

THE LAST NOEL

A Christmas Comedy in Two Acts

By

D. Richard Tucker

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## THE LAST NOEL

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In this spoof on the Film Noir genre, some one is killing all the Christmas carolers in Seattle and our hero, Sam Chase find himself framed for murder when his ex-wife is bludgeoned to death with a giant candy cane. Attempting to clear his name, Sam is launched into the mystery of the Christmas Hymn of Malta, and the blood thirsty Christmas carolers anxious to find it.

SETTING: Seattle, multiple locations. The present.

## THE LAST NOEL

## Dramatis Personae

SAM, Male, (30 – 40), software engineer, a modern day Humphrey Bogart  
 PART TIME, Female, (18-24), a barista, Sam's sidekick  
 Detective FELDMAN, Female, (30-45), no nonsense cop  
 Uniform COP, Male  
 JASON, Male, neighbor, flamboyantly gay  
 TRACY, Female, (22-30), musician, beautiful, soon to be Sam's new love interest  
 MYRNA, GOLDIE, FRANKIE King, Sisters, Female, (30-45), music antiquities  
 specialists, all played by same actor.  
 JIMMY, Male, informant  
 NATHAN Nicholas, Male, (25-30) musician  
 CONNIE Hanson, Female (20-25) Bookish composer  
 JESSICA Holly, Female, (25-35), owner of the Yule Time Singers, femme fatale  
 NORMAN Ivy, Male, owner of the Olde Towne Carolers  
 The FAT MAN, Male, the kingpin of Christmas Crime  
 Security GUARD, Male  
 MUGGER ONE, MUGGER TWO, MUGGER THREE,  
 SHOPPER  
 MEDIC ONE, MEDIC TWO, MEDIC THREE, MEDIC FOUR

CAROLERS (at least four), dressed in traditional Victorian costumes.

The play can be performed by 12 actors (and 4 singers), using this plan for double-casting:

Sam  
 Part Time  
 Tracy  
 Detective Feldman  
 Fat Man  
 Jimmy, Cop, Guard  
 Jessica  
 Norman  
 Myrna, Goldie, Frankie, Medic 4  
 Jason, Mugger 1, Medic 1  
 Nathan, Mugger 2, Medic 2  
 Connie, Shopper, Mugger 3, Medic 3

Four Carolers (may be distributed among cast members, if casting permits)

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ACT I  
Scene One

The play takes place in a mostly empty stage with different locations represented by one or two pieces of furniture. Lights up on CAROLERS, dressed in 19<sup>th</sup> Century attire, straight out of a Charles Dickens story.

CAROLERS

(singing)

HERE WE COME A-CAROLING  
AMONG THE LEAVES SO GREEN;  
HERE WE COME A-WAND'RING  
SO FAIR TO BE SEEN.  
LOVE AND JOY COME TO YOU.  
AND TO YOU GLAD CHRISTMAS TOO.  
AND GOD BLESS YOU AND SEND YOU  
A HAPPY NEW YEAR.  
AND GOD SEND YOU  
A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

SOUND: Explosion. Simultaneously black out. After a brief moment, lights go up on CAROLERS' bodies strewn across the stage. Detective FELDMAN and COP are surveying the aftermath.

COP

Whatta ya think, Detective?

FELDMAN

I don't know.....maybe they were off-key.

Blackout.

## Scene Two

Lights up on SAM in the coffee shop.

SAM

(to audience)

December 21<sup>st</sup>.....and it's raining. Christmas in Seattle isn't much different than any other time of year – the sky is gray, the wind is cold, and the people are annoyingly friendly.....I hate it.

SAM sits at table. SHOPPPER enters and smiles cheerfully while walking past SAM.

SHOPPER

Merry Christmas.

SHOPPER exits.

SAM

Right.

(pause, then to audience)

It's not that I hate Christmas, it's just that I don't like people shoving it in my face.

(producing an airline ticket from his jacket)

My idea of "Happy Holidays" is a party on the Vegas strip. In three short days, I'll be there.

PART TIME enters.

PART TIME

What'll it be, Sam? You want a muffin, 'cause they're fresh today – Blueberry, and I know how you like your antioxidants.....?

SAM

Just coffee.

PART TIME

Sure.

(turning to go, but then remembering)

We've got a caramel coconut mocha – it's the new promotion – You like coconut, don't you, Sam?

SAM

What makes you think that?

PART TIME

(thinking)

Well, I just....somebody said you liked coconut.

SAM

Who?

PART TIME

Ummm....

(mostly to herself)

Well, hold on, let me think a minute. I know that there's a reason that I was thinking...Maybe Darla told me – because she's really good about customer preferences, or maybe .. I'm not sure. I could swear somebody told me-

SAM

Just coffee – black.

PART TIME

(turning to go, but trying hard to remember)

I know somebody told me.....

PART TIME exits.

SAM

(to audience)

Her name was Mary Ann, but everybody called her Part Time because she had a half a dozen jobs around town. Her Dad had passed away and so she was helping her Mom raise the family. I don't think she had any close friends, but she knew almost everyone in town.

PART TIME enters, serves SAM coffee and sits down with him.

PART TIME

I think it was you.

SAM

What?

PART TIME

That said you like coconut.

SAM

(takes a sip)

You're right. Back in August when you were serving coconut pound cake.

PART TIME

You remember that?

SAM

I asked you to bring me a piece, but you couldn't because Mrs. Landis bought the whole loaf. Then the next week you guys took it off the menu.

PART TIME

Gee, Sam, you've got a heck of a memory.

SAM

It's a curse.

PART TIME

Did you hear about the incident over at Pacific Place?

SAM

(nodding)

Pretty nasty.

PART TIME

They say the cops are totally stumped. You gotta wonder what would make somebody blow up a bunch of Christmas carolers.

SAM

No kidding.

PART TIME

Any big plans for the holidays?

SAM

Real big – four days and three nights at Caesar's Palace.

PART TIME

You're not sticking around?

SAM

(shaking his head)

Holidays are for families. For me, Christmas is just a day off from work.

PART TIME

Don't you have a family, Sam? I mean besides your folks, 'cause I know your parents are gone now, but is that all of your family –no cousins or stepchildren or stuff like that?

SAM

Nope.

PART TIME

You're a mystery, Sam. I wish I could go to Vegas. Hey, you know all the video games, right?

SAM

Sure.

PART TIME

I was thinking about getting little Bobby that rock star game for Christmas – what do you think?

SAM

It's a great game, but it's pretty expensive, you know, for a kid. Why don't get something cheaper and spend some of that cash on yourself.

PART TIME

That's just it, Sam - the best part of Christmas is the things you do for others.

PART TIME rises and walks away.  
FELDMAN enters.

SAM

(to audience)

That was when she walked in. Just a whiff of her perfume should have told me right away that she was trouble.

FELDMAN approaches PART TIME,  
having a silent conversation during the  
following narration.

SAM (cont'd)

She had an attitude that meant business, but a figure designed for recreation. She was a smart one.... with a sultry manner, a pensive look, and legs that went all the way up to her hips.

PART TIME nods toward SAM and  
TRACY approaches him. PART TIME  
exits.

FELDMAN

Mr. Chase?

SAM

Yeah?



FELDMAN  
(flashing her badge)  
Detective Feldman. Seattle PD.

SAM  
(turning on the charm)  
What can I do for you?

FELDMAN  
I need to ask you a few questions.

SAM  
Shoot. I love a little interrogation.

FELDMAN  
You know Lindsay Chase?

SAM  
(back to normal)  
I used to.

FELDMAN  
Heard from her lately?

SAM  
(wary)  
No. Why?

FELDMAN  
Her body was found in her apartment last night – she was bludgeoned to death with a giant candy cane. Sorry to break the news to you. Maybe we should do this down at the station.

SAM  
Right.

FELDMAN  
And if you don't have an attorney, you may want to get one.

SAM  
What?

FELDMAN  
And don't leave town .....until we can tie up a few loose ends.

SAM

Hold it – you think I murdered my ex-wife?

FELDMAN

It's not a matter of what I think, Mr. Chase.

