

"RECOVERING CHRISTMAS"

By

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FADE IN

EXT: STRIP MALL - DAY

A blazing midday sun cooks the sidewalk. A SIGN with an arrow points to "San Diego's Best Black Friday Deals!" Happy voices LAUGH AND CHATTER (O.S.) SPLAT! A plastic snowman's head whacks the pavement, his black eyes lifeless, his carrot nose mashed flat, air oozing out, "PSSSSSSSSSSsssss..."

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Son-of-a ...

An adult in a "LARRY LAPTOP" COSTUME rescue Frosty with a bicycle pump. People in shorts and flip flops stream by.

LARRY LAPTOP

(pumping)

Merry Christmas folks!

MAN

Merry Christmas. You still have those hard drives?

LARRY LAPTOP

Yeah, plenty, Mac or PC. Go get 'em!

CLOSER - TECH DAY COMPUTERS ENTRANCE

A line 30 shoppers long is out the door. A LOCAL TV NEWS TEAM is interviewing shoppers. Larry Laptop runs up and joins SOPHIA CELL PHONE entertaining kids in line. Above the tinted double-door a BANNER, "Black Friday Special: \$49 750 Gig Backup Hard Drives!"

INT: TECH DAY - SAME

Mid-20s employees APRIL, BENNY and STEVE wearing SANTA HATS swipe credit cards, scan bar codes and stuff hard drives in bags.

APRIL

Enjoy. Merry Christmas!

BENNY

(dabs the sweat off
his face)

Happy holidays, come back soon!

Store co-owner DAVID WILKS, late-40s, hyper, overworked, emerges next to April adjusting his tie which is clearly too tight.

DAVID
How do I look?

APRIL
Blue.

DAVID
Can't breath.

April loosens the tie, dabs him with a napkin.

DAVID
Thanks. Well, here I go. My TV debut.

BENNY
Kill it boss!

David takes a deep breath and weaves through customers, out the entrance.

EXT: TECH DAY - SIDEWALK

David emerges, sliding out the door. He spots the news crew down the line about 20 people, but is suddenly grabbed by a curvy, familiar woman.

MRS BENNETT
David, oh my lord, David!

DAVID
Uh, hello Mrs Bennett. Merry-

MRS BENNETT
I've got an emergency!

She hands him a high-end department store sack. David pulls out a bundle, and quickly unwraps it revealing a cell phone.

DAVID
What's wrong with it?

MRS BENNETT
It just stopped working.

David picks up the smart phone. DRIP, DRIP, DRIP. Its coffee.

DAVID

There's no way your warranty is going to cover this.

MRS BENNETT

Why?

DAVID

They won't pay for liquid damage. They'll cover factory defects, software malfunctions, stuff like that. But if you drop your phone in -

MRS BENNETT

It slipped!

DAVID

(sniffs the phone)

Carmel Machiato?

(she nods)

... they won't pay to fix or replace it.

MRS BENNETT

Oh Lord, I can't tell Alfred! I haven't had this one for even four months! Can you replace it, and, well, just keep it between us, hun?

DAVID

Now Mrs Bennett, don't you worry. Benny will take care of you inside, but I gotta do my TV thing now-

MRS BENNETT

TV thing?

(horrified)

Oh Lord, I ate too much Thanksgiving dinner last night, honey!

DAVID

Uh, here they come-

She grabs the cell and bolts inside mid-sentence.

REPORTER DANIELLE WILSON and CAMERAMAN ALLEN BARNES approach.

DANIELLE
Cute kids in line. Love the laptop
and cell phone.

DAVID
Well, Danielle, we've got it all, plus
no one can touch our hard drive sale,
not Walmart, not Best Buy-

DANIELLE
Hmm, we're trying to do a light-
hearted, fun Black Friday economy
story, not a commercial, sooooo ...

Allen's cell phone RINGS.

DAVID
Hey, what is that ancient thing, a
Blackberry? They're going out of
business you know. I can hook you
up, the whole station!

Allen shrugs and answers his phone. David spots Frosty
lying on the sidewalk.

DAVID
Hey Larry! Larry!

The Laptop turns towards him.

DAVID
Frosty is down, dude! Frosty!

LARRY LAPTOP
Son-of-a ... just filled it up!

DAVID
Sshh. Careful, there's kids around!
(to Danielle)
Don't put that in your story.

The Laptop runs towards the downed snowman. Allen is
talking on his cell, looking down the long main street.

ALLEN

Yeah, I can see it.

A couple miles down the street black plumes rise from a building. Allen returns to Danielle and David.

DANIELLE

What's up?

ALLEN

Apartment fire. Gotta go.

DAVID

What, fire? Where?

ALLEN

Down there, about two miles.

DANIELLE

Ugh. Crap. I was hoping for an easy, fun story today day.

Allen starts to put his gear away, Danielle makes a call.

DAVID

But ... are you coming back?

Danielle shrugs 'don't know' as they get in their van. Larry Laptop and Sophia Cell Phone walk up behind David.

LARRY

Where'd they go?

DAVID

See the smoke? Big fire apparently.

SOPHIA

That's so sad, day after Thanksgiving.

LARRY

Down there, probably a meth lab blew up.

Larry and David laugh, smirk, fist bump.

SOPHIA

C'mon you guys! People down there might be losing everything they have, and just before Christmas.

David watches the news van cruising down the street towards the fire.

DAVID

I just lost all that free advertising.
Couldn't wait 'til after lunch to fire
up the crack pipes? ... Alright, let's go.
Got hard drives to sell and computers
to fix!

(turns to line)

Larry and Sophia, bring out the cold
drinks for these folks, its gettin' hot.
Merry Christmas!

INT: TECH DAY COMPUTERS — BACK ROOM — NIGHT

Benny and April are passed out on a table, faces melting into the surface, Santa hats mashed. SNOORING (O.S.)
Benny opens one eye, rises and looks across the room.

David is sitting at his desk, computer on, stacks of papers all over, asleep, snoring. His Santa hat topples to the floor. THWAP. David snaps awake, grabs his cell.

DAVID

10:30? Crap. Missed three texts
from Maria.

BENNY

We kicked butt today, didn't we boss?

David looks at the monitor and taps a key. The screen flashes and spits out some numbers.

DAVID

Well, young employees ... it was just
the best ever Black Friday ever!

The three bounce lethargically, trying to celebrate while half asleep and yawning.

BENNY

Christmas bonuses!

DAVID

It wasn't that good.

The fun stops cold, panic across Benny and Aprils' faces.

DAVID
Of course there'll be bonuses!

Bouncing resumes.

BENNY
Maybe that promotion!

DAVID
Don't push it, boy! Where's Steve, Larry
and Sophia?

APRIL
Steve went home hours ago, but Larry,
Sophia, hmmm?

FRONT ROOM - BEHIND THE COUNTER

Still in the lower half of their costumes, Sophia is
asleep on top of Larry surrounded by disorganized boxes
of computer accessories. David, Benny and April come in.

DAVID
Hey, wow, what's going on here.
Phone sex?

APRIL
O-M-G!

BENNY
You scanning his hard drive Sophia?

LARRY
(groggy)
Knock it off, we just fell asleep.

BENNY
In your costumes?

DAVID
OK, that's weird. Nevermind. Bonus
checks next week!

Cheering.

DAVID
You all did a remarkable job today-
(cell phone beeps)

CELL PHONE SCREEN has a text from ALLY: "Daddy, come home".

DAVID (CONT)
... but now go home, get some rest.
Another big day tomorrow then we're
closed Sunday. I'll open in the morning.
Benny come in at 8:30, OK?

BENNY
Sure boss.

INT: DAVID'S CAR - NIGHT

He sings along with a Christmas tune on the radio as he drive, stopping at a red light he sees -

Across the intersection is the fire scene; charred remains of the building, yellow police tape.

Bummer. Light turns green. He zooms away.

EXT: FIRE SCENE - NIGHT

A wheelchair rolls up to the yellow tape. He has dark, curly hair to his shoulders. He looks around, sobs ... but then stops himself. Determined, he stands. He's medium height, slender, young, one leg below the knee is gone. The crutch is being held tight by a prosthetic arm. He struggles under the police tape, into the rubble.

INT: WILKS FAMILY HOME - DAY - SUNRISE

Steaming drops of fresh java drip into the automatic coffee maker pot. The LED clock reads 6:37AM. A miniature Eiffel Tower sits next to the coffeemaker between two cups with Paris scenes imprinted on them. One cup is snatched away. Dressed, showered, yawning, David pours while staring out the kitchen window at the sunrise.

DAVID
Uh-mayyyyyyyzing.

Distracted, he splashes coffee on the counter. While wiping the mess he checks a weather web site on a counter laptop, missing the spill entirely.

SNAP, burned bread pops up in the toaster.

He slops butter, stuffs a piece in his mouth, chokes on it, tries to wash it down with coffee, but winds up spitting it out. LED clock changes; 6:39. In two minutes he's quietly destroyed the kitchen. He wipes his mouth and pulls a pad and pen out of a drawer, scribbling a NOTE, 'Have a great day. Love you'. He ponders it.

DAVID

Love you.

Crumbles it. Gets another.

DAVID

Love-you-all-so-much-will-try-to-be
-home-early-today ...

He feels eyes on him, looks over his shoulder. 12-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER ALLY sits on the stairs, yawns.

ALLY

Daddy, its Saturday after Thanksgiving.
Are we gona set up the Christmas tree
today?

David walks to her, eye level.

DAVID

Of course, its our tradition.

ALLY

When are you gona be home?

DAVID

I'll be home just after the sun goes
down.

ALLY

I'm not a baby, give me a time.

DAVID

I'm shootin' for seven.

ALLY
Sun sets at 5:30.

DAVID
How did you know that?

David's wife MARIA, late 40s, a delicate flower, quietly eases down the stairs and joins them.

ALLY
Daddy made a mess as usual.

DAVID
Traitor!

David kisses Maria gently, she sits next to Ally.

ALLY
Quand ma soeur être à la maison?

MARIA
That was great sweetheart.

DAVID
Yeah, great, what did you say?

ALLY
When is my sister coming home.

MARIA
Its early, but lemme try ... Semaine
prochaine.

ALLY
Really mom?

MARIA
Oui. Next week.

ALLY
C'est fantastique.

DAVID
Are we sure this is our kid?

The old family LABRADOR MODEM eases himself down the stairs wagging his tail, followed by their 16-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER SABRINA who just crawled out of bed.

SABRINA
(mumbling)
Driving lessons, dad.

Sabrina and Modem join on the crowded stairs.

DAVID
Girls, we've got 3,500 square feet here.
Must we squeeze into two of them?

MARIA
This is cozy.

ALLY
Yeah Daddy.

DAVID
(to Modem)
Well boy, we're overrun by females.
We gotta represent. Lets wrestle!

The girls scold him, cooing and petting the old pooch.

SABRINA
Did I hear you say the first born
is coming home next week?

MARIA
Do you have to call your sister the
first born?

SABRINA
Well Dad does.

DAVID
(looking at cell clock)
Uh, I gotta go.

SABRINA
Driving lessons Dad, you said!

DAVID
Babe, can you take her today?

MARIA
I can't, David. Remember what happened
when I tried to teach the first born?

DAVID
Yeah, but we have that lifetime supply
of Xanex now, so?

MARIA
(laughing)
It will kill me, I can't.

DAVID
Ok, I'll have to update my will today!

ALLY
Can I cut your hair tonight after we
decorate?

DAVID
Cut my hair?

ALLY
For Christmas money.

DAVID
How much?

ALLY
Fifty dollars.

DAVID
Fifty bucks!

ALLY
That includes washing and blow dry.

SABRINA
Not with my blow dryer, you'll break
it like you did last time.

MARIA
Girls stop. Honey, you gotta go.

DAVID
Right, gotta go. Yes to decorating
tonight, no to the haircut, yes to
driving lessons, but tomorrow, any more
requests – text me!

SABRINA

But you never check your texts!

David kisses them all, pats Modem on the head, and stops at the garage door entrance.

DAVID

Love you.

