

## SCENE ONE

[Curtains open. The set presents a modern, comfortable living area decorated for the Christmas season. A couch and a large armchair sit in Center Stage facing the audience, with a side table between them and a waste basket on the floor. On the back wall hangs a sign that reads *The Three Bees Inn & Bookshop*. The audience can vaguely see snow through a window in the wall Upstage Right. Roughly in the center of the back wall stands an open doorway that leads to an unseen foyer and front door. Exiting Stage Left leads characters to an offstage kitchen and laundry room, and exiting Stage Right leads them to the rest of the house, where they would find the stairway to guests' rooms above and the bookstore in the back.]

**Cynthia:** *[Her face appears outside at the window, framed by a scarf wrapped around her head. She peers into the room and raps on the window.]* Bethany? *[knocks again]* Bethany, baby? Hello? *[pauses, looking around, and Bethany enters Stage Left, carrying a laundry basket full of unfolded sheets]* Bethany!

**Bethany:** *[gasps and almost jumps in surprise, seeing Cynthia]* Mom! You scared me! What— *[Cynthia is gesturing and talking unintelligibly.]* Hang on, come to the door! *[Cynthia nods and disappears. Bethany quickly drops her basket on the couch, glancing at her watch, then halts suddenly, seeing that the slipcover of the armchair is askew and a lamp on the table is crooked. She fixes the slipcover and lampshade, then exits quickly through the central doorway, and a moment later we hear the front door open offstage - DOOR OPEN.]*

**Cynthia:** *[just out of sight]* Ooh, it's nice and warm in here. *[DOOR CLOSE]*

**Bethany:** It was unlocked, Mom, why didn't you just come in? *[reentering the room, with Cynthia]*

**Cynthia:** I didn't want to startle you, sweetheart. *[taking off her coat and headscarf]* I could just see you coming down the stairs and finding me in the chair there and having a heart attack. *[adjusts the lampshade that Bethany already straightened, which slightly annoys Bethany]*

**Bethany:** The face in the window was a bit startling. What's up? Why didn't you call?

**Cynthia:** Well...I wasn't at home, so I couldn't call you, actually—

**Bethany:** *[interrupts]* You need a cell phone, Mom....

**Cynthia:** —and anyway, taking the time to call first would have been wasteful, I thought. You know your father always wanted us to be efficient in everything.

**Bethany:** Mm-hm. *[picking up her laundry basket, feeling puzzled and trying to figure out her mother]* So...is there something specific you need, or did you just want to chat...?

**Cynthia:** Oh, um— *[glances around, goes and sits down on the couch]* How are you today, dear?

**Bethany:** *[puzzled]* Fine...thank you. And you?

**Cynthia:** Doing very well. Do you have guests booked for tonight?

**Bethany:** Yes, as a matter of fact—

**Cynthia:** For several nights?

**Bethany:** *[shifting restlessly]* Yes, I've got a family coming in for the week, so really I should be—

**Cynthia:** *[looking slightly concerned]* Bethany, baby, have you been eating your green leafy vegetables?

**Bethany:** *[sighs, trying not to be impatient]* Yes, Mom.

**Cynthia:** *[standing up and moving closer to Bethany]* And milk, are you getting enough vitamin D? It's so important to drink plenty of milk in the winter months especially, when we get less daylight.

**Bethany:** Yep, I'm definitely drinking enough milk.

**Cynthia:** Speaking of winter, do you have enough layers on right now? You need to be wearing woolen leggings and socks at all times—

**Bethany:** Momma. I'm thirty-one.

**Cynthia:** Only for another month! I'll have to buy a lot of candles for your cake this time.

**Bethany:** No, I meant...I've been through a few winters! *[Cynthia looks at her, perplexed and unsure what to say. Bethany sighs.]* I'm sorry, look— Would you like to help me fold these?

**Cynthia:** *[brightening]* I'd love to, dear!

**Bethany:** Great, thanks. *[puts her laundry basket on the floor, sits with Cynthia on the couch, and begins to fold one of the bedsheets with Cynthia's help]* So. I don't think you ever told me why you came.