SAM

I didn't do anything-

FELDMAN

Then I'm sure it won't be a problem.

SAM

Look, lady – don't go accusing me-

FELDMAN

Mr. Chase, just come down to the East Precinct and talk with us, okay?

SAM

I didn't kill anybody.

FELDMAN

We're at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Pine. I look forward to talking with you.

FELDMAN exits. Lights fade out on table.

SAM

(to audience)

My ex-wife was dead and the cops suspected me. That made me pretty angry, but over all, I admit, I felt bad.... because I ...well, because I didn't feel bad. At least not as bad as I thought I should. I hadn't seen Lindsay in three years, and yet I often wondered if things might have turned out differently between us ... if life had dealt us different cards. But I didn't have time for introspection. I left for the East Precinct, but on my way, I made a little detour.

### Scene Three

Lights up on a Lindsay's apartment door, a door with a frame, marked off in "Crime Scene – Do Not Cross" tape. SAM looks around and rips down the tape, opening the door. SAM is about to enter the apartment as JASON enters, very flamboyant and wearing a bath robe with a towel wrapped around his head like a woman who had just gotten out of the shower.

JASON

Hey, whatcha doin'?

SAM

Huh? Oh, I was just checking out the place.

JASON

Sorry, it's not for rent – not yet, anyhow.

SAM

No, I uh....knew the ...occupant.

JASON

You mean the dead lady?

SAM

Yeah.

JASON

Oh, isn't that so tragic? I can't believe some one would do that, you know, crush a woman's skull with a piece of Christmas candy. It just goes against everything the holiday stands for.

(shaking his hand)

My condolences. I'm Jason. I'm so sorry for your loss.

JASON shakes SAM's hand.

SAM

Thanks - Sam. I was just going to look around.

SAM exits into apartment.

JASON

Excuse me...., you're not supposed to go in there.....

(getting no response)

It was so maniacally horrid. I was the one who found her, you know.

SAM (offstage)

You found her?

JASON

Yes. I was just coming back from The Nutcracker – oh, that is sooooo over-rated – anyhow I was coming up the stairs, I see the door is open, so I peek in and say “yoo-hoo, Lindsay,” but much to my surprise - I mean, you could have knocked me over with a feather – there she was, in the middle of the carpet, laid out flat. And I don't mean that in a good way, either.

SAM (offstage)

Any idea who did it?

JASON

No, I can't imagine. Everybody loves Lindsay. I can't understand why anyone would do such a ghastly thing.

SAM enters with an armful of sheet music.

JASON (cont'd)

(pointing at papers)

What's that?

SAM

Some of the papers she had on her desk – looks like she was working on these – maybe even just before she died.

JASON

What – are you going to do some kind of CSI thing?

SAM

No, I just thought I'd see what she was up to – maybe tie it in to whoever it was that killed her.

JASON

Well, the police said not to touch anything.

SAM

Yeah, I know, just don't tell the apartment manager, okay?

JASON

I don't have to, because you just did.

SAM

You're the apartment manager?

JASON

Ironic, huh?

SAM

Oh....I didn't realize you were-

JASON

Oh, I wouldn't expect you to - it's not my real vocation. I'm actually a performer – a little song, a little dance – I do an amaaaazing Cyndi Lauper. You should check out my show some time. I'm at Thumpers on Capitol Hill every other Wednesday.

SAM  
 Sure, I'll ... have to look into that.

SAM turns to go.

JASON  
 Excuse me!  
 (scolding with attitude)

SAM turns back.

JASON (cont'd)  
 Sorry – I'd like to help, but the law is the law.

JASON gestures toward the paperwork.

SAM  
 (reluctantly)  
 .....Right.

SAM hands the papers over to JASON, who exits into apartment.

JASON (offstage)  
 If you want anything, you'll need to get police approval, you know.

SAM  
 (nodding)  
 Thanks again.

TRACY enters. She is dressed tastefully, very pretty and wearing glasses. SAM turns and sees TRACY.

SAM (cont'd)  
 (to audience)  
 That's when I saw her.

SAM walks away and TRACY approaches the apartment door as JASON enters from the apartment.

JASON  
 Sorry, there's nobody home.

TRACY

No?  
 (noticing the police tape)  
 Did something happen?

JASON pantomimes conversation with  
 TRACY while SAM addresses audience.

SAM

(to audience)  
 She was gorgeous, a real babe. Lots of curves, pouty lips, and a great big pair of  
 ...glasses. She had the kind of figure that would make any man look up from his  
 Blackberry and take notice.

JASON

Gotta go. I've got fudge in the oven.

JASON exits. TRACY approaches SAM.

TRACY

Did you know.....?

SAM

My ex-wife.

TRACY (cont'd)

This is so....so...

TRACY buries her head in SAM's chest and  
 sobs.

SAM

(to audience)  
 Her name was Tracy Leeds. She was a choir director who knew my ex, and I was more  
 than happy to console her. She was different - fragile, and yet classy; innocent, and yet  
 dangerous. I was smitten-

SAM produces a handkerchief.

SAM (cont'd)

By her warmth on my chest ... the scent of perfume...

TRACY takes handkerchief from SAM.

And even the dainty way she blew her nose.

TRACY blows her nose with a resounding honk. SAM examines his tear-soaked shirt.

TRACY

I'm sorry.

SAM

That's okay – I think the drycleaner can get this out.

TRACY

No, I mean about Lindsay.

SAM

Oh – yeah.

TRACY

Well,...I should go now.

SAM

Hold it – do me a favor. There's a pile of papers on Lindsay's desk – go get them, and I'll stay here and keep an eye out.

TRACY

I don't know-

SAM

Please?

TRACY

Well....all right.

TRACY enters the apartment.

SAM

(to audience)

I needed help, and she looked trustworthy. And by "trustworthy," I really mean "beautiful." But I did need help.

TRACY returns with the papers.

TRACY

What do you want with-

SAM

These may be a clue as to why Lindsay was killed. You knew Lindsay, you know music – help me figure this out.

TRACY

Well, I just –

SAM

If I can't prove who did it, they're gonna lock me up.

TRACY

....All right.

SAM

Look through everything here. See if you figure out a connection and I'll catch up with you later. I have to go downtown.

TRACY and SAM stare into each other's eyes for a moment and

TRACY

(looks at papers, then back to SAM)

All right.

TRACY exits, as SAM watches her go.

SAM

(to audience)

I had a feeling ....that behind the dark cloud of Lindsay's demise was the silver lining of Tracy's negligee.

Lights out on Apartment door.

Scene Four

Lights up on police station represented by a desk and chair. FELDMAN and COP are waiting on SAM who enters.

FELDMAN

Have a seat.

SAM

(sitting)

Thanks.

FELDMAN

What do you know about the murder of Lindsay Chase?



I don't know anything. SAM

Don't act dumb, okay? FELDMAN

Believe me lady, it's not an act. SAM

Where were you last night?? FELDMAN

At home. SAM

All night? COP

All night. SAM

Anybody who can vouch for you? FELDMAN

No, I didn't leave my apartment. Last night I finally beat Gears of War 2. SAM

Huh? FELDMAN

Video game. COP

So ....you're one of those pin-headed geeks with no life – wasting your evenings at home with a Playstation? FELDMAN

Don't insult me lady – I own an Xbox. SAM

I think you know more than you're telling us. FELDMAN

And I think I don't – why don't we just agree to disagree? SAM

FELDMAN

Give me some answers, Chase!

SAM

Madison, Wisconsin - The square root of seventeen - Alexander Hamilton – The Cleveland Browns.

FELDMAN

Look, I don't like smart mouths.

SAM

I thought you didn't like me playing dumb.

FELDMAN

(pause, looking him over)

When's that last time you saw Lindsay Chase?

SAM

Three years ago. April seventeenth. About six-thirty PM.

FELDMAN

Oh?

SAM

I ran into her at Trader Joe's on Capitol Hill. She was examining the melons and I was picking up some fresh ginger for a stir fry.

COP

You remember that?

SAM

I have an uncanny ability to recall completely inconsequential events.

FELDMAN

What else do you remember?

SAM

They were having a sale on Hummus and Couscous.