Maria blows him a kiss. He catches it and rubs it on his cheek. He stands at the garage doorway, then extends an arm, backing into the garage slowly.

DAVID

Maria, helllllp! They're taking me away! Helllllp girls! Noooooooooo ...

He slowly backs into the garage in make-believe agony as he shuts the door.

Maria walks over to the coffee pot. She takes her cup, pours, and stares endearingly at the image on the cup.

ALLY

He said he'd be home at seven and we'd set up the Christmas tree.

MARIA

Seven, wow.

She sighs, looks out the window as his car drives down the street.

MARIA

(longing)

That would be great. C'mon girls.

She follows the girls up each practicing their French.

INT: DAVID'S CAR - MAIN BOULEVARD - SUNRISE

The fire scene comes up on his right side. He slows down and eases into the cross street to gawk.

The small hotel is destroyed. A couple walls remain blackened, half-charred beams lay in the middle. Ashes, melted appliances, burned personal items. In the rubble beneath fallen cross beams, David sees movement.

INSIDE THE RUBBLE

The person stops, concealed behind the charred beams but his eyes penetrate the space between himself and the gawking David, who ...

INSIDE CAR

... feels the man's eyes, looks away and gasps.

DAVID
OK, that's weird.

He peels out.

INT: TECH DAY - DAY

David rushes around singing along with CHRISTMAS MUSIC as he carries boxes of hard drives into the front retail area and stacks a shelf. DOOR KNOCK (O.S.)

DAVID
(shouts at the door)
Benny, go around, the back door
is open.

He continues stacking. Again, the KNOCK (O.S.) He goes to the door, swings it open.

DAVID
Benny, I said the-

RON DAVIS sits in a wheelchair looking up at him. His one hand is dirty with ash, and he holds a SMALL, SQUARE METAL DEVICE.

RON
I couldn't tell if you were open or
closed.

DAVID
Well ... sir ... we don't open for ... about
35 minutes.

David curiously looks him over as Ron looks around the strip mall that is just coming to life, then back at David holding his steaming cup of coffee.

RON
Any place around here to get some
coffee?

DAVID
There's a 7-11 at the next intersection.

RON
OK ... Can you fix hard drives?

David looks down at the device in his dirty hand.

DAVID
What happened to it?

RON
Fire.

DAVID
The place down the street?

RON
Yeah.

DAVID
Was that you digging around in there
this morning?

RON
Yeah.

DAVID
That was me in the car.
(shamed)
God. Sorry ... I ...

Benny pulls into his employee parking spot and
approaches, confident.

DAVID (cont)
We can't fix it, but we may be able to
recover the data ... pretty expensive.

Ron stares at the dirty device, then back up at David.

RON

I was writing something ... it's a love story ... our love story. I was going to give it to her for Christmas.

David is lost. Benny looks, gesturing, 'what's this?'

DAVID

Morning Benny.

Benny studies David, sensing his distress.

BENNY

Everything alright boss?

DAVID

Yeah ... give me a minute.

Another early customer pulls into the lot.

CUSTOMER

Great! You're open. Got any more \$49 hard drives?

Benny wanders into the lot to engage the customer. David kneels down and looks at the hard drive.

RON

How much did you say it would cost?

DAVID

Well, \$200 just to start, no guarantees ... we can probably get to it in about a week.

RON

\$200 to start. Ouch.

Ron looks off into the distance, clutches the hard drive.

RON

Gotta think about it.

DAVID

Sure, take your time.

PARKING LOT

Benny watches as Ron gently takes the hard drive from David and slowly wheels himself away.

RON
 (to Benny)
 I'll come back later, when I have the
 money. Thanks.

Benny waves and watches him slowly wheel away, walks to David who looks remorseful.

DAVID
 He didn't any money ... I couldn't, um-

BENNY
 Ok.

INT. TECH DAY - DAY

Phones ring. Bags are filled. David finishes organizing a shelf. Above him, a BANNER, 'THE SEASON OF GIVING!' He stares at it. Outside on the sidewalk the RED KETTLE AND A PERSON RINGING A BELL. People drop money into the kettle. He turns away, and walks from the front retail sales room to the back storage spaces where Benny is.

DAVID
 I could've given the poor dude a
 friggin' cup of coffee, or, a discount?
 Man, I could've done something!

BENNY
 Wheelchair guy? I suppose, its your store.

DAVID
 I blew that one. I want a do-over.

David snaps his finger, an idea.

DAVID
 Aha!

He bolts to his ...

OFFICE

- scrambling through papers on his desk, pockets and finally ...

EXT: DAVID'S CAR - SAME

... where he finds a scrap of paper on the floorboard. He calls the number but disappointedly gets voicemail.

DANIELLE (V.O.)

This is Danielle Wilson of Channel 11 News. I'm sorry I missed your call. If this is an urgent news event please call the newsroom, otherwise leave a message. Thanks. (BEEP)

DAVID

Danielle, hi, this is David Wilks from Tech Day Computers. You were here yesterday, but there was a fire and you had to leave. Anyway, I was wondering, where do people go when their apartments burn down? I wanna help the folks of that fire. Could you please call me back. Thanks so much!

Lead Technician and business partner JOHN pops his head into the car.

JOHN

You OK?

DAVID

Yes, fine.

JOHN

Al Bennett called. They just lost their internet.

DAVID

Which store?

JOHN

Number one, the big kahuna. But we're slammed in the back, Dave. Got three repair jobs we promised today. Can you go?

DAVID

Yeah, sure.

INT: BENNETT'S FINE FURNITURE — LOBBY — DAY

Big, bold ALFRED BENNETT stands at the entrance to his massive furniture store in a Christmas sweater and slacks sweating with a smile as he greets customers.

ALFRED

Merry Christmas and Happy Hannukah to our Jewish friends. Welcome to Bennett's Fine Furniture, the best selection, best prices at the best time of year.

Smiling CUSTOMERS walk by.

ALFRED

Please stop by the refreshment stand to your right ...
(motions towards it where Mrs Bennett smiles)
... where the lovely Mrs Bennett is serving up her fresh lemonade!

More CUSTOMERS walk by. The smile drains from Al's face and he wipes the sweat off his forehead, looking up he's staring at an electrical cable with a frayed end.

DAVID (O.S.)

Rats.

ALFRED

Say what?

DAVID

You've got rats in the computer room.

ALFRED

Keep it down, man. Rats?

DAVID

Yeah, I saw the bugger running when I popped open the lower mainframe panels. And there it was. Your T-1 line chewed in half, router shorted out.

(Looks Al's sweater up and down)
And if I ever wind up wearing a Christmas sweater, just shoot me.

ALFRED

Spare me the fashion tips, my brother.
Are we up, and uh-hum, how much?

DAVID

You're up, so ...
(cell phone calculator)
... diagnostics, emergency service, new
T-1, router, splitter ...

ALFRED

Good Looorrrd, a little 'ol rat did
all that!

DAVID

It was a big rat, and it had lunch
on your wiring. Electricity and moisture
did the rest. Good thing we upgraded your
surge protector this fall. You didn't
lose any sales. You can send all the
transactions now.

ALFRED

How much?

DAVID

\$1,800.

ALFRED

Two grand! At Christmas? Where's the
spirit of giving, my brother?

DAVID

Its Christmas for me too, Al.

Alfred puts his arm around David and sighs.

ALFRED

Lord. I remember when I had one store
and I thought, if I could just get
bigger, then I could really be living,
you know. Money and time to enjoy it.

DAVID

Preach it, brother.

ALFRED

I'm working harder now with three stores than when I had one! Three kids in college, takes a whole store for each kid. Every week one of them calling me for money.

DAVID

Tell me about it, my 12-year-old wants to charge me fifty bucks for a haircut.

ALFRED

Fifty dollars! Good Lord. See that beautiful woman over there?
(points to Mrs Bennett basking in happiness)
You know how many pairs of shoes she has?

DAVID

Uh ...

ALFRED

45. She can't come out of a mall without shoes.

DAVID

And she broke another cell phhhh-ayyy!

ALFRED

What! Another cell phone?

DAVID

Crap! I wasn't supposed to say!

ALFRED

It's your conscience, my brother, let it out. Don't hold that in. Tell me what happened!

David cringes at his slip, and yields.

DAVID

She dropped it in her Carmel Machiatto. I gave her a spare until her new one comes in.

ALFRED
Machiatto? If I didn't love that
woman so much, mm-mm-mm.
(looks at David with
a puppy face)

DAVID
Aaaahhh, man! Alright, \$300 off the
bill and her phone at cost.

ALFRED
Now that's what I'm talking about David,
that's the Christmas spirit! Uh, get her
the best phone you've got, OK.

DAVID
Uh, OK. So what do I get?

ALFRED
The immense joy of knowing you helped
a brother out!

DAVID
How about a couch?

David's cell phone rings. It's Danielle Wilson.

DAVID
Gotta take this.

Alfred puts on his big, bold smile.

ALFRED
Welcome to Bennett's Fine Furniture.
Merry Christmas and Happy Hannukah!

David walks away.

DAVID
Danielle, thanks for calling me back.

DANIELLE (V.O.)
No problem. You want to know where
the people from the fire are staying?

DAVID

Yeah. One of them showed up at my store, and, it's just, well, I want to try and help but I don't know where he went. I thought you might know something?

DANIELLE (V.O.)

Usually when people get displaced the local Red Cross shows up with supplies, gets them a place to stay. The local chapter is off Ruffin Road.

DAVID

Hmm, Red Cross. Thanks so much.

Hangs up, turns to Alfred.

DAVID

How about that couch?

ALFRED

Lets talk after the holidays.

DAVID

Mm-hh. Gotta go. Take care Al.

David walks out of the store.

EXT: WILKS HOME – NIGHT

David pulls into the garage ...

INT: WILKS HOME - NIGHT

Soft Christmas music, Modem sits in a doggie bed as Ally tries to fit a small Santa hat on him. David zips through the garage entry door.

DAVID

Happy Hannukah family! I'm only an hour late!

Ally comes running with an armful of Santa hats.

ALLY

We're not Jewish dad. Put on your Santa hat and let's put up the Christmas tree! Yayyy!

DAVID
(putting on hat)
Did I say Hannukah?

Maria comes down the stairs and kisses him.

MARIA
Hi sweetheart. How was your day?

DAVID
Oh, very unusual. Where's Sabrina?

MARIA
She just went down the street to
Stacey's. Should be home soon.

DAVID
Ally, let me get changed and we'll
get started.
(to Maria)
Honey ...
(motions for her to come
upstairs with him)

BEDROOM

David whispers loudly.

DAVID
I'm a horrible person.

MARIA
Oh, sweetheart, what happened?

DAVID
This morning a guy from that fire ...
missing an arm and a leg ... shows up
wanting to get some data off a hard
drive, and I just ...

MARIA
Just what?

DAVID
He didn't have any money, so ... I didn't
help him. I did nothing.

MARIA

Sweetheart, that's a really hard situation.

DAVID

Well, later I gave Bennett's Fine Furniture a discount on services and a smart phone at cost. Bennett! The guy has three kids in Ivy League colleges, he's paying cash! His wife has 45 pairs of shoes, and I gave *him* a discount!

MARIA

45! Oh my gawwd! 45?

David frowns, she snaps back.

MARIA

Right, you were saying-

DAVID

The one-armed-one-legged guy, who I think is a war vet said there's a Christmas present on the hard drive, a love story he was writing for his girl!

Maria covers her mouth, then smacks him in the shoulder.

MARIA

Why didn't you help him!

DAVID

See what I mean. Can't get it outta my head.

MARIA

OK, ok. I'm sorry, I didn't mean it. David, look at me. You're a wonderful husband, a wonderful father. You give everything to this family, and that's the most loving thing you can do. Your mom used to say charity starts at home, remember? You'll get another chance, and when you do, I know you'll do something good. Everything is fine. OK?

David takes a breath, exhales.

DAVID
I don't deserve you.

MARIA
C'mon. Let's go decorate the tree!

INT: WILKS HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The Christmas tree glows with beautiful décor and family pictures. GIGGLING (O.S.)