**Cynthia:** Oh. *[clears throat]* If you're putting these sheets away, does that mean you have a bed free?

**Bethany:** *[slowly, confused]* No, it just means I washed the sheets my guests used last night.

**Cynthia:** But those folks are gone now?

**Bethany:** Yes....

**Cynthia:** So that room's free?

**Bethany:** No, I've made it up for the family coming in tonight, for the parents.

**Cynthia:** Oh phooey. Do the kids take both the other rooms?

**Bethany:** *[shaking her head]* No, just one child.

**Cynthia:** Oh! So there *is* a room free?

**Bethany:** Yeah, one.

**Cynthia:** *[elated]* Why didn't you say so at first, baby?

**Luke:** *[Offstage Right]* Beth?

**Bethany:** Oh, in here, Luke!

**Luke:** *[enters Stage Right a moment later]* Have you seen my— *[smiles, seeing Cynthia]* Oh hi, mom!

**Cynthia:** *[pleasantly]* Hello, son.

**Luke:** *[cheerfully]* How's the old girl doing?

**Cynthia:** *[looks at him reproachfully over her glasses]* Son, I am not an old girl. I'm an old woman. Not all that old either. Luke, baby, we've talked about this.

**Luke:** *[raising an eyebrow]* I'm sorry. Was that the time we also talked about "Luke, baby"?

**Cynthia:** Oh yes, I'm sorry, baby, I forgot.

**Luke:** *[bites his tongue]* Uh-huh.

**Bethany:** Okay but, Momma, why were you hoping a room would be free?

**Luke:** *[before Cynthia can answer]* Oh, real quick, Beth—I've got two questions for you. Just wondering, what are lunch plans?

**Bethany:** *[sighing]* I'm sorry, I've been cleaning all morning and haven't even thought about lunch.

Let's just.... *[glances at Cynthia, then cups a hand beside her mouth and whispers]* Let's get out a frozen pizza. *[tries to indicate pizza by shaping a circle in the air with her hands and biting into an imaginary pizza slice, until Cynthia glances at her, and she immediately drops her hands and smiles awkwardly.]*

**Luke:** *[confused]* Okay, that...sounds good. Mom, you staying for lunch? *[Bethany silently mouths "no!" to him.]*

**Cynthia:** Maybe. Depends on what you're having.

**Luke:** *[Bethany is anxiously shaking her head at him, but he doesn't realize in time.]* Frozen...pizza?

**Cynthia:** *[gasps, appalled]* Pizza! Frozen pizza! I thought you looked unhealthy, Bethany, and now I know why. And you're feeding it to your brother too?

**Bethany:** Mom, it's not—

**Cynthia:** I swear, your skin looks yellowish, baby. *[to Luke]* Doesn't it have a yellow—oh, honey, you've got it too! Almost sallow, I think. Do you know what sallow means?

**Luke:** Yes, Mom.

**Cynthia:** It's like a dark yellow, almost brownish, color of the skin—and a sure sign of ill health.

**Luke:** Yes, Mom.

**Cynthia:** I just can't believe it's come to this—frozen pizza, indeed!—why, I raised you children eating zucchini and bananas and whole wheat bread, and now—

**Bethany:** Mom, it doesn't happen often! We're just in a rush today.

**Cynthia:** Do you need me to cook you two a proper meal?

**Bethany:** No, really, it's fine! We usually eat green vegetables three meals a day!

**Luke:** *[shrugs]* Two meals.

**Bethany:** *[thinks for a second]* Two meals. It's not a big deal.

**Cynthia:** Well. I still just—

**Bethany:** *[quickly]* Um, what was your other question, Luke? You said you had two for me.

**Luke:** Oh! Yes, uh...you haven't happened to see my Bible lately, have you? It's almost embarrassing, I can't seem to find it anywhere—

**Cynthia:** *[appalled]* You lost your Bible?

**Luke:** *[reaching for his phone in his pocket]* Just my hard copy, I mean. I have my phone—

**Cynthia:** My son doesn't have a Bible! And they eat frozen pizza! My children are pagans!

**Luke:** *[holding out his phone]* Mom, I have a Bible! I've got apps on my phone with all kinds of study tools and different versions. I can read it anywhere, anytime.