FELDMAN

Don't waste my time, Chase.

SAM

Good idea.

(rising)

Why don't I just leave, and then you won't waste my time, either.

COP pushes SAM back into chair.

FELDMAN

Don't you have any manners?

SAM

I tried to get some, but my vendor says they're backordered.

COP

What do you know about this?

COP produces a large candy cane, about the size of a baseball bat encased in a clear plastic bag and drops it on the table. SAM stares at it for a moment.

SAM

Is that the murder weapon?

FELDMAN

What's the matter, Chase? You look a little uncomfortable.

SAM

Look, I haven't even seen my ex-wife in more than three years.

FELDMAN

Except maybe last night.

SAM

I didn't see her last night. I wasn't anywhere near her apartment, I swear.

COP

Come on, why don't you-

SAM

Would you just tell me what happened?

COP

Ten-thirty last night, the property manager found your ex-wife dead in her apartment – with a giant dent in the back of her head.

FELDMAN

No sign of forced entry, just a lot of papers strewn around the room.

SAM

Look, either book me or let me go. Ever heard of habeas corpus?

SAM gets up and the COP pushes him back into the chair.

FELDMAN

Ever heard of Bad Cop/Bad Cop?

SAM

I thought it was Good Cop/Bad Cop.

FELDMAN

Not on my watch.

(checks wrist watch)

Look, Chase, I'm half tempted to toss you in jail and close the case.

SAM

But I didn't do it.

FELDMAN

As it is, we're under pressure to wrap this thing up by Christmas-

SAM

In three days?

FELDMAN

So we'll do our investigation and if anything turns up proving your innocence, we may not have to throw your ass in the slammer.

SAM

I told you – I didn't do it.

FELDMAN

Yeah, I have a vague recollection of that. Stop in down the hall and get fingerprinted, and then you can go. Just don't leave town – if we so much as see you looking in the direction of the airport, I'll slam your butt in jail.

SAM

But I've got plans for a trip.

COP

Not anymore you don't.

FELDMAN and COP exit. SAM steps forward as the lights fade on the interrogation room.

SAM

I had a problem. It wasn't just Lindsay. Or the cops setting me up for a murder rap. My trip to Vegas was in jeopardy, and worst case scenario: I might have to spend Christmas in Seattle. I needed to get to the bottom this – fast.

Scene Five

Lights up on TRACY at the coffee shop table with a stack of papers. SAM joins her.

SAM

Any luck?

TRACY

I can't seem to find anything of importance.

SAM

Do you know what Lindsay was working on?

TRACY

I think ...she said she was researching Christmas carols. Something like that. Something about their history.

SAM

That sounds incredibly boring.

TRACY looks at one last piece of sheet music.

TRACY

(concentrating on music)

Oh, no. Christmas carols can be quite intriguing - each one has a specific history and often a remarkable story about its origin.

SAM

Okay...

TRACY

(with academic passion)

You may not know this - the classical carol "The First Noel" was published in 1833, but there's evidence that the chorus was actually written in the First or Second Century, so it's possible that whoever wrote it may have actually known Jesus Christ personally.

SAM

You're right – I didn't know that.

TRACY

The history of Christmas hymns is absolutely fascinating. The first one is generally considered to have been sung in 1535 when the French sang the carol, "Ça, Bergers, assemblons nous."

SAM

Well, when you say it in French, it sounds a lot more interesting.

TRACY

There's something about you, Sam...you're dark....and mysterious.....and dangerous.

SAM

I also make a mean grilled cheese sandwich.

TRACY's eyes meet SAM's and they stare for a moment, followed by an awkward pause.

TRACY

I suppose ...I should be going.

(picks up music and singles out one sheet)

This looks rather intriguing– would you....mind if I take it with me?

SAM

Do you think it might explain Lindsay's.....you know?

TRACY

Oh, no. I just thought it was a nice melody.

SAM

What is it?

TRACY

It's just a composition, rather interesting harmonic progression. Kind of reminds me of Lindsay. I'd like something to remember her by.

SAM

(taking music to look at it)

Guess it can't hurt.

(noticing something)

There's something written in the margin. Can you make it out?

TRACY

(looking closely)

Umm....not really....the writing is kind of sloppy.

SAM

(handing her back the music)  
 “King. F. King.” Does that mean anything to you?

TRACY

(putting the music in her purse)  
 Mmm...no.

SAM

I’m guessing it’s somebody’s name.

TRACY

I’m certain you’ll get to the bottom of this, Sam. I know you’ll find out what happened to Lindsay.

SAM

Yeah, I will.

They stare in each other’s eyes and then  
 TRACY turns and exits. SAM stares in her  
 direction as PART TIME enters.

PART TIME

(picking up pieces of sheet music)  
 Did you find anything?

SAM

Maybe. Does “F. King” mean anything to you?

PART TIME

F-king? Is that...um....?

SAM

A name, Part Time - it’s somebody’s name.

PART TIME

Oh! No, I’ve never heard of anybody like that. Um, I didn’t realize you had been married, Sam.

SAM

Yeah.

PART TIME

So ... I’m guessing it didn’t work out, huh?

SAM

(arranging the papers)

We were very different kinds of people. She was a musician, a composer, very artistic - Me - I'm a rogue, a renegade, a software engineer.

PART TIME

What happened?

SAM

(shrugging)

.....I suppose being a husband wasn't my strong suit. I was a too selfish, and once I figured it out, it was too late.

PART TIME

No second chance?

SAM

I didn't deserve one.

PART TIME

(pause)

I've been thinking..... maybe your ex-wife found out something she shouldn't have, you know, stumbled across somebody's dirty laundry and that particular somebody was afraid of blackmail so he.....

SAM

(shaking his head)

Probably not.

PART TIME

(pause)

Maybe she was working for someone, you know composing stuff and then the guy couldn't pay her and so he hit Lindsay over the head and .....

SAM

Doubt it.

PART TIME

(pause)

What if Lindsay was arranging something for somebody and she didn't get it right, you know so the guy is all upset and he says "Hey, I wanted this in D Major," and Lindsay is like, "No, you specifically said D Minor," and the guy gets really mad and says "No, I would never want anything arranged in a minor key and so now I'm going to -

SAM looks at PART TIME.



PART TIME (cont'd)

(pause)  
Okay, I'll just shut up now.

SAM

Thanks.  
(pause)  
Looks like Mr. King is our only clue at this point.

SAM walks off and the lights fade out on  
PART TIME and the table.

SAM (cont'd)

(to audience)  
I tried looking up "F. King" on the web, but, well ... the results I got even made the search engine blush. I decided to find out the old fashioned way – I headed over to Belltown.

Scene Six

Lights up on JIMMY, wearing a Santa Claus hat, ringing a bell standing next to a collection bucket. SAM approaches JIMMY and looks around suspiciously, talking to him while trying to appear nonchalant.

SAM

Jimmy.

JIMMY

Ho ho.

SAM

I need some help.

JIMMY

Most people do.

SAM

I need information.

JIMMY

You know the drill.

SAM reaches into his pocket and pulls a twenty dollar bill out of his wallet. He returns his wallet to his pocket and deposits the twenty in JIMMY's collection bucket.

JIMMY (cont'd)

Whatta ya need?

SAM

I have a name – "F. King." Probably associated with the music industry.

JIMMY

"F. King?" Frankie King - Manhattan Center for Musical Antiquities - New York.

SAM

What else can you tell me?

JIMMY rings the bell and nods toward the bucket. SAM pulls another twenty out of his wallet and stuffs it in the bucket.

JIMMY

Frankie King is the foremost authority on European music from 1500 through the end of the Nineteenth Century. Discovered several unpublished songs last year that were verified as having been written in Portugal in 1649. A bit of a recluse, but extremely knowledgeable.

SAM

How can I get in touch with King?

JIMMY

(giving SAM an annoyed look)

Do I look like Directory Assistance?

SAM pulls out another twenty in shoves it in the bucket.

JIMMY (cont'd)

Area code 212-555-3471.

SAM

Thanks, Jimmy.

JIMMY

Ho ho.

SAM walks off and pulls out his cell phone.  
Lights out on JIMMY.

