

THE CHRISTMAS GYPSY

by

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FADE IN:

TITLE CARD

"Everyone is a moon, and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody."

-- Mark Twain

EXT. MODESTO - PARK - MORNING

It's Thanksgiving Day. A group of graying BABY BOOMERS play flag football in the rain.

KEVIN WOODWORTH limps off the field. He's tired and covered completely in mud and blood. He has a likeable, well-meaning face. He wears a baseball hat with the embroidered words: "Modesto JC." His torn football jersey reads: "The Mud Bowl - 30 Years of Refusing to Grow Up." He wears a canvas belt with two red football flags.

Someone on the sidelines tosses him a can of cheap beer. He snags it and drains it.

A second player appears at Kevin's side, throwing an ARM over his shoulder. It's Kevin's younger brother, TIM JUNIOR, also a combatant - but for the other team. He has a competitive, sharp face. He wears a UCLA baseball hat. His threadbare t-shirt features the image of a naked woman bent over and prepared to hike a football to a man with his hands cupped between her legs. The caption reads: "Play Naked." He wears a belt of yellow football flags.

The two brothers walk away from the action on the field toward a small KNOT OF PEOPLE huddled together against the rain and cold. Another man and two women. From the striking family resemblance, we can tell these are Kevin and Tim Junior's brother and sisters.

KEVIN (V.O.)

We were the closest of strangers. As good a family as some, probably better than most.

The five siblings drift together into a ragged circle.

William "Willy," the middle brother, has a get-along, go-along face. He wears an elaborate Indian war bonnet and a sweatshirt sporting the image of an Indian brave carrying a television set with a football game on the screen. The caption reads: "After the hunt, the men returned with the game."

Diane "Dee-Dee," the oldest sister, has a nurturing, accepting face. She wears a child-made hat that somewhat resembles the Mayflower and a sweatshirt featuring the image of a turkey shaped like a football.

Cheryl "Cheri," the youngest sister and sibling, has an intense, edgy face. She wears a Pilgrim woman's bonnet and a t-shirt that reads: "Tim Turkey Died for Your Sins."

A HAND darts into view and flips Kevin's baseball cap off his head.

The hand belongs to GARY RINGSTEAD, Kevin's childhood (and oldest) friend. Gary has a fun-loving, trickster face. He wears an Admiral's cocked hat with an arrow stuck through it Steve Martin-style. His sweatshirt proudly proclaims: "Runs with Scissors."

CHERYL

(to Kevin)

We're serving Thanksgiving tomorrow. At the mission.

KEVIN

What good will that do?

CHERYL

I put you down for three o'clock.

KEVIN

Got a lot going on.

Kevin smiles, wraps his arm around his little sister's head, and rubs her scalp with his knuckles.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Wants to make a difference—

GARY

But can't make a commitment.

Gary affectionately punches Kevin's shoulder.

The woman's voice belongs to RORY JEFFERSON, Kevin's wife. She has a no-nonsense, honest face. She wears fake Indian princess pigtails and a sweatshirt that reads: "Plays Well with Others."

Rory joins the family circle, giving Kevin a wet, sloppy French kiss in his ear, which he promptly wipes away.

TIM JUNIOR

Need any money for the banquet hall?

KEVIN

Know where you all live.

RORY

Think he has any idea?

DIANE

Joan's keeping him awfully busy.

CHERYL

All to herself, as usual.

DIANE

They hardly ever see her family,
either.

WILLY

Kind of weird.

TIM JUNIOR

Is Grampa Otto coming?

KEVIN

They didn't invite him.

CHERYL

Hope my children never do that to me.

WILLY

She's cutting 'em all loose.

GARY

(under his breath, to
Kevin)

Know the feeling, don't we.

Cheryl suddenly puts her finger to her lips, urgently shushing them all.

TIMOTHY WOODWORTH, SENIOR—the patriarch of the family—walks up and joins the circle. He has a rock-steady, dependable face. He wears a snap-billed, sports car racing cap, a NASCAR sweatshirt, and a silk jacket with the name, "Otto," embroidered over the heart.

Clinging to Tim Senior's arm is his wife, JOAN. She has a pinched, shifty face. She wears a plastic, floral-print rain cap and a sweatshirt with an elaborately cross-stitched Berenstain bear.

Hugs, kisses, and greetings all around. Except for Kevin, who acknowledges his father and step-mother with a restrained nod.

TIM SENIOR
(chuckles)
Got the bird in the oven.

GARY
Not on the floor?

TIM SENIOR
Kept both hands on the sucker this
year.

JOAN
I rationed his wine.

The five siblings are joined by the rest of their respective FAMILIES.

Tim Junior's wife, LINDA, and their two twenty-something sons, JARED and TRAVIS, both covered in mud and sucking on beers, like their father and uncle.

Willy's wife, POLLY.

Diane's two daughters, 16-year-old CAROL and 12-year-old KAITLYN.

Cheryl's husband, SKIP LAURENTI, and her 14-year-old son, JAMES, and 10-year-old daughter, LUCY.

Kevin herds them all into a half-moon for the annual Mud Bowl, Thanksgiving family portrait. They pose for the camera.

EXT. MODESTO - COLLEGE AREA - SATURDAY NIGHT

The winter moon is an orange globe in the achingly clear, winter's night sky.

Only one house in the dark neighborhood of ranch-style, California bungalow homes is brightly decorated for Christmas.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - VARIOUS ROOMS - SAME TIME

Inside the Arts and Crafts-style house, all the rooms are lavishly and overly decorated for Christmas.

In the window nook of the dining room, the "Alcoa" has landed. A rotating color wheel casts multi-colored lights on a well-used, silver aluminum tree, circa 1960.

In the living room, on a cedar chest behind a white couch, there's a collection of ceramic houses and figurines from the movie, "It's a Wonderful Life." The woven cloth throw on

the couch features an image of the main street of Bedford Falls.

A built-in bookshelf holds a collection of photographs and Santa Clauses. Christmas music plays on the radio.

In the floor-to-ceiling window of the living room stands a 10-foot-tall, live Christmas tree.

Kevin adjusts an ornament on one of the upper branches. He wears a Santa Claus hat shaped like a baseball hat. He takes a sip of his Tom and Jerry. He stares at the tree lights, squinting his eyes. He smiles at a memory.

Rory sits on the couch, reading the newspaper. She gives him a bemused look.

RORY

You are a sick man, Kevin.

KEVIN

Just trying to get into the spirit.

On the radio, Andy Williams sings, "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year."

KEVIN

You got that right, Andy. It is the most wonderful time of the year.

RORY

It's the same every year. You'll be wishing it was the 4th of July long before the first needle drops from that tree.

KEVIN

This year will be different.

Kevin walks across the room and sits on the rug in front of the roaring fireplace. He starts working on a partially assembled model of the solar system.

RORY

That really is a wonderful Christmas gift. James will be thrilled.

Kevin stares at the model's directions, then holds the diagram close to the model. From the look on his face, it's not going well.

KEVIN

Becoming my father.

RORY

You look a lot alike. Especially in that hat.

KEVIN

Must be some pieces missing.

RORY

It looks fine.

KEVIN

Back to being the "Book Uncle" next year.

RORY

You give up too easily.

On the radio, Bing Crosby's crooning of a mellow, traditional Christmas carol is suddenly shattered by the blaring, staccato horn of the Emergency Alert System, followed closely by the sound of an Amber Alert.

ANNOUNCER (ON RADIO)

We interrupt our programming to broadcast a Child Abduction Alert for Stanislaus County.

EAS ANNOUNCER (ON RADIO)

The Modesto Police Department and the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department are searching for 10-year-old Melissa Sue Marlow. She was abducted around 4 P.M. while riding her bicycle at the corner of Kearney and Del Vista in Southwest Modesto. Police believe she was taken by a white male in his thirties. He is approximately five feet, ten inches tall, weighs two hundred pounds, and has a shaved head. The suspect is driving a bright red Chevy van, license number "MUDCAT." It was last seen heading west on Briggsmore Avenue toward Highway 99. If you have any information regarding this abduction, immediately call the Modesto Police Department at 209-552-2470.

ANNOUNCER (ON RADIO)

This has been a Child Abduction Alert. We now return to our regular programming.

The Emergency Alert System end-of-message code blares. The radio resumes playing the Christmas carol.

RORY
My God, she's Lucy's age.

KEVIN
That's my dad's street.

RORY
The poor family.

KEVIN
How could anybody—

Kevin stops, struck abruptly by a thought, a memory, something.

Rory stares into the fire.

Kevin returns to the solar system model. But, the model doesn't have his full attention. The last piece he assembles is the moon.

RORY
The dark side of the moon.

KEVIN
(half-listening)
What's that?

Rory points at the miniature moon, then stares out through the window at the real moon, lying low on the horizon.

RORY
The dark side of the moon. The side you don't see. Of who you are. That's your family.

KEVIN
What about them?

RORY
You see them as you want them to be.
Not as they are.

KEVIN
No, Rory, I just wish people would do what they're supposed to do.

Rory shoots him a look.

RORY
Accept them as they are, Kevin. And the family as it is.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - OFFICE - MONDAY MORNING

Kevin's home office is a remodeled space over the detached garage.

The back half of the space is Kevin's office. The front half is a family room with a fireplace, book shelves, and a floor-to-ceiling entertainment center.

Kevin sits at the console of his digital video editing system. He plays back a program he's working on.

It's a "Day in the Life" portrait of a young father killed in an auto accident.

EDIT SYSTEM - MONITOR

Montage of stills and clips from "It's a Wonderful Life."

NARRATOR (V.O., ON SPEAKERS)

"In the movie, 'It's A Wonderful Life,' director Frank Capra showed us what the world would have been like if one man hadn't been born. An ordinary guy named George Bailey who believed in human dignity, community, and family."

Clarence confronts George outside the Bailey house.

NARRATOR (V.O., ON SPEAKERS)

"At the end of the movie, Clarence-his guardian angel-tells George: 'Each man's life touches so many other lives. And when he isn't around, he leaves an awful hole.'"

Stills and home movies of GEORGE ROGERS.

NARRATOR (V.O., ON SPEAKERS)

"When George Rogers died last September, he also left an awful big hole ..."

Stills and home movies of GEORGE'S FAMILY and FRIENDS.

NARRATOR (V.O., ON SPEAKERS)

"... in the lives of a lot of people who believed he'd always be around. Always be there to count on."

Series of hero shots of George.

NARRATOR (V.O., ON SPEAKERS)

"Can you imagine what this world would have been like without him."

BACK TO OFFICE

Kevin saves and closes out the project, then opens one labeled, "White Christmas." He slides the mouse over and hits play in the timeline.

EDIT SYSTEM - MONITOR

A montage of still photographs, old home movies, and graphics set to Bing Crosby's "White Christmas."

In one series of images, there's a still photograph of a group of children sitting with their mother and father in front of a silver aluminum Christmas tree.

That image dissolves into the same group of children as grown-ups and their father as an older man in front of the same aluminum tree, which is now a little shabby looking.

We recognize the adult children as Kevin's family and the father as Kevin's father. And the tree as the shabby aluminum tree in Kevin's house.

The image of Kevin's mother in the first photograph has been replaced in the newer photograph by Kevin's step-mother, Joan.

Another photograph in the sequence is a picture of three men: two young men and a middle-aged man. They stand in the middle of a hay field, leaning on pitchforks.

We recognize one of the young men as a younger, leaner version of Kevin's father. The other two men we will come to know as Kevin's father's older brother, UNCLE BILL, and his father, GRAMPA OTTO WOODWORTH.

The photograph dissolves into another photograph of the same men quite a bit older. Grampa Otto has a cold, distant face.

Uncle Bill looks very different in the second photograph. His innocent face has become dim, almost lop-sided.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - OFFICE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Kevin sits at a built-in work table. Christmas music plays in the background.

A shadow box sits on the table. Inside the shadow box is the same photograph we saw earlier of Kevin's father, uncle, and grandfather.

On the table around the box, there are pieces of other photographs of his father, as well as a collection of small objects.

There's a small NASCAR race car, a carp, needlepoint thread and a needle, a small bottle of Woody's BBQ sauce, a miniature deck of pinochle cards, two small horseshoes, an old Indian motorcycle, a small architect blueprint, and a Pacific Bell Pioneer pin.

Rory places her hands on Kevin's shoulders. He jumps.

RORY

That's a very nice tribute, sweetie.

KEVIN

It's all coming together.

RORY

Please, don't do this again.

KEVIN

What?

RORY

Expect so much. People can't disappoint you if you don't expect anything.

KEVIN

It'll be fine.

RORY

No, it'll be like every year.

EXT. MCHENRY MANSION - DAY

The McHenry Mansion is a 19th Century Victorian Italianate structure originally built by one of the leading businessmen and pioneers of Modesto and Stanislaus County.

INT. MCHENRY MANSION - SAME TIME

The mansion is decorated for Christmas, as it would have looked when it was built in 1883.

Kevin and Cheryl walk from room to room.

CHERYL

You're using the "big brother" voice.

KEVIN

She won't tell me what's going on.

CHERYL

She doesn't want you to judge her.

KEVIN

Need to do something before he does.
I'm afraid for her and the girls.

CHERYL

Diane's not going to listen. She's
going to keep doing what she's doing.
What she's always done.

KEVIN

She picks such total fixer-uppers. She
deserves better.

CHERYL

They can't all be dad, or you. It's
tough for any man to live up to you
guys. Just ask Skip.

KEVIN

Don't know what to say.

CHERYL

How about, "You're our sister and we
love you. We're here for you and we'll
support you however we can." You know,
there's really nothing else we can do.

KEVIN

Her self-image sucks. Somewhere along
the way, something happened. Somebody
did something that made her really hate
herself.

A look of pain flashes across Cheryl's face for a moment and
then it's gone.

CHERYL

I think dad knows.

KEVIN

What makes you say that?

CHERYL

Things mom used to say when she was
drunk.

KEVIN

Need to plan some kind of intervention.
You and me and Willy. Before . . .

CHERYL

What about Timmy?

Kevin shrugs.

CHERYL

Before you do anything, talk with Rory.
She's the professional.