Sabrina and Ally are decorating their father, who is sound asleep on the couch. Maria snaps a picture.

MARIA
He almost made it girls.

INT: WILKS KITCHEN - MORNING

The Eiffel Tower coffee cups are now joined by the PHOTO OF DAVID DECORATED as the coffeemaker fills the pot. (O.S.) WHISTLING. One cup is snatched, then the photo.

DAVID
Oh, fuuu-nee, very funny. I look better than the tree.

David and Maria are in their PJs, they kiss, pour their coffee. David checks the weather on the counter laptop.

DAVID
What! Rain?

He snaps over the blinds covering the kitchen window. Outside the street is damp and the sky is gray.

MARIA
It's that strange liquid that falls from the sky occasionally sweetheart.

DAVID
It doesn't *rain* in San Diego, certainly not at Christmas!

MARIA
I like it. Remember how it snowed in Indianapolis?

DAVID

We pay an outrageous cost of living to
get away from that! I want my money back.

A set of KEYS JINGLE behind them.

SABRINA (O.S.)

Dad, you said we'd go driving today.

David stares at her for a moment, then eureka - an idea.

DAVID

Yes! Driving we will go!

MARIA

Honey, it's raining?

DAVID

No better way to train for safe driving
than in the rain! Besides, that's not rain.

SABRINA

It's raining?

DAVID

Sabrina, take me to the Red Cross
in Serra Mesa!

SABRINA / MARIA

In the rain?

DAVID

Seriously, girls, it's barely a mist
out there, look. That's not rain.

EXT: RED CROSS BUILDING - DAY

RAIN POURS DOWN. David comes out of the building and runs
to the car, gets in.

INSIDE CAR

Sabrina sits behind the wheel terrified as the rain
pounds the windshield.

DAVID

Where are we, Seattle? OK, don't say it. Anyway, they said the shelter these folks are staying is an old school auditorium just a few blocks away, down the street, right on Aero Drive.

Sabrina slowly turns to him, managing a smile.

SABRINA

Sure dad.

He sees her hands gripping the steering wheel so tight her KNUCKLES ARE TURNING WHITE.

DAVID

Uh ... take a breath, ease up on the wheel. Loosen, loosen.

She exhales and tries to relax, her grip eases up.

DAVID

Now take your right hand off the steering wheel and start the car.

SABRINA

It's raining really hard, dad.

David contorts his face, using a deep, sinister voice.

DAVID

Sabrina! Its me again, the fear monster. You can't do it. You're going to fail! Ahhhhhhaaaahahaha!

SABRINA

Stop it, this is serious.

DAVID

Yeah, its serious. That 'ol fear monster trying to stop you from getting in the game, trying to tell you you're not good enough to be doing this.

SABRINA

Can't we just wait a few minutes until the rain lets up?

David leans over and looks her in the eye.

DAVID

It's OK to be afraid. It's not OK to let it stop you. You start this car and drive me to where I need to go, or I will never take you driving again.

She takes a breath, starts the car, and eases into the street.

DAVID

Good, good. Now a leeeetle faster.

She ever-so-lightly eases on the gas pedal. Her breathing gets heavier as cars pass her by. The rain pounds the roof. The wipers slide across the windshield, CHUNK-CHUNK-CHUNK. David is swiveling his head between his smart phone map and the street.

DAVID

Turn right.

Sabrina concentrates intensely. Checking mirrors, her speed. CHUNK-CHUNK-CHUNK.

Through the downpour David sees a PERSON IN A WHEELCHAIR pushing himself along the sidewalk ahead. He squints to focus in.

DAVID

Stop!

Sabrina slams the brakes, the car hydroplanes out of control. Cars HONK. They SCREAM.

ON SIDEWALK

Ron whips around at the commotion and sees the car coming towards him.

RON

Oh god!

He pivots away, spills into a bush. The car spins towards the sidewalk and smacks the curb facing the wrong way, just feet from Ron.

INSIDE CAR

Sabrina is frozen staring into the windshield. CHUNK-CHUNK-CHUNK.

SABRINA
Did we hit anything?

DAVID
No. We didn't. A Miracle, a Christmas miracle.

Sabrina starts to cry.

SABRINA
I'm sorry daddy.

DAVID
No, no, sweetheart, that was *totally my fault*. I shouldn't have shouted like that!

David leans in close to his little girl.

DAVID
Nothing bad happened. We're fine, the car's fine, everything is fine.

SABRINA
What do we do now?

David looks around.

DAVID
You stay right here behind this wheel and we'll get going in a minute.

OUTSIDE

David climbs out and looks over the roof of the car into the sidewalk where Ron is picking himself up.

DAVID
Gawwwwwwd!

He runs to him. Ron is both surprised and angry.

RON
You? What the - ?

DAVID
Driving lessons for my daughter.

He points to the car. Sabrina gestures through a closed window. Motorists drive by gawking.

RON
Mister, you're a lousy teacher.

A POLICE CAR comes to a stop in front of their wayward vehicle. Sabrina SCREAMS, then rolls the window down.

SABRINA
Dad!

The COP looks at the car, looks at David helping Ron. He walks over to them.

COP
Is this man injured?

DAVID
Absolutely not. No damage, no injuries.
Just a tough driving lesson for my daughter.

COP
In the rain? Seriously?

DAVID
Yeah, my bad. But, everything's fine.

RON
We're fine officer. I just wanna go.

DAVID
Actually, I was looking for you.

RON
Me?

DAVID
You left in such a hurry I didn't get a chance to get started on your hard drive. We were going to the shelter.

COP

Sir, lets get your car turned around
and all get on our way.

DAVID

Ok, I'm on it officer. Uh, Merry
Christmas.

(to RON)

Want a lift?

RON

(looks at Sabrina)

No. No. I'll meet you there.

INT: SHELTER - DAY

Sabrina stares into the 18-bed shelter. Each resident has a cot, a small shelf rack and their own suitcases or bags piled around. Tables with snacks and bottled water surround them. Some of the cots are empty, others with tired, RAGGED MEN sleeping, reading or tinkering with their stuff. A couple of SHELTER STAFFERS mill about.

RON

Mine's over there.

David and Sabrina timidly enter the shelter, Ron wheels over to his space. SHELTER DIRECTOR DORIS approaches.

DORIS

Hi Ronnie. Who are your guests?

Ron stops and looks at them. He doesn't know their names.

DAVID

Hi, I'm David Wilks, this is my
daughter Sabrina. We're friends.

RON

Yes ... friends.

DORIS

Well its nice to have you, we love
visitors. Ronny you missed lunch.
Dinner's at 5 if you're interested.

Doris smiles and goes about her business. Sabrina scans the scraggly, dirty men with their few possessions. She pulls her dad away.

SABRINA
He's your friend?

DAVID
I guess.

She looks at him skeptical, raises an eyebrow.

DAVID
OK, sure, he's my friend.

SABRINA
Well, can he come over to our house?

DAVID
What! No.

SABRINA
Just for dinner? This looks so lonely,
and horrible ... he's your friend, isn't he?

DAVID
Dinner? Uh-

RON (O.S.)
Here it is.

They walk to Ron's space. Ron sits on his cot cherishing his dead hard drive. He looks up at David.

RON
The computer was all burned up, melted
and stuff. Do you think you can
recover anything?

DAVID
Only one way to find out, gotta hook
it up.

SABRINA
Can you come over for dinner tonight?

RON / DAVID
Dinner?

SABRINA

Yeah.

DAVID

Yes, of course, we want you to have dinner with us.

RON

Well ... no, I couldn't -

SABRINA

Please, please! It'll be fun!

Ron's uncertain, looks up at them both. Sabrina is praying, David nodding positively.

RON

OK. Lemme get cleaned up.

DAVID

Great.

RON

Uh, who's driving?

INT: WILKS HOME - LATE AFTERNOON

Colorful veggies and tempting meats are spread along the counter. ANDREA BOCCELLI sings, a JULIA CHILDS FRENCH COOKING recipe book sits next to Maria who is chopping onions. Her cell rings.

MARIA

Hi sweetheart ... You're bringing who for dinner!?!?! ... Gawwwd David, the house is a mess ... Don't blame Sabrina. You're on my bad list. Bye.

She walks to the edge of the stairs and shouts.

MARIA

Ally!

UPSTAIRS

Ally is intensely brushing Modem's hair and has attached little Christmas bows on him.

ALLY

Yes mom.

MARIA (O.S.)

Clean the downstairs bathroom please!
We're having a guest for dinner!

ALLY

(rolls her eyes)

Ugh!

INT: WILKS DINING ROOM – NIGHT

The four Wilks sit at the table with Santa hats on, poking their food, staring at the young man with a prosthetic arm. The girls are mesmerized. The parents are self conscious of the girls being mesmerized. David reaches out with a Santa hat towards Ron.

DAVID

(apprehensive)

Here. We all wear them during Christmas.

SABRINA

He drives us crazy, makes us wear hats,
Christmas music playing day and night.

DAVID

Its a Wilks family tradition. Gotta
wear Santa hats at home during Christmas.
My grandpa started it after the Big War.

RON

The Big War?

DAVID

World War Uno.

RON

That was "The Great War".

DAVID

Oh, I knew that.

Ron eases the hat onto his head, smiles. The white cotton ball end dangles between his eyes.

ALLY
Can I cut your hair?

MARIA
Ally!

DAVID
Our future hair stylist. Ask how much she charges before you answer that.

RON
Ok, how much?

ALLY
Five bucks.

SABRINA
You can use my blow dryer if you want, Ally.

DAVID
(incredulous)
Five bucks! Sabrina, your blow dryer?

ALLY / SABRINA
Sure.

RON
Deal.

DAVID
She was going to charge me fifty and her sister didn't want her to touch the blow dryer.

ALLY
Doesn't include the tip though.

LATER

Empty plates, laughs.

RON
Dinner was great Mrs Wilks. Fantastic.

MARIA
Thank you.

ALLY
How did you lose your arm?

MARIA / DAVID
Ally, please!

SABRINA
Really, dork!

ALLY
Sorry, jeez!

DAVID
Do you feel sorrow in your heart?

ALLY
No.

SABRINA
Then don't say it.

ALLY
Ugh! You guys drive me crazy. Mr Davis
what happened to your arm and leg?

Ron is chuckling to himself.

RON
I'm glad someone finally asked, you
guys all looked so uncomfortable.

MARIA
You don't have to Ron, it's ...

RON
No, it's fine, I can talk about it.
It's just that ... are you sure you
wanna know?

SABRINA / ALLY
Yes! Yes!

DAVID
Uh, Ron, make it PG, por favor.

Ron nods and takes the final sip of his iced tea.

RON
You know I was in the Army?

Girls nod 'yes'.

RON
So, my squad's in Iraq. Its night.
Moving on a high-value target, uh, a
bad guy who was a leader of other bad
guys. We found his compound, a little
shack outside Baghdad.

Sabrina mesmerized.

RON (CONT)
I kick the door in, boom, go in first.
Bam, bam, bam. The bad guys start shooting,
We're blasting, bullets are flying-

Ally mesmerized.

RON (CONT)
We drop three, four of 'em. Rest bolt
out the back. We chase 'em out the same
exact door. Just as I go out there's a
loud ka-boom, a bright yellow flash.

Maria near tears. David shovels food, mesmerized.

RON (CONT)
That's the last thing I remember. I
stepped on an IED, a bomb hidden in
the floor. I woke up in the Army
hospital in Germany without my arm
or leg.

The Wilks stare, speechless. David mouths 'wow.'

RON (CONT)
I think I'm ready for that haircut.

LATER - KITCHEN

Maria finishes at the sink. David dries the last dish
while looking over his shoulder towards the living room
where Ron is getting his haircut from Ally while Sabrina
chats with him.

DAVID

Look at that.

MARIA

I know, its beautiful.

DAVID

Yeah, but how did this guy wind up so ...
lost? It doesn't make sense.

MARIA

Doesn't he have any family?

DAVID

No idea. I barely know him at all.

Maria kisses him tenderly.

MARIA

I'm glad you brought him. It was a
good thing. You're off my bad list.

DAVID

Some one told me I would have another
chance and I would know what to do.