SAM

(to audience)  
I called King and got voicemail. I left a message and then called Tracy to fill her in.

Black out.  
Scene Seven

Lights up on four CAROLERS.

CAROLERS

(singing)  
I HEARD THE BELLS ON CHRISTMAS DAY  
THEIR OLD FAMILIAR CAROLS PLAY,  
AND WILD AND SWEET THE WORDS REPEAT  
OF PEACE ON EARTH, GOODWILL TO MEN.

AND IN DESPAIR I BOWED MY HEAD;  
"THERE IS NO PEACE ON EARTH," I SAID,  
"FOR HATE IS STRONG AND MOCKS THE SONG  
OF PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TO MEN."

SOUND: Machinegun fire and the  
CAROLERS fall forward dead. Black out.

Scene Eight

Lights up on the coffee shop. SAM walks  
over and sits down. PART TIME enters.

PART TIME  
Did you hear about the singers down at the SuperMall?

SAM  
Another bomb?

PART TIME  
Guns, I think. A machine gun or something.

SAM  
Really?

PART TIME  
Ummm, I think....Well, hold on, let me think a minute.

SAM

Just coffee – black.

PART TIME

I think it was a machine gun. I know I heard that somewhere. Maybe the news.

SAM

Coffee?

PART TIME

(nods, in thought, turning to go, then remembers)

Oh! I got you something.

PART TIME turns back to SAM and hands him an index card.

SAM

(looking at the card)

Nathan Nicholas?

PART TIME

You know him?

SAM

Am I supposed to?

PART TIME

He had a hundred thousand dollar life insurance policy on your ex-wife. Thought you might want to know that.

SAM

Really? So he....how did you get this?

PART TIME

My other job - Island Insurance. Data entry.

SAM

Thanks, Part Time.

(rising)

Forget the coffee, I've got to go. I need to see if Mr. Nicholas has been naughty or nice.

PART TIME shrugs and exits and the lights fade out on SAM staring at the card.

## Scene Nine

Lights up on NATHAN in his studio playing a large instrument (tuba, oboe, cello, etc).  
SAM enters.

SAM  
Excuse me. Nathan Nicholas?

NATHAN  
(stops playing)  
Yes. Can I help you?

SAM  
My name is Sam Chase.

NATHAN  
(suddenly cold)  
Lindsay's ex-husband?

SAM  
Right. Umm....Lindsay...told you about me?

NATHAN  
She mentioned your name once or twice.

NATHAN resumes playing his instrument.  
SAM gazes about awkwardly, not knowing how to start.

SAM  
Nice tune.

NATHAN  
Thank you.

SAM  
Sounds kind of like the theme music to Bioshock.

NATHAN  
I beg your pardon?

SAM  
Video game.

NATHAN rolls his eyes.

So .... you two were good friends?  
SAM (cont'd)

You could say that.  
NATHAN

You must have been pretty close.  
SAM

Yes.  
NATHAN

I was wondering-  
SAM

(stops playing)  
NATHAN

Mr. Chase, do you have any official business here?  
SAM

Official...?  
NATHAN

Look, I'm busy. Unless there's some pressing reason for your visit, I suggest you leave.  
SAM

What's the problem - am I getting too close for comfort?  
NATHAN

What do you want?  
SAM

I want to know why my ex-wife had a life insurance policy with you as the sole beneficiary.  
NATHAN

I don't think that's any of your business.  
SAM

Seems kind of strange to me. So...how's business, Nathan? Does playing on that thing bring in a lot of cash?  
NATHAN

I'm an artist, Mr. Chase – profitability is not how I measure my success.

SAM

But it wouldn't hurt to have a little extra money, now would it? Maybe a hundred thousand dollars.

NATHAN

What are you suggesting, Mr. Chase?

SAM

Lindsay's death, the insurance policy-

NATHAN

I didn't kill Lindsay.

SAM

Look, Vivaldi, it just seems-

NATHAN

Have you ever considered using manners, Mr. Chase?

SAM

It's on my list – right after “brutal ass-kicking.”

NATHAN

Based on what your ex-wife said about you, I'd consider you to be the prime suspect.

SAM

You're in good company, believe me.

NATHAN

Lindsay and I both had policies, in the event that one of us should pass away. We're musicians – neither of make the Microsoft money that you do,  
 (spits o the ground in disgust)  
 so we thought this might be a way to help each other out.

SAM

Lucky for you she went first.

NATHAN

You disgust me.

SAM

(nodding toward the instrument)  
 What is that thing, anyhow?

NATHAN

It's a kazoo.

SAM

Looks heavy. Ever hit anybody over the head with it?

NATHAN

I'm about ready to try.

SAM

Don't be so hostile.

NATHAN

And I should probably remind you to stay away from Lindsay's apartment.

NATHAN begins playing again.

SAM

Right.

SAM walks away and the lights fade on  
NATHAN.

SAM (cont'd)

(to audience)

I didn't buy his explanation. Even so, all I knew for sure was that he hated my guts....and that drag queen Jason had a big mouth. It was December 22<sup>nd</sup>. It was raining.... and I was running out of time.

### Scene Ten

Lights up on TRACY, seated at the coffee  
holding a folder of music. SAM enters.

SAM

Ever heard of a guy named Nathan Nicholas?

TRACY

Umm.... I'm not sure.

SAM

Well, right now, I'm guessing he's the one who did it.

TRACY

Really?



PART TIME enters, followed by MYRNA King.

PART TIME

Sam, there's someone here to see you.

MYRNA

Mr. Chase, I'm Myrna King. Manhattan Center for Musical Antiquities. I got here as quickly as I could once we got your message.

SAM stands and shakes MYRNA's hand.

SAM

I'm sorry... I don't understand.

MYRNA

I'm Frankie King's sister. We work together extensively.

SAM

Oh. This is Tracy Leeds. She's the one who found the music with Frankie's name on it.

TRACY and MYRNA shake hands.

TRACY

Here's everything we have.

TRACY hands the folder to MYRNA, who looks it over.

MYRNA

(examining the music)

What's your take on this?

TRACY

Well, it looks like Lindsay was analyzing the music.....trying to identify certain types of harmonic movement.

MYRNA

Hmm. This is .....

Jolted, MYRNA stops and looks at SAM and TRACY.

MYRNA (cont'd)

This is....do you have any idea what you have here?

SAM

Apparently not.

MYRNA

I don't want to jump to conclusions, but quite frankly, this .....this could be....

TRACY

Yes?

MYRNA

(very excited)

This could be a major discovery in the field of musical antiquity. It's possible there's an ancient song is hidden in this composition...deliberately disguised by someone. Whoever did this – probably many years ago – created an Oratorio with a single phrase in each movement. Based on careful analysis, one may be able to extract the more contemporary harmonic movement and reveal the musical phrases belonging to .....

SAM

Yes?

MYRNA

Have you ever heard of the Christmas Hymn of Malta?

SAM

Umm, no.

TRACY

No.

MYRNA

Let me look this over. I need to unpack my computer, runs some tests, make some calls. I'll be at the Edgewater Hotel if you need me – I need an internet connection.

PART TIME

You're welcome to use ours – I'll clear out the back office for you.

MYRNA

Oh, thanks. That'll save some time.

PART TIME and MYRNA exit.  
FELDMAN enters, followed by COP.

SAM

Detective – any news? Any leads?

FELDMAN

A couple.

SAM

Did you check out Nathan Nicholas? He stands to make a little money on a life insurance policy.

FELDMAN

If I'm not mistaken, you're also a beneficiary to your ex-wife's death.

SAM

What?

FELDMAN

Don't you hold a policy, too?

SAM

Oh..... that.

TRACY

What's she talking about, Sam?

SAM

Lindsay and I both have policies, from when we were married. It's only ten grand.

COP

Which should make for a great little party in Las Vegas, right?

FELDMAN

Of course, now that you're a suspect, I wouldn't be surprised if they void your policy.

SAM

Look-

PART TIME enters.

COP

Why don't you just confess now and save us some trouble?

SAM

Because I didn't do it.

FELDMAN

The boys down at the lab might disagree with you.

