

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

Jose Victor Torres

Note: This play is based on the short story “Christmas Lights” by Jhoanna Lynn Cruz.

Characters:

Diana

Eva

Jay

(The time period is now. The setting is the city. Note: There are two apartment sets for Jay: the old one, and the new one where Scene 2 and 6 are played.)

Scene 1:

(The lights open onstage. The stage is sparse except for a small dining table in the middle with a table setting for two. There are two unlit Christmas candlesticks on the table. Diana enters carrying two wineglasses and sets them on the table. She is dressed in a long shirt for sleeping. She steps back, studies the arrangement then nods and lights the candles. Eva enters and stands on one side a few feet away from the table. She is dressed in her office attire. She is studying the table setting. Diana sees her and smiles.)

DIANA : Do you like it?

EVA : It’s nice, Diana.

(A brief silence.)

DIANA : Will you stay?

(Eva does not reply.)

DIANA : Eva? (pause) Stay. Please. Stay. (pause) It’s almost Christmas.

EVA : I have to go.

(Eva begins to leave.)

DIANA : (calls out) I'm sorry.

(Eva pauses and looks at Diana.)

EVA : If I could. (pause) Who wants to miss a Christmas dinner?

(The lights go on one part of the stage. Jay's apartment. There is a double bed with a naked man sleeping on it—Jay. Diana goes slowly to the bed, slips under the sheets but remains sitting up, looking at Eva.)

EVA : Do you really still need him in your life?

(Eva exits. Diana looks at Jay then lies down. The lights dim. After a few seconds, the tinny, sharp sound of an alarm clock can be heard. The lights go on. Diana sits up, startled. She looks around before realizing it's all a dream. The lights fade out.)

Scene 2

(The lights open onstage. Jay's new apartment. Jay is sitting at the dining table, drinking coffee. A cellphone on the table sounds a text tone. He picks it up, reads the message, puts the phone back down and goes back to drinking his coffee. Diana enters. She is dressed in her office uniform which is similar to Eva's. She is sleepy and sits down heavily on the chair across from Jay.)

DIANA : Coffee, please?

JAY : In the coffeemaker

DIANA : I didn't ask where it is. I asked *for* it.

JAY : Touchy.

(Jay stands up and pours some coffee into a mug for Diana. He hands the mug to her.)

DIANA : Thank you. You're sweet.

JAY : I know.
DIANA : That was just an expression.
JAY : That I know you meant.

(Diana does not reply. The cellphone sounds another text tone. Diana looks at the cellphone then returns to drinking her coffee. Jay looks at her.)

JAY : Someone has been texting you for a while.
DIANA : Let them text.
JAY : Could be your office.

(Diana shrugs. She takes a sip of her coffee.)

JAY : Slept well?
DIANA : No.
JAY : I thought so. You were tossing a lot in bed. I mean, after all that we did...
DIANA : Don't you have anything to eat here?
JAY : Leftovers.

(The cellphone sounds again. Diana doesn't pay any notice.)

DIANA : Like something for breakfast?
JAY : Raid the ref if you like. I didn't expect you to pass by last night nor to spend the night...

(Diana stands up and exits.)

JAY : ... but help yourself.

(Jay returns to his coffee. The cellphone sounds a text tone again. Jay just looks at the phone. There is a sound of rummaging in a refrigerator offstage.)

DIANA : (offstage) What do you keep here? Science experiments?
JAY : Told you.

(A pause.)

DIANA : (offstage) How old is this muffin?
JAY : That was... yesterday.

(Diana comes in eating the muffin.)

JAY : I think.
DIANA : (shrugs) It tastes ok.
JAY : Then it was probably from yesterday.
DIANA : (chews slowly) Chocolate chip. I thought you didn't like this.
JAY : I don't. That's why it's the only one left in the box.

(The cellphone sounds a text tone.)