KEVIN

Not her problem. It's ours.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Rory writes Christmas cards. Kevin goes through a basket of photographs.

KEVIN

Cheryl went to the doctor.

RORY

Anything serious?

KEVIN

Irregular heartbeats.

RORY

Like yours.

KEVIN

Just like mine.

RORY

She okay?

KEVIN

Fine. She's me. Just younger and a
girl.

RORY

What'd she have to say about Diane?

KEVIN

She's on your side.

RORY

There are no sides on this one, Kevin.

KEVIN

She really has the best of intentions.

RORY

You all do. Your hearts are in the
right place.

Kevin stops shuffling through the photographs. He holds up a picture of a young girl, about twelve years old, standing next to Grampa Otto. We will come to know the young girl as KEVIN'S HALF-SISTER, SALLY.

Kevin looks closer at the photo. There is a shadow, or a figure, in the background he can't quite make out.

KEVIN

Something about this picture that's always bothered me.

He passes the picture to Rory.

RORY

Maybe it's what you're reading into it.

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE LOT - NIGHT

Kevin and Gary walk along rows of freshly-cut Christmas trees. Gary randomly grabs one.

GARY

This is it.

KEVIN

It's the only one you looked at.

GARY

It's the one.

KEVIN

It's crooked.

GARY

Even better.

As they lug the tree out of the lot, Gary stops and gives a HOMELESS MAN some change.

KEVIN

What good does that do?

GARY

Does me good.

KEVIN

You keep doing it and they get used to it.

Gary shivers.

KEVIN

Has gotten cold.

GARY

Wasn't that I was thinking about.

Kevin smiles a thin, brief smile.

GARY

I mean what happened to that old "milk of human kindness" crap? Especially this time of year.

KEVIN

You're good at this stuff. It works for you.

GARY

You know, you should come with me later.

KEVIN

Church? Serious business.

GARY

Hey, it's your church after all.

KEVIN

Was. A long time ago.

GARY

Cheryl's coming along.

KEVIN

Finally got her to join the choir?

GARY

I'm backing her on flute. It's actually kind of a hoot.

KEVIN

You're kidding, right?

GARY

No, there's kind of this comfortable, safe feeling.

KEVIN

And single women.

GARY

Horny, single women.

KEVIN

Thought you were there to lay your soul bare.

GARY

Getting laid is a bonus.

As they load the deformed tree into the back of Gary's red truck, a very attractive, VERY YOUNG GIRL sashays by. She smiles coyly at the two men as they check her out.

KEVIN

Last time I was in church was when mom died. And Christmas Eve last year.

GARY

Well, it's that time of year again.
(slams tailgate shut)
Join us. Might have a little of what you're looking for.

EXT./INT. SMALL SHOPPING CENTER - SUPERMARKET - DAY

Kevin turns into the fresh produce aisle. He stops. A plain, but compelling, WOMAN stares at a stack of fresh pineapples.

Kevin quietly walks up behind her. He touches her on the sleeve.

KEVIN

Julie.

Startled, she turns. She doesn't recognize him at first. Then, she does. She reaches to hug him and the entire contents of her over-sized purse spill into the aisle. They both laugh until they cry.

CHECK-OUT STAND

Kevin and Julie wait in line.

JULIE

How long has it been?

KEVIN

High school. Graduation night. You wanted to make love. I threw up in your parents' cactus garden.

JULIE

I left for NYU the next day.

KEVIN

And never came back.

JULIE

There was no reason to.

KEVIN

Why now?

JULIE

My father just passed away.

KEVIN

I hadn't heard. I'm really sorry.

JULIE

Thanks, that's nice. How's your family?

KEVIN

My mom died last year.

JULIE

We're reaching that age, aren't we?

KEVIN

Yes, we are.

EXT./INT. SAME SHOPPING CENTER - IRON RAINBOW BAR - LATER

Kevin and Julie sit in a dark, corner booth.

KEVIN

Heard you married a lawyer.

JULIE

No children.

KEVIN

You always wanted kids.

JULIE

You?

KEVIN

Twice. Marriages, I mean. First one didn't take. Married to a therapist now.

JULIE

That could make for interesting bedtime conversations.

KEVIN

She doesn't analyze us. You probably knew her. Rory Jefferson. She was four years behind us.

JULIE

No, I don't really remember her. Children?

KEVIN

No, lots of nieces and nephews. Rory has two grown boys I helped raise.

JULIE

That's pretty much the same.

KEVIN

Not really.

Julie extends her hand across the table. Kevin hesitates, then takes it.

KEVIN

How long you staying?

JULIE

Depends.

KEVIN

Maybe we can get together again.

JULIE

What will your therapist have to say about that?

For a moment, Kevin drifts away, lost in thought.

JULIE

Where are you?

KEVIN

Back in high school.

JULIE

Christmas is a good time for looking back.

Kevin raises his beer bottle in toast.

KEVIN

To old times.

JULIE

To now.

EXT. SAME SHOPPING CENTER - PARKING LOT - LATER

It's pouring rain. Kevin pulls out of the lot.

On the car radio, the Beach Boys' "Little Saint Nick" is interrupted by the Emergency Alert System, followed closely by the sound of an Amber Alert.

ANNOUNCER (ON RADIO)

We interrupt our programming to broadcast a Child Abduction Alert update for Stanislaus County.

EAS ANNOUNCER (ON RADIO)

The Modesto Police Department and the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department continue to search for 10-year-old Melissa Sue Marlow. Her suspected abductor is now believed to be Melissa's step-father, Steven David Marlow. He is driving a red Chevy van, California license plate "MUDCAT." If you have any information regarding this abduction, immediately call the Modesto Police Department at 209-552-2470.

ANNOUNCER (ON RADIO)

This has been a Child Abduction Alert. We now return to our regular programming.

The Emergency Alert System end-of-message code blares. The radio resumes playing the Beach Boys.

EXT. THE OLD FISHERMAN'S CLUB - NIGHT

The social club sits on a small bluff overlooking the Tuolumne River.

INT. THE OLD FISHERMAN'S CLUB - SAME TIME

The banquet hall overflows with REVELERS of all ages. It's bright, loud, and merry.

The hall is decorated for both Christmas and a birthday celebration. A banner strung across the wall behind the portable stage reads: "Happy 70th Birthday, Tooter. Long May You Run."

Photographs of Kevin's father at different times of his life plaster the walls.

A videotape of old home movies plays on a solitary television monitor.

Tables are piled with food. The open bar is doing a very brisk business.

On the stage, Kevin's family plays and sings the old standard, "Let the Rest of the World Go By," one of their father's favorite songs.

The family band includes sister Cheryl on acoustic guitar and vocals, brother-in-law Skip on drums, sister Diane on vocals, brother Willy on electric guitar and vocals, sister-in-law Polly on piano and vocals, best friend Gary on flute and vocals, niece Lucy on violin, and nephew James on timbales.

Kevin and Rory watch from the back of the hall.

KEVIN

I think we done good.

Kevin watches his grinning father move from person to person, group to group.

Many of the people gathered here can be seen in younger, more hopeful versions in many of the photographs and home movie clips. These are the people Kevin's father has spent most of his life with. They've gathered to pay tribute to him, swap stories, and tell lies on the anniversary of his birth.

Kevin glances at a poster-sized blowup of the same photograph we saw earlier of his father, his grandfather, and his uncle as much younger men, leaning on pitchforks in the middle of a hay field.

KEVIN

Grampa Otto and Uncle Bill should be here.

RORY

Your dad ever tell you what happened?

KEVIN

Won't talk about it.

Kevin is distracted by shouts coming from the stage.

RORY

They want their big brother to join them.

KEVIN

Thought they'd never ask.

Kevin hustles on stage and grabs the microphone held out by Gary.

KEVIN

This one's for the old man.

The family band kicks into a heartfelt rendering of "Cat's in the Cradle," a song about fathers and their children.

The gathering rocks and sways and sings along.

At the end of the song, the crowd erupts with emotional enthusiasm.

KEVIN

Tooter, you're up.

Tim Senior ambles on stage to the hoots and whistles of the crowd.

Cheryl hands him a saxophone and gives him a kiss.

Skip counts them down into a bluesy version of the old Glenn Miller instrumental, "In the Mood."

The crowd starts to dance. Depending on what year they were born, they Lindy hop, Charleston, swing, jitterbug, twist, hustle, or country swing.

The song ends. The gathering goes nuts. There's a group hug onstage.

Kevin escorts his father, arm-in-arm, from the stage.

Father and son join Joan and Rory.

TIM SENIOR

This is great. Thanks.

Kevin smiles and nods.

RORY

Did you know?

TIM SENIOR

Not a clue.

JOAN

I don't want to spoil all the fun, but your father has something he needs to talk with you about.

TIM SENIOR

I was going to get to it, dear.

JOAN

When you'd had too much to drink to say what you need to say.

KEVIN

Everything okay?

Tim Senior turns to face his oldest son.

TIM SENIOR

I've got this spot on my lung.

KEVIN

From what?

TIM SENIOR

Last summer, that wreck I was in.

JOAN

Coming home from those silly stock car races.

Kevin is speechless. The mortality this celebration has danced around is suddenly evident on all their faces.

TIM SENIOR

They can't seem to get my blood pressure under control.

RORY

They doing anything?

JOAN

They have him on Coumadin.

KEVIN

That shit's rat poison.

JOAN

Language.

Kevin barely acknowledges her admonishment.

TIM SENIOR

There's another thing.

RORY

Should I leave?

TIM SENIOR

No, you're part of the family, Rory. It affects you.

KEVIN

We're okay. We don't need-

JOAN

The will's in order.

TIM SENIOR

We got another letter from Sally.

KEVIN

What's she want this time?

JOAN

She's not as bad as you all think.

Kevin shoots a glance at his step-mother that says, "Stop meddling."

TIM SENIOR

She heard I was having some health problems.

JOAN

She's having some of her own.

KEVIN

She's a hypochondriac. Just like mom was.

TIM SENIOR

She says she's thinking about moving back. To your mom's old house.

KEVIN

That shack. Thought they tore it down.

TIM SENIOR

It got me to thinking. About maybe inviting her for Christmas.

Kevin can't mask his shock.

KEVIN

What's everyone else think?

TIM SENIOR

You're the first to know.

RORY

Familiar territory.

KEVIN

I don't know. I'm not sure it's the best thing to do right now.

TIM SENIOR

It's something I'd really like to do.

KEVIN

Let me think about it.

JOAN

Only twenty-one shopping days until Christmas.

Kevin shoots Joan another one of those withering, stay-out-of-it looks.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - OFFICE - MONDAY MORNING

In the home theater area, Kevin and Rory watch the sequence in "A Christmas Carol" where Scrooge learns his fate from the Ghost of Christmas Future.

RORY

She's good for him, you know.

KEVIN

She's such a control freak. He can't fart without her approval.

RORY

He's worried.

KEVIN

Is that what this invitation is about?

RORY

Maybe he wants closure. I don't know. I don't know the whole story.

Kevin gets up and walks to his edit system at the back of the room. He touches the keyboard and the system stirs to life. He makes a few mouse clicks and opens a project.

He gestures to Rory. She walks over. He pulls out a chair and she sits.

EDIT SYSTEM - MONITOR

A picture of a YOUNG COUPLE. It's Kevin's dad and mom, CAROL. She's pregnant.

KEVIN (V.O.)

Mom was pregnant with Sally when she got together with dad. It wasn't his. He made her give up the baby for adoption.

A picture of the same young couple. An OLDER MAN poses with them. It's Grampa Otto.

KEVIN (V.O.)

My grandfather got involved. Things went south between him and dad after that.

A picture of a YOUNG FAMILY. Mother, father, and two boys.

KEVIN (V.O.)

I must've been about eleven. Timmy was ten. We didn't go to school that day.

(MORE)

KEVIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Dad piled us in the car. We drove up to the foothills. It was snowing. We asked what was going on. He said, "We're going to see your sister."

A picture of a TWELVE-YEAR-OLD GIRL sitting on a front porch. It's Sally.

KEVIN (V.O.)

We drive for a while. Dad tells us to get in back and get down. We do. He slows down and opens the car door. Man it was cold. He stops. We peek over the back of the seat. We see a girl. She's on her way home from school. Got her lunch pail and books. Dad says, "Hello, Sally. Remember me?" She says, "Yes. You're Uncle Tim." "That's right," says dad. "Would you like a ride home?" he asks. "Okay, I guess," she says.

A picture of twelve-year-old Sally with Kevin and Tim Junior.

KEVIN (V.O.)

She gets in. Dad pulls away. She sees us hiding in the back. We're freaked. She says, "Hello." We just get down lower. Then she gets scared. "Uncle Tim, take me home. Take me home right now." "I am," dad tells her. And he speeds up. Then she starts to cry. And kick. And hit him. She does that all the way back to Modesto. It was no fun.

A picture of Tim Senior and Kevin's mom dressed up like they're going to church or a funeral. Carol is crying. Tim Senior is consoling her.

KEVIN

Mom had decided she wanted Sally back. Of course, dad could never say no to her. They ended up in court, fighting for custody. Sally's foster parents and their lawyer hammered my parents. Made mom look like some kind of whore and dad some kind of pervert.

A picture of Sally with her FOSTER PARENTS. And Grampa Otto. And Kevin's Uncle Bill.

KEVIN (V.O.)

The judge decided against my folks.
Sent Sally back home to her foster
parents.

A picture of Kevin's parents a few years after the kidnap.

KEVIN (V.O.)

Sally and my parents didn't see each
other for years after that. Grampa Otto
kept my folks up to date about what was
going on with her. We all grew up and
never really talked much about our
older sister.

A picture of Kevin's mom with Cheryl and Diane as little
girls.

KEVIN (V.O.)

When she was drunk, mom would come in
and cry to the girls about Sally. About
how much she missed her and what a
mistake she'd made abandoning her. How
much she hated dad for not standing up
for her.

A picture of the entire family. The five kids are now young
adults.

KEVIN (V.O.)

Mom never saw Sally again. Mom died.
Sally didn't hear about it until after
the funeral. A year or so later, dad
got a letter from Sally. She wanted to
see the family. Dad couldn't believe
it. He checked with us kids. We said
maybe we'd talk with her on the phone
and see how it went.