What? SAM

That monster candy cane was covered with your fingerprints. COP

(deflated) SAM  
So?

You want to explain? FELDMAN

I didn't – SAM

Then how did your prints wind up on the murder weapon? COP

I sent it to her. It's a Christmas gift. SAM

You sent your ex-wife a giant piece of candy? FELDMAN

(humiliated) SAM  
It was a tradition. I sent her one every year.

Or maybe you're just a liar. COP

Look- SAM

By the way, we threw your name into hat as a possible suspect on these Christmas Caroler murders, too. FELDMAN

You really think there's a connection ....or are you just too lazy to investigate? SAM

Watch it! COP

FELDMAN

Don't let your overwhelming grief get you in trouble. Of course, it doesn't seem to me that you're grieving at all.

SAM

I told you – we weren't that close.

FELDMAN

So it doesn't bother you then?

SAM

It bothers me. You bother me. My ex-wife's dead, somebody's killing all the Christmas carolers, and you want to pin it all on me. I'd say that's just plain terrible.

FELDMAN

This is more than plain terrible - this is fancy terrible - this is terrible with whipped cream and a cherry.

SAM

Who died and made you Dorothy Parker?

FELDMAN

Listen, if you don't come clean, we'll show you what real police brutality is.

SAM

This is Seattle, lady – what are you gonna do – serve me coffee in a Styrofoam cup?

FELDMAN

Watch your step, Chase. You're still our number one suspect.

FELDMAN and COP exit.

TRACY

I can't believe they think you killed Lindsay.

PART TIME

Sam, what's the deal with the candy cane?

SAM

It's nothing.

PART TIME

Sam....

SAM

(pause)

Lindsay had a thing about candy canes at Christmas. After we split up – and she took half of everything I owned – I would send her one every Christmas...you know, just to say “This is the last thing you’ll get from me...”

PART TIME

That sounds pretty shallow.

SAM

Yeah, well...I’m a shallow guy.

MYRNA enters.

MYRNA

Mr. Chase, I need to ask you - it appears as though we’re missing some of the composer’s arrangements - is this all you had?

SAM

That’s all I could get my hands on.

MYRNA

I need to see the rest. As of yet, I can’t be certain, and if anything goes wrong, Frankie will definitely be upset. At this point, it’s only a theory, but with a little more evidence, we may be able to substantiate my findings and announce to the world that that this composition is the biggest finding in musical history. The entire music world has been waiting for the moment when we can-

SOUND: Gunshot. MYRNA falls dead in front of SAM and TRACY, who stare at her corpse.

PART TIME

Looks like the entire music world is going to have to wait.

Blackout.

Scene Eleven

Lights up on JIMMY, wearing a Santa Claus hat, ringing a bell standing next to a collection bucket. Across the stage are MUGGER ONE and MUGGER TWO, dressed as snowmen, standing perfectly still.

SAM approaches JIMMY, talking to him while trying to appear nonchalant.

Jimmy. SAM

Ho ho. JIMMY

I've got a question. SAM

You know the drill. JIMMY

SAM reaches into his pocket and pulls a twenty dollar bill out of his wallet. He returns his wallet to his pocket and deposits the twenty in JIMMY's collection bucket.

Whatta ya need? JIMMY (cont'd)

What is the Christmas Hymn of Malta? SAM

Well..... it goes kind of like this – JIMMY  
(humming)  
Dom dum dom dum da dada dom -

No, Jimmy, what is it? A definition, maybe? SAM

JIMMY rings the bell and nods toward the bucket. SAM pulls another twenty out of his wallet and stuffs it in the bucket.

JIMMY  
In 1539, the Emperor of Spain gave the Island of Malta to what later became the Knights of Rhodes. In return, the Knights paid tribute by sending him a ninety voice choir to sing a single Christmas Hymn, now known as the Christmas Hymn of Malta.

That's it? SAM

JIMMY rings the bell and nods toward the bucket. SAM pulls another twenty out of his wallet and stuffs it in the bucket.

JIMMY

Legend has it that the Hymn is the most sought-after piece of music in history, coveted by Christmas Carol aficionados everywhere. Whoever owns this composition could change the entire industry and art form of holiday music.

SAM

Somehow, I expected more.

JIMMY

(shrugs)

Ho ho.

Lights fade out on JIMMY.

Scene Twelve

Leaving JIMMY, SAM walks away, and MUGGER ONE and MUGGER TWO, as snowmen., come to life. MUGGER ONE grabs SAM from behind and MUGGER TWO punches him mercilessly. MUGGER ONE releases SAM, who falls to the floor.

MUGGER TWO

If you know what's good for you, you'll stop asking questions.

MUGGERs exit quickly, leaving SAM on the ground in a heap. PART TIME enters, wearing a pizza delivery uniform carrying a pizza delivery case, inside of which is a pizza in its box.

PART TIME

Sam? Are you okay?

SAM

(sitting up, rubbing his head)

Yeah, just a bad case of freezer burn.

PART TIME

What happened?



SAM

Nothing, I just - is that pizza?

PART TIME

I deliver for Zeek's Pizza on Tuesdays. Donny and the twins all want new bicycles for Christmas.

SAM

It must be tough.

PART TIME

We get by.

SAM

What's up?

PART TIME

Frankie King wrote a book about the Christmas Hymn of Malta.

(hands an index card to SAM)

There's only one copy in the Seattle Public Library and it's checked out to her.

SAM

Connie Hanson? How do you know this?

PART TIME

I work weekends at the Montlake Branch. The book's overdue by two weeks.

SAM

We better check this out.

Blackout.

### Scene Thirteen

Lights up on the doorframe of CONNIE's apartment door which has a recycling bin sitting next to it.. SAM and PART TIME walk over to it. We hear piano music playing from behind the door. SAM knocks and the music stops.

CONNIE (from behind door)

Who is it?

SAM

(pause, puzzled, then instantly making a plan)

Pizza.

CONNIE (from behind door)

I didn't order a pizza.

Piano music plays again.

SAM

Sure you did – I got your pizza right here.

Music stops.

CONNIE (from behind door)

No, I didn't.

SAM

Oh, ....well then ....we must have made a mistake. I tell you what, since you're such a good customer, we'll give this one to you for free.

Music stops. PART TIME looks concerned because she's not sure they have a pizza.

CONNIE (from behind door)

Really?

SAM motions, and PART TIME starts digging through pizza delivery case to find a pizza.

SAM

Sure.

PART TIME

(sotto voce)

I've got a leftover sausage and mushroom.

SAM nods and takes pizza. CONNIE opens the door a crack and peeks out. She is bookish and wears glasses.

CONNIE

What – it takes two of you to deliver a pizza?

I'm in training. Here you go.

SAM

CONNIE steps out and takes the box and opens it.

Hey – what is this?

CONNIE

Look, I just need to ask you some questions.

SAM

CONNIE

(hands pizza back to SAM)  
This has meat on it! I can't eat meat!

SAM

Do you know anything about the Christmas Hymn of Malta?

CONNIE looks at him shocked and then quickly breaks for the door trying to get back in, but PART TIME has blocked her progress and closes the door, standing in front of it. Trapped outside, CONNIE stands still, wide-eyed in fear.

Well? Do you?

SAM (cont'd)

CONNIE

Look, mister, I don't want any trouble. Just let me go back into my apartment, okay? I really don't want a pizza.

SAM

You know something, don't you?

CONNIE

Please – I'm telling you.....

PART TIME

What can you tell us?

CONNIE

Please, Mister, don't kill me!

SAM

What?

CONNIE

I don't have the song – honest I don't. I've never had it - I swear!

SAM

Why would you have it?

CONNIE

You mean you're not.....

PART TIME

.....Not what?

CONNIE

You don't know, do you?

SAM and PART TIME trade looks.

CONNIE (cont'd)

Okay, Deep Dish – let me back in my apartment!

SAM

Not until you tell us-

CONNIE

I'm not saying anything! Let me back in.

SAM

(grabbing her)

Not until you tell me what's going on.

CONNIE

(trying to wrench her arm free)

You're a real jerk, you know that?

SAM

It's right at the top of my resume.