JAY : Shit.
DIANA : I can turn it off if you like.
JAY : Why don't you?
DIANA : Ok, now I'm awake.
JAY : Good.
DIANA : And I have to go to work.
JAY : No, you don't.
DIANA : Why not?
JAY : It's a Saturday.
DIANA : Oh, (a pause and then a nervous laugh) How time flies....

(Diana grabs the cellphone and starts checking the messages. She stops to read some of the messages then goes through the list again.)

JAY : Diana. (pause) What's wrong?
DIANA : What do you mean?
JAY : What's wrong?
DIANA : Nothing. (pause) What makes you say that?
JAY : Well, just two days ago, you were telling me you needed space.
DIANA : I do need space.
JAY : After I asked you to marry me.

(Silence.)

JAY : I gave you that space. And now you appear at my door and decide to spend the night. (pause) Is something wrong? Or have you decided to come back?

(A long pause.)

DIANA : (softly) Hold me.

JAY : What?

DIANA : Hold me. (goes up to Jay) Hold me. (pause) Make love to me... (kisses Jay passionately) Make love to me, please.

(The two begin to kiss. Jay will start kissing Diana's neck and chest. Diana moans with pleasure. The lights dim on them. Eva enters and looks at them. She is holding a cellphone and is obviously the one texting Diana.)

EVA : (addressing the audience) Relationships like that are supposed to make your life complete. To make *you* complete. How you make them and handle them gives you that edge in creating what is supposed to be yours... All yours...

(Eva goes up to the two and begins to kiss and caress Diana. Jay stops his caressing and exits. The lights dim and change.)

Scene 3

(The lights open onstage. Eve and Diana's office. Nighttime. The two are in Eva's office cubicle. Eva and Diana continue their caressing, touching each other through their clothes. They continue their lovemaking until both climax. They separate, breathing heavily. Diana quickly stands up and pulls her skirt down as Eva buttons her blouse. Eva sits down on the chair and faces her computer. She stares at the computer screen for few minutes and taps a few keys. Diana stares at what Eva is doing and smiles.)

DIANA : Did you save your file?

EVA : Of course, I did.

DIANA : (looks at her watch) It's getting late.
EVA : I just have to finish this proposal. I would've finished it earlier if not for the interruption.
DIANA : Yeah, ok. Right. And who was the one who made the move?
EVA : (smiles) It was nice, really. Now let me finish.

(Diana goes up to Eva and kisses her. She then takes Eva's hand and sucks her fingers, then kisses Eva full on the lips. Eva moves away.)

EVA : Whoa, girl.
DIANA : Mmm... salty. Is that from me?
EVA : Keep this up and I'll not finish work.

(Diana sighs, straightens up, then walks to the window. She looks out and down the street. Eva returns to encoding.)

DIANA : One... two... three...
EVA : What are you doing?
DIANA : Four... five... six... cars.
EVA : From this floor?
DIANA : Why not? We're not that high. (pause) What do you do when you wait for me?
EVA : Count people.
DIANA : From this floor? At least cars are bigger.
EVA : But people are more interesting.

(A brief silence. Diana goes up to Eva and looks at what she's typing. Then she moves away and goes back to the window. She quietly stares out. Eva continues to type for several seconds before stopping.)

EVA : What?
DIANA : Hmm? What's what?
EVA : You're too quiet.
DIANA : First you don't like me counting. And now I'm too quiet.
EVA : What are you thinking?
DIANA : You first.
EVA : Huh?

DIANA : What are you thinking?
 EVA : I'm not.
 DIANA : Well, there's must be an explanation why you're still on the
 same line you
 stopped in when I "interrupted" you.
 EVA : (pauses then sighs) I give up. I'm shutting down.
 DIANA : That's unfair.
 EVA : What's unfair?
 DIANA : You didn't answer my question.
 EVA : What? What I'm thinking? Nothing. What were you
 thinking?
 DIANA : (pause) Don't you even wonder why you like women?

(Silence. The light goes on in one part of the stage. Jay enters. He watches the scene before him.)