BACK TO OFFICE

KEVIN

Sally called my sisters a couple of
times. It was going pretty well. They
were excited. Then, they said, she got
weird. She got pushy and demanding.
They got worried because they didn't
really know who this person was. They
didn't want some whacko coming around
their kids. So, they decided they
didn't want to see her after all.

RORY

What about you?

KEVIN
Wasn't up for it, either.

RORY
Why not?

KEVIN
Already had a family.

RORY
What about now?

KEVIN
Just as soon leave things the way they
are. It's easier.

RORY
She's your sister.

KEVIN
Half-sister.

RORY
Why did your mom and dad let her go?
She could still have been part of your
lives.

KEVIN
They had their own family. She wasn't
part of it.

RORY
That just doesn't seem right.

KEVIN
No, it doesn't. But, that's the way it
was. And is.

RORY
Now your dad wants to set things right.

KEVIN
And he wants me to make it happen.

RORY
You are the oldest.

KEVIN
It shouldn't be so damned complicated.

RORY
Stop "Wizard of Oz-ing" it, Kevin.
There's no place where there aren't
problems. Especially home.

INT. GARY'S HOUSE - VARIOUS ROOMS - EVENING

It's an eclectic and cluttered, but cozy, home. It overflows with music, poetry, art, and books. Drawings by Gary's grandkids and school kids cover the walls. His life's memorabilia are scattered throughout the house.

INT. GARY' HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Kevin and Gary make candied walnuts.

A Christmas song by Jimmy Buffett plays.

KEVIN

Last batch almost broke a tooth. Damn shells.

GARY

What'd you expect? I was drunk when I made them.

KEVIN

Dad wants to invite Sally to Christmas.

GARY

Whoa, no shit. Why?

KEVIN

Rory says he wants to tie up loose ends.

GARY

He okay?

KEVIN

Why?

GARY

Only dying people do things like that.

KEVIN

His heart's acting up again.

GARY

It going to happen?

KEVIN

He wants me to talk to everyone.

GARY

Big brother job.

KEVIN

Don't know if they'll go along. I know Cheryl and Diane still think she's strange. Don't know about Willy. Timmy and I really haven't talked about it.

GARY

We both know your family. You can't force them to do something they don't want to do.

KEVIN

We all got that special trait from mom.

GARY

You think they should go along?

KEVIN

Guess I think we should all be in the same orbit.

GARY

Like horses in harness.

KEVIN

Yeah, sort of like that. When we aren't, I'm disappointed. It's always been that way.

GARY

There's no changing them. You take them as they are, or not at all.

KEVIN

Right now, it's not at all.

GARY

Be careful. Your family, it's not like the weather. The days when you could take it for granted are long gone.

KEVIN

It's funny. I want to see them, then I don't. I feel guilty when I don't try. We get along great when we're together. I miss it.

GARY

Every family has this little push and pull deal going on. This battle between wanting distance and wanting to be together. It's only human.

KEVIN

Guess we're all in this together. No matter what.

GARY

Always will be.

EXT. DOWNTOWN MODESTO - EVENING

The annual Christmas parade winds through the city streets.

EXT. MCHENRY MUSEUM - SAME TIME

The McHenry Museum is a converted Carnegie library built in 1912. The museum houses exhibits and artifacts profiling Modesto's past.

Kevin and Rory sit in lawn chairs on the steps of the museum, huddled against the cold.

RORY

You don't have to be stuck together to love each other.

KEVIN

What if I screw up?

RORY

You're their brother. They'll always love you.

KEVIN

Always in the middle.

RORY

You can't protect them. You can't save them. You can only be there for them. When they need you.

A float for the local Baptist church cruises by. The MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION re-enact a living nativity.

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE LANE - NIGHT

Houses on both sides of the street are obscenely decorated for the holidays.

EXT./INT. RED NASH RAMBLER - SAME TIME

Kevin and Gary cruise in Gary's vintage car. It's festooned with Christmas lights. Two real antlers and a fake, red nose protrude from the front grate. This time of year, Gary's car is known as "Rudy."

Kevin wears his own set of felt antlers. Gary wears a raggedy, moth-eaten Santa hat.

GARY

We've been at this a very long time.

KEVIN

In junior high, the parents drove. We sat in the back.

GARY

And drank Nehi orange sodas.

KEVIN

In high school, we drove.

GARY

And drank beer.

KEVIN

In college, our girlfriends drove.

GARY

And we smoked dope.

KEVIN

After college, our wives drove.

GARY

And we snorted coke.

KEVIN

Then our kids drove and we sat in back.

GARY

And drank Maalox.

KEVIN

Now it's just you and me. No wives, no kids.

Gary toasts him with a Nehi orange soda.

GARY

(sings)

"Will the Circle Be Unbroken? Bye and bye, Lord, bye and bye."

They pass a long line of cars traveling in the opposite direction, filled with KIDS AND THEIR PARENTS, HIGH SCHOOL KIDS WITH THEIR DATES, all pointing at the amazing display.

KEVIN

Maybe next year we'll just skip Christmas and go to Mexico.

GARY

You're amazing. You're just never happy with what you've got. With the way things are.

Kevin blows on his hands.

KEVIN

Damn, it's cold. I'm ready for summer.

GARY

That's what I mean. When you're safe at home, you wish you were having an adventure. When you're having an adventure, you wish you were safe at home. You always want to be somewhere else.

KEVIN

Just saying I'm not a winter person, that's all.

GARY

It's the same with your family. All you do is drift into their lives and tell them what you expect. Like some kind of Christmas gypsy.

EXT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kevin replaces the damaged bulbs in the string of Christmas lights rimming the outside of his house. He moves the ladder. As he steps up on the ladder, he bangs his head against the eaves. It knocks his baseball hat off and nearly topples him from the ladder.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Kevin enters, rubbing his head.

Rory makes brightly decorated sugar cookies. The kitchen counter is blanketed with flour. Tiny specks of colored candy decorations dot the floor.

Kevin takes in the glorious mess.

RORY

What happened?

KEVIN

Banged my head. Just like my old man.

RORY

You're not your father.

KEVIN

Kill me before I start wearing coveralls all the time.

They both look at his clothes. Under his nylon, warm-up jacket, he's wearing coveralls.

KEVIN

You know I love him. I just don't want to be like him.

RORY

Why not? He's a good man. He's created quite a legacy with your family. Give him credit for that.

KEVIN

He's just too easy. Always been that way. Lets people walk all over him. All the time. I'm no different.

RORY

Cut him some slack.

KEVIN

Doesn't cut me any. Why is that?

RORY

Maybe he's jealous.

KEVIN

Of what?

RORY

You're doing what he wanted to do.
You're being what he wanted to be.

KEVIN

Just wish he'd stop expecting so much.

EXT. GATED COMMUNITY - CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT

The Woodworth clan hosts their annual "Holiday Jam." The place is packed with FAMILY, FRIENDS, and DISTANT RELATIVES.

Cheryl sings and daughter Lucy plays a Christmas carol on the violin. Tim Senior, Joan, and Rory sit in the first of several rows of chairs.

Kevin and Gary stand at the back of the room.

Lucy finishes her solo to appreciative applause.

KEVIN
I worry about them.
(nods at Lucy)

GARY
It's not the same world we grew up in,

KEVIN
I'm afraid something will happen if we
don't keep an eye out. If we let things
slide. Like we did with mom.

GARY
That was a tough night.

The family band launches into a rock 'n roll Christmas
carol.

KEVIN
Never cried for her. You did.

GARY
I know you loved her.

Kevin gazes out at this gathering of family.

KEVIN
Got a half-sister out there who wants
to be part of our family again. And I'm
debating about "allowing" her back into
our lives. How cold is that?

GARY
It's not just up to you.

KEVIN
They're waiting for me to make the
first move.

GARY
Maybe they're afraid. If she comes,
Christmas might get strange.

KEVIN
They won't let me let that happen.

The family jam continues with a Christmas rock song.

KEVIN
They're my best friends. They piss me
off. They disappoint me. But, they're
still the people I'd rather be with.

GARY
Me, too.

KEVIN

Time is slipping away. I turn around and more of it is gone. So, I want more from them. I want to see them more. We're the only ones that share that common history.

GARY

I'm sure they feel the same way.

KEVIN

If I had all the money in the world, I'd take care of all of them.

GARY

What good will that do?

Gary mimics Kevin from their earlier conversation at the Christmas tree lot.

GARY

They don't want your charity. They want your acceptance.

EXT. SIERRA FOOTHILLS - STENT - DAY

Stent is a cow pie in the Sierra foothills near Jamestown. It looks a lot like something you might see in the hollers of the Ozarks. Shacks and log cabins with outhouses and smoke curling from stone chimneys. Chicken coops, chained dogs barking, and rusted-out trucks.

There are some brand new, high-end subdivisions beginning to crowd out the rustic originals.

EXT. BELL MOONEY ROAD - TRAILER - DAY

At the top of a rise sits a double-wide trailer. This is all that's left on the property where Kevin's mother was born and raised.

In a rickety lawn chair, a WOMAN sits, sipping coffee and smoking a cigarette. She has a slightly resilient, but haunted, face. This is Sally Muse, the estranged half-sister of the Woodworth clan.

A cat rubs against her leg. She strokes a mongrel dog's head sleeping at her feet. She winces and touches her lower abdomen. She tosses the cigarette away. Her coffee cup begins playing a Christmas tune.

INT. TRAILER - DAY

Sally refills her coffee cup and sits at the kitchen table. Scattered on the table are several photographs.

There is one of Carol holding a baby Sally. A photo of the Woodworth kids, including Sally, posing as a family at the time of the kidnap. And the one of her as a young girl standing next to Grampa Otto.

Sally methodically tears each one into very tiny pieces.

At the edge of the collection of photographs lies an opened envelope. The return address reads: "Dr. Dwight Battle, Doctors Medical Center, Department of Oncology, Phoenix, Arizona." It's addressed to Sally at her home address in Scottsdale.

Beneath the envelope and some other, legal-looking documents, the barrel of a small caliber pistol peeks out.

EXT. CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH - SUNDAY MORNING

Kevin stops in front of the church. His childhood church and the one Gary now attends.

INT. CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH - MORNING

A few PEOPLE OF ALL AGES, entering for the service, smile as they pass Kevin. They talk and laugh quietly, greeting family, friends, and neighbors.

Kevin peeks into the sanctuary. An OLDER MAN, preparing to close the door, looks questioningly at Kevin. Kevin smiles and backs away. The door closes.

Kevin looks around the old hallway: the donor plaques, the bulletin board, the photographs, a tiny gift shop, the hymnals in heaps on folding chairs, a small office.

PASTOR WALT (O.S.)

Hello?

It's the older man who closed the sanctuary door.

KEVIN

Hi, um . . .

PASTOR WALT

I'm terrible with faces . . .

KEVIN

My name's Kevin.

PASTOR WALT

I'm Pastor Walt. Michael Walt. Soon-to-
retire-and-ambivalent-about-it Pastor
Walt.

KEVIN

I'm not a member of this church. Not
now. Used to be. As a kid. My mother
taught Sunday School.

PASTOR WALT

Welcome back.

KEVIN

I'm a friend of Gary Ringstead's.

PASTOR WALT

Such a talent. I love his voice. You
love his voice?

KEVIN

It's very nice.

PASTOR WALT

He's been bringing a young lady lately.

KEVIN

Cheryl.

PASTOR WALT

Yes, a songbird.

KEVIN

She's my sister.

PASTOR WALT

A musical family.

KEVIN

I don't sing.

PASTOR WALT

So, Kevin, Gary's friend, how can I
help you?

KEVIN

There's nothing, really.

PASTOR WALT

Nonsense. Everybody needs help.

Kevin looks at him, feeling an almost irresistible urge to
unburden himself.

KEVIN

No, actually, I was just in the neighborhood.

The carillon strikes the hour.

EXT. TWAIN HARTE - DAY

Kevin and Julie walk the streets of the small town in the Sierra foothills above Sonora. With its Christmas decorations, forest of pine trees, and blanket of snow, it looks like a postcard, Alpine village.

KEVIN

Ever wonder what would've happened if we'd stayed together?

JULIE

From time to time. You?

KEVIN

A lot lately.

In their eyes and body language, there's still a spark, a yearning, a reaching out.

JULIE

I guess it's about missed opportunities. Time slipping away, life passing you by.

KEVIN

Making amends.

JULIE

Could haves and should haves.

Kevin's face changes.

JULIE

I seem to have struck a nerve.

KEVIN

No, just been thinking about some things.

JULIE

We're all doing more of that these days.

KEVIN

You ever go to church?

JULIE
Once in a while. Not as much as I'd
like.

KEVIN
Me, neither.

JULIE
More and more of my friends are going.
Seems to be a trend.

KEVIN
You think it's a generational thing, or
just age?

JULIE
Little of both.

KEVIN
It just feels like something's missing.
Like something got lost along the way.

JULIE
It's not good living life with regrets.

She affectionately takes his arm as they walk back to the
car.

EXT. SALLY'S TRAILER - DAY

Kevin knocks on the trailer door.

Sally opens the door a crack.

KEVIN
Sally?

SALLY
Uncle Tim?

KEVIN
No, it's your half, er, brother, Kevin.

SALLY
I'll be damned. My God, you look so
much like your father.

Kevin nods and smiles. And waits.

She slowly opens the door.

SALLY
Guess you'd like to come in.

INT. SALLY'S TRAILER - DAY

Kevin and Sally sit at the kitchen table. There are more photographs scattered around. Kevin shuffles through them, smiling a small smile.

Sally holds a photograph of Tim Senior as a young Marine. She slides the photo across the table to Kevin.

SALLY

I became a Marine because he was.

KEVIN

Two tours. He was proud of you.

Sally takes a puff off her cigarette. Kevin frowns.

SALLY

Sorry.

She stubs out the cigarette. She picks up a photo of their mother, Carol.

SALLY

I never knew our mom had died until later. They didn't want me to know. I was so pissed.

KEVIN

Sorry.

She flares for a moment.

SALLY

You had nothing to do with it.

KEVIN

Somebody should have told you.

SALLY

Why didn't she want me?

KEVIN

She was young.