CONNIE

Let me go!

SAM

If you don't talk, I'm going to break every one of your fingers. Can you play the piano with your hands wrapped up in plaster?

CONNIE

What do you want?

SAM

Somebody killed my ex-wife, and this Hymn of Malta has something to do with it.

CONNIE

Lindsay was your ex-wife?

SAM

Maybe you did it.

CONNIE

Don't be stupid. I'm afraid to even go outside. This whole city is a bloodbath. First somebody kills Lindsay, then all the Christmas carolers in Seattle are being murdered, quartet by quartet.

PART TIME

Not to mention Myrna King.

CONNIE

Myrna King is dead?

PART TIME nods.

CONNIE (cont'd)

(genuflecting)  
Saint Cecilia defend us!

SAM

Saint Ceci-

PART TIME

Patron saint of musicians.

SAM

(to CONNIE)  
Why did you check out Frankie King's book on the Christmas Hymn of Malta?

PART TIME

And why is it overdue?

CONNIE

I got a package – maybe a month ago - a box full of sheet music, with a letter saying that if I could piece together the Christmas Hymn of Malta, there'd be big money in it for me.

SAM

Was the hymn in the package?

CONNIE

I don't know – It was a lot of music– nothing complete. I think that whoever sent it thought of it as a musical puzzle and he wanted somebody to figure it out.

PART TIME

He? You mean it was a “him?”

CONNIE

I don't know – I was just using the traditional singular gender–neutral pronoun.

SAM

Where's the music now?

CONNIE reaches into the recycling bin, pulls out a red cardboard box with a bundle of papers and hands them to PART TIME.

PART TIME

You threw the stuff away?

CONNIE

Hey, I don't want any part of it!

SAM

What did Lindsay have to do with this?

CONNIE

She got the same package. Lindsay seemed to think that Jessica was behind it.

PART TIME

Jessica who?

CONNIE

Jessica Holly.

SAM and PART TIME give her a blank stare.

CONNIE (cont'd)

(annoyed)

She's the founder of the Yule Time Singers. Don't you people know anything?

CONNIE sees that SAM and PART TIME have dropped their guard, so she dives back into the apartment and slams the door behind her.

SAM

(takes red box)

There's a lot more here than we got from Lindsey's apartment. I wish there was a way to get back in there and get the rest.

Blackout.

Scene Fourteen

Lights up on coffee shop with TRACY looking through the red box of sheet music that SAM got from CONNIE. SAM enters with a green box just like it.

SAM

Look what Part Time came up with.

TRACY

Where did she get it?

SAM

Lindsay's apartment. Part Time installs satellite TV on the weekends. She uninstalled Lindsay's and snuck out with the music.

TRACY

(taking the green box)

I've been through this box – some it matches the music we took from Lindsay's apartment. Hopefully the rest is in here.

SAM

Then it all makes sense – Connie got a package, Lindsay got a package. I wonder who else got a package.

TRACY

Do you think Connie could have murdered Lindsay?

SAM

Maybe. But if she did, why would the Frostbite Twins do the uppercut polka on my face? What's the connection?

TRACY ponders the question.

SAM (cont'd)

I'm guessing that Lindsay's murderer knew about the Hymn of Malta....may have even gotten the same package but couldn't figure out the music, so they tried to take it from Lindsay instead.

TRACY

I don't know, Sam. That sounds pretty far-fetched-

GOLDIE King enters.

GOLDIE

Mr. Chase?

SAM

Yes.

GOLDIE

(shaking his hand)

Goldie King, Manhattan Center for Musical Antiquities. I'm Myrna's sister. I came to follow up.

SAM

Yes – I'm sorry about your sister, Ms. King, I'm sure that the police will find her killer.

GOLDIE

Yes, I've met with them. I'm looking into Myrna's findings. Frankie insisted I speak with you.

SAM

Sure. This is Tracy Leeds.

(handing over the green and red boxes)

Here's what we have.

GOLDIE

How did you get your hands on the composition?

GOLDIE starts looking through the boxes.

TRACY

Some one was trying to get some of the local musicians to piece together the melody of the Christmas Hymn of Malta. There was a promise of payment to whomever could identify the tune.

SAM

It was supposed to be a lot of money.

GOLDIE

Was there any indication as to what would happen to the Hymn afterwards?

SAM

No.



GOLDIE

(perusing the sheet music)

It's believed that in 1713, the Hymn of Malta turned up in Sicily and later in Paris in 1840. But each time, the song had been altered by inserting coded musical phrases into the original composition, thereby disguising the true nature of the Hymn.

SAM

So if somebody were to stumble across the Hymn, they wouldn't recognize it until those erroneous musical phrases were removed-

GOLDIE

Revealing the Hymn in its pristine form.

TRACY

Is that really possible?

GOLDIE

For a trained professional, yes – some one with an extensive knowledge of early European musical styles. It would, however, require extensive analysis and comparison to other patterns found in music of the day.

(pause, while looking through music)

I've heard about the Christmas caroler massacres – do you know anything about them?

SAM

Thirteen casualties so far. Do you think they're related to this song?

GOLDIE

Song? The Christmas Hymn of Malta is not a "song," Mr. Chase.

SAM

Sorry.

GOLDIE

Look, I don't want to jump to conclusions. I know how fast these rumors can spread - I need to talk to Frankie. Let me get in touch with New York before we make any assertions.

SAM

But, Ms. King-

GOLDIE

We can talk later - if anything goes wrong, Frankie will definitely be upset. I'm staying at the Edgewater Hotel - I'll call you later this evening.

GOLDIE exits.

SAM

This must be bigger than we thought.

TRACY

I think so.

SAM

I'd like to know who else in town got a package of sheet music in the mail.

TRACY

There could be dozens of people.

SAM

We should check with Jessica Holly. Maybe we can get her to show her hand. Let's go.

TRACY

(reluctant)

Umm, Sam...

SAM

Huh?

TRACY

I'm sorry, Sam – it's just that ... this whole thing is a little scary for me. Please ....be careful.

SAM

All right.

TRACY exits.

SAM (cont'd)

(calling after her)

I'll call you later.

Scene Fifteen

As SAM speaks, lights slowly go up on JESSICA Holly sitting on a settee. She is the stereotypical femme fatale.

SAM

(to audience)

She was appropriately named. Holly is an ornamental evergreen with toxic berries and spiny leaves. That described Jessica to a tee - lovely, bright, alluring - but I got the feeling that touching her would only leave me scratched and bleeding.

SAM approaches JESSICA.

SAM

Miss Holly?

JESSICA

Good afternoon, Mr. Chase. I'm glad I could work you into my schedule.

SAM

Pretty busy, huh?

JESSICA

What is that I can do for you? Who did you say you were with?

SAM

Umm...Megasoft – we're a game designer, you know...computer games, video games. I just wanted to ask a couple questions...about Christmas carols.

JESSICA

Then you've come to the right place.

SAM (cont'd)

We're looking for someone who can consult for us – specifically on ...Christmas carols.

JESSICA

I believe you've struck a chord.

SAM

I was ....ummm... ....well, here's the deal – we're developing a game that allows players to play Christmas songs – kind of a virtual bell choir kind of thing. We have the programming worked out, but we need some one – an expert – to help us select the carols. I thought maybe-

JESSICA

I'd be happy to consult, but it would have to be after the holiday season, of course. Right now, I don't have the time.

SAM

Pretty busy, huh?

JESSICA

This is our biggest year ever, and I'm unexpectedly under-staffed.

SAM and JESSICA stare at one another as the sexual tension builds and then JESSICA turns away smartly.

SAM

I'm assuming you can do this kind of job.

JESSICA

I'm an expert, Mr. Chase. I founded the Yule Time Singers fifteen years ago and we were an immediate hit, putting a cosmopolitan spin on what had become a stale, stagnant aspect of the traditional Christmas celebration.

SAM

So I hear.

JESSICA

We've taken the spotlight in the caroling industry. We're Seattle's harbingers of Christmas, in fact other than Norman's group no one has been able to keep up with us.

SAM

Norman?