EVA : (stares at Diana before leaning down and pulling out the
 computer plug
 with a hard jerk) Do men ever wonder why they like women? What is this?
 Post-coital angst?
 DIANA : No! I mean...
 EVA : Well, you can do better than that.
 DIANA : (goes up to Eva) I liked it.
 EVA : Ok. So, take me to dinner.
 DIANA : What? Are you serious?
 EVA : I *am* hungry.
 DIANA : And I am exhausted.
 EVA : I know... so, buy me dinner.
 DIANA : (laughs) Ok, for the excellent service. I'll just get my things.
 I'll meet you downstairs.
 EVA : Ok.

(Eva begins to fix her things. The lights dim slightly on her part of the stage. Diana goes to the other part of the stage where Jay is standing. She momentarily stops as the light changes.)

JAY : You know when I started having suspicions? It was

whenever you started talking about her. How you say her name. That certain tone. Like there was something special. Sure, she was your friend. But... (pause) I guess I was just using what we do when we work in the PR business. Instinct. Gut feel. And, yes. I had this gut feel.

Scene 4

(The lights open onstage. Jay's old apartment. The dining table is set for a dinner for two. Diana goes up to Jay and kisses him.)

DIANA : Happy anniversary, darling
JAY : Anniversary?
DIANA : Ok. Month-sary.
JAY : Six months
DIANA : Yes. I just like to say "anniversary" because it sounds mature.
JAY : "Mature"?
DIANA : Yes.
JAY : And "month-sary"?
DIANA : It sounds so... so college-ish
JAY : "College-ish"
DIANA : Yes.
JAY : You seem to have a word for everything.
DIANA : You know what I mean.
JAY : (smiles) Uhm... no.
DIANA : Never mind. (pause) Anyway, this is nice. What's for dinner?
JAY : Chicken Provençal.
DIANA : Your specialty.
JAY : And your favorite. I was deciding on steak but you being a vegetarian and
all.
DIANA : Semi. No red meat. And the reason it's my favorite, it's because it is the only thing you can decently cook.
JAY : (sarcastic) Haha.

(Jay goes to the table and pulls out a chair for Diana. Diana sits down. Jay opens a bottle of wine and pours some into Diana's glass. He then pours some into his own glass and sits down. Diana raises her glass to Jay.)

DIANA : Happy anniversary!
JAY : Month-sary. Six months.
DIANA : Can you at least let me fantasize a bit?
JAY : Fantasize what?
DIANA : A long relationship.
JAY : Isn't six months a long relationship?
DIANA : (pause) Ok. I can count that.

(The lights go on in one part of the stage. Eva enters and observes the scene.)

EVA : You used to tell me about how you met him. Or how he met you. And how you imagined he might be the one. That sooner or later you would try to convince him to... what... (pause) marry you? (pause) Are you sure you want to do that? Is it something you really want?
JAY : (pause) Is six months long enough to get to know each other?
DIANA : (pause) Depends.
JAY : Depends?
DIANA : Depends.

(A brief pause. Jay is about to say something but stops himself. Diana notices this and waits.)

DIANA : Yes?
JAY : I'm going to get the chicken
DIANA : You were going to say something.
JAY : Forget it.
DIANA : (pause) Ok, Jay. What is this?
JAY : What is what?
DIANA : What do you want to say? (pause) Six months is long enough for me see that you want to ask something.

(Pause.)

JAY : Nothing. (shakes his head) Nothing. Let's eat.

(Jay stands up, exits for a moment, and returns with two plates of chicken. He places them on the table, sits down. Diana begins to eat.)

DIANA : It's good.

JAY : Thank you

DIANA : The wine too.

JAY : Yes.

DIANA : (sighs and puts down her fork) So, why aren't you eating much?

(Silence. Jay puts down his fork and seem to be deep in thought. Diana looks at him, then takes a forkful of sliced chicken and chews.)

JAY : Have you ever had a relationship with a woman?