SALLY

Why did they leave me there? Why didn't she try again? She and your father should have tried again.

KEVIN

It's complicated.

SALLY

It was horrible. Did you know my foster father . . .

(hesitates)

Did you know what he did to me?

KEVIN

No.

SALLY

I just wanted someone, something, to take me away.

Kevin shuffles through more pictures.

SALLY

I got him back.

Kevin stops going through the pictures and stares into her eyes.

SALLY

You know, it's your fault in a way. None of this would have happened if it wasn't for you.

Kevin looks confused, then a little angry.

SALLY

They got pregnant with you. They didn't need me anymore.

Sally picks up a recent picture of Kevin's sister, Diane, and her girls.

SALLY

I called your sisters. A bunch of times there for a while.

KEVIN

They told me.

SALLY

Things were going well, I thought. Then something changed. They didn't want to talk anymore.

KEVIN

I know.

SALLY

I was going to come out and see you all. They made it pretty clear I wasn't welcome.

KEVIN

They weren't sure, that's all.

SALLY

I just wanted to know more about you. I had this big family and I couldn't be a part of it. I knew nothing about any of you. I just wanted to know more. That's all.

KEVIN

We're a tight family.

Sally sorts through more pictures.

SALLY

What about your grandfather and Uncle Bill? You see much of them?

KEVIN

Not really. Uncle Bill is still at the state hospital. I haven't seen Grampa Otto in years. My dad's not real close with them anymore.

SALLY

Too bad. No surprise, though.

Kevin gives her a questioning look.

Sally takes the envelope from Dr. Battle and slides it across the table to Kevin. He picks it up and reads the return address. He starts to remove the letter inside.

SALLY

I've got ovarian cancer. The same thing that killed our mother.

KEVIN

Damn. Joan said you were having problems.

SALLY

We're treating it aggressively. The doctors are pretty optimistic.

KEVIN

That sucks.

SALLY

I'm going to be honest with you, Kevin. Mortality gives you the strength, maybe even the right, to say what has to be said.

She picks up a photograph of the Woodworth family. The image doesn't include Sally.

SALLY

I'm angry. I've been angry for a very long time. With my mom, your father, all of you. None of you wanted me. That's a very hard thing to live with. I'm a good person. But, I could have been so much better with all of you.

Kevin begins staring at the photographs again because he can't look her in the eyes.

SALLY

For years, I'd hear about all of you. Even though my foster parents tried to keep it from me. After mom died, Uncle Tim started writing these wonderful letters. And sending all these beautiful old pictures. Of this loving, caring, intact family. A family I couldn't have.

Kevin leans back and crosses his arms.

SALLY

Look, I don't know how long I've got. I do know that your family is all I've got. And I want to be a part of it. Even if it's just for a little while. If I can't have that, well, what's the point, really.

KEVIN

You just can't give up. What good does that do?

SALLY

Then help me.

KEVIN

What can I do?

SALLY

What your father asked. Let me spend Christmas with your family.

INT. TIM SENIOR'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Tim Senior makes his locally-famous Christmas fudge. Kevin sips a beer. A World War II-era singer sings a Christmas carol.

TIM SENIOR
I'm glad you visited her.

KEVIN
She looks a lot like mom.

Tim Senior stops stirring the fudge mix.

TIM SENIOR
Something's wrong with my fudge this year. It doesn't taste right.

KEVIN
She told me about the cancer.

TIM SENIOR
She can't catch a break.

KEVIN
Did you know that stuff about her foster-father?

TIM SENIOR
She wrote about it in her letters.

KEVIN
Kind of sad.

TIM SENIOR
It wouldn't have happened if she'd stayed with us.

KEVIN
She believes that.

TIM SENIOR
Any change with your brothers and sisters?

KEVIN
We'll see.

TIM SENIOR
We need to do this, Kevin.

KEVIN
She asked about Grampa and Uncle Bill.

Tim Senior puts down the wooden mixing spoon and looks at his son.

TIM SENIOR
I don't want her to see them.

KEVIN

She will if she wants to, Dad. She's like mom that way, too.

Tim Senior goes back to working on his fudge.

TIM SENIOR

Taste this. See if I got it right.

Kevin takes a bite. He unsuccessfully covers the fact that something tastes a little funky.

INT. TIM JUNIOR'S HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

The Woodworth family gathers for their annual, family-only gift exchange.

Willy pops a CD into his brother's CD/DVD player.

WILLY

I did the final mix at four this morning. I'm toast. It might be a little rough.

KEVIN

Always last minute.

POLLY

He's that way with everything. Never shops until Christmas Eve.

WILLY

Dude, I told you I'd have the music tracks done in time. Trust me for once.

The opening power chords of a rock 'n roll, Christmas anthem blare from the speakers. This is Willy and Polly's yearly gift to the family. It's a song about family.

JOAN

Can we please turn it down just a titch?

Willy shoots Joan a glance. His dad nods at his son and Willy reluctantly complies.

LINDA

(shouting over the music)

Let's take our seats.

Willy stares at them all as his audience drifts away.

The family sits in chairs and sofas in a circle in the living room. The kids sit on the floor in the center of the

circle, surrounding the pile of gifts like vultures around road kill. Everyone nibbles on appetizers and sips a drink, alcoholic and non.

In the background, Willy's song ends in a crescendo of flashy pyrotechnics. The family applauds. Some more than others.

Willy, still standing by the stereo system, shoots Joan a withering glance as he pops out the CD.

Kevin inserts a DVD in the same player. He gestures for Tim Junior to turn on the TV.

KEVIN

Hope you don't mind looking at last year's. This year's will be in your stockings.

DVD PLAYBACK ON THE TV

The video opens with a song about family and Christmas. And a collection of photographs, old home movies, graphics, and video effects.

There are lots of images of the family, as well as images of all the friends who have called the Woodworth house their home during the holidays.

The video seems to be divided into two parts—before Joan and after Joan. In just about every image of their mother, Carol, she's flipping a bird at the camera. In the last image, she's passed out in her favorite, broken-down recliner.

The video ends.

BACK TO FAMILY ROOM

It's quiet for a moment. We see misty eyes and hear throats clearing. Then hands clapping. And chairs scraping, as people begin to move around.

TIM SENIOR

It's always great to see those old home movies. Such a long time ago.

Willy still seems disappointed at his father's slight. Polly puts her arms around Willy. He tries to pull away. She won't let him.

KEVIN

How about Willy's song? They put in a bunch of time.

TIM SENIOR

I wonder every year what they'll come up with.

JOAN

It's always . . . very unique.

The adults drift into the kitchen for one last plate-full of food and a fresh drink.

Kevin herds the kids over to the staircase and poses them for the traditional, kids-only, holiday photograph. Kevin snaps the shutter on the digital camera, checks it, and releases his nieces and nephews, who grab-ass their way back to the pile of Christmas presents.

Linda walks from person to person with a small basket. Everyone draws a tiny slip of paper. On the paper is written the number that will determine their turn in the gift draw.

Tim Junior tunes the radio to a light jazz station playing continuous Christmas tunes.

JOAN

Let's start, let's start.

Joan hustles the malingerers from the kitchen back into the living room.

KEVIN

Before we begin, there's something I'd like to kick around.

There are theatrical grumbles and groans. The kids start rattling presents. They're way past ready.

It gets really quiet as everyone realizes Kevin is serious.

Rory shoots Kevin a worried glance. Kevin looks over at his father, who gives his son an encouraging nod.

KEVIN

We're thinking about inviting Sally for Christmas.

It is painfully quiet. So quiet, you can hear the ice cubes melting.

WILLY

Sally, as in our half-sister, Sally?

Kevin nods.

DIANE

Who's we?

TIM SENIOR

Your brother and I have been talking about it. It was sort of my idea.

KEVIN

She's living in Stent.

TIM JUNIOR

You're kidding.

KEVIN

Went up there the other day.

DIANE

How come nobody told us?

CHERYL

We're grown-ups, Kevin. We don't need your protection.

WILLY

You're determined to screw this Christmas up, aren't you pal.

DIANE

Is she still ... odd?

KEVIN

She's mom. Kind of, sort of.

CHERYL

I'm not ready for this. Not now. There's too much going on.

Cheryl gives Skip a troubled look.

TIM JUNIOR

A little time to think about it would've been nice.

DIANE

I'd like to know more about how she's doing before I let her see the girls.

KEVIN

Actually, she's kind of sick. She may have ovarian cancer.

Quiet again. From the looks on their faces, they'd like to take the words back.

DIANE

That's so sad.

TIM JUNIOR
Nobody tells us anything.

JOAN
I thought I told you. She wrote. I was
sure I told you. I didn't tell you?

WILLY
We know squat about her.

Willy shoots a burning look at his father and step-mother.

TIM SENIOR
I'd like to do this. I'd really like to
make this happen.

JOAN
It's important.

On the radio, a jazz rendition of "The Nutcracker" is
interrupted by the Emergency Alert System, followed closely
by the sound of an Amber Alert.

ANNOUNCER (ON RADIO)
We interrupt our programming to
broadcast a Child Abduction Alert
update.

EAS ANNOUNCER (ON RADIO)
The Modesto Police Department and the
Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department
have reported finding the bright red
Chevy van owned by kidnap suspect
Steven David Marlow. There was no sign
of the suspect, or little Melissa. If
you have any information regarding this
abduction, immediately call the Modesto
Police Department at 209-552-2470.

ANNOUNCER (ON RADIO)
This has been a Child Abduction Alert.
We now return to our regular
programming.

The Emergency Alert System end-of-message code blares. The
radio resumes playing "The Nutcracker."

Everyone in the room is lost in their own thoughts. Except
the kids.

INT. VINTAGE FAIRE MALL - EVENING

Kevin and Rory cruise the mall. It's packed. Lots of FRANTIC
SHOPPERS, OVER-STIMULATED KIDS, STRESSED-OUT PARENTS, and

FRENZIED VENDORS. People are literally running over each other.

RORY

Try not to read more into it than there is.

KEVIN

We don't act like a family.

RORY

Maybe they don't agree.

KEVIN

They have no choice.

RORY

Give them a choice and they might come around.

KEVIN

Why can't they just trust me? Why do they always have to fight me?

RORY

Give them one good reason.

KEVIN

Because I said so. Because I'm the oldest. Because I say it's what we need to do.

RORY

They're their own people, Kevin. They're not your kid brothers and sisters anymore.

As they pass a mobile kiosk selling the latest fad trinket, two little KIDS fight over the last item on the stand.

KEVIN

Christmas sucks.

RORY

Here we go.

KEVIN

It's too much.

RORY

Don't blame it on Christmas.

EXT. ORVILLE WRIGHT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Orville Wright is located in the Airport District, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Modesto.

INT. ORVILLE WRIGHT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Kevin helps Gary with a Christmas party for the STUDENTS in his sixth grade class. They serve punch and cookies and sing Christmas carols. The kids give Gary an interesting variety of presents, many home-made.

CLASSROOM - LATER

The party is over and the last lingerers have left. Kevin and Gary clean up.

KEVIN

They had fun. Cute kids.

GARY

You should have stuck with teaching. It suits you.

KEVIN

Don't have your kind of patience.

GARY

It's a good crop this year. We really connect.

KEVIN

Christmas was the best when we were kids.

GARY

No school. Lots of toys. No obligations. All kinds of junk to eat. Free to hang with your buddies. No expectations.

KEVIN

I'd like to feel the way I did back then. See it through their eyes again.

GARY

A big part of Christmas is holding onto the past. Sometimes I think you hold onto it a little too desperately.

KEVIN

Don't want to live in the past. Just don't want to lose it. Time just keeps slipping away.

GARY

Christmas is something to enjoy, not
endure. Just savor it.

Gary gobbles up a sugar cookie and chases it with punch.

KEVIN

Can't. Not the way I used to.

GARY

Christmas is for kids, old friend.
Christmas is for kids.

INT. SALLY'S TRAILER - DAY

Sally sits at the kitchen table. Cigarette butts fill the
ashtray. She listens to someone on the phone. She winces in
pain and shifts her weight to get more comfortable.

SALLY (ON PHONE)

It's actually been getting better.
(listens)

She touches her abdomen.

SALLY (ON PHONE)

More tests? Really?
(listens)

SALLY (ON PHONE)

Can it wait until after Christmas? I
have to take care of some things here.
(listens)

SALLY (ON PHONE)

Great. I'll call when I get back in
town.

EXT. TIM SENIOR'S HOUSE - EVENING

Kevin and his father decorate the outside of Tim Senior's
house. Kevin's father stands on an old, rickety ladder. He
strings lights, haphazardly.

Kevin untangles the power cords and lights for a plastic
Santa, a sleigh, and eight, tiny reindeers. Kevin watches
his father. His face tells us this isn't the way his father
normally does these things.

Tim Senior climbs down from the ladder and joins Kevin, as
he sticks Rudolph into the ground, completing a precise,
semi-circle arrangement.

Kevin shoots his dad a look of mild concern.

TIM SENIOR

I know. We got a late start this year.
I've been kind of tired.

KEVIN

I remember when mom ordered these out
of the Sears catalogue.

TIM SENIOR

That was an expensive year. I had to
work extra weekends at the gas station.

KEVIN

We appreciated it.

TIM SENIOR

So'd she.

KEVIN

You had to give up your weekend
classes.

TIM SENIOR

Were never enough hours in the day.

KEVIN

You've never told me what you wanted to
be when you grew up.

TIM SENIOR

Wasn't important.

KEVIN

How come you kept all your books and
class notes?

TIM SENIOR

Your mom was always trying to throw
them out.

Kevin's father smiles at the memory.

TIM SENIOR

An architect, I guess. I always wanted
to build things.

KEVIN

What happened?

TIM SENIOR

Your mom and you kids. Couldn't afford
college, a mortgage, and a family.

KEVIN

Too bad.

TIM SENIOR

I suppose.

KEVIN

You regret it?

TIM SENIOR

Sometimes. Not all that often.

KEVIN

Really?

Tim Senior shoots his son a look.

TIM SENIOR

I married a wonderful woman. Had five great kids. I've got a special lady in my life now. Grandkids I enjoy. It's good. It's all good.

TIM SENIOR

Would you do it the same again?