JESSICA

Norman Ivy— founder of the Olde Towne Carolers. That's Seattle's oldest caroling group. Norman runs a tight ship, but his tastes are completely out-dated, almost Neanderthal.

SAM

That's funny, I heard the Olde Towne Carolers are much better than your group.

JESSICA

I beg your pardon?

SAM

Word is that you are somewhat inferior to them.

JESSICA

Mr. Chase! Where are your manners?

SAM

I keep them in my glove compartment, next to my devilish charm.

JESSICA

Norman Ivy is nothing but a pompous ass who's left an ugly stain on this industry and one day I'm going to drive him out of the caroling community completely.

SAM

Sounds like a good business plan. Unless some one beats you to it.

JESSICA

What do you mean?

SAM

You know... the recent Christmas caroler slayings.

JESSICA

Yes – it’s just horrible. I’ve lost my best quartet and an award-winning soprano. Not to mention the jump in my insurance rates.

SAM

Any idea who’s behind it?

JESSICA

I can only guess that it’s an attempt to remove the top performers, in order to gain a more prominent share of the market. I’m having a hard time convincing my singers that they’re safe out there.

SAM

(staring deep into her eyes)

Are they?

JESSICA

(dreamily returning his gaze)

I can only hope.

SAM

(breaking it off)

So is it just your group that’s been targeted...or are there others?

JESSICA

Well, I believe the Olde Towne Carolers lost a few singers as well. And then there was one teenager, an alto who belonged to a group from Lynnwood.

SAM

Oh?

JESSICA

She was crushed by a Fedex truck in Pike Place Market.

SAM

That’s tragic.

JESSICA

Possibly. The little girl was tone deaf – I prefer to think of it as a mercy killing.

SAM

So what are you doing about...this whole thing?

JESSICA

What can I do? Someone is out to put an end to caroling – trying to destroy Christmas. First it was the Moral Majority, then the Eco-terrorists, and now this! But we dare not turn our backs on Christmas. To stop our caroling would be to admit full defeat in the face of this maniacal crusade.

SAM

That's quite the risk you're taking, Miss Holly.

JESSICA

Please, Mr. Chase, call me "Jessica."

SAM

Then I guess you should call me "Sam."

JESSICA

I will.....Sam.

SAM

I was wondering....Jessica... with respect to our computer game, do you think we would improve the game's ratings by including some more obscure Christmas songs?

JESSICA

Like the Portuguese "A criança de Christ é carregada?"

SAM

Maybe.

JESSICA

Or the Dutch hymn "Een ster glanst over het hoofd van de baby?"

SAM

How about...the Christmas Hymn of Malta?

JESSICA

(all ears)

What do you know of it?

SAM

Just wondered.

JESSICA

Do you have a copy of the Hymn, Mr. Chase?

SAM  
Sam.

JESSICA  
Do you?

SAM  
Doesn't everybody?

JESSICA  
Sam, do you have the Christmas Hymn of Malta?

SAM  
Would it be to your advantage, as a caroling organization, to have it?

JESSICA  
There is nothing - absolutely nothing - that could reshape the industry like the presence of the Christmas Hymn of Malta. It is considered to be the ultimate Christmas carol, the most beautiful holiday melody ever written. Most singers would give up a full octave for the chance to sing it just once. It is....the Holy Grail of the Christmas caroler.

SAM  
Wow. And how much do you think this song ...might be worth?

JESSICA  
What? You can't stick a price tag on Michaelangelo's "David." You can't put in a real estate listing for Great Wall of China.

SAM  
A lot of people would want to get a copy of this hymn, wouldn't they?

JESSICA  
Can you get it for me?

SAM  
Jessica, I really can't-

JESSICA  
(turning on the seduction)  
Because if you did, I can certainly make it worth your while.

SAM  
Really, I-

JESSICA

(turning on the seductress again)

Can you imagine what it would be like to hear that carol? I'd sing it for you myself.

SAM

Actually –

JESSICA

(sensually)

It would have the most romantic melody.... With intriguing intervals that rise and fall over a pulsing ostinato -

SAM is becoming aroused.

JESSICA (cont'd)

(very sultry)

The harmonic progression building steadily towards that final cadence.....as the music crescendos into the last powerful climax.

SAM and JESSICA stare into each other's eyes for a moment of sexual tension.

SAM

(pause)

We are talking about music here, aren't we?

PART TIME enters.

PART TIME

(interrupting)

Sam....

JESSICA breaks away in surprise.

PART TIME (cont'd)

I came over to see how you were doing. Goldie finished up her talks with New York.

SAM

Right. Umm, Jessica... did you happen to receive a box of sheet music in the mail...maybe a red or green box?

JESSICA

....No.....why would I...?



SAM

Sorry, I must have gotten it mixed up with some other computer game. I'd better get going.

JESSICA

Sam. What about the Hymn?

SAM

Well, I need to get the final word from Goldie. She was-

JESSICA

Goldie? Goldie King?

SAM

Yes.

JESSICA

If Goldie King is here, then you must have something monumental.

PART TIME

We'd better be going.

JESSICA

Sam! If you can get the Hymn for me, I'll...do anything. Name your price – it's yours.

SAM

Sure, Jessica. I'll be in touch.

JESSICA

But whatever you do...please don't let Norman Ivy find out about this.

SAM

Right. I'll call you when I -

JESSICA

Don't bother calling, just drop in...any time of day...or night.

SAM turns to go.

JESSICA (cont'd)

Remember, Sam – anything. Anything at all.

SAM and PART TIME exit. Blackout.

## Scene Sixteen

Lights up on SAM and TRACY at the coffee shop.

SAM

She really wants the Hymn.

TRACY

Maybe she thinks Lindsay found it and that somehow you've got it now.

SAM

Could be. But it doesn't seem likely she would have killed Lindsay, only to turn up empty handed.

TRACY

Maybe she just found out about this competition thing and tried to snatch up the Hymn.

SAM

What about this guy – Norman Ivy?

TRACY

I don't know him.

PART TIME enters and approaches SAM.

PART TIME

Trouble, Sam.

FELDMAN enters.

FELDMAN

Hello, Mr. Chase.

SAM

Detective.

FELDMAN

(handing him an envelope)

This is for you. I've had a little complaint from Nathan Nicholas.

SAM

(opens envelope)

The kazoo player?

(peruses letter)

A restraining order?

FELDMAN

You'll have to keep your distance from him until the court date.

SAM

Any word on the Caroler murders?

FELDMAN

Well, actually, we've figured out how to stop that.

PART TIME

Really?

FELDMAN

We got the City Council to pass a new noise ordinance. No more explosions, no more gunfire – 'cause if they do – bang - \$65 fine!

FELDMAN exits. Blackout.

#### Scene Seventeen

Lights up on a CAROLER who is disguised as a Christmas tree. Two CAROLERS stand in front of the tree, singing tentatively as though they're expecting the worst.

CAROLERS

(singing)

WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS;  
 WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS;  
 WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.  
 GOOD TIDINGS WE BRING TO YOU AND YOUR KIN;  
 GOOD TIDINGS FOR CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

The Christmas tree CAROLER strangles CAROLERS with a garland. Lights fade out as CAROLERS collapse on the floor.

#### Scene Eighteen

Lights up on NORMAN Ivy pouring a cup of coffee behind a desk with a chair next to it. SAM enters.

SAM

Mr. Ivy?

NORMAN  
Please have a seat, Mr. Chase.

SAM  
(sitting)  
Thanks.

NORMAN  
What do you like in your coffee?

SAM  
More coffee.

NORMAN  
We begin well, sir.

NORMAN passes a cup to SAM.

NORMAN (cont'd)  
(pouring coffee)  
I distrust a man who fills his cup with frivolity.

NORMAN pours his own coffee, filling it  
with milk and sugar.

NORMAN (cont'd)  
Hot black coffee is the drink of a decisive, straightforward man.  
(adding a dollop of whipped cream)  
I understand you wanted to talk to me. Tell me, Mr. Chase, are you a tight lipped  
individual?

SAM  
Not me – I'm a regular chatterbox.

NORMAN  
Even better. I dislike having to extract conversation from a man. I prefer to let it flow  
naturally, which only comes from a natural affinity towards self-expression.