(Diana chokes and coughs. Eva bursts out laughing. Diana stands up and goes to center stage. Jay stands up and moves upstage. The lights brighten and change.)

Scene 5

(Diana faces Eva.)

DIANA : That son of a bitch!

EVA : Well, you should've known he was going to ask that question sooner or later. You were dropping too many clues. He is that perceptive you know. I warned you. (pause) What would you have answered?

DIANA : With a lie.

EVA : Lie?

DIANA : (turns to Jay) No, I never had a relationship like that. (turns to Eva) He wouldn't understand. They never understood.

EVA : Really?

DIANA : All they have playing in their dirty little minds are girl on girl porn. That's their understanding of how we are.

(Eva laughs)

DIANA : (to Jay) Why do want to know? Does it excite you or repel you?

JAY : (pause) I just hope you will not leave me for another woman.

EVA : (to Diana) Why don't you tell him that you had relationships with women? That it was a thing in high school? In that all-girl school that you went to.

Why don't you tell him that it was the in thing, that ugly girls don't get

chosen? (pause) It is not the past that comes back and bites you in the ass.

Because you never left it.

DIANA : He wouldn't understand. (pause) But we never talked about it anymore.

After that night. It was just something he probably heard about.

EVA : Rumors

DIANA : Yes. Rumors.

EVA : Real rumors.

(A pause)

EVA : Trust.

DIANA : What?

EVA : It's a big thing between partners. Trust.

DIANA : (pause) Yes.

JAY : I trust you.

DIANA : (to Jay) Yes.

EVA : And you are just going to leave it like that.

DIANA : What do you mean?

EVA : Not one word to defend yourself? That what he heard was just gossip. No lies to tell? That the one time someone saw us hugging was just a time we weren't intimate, but congratulating ourselves on a project for a job well done? Why didn't you defend yourself?

DIANA : Why should I? (pause) I mean, what's the point?

EVA : What's the point?

DIANA : It will have no bearing on our relationship.

EVA : (pause) I see.
JAY : Trust. (pause) I trust you.
EVA : So... what am I here now? An appendage to whatever life you want?
DIANA : It's not that.
EVA : Then what is it?
DIANA : I got all my bets on this man. (pause) I do love him. (pause) I mean... I already did everything to make him leave his bachelor life. I didn't want to be just any girl he was going to bed with. I want to carry his surname. I want to feel the kind of love that I feel is meant for me. I want to be able to face my mother and say, "The train's not going to leave me behind, Mama." He's there. And... I want to face it. Because I want it... (pause) I want it... (stares at Eva) I... want... it.

(Eva shrugs.)

JAY : Trust. (laughs) And love.

(Diana exits as Eva remains standing onstage, staring at Diana. Jay continues to laugh as the lights fade out on Eva. The lights open on Jay's side of the stage.)

Scene 6

(Jay's new apartment. Morning. The new apartment is still a bit messy. There are opened and unopened boxes on the floor. The small dining table has already been set up with a toaster and a small personal espresso maker machine on it. Jay is whistling as he is setting up the table. Diana walks in, dressed in a long shirt.)

JAY : Good morning!
DIANA : (pause) Cheerful today, aren't we?
JAY : It's a beautiful morning
DIANA : Coffee.
JAY : The sun is shining.
DIANA : Coffee.
JAY : And I like this new place.

DIANA : (sarcastic) Can I please have some of your wonderful espresso, please?

JAY : Coming right up.

(Jay pours some coffee for Diana and hands the mug to her. Diana takes a sip as Jay also serves her some buttered toast.)

DIANA : I thought you were going to be tired after all that moving and unpacking.

JAY : Yes.

DIANA : Well, obviously you're not.

JAY : I just like to savor the first morning of living in a new place. Especially in a new place. With you.

DIANA : (pauses then smiles) That's nice.

(Jay goes up to Diana, kneels and takes her hand. She coughs nervously.)

DIANA : Ohhhh... kay.

JAY : Diana...