TIM SENIOR

Absolutely. You kids are all healthy. You've each done well. I get to do things now I couldn't do when you were younger. We all like being together.

KEVIN

Except Sally.

A look of anger, mixed with sadness, crosses his father's face.

TIM SENIOR

I can't believe the kids are fighting this. It kind of hurts.

KEVIN

Gave it my best shot.

TIM SENIOR

Thanks for that.

KEVIN

What now?

Tim Senior starts folding up the packing boxes.

TIM SENIOR

It's something I have to do, Kevin. I may just invite her anyway. The rest of you can come, or not.

KEVIN

Let me work on it some more.

TIM SENIOR

Like I say, it's something I need to do. With or without you kids.

KEVIN

You're sounding a little like Joan.

TIM SENIOR

Excuse me.

KEVIN

Just reminds me a little of what happened with Anne. Or, that time you gave Timmy the Mustang.

TIM SENIOR

It's nothing like that. Your ex-wife brought all that on herself. She was a pain. And your brother should never have sold that car. I gave it to him. He should've given it to one of the grandkids.

KEVIN

That's what I'm talking about.

TIM SENIOR

It's not the same and you know it.

KEVIN

All I'm saying is don't give up. They're, we're, your kids. Don't cut them loose for no good reason. That's what Joan wants. It's what she's always wanted. This is her way of making it happen.

TIM SENIOR

Careful, Kevin. You used to do this when you talked about your mother. I didn't like it then and I don't like it now.

KEVIN

Was just calling mom on her crap, that's all.

TIM SENIOR

Joan and your mom are very different.

KEVIN

Mom may have had her problems, but her heart was in the right place.

TIM SENIOR

There's nothing wrong with Joan. She cares about you kids. All of you.

KEVIN

Joan's never wanted any of the people around from your previous life.

TIM SENIOR

She doesn't do that.

KEVIN

What about Grampa Otto and Uncle Bill?

TIM SENIOR

It's more complicated than that.

KEVIN

She doesn't want anything to do with your past. And you let her get away with it.

TIM SENIOR

If that's true, why's she trying so hard with Sally?

KEVIN

Because she knows it's important to you. Besides, Sally is an outsider. Like her.

TIM SENIOR

She's part of my life. It's time you all start accepting that.

KEVIN

Look, Dad. You're easy. You've always been easy. So am I. So's Timmy. Our whole family is. You let Grampa Otto push you around. Then mom. Now it's Joan's turn.

Tim Senior starts to say something, but catches his breath and groans a little.

KEVIN

You okay?

TIM SENIOR

A little pain. In my back. It's gone.

KEVIN
You sure?

TIM SENIOR
(impatient)
It's okay. Go home. I'm just tired. I
need a little sleep.

KEVIN
Don't bullshit me, Dad.

TIM SENIOR
I'll be fine.

EXT. GRACE M. DAVIS HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Kevin and Julie walk the campus of their alma mater. In the
cement quad, they sit on a bench and sip coffee from paper
cups.

KEVIN
If only these halls could talk.

JULIE
We survived.

KEVIN
Really don't remember much. It'd be fun
to try it again.

JULIE
You think?

KEVIN
Maybe.

Julie reaches to curl her arms inside Kevin's and leans
closer. He pulls away. She frowns and withdraws.

JULIE
I'll be leaving after Christmas.

KEVIN
Figured.

JULIE
Will you miss me?

KEVIN
A little.

JULIE
Will you call me?

Kevin stares off at the familiar buildings, then turns to Julie.

KEVIN

Look, Julie, this is not a good time right now.

JULIE

I know.

KEVIN

I think you're great, but-

JULIE

You love Rory.

KEVIN

I do. And with all that's going on with my father and my family-

JULIE

I'm just selfish enough to not care.

KEVIN

I'm really sorry.

Julie stands.

JULIE

You don't need anybody, do you? You could live the rest of your life alone and be fine.

Kevin shrugs.

JULIE

Your dad deserves to be happy. So do you.

KEVIN

Appreciate that.

JULIE

Promise me something.

JULIE

What's that?

JULIE

Don't become the kind of person you have to hold your breath around.

EXT./INT. KEVIN'S CAR - LATER

Kevin and Julie drive down the freeway, isolated in their silence.

They pass a highway sign. The scrolling message reads:
"Kidnap suspect Steven David Marlow remains at large. Authorities report he is driving a stolen white Honda Accord, license number 'MUDBOWL.' If you have any information regarding this abduction, immediately call 209-552-2470."

EXT. SCENIC CEMETARY - DAY

Sally stands in front of a simple headstone. She places a live, potted poinsettia plant at the base of the gravestone.

The inscription on the headstone reads: "Carol Woodworth, Loving Wife and Mother. Her Love and Acceptance Were Her Greatest Gifts."

EXT. MCHENRY VILLAGE - DAY

Kevin and Gary walk through the Village, a Fifties-era shopping center. They pass a long line of KIDS and PARENTS snaking outside the entrance to a little log house.

The sign on the red-and-white candy cane next to the house reads: "North Pole."

GARY

His whole life has been "has-to." You guys owe him.

KEVIN

Know that. Do they?

GARY

What's one Christmas?

KEVIN

Not like she's staying forever, I guess.

GARY

He needs to have this happen. It's your job to make sure it does.

KEVIN

Always the go-to guy.

GARY

Always.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Kevin and Rory wrap Christmas presents. A country Christmas song plays in the background.

Kevin picks up the solar system model. He turns the wheel that initiates the planetary orbits around the sun. It won't move. He tries to turn it again. It still won't move. He looks more closely at the mechanism. It seems fine. He forces the wheel to turn.

The railing that holds the planets in place comes unhinged. The planets all rattle-slide together. The sun slips off its center perch, falls to the floor, and rolls away. Kevin scoops it up before it gets too far.

RORY

Get him a book next year. No assembly required.

KEVIN

Christmas stinks.

Kevin drops the broken constellation into an empty packing box.

KEVIN

They need to understand how important this is to dad.

RORY

I think they do. They just don't agree.

KEVIN

They need to change their minds.

RORY

How's that going to happen?

Kevin stands next to the Christmas tree, squinting at the lights.

KEVIN

Decided to go see them. Each one. Separately. Talk it out.

RORY

You think that's a good idea? It may create more problems than it solves.

KEVIN

Have to risk that.

Kevin touches a brass ornament shaped like a wreath and inscribed with the words: "The Woodworth Family - A Circle of Love."

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

Kevin sits at the edit system. He previews an edit.

EDIT SYSTEM - MONITOR

TWO YOUNG BOYS—"Kevy" and "Timmy"—open Christmas presents. Football helmets. 49ers and Rams.

The sequence jump-cuts to the two boys playing football in the mud. Kevin tackles his little brother and holds him down in the muck.

Kevin's dad steps into frame, grabs Kevin by the scruff of the neck, and yanks him off his brother.

BACK TO OFFICE

Kevin sits at the built-in work table. He slides open the glass front of a new shadow box.

The shadow box he put together for his father sits in the background. There are six brand-new, empty boxes lined up to his right.

Kevin positions a photo inside the shadow box of he and his brother as little boys, his father as a young man, and Grampa Otto as a middle-aged man.

He adds a miniature Rams football helmet, a trophy from the Mud Bowl, an action figure of a soccer player kicking a soccer ball, a formal portrait of Tim Junior, Linda, Jared, and Travis, a miniature UCLA Bruin mascot, and a statue of Christ on the cross.

EXT. ROOSEVELT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

On the athletic field, a TEAM OF UNDER-14 BOYS play soccer.

Kevin's brother, Tim Junior, assists his son, Travis, who's coaching one of the teams. Kevin stands next to his brother.

It's a close game. The action is heating up on the field. One of the OPPONENTS slide-tackles one of Travis's kids hard. The REF waves for them to play on.

KEVIN

Yo, ref. Where's the yellow card?

TIM JUNIOR

Calm down. He's still pissed at us from last game.

Kevin sticks his hands in his pockets.

KEVIN

You think dad should have kidnapped Sally?

Tim Junior gives his brother a look that says, "Where the hell did that come from?"

TIM JUNIOR

He did whatever mom wanted.

KEVIN

He was always easy.

TIM JUNIOR

No, he did it because he loved our mother. Why is it no one ever gives him credit for making his own decisions?

Kevin looks at his brother a moment. Tim Junior, too, looks a lot like their father.

KEVIN

We need to do this for him.

TIM JUNIOR

You need to do it.

KEVIN

She's our sister.

TIM JUNIOR

That none of us know.

KEVIN

You and I were both there. We know what happened. We need to put this together. Soon. No telling-

TIM JUNIOR

I can't deal with this right now.

KEVIN

What else is new?

TIM JUNIOR

You really want to know, bro? You really want to know?

Tim Junior turns to face his brother.

TIM JUNIOR
My business is in trouble, okay. If things don't turn around in a hurry, I'm going belly-up.

KEVIN
Shit.

TIM JUNIOR
Shit is right.

KEVIN
How long you been having problems?

TIM JUNIOR
A while, obviously.

KEVIN
Didn't know.

TIM JUNIOR
How would you? You're never around. You never ask. You're too busy orchestrating people's lives.

KEVIN
How come you didn't tell me?

TIM JUNIOR
Got enough people looking over my shoulder.

The game flows back and forth. Tim Junior checks his watch, then shows it to Kevin. Time is winding down. One of Travis's players launches a kick downfield.

Two opposing players, including the kid who slide-tackled Travis's player earlier, converge on one of Travis's players. This time the slide-tackler throws an elbow as both players leap to head the ball.

KEVIN
Little asshole!

The ref wheels on Kevin and holds up a yellow card. Kevin starts to step onto the field. Tim Junior grabs his arm and pulls him back. Kevin yanks his arm loose.

KEVIN
I didn't throw the elbow, ref. Call the game on the field.

The ref points the yellow card at Tim Junior.

TRAVIS

Get him off the field.

Tim Junior drops his clipboard and pushes his older brother away from the field.

TIM JUNIOR

Knock it off, Kevin. He'll call the game if you don't cool it.

KEVIN

He's a jerk. He got a hot date or something?

Tim Junior gets nose-to-nose with Kevin.

TIM JUNIOR

You're my brother, Kevin. My oldest friend. We've known each other our entire lives. Longer than anybody. But we don't know each other. If we weren't brothers, we probably wouldn't be friends. We just don't have that much in common. Never have. We hang out and do things. At holidays, on birthdays. Other than that, I never see you. And that's okay. I've got my life with Linda and the boys. And, the way I see it, it's too late in life to add an older sister to the mix.

KEVIN

That's too bad. But, just to set the record straight, you're the one that made the choice. You're the one that disappeared from the family. You're the one that never shows up when we get together. We're not close because you're never around. That's why you were never close to mom and dad. You got married and got sucked into her family's orbit. She got a husband, we lost a brother. Man, you're just as bad as dad. You've let Linda push you around the same way mom pushed dad around. The same way Joan's doing now.

Tim Junior clenches and un-clenches his fists.

TIM JUNIOR

You and I have thrown punches only once in our lives. It wasn't fun. Let's not do it again.

KEVIN

It was Linda made you sell the Mustang
dad gave you.

TIM JUNIOR

I wish you guys would let that one die.
It's over and done.

KEVIN

Would be if you'd given it to someone
else in the family like he wanted you
to.

TIM JUNIOR

People been telling me what to do my
entire life. Especially you. I'm done
with it.

KEVIN

Fine time to find a backbone.

Tim Junior pushes his older brother hard and points an index
finger at him.

TIM JUNIOR

(through gritted
teeth)

Enough.

KEVIN

You'll be the only one. As always. Why
can't you go along? For once.

TIM JUNIOR

Why start now? You guys don't consider
me part of the family anyway. What I
think doesn't mean shit.

From a distance, Sally watches the two brothers glaring,
toe-to-toe.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

Kevin's fingers glide over the keyboard of the edit system.

EDIT SYSTEM - MONITOR

A skinny, squirrely-acting YOUNG BOY—Kevin's brother
"Willy"—opens a Christmas present. It's an Emmett Kelly
clown doll.

Kevin, a little older than the previous sequence with Tim
Junior, steps into frame and yanks the doll out of his
little brother's hands. Kevin does a little hula dance,

curtsies, bends his wrist, and points at his little brother with an upraised pinky finger.

When Willy tries to grab his doll, Kevin pushes him down on his back and straddles him, pinning Willy's arms with his knees. Kevin begins gleefully thumping Willy's chest with his pointed knuckle.

Kevin's mother's hand reaches into frame and whacks Kevin in the back of the head with a rolled-up newspaper.

BACK TO OFFICE

Kevin populates the empty shadow box with a photo of he and Willy with their arms around each other's shoulders, both wearing softball uniforms.

He adds an action figure of a rock 'n roll guitar player, a magazine cutout of Martha Stewart, an Oakland Raiders decal, a tiny set of golf clubs, a miniature "Spider-man" comic book, and a magician's wand.

INT. WILLY'S HOME - BASEMENT - DAY

Willy sits in the middle of his recording studio. A guitar straddles his lap. He smokes a joint. Headphones encircle his neck.

Kevin descends the stairs, enters the room, and hands his brother a plastic grocery bag. Willy opens up the bag and pulls out several copies of *Martha Stewart Living*.

WILLY

All right. The Martha drop. Any good recipes?

KEVIN

Paella looks good.

WILLY

You mean do-able. I think Martha's got her head up her ass half the time when she writes these. She includes twenty steps when you only need ... nineteen.

KEVIN

Course, you'll have to catch your own fish, grow your own rice-

WILLY

And harvest your own saffron.

KEVIN
But, we love her.

WILLY
Yes, we do.

KEVIN
Need those music tracks ASAP. I'd like
to show the client a rough cut next
week.

WILLY
I'm changing the intro.

KEVIN
Sounded good to me the way it was.

WILLY
Wasn't quite right.

KEVIN
Sometimes we need it done, not good.

WILLY
That's you.

KEVIN
Fascist.

WILLY
When it comes to my music, yes.

Willy grabs an ashtray and stubs out the joint.

In a wall mirror, Kevin sees a reflection of himself and his brother. The way they cock their heads, gesture, smile, and fidget is uncannily identical.

Kevin's eyes move around the room. On another wall is a glass case with the Emmett Kelly doll Willy got for Christmas a long time ago and a variety of other Emmett Kelly memorabilia.

On the floor, there's a stack of books by wellness gurus like Deepak Chopra, Wayne Dyer, and Dr. Andrew Weill. Another wall is covered with autographed and framed photographs of several rock 'n roll legends.

KEVIN
Your Christmas song was killer.

WILLY
Dad didn't think so.

KEVIN

Joan doesn't like cranky.

WILLY

She was a musician once. She knows what it's about.

KEVIN

Different era.

WILLY

Different agenda.

KEVIN

Dad liked it, I'm sure. Just has a special way of showing it these days.

WILLY

Yeah, like not at all. Why can't he just tell her to kiss his ass?

KEVIN

Because he loves her, maybe. Because he's never been able to do that, mostly.

WILLY

Has he ever had any balls?

KEVIN

Once. When he married mom.

WILLY

Grampa Otto was pissed.

KEVIN

Think we're too hard on him, sometimes. Especially since mom died. I'm sure he's stood up in the past. Just picked his battles.

WILLY

Like now. With Sally.

KEVIN

It's pretty serious.

WILLY

As a heart attack.

A look of guilt flashes across Kevin's face.

KEVIN

We've got to deal with this Sally thing.

WILLY

Back on the clock, eh, big bro.

KEVIN

He wants us all on board.

WILLY

Look, I want to help you out. You need to make it happen as badly as he wants it to happen.

KEVIN

Can count on you, then.

WILLY

Well, not really.

Kevin gives him an exasperated look.

WILLY

Look, here's the deal. I've sort of been seeing somebody.

Kevin's jaw drops.

WILLY

Not that. A head doctor.

KEVIN

About what?

WILLY

I've sort of been freaking a bit. For no good reason. Get kind of shaky. Rapid heartbeats. Clammy. Don't want to leave the house. Sort of scared.

KEVIN

Didn't mom have the same crap? Agoraphobia, or something like that?

WILLY

Yeah, but this is different. It's some kind of anxiety thing.

KEVIN

You okay?

WILLY

They've got me on medication. It's getting better. I'm still not in control like I'd like. So, I'm trying to keep the stress to a minimum.

KEVIN

Can I do anything?

WILLY

Yeah, back off for a while.

EXT. WILLY'S HOUSE - LATER

Kevin pulls away from Willy's house.

Down the street, partially obscured by a hedge, Sally sits in her car, smoking.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

Kevin scans through some home movie footage stored on the edit system. He stops and plays a sequence.

EDIT SYSTEM - MONITOR

Kevin's oldest sister—"Dee Dee"—cooks a fake meal on a cardboard stove. Her face is smeared with chocolate.

Kevin darts into frame, holding a glass of milk. He holds it out to her, she reaches for it, and he yanks it back. He keeps doing it until she bursts into tears.

Kevin's dad's hand comes into frame and whacks Kevin across the butt.

BACK TO OFFICE

Kevin brushes some sawdust out of the shadow box. He pins a photo of he and Diane mock-snarling and holding the Alcoa aluminum tree between them like they're fighting over it.

Kevin adds a slightly worn cut-out of a Fifties-era, Donna Reed-type mother wearing an apron and holding a mixing bowl. He also includes a Weight Watchers scale of points, a postcard photograph of Billie Holliday, a miniature plastic microphone, a Hershey's kiss, a photograph of Diane and her two girls, and a newspaper photograph of a homeless girl.

INT. DIANE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Diane stands behind a wood island in her cluttered, filled-to-the-brim kitchen. Fifties-era Christmas carols play in the background.

The refrigerator is covered with report cards, greeting cards, photographs, and certificates of achievement. A photo of Tim Senior and Carol, with a written tribute by Diane, is attached to the front of the frig with a Santa Clause magnet.

Diane adds icing to an elaborate gingerbread house. She dips her finger into the bowl and eats a finger-full.

Kevin wipes the table with a dish rag. Diane gives him a look. He stops cleaning.

KEVIN

Thought I could rely on you and Cheryl,
at least.

DIANE

Because we're the little girls?

KEVIN

Because you're the first ones she
talked with. You guys were up for it,
once upon a time.

DIANE

We were. We'd only heard about her all
these years. We were too young to
remember. I guess we kind of felt
guilty we hadn't tried harder. She
wrote a couple of letters. We talked on
the phone a few times. She was all set
to come out and stay with us.

KEVIN

Why didn't she?

DIANE

Skip and my boyfriend-of-the-week got
involved. They said we should slow down
a little. We had young children and
they just wanted to know more about who
we were exposing our kids to.

KEVIN

What'd Sally say?

DIANE

She really sort of lost it. She got
angry. Started yelling. Sounded a lot
like mom on one of her bad days. We
never talked again.

KEVIN

Maybe she was angry because she was
hurt. I mean, we're all she had.

DIANE

We couldn't take that chance, could we?
We had our children to think about.
'Course, you don't have children, so
you don't know what that's like.

Judging from Kevin's reaction, it's not the first time he's heard that comment.

KEVIN

What do the kids think now?

DIANE

They're curious, but it's not a priority.

KEVIN

What about you?

DIANE

You've seen her. What's she like?

KEVIN

Still a little angry. Not with us, but her foster parents. Mom and dad some. Sad because she's never known her other family.

DIANE

Are you okay with all this?

KEVIN

Dad needs it more than me.

DIANE

Joan thinks it's all going to work out.

KEVIN

It's the least she can do.

DIANE

You expect too much of people.

KEVIN

Only what they're supposed to do.

DIANE

And guilt them until they do.

KEVIN

If you love dad, you'll do this for him. It's that simple.

DIANE

It's not that simple, Kevin. And that's an unfair thing to say.

KEVIN

It's how I feel right now.

Diane stops icing the gingerbread house.

DIANE

There's just too much going on.

KEVIN

What's more important than what our father needs?

DIANE

What I need.

KEVIN

So, what's that?

DIANE

I've been having some problems with Stan.

KEVIN

No surprise.

DIANE

Calm down. Stan's really an okay guy. He's just a little jealous. When we go out to the clubs and I sing, he gets a little possessive. Sometimes he gets a little rough.

KEVIN

Damn it, I knew it. I told Cheryl.

DIANE

You know, I wish you guys wouldn't talk so much behind my back. You need to talk to me, not about me.

KEVIN

That bastard is toast.

DIANE

No, he's not. You're going to let me handle it.

KEVIN

Same way you always have. By finding another one just as bad.

DIANE

Just trust me for once in your life. Stop second-guessing me. All of you.

KEVIN

What about the girls? He done anything to them?

DIANE

He's never around the girls. I won't allow it.

KEVIN

You need to throw his lazy butt out in the street. Sooner the better.

DIANE

I need to do what works for me and the girls.

Kevin grabs a chocolate chip, peanut butter cookie and takes a bite.

Diane pours a glass of milk.

Kevin holds out his hand for the glass. Diane extends it toward him. He reaches for it, she pulls it back, and drinks the milk.

EXT. DOWNTOWN PLAZA - NIGHT

Kevin stands in the middle of the plaza. Several trees are strung with white twinkly lights. Surrounding each tree is a circular pattern of weathered brick.

Kevin walks around each tree, searching for something. He stops and leans down. Each of the bricks has an inscription gouged into its face. There are names of individuals, families, and businesses.

Kevin touches one brick. On one line, it reads: "The Woodworth Family." On the second line, it reads: "Tim and Carol." On the five bricks encircling that brick are written the names: "Kevy, Timmy, Willy, Dee Dee, Cheri."

Kevin stands and walks away toward an adjacent parking garage.

A moment later, Sally walks to the spot where he was standing. She kneels down and touches the bricks.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - OFFICE

On the edit system, Kevin assembles a mosaic of still photographs.

EDIT SYSTEM - MONITOR

The series of photographs features Kevin and his sister—"Cheri"—at different points in their lives. There is one common thread. In each photo, a scrawny, bespectacled Cheryl stares up adoringly at her older brother.

In the last one, Kevin holds his little sister's head in a head-lock and rubs the top of her scalp with his knuckles.

In the background, Kevin's mother approaches waving a wooden mixing spoon.

BACK TO OFFICE

Kevin cleans the glass cover of the shadow box with Windex and slides the cover into its groove. The collection inside the box includes a photo of Kevin and Cheryl walking in a protest march against drilling oil in Alaska.

He adds a small peace symbol, a vegetarian recipe, a solar-powered calculator, a miniature sheet of music, a photograph of Cheryl and her family, a tiny acrylic heart, and a photograph cut out of a magazine of Judy Garland as Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz."

INT. MODESTO HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - DAY

Kevin and Cheryl stand in the glass-enclosed control booth above the auditorium. Cheryl is running the sound and lights for the rehearsal of her son's annual junior high school Christmas pageant.

On the stage, a very competent and enthusiastic ORCHESTRA performs a Christmas carol.

KEVIN

(gestures to stage)

Remember your first performance in one of these?

CHERYL

I threw up all over my Rosemary Clooney costume.

KEVIN

Mom cleaned you up and had you back on stage faster than you could say "tap-dancing with Danny Kaye."

CHERYL

Remember what Diane and I sang?

They both begin singing the song, "Sisters," from the movie, "White Christmas."

KEVIN

One of us has been in one of these every year for-

CHERYL

A lot of years.

Kevin reaches out to grab his sister in the familiar headlock. She holds her hands up to stop him. Kevin smiles and steps back.

KEVIN

That's what I'm talking about. Sally never had that.

CHERYL

We can't change that.

KEVIN

She can have it now.

CHERYL

That's what she wants?

KEVIN

That's all she wants.

CHERYL

Some of her phone calls made me think otherwise.

KEVIN

Maybe you were reading too much into it.

CHERYL

Do you enjoy this?

KEVIN

What?

CHERYL

Being the one who always has to do this?

KEVIN

I'd trade birth dates with you, with any of you, in a heartbeat.

CHERYL

I'm not sure you would. You wear it too well.

KEVIN

You'd do the same. If dad asked you to.

CHERYL

That's what I don't get. Why does he want this so badly?

KEVIN

Trying to finish some old business.

CHERYL

Or start some.

KEVIN

Don't think so.

CHERYL

That's the problem. You don't think so because that's all you know and you think that's all there is to it. I know so because I know the whole story.

KEVIN

What else is there to know?

CHERYL

You'd be surprised.

KEVIN

If there was more, they would've told me.

CHERYL

They didn't want you to judge them.

KEVIN

Wouldn't do that.

CHERYL

That's what you were born and raised to do.

KEVIN

Try me.

Cheryl takes a deep breath and turns to face her brother.

CHERYL

Okay. When mom would drink too much, she'd start thinking about Sally. She'd come into our room and talk about how she missed her and how she was sorry she ever gave her up.

KEVIN

Know all that.

CHERYL

One time, it was just me. She was really drunk. And really depressed.

(MORE)

CHERYL (CONT'D)

There was something she wanted to say and she was trying not to say it, but she had to say it. She had to get it out. I only got bits and pieces because she was too wasted. But, from what my little girl mind could piece together, it had something to do with dad and Sally and Grampa Otto and Uncle Bill. What she kept saying over and over was that if "it" ever got out, it would destroy dad. I tried to get her to tell me what "it" was, but she kept repeating that she couldn't because "it" would kill the only man she ever really loved.

KEVIN

How many times did this happen?

CHERYL

All the time.

KEVIN

She never told you what it was?

CHERYL

Never. I asked Diane. She doesn't remember anything about it. Willy doesn't either. Timmy was never around, so I don't know what he heard. You obviously know nothing about it.

KEVIN

Ever talk with dad about it?

CHERYL

I didn't want to know. I was just a kid. I figured he'd tell me if he wanted. I mostly hoped it would just go away.

KEVIN

It did. Until now.

CHERYL

That's why I don't think you should be pushing so hard.

KEVIN

He must be ready to deal with whatever it is.

CHERYL

I'm not. I may never be.

KEVIN
Out of your hands.

CHERYL
Who made you God?

KEVIN
Birth order.

CHERYL
You're on your own.

KEVIN
I'm your brother. We're a family. Why
is everybody fighting me on this?

CHERYL
Maybe we're happy with the way things
are.

KEVIN
Happy?

CHERYL
Maybe just okay.

KEVIN
She's our sister.

CHERYL
She's never been a part of our life. We
don't know her. It'd be like asking
someone off the street to come live
with us.

KEVIN
Not even close.

CHERYL
Close enough.

KEVIN
How can you, of all people, say that?
You've spent your whole life working
with losers.

Cheryl gives him a disappointed look.

KEVIN
Okay, people with issues.

CHERYL

This is different. This is my family. Until I know more about her, about what this secret has to do with dad, I'm not going along with anything.

KEVIN

All I'm asking for is a little flexibility.

CHERYL

Look who's talking. You've never been flexible in your life.

KEVIN

I'm getting older.

CHERYL

Well, all I'm asking is that you stop browbeating us. Stop being the big brother. Let me, let all of us, make our own decision about this.

KEVIN

You can't. None of you can. You've never been able to.

CHERYL

So, if it wasn't for you, we'd be totally helpless. And we should thank you for that?

KEVIN

Just needed a little push from time to time.

CHERYL

Kevin, you will always be our brother. We will always love you. But, we've never liked how you've tried to take care of us, tried to do what you thought was best for us, whether we wanted you to or not. We stepped out of your shadow a long time ago. And we're not going back.

KEVIN

Just think about it. Why won't any of you just think about it?

Cheryl crosses her arms.

CHERYL

Look, there's something else going on right now that's sort of sucking up all the energy I can spare.

Cheryl stares out the control booth window at her son on the stage. James waves from behind his drum kit. She waves back.

CHERYL

Nobody knows what I'm about to tell you.

KEVIN

Doesn't sound good.

CHERYL

It's not.

(she exhales)

I'm having an affair. I've been having affairs my entire marriage. Skip and I were opening up to each other last night and I told him. I couldn't keep it to myself anymore. I thought he would handle it. But, he didn't. He wants me to leave and he wants to tell the kids.

KEVIN

This sucks.