SAM  
If you say so.

NORMAN  
I enjoy a good conversation, Mr. Chase. I'm a man who likes to talk and likes to listen -  
primarily to myself talking. I have an ear for conversation and take great joy in the  
melody of my own voice.

SAM

I can tell.

NORMAN

And what topic of conversation brings you to my doorstep this afternoon, Mr. Chase?  
How may I indulge you?

SAM

How about the Christmas Hymn of Malta?

NORMAN

Amazing. This is the moment when I would normally encourage you to get to the point and stop beating around the bush. I see, however, that you've dispensed with this formality by dropping the proverbial bomb right in my lap. Why do you wish to discuss the Hymn of Malta?

SAM

It seems to be driving a lot of local events lately.

NORMAN

Like?

SAM

Like a dozen or so murders.

NORMAN

You refer, no doubt, to the recent tragedies in the caroling community.

SAM

I assume it's been bad for your business.

NORMAN

I've lost two of my finest caroling teams to this madness.....but what makes you think that this is related to the Hymn of Malta?

SAM

I expected you to tell me. After all, you're the one who likes to listen to your own voice.

NORMAN

Your manners leave something to be desired.

SAM

Actually my real manners are in the shop – these are just on loan until Friday.

NORMAN

Mr. Chase, who do you represent in this matter?

SAM

That depends.

NORMAN

Depends on what? Are you representing the Seattle news media?

SAM

Hardly.

NORMAN

Are you representing the Yule Time Singers?

SAM

Maybe.

NORMAN

How about the Jingle Bells?

SAM

The what?

NORMAN

You disappoint me, Mr. Chase. I would have expected you to know about them.

SAM

Tell me about the Jingle Bells.

NORMAN

(annoyed)

The Jingle Bells are a fourth rate caroling organization, working on the outskirts of the established caroling industry. They've been trying to move into my territory for years, but they're unpolished, inexperienced, and have a strange propensity toward baroque vocal arrangements.

SAM

Okay, then I don't represent the Jingle Bells.

NORMAN

Very judicious of you. Whom do you represent?

SAM

Maybe I just represent myself.

NORMAN

Charming answer. What do you know about the Christmas Hymn of Malta?

SAM  
I know it's worth a lot of dough.

NORMAN  
And?

SAM  
I know it's sought after by carolers all over the world.

NORMAN  
And?

SAM  
I know it sounds best in the key of B.

NORMAN  
(pause, annoyed)  
Actually, it sounds better in E flat.  
(pause)  
What is it you want to know, Mr. Chase?

SAM  
How much you're willing to pay for it.

NORMAN  
You have the Hymn?

SAM  
Maybe I do, maybe I don't.

NORMAN  
Well, if you did have the Hymn, may I assume you'd be able to provide it to me?

SAM  
That's a good assumption.

NORMAN  
Do you plan on approaching anyone else about this?

SAM  
Maybe I do, maybe I don't.

NORMAN  
What about Jessica Holly?

SAM

What about her?

NORMAN

Do you anticipate offering the Hymn to her?

SAM

Maybe I do, maybe I-

NORMAN

(cutting him off)

Please - don't say that again.

How much did she offer you, Mr. Chase.....or did she even name a price?

(getting no response, then chuckling)

Then I'm certain she has no idea of its value. Do you know what that means, Mr. Chase?

SAM

Maybe I-

NORMAN glares at SAM.

SAM (cont'd)

(as if scolded)

.....Maybe.

NORMAN

The truth is, Mr. Chase, that no one alive knows the value of this relic. No one ...except me. I am the only one.

SAM

Then why don't you tell me, and that'll make it two.

NORMAN

You have a strong grasp of mathematics, Mr. Chase. I admire that. In 1539, Charles V presented the Island of Malta as a gift to the Knights of Rhodes. In appreciation, the Knights proposed a gift for the Emperor, by commissioning a composer named Melatine Tormaysius to write the most beautiful Christmas Hymn ever. After a year of rehearsal, the choir sailed to Spain to perform for Charles, but do you know what happened?

SAM

The suspense is killing me.

NORMAN

The choir never arrived. The ship was intercepted by pirates, and all was lost.



SAM

And that's just one more reason why you should always back up your hard drive.

NORMAN

How did you get your hands on the Hymn, Mr. Chase?

SAM

It was a Christmas present.....from my ex-wife.

NORMAN

(putting two and two together)

Lindsay Chase..... my condolences. But .....how can you be certain that you've uncovered the genuine Christmas Hymn of Malta?

SAM

Ever heard of Frankie King?

NORMAN

Of course.

SAM

Frankie's crew is working on it now. Get the money together, Mr. Ivy, I'll call you, if I decide to sell the Hymn.

NORMAN

You aren't certain?

SAM

I have one more stop to make – the Jingle Bells.

NORMAN

Oh, please, Mr. Chase – they don't have any money. They could never afford it, even if they knew what it was.

SAM

Who did you say is in charge of that group?

NORMAN

I don't know.....some silly woman.

SAM

A woman?

NORMAN

She used to belong to the Yule Time Singers – then when she quit, she tried to sell me Jessica's musical arrangements.

SAM  
And you bought them?

NORMAN  
Of course.

SAM  
That doesn't sound ethical.

NORMAN  
This is business, Mr. Chase. Caroling and ethics are mutually exclusive.

SAM  
Was it worth it?

NORMAN  
Hardly. Jessica's arrangements are greatly inferior to mine.

SAM  
Well, thanks, Ivy– I'll get back to you.

NORMAN  
Mr. Chase! What ever you do – don't give it to Jessica Holly. She would only destroy such a beautiful piece of music, and I can outbid any of the competition.

SAM  
Lucky for you – I sell to the highest bidder.

SAM exits. Blackout.

#### Scene Nineteen

Lights up on TRACY sitting at coffee shop table. SAM enters.

SAM  
Has Goldie called yet?

TRACY  
No.

SAM  
How much longer can she take?

TRACY  
I guess she's more thorough than her sister Myrna.

SAM

I don't think Holly or Ivy know about the boxes of music.

TRACY

But I would have thought they were behind it. Who else could it be?

SAM

Norman Ivy seems to think there may be another group mixed up in this – some group called the Jingle Bells. Know anything about them?

TRACY

No. You sure are brave, Sam...to do all this.

SAM

No big deal.

TRACY

I think it will be exciting to discover the Christmas Hymn of Malta.

SAM

I just want to clear up this stuff surrounding Lindsay's death.

TRACY

(pause)

Sam? do you think that....maybe after this is over...that we could.....

SAM

(pause, assuring himself of what she's hinting at)

.... Sure. What do you think of Vegas?

TRACY

I've never been.

SAM

I think you'd like it.

PART TIME enters.

PART TIME

(waiting a moment, then interrupting by clearing her throat)

Goldie's back.

SAM and TRACY break apart at the interruption. GOLDIE enters.

GOLDIE

Well, I think I have something for you now.

SAM

Great.

GOLDIE

I don't expect you to share my excitement – I just hope you can understand the relevance of my findings. The fact is, I've spent my entire professional life hoping for a moment such as this.

SAM

Is there a way we could delay your findings? It may help clear up the matter with my ex-wife's death.

GOLDIE

Trust me, Mr. Chase - we will take the utmost care in making an announcement. If anything went wrong, Frankie would definitely be upset.

SOUND: Cell phone ringing.

GOLDIE (cont'd)

Oh, just a minute – I need to take this.

(answering)

Yes, Frankie?

GOLDIE walks off to get some privacy while SAM discusses the matter with TRACY and PART TIME.

PART TIME

So...you don't want Goldie to make an announcement?

GOLDIE

Frankie, I'm certain.....Without any question.....absolutely no uncertainty.....beyond a shadow of a doubt, this is -

A giant Christmas tree from off stage falls over and crushes GOLDIE. PART TIME checks GOLDIE's pulse.

PART TIME

She's dead.

SAM

I think Frankie is definitely going to be upset.

Blackout. End of Act I

To read the second act, please write [dave@drichardtucker.com](mailto:dave@drichardtucker.com)