**Cynthia:** Oh, baby, that just doesn't seem right—

**Bethany:** It's really convenient, Mom. If you had a cell phone, maybe you would understand—

**Cynthia:** Ohh no, absolutely not. *[stiffening, stands up, holding her chin up]* I don't have to take impertinence. I think I might just go home. *[moves toward the open doorway]*

**Bethany:** Momma....

**Luke:** You're sure you won't stay for lunch?

**Cynthia:** I should think not! Frozen pizza, indeed. *[takes another step or two, but halts at the doorway, pausing in expectant silence for a moment]* Of course, nobody is interested in why I came in the first place....

**Bethany:** *[dryly]* I think I asked you three times, Mom.

**Cynthia:** Well...the subject kept changing.

**Bethany:** *[sighs]* So, why *did* you come? Why the interest in our room reservations?

**Cynthia:** *[eyes sparkling]* You really want to know?

**Bethany:** *[still feeling impatient, but trying to be patient]* We want to know!

**Cynthia:** *[eagerly hurries over and sits back down on the couch, motioning Luke and Bethany close on either side of her]* I have the most sensational piece of news.

**Bethany:** *[slightly interested, in spite of herself]* Really?

**Cynthia:** Oh yes, baby, you won't believe me when I tell you. But I promise you it's true: I got it straight from Janet Ingram herself.

**Luke:** *[dryly]* Ah, of course. The source of all superior gossip.

**Cynthia:** Exactly. I ran into her in Bristol's this morning—her daughter's in town too and I met her—and they were full of the news. But still, I know you won't believe me. This is just *too* sensational.

**Bethany:** What is it?

**Cynthia:** *[smiling]* You really want to know, don't you?

**Bethany:** *[throws her hands up]* No, okay? I have work to do and would just as soon leave and clean the bathrooms at this point! *[stands to leave]*

**Cynthia:** *[quickly]* Alright! Alright, I'll tell you. *[She pats the couch, and Bethany sits back down. Cynthia leans forward to share her gossip]* I have it on Janet's impeccable authority—  
*[DOORBELL. Bethany closes her eyes, exasperated.]*

**Luke:** I'll get it. *[He exits through doorway. DOOR OPEN. Luke speaks offstage]* Hello? *[with a note of surprise in his voice]* Oh, hello, Janet. *[Cynthia and Bethany look at each other in surprise and rise to their feet.]*

**Janet:** *[offstage, speaking briskly]* Good morning.

**Luke:** Uh, won't you ladies come in?

**Janet:** *[already appearing in the open doorway]* Thank you, we will. *[DOOR CLOSE. Janet enters, followed by Heather, Riley, and finally Luke. The ladies have on coats and other winter gear.]*

**Bethany:** *[trying to be cheerful]* Janet, hello!

**Janet:** *[in a businesslike manner]* Morning, Bethany, and again, Cynthia. Allow me to introduce my daughter, Heather—

**Heather:** *[enthusiastically shaking hands with Bethany]* Oh, it's *such* a pleasure! I met your dear mother this morning and she told me all about you two!

**Janet:** —and Riley, my granddaughter.

**Heather:** *[bundling Riley forward]* Say hello, Riley!

**Riley:** *[cheerfully, shaking Bethany's hand]* Hello!

**Heather:** *[pulls Riley back]* Very good!

**Bethany:** Well, what a surprise!

**Heather:** Mother talks about your family so often, we just thought we *had* to come by and meet you.

**Janet:** Indeed. But more to the point—

**Heather:** Have you heard the news? *[Cynthia perks up, afraid Heather is about to steal her thunder.]*

**Janet:** You, Bethany Tanner, are a favored young woman. Dominic Caruso is coming to town!

**Cynthia:** *[dismayed]* Janet!

**Janet:** What?

**Cynthia:** I was just about to tell them that!

**Heather:** Oh no!

**Luke:** *[slightly amused]* Thunder stolen.

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**End of script preview.**