Cheryl bursts into tears.

CHERYL

I thought we were making progress. I'm not happy, but I don't want us to break up. Not now.

KEVIN

Did you ask him to wait? Maybe slow down a little before he tells the kids.

CHERYL

I did. And he agreed. At least until after the holidays. After that, I don't know.

KEVIN

If there's anything Rory and I can do, just let us know. You can stay with us if you need to.

CHERYL

I hope it doesn't come to that, but thanks.

Cheryl wipes her eyes with the sleeve of her sweater.

CHERYL

You know, if Sally becomes a part of the family again, you won't be the oldest anymore. That could change everything.

Kevin smiles weakly.

At an exit off to the side of the stage, Sally stands in the shadows, partially obscured by the stage curtains. She watches Kevin and Cheryl talking in the glass booth.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

Kevin slouches at the editing console.

EDIT SYSTEM - MONITOR

Kevin scans through a series of video clips and photographs of himself and Rory at Christmas.

They pose outside in front of their decorated house, inside in front of the green Christmas tree, and sitting in front of the living room fireplace. It's only the two of them. They both look relaxed, happy, content.

BACK TO OFFICE

Kevin rests a photo of he and Rory dancing against the back wall of the shadow box.

He adds an action figure of a slightly worn down Wonder Woman, a small reproduction of painter Gustav Klimt's "The Kiss," a miniature novel, a magazine ad for a latte, a photo of her TWO SONS, a small reproduction of her therapist's license, a pack of cigarettes, a drawing of an apple pie, a small bottle of white wine, a portrait of her family, a picture of her neck-deep in a mud bath, and a porcelain miniature of Confucius.

EXT. KEVIN'S NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING

Kevin and Rory power walk. It's damp and foggy.

KEVIN

They say the longer you're in a relationship, the worse your hearing gets.

RORY

What?

Kevin sighs.

RORY

Stop mumbling. I didn't hear what you said.

KEVIN

Really need to get your hearing checked.

RORY

I hear everyone just fine. Except you.

KEVIN

Exactly.

RORY

Lighten up, sweetie. I just didn't hear what you said.

KEVIN

Asked what you thought I should do. You're the expert.

RORY

Stop rolling rocks uphill. They'll come around. They know what needs to be done and they'll do it. All in their own good time.

KEVIN

Don't know that we've got time for "all in good time".

RORY

You know that little game we play around putting my clothes away. You lay them on the bed so I'll see them when I come home. You figure I'll put them away before I go to bed if I see them. But, I just move them. You lay them on the bed again the next day and I move them again.

KEVIN

Until I finally put them away.

RORY

Exactly.

KEVIN

You do that on purpose?

RORY

Sort of. I just don't want you telling me what to do. I'll get around to putting them away. But, it'll be when I want to, not when you want me to.

KEVIN

You enjoy stressing me out?

RORY

A little.

KEVIN

Why would you do that?

RORY

You're not my father.

KEVIN

Sure I am. That's why you married me.

RORY

Screw you.

KEVIN

Just wish they'd do what they're supposed to.

RORY

Stop cleaning things up. Don't look for solutions. It's life and it's messy. Deal with it.

KEVIN

They're not your brothers and sisters. It's not your family.

Rory is stung by his exclusion.

INT. SALLY'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Sally sits at the kitchen table. The phone rings. She extinguishes her cigarette.

SALLY

Hello.

KEVIN (ON PHONE)

Sally, it's Kevin.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

SALLY

How are you?

KEVIN

Fine.

SALLY

Good, that's good.
(she waits, expectant)

KEVIN

Just wanted to give you a quick update.
Been to see all the sibs.

SALLY

They're all okay?

KEVIN

Yeah, but I have to tell you, it's not
going real well.

SALLY

Too bad.

KEVIN

Don't worry. I haven't given up.

SALLY

I'm glad.

KEVIN

I'll keep you posted.

Sally toys with the cigarette butts in the ashtray.

SALLY

Tell me, Kevin, you ever think about
suicide?

KEVIN

Excuse me?

SALLY

Suicide, you know—

KEVIN

I heard you.

SALLY

They say it's the ultimate act of
selfishness.

KEVIN

Don't know about selfish. Inconvenient
maybe.

SALLY

Inconvenient. Really?

KEVIN

You know, for the ones left behind.

SALLY

Messy. Isn't that what you mean? It's messy.

KEVIN

Look, Sally, we'll get this worked out, okay? Okay?

SALLY

Sure.

KEVIN

Talk with you later. Take care.

Sally hangs up the phone.

SALLY

Take care. Damn right, I'll take care.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

Kevin stares at the edit system monitor.

EDIT SYSTEM - MONITOR

Kevin previews a series of motion video clips and scanned photographs of himself and Gary at various stages in their lives.

In most of the images, they dress alike, wear their hair alike, smile alike. As they get older, their looks change and diverge drastically, as Kevin becomes more serious and Gary the free-spirit.

They change again as Gary becomes a father and Kevin travels the world. They change again and become the same as they stand together in identical golf shirts and hats in the middle of a scenic golf course.

BACK TO OFFICE

Kevin adds a tiny golf bag to Gary's shadow box, next to a tattered baseball card of Giant's baseball legend, Orlando Cepeda.

There is also a miniature flute, a tiny can of Budweiser beer, a photo of Gary with his SON and THREE GRANDKIDS, a music CD, a class picture of his sixth graders, a poem about his best friend, and a sandstone etched with the image of Kokopeli, the flute-playing jester.

INT. GARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kevin and Gary watch an NFL football game.

Kevin reads some of Gary's poems from a handful of plastic presentation folders.

GARY

Sounds like you and your dad need to talk.

KEVIN

Next thing on the agenda.

Kevin wants to set the folders down on the coffee table, but it's covered with dirty dishes, coloring books, and children's reading books.

GARY

Had the grandkids over last night. They wore me out.

KEVIN

Looks it.

GARY

My sister came by to help out.

KEVIN

How'd that go?

GARY

Better. We're working things out.

KEVIN

Good thing for you.

GARY

How's that?

KEVIN

You only had two sisters. And you're the baby.

GARY

Yeah, but none of your family is as screwed up as she is.

KEVIN

Don't know as I would agree right now.

GARY

You have no idea how lucky you are.

KEVIN

You take them. All of them. I've had it.

GARY

That was my mistake. My family got pissed off and just stopped dealing with it. We closed down because we thought that was the safe thing to do. It was. And it was easy. The hard thing was staying open. That's what we needed to do. Because that's the only way you can stay connected to what's important. Love and forgiveness. We're only now getting to that point. Finally. It's been a long road and we're not even close to seeing the end.

KEVIN

Just wish I could say something, do something, that would convince them so we can put this behind us. We've all been avoiding it and dreading it for years because we didn't know what would happen. Now, she's here and I don't think it's all that big a deal.

GARY

You know, doing something isn't the same as being something.

INT. STATE THEATRE - NIGHT

Kevin and Rory sit in the first row balcony of the historic local art house theater. They watch the scene in "It's a Wonderful Life" where George Bailey contemplates taking his own life.

INT. SALLY'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Sally stands at the kitchen sink of her trailer. She opens the cap on a medicine bottle of pain pills. She sprinkles two into her hand, pops them into her mouth, and chases them with a beer.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kevin and Rory sleep. The phone rings.

Rory picks up the phone. Kevin looks at the clock. It's after midnight.

RORY

Hello.

She listens. She hands the phone to Kevin.

RORY

It's Joan.

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - ICU - NIGHT

In room seven, Tim Senior lies in bed, hooked to a respiratory. Other equipment monitors his vital signs. An IV feeds blood and meds. Tim Senior sleeps.

Joan and Kevin stand in the doorway to the room. Joan's eyes are red from crying. She wipes her nose with a Kleenex.

JOAN

He had another small stroke.

KEVIN

Thought the bypass took care of that.

JOAN

They think he bruised his heart last summer.

KEVIN

The crash?

Joan nods.

KEVIN

What now?

JOAN

They're giving him blood. They need to get him stabilized before they decide what to do. They really can't do anything until they get the Coumadin out of his blood system.

KEVIN

Knew it. Hate that shit.

JOAN

I'm worried, Kevin.

KEVIN

It'll be okay.
(pats her shoulder)
He's tough.

JOAN

This whole thing over Sally has been too much.

KEVIN

We'll work it out. He'll have plenty of time to do what he needs to do.

JOAN

I hope you're right. I really do.

INT. FIRST METHODIST CHURCH - NIGHT

Kevin and Rory attend the traditional Candlelight Concert. The Modesto Symphony plays Corelli's "Christmas Concerto."

Kevin bows his head in what appears to be prayer. Rory takes his hand.

Kevin looks up and stares at the collection of sacred and secular holiday decorations, then the stained glass depiction of Christ behind the CHOIR.

EXT. CHURCH - AFTER THE CONCERT

Kevin and Rory leave the church and walk to their parked car.

KEVIN

It's their fault.

RORY

It's nobody's fault.

KEVIN

Be easier to just walk away. Do what works for me for a change. They don't want a big brother anymore. Maybe I'll give them what they want.

Rory stops walking. She takes Kevin by both his shoulders and looks into his eyes.

RORY

There are some things you have to do, whether you like it or not. Sacrifices you have to make.

KEVIN

No, I don't. I'm tired of always "having to."

RORY

It's life, Kevin.

KEVIN

It's no fun.

RORY

It never is. That's no reason to give up.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

Kevin sits at his edit system. He hits the play button and we hear a song about fathers and sons.

EDIT SYSTEM - MONITOR

A montage of clips of Kevin's father over the years. There are photographs of him as a young father, at work as a telephone lineman, as a Dad's Club dad, a little league coach, and playing cards with Kevin and his buddies.

More photographs of him attending a stock car race, dancing and singing with Kevin's mom, barbecuing chicken, doing needlepoint, gardening, playing the saxophone, and feeding his koi fish.

BACK TO OFFICE - PRESENT

Kevin holds a photo of his dad balancing a baby Kevin on his shoulders. He places the photo inside the shadow box. Many more items have been added since we first saw this shadow box. Kevin adds a Marine Corps. insignia brass pin and a toy soldier.

On the left side of the box, there is now a photo of Kevin's mom and dad on their wedding day and a solo image of Kevin's mom, Carol. Clustered around it are a miniature vacuum cleaner, a slot machine, a TV, a pack of cigarettes, a well-worn pocket Bible, a picture of Kevin and his siblings, and a tin angel.

On the right side, there is a formal photograph of Tim Senior and Joan. Arranged around it are miniature Berenstain bears, a gardener's trowel, a tiny cat, a miniature tape measure, a Princess telephone key chain, a parrot, a piano, and a cross-stitched koi.

Kevin slides the glass front into place.

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - ICU - NIGHT

Kevin watches as his father drowns. He looks thin and very tired. Kevin straightens up his father's room. It wakes Tim Senior.

KEVIN

How you doing, Daddy-o?

TIM SENIOR

Not bad.

KEVIN
Joan holding up?

TIM SENIOR
She's a tough old bird.

KEVIN
Like you. I'll check in with her later.

TIM SENIOR
I'd like that. She sort of gets lost in
the shuffle.

KEVIN
We need to watch that.

TIM SENIOR
She's a good person, Kevin. She's been
great for me. I just wish you kids
would acknowledge that once in a while.

KEVIN
We can do that.

Kevin notices some needlepoint on the table beside the bed.

KEVIN
You been working on that?

TIM SENIOR
Not really. Not enough energy.

KEVIN
Who's it for?

TIM SENIOR
A Christmas present.

Tim Senior closes his eyes a moment, gathering his strength.
Kevin picks up the needlepoint and unrolls it.

A photograph has been silk-screened onto the fabric. Pinned
to the corner of the fabric is the original photograph he's
working from. It's an old photo of the Woodworth family.
Everyone is in it, including Kevin's mother and Sally. Kevin
catches his breath.

TIM SENIOR
That was the day after our little trip
to the foothills.

Kevin nods, then glances up at the television. The sound is
off. The video clips and word supers indicate it's an Amber
Alert Update.

NEWS BROADCAST ON HOSPITAL TV

The screen flashes pictures of Melissa and her alleged kidnapper, Steven David Marlow. A clip shows articles of a little girl's clothes. Another sequence shows the abandoned white Honda.

BACK TO HOSPITAL ROOM

Kevin turns back to his father. There is a deeply sad look in his father's eyes. Tim Senior closes his eyes again.

Kevin takes his father's hand. His father opens his tired eyes and fights falling asleep.

KEVIN

Has Grampa Otto been by?

Tim Senior shakes his head.

KEVIN

Does he know?

Tim Senior shakes his head again.

KEVIN

Think it's time I go see him.

A look of mild panic flashes through Tim Senior's eyes. He grabs Kevin's hand.

KEVIN

Dad, there's something else—

Just then, TWO NURSES enter.

HEAD NURSE

We need to run a few tests. Routine.

KEVIN

Was just leaving.

NIGHT NURSE

We won't be long.

Kevin extricates his hand from his father's and pats his arm. Tim Senior's exhausted eyes close.

Kevin leaves his father lying alone, surrounded by equipment and strangers.

KEVIN

(to head nurse)

Could I see you a moment?

Kevin leaves the room. The head nurse follows.

KEVIN
What's going on?

HEAD NURSE
His blood pressure is still a problem.

KEVIN
Looks worse than yesterday.

HEAD NURSE
He's been through a lot.

KEVIN
Do we have a plan?

HEAD NURSE
Wait. And pray.

KEVIN
Pray? How bad is he?

HEAD NURSE
You'll have to ask the doctor.

INT. CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH - DAY

Kevin sits in the back row. He's lost in thought. Pastor Walt stands at the pulpit.

In the balcony above the main floor of the church, Sally sits in the front pew, watching Kevin.

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - ICU - EVENING

Kevin, his brothers and sisters, stand in a half-circle around their father's bed. Kevin looks from face to face. He suddenly realizes they are standing in birth order. Oldest to youngest. Except for Sally, the eldest half-sister.

KEVIN (V.O.)
(thinking to himself)
Funny. We always stand in this order
when we stand together.

INT. SALLY'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Sally sits alone in the dark. Blue shadows flicker across her face.