LIVING ROOM

The final snip of Ron's curly locks. Ally studies him
intensely.

ALLY

Done!

She holds up a mirror. He swivels his head side to side
looking at the obviously beginner haircut.

RON

Great job.

He struggles to get his wallet. There's ONE BILL in it.
He pauses, then hands it to Ally.

ALLY

Twenty bucks, cool!

RON

Share that with Sabrina.

ALLY
Mom, we got \$20!

RON
In the Army when somethin' cool happens,
we all shout HUA! C'mon, from the gut,
HUA!

Ron and the girls are high-fiving and shouting, HUA, HUA, HUA! The parents come in and join!

MARIA
OK girls, let's call it a night,
school tomorrow.

David and Maria watch the girls give Ron a hug, say good night and head for the stairs. David grabs Sabrina's hand just as she starts up.

DAVID
Proud of you, driving, inviting Ron,
was a great day.

SABRINA
Dad, I ... its like, I think I grew up,
a little.

David smiles, affirms her.

SABRINA (CONT)
So, am I your favorite?

DAVID
Don't have a favorite, ha ha ha!

Sabrina leans in and gives him a kiss on the cheek and runs upstairs after her little sister.

MARIA
Ron, it was so nice having you
for dinner.

RON
It was amazing. What do you call that
main dish again?

MARIA

In Francais', Beef Bourguignonne.
It's basically fancy stew. I'm going
upstairs. It was so nice meeting you.

She hugs him, kisses David and disappears up the stairs.
Modem curls up under Ron's leg. He reaches down with his
prosthetic hand and scratches the pooch's head.

RON

You're a lucky man, Dave. And that
Ally ...
(gestures to his hair)

DAVID

You haven't met them all. Shauntay,
my first born, is coming home from
college next week. Now, for some wine.
Oops, do you, uh?

RON

Love some wine. Reminds me of home.
What do you have?

David goes to a small wine rack on a table next to the
Christmas tree, struggles reading the labels.

DAVID

Well, its either a Pinot Noir, or a
Zinfandel.

RON

What region is the Zin from?

DAVID

My neighbor Bob's back yard?

RON

Can I see it?

Ron reads the label.

RON

Napa.

DAVID

The auto parts store?

RON
No, outside Sacramento, California's
wine country.

DAVID
Oh, I knew that.

David struggles with the cork.

RON
They used to think the Zinfandel grape
was a California original, but later
they found out it was brought from the
Mediterranean.

DAVID
(working the cork)
Where'd you get this vast knowledge
of wine?

RON
My father. Before he died ... when I'd
come home on leave we'd talk for hours
over a couple bottles. Talk about the
war, Hemmingway, why the Cleveland
Indians are so bad all the time.

POP. David pours, then brings to his mouth for a sip.

RON
Gotta swirl it around, let it breath.

David submits and sits down trying to swirl.

RON
Easy, gentle, like this. Then inhale
the aroma, like this.

DAVID
(sniffing, sipping)
Hmm. Nice ... When did your father
pass away?

RON
Five years ago, right at the beginning
of my second enlistment. My dad was-
(chokes up)

DAVID

Oh, man I'm sorry, I didn't mean to-

RON

No its OK, I want to talk about him,
he was a great guy. I loved my father
a lot. It was too soon ... too soon.

David raises his glass.

DAVID

To your father.

TINK. They sip. Ron closes his eyes, a slight smile.

RON

My dad would lift his glass and say,
"Ronnie, the best stories are all love
stories." Then he'd tell me something
about my mom. I never knew her, she
died when I was like a year.

DAVID

Spending time with you tonight, seeing
you with my girls ... I don't get it,
Ron. Why are you ... *here!*

Ron gives his wine a good swirl and inhales the aroma.

RON

When you were a kid, did you ever
think you'd be a computer guy?

DAVID

God no! I got into computer work
by accident, because I was good at it.
But before, well ...

RON

What was your dream?

David looks around, his mind drifting to childhood.

DAVID

Grew up in Indiana, there were tons
of rivers and lakes. Spent a lot of
time on the water. I always thought how
cool it would be to be a ...

RON

What?

DAVID

River boat captain.

Both men laugh hard, trying to be quiet at the same time.

RON

Are you serious? River boat captain!

DAVID

Yeah. Man, there I was, *in my dreams*, it's night, I'm wearing a captain's hat standing at a big 'ol wheel cruising a ferry boat up the Mississippi or some other big river, happy people partying on the lower deck, a canopy of stars above, gliding through a calm river. Mmmm. Alright, your turn.

Ron pushes himself back in the couch.

RON

Since 9-11 all I ever wanted was to be a soldier, have a beautiful wife ... I thought I could give her the best life ever, you know. The best. Then this happened. It haunts you every day. Not the combat, the bad guys you killed, what you've seen. I can handle that. It's all those childhood dreams that are gone. The man you were. Her. All you want is to go back in time, have things be the way they were before. You don't even recognize who you are, and darn sure don't want to be that guy. That's how it happens.

DAVID

She left you?

RON

She didn't leave me.

DAVID

What happened to her?

RON

She wanted to come, she begged me.
But ... I couldn't bear it. I wanted
so much more for her, Dave, you
understand? I had to let her go.
I had to.

The story is spinning in David's head.

DAVID

If you're ... I guess I don't understand.
What is this love story supposed to do?

RON

Besides the Army, making her happy was
the only thing I've ever done that's
worth a damn. Once ... I made a woman
happy, and it was her.

(beat)

Maybe it's really just for me ... but
I'm gona give it to her, somehow.

David silent, unprepared.

RON (CONT)

I really appreciate your hospitality.
I gotta get back to the shelter before
they lock up for the night, pretty
strict about that.

DAVID

Leave me the hard drive and I'll
get started on it tomorrow.

Ron takes his treasure out of his backpack gently.

RON

It's a folder called "Love Story."

DAVID

Love story. Is that all you want?

RON

Yes. It's a text file, about 20 pages.
Pictures too, about ten I think. Almost
done. Was going to give it to her for
Christmas.

DAVID
What if we can't recover anything?

RON
Well ... do what you can and I'll
pay you when I get the money.

David looks at the hard drive, knowing he'll never charge
him a penny.

DAVID
Deal.

INT: TECH DAY — DAY

Benny hangs a "CYBER MONDAY SPECIALS" banner above
merchandise stacked on shelves, mumbling to himself.

BENNY
Can't have Cyber Monday without an
online store.

DAVID (O.S.)
I heard that.

Benny looks over his shoulder.

BENNY
We neeeeeed an online store, boss!

DAVID
Yes, yes, I know. But it's all about
the finances, my man. We'll see what
the accountant says.

Benny sees Ron's hard drive on the counter.

BENNY
That looks familiar, but ... ?

DAVID
Oh, almost forgot. Remember the wheel
chair guy? It's his hard drive. Gotta
get it to John.

Benny raises an eyebrow.

INT: REPAIR SPACES - DAY

THREE TECHNICIANS work on computers in various stages of disassembly. John looks over the scratched dirty hard drive with skepticism.

JOHN

We're gona do this for free?

DAVID

Think of it as a Christmas gift.

JOHN

Gee, thanks for asking me, partner.

DAVID

C'mon, dude, just run a scan.

JOHN

You know its highly unlikely, right?

DAVID

Let's just take a look, please.

John takes the hard drive and plugs connectors onto it that lead into another computer, launches software which starts scanning. A window pops up ON SCREEN, "Data Recovered = 0%".

DAVID

We're looking for a folder, "Love Story", with a text file, and some pics. A Christmas present for his lady. That's all he wants.

JOHN

We're all about Christmas presents today.

DAVID

Just trying to help.

(beat)

John, what are you getting Kristen for Christmas?

JOHN

Wow, wasn't even thinking about it yet. Guess I should start.

DAVID

I want to get Maria something she won't return. Something she loves.

They both look at each other seriously, which quickly turns to smirks.

JOHN

Yeah, right.

DAVID

It could happen!

They turn to the computer screen, "Data Recovered = 0%".

JOHN

Christmas present. Hmm. It could take a while.

DAVID

Yeah, I know, women are soooooo tough to shop for, and god, finding the time.

JOHN

I mean the hard drive. It's gona take a while.

David stops and strokes his chin, uncertain.

DAVID

I think ... I'm going shopping.

JOHN

Yeah, sure.

DAVID

I'm serious. I'm going.

He gets up and walks towards the door.

JOHN

Dave? It's Cyber Monday! You know perfectly well as soon as you walk out that door every client we have will have some kind of system meltdown, and where will you be?

David looks over his shoulder, a steely determined look.

JOHN

Just stay here, shop online like everyone else.

DAVID

John, aren't you sick of missing *everything* because we're chained to this store night and day! Aren't you?

JOHN

Sure, but its our business man, our livelihood. We don't have a choice.

David looks around the room, determined. John stops fiddling with a mainframe, resigned.

JOHN

Look, we're almost over the top. Just stick it out.

DAVID

It can't be like this. I'm going. Today while everyone else's faces are melting into their computer screens trying to get free shipping, I'll be in the belly of the beast getting something she's gona love!

JOHN

Alright, sure. Go. But you'll be back, I know it. I'll keep this computer station right here open just for you.

DAVID

I'm on my cell if anything happens.

JOHN

Dave ...

(uncertain, but firm)

then I get to go tomorrow, after the accountant meeting, OK?

The partners shake and smile. David bolts out the door.

EXT: MALL PARKING LOT – DAY

Hordes of cars inch into the Mecca of San Diego shopping – the enormous FASHION VALLEY MALL. In a parking space far from the structure, David squeezes out of his car.

DAVID

What are you people doing here on
Cyber Monday! Jeez!

He pulls an ENERGY DRINK out of his pocket, pops the top, chugs it down, wiping red drips off his chin.

DAVID

You and me. Let's rumble!

He clicks the car alarm and stomps towards the beast.

INT: MALL – DAY

David walks briskly through the mall, his head on a swivel; right, left.

An upscale clothing store; a well-dressed clerk explains the outfit on a manikin. David nods, rubs his chin.

DAVID

Her size?

Inside a novelty store; David sits in a vibrating chair on full speed as the clerk stands by. His voice vibrates.

DAVID

How many speeds?

At a jewelry store; the associate pulls a beautiful and outrageously expensive bracelet from the case. David gasps.

DAVID

How much?

MONTAGE: Store signs. Stores, stores, and more stores. David goes up the escalator; he eats in the food court, stares at others' bags filled with packages.

A neon store sign, LINGERIE. David walks towards the store, worn, and stares at it. The Lingerie sign stares back. Inside, a YOUNG COUPLE, looking through racks of sexy nighties. The guy gently kisses her neck, she turns and kisses him passionately. David becomes self-conscious of watching and turns away, dejected.

EXT: MALL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

David walks towards his car, defeated. He turns back towards the mall, now a mass of BRIGHT SIGNAGE TWINKLING through the dark.

DAVID
I'll be back!

INT: TECH DAY - NIGHT

John is closing the repair spaces. David enters and melts into a chair. He scowls, holds up his hand.

DAVID
Don't say it!

John gestures, 'told ya.'

DAVID
What horrible things happened here?

JOHN
Nothing. Oh, your freebie project over there recovered some data.

David stares across the room at the hard drive connected to the computer. "Data Recovered = 1%"

DAVID
His love story.

John looks at the hard drive, back at David, puzzled.

DAVID
I spent hours looking for a Christmas present for the woman I love most in the world, and I couldn't find a thing. I had no idea what to get her. I left the mall feeling like ... like I'm not ...

JOHN

Not what?

DAVID

Like I'm not her lover anymore.

John pauses ... guilty too ... his mind at home.

JOHN

Don't be too hard on yourself. I gotta go.

DAVID

Yeah, see ya ... god, the accountant meeting. Another marathon day.

JOHN

'Night partner.

DAVID

'Night ... remember before we started Tech Day, we used to go out all the time. I can't remember the last time we did that.

JOHN

Me either. God. How old are your kids now?

DAVID

Ally's 12. Sabrina's 16. Shauntay, 21.

JOHN

21!

DAVID

She's comin' home from college this week.

The men are lost in their minds' eyes, pondering all the missed moments.

DAVID

John, when you get home, give Kristen a gentle kiss on her neck, right here-
(points to soft spot on his neck above the collar bone)

John touches his neck in the spot, thinks. David knods. John smiles and goes out the door leaving David alone in the big repair space. He sighs and looks over at the hard drive. BLEEP! "Data Recovered = 2%". He pushes his chair and rolls across the floor.

DAVID

Ok, let's see it.

He types some prompts. A WINDOW pops up with scattering of icons. But then a folder appears, LOVE STORY. He studies it, tempted to click and see what's inside. Benny enters.

BENNY

Hey boss, closing up.

DAVID

Good. How was Cyber Monday?

BENNY

Our online store rocked.

DAVID

We don't have an online store.

BENNY

That was a joke.

DAVID

Very subtle.

BENNY

The hard drives are getting them in the door. Sales are good. Picked up a few new repair customers. Not bad for a day when everyone's supposed to be shopping online.

DAVID

Don't remind me, god, I was out at Fashion Valley. I'm exhausted.

BENNY

Want me to close up?

David stares at the folder intensely. The folder, LOVE STORY, looks right back at him.

DAVID
Yeah, thanks.

INT: SHELTER - NIGHT

The shelter beds are mostly full, residents mill about. Ron lays on his bed staring at the ceiling. A DOOR OPENS (O.S.), someone quickly approaches.

DAVID (O.S.)
Ron. We recovered some data on your hard drive. Wanna see?

Ron turns, surprised, smiles and gets up.

INT: TECH DAY REPAIR SPACE - NIGHT

David pushes Ron through the space in his wheelchair. They glide through, smiling and enjoying the time.

DAVID
OK, let's see what we've got.

The COMPUTER MONITOR, "Data Recovered = 2%". David works the keyboard. The data window pops up, the LOVE STORY folder icon appears. Ron smiles nervously.

RON
Well open it already.

DAVID
No, no. Company policy. It's yours, you do it.

Ron takes the mouse and clicks. On the screen TWO PICTURES OF RON, surrounded by empty-square icons.

RON
What do those squares mean?

DAVID
The computer sees the data, but can't grab it, like it's just out of reach or something's blocking it.

RON
Does that mean it's gone?

DAVID

No, not at all. The software will keep trying until we stop it.

The TWO PICTURES stand out; ONE is a younger Ron cleaned up, plaid shirt, a forest background, the sunlight dimming. Life in his eyes, staring at the photographer just above the lens view. PICTURE TWO is Ron in a swimsuit at a lake making a muscle-man pose, showing off his bicep in one arm, a beer in the other, laughing, enjoying life on a hot, beautiful summer day.

RON

She took the pictures, wanted to be a photographer. That first one ... we drove up to this little mountain getaway, got a cabin for the night. I had to stand out in front of a little market for an hour to get someone to buy us some wine ... a cheap Oregon Pinot. We didn't care. We stayed in the cabin the entire time listening to music, getting drunk on wine, drunk on each other. Making love all night, stopping just to slow dance ... god ... best night of my life.

DAVID

The other one?

RON

That's a lake near her home town. She wore a white string bikini with a big floppy straw hat and dark black sunglasses. God she was beautiful. I was just showing off. It made her laugh. I can hear her voice, the sound of the shore breakers. Her lips. I can still taste her.

David's cell phone chimes, a TEXT from Maria.

DAVID

Jesus, Maria. I've missed two messages?

RON

I'll find a way back to the shelter, don't worry about me.

DAVID
Be serious. I'll take you.

RON
Are you an idiot! Go be with her!

Ron whips his wheelchair around and angrily pushes himself away, BANG, and out the door.

EXT: TECH DAY SIDEWALK - NIGHT

The strip mall is lit with Christmas cheer, a few shoppers wander. Ron moves through it with his head down, focused hard on his pain. David runs after him.

DAVID
Ron, wait!

David jumps in front. Ron smashes into his legs. BAM. The two men stare hard at each other. David shakes it off, noticing Ron is almost hyperventilating.

DAVID
What's wrong with you?

RON
I'm sorry ... and yes, I feel sorrow in my heart! ... I'm just pissed.

DAVID
Pissed? We're getting your data back.

RON
Not that ... I'm pissed at you.

DAVID
Me?

RON
Because you're happy. You've got a great family and ... a beautiful, caring lady at home.
(weeping)
I'm never gona have it. Never.

David kneels down embracing the lost, lonely young man.

RON

The VA shrinks tell us one of the things we have to fight off is our anger towards people for not being messed up like us. Angry at people for being happy, in one piece. I fight it off every day ... sometimes I win, sometimes I lose.

DAVID

Let me take you back.

RON

No, really. I need to be alone, just to clear my head. Its fine, really.

David watches him wheel away, unsure of what to do.

INT: WILKS DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Christmas music plays, festive decorations, the table is set. Maria, Sabrina and Ally are standing by, looking towards the garage entry door with smiles.

The door opens, a dejected David steps through.

GIRLS

Hi!

David is surprised, immediately changes.

DINNER TABLE - LATER

Each wearing their Santa hats eating, David gazes curiously warm at Maria. Sabrina snaps the hat off.

SABRINA

OK, enough with the hat, its messing up my hair.

DAVID

Put the hat on, it's Christmas.

She looks at her cell phone hidden secretly in her lap.

MARIA

No cell phones at the table Sabrina. Do I have to take it.

SABRINA
No, its off. Sorry.

ALLY
I like my Santa hat.

SABRINA
That's 'cuz you're a dork.

MARIA
Don't.

DAVID
Ally, are you a dork?

ALLY
No!

DAVID
See, your sister's not a dork. Come
Modem, come give me a kiss.

Modem struggles to get up and approaches wagging his tail, licks David's face. David takes Sabrina's hat and tries to stick it on Modem's head.

GIRLS
Dad, no! Poor boy!

Modem won't stand for it, shakes it off. Everyone laughs.

DAVID
Thanks for waiting until this ungodly
hour for dinner. It's ... amazing.

ALLY
That's dinner twice in one week.

SABRINA
It's a record!

MARIA
Your dad works very hard girls. We're
very blessed.

David absorbs the comments.

DAVID
 (looking at each girl)
 I cannot believe how lucky I am.
 (at Maria)
 You are amazing.

ALLY / SABRINA
 Aaaawww.

DAVID
 Hun, what do you want for Christmas?
 I mean what do you really, really want?

Maria blushes at the sudden raw love flowing towards her.

SABRINA
 I know what she wants, Dad, but it'll
 cost you.

DAVID
 That's against the law.

David lurches out of his chair and attacks Sabrina who jumps out of his reach. All four begin running around the table, into the living room, collapsing on the floor in front of the Christmas tree where David and Ally hold Sabrina down, tickling her.

DAVID
 Talk!

ALLY
 Yeah, talk!

Sabrina won't talk.

MARIA
 Resist, Sabrina, hold out for the
 money!

SABRINA
 Ok, Ok, I'll talk.

They stop. Sabrina primps her hair.

DAVID
 Spill it.

SABRINA

Mom wants ...

All captivated, anticipating.

SABRINA

... world peace!

Sabrina scurries up the stairs out of her dad's reach. David, Maria and Ally collapse laughing.

DAVID

World peace?

ALLY

Yayyy, world peace! Merry Christmas.

DAVID

C'mon, babe. Tell me what you really want.

MARIA

You can't deliver world peace?

They kiss a long passionate kiss. Ally runs away.

ALLY

Oh gross, mom and dad are making out!

MARIA

I just want my family to be together for Christmas. That's all. Bring our first born home from the airport Thursday ... and I'll have my Christmas present.

They look into each other's eyes, start laughing.

DAVID

Call the Pope, got a saint here.

INT: WILKS KITCHEN — SUNRISE

The automatic coffee maker drips. The PHOTO OF DAVID still rests between the Paris coffee cups. David inhales the aroma, mmmmm. After pouring, he lifts the cup to his lips, but stops. He studies the tiny Eiffel Tower image and a small circle of the surrounding city. He ponders it, and walks ...

LIVING ROOM

... around the house, stopping to gaze at his family pictures along the wall as though he's never seen them. He touches delicate nick-nacks on shelves, runs his fingers along the smooth edges of an antique wooden table, smells the potpourri in a bowl next to the sofa, all Maria's loving decor. He pauses at the Christmas tree and studies the beautiful ornaments, pictures of his family, MARIA AND ALL THREE GIRLS AT DISNEYLAND. Modem joins him quietly, slowly. David turns and opens the sliding glass door to the back yard revealing ...

EXT: BACKYARD – SUNRISE

... dazzling beauty; potted plants, flowers, little trees, a fountain, teak furniture with small Christmas figurines. He inhales the sweet aroma of the jasmine flowers, listens to the fountain trickle. Sees Modem, gets on his knees.

DAVID

I'm in trouble Modem! What do I get her for Christmas?

Modem gives him a confused expression. David sighs, kisses the pooch, and leaves.

INT: TECH DAY – DAVID'S OFFICE – DAY

Accountant TED NGUYEN's fingers fly across the keyboard. Ted is surrounded the computer spread sheet BLIPS numbers. David and John nervously pace the small office.

DAVID / JOHN

More coffee?

TED

Yeah, thanks guys. Won't be long, just finishing up.

David takes the cup and walks towards the break room, but stops to peek at the work station with Ron's hard drive; "Data Recovered = 3%". He hesitates.

DAVID

Oh! He won't care!

He clicks the folder. There are TWO ADDITIONAL PICTURES, both of Ron by himself. David looks hard, skeptical.

DAVID

Just him. They're all just him.

BACK IN THE OFFICE

David sets the cup down. John sits and taps David on the forearm, motions to his neck, smiles and gives him a thumbs up. Ted hands David a stack of envelopes.

TED

There's the bonus checks. Now, on to the bigger picture. Guys, Tech Day's doing really well. Its not an ocean of revenue, but the company is very healthy. Plenty of cash reserves, revenue isn't up much, but it is up. The biggest positive is expenses are down, you're running the place super efficient.

DAVID

Ted, that's Benny. He's amazing.

TED

Yes, and if you don't do something big he's going to leave, I'm telling you!

DAVID / JOHN

Yes, yes, we know.

TED

So, thinking big, you should do it.

JOHN

Online store?

Ted looks seriously.

TED

More. Another store.

DAVID

An online store and another storefront?

TED
Yes. Absoultely.

JOHN
Holy crap.

TED
An online store by itself isn't suited for one storefront. It's a bigger project than that and will consume a lot of your space and time. You need to expand.

DAVID
Oh Lord.

TED
Do both, it makes sense. I can start the process with the bank first of the year. Find a place in, say, three months. Stock it, hire people. You're up by April.

David and John look at each other to gauge their reaction. Smiles slowly spread across their faces.

TED
You're gona be rolling in it, boys!

DAVID
God, sounds like a lot of work, Ted. A lot of work.

TED
Yeah, so?

Their smiles fade. David fiddles with his wedding ring and stares at Ted's piles of books and files.

TED
You need time to think, or what?

DAVID / JOHN
Yes, we do. Yes.

INT: BENNETT'S FINE FURNITURE — ALFRED'S OFFICE — DAY

Alfred sits at his desk fretting over a mountain of paperwork, popping meds. His desk phone BLASTS, almost gives him a heart attack.

ALFRED
Bennett's Fine Furniture, Alfred speaking.

DAVID (V.O.)
Al, its Dave Wilks.

ALFRED
David, my brother, what can I do
for you?

DAVID (V.O.)
I'm thinking about opening another
store. My accountant makes it sound
like a breeze. Can you meet for lunch
and tell me what I'm getting into?

ALFRED
(smile slips away)
Oh, Lord ... you got the disease!

DAVID (V.O.)
Disease?

INT: MEXICAN RESTAURANT — DAY

Alfred has antacids by his plate and a scowl on his face
as he eats a pile of food. David devours fish tacos.

DAVID
What did you mean by "I have the
disease"?

ALFRED
Dreamer. Entrepreneur. Crazy fool.
Call it whatever you want, but you
got it.

David leans forward, whispers.

DAVID
Will I get a rash?

ALFRED
(serious, firm)
Worse. You see, you're not just
satisfied with one store, naw, you
(MORE)

(CONT)

gotta have another one. And then another. *More.* Lord, you remind me of me! Its in us man, part of our soul lurking in here that says, "Go for it!" Fear doesn't even matter, won't stop us. Sometimes no common sense either. But either way, we're gona step up to the plate and take our swings.

David listens closely.

ALFRED (CONT)

We got lucky, we hit one out of the park. Most guys who start businesses strike out, but here's the thing, even though they strike out, they get back in there, failure after failure after failure. Then one day, kapow, out of the park, but then ... it starts all over. *More.* That's where you're at now. It's a disease, Lord, just as I live and breath.

DAVID

But is it worth it, I mean ... are you happy, Al? Is your family happy?

ALFRED

Happiness?

(deep thought)

Wrong question to ask, Dave.

DAVE

Wrong question?

ALFRED

I started Bennett's Fine Furniture because of what's

(points to heart)

in here, brother, 'aint nothing I can do about it. Happiness is something totally different. Don't need a chain of furniture stores to be happy, can be happy doing 9-5. And yes, I believe the Bennett family is happy. Better be happy dammit, after what I've been through.

DAVID
So what's the right question?

Alfred contemplates the question.

ALFRED
Folks like us, the question is ...
can you live with yourself if you
don't do it? If you *don't* try that
crazy thing floatin' around in your
mind, in your heart. Even if it fails,
can you live with not doing it.

INT: SHELTER - NIGHT

Ron is packing. Doris approaches.

DORIS
Well, we have to close the shelter up
in a few hours ... any luck?

RON
Yeah. I found a place.

DORIS
Oh, thank God. That's great. Can we
give you a ride?

RON
No, I can manage.

Doris looks at him sympathetically, sits next to him.

DORIS
I'm so sorry for everything that's
happened to you. I wish there was
more we could do.

RON
Don't worry, things are getting better.
I got my disability check today, got
ahold of a cousin up in Orange County.
Still got the VA, they're helping too.
Don't feel bad, it'll ruin your Christmas.

DORIS
Ron ... why don't you go home. I don't
understand?

RON
No, Doris. I'm never going back.

He acknowledges her sincerity, finishes packing and holds out his hand.

RON
Goodbye.

She hugs him. As Ron wheels himself away with his few possessions, a tear streams down Doris' face, utterly helpless to do anything. Ron disappears out the entrance.

INT: TECH DAY - NIGHT

Ron wheels himself into the retail area. April and Sophia are helping customers. Larry is behind the counter.

LARRY
Hey, hows it going?

RON
Its good.

LARRY
You need service right, for your hard drive?

RON
Yeah.

Larry makes a quick call. John pops out and greets Ron.

RON
Just check'n on my hard drive.

John nods sympathetically.

INT: REPAIR SPACES - DAY

John works the keyboard.

RON
Can you open up that folder there called Love Story.

The folder pops open, revealing TWO MORE PICTURES have been recovered (six total.) They are both of Ron in different scenes, alone. Four empty icons remain.

RON

How long will it take to get the rest?
I'm ... I might be leaving soon.

JOHN

No idea. Actually, I'm surprised you got anything off that drive. I wouldn't count on much more, if anything. Just trying to be realistic.

RON

Yeah, I understand. How much do I owe you so far?

JOHN

You gotta discuss that with Dave.
He went shopping, again. Be back to close up though.

RON

I'll just come back tomorrow. Thanks.

INT: DAVID'S CAR - DAY

David cruises, glances over at PACKAGES filling the passenger seat. A large, shining Eiffel Tower pokes out of a beautifully colored paper bag on the floorboard. Two identical smaller Eiffel Towers in cellophane packaging rest on the seat with a large Eiffel Tower photograph.

DAVID

Oh boy. Do these suck.

Ahead David sees police cars with flashing lights as the fire scene. He slows and curiously rubbernecks. Cop cars and construction workers in hard hats surround a bulldozer. With his limited view into the scene he sees Ron in the middle of the rubble, yelling, throwing debris around. Cops stand stoically, patiently, waiting.

DAVID

Ron? Oh my god!

A cop directing traffic urges him to move forward. David speeds up and turns, stopping 20 yards from the scene.

EXT: FIRE SCENE - DAY

David runs to the scene.

DAVID
That guy is a friend of mine!

COP 1
Slow down, sir.

DAVID
What happened?

COP 1
He won't let the construction crew clear it.

DAVID
Why?

COP 1
He's ranting about some pictures he thinks are in there.

DAVID
Please let me help, please.

COP 1 gets on his radio.

COP 1 (to radio)
Sergeant, I've got a guy here who says this guy is a friend of his and he wants to help get him out of there.

SERGEANT (on radio)
Stand by.

A moment later the SERGEANT appears, the same cop who stopped when Sabrina spun out.

SERGEANT
Oh, its you, and him, again.

DAVID
Yeah.

SERGEANT

Will he come out peacefully if you ask?

DAVID

I'll try.

The Sergeant escorts David to the edge of the rubble. All the cops, construction workers and onlookers are staring. David kneels down. Ron is sitting about 20 yards away.

DAVID

Hey, Ron, its David, buddy. You OK or what?

RON

I gotta find 'em ... they're gona raze it all, bulldoze it. I gotta find 'em.

DAVID

We'll get them off the hard drive, buddy, we'll get them.

RON

No, you won't get them, its not working. I'm trying to be strong, Dave, I'm trying! It's too much. Too much.

David looks towards the Sergeant.

DAVID

Can he get in trouble for this?

Sergeant kneels down next to David and whispers.

SERGEANT

He hasn't committed a crime, so its basically like a traffic ticket. But if we have to remove him and it gets ugly, then we're looking at jail.

DAVID

Can I go in there?

SERGEANT

No, I can't let you do that. Don't know if he has a weapon and what's left of that structure is pretty unsafe. I'll give you another five minutes then we'll have to go get him. These construction workers have a job to do.

David nods OK, moves closer.

DAVID

Hey Ron, now listen to me buddy. They're going to come in and get you if you don't come out. Whatever you had in that apartment is gone. Gone! I know it hurts, but come out and I'll help you finish it! That's my gift to you ... for Christmas. We'll finish your love story together.

Ron wipes away tears, stands up, hobbles out.

RON

I don't want her to see me like this, ever. I just want her to know we had a good story. Something special. That's all.

DAVID

C'mon, let's go get your stuff.

David helps Ron towards his things on the sidewalk.

AT DAVID'S CAR

David slides the wheelchair into the trunk and shuts it. Ron opens the passenger door.

DAVID

Let me get that stuff outta there.

Ron stares at the Eiffel Tower gifts for a heartbeat.

DAVID

For Maria. It's a Christmas-

RON

No it's okay, I'll sit in the back.

INSIDE THE CAR

David takes a deep breath and de-stresses for a moment. Ron is leaning back, staring straight ahead. The razing begins with a loud ENGINE ROAR. They both stare out the window as the construction crew begins.

RON

She doesn't want that stuff for Christmas.

David turns to Ron and curiously eyes him.

DAVID

You know what Maria wants for Christmas?

RON

Yeah.

DAVID

Does it have anything to do with world peace?

The two men have good long laugh.

INT: MALL - DAY

Maria and Ally are Christmas shopping together. Maria's cell phone rings.

MARIA

It's daddy. Hi honey.

Maria listens to him, nodding as the tale unfolds. Her eyes begin to dim, her smile fades away.

MARIA

Oh-my-god. That poor boy. Yes, of course, but honey,
(struggling, torn)
Shauntay is coming home tomorrow.

INT: WILKS HOME - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

David and Maria are fully engaged in a quiet, tense debate.

DAVID

He doesn't have any money, no family. Sometimes I wonder if what's been happening to the guy is real! His life just keeps getting worse and worse, and it's not his fault! I don't know how he goes on. How does he do it?

MARIA

Sofa bed. On the sofa bed. One night, OK, then tomorrow we'll find a place for him to stay.

INT: WILKS HOME - DINNER TABLE - NIGHT

Ron is cleaned up, looking great, wearing a fresh set of David's clothes. He sits at the table with a crutch behind him leaning on the wall. All wear Santa hats.

SABRINA

My dad's clothes look good on you.

RON

Thanks.

ALLY

Why don't you wear your fake leg all the time?

The parents have accepted Ally's spontaneous inquisitions, they shrug.

RON

It kind of hurts, actually, so, only when I need to.

ALLY

Can you come to my school Christmas concert? I'm in the choir.

RON

When is it?

ALLY

Next week.

RON
 (struggling)
 Oh, I don't know if I'm going to be
 in San Diego then.

ALLY / SABRINA
 Ooohhh?

MARIA
 Really? Where are you going?

He looks to David for help, David studies Maria,
 surprised. He notices Ron's silent plea.

DAVID
 Yeah, uh, you never know. We'll see
 what happens at the time, OK, girls?

RON
 Yeah, let's wait and see.

LATER - LIVING ROOM

David is setting up the sofa bed. Maria stands by with
 arms full of sheets, looking over her shoulder into the
 dining room where the girls are giving Ron a warm,
 curious third degree about his prosthetics. Maria looks
 at his sea bag, his wheel chair, a few lonely possessions
 nestled against the wall near the Christmas tree.

MARIA
 Everything he has in the world ... and
 all he wants is his love story.

DAVID
 Hon ... We've recovered some of the
 pictures. It's just a bunch of shots
 of him alone, looks like he could've
 taken them. I don't ... I don't know if
 this girl exists.

MARIA
 Oh my god. He really has no one.

Maria clutches the sheets closer.

EXT: WILKS HOME - BACK PATIO - NIGHT

David and Ron sit together in lounge chairs sipping red wine. Christmas music softly plays, the Christmas tree glows through the sliding glass doors. Their Santa hats lean slightly off their heads.

RON

This is an excellent Syrah, Dave,
excellent.

DAVID

Better be, paid eight bucks for it.

RON

I was kidding. Its pretty bad.

DAVID

So, you went by the shop and talked
to John about your hard drive?

RON

Couple more pictures were recovered,
but he said that was pretty much all of it.

DAVID

Your girlfriend?

RON

No, two more that she took of me.
Wanna know what they're of?

David hesitates, but, surrenders to the statement he made
at the rubble.

DAVID

Love to.

David listens as Ron tells the stories.

UPSTAIRS

Maria listens. Tears flow down her face.

INT: TECH DAY - DAVID'S OFFICE - DAY

David rubs his eyes and crosses off another shelter on
his list. He looks at the clock. 11:30. He calls Maria.

DAVID
Hey Babe. Any luck?

INT: WILKS HOME — DAY

Maria looks over her shoulder at Ron who is sitting in his wheelchair staring into the back yard.

MARIA
No. I can't find anything. Every shelter I called is maxed out with a waiting list. I couldn't even get a human being on the phone at the VA. You?

DAVID
Nada.

MARIA
What are we going to do?

DAVID
Uh ... put him on the phone.

MARIA
But what are you going to say?

DAVID
He has to go somewhere!

MARIA
But where, David?

John walks into the office.

JOHN
Got another more picture.

David waves him over.

DAVID
Sweetheart, hold on. John, a girl?

JOHN
Dunno. Listen, Dave, w've got maybe a few kilabytes of data that can be recovered, so we're pretty much done with it. We've tied up the work station long enough. We've got repairs waiting, you know, paying customers.

David takes a deep breath and sighs.

DAVID
Close of business tomorrow.

JOHN
That's almost two days!

DAVID
Please John. Whatever we get off
that hard drive is the only thing
this guy has left in the world.
He has nothing else. Nothing.

JOHN
OK, Dave. But close of business
tomorrow, that's it.

David nods. John leaves.

DAVID
Honey, let me talk to Ron.

Maria takes a deep breath and slowly approaches Ron with
the phone. He notices her and slowly looks over his
shoulder with a content, happy smile.

RON
Hi.

MARIA
Everything OK?

RON
Sure.

MARIA
David's on the phone.

She hands him the cell phone.

DAVID
Hey. Guess what, we pulled one more
picture off the drive. You want to
come take a look?

RON
Heck yeah. Give me about an hour to
catch a bus -

DAVID
What? Nonsense. Maria will give you
a lift.

Ron looks up at Maria.

RON

They recovered another picture. He wants me to come by?

MARIA

Of course, sure. I can take you.

Ron hands her the cell phone. Maria takes it and walks away talking casually with David until she gets out of hearing range.

MARIA

What are you going to do?

DAVID

He can stay here in the store, I'll get him a bed or something from Bennett's, he owes me a couch.

MARIA

What? Get him a hotel room, David!

DAVID

Hotel?

She places her hand on her head as though she's nursing a headache.

MARIA

We're horrible ... at Christmas.

DAVID

Welcome to my world.

INT: MARIA'S CAR - DAY

Maria drives as she and Ron travel towards the computer shop.

RON

Your first born gets in today, right?

MARIA

Yes. Her flight gets in around seven.

RON

Well, don't worry about me, Mrs Wilks. I'll be long gone by then.

MARIA

Oh, no, Ron, I wasn't worried. But ... do you have someplace to go?

RON

I'll find something.

The car ride becomes quiet and awkward.

RON

My lady had a big family like yours, four sisters and a couple of brothers. Toys everywhere, constant noise. It drove her crazy, but to me it was a beautiful sound. I never had anything like that.

As Ron tells his story a content, knowing sense comes over Maria. She knows what to do now, what she must do.

INT: TECH DAY — DAVID'S OFFICE — DAY

Ron rolls in followed by Maria. David kisses his wife and fist bumps Ron.

DAVID

Alright, lets take a look at that image, shall we?

MARIA

Can I see them all?

DAVID

Uh ... sweetheart?

Maria hesitates.

MARIA

Oh, yeah, I already told him, honey.

DAVID

Told him ... what exactly?

MARIA

That he can stay with us until he can make whatever arrangements he needs.

She gives him the evil eye.

DAVID

Right, that, yes of course.

MARIA

Yes, that.

RON

I just need a couple days, that's all. Three days tops.

DAVID

So, he'll be able to meet-?

MARIA

Yes, he'll get to meet Shauntay.

RON

If she's anything like her mom, she's a saint.

MARIA

Ooooooh, you're too sweet Ronnie.

DAVID

Ronnie? Uh - well, she's not exactly like her mom.

MARIA

At all.

RON

Can't wait.

DAVID

OK, lets take a look at that picture.

REPAIR SHOP SPACES

David works the keyboard and brings up the new image of Ron alone as he stands in a river. Ron sees it and chuckles.

RON

Oh, that one! Water was freezing. It was October, we were up in the mountains, camping, before I had to go back to Iraq. Let me show you the rest.

Ron works the keyboard and brings up the other recovered images, all of him. Maria sits down next to him and smiles contently, enthralled with the images.

MARIA

Tell me about this one.

As Ron loses himself reminiscing, Maria makes a knowing glance over her shoulder to David. Their eyes meet, surrendering to the heartbreaking conclusion that will certainly follow, unable to stop it.

INT: SAN DIEGO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT – NIGHT

The airport is buzzing with Christmas decor and holiday travelers. The Wilks family waits below an escalator near baggage claim, giddy with anticipation, flowers and balloons. Above, a crowd of arrivals flow towards the escalator. A flashing ball of color pushes through the crowd and stops at the top. She's got long brown hair with blonde and red dyed stripes, bootie shorts, fuzzy boots, a t-shirt that says "First Born", and sunglasses flashing red and green lights with "Merry Christmas" across the top. When she sees her family, she screams.

WILKS FAMILY

First born!

DAVID

(frowns)

She's half naked!

Shauntay slides down the rail.

DAVID

Oh lord!

He lunges to catch his daughter. The girls follow, embracing her, loving on each other.

SHAUNTAY

(with drama)

Take me home, father!

DAVID

Home we go – uh, gotta tell you we have a visitor.

SHAUNTAY

Who is it, grandma Alice?

DAVID

Nope. Not grandma Alice.

INT: WILKS HOME – NIGHT

Christmas rock music blasts. BAM, a suitcase plops in front of the Christmas tree. Shauntay pulls out crunched, badly wrapped presents.

SHAUNTAY

Ally this one's for you. Sabrina, here.
Mom and dad, this is yours.

Ally shakes and feels each one as she stuffs them under the tree with the growing pile.

SHAUNTAY

So where's this visitor?

Ron comes in from the back patio wearing his prosthetic leg. When she sees him, Shauntay is mesmerized.

DAVID

Sweetheart, this is Ron Davis. Our guest.

She walks right up to him, making him nervous.

SHAUNTAY

Hmm, I see Ally's gotten to your hair.

RON

Yeah. Hi.

SHAUNTAY

Hi. I'm the First Born. Dad says you were in the war?

David pokes his face between them.

DAVID

Yes, he was. Let's eat!

DINNER TABLE

Wine pours in three glasses. Another glass enters.

SHAUNTAY

I'm 21 now. Fill me up!

She has on those sunglasses with 'Merry Christmas' on top blinking red and green lights, a psychedelic shirt and tights blazing with color. David pours.

MARIA

David? Stop, not too much!

SHAUNTAY

Oh mom, it's Christmas, time to celebrate! Santa's having margaritas on the beach!

Another glass enters the count.

MARIA
Sabrina!

DAVID
(to Shauntay)
You're corrupting your sister.

SHAUNTAY
She needs corrupting.

SABRINA
Fill me up dad!

ALLY
If she gets some then I get some!

DAVID
Well then why not the dog. Here boy,
care for a nice Argentine Malbec?

Everyone at the table is laughing, consoling the dog.
David takes away Sabrina's wine glass.

DAVID
Sorry kid, nice try.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Maria plops in a comfy chair, exhausted but content.

DAVID (O.S.)
Wanna call it a night?

Maria looks over at her kids talking together around Ron.

MARIA
No, not yet. I just want to watch them
for a little while.

The song "OH HOLY NIGHT" comes on.

SHAUNTAY
Oh, this is my favorite Christmas
song. Remember dance lessons Dad?

Shauntay holds her hand out to Ron.

SHAUNTAY
Will you dance with me?

Everyone is stunned, including Ron.

RON
I ... I can't dance.

SHAUNTAY
Yes you can.

Ron looks at her parents, searching.

DAVID
Sweetheart, we really should-

SHAUNTAY
You have your prosthetic on.

RON
I haven't danced on it. I haven't
danced in years.

SHAUNTAY
Doesn't matter.

Shauntay walks over to the CD player and pauses it. David moves towards her, but Maria clutches his arm, watching the scene intensely. Ally and Sabrina move to the stairs glued to the scene. Shauntay holds out her hands to Ron who stares at them.

SHAUNTAY
C'mon. It'll be fun.

Her hands hover in front of his eyes. Ron reaches to her hands, his prosthetic gently joining hers, and he rises. Maria starts the CD player. Ron closes his eyes and holds her loosely at first, then closer, lost in his memories and filled with uncertain, awkward happiness.

MARIA
How beautiful.

DAVID
This is not good.

They dance in the glow of the Christmas tree. His prosthetic arm around her back. His prosthetic leg moving slowly across the floor. For this moment, Ron is whole again. The song ends. Shauntay steps back.

SHAUNTAY

What do you mean you can't dance?
That was beautiful. Thank you.

The Wilks' applaud. Ron is beaming.

RON

I can dance.

LATER — IN THE BACKYARD

David and Ron are staring up at the stars. It's a warm night. Maria is just inside the sliding glass doors preparing the sofa bed. David turns and stares at his wife lovingly through the glass as she fluffs up pillows.

RON

You gona give her those cheap Eiffel
Towers?

DAVID

Gawwd no! I'm returning that crap,
so she won't have to.

(beat)

I really don't know what I'm gona give
her. But ... I've been thinking.

(beat)

You wanna hear what a friend of mine
told me the other day?

RON

Sure.

DAVID

He said we can be happy doing the
same old thing if we really wanted.
But for some people ... the question
is ... if you *can live without* doing
the crazy thing you're thinking about.
Even if it fails, can you live with
yourself if you don't do it.

RON

Live ... or die, but be at peace.

DAVID

I was thinking more like 'win or lose',
but I guess you could say it that way.
Merry Christmas to that.

The two men toast each other. Ron pauses and looks at Maria and David for a second.

RON

You can stop, Dave ... its finished.

DAVID

Stop what?

RON

The hard drive.

(beat)

After I danced with the First Born ...
I knew it was finished. I don't need
the love story any more. Its over.

INT: TECH DAY – NIGHT

A shiny new smart phone.

DAVID

Here you go, Mrs Bennett. Brand new.
All the bells and whistles.

MRS BENNETT

Oh, David, you are the sweetest man!
How can I ever thank you?

DAVID

No worries. I have connections.

MRS BENNETT

I mean for not telling Alfred, honey.

DAVID

Uh, yeah, that. Hmmm.

MRS BENNETT

You ... didn't tell him, did you David?
C'mon now!

DAVID

Lord strike me down now! It just
slipped out!

MRS BENNETT

Oh my, and he didn't say a word to me.

DAVID

He wanted you to have the best.

MRS BENNETT

Lord how I love that man. As for you ...

She walks away wagging a finger with a devilish smile.

MRS BENNETT (CONT)

Santa Claus doesn't visit naughty boys.

DAVID

I wasn't naughty before you walked
in, Mrs Bennett.

MRS BENNETT

Well who knows, maybe it just took someone
like me to bring it out. Merry Christmas
David!

Door shuts, KU-CHUNK.

David collapses on the counter exhausted.

DAVID

Ugh! O-M-G, can we puh-leeeeeze close
this store. Puh-leeeeeze!

Benny and the crew start the closing routine. John taps
David on his shoulder. He doesn't budge.

DAVID

(muffled)

Wa?

JOHN

Your freebie hard drive job is done.
I've taken it off the recovery software,
the hard drive is on the finished jobs
shelf. So ...

David slowly gets up and rubs his eyes.

DAVID

Put it on a thumb drive and I'll give
it all back to him tonight.

JOHN

Tonight?

DAVID

He's staying at my place for a
few days.

A frown spreads across John's face.

JOHN

Dave, do you have any idea how risky that is, taking in a homeless person?

DAVID

He wasn't homeless 'til his home burned down. He's a fine man, John. A good man.

APRIL

That's so sweet! Like she said, "it just takes someone to get it out of us".

JOHN

Oh boy.

SOPHIA

So beautiful David.

BENNY

Pardon the love fest, but is there anything else important that needs to happen today, boss?

David thinks. The entire team stands by, anticipating.

DAVID

Not that I can ... wait a minute ...

He snaps his fingers playfully, makes them sweat.

DAVID

Does it have something to do with world peace?

ALL

(laughing)

No!

DAVID

Well then it must be these!

He whips out the bonus checks! Cheering. Dancing. David passes them all out, except one. He gently folds it and tucks it into his wallet.

EXT: WILKS HOME - NIGHT

David pulls into the driveway and gets out, whistling a Christmas tune. He has his briefcase and a small box.

INT: WILKS HOME - NIGHT

David enters. The place is silent, only a few lights are on. He goes into the living room and turns on the Christmas tree, then music. The sofa bed is neatly tucked back into the couch. Ron's things are gone.

DAVID

Anyone home?

He walks into the kitchen and turns on the light. There's a note on the counter.

DAVID

(reading)

'Your daughters went shopping with mom.
Do you ever check your text messages?
Ciao and Love, the First Born.'

He fishes his cell phone out of his brief case and checks the text messages.

DAVID

Oh, crap, there it is.

He pulls the folded check out, the thumb drive, and places them on the counter, smiles. He brings the thumb drive up to his eyes.

INT: MALL - NIGHT

SANTA CLAUS has a frightened look on his face.

SANTA

Aren't you girls a little big for
Santa?

He looks at his ELVES for help. The Wilks daughters, led by Shauntay covered in color and accessories, push in.

SHAUNTAY

Come here little sister.

She grabs Ally and hoists up on her own lap. Santa yelps as the weight of the three girls crushes his thighs.

SABRINA

Oh-my-gawwd, this is so embarrassing!
How's my hair?

Ally snips off Santa's locks with mini scissors.

SANTA

What the-?

ALLY

Santa, I'm gona be the world's best hair stylist to the stars! Can I get all the fancy scissors, brushes and maybe some cool hair dyes for Christmas?

SABRINA

(talking loud in Maria's direction.)

Car. I want a car. No! I neeeeed a car, Santa. Desperately!

Maria waves from a bench outside Santa's Village, exhausted.

SHAUNTAY

Guess what I want Santa!

SANTA

Legalized Marijuana? Elves, can we take the picture already!

SHAUNTAY

Girls ...

ALL THREE

(scream at the top of their lungs)

World Peace!

Santa cringes. CAMERA FLASH.

Maria's cell rings.

MARIA

Hi sweetheart ... they're killing me, but we're having fun ... no, Ron isn't with us. When he left this morning he said he was going to see you ...

BACK AT HOME

DAVID

His stuff is gone too. I'm gona check the shelter, maybe they didn't close down after all ... OK ... see you guys in an hour. I'll get pizza for dinner. OK, bye.

David grabs his car keys, but stops, looking at the box. He pulls out Ron's dead hard drive, then looks at the thumb drive. He opens the kitchen laptop and brings the thumb drive next to a USB port but stops short of inserting it. He slowly pulls the thumb drive away.

DAVID

You're right First Born. Doesn't matter. It doesn't matter.

EXT: SHELTER LOCATION – NIGHT

The large room at the old school is no longer a shelter. Seniors are playing Bingo there. Doris shakes her head, she hasn't seen Ron.

EXT: RED CROSS – NIGHT

David looks through the glass doors. They're closed.

EXT: FIRE SCENE – NIGHT

David pulls up to the corner where the charred apartment building was. At the curb, his car lights cut through what is now a razed, empty lot with a chain-link fence around it. He opens his door and stands up, squinting through the darkness.

DAVID

Ron! I know she wasn't real, but it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter to me, to us. You can talk to us.

Looking around, searching ...

DAVID

It doesn't have to be over. Your story isn't finished.

Nothing but the sound of his car engine. He leaves.

INT: WILKS HOME – MASTER BEDROOM – NIGHT

David slips into bed with Maria and cuddles up. She turns and sees he is troubled.

MARIA

Any luck?

DAVID

No.

David leans over and kisses his bride softly and looks into her eyes.

DAVID

I want you to know something ... our love story isn't over, Maria. It's not over. I mean it.

She smiles and kisses him. They hold each other.

INT: TECH DAY – DAY

The store is busy with customers. April and Larry are at the counter, Sophia is on the floor. David walks in and looks around at the people, at his employees. He inhales and smiles.

SOPHIA

Wow, boss, you're in late today. We were about to call the police and file a missing person's report.

DAVID

Sophia, I bought my wife her Christmas present today.

SOPHIA

Aw, how cute, what is it, a new toaster? Plastic house plants? An ugly jacket?

DAVID

Ha-ha-ha, very funny. Maybe in years past I would have done that-

SOPHIA

You did that.

DAVID

Well, this year is different. No chance she'll return this gift.

SOPHIA

Ooohh, I'm intrigued. Tell, tell!

David just smiles. She leans in to him.

SOPHIA

Whisper.

He whispers in her ear. Her eyes light up, then begin to water. She covers her mouth.

SOPHIA

Oh my god, that's so beautiful.

Sophia hugs her boss.

DAVID

Next thing is, where's Benny?

SOPHIA

Stock room.

David disappears through the back room doors. The store continues on: Sophia moves to help a customer. Larry answers the phone, April rings a sale. The back room door bursts open.

BENNY

Yeeeeesssss!

He fist pumps and cheers as he runs straight through the store on his way out the front door full of happiness.

DAVID'S OFFICE

David happily sits down at his messy desk and half-heartedly moves papers around, tidies up, but his mind is somewhere else.

DAVID

The crazy ideas in your head.

He fishes his cell phone out to look through contacts.

DAVID

Ted the accountant.

Deep breath.

DAVID

OK, let's wrap it up.

He dials and waits. Ted answers.

INT: WILKS HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

David stands at a distance staring through his living room to the backyard where Maria gardens in the amber glow of the late afternoon sun. She is a vision. David moves in closer. She wipes her feet, takes off her gloves and comes inside.

MARIA

Ahh! Hi! You scared me. You're home so early. You OK?

DAVID

Could not be better.

He comes to her and gives her a passionate kiss.

DAVID

Where are the girls?

MARIA

The First Born took them shopping.

DAVID

If the police show up, deny you know them.

He points to two glasses of wine he's poured. They sip.

DAVID

It's a Sonoma Cab, 2013.

MARIA

So cultured these days ... your heart is racing.

DAVID

I'm nervous.

MARIA

Why?

DAVID

Remember how Ted the accountant told us we could expand the company after Christmas? Well ... we told him there was no way we could do it, not yet anyway.

MARIA

Why?

DAVID

Because there's something I had to do first, a crazy idea that I couldn't live with if I didn't do it.

MARIA

Oh David, what did you do?

DAVID

I wanted to wait until Christmas, but that's why I'm nervous ... god, its like the first time I asked you out.

David reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out an envelope.

DAVID

Merry Christmas, Maria. I love you.

She opens the envelope and reads for a moment, then her eyes begin to water and she smiles, her heart races, she looks into his eyes.

MARIA

You're taking me to Paris?

DAVID

For three weeks, right after Christmas when Shauntay goes back to college.

MARIA

(in disbelief)

But ... can we afford this? And, the store, the girls, what did John say-

DAVID

John agreed. In fact, when we get back he's taking Kristen on a cruise. We gave ourselves a big bonus, and took a little from the cash reserves. We have the money. This morning I promoted Benny to assistant store manager, he'll take care of it. And Gramma Alice is coming to watch the house and the girls. It's done, sweetheart. You are going to Paris.

Maria is filled with inexplicable joy, then, she suddenly remembers something.

MARIA

Oh, wait here, I have something for you too!

She runs upstairs, (O.S.) a CLOSET OPENING, SOME SHUFFLING AROUND, she whirls back down with bag.

MARIA

I hadn't wrapped it yet, its just a small thing.

He opens the bag and peeks inside.

DAVID

What the ... is that a-

Maria pulls it out and places it on his head.

MARIA

A Riverboat Captain's hat.

DAVID

How did you ...?

MARIA

Ron told me.

The two lovers embrace. A door (O.S.) opens.

GIRLS (O.S.)

Would you two stop that! Gross.

MARIA

Girls, dad and I are going to Paris!

Screaming ensues with rusty French expressions being shouted among the girls.

INT: WILKS HOME - UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ally has Shauntay set up for a full hair treatment. Sabrina sits nearby texting. David pops his head in.

DAVID

Hi girls.

GIRLS

Hi dad.

ALLY

Daddy, grandma Alice is going to stay in your room, right? Last time she stayed with me, and she smells.

DAVID

(pointing to dyes on counter)
 Couldn't be worse than that stuff, gawwwd that stinks. What is that?

ALLY

Hair dye.

DAVID
How did you get ahold of hair dye?

ALLY
I asked Santa Claus at the mall.

DAVID
I don't think Santa delivers early gifts kid.

SHAUNTAY
I'm supervising.

DAVID
Did Santa bring any early gifts for anyone else?

SABRINA
I checked the driveway, no car.

DAVID
You'll be checking the driveway until you're 17 young lady.

SABRINA
17! Oh-my-god, that's an eternity!
Can gramma Alice take me driving when you're in Paris?

DAVID
The state took her license away, sorry.

SABRINA
You feel sorrow in your heart?

DAVID
Uh, no.

Sabrina collapses on the floor dramatically.

DAVID
Your mom gave me this.
(puts on hat)
Watcha think?

Girls giggle.

SHAUNTAY
Excellent, time to par-tayyy!
What it is?

DAVID
It's a Riverboat Captain's hat.

David leans in to Shauntay.

DAVID
Have I ever told you how proud I am
of you?

SHAUNTAY
Before you get all mushy, uh, I have
to tell you something about college.

DAVID
What?

SHAUNTAY
I'm doing really bad in one class, and
only getting a C in two others.

David is surprised at first, and lets it sink in.

SHAUNTAY
Dad, I'm going to really get serious
after Christmas, slam the books hard.
That class I'm failing, the professor
says I if I nail the next semester exams
I can still pass-

DAVID
Stop, stop sweetheart. I meant ... you're
an amazing person. The way you're always
exactly who you are, no illusions, no
trying to be like someone else. The way
you danced with Ron, no fear. I love that
about you.

She reaches up and hugs him smearing pink dye on the side
of his face. Ally joins the hug.

SHAUNTAY
Mom's still my favorite.

SABRINA
And the First Born is dad's favorite.

DAVID
(to Sabrina)
Come here and let me dye your hair
pink!

SABRINA

No one touches my hair.

She screams and runs to her room. Ally goes back to working on Shauntay.

ALLY

Where is Ron, Dad? Did he go home, back to his girlfriend?

DAVID

He didn't tell me.

SHAUNTAY

That's messed up, after what you did for him. But I really liked him anyway.

DAVID

Me too. Don't be too hard on him girls, he had it pretty rough. You know what he told me the night before he left?

SHAUNTAY

What?

DAVID

After dancing with you his story was finished.

SHAUNTAY

You know what ... when you were at work, Ron and I were talking. He told me he was scared. I said its OK to be afraid, but it's not OK to let it stop you. Ally, stop for a sec ...

Shauntay stands up next to her father and looks him in the eye.

SHAUNTAY

I meant to help him overcome his fears, like you always told us. But ... Dad, do you think he could have ...

The three sit in silence looking at each other, flashes of what could be flying through their minds.

DAVID

No. He just went somewhere else to start over. A new life, you know.

David kisses the girls and goes downstairs ...

LIVING ROOM

... and walks into the living room where Maria is still beaming, rifling through Paris web sites on a laptop.

DAVID

Hey beautiful. Can I get you tipsy and take advantage of you?

Maria looks up and focuses on the pink dye across the side of his face.

MARIA

That depends. Have you seen a doctor for that rash?

DAVID

Oh, this – it's hair dye. I'll wipe it off.

He turns to go into the kitchen then stops.

DAVID

Sweetheart, about Ron ...

She looks up, still beaming, her heart and mind in Paris.

MARIA

Is he OK?

DAVID

Of course ... its nothing. Be right back.

In the bathroom David washes the dye off his face and looks into the mirror, worried.

FADE OUT

EXT: WILKS HOME – DAY – CHRISTMAS EVE

David pulls into his driveway, sees the MAILMAN delivering on his street.

DAVID

They got you working on Christmas eve, huh Bernie?

BERNIE

Its OK, I get tomorrow off paid, but the joke's on them, I'm Jewish! Come on over and get your mail.

David walks to Bernie who hands him a small stack.

BERNIE
Merry Christmas Mr. Wilks.

DAVID
Thanks.

David scans the stack. An envelope catches his attention.

DAVID
Ron Davis?

He tears into the envelope and pulls out a CHRISTMAS CARD. He opens it, scanning the contents, worried.

DAVID
Oh my God!

A smile spreads on his face. Taped into the card is a PICTURE: Ron posing with a beautiful girl glowing with happiness, his prosthetic arm around her waist. He holds the card up to the sky and shouts!

DAVID
She was real! She was real!

He begins to dance on the street, calling out.

DAVID
Merry Christmas Ron Davis! Merry
Christmas!

He dances to his front door and goes inside. Cars come home, neighbors walk.

RON (V.O.)
Its all those crazy ideas in your
head ... can you live with yourself if
you don't do them. I couldn't. So I
went home. I was afraid at first, but
then I remembered what the First Born
told me. Its OK to be afraid, its not
OK to let it stop you. Thank you for
recovering my Christmas present. Give
my best to your girls. Ron.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END