DIANA : (is rattled and begins to babble) It's going to be a busy day for me... Have you seen that new ad we're working on?... It still needs some refinements... But the boss likes it...

JAY : (pause) Uhm... that's good. (pause) Diana...

DIANA : And did you get that email where the next ad congress will be held? They say they're going to do it in CamSur. That's a big possibility, you know. Always wanted to go that place... they say they made it into a really great tourist spot....

JAY : Diana....

DIANA : (a pause, then looks at Jay) I have to go to the bathroom.

(Diana stands up and exits. Jay waits. Diana returns, wiping her face with a face towel. Jay goes up to her and hugs her.)

JAY : Let's get married.

(Pause. Diana breaks away from Jay and takes a step back. She stares at Jay. The lights open on one part of the stage. Diana's cubicle. Eva enters carrying a bunch of flowers.)

DIANA : (to Jay) So this is what it is all about.
JAY : Yes.
DIANA : This place? For us?
JAY : Yes.
DIANA : No wonder you wanted to move into it so fast.
JAY : You noticed. (pause) And...
DIANA : And?
JAY : I asked something from you.
DIANA : (takes a deep breath and exhales heavily) Yes.

(Eva places the flowers on Diana's desk. She pauses then begins to look for something.)

DIANA : (hugs Jay) Yes. (smiles) Sorry, I have to go to work.
JAY : (nods) Ok. (pause) Later?
DIANA : (smiles and nods) Later.

(Diana exits. The lights fade out on the scene. The light remains on in Diana's cubicle.)

Scene 7

(Eva continues to look for something in Diana's cubicle until she sees a drinking glass. She exits. After a while, Diana enters. She is dressed in her office uniform. She sees the flowers on the table. She picks it up, touches some of the flowers and smiles. Eva walks in carrying the glass now full of water. She stops when she sees Diana.)

EVA : Good morning.
DIANA : (kisses Eva) Good morning. Thank you for the flowers.
EVA : I saw those and thought of you. I wanted to surprise you with those in a vase.
DIANA : You're sweet. (pause) Now if I could only find...
EVA : (shows Diana the drinking glass) Here. I hope you don't mind. It's the only container I saw suitable for it on your table. The flower stall near the park didn't have vases.
DIANA : (takes the glass) Thanks. (puts it down on the table) It was really sweet of you.

(A pause.)

EVA : We still have time for some breakfast. A new coffee shop opened down the road...

DIANA : (pause) That would be fine.

EVA : Unless you just want to eat at our usual place. They have an early Christmas treat.

DIANA : Yes, that's ok. (pause) But...

EVA : Anything wrong? (pause) Unless you already had breakfast.

DIANA : Well...

(Diana is about to put her down her bag but accidentally knocks over the drinking glass. It falls to the carpet, spilling its contents.)

DIANA : Shit.

(Eva and Diana begin to sop up the water on the carpet with pieces of bond paper.)

DIANA : Sorry.

EVA : Don't worry. It's just water. The janitor can clean it up.

DIANA : No... I mean. (pause) I'm sorry.

EVA : (stands up) There. I think that should do it.

DIANA : Eva... (pause) Jay asked me to marry him. (pause) And I said yes.

(Pause.)

EVA : Well... that was what you always wanted, isn't it?

(Eva turns away to leave.)

DIANA : Eva...

(Eva stops.)

DIANA : Don't go.

EVA : Then make me come back.

DIANA : (pause) I can't.

EVA : (pause) I promised myself that I wouldn't ever again ask another woman to stay with me. To love me. And once she goes, that I wouldn't force myself to continue loving her. (pause) And there you are. (pause) It is too painful to fight anymore. Particularly with a man in the picture. (pause) What else can I do but leave?

DIANA : Don't... go.

EVA : Then make me come back.

(Silence.)

EVA : Once I turn away from you... I will no longer look back. Once I step away... I will never take that step back. It will be gone. Just make me come back. (pause then softly) Please... don't make me leave....