She watches the closing scene in the movie, "It's a Wonderful Life," where George Bailey is re-united with his family and all his friends gather to express their good wishes.

INT. GRAMPA OTTO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Kevin sits at a small Formica table across from Grampa Otto.

GRAMPA OTTO
I didn't know.

KEVIN
Nobody called?

GRAMPA OTTO
If I'd known, son, I'd have gone to see him.

KEVIN
He's still there.

GRAMPA OTTO
How's he doing?

KEVIN
Not good.

GRAMPA OTTO
I'll see what I can do.

Kevin removes a small photo from his shirt pocket and slides it across the table. His grandfather picks it up.

KEVIN
That's you and Sally, isn't it?

GRAMPA OTTO
Yes. I haven't seen this photo in years.

KEVIN
How old was she then?

GRAMPA OTTO
About twelve.

KEVIN
Was it taken when she was here? After dad kidnapped her?

GRAMPA OTTO
Let's not call it kidnapping. I'm not sure that's what it was.

KEVIN
The judge was.

GRAMPA OTTO
They're not always right.

KEVIN
(points at shadow)
There's something, here in the
background. Can you see it?

GRAMPA OTTO
Yes.

His grandfather says without looking at the picture.

KEVIN
Any idea what it is?

GRAMPA OTTO
Who. It's a "who," Kevin. It's your
Uncle Bill.

Kevin stares at his unblinking grandfather.

KEVIN
Did you know dad and Sally had been in
touch?

GRAMPA OTTO
Your dad and Joan haven't included me
in much these last few years.

KEVIN
Well, they are. He invited her to
Christmas. Before he got sick.

GRAMPA OTTO
She accept?

KEVIN
She's living in Stent. In mom's old
house.

Judging from the old man's reaction, this is a surprise. A
somewhat unpleasant surprise.

KEVIN
Dad asked us kids if it was okay.

GRAMPA OTTO
She is your sister.

KEVIN
Half-sister. I'm the only one who's
agreed. The rest aren't convinced yet.

GRAMPA OTTO

That's too bad. She's a good person.
Good-hearted. A lot like your mother.
Your mom and dad always wanted you kids
to all be together. Someday.

KEVIN

Someday is now.

GRAMPA OTTO

That's a good thing.

KEVIN

Dad needs this to happen. But, there
are some things I have to know. So I
can get him what he wants. Before it's
too late. I think you can help.

GRAMPA OTTO

I'll tell you what I know. What I can
still remember.

KEVIN

Mom told us you helped find Sally a
home when they put her up for adoption.

GRAMPA OTTO

Your folks weren't married yet. Your
dad wanted to get hitched, but he
didn't want to take on a baby.
Especially since it wasn't his. He
always regretted that, I think. That's
probably why he let your mom talk him
into kidnapping . . . I mean, taking
her.

KEVIN

Mom said Sally was taken in by
relatives.

GRAMPA OTTO

Cousins of your dad's. I set it up. It
was easier to do that back in those
days. Sally never knew who her real
parents were. Not till later.

KEVIN

Mom and dad never really talked about
who the father was. I've never seen any
pictures. They just never talked about
it.

Grampa Otto shifts in his chair uncomfortably. Kevin waits,
then continues.

KEVIN

Here's the deal. When I talked with Cheryl, she said she didn't want to do this because of some kind of secret. Something mom had talked about a bunch of times when she was drunk.

GRAMPA OTTO

I never liked that about your mom. She drank too much.

KEVIN

Cheryl said mom told her that if this secret got out, it would kill the only man she ever loved. She said it had something to do with you and Uncle Bill and mom and dad. I figured you might know something about it.

Grampa Otto flicks the edge of the picture with his fingernail.

GRAMPA OTTO

I would never have told you, any of you, this. But your dad's sick and he wants you all to be together. Somehow. If some of you need to know what really happened so he can get what he wants, then I'll tell you what I know.

KEVIN

So, what's the big secret? I mean, how bad can it be?

Grampa Otto lays the picture down and clasps his hands together, gathering his thoughts.

GRAMPA OTTO

Sally accused your dad of molesting her.

The color drains from Kevin's face.

GRAMPA OTTO

Sometime while she was staying with your folks. After your father had taken her. About the time that picture was taken. That's why the judge never gave them custody.

This takes a moment to sink in.

KEVIN

They ever prove anything?

GRAMPA OTTO
No, but the courts weren't about to
take a chance.

KEVIN
Did he?

GRAMPA OTTO
No.

KEVIN
You know that for a fact?

GRAMPA OTTO
I do.

KEVIN
How?

GRAMPA OTTO
Because I know who did.

Kevin can barely choke out the words.

KEVIN
Who?

GRAMPA OTTO
Her father.

KEVIN
You know who that was?

Grampa Otto points at the shadow in the picture of he and Sally.

Kevin is stunned by this revelation. All he can do is look at his grandfather and the photo.

KEVIN
Uncle Bill? I thought he spent his
whole life at the state hospital?

GRAMPA OTTO
Only after the accident.

Kevin is having a hard time processing all this.

KEVIN
An accident. What accident? Never knew
about any accident.

GRAMPA OTTO
Let me show you something.

Grampa Otto gets up, opens a cupboard, and takes out a shoebox. He sits, opens the box, sifts through a stack of photos, and removes one. He passes it over to Kevin.

GRAMPA OTTO

That's your dad and mom and Uncle Bill. They used to hang out a lot together. My boys both liked your mom, you see. I guess you could say they were rivals. They'd all ride horses on the ranch I managed. Go to dances. Ride around in an old jalopy your dad got running. Buy some beer and go swimming down at the river. One afternoon, Bill decides he's going to show off. He dives out of a tree into the river. He hits the water. And doesn't come up. Your dad and mom figure he's really trying to show off now. But, he still doesn't come up. Your dad's about to dive in after him, and Bill surfaces. His head's all bloody and he's out cold. Your dad jumps in and pulls him out.

Grampa Otto abruptly stops a moment. Sucks in his breath. He toys with a ceramic container of toothpicks on the table.

GRAMPA OTTO

Apparently he'd hit a submerged rock. Scrambled his brains. Was never the same. Started having epileptic fits all the time. We couldn't control him so we, your grandmother and me, had to put him in the hospital. Tore your grandmother up something bad. I guess your mom visited a lot. Apparently she felt a little responsible. She was that way.

The old man pauses again.

GRAMPA OTTO

It was during one of those visits, maybe she was feeling guilty. I don't know. Anyway, she gave Bill the only thing she had to give. Her love. And herself. Nine months later, Sally was born.

KEVIN

Unbelievable.

GRAMPA OTTO

I know, it's kind of hard to imagine.
The heart is a funny thing. Always
seems to want what it doesn't have.

Grampa Otto points at the picture of he and Sally.

GRAMPA OTTO

Anyway, when Sally was here with your
mom and dad, your mom took her to see
Bill. He was still at the mental
hospital. Your mom wanted to give them
some alone time, so they could get to
know one another. So, she went out for
a smoke. Left them by themselves for a
minute. Just a second, you know. I
guess Bill got confused. Sally looks a
lot like your mother. I guess Bill
thought she was.

Kevin exhales, slowly.

KEVIN

Dad didn't do anything about it?

GRAMPA OTTO

To who? His wife? His brother? The two
people he loved the most in the world.
Sally? No, he took it like a man and
didn't do anything. Except love your
mother and take care of you kids. And
sacrifice any dreams he may have had to
make your life and your mom's better.

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - ICU - NIGHT

The ICU is quiet. NURSES take care of PATIENTS and
paperwork, sip coffee and gossip. FAMILY MEMBERS of patients
come and go.

In room seven, Tim Senior sleeps. The respirator has been
removed. There's some color in his face. He sleeps
comfortably.

A tentative HAND reaches in and touches Tim Senior's
forehead.

The hand belongs to his brother, Bill. On the other side of
the bed stands his father, Grampa Otto. Father and brother
stare at their son and brother.

They both hear a small COUGH behind them. They turn.

Sally stands in the doorway.

EXT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's Christmas Eve. The halo around the moon has a chunk sliced out of it.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - OFFICE - SAME TIME

Kevin sits at the edit system alone in the dark. The only illumination comes from the lights on the Christmas tree and the glow of the edit system monitors.

Kevin clicks on the "play" button in the "White Christmas" timeline. Nothing happens. He waits, then clicks "play" again. Still nothing. He moves the mouse around, but the cursor is frozen. This isn't good.

He hits "Control-Alt-Delete" to re-boot the system. Not even that works. He reaches for the monitor with both hands like he's going to yank it off its perch and toss it through the window. He slams his fists against the desk, kicks the chair out from under him, and storms away from the system.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kevin enters the house. All the Christmas lights are lit. Christmas music plays. A muted TV runs a twenty-four hour marathon of the movie, "A Christmas Story."

Kevin goes into the kitchen. There are chips and salsa on the counter. Kevin grabs a beer from the refrigerator and opens it. He munches on the chips and salsa and sucks on the beer.

Rory walks up behind him. She nuzzles his neck, then pinches the fat around his middle.

KEVIN

Fuck it. What good does it do?

RORY

I'll have to find me a new boyfriend.

He gives her a look that says, "What the hell are you babbling about?"

RORY

I was talking about these.

She grabs his fat again.

He just glares at her.

KEVIN

I'm tired. Tired of "got to".

She puts her arms around him, lays her head on his back, and rests against him.

KEVIN
Stop leaning on me.

Rory steps away.

RORY
They are who they are. Deal with it.
It's family.

KEVIN
What do you know about family? Your
sons can't stand being around your
family. They hate Christmas.

RORY
You don't know what you're talking
about.

KEVIN
Different when it's your family.

RORY
Back off.

KEVIN
How's it feel?

RORY
Stop drinking. It's making you stupid.

KEVIN
Not done yet.

Rory takes a deep breath.

RORY
When all is said and done, all you've
got is your family.

KEVIN
It's not enough.

RORY
It has to be.

KEVIN
Don't know what they want from me. What
anybody wants.

RORY
Nobody wants anything. They just want
to be happy.

KEVIN

Where are they when I need them?

Rory shakes her head, dismayed and frustrated.

RORY

You don't know all that you've done.

KEVIN

Yeah, if it wasn't for me, everybody'd be a lot better off.

RORY

You spend all this time and energy trying to create a safe, controlled life that works for you. Problem is, nothing goes as expected. Ever.

KEVIN

I'm done. They can do whatever they want.

RORY

It's winter, Kevin. Stop wishing it was summer.

In the background, we hear Joni Mitchell sing: "I wish there was a river I could skate away on."

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Kevin stands by the Christmas tree. He stoops and takes the solar system model out of the box. It's been patched back together with duct tape and wire.

The tape pops loose and the rails sag. The planets start to slide off. Kevin grabs them. He grits his teeth, drops his head, and ...

Throws the model across the room. The planets and sun roll crazily around the floor. Kevin grabs a coat, baseball hat, and scarf from the hall tree and slams out of the house.

Rory rushes into the room at the sound of the slamming door. She sees the pieces of the model. She hurries to the door, opens it, and peers out into the thick valley fog. She closes the door. She goes to the phone, dials, and waits.

RORY

Hello, Joan.

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - ICU - NIGHT

Kevin approaches his father's room. Several NURSES stand outside the door. A look of concern crosses Kevin's face. He quickens his pace. As he gets closer, he hears a guitar, flute, and ANGELIC VOICES.

One of the nurses turns from the doorway and walks toward him. She has tears in her eyes.

NURSE

Beautiful. What a gift.

Kevin steps behind the group of nurses at the door. He peeks inside. Cheryl, Diane, and Gary sing Christmas carols to his sleeping father.

One of the nurses gestures for him to go in. He shakes his head. He listens a moment longer then leaves.

EXT. DOWNTOWN MODESTO - NIGHT

Kevin walks through the foggy streets. Everything is festive and bright. PEOPLE rush about doing last-minute shopping.

Through the windows of houses and restaurants, bars and businesses, Kevin watches others celebrate the season with family and friends.

He walks past the Brenden Theatre Multiplex. The marquee reads: "Benefit Showing for Center for Human Services/Miracle on 34th Street."

Kevin turns down a misty, one-way street, walking the wrong way.

Kevin approaches the 7th Street Bridge. He walks past the two lions that guard the bridge on either side. He stops mid-span and stares down into the Tuolumne River.

The river rushes by. He looks downstream to where it's been, he gazes below at where it is, and sweeps his eyes upstream to where it's going. The past feeds into the present and then flows upstream, into the future and out of sight.

EXT. SCENIC CEMETARY - NIGHT

Kevin crosses the bridge and enters the cemetery. He walks through the graveyard. The gravestones and plots are decorated with miniature Christmas trees, fir garlands, tinsel, poinsettias, and other holiday items.

Kevin stops in front of a gravestone—his mother's gravestone. In the muted moonlight, he sees the wilting poinsettia Sally left. He squats and places a brightly-

colored, hammered tin angel at the base of the stone. He touches the inscription.

Kevin leans back on his heels and begins to sob uncontrollably.

The CEMETERY CARETAKER materializes out of the mist. He's an elderly man, stoop-shouldered. He wears a rain slicker and fisherman's hat.

CARETAKER

You okay, son?

Kevin coughs and wipes his eyes.

KEVIN

Fine.

Kevin pulls his coat and scarf tighter.

CARETAKER

Thought you might be sick or something. Lots of kids come out here and party some.

KEVIN

No, I'm okay. Really.

CARETAKER

Guess if you was fine, you wouldn't be here on Christmas Eve.

Kevin stands.

KEVIN

You're not me. Lucky man.

CARETAKER

(points at gravestone)
Family?

KEVIN

Mother.

CARETAKER

Sorry.

KEVIN

She loved this time of year.

CARETAKER

Me, too. Once.

KEVIN

You have family?

CARETAKER

Kind of lost touch with them.

Kevin waits, figuring the man will tell him the story, or he won't.

CARETAKER

They sort of cut me loose when I was a kid.

KEVIN

Lot of that going around.

CARETAKER

Miss them some. Especially this time of year.

KEVIN

You talk at all?

CARETAKER

Don't want to hear from me.

KEVIN

Not too late.

CