveling in Europe when I was the victim of a terrible accident. My heart was pierced by a metal rod in a subway wreck. There was no hope for me. But, fortunately for me, another American was in the same hospital on a respirator who had willed her organs for transplant.

VICTORIA: What? You mean . . .

VICKI: Yes, ma'am. Danielle's heart beats within me. She died so that I could live. I begged the authorities to let me have her personal belongings. All that was left was this Bible. So, I took it and read all the notes in the back. I found out who Danielle was and I learned a lot about her mother and how wonderful she is.

I also met someone else in this Bible. I met Jesus. Not only did your daughter save my physical life, but she saved my spiritual life. And, so I had to come and find you. Especially after my husband left me.

VICTORIA: Your husband left you?

VICKI: Yes. He couldn't deal with my conversion. He kept calling me a holy roller. He also couldn't come to grips with the fact I had someone else's heart within me. So he left.

VICTORIA: Oh, Vicki, you just don't know what this means to me. To know that Danielle didn't die in vain. To know that her life and death meant something. Thank you for finding me.

VICKI: There is something else I need to tell you. I have a gift for you. A gift like the night gift that was given to the world almost two thousand years ago tonight.

(She goes out into the hall and brings in a bundle. She unwraps it to show a baby girl.)

VICKI: I was pregnant when I was in the accident and didn't know it. I never told my husband. I don't think it would have made a difference. Now, it's just me and my daughter. And, I need someone to help me. Advise me. Danielle spoke so lovingly of you I want you to be the grandmother to my child.

VICTORIA: *(Takes baby.)* I would be honored to. What is her name?

VICKI: Danielle.

Behind them, the stars begin to glow brighter and one star in particular flares to sudden brightness shining down on the baby in Victoria's arms. This can be done by having a suspended blue spot light shine directly down onto Victoria while the remainder of the lights go down.

VICTORIA: Thank you, God, for the night gift like the gift of peace and love you gave to this world 2000 years ago. Now my life will no longer be filled with darkness but will be filled with the light of hope.