(Diana remains silent. Eva bows her head, trying to stop the tears. Then she straightens up, a look of determination on her face. As she is about to leave, Diana goes up to her and kisses her hard and passionately. Eva remains unresponsive. Diana breaks off the kiss and looks at her.)

(The light opens on one part of the stage. We see Jay's new apartment. There is a bed on one side. Jay is standing half-naked by the bed. Diana walks towards Jay. Eva watches as Diana undresses while walking to Jay. The two begin to make love as Eva watches. The lights fade out on Eva. As Jay and Diana continue to make love, the light fades out.)

(Blackout)

Scene 8

(In the dark, the sound of classical music can be heard. The lights open onstage. Jay's new apartment. The dining table is bare. The bed can be seen with Diana sleeping on it. On one part of the stage, a dim light is open over a lounge chair facing the bed with Jay sitting on it, watching her. Diana wakes up with a start, looks around, notices that she is alone in bed. Then she sees Jay.)

DIANA : What time is it?
JAY : Past midnight.
DIANA : I have to go.
JAY : This is your place as much as mine. (pause) I gave you space before. And you came back. So... does that mean something?

(Diana is silent.)

JAY : I was wondering if you could stay till tomorrow so we can talk about our plans. Our wedding plans. (pause) Like the church. (pause) December is usually a busy month. We could have the wedding in January. I was thinking we can have it in Malate Church. What do you say?

(Diana stands up and pulls on her long shirt.)

JAY : Would you like something to eat?

(Diana nods. Jay stands up.)

DIANA : I need a shower.

(Diana exits. There is a sound of a shower running. Jay exits then returns with plates and utensils. He goes on talking as he places the plates and utensils down on the table without really setting the table.)

JAY : My parents would like to meet you soon. How about dinner with them after Christmas? Of course, it would be a bit late now to book a flight... Christmas season and everything. But I think I can talk to someone to get us some seats. (pause) What do you think?

(No reply from Diana. The shower continues to run for a bit then stops.)

JAY : They would like to hear our plans, too. (pause) What about your family? Do they have any suggestions?

(Diana enters, dressed in her office uniform.)

JAY : What are you doing?
DIANA : What do you mean?
JAY : (points at her uniform) That.
DIANA : I have to go home. I have to wake up early. Work.
JAY : It's Saturday tomorrow.
DIANA : I like working on Saturdays
JAY : In an empty office?
DIANA : I like the office empty.
JAY : What? Why?

(Diana begins to cry.)

DIANA : I don't know why anymore.
JAY : What are you saying?
DIANA : I don't know why anymore. I don't know why I stay here.
In this place. With you. With your life. I don't know why I
had to change everything when she was there all along.

(Silence.)

JAY : She?

(Diana does not reply.)

JAY : She?

(Pause.)

DIANA : I have to go. (pause) I am sorry.

(Diana exits. Jay remains standing onstage, stunned. Eva enters. The two momentarily stare at each other.)

JAY : (to Eva) Does she really need you in her life?

(The lights fade out on Jay. A dim light remains on the dining table with the setting for two.)

Scene 9

(Diana enters, carrying two Christmas candlesticks with unlit candles and begins to set the table. Eva enters and watches her. Diana delivers her dialogue as she sets the table.)

DIANA : I wrote him a letter. Explaining everything. How the rumors were true. About us. About everything. About who I am. And what I am. It was... cleansing. Facing the truth. Then I called you after you asked for a transfer to another office branch. (pause) I texted you. I wrote you emails. Letters. I thought you changed everything. Your number. Your email address. Everything. (pause) You don't know how glad I was when you finally replied. (finishes setting the table) Do you like it?

EVA : It's nice, Diana.

(Pause.)

DIANA : Will you stay now?

(Pause.)

DIANA : Stay. Please. Stay. (pause) I know now what I want.

(Silence.)

EVA : (smiles and nods) I will.

(Diana nods and smiles. She lights the two candles. The two women stare at each other. The lights fade out.)

CURTAIN