

Dramatis Personae:

Cliff, 40s, sharp-dressed deadbeat, accent neutral
Kenny, bartender, thinks he's Irish, he just might be
Denise, a regrettable bar crone of indeterminate age
Father Tim, priest to a Dominican and Irish parrish
The Caliph, a bearded Muslim holy man in sandals

The Scene

A New York City dive bar with several unused stools. Cliff is on one, nursing a bourbon low-ball. He alternates between gazing around and mucking with his phone. Kenny is doing bartender shit. Instrumental of "The 12 Days of Christmas" tinkles along in the background.

CLIFF

You still got the cat? I guess the cat's gone after ten years. But, you still got the cat?

KENNY

Nah, I don't know about the cat. The cat was gone before I got here.

CLIFF

Place really looks the same though. I know I keep saying that, but it really looks the same.

KENNY

Yeah. I guess we like it this way.

CLIFF

Well, I like it too.

KENNY

So, you seem to know the place. What brings you back?

CLIFF

I said to myself, it's Christmas time and I should get home to New York.

KENNY

You got a home here? Here's your home?

CLIFF

No.

KENNY

Okay.

CLIFF

I used to live down the street.

KENNY

Unh-huh.

CLIFF

Y're one of the few Irish bars left in the area. I walked past the Liffey. That's a gastropub. The Eyes is a pet food shop. And the Brigade, it's, uh, emergency care center, which doesn't make much sense with the hospital so close.

KENNY

Yeah, a lot can change.

CLIFF

And, the Hall isn't even there anymore. That whole building is gone.

KENNY

O'Shaunessey's is a Dominican place now. Some Spanish name.

CLIFF

An island of islanders.

KENNY

How do you reckon that? What's that mean?

CLIFF

Well, they're all here. Dominicans. Puerto Ricans. Cubans... The Irish.

KENNY

What about the blacks?

CLIFF

(Twirling a globe in his head.)

Madagascar. Canary Islands. Haiti. It's possible. Right here. Manhattan, even. Harlem World, right?

KENNY

(Cliff's not Kenny's kind of racist)
I'm gonna put this American football game on.

Up and under sound effects of
muffled crowds and sportscasters.

CLIFF

Yeah, you do that.

KENNY

You're on your phone an awful lot. You checking up your fantasy teams like?

CLIFF

Nah, our league ended last week. I got sixth. Out of twelve teams. Injuries.

Enter Denise, fresh from the
restroom and sorta dancing. The
music is now a more swinging carol.

KENNY

I don't play it. I don't even get it.

CLIFF

You might when you're older.

KENNY

And how's that now?

CLIFF

Well, I don't know if you're gonna get it. But, you might play it when you're older.

DENISE

What are you two suppositories getting so philosophical over?

KENNY

(tapping on Denise's Bud Light bottle)
Another here, Denise?

CLIFF

(To Denise)
Football.

DENISE

(assenting to Kenny)

Dallas Cowboys. That's my team. They're America's team. They won three Super Bowls in the 1990's. That's almost a ring for every finger. A woman notices facts like that.

CLIFF

I don't know about that.

DENISE

What don't you know about? The Dallas Cowboys? Fingers? Women?

CLIFF

I don't think the Cowboys won three Super Bowls in the 90s. And unless you're handicapped, you got eight fingers. So even if they did win three Super Bowls—and I am not saying they did—that's nowhere near a ring for every finger. I'll grant you: you know more about women than I do.

KENNY

Well just look it up on that phone you can't put down.

CLIFF

I'm not doing that.

KENNY

Well then I'm with her; them Dallas Cowboys have three Supper Balls.

Everyone goes into their respective headspace.

CLIFF

Either of you ever owned a bird?

KENNY

What's with all your crazy questions? You some kind of veterinarian or animalologist?

CLIFF

Hunh? How's that a crazy question? We just listened to a song about a hundred-plus fuckin' birds.

DENISE

This song's about Christmas, dum-dum.

CLIFF

No, not this song! I know this song is about Christmas. Shit, it's Christmastime. They're all about Christmas. The last song. That was "The 12 Days of Christmas." It's got 12 partridges and 22 turtledoves in it. It's a completely topical question.

KENNY

Hold it right there. You think the hero of that song is returning with more of the gifts that he gave on the previous day? The same ones, over and over?

CLIFF

Absolutely. It's in the lyrics.

KENNY

You are right mental.

Enter Father Tim. He sits down at the bar, leaving an empty stool beside him. Kenny pours him something in a pony glass.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Padre.

Father Tim salaams to Kenny.

CLIFF

It's all there in the song. All you have to do is get to the second stanza.

(fighting to sing against the music that is playing behind him.)

"On the second day of Christmas, my true love gave to me two turtledoves AND a partridge in a pear tree."

KENNY

And you believe everything you hear no matter how daft it sounds?

DENISE

I'll tell you something unbelievable. I had Samantha Mathis's tongue in my mouth.

KENNY

Who's that? Is she from the neighborhood?

CLIFF

The actress?

DENISE

Oh, somebody does know something about women, after all. Yeah, I was a junior at Marist. Me and my friends, we went to our bar in Poughkeepsie and Ms. Mathis was there, shooting some TV thing in the area. She was three sheets to the wind. She strolls up to me as cool as the breeze and tells me something about the electricity guy in her crew dared her to kiss someone in the bar. And she chose me. Thought I was gonna get some little movie star stage kiss, but she slipped me the tongue.

CLIFF

Why's that unbelievable?

KENNY

It's unbelievable to think that some Christmas crazy is daily dragging his true love a partridge-infested pear orchard, that's for sure.

DENISE

Nah...it's romantic. I especially like how at the end of the song there's enough rings for both the lovers' fingers and toes. Nothing left to chance...

CLIFF

Now how do you count that? Because 7 times 5, that's 35.

Denise throws him a pitying look. Cliff's need to be right is powered by bulldozer; he taps his fingers until he comes to the realization that there would in fact be 40 rings at the end of the song. Kenny refills Cliff's glass. More headspace.

CLIFF

So, what did you study at Marist?

DENISE

Accounting.

CLIFF

Beautiful country up there.

DENISE

Yeah, I really wanted to go off for school. Some real party place, like Hawaii or Santa Cruz. But Ma was convinced something terrible would happen to me. As if something terrible wasn't gonna happen right here. So, my girlfriends and I looked at the Metro North map. I applied to

almost every school by those trains. Nearly everybody who went there was some kinda shitbag. But...Yeah, the landscape was nice.

CLIFF

And, you got to French Samantha Mathis.

DENISE

Oh, she Frenched me, numbnuts.

CLIFF

Even better.

(attempting warmth)

So, you were some sort of business math vixen?

KENNY

Vixen? Really? You are something else, Animal Kingdom. Why doncha tell her how you want to dangle your toy mouse in front of her little kitty?

CLIFF

(to Kenny)

What is your problem?

DENISE

Yeah, Kenny, there's a motherfuckin' man of the cloth sitting just four feet away from that shit sandwich you call a face.

CLIFF

(to Denise)

Say, do you remember the cat they used to keep at the bar?

DENISE

Oh yeah. Blacksie. He died.

CLIFF

Blacks. That was his name. Sweet cat.

DENISE

Not for rodents, he wasn't. He was a goddamned hitman.

CLIFF

...Not a creature was stirring...

(He spins his swizzle around and drains his drink, gestures at Kenny)

Is that reference fucking topical enough for you?

(Kenny doesn't get this reference, but gives Cliff a perfunctory refill)

KENNY

Look, boyo, I got no problem with you turning this place into your own personal time machine, but we are gonna have some rules of order, okay? Or, me and the padre are gonna personally remove you from this Garden of Eden. And you will know mortality and shame.

Cliff's phone lights up and vibrates the counter. He studies the name, and it's as if all time freezes. Cliff swipes it on and tries to take the call despite the Christmas carols rattling around. He cups his hand over the mic.

CLIFF

(into phone)

Well, are you ready to be sensible now? OK. I'm sorry. No, you're right. That wasn't very nice. I'm just under a lot of stress now. Can you understand that? It seemed like we had everything sorted out, and then it just blew up in my face. Ka-Blooey! Yes, I most certainly do take responsibility for things. The things I'm responsible for. I did too get him a present this year. It was Legos. And those aren't cheap. Well, then, put him on the phone and he can tell me that himself. What do you mean it's after midnight?

(to Kenny)

Can you lower this stupid music? I'm trying to have a conversation.

(Kenny doesn't move an inch. Cliff moves away from the bar.)

Look, I did everything I was supposed to do. I got this stupid AirBnB. And that wasn't cheap. And you factor in the airfare...well, it's a big deal for me too. It's a really big deal. No, I'm not mad at you. No, I'm not mad. Well, I *am* a little upset. But it has nothing to do with you two. I feel like an idiot even talking about it. A stupid idiot. No, it's big. It's the biggest dumb thing I've ever done. I lost a winning Powerball ticket. No, not a total winner. It was a four-flusher; we were off by one number. I am telling you. Can I tell you? You remember that spot on Broadway and Isham, where we used to get coffee and the Sunday Times? Then go sit in the park? Yeah, it is sentimental...that's not the only stupid part. I went there and bought that Powerball ticket. I put all our important numbers in there: 12, 20, 33, 36, 47, 52. Yesterday I did it. Well, you can go to the bodega tomorrow and see for yourself. I don't know! After taxes, maybe 600K... No, it was just the one ticket. Again, I am telling you. I woke up this morning and something just felt lucky, you know? That electricity in the air, and your arm hairs get up. Well, the dang Metrocard machine wasn't taking cards, so I went up to the window, like some dumb tourist. I'd tucked it into my wallet. What it? The ticket, the Powerball. I didn't expect to be dealing with cash, and these numbers are crazy. 31 dollars for a weeklong. What's wrong with 30? Can we have some common sense, people?

(glances at Kenny)

Aah, this music is just making me crazy. Anyway, I finally get a seat on the Q...cuz, I'm gonna transfer. So, I pull out that wad of bills and I'm getting them sorted to put back in my wallet. And it's not there. It's just not fucking there. I have no idea. Left it on the ledge. Got it mixed in with the payment. No idea.

(long pause)

No, you do that. Get some sleep. You took bites out of the cookies, right? Sloshed the milk? Okay. Yeah, I know tomorrow. Tomorrow's gonna be something special.

KENNY

(letting Cliff get back to his stool)

You can lie to your Christmas people like that? People that depend on ya and open their hearts to ya? I should flatten you on yer back, so you can't get off the ground. Cuz, you know what else ain't cheap? The past seven o' these moneybag whiskys.

DENISE

Oh, let him be, Kenny. It's just the saddest goddamned holiday.

(She moves her stool in such a way she can rest her head against Cliff's shoulder.)

Enter The Caliph, carrying two wrapped presents. He sees Father Tim, walks over to him, takes that seat.

THE CALIPH

(to Kenny)

Club soda, please.

(to Father Tim)

I am so sorry I'm late. Where is Rabbi Moishe?

Lights out. Up and out on a needle-drop of "God Rest Ye, Merry Gentleman".

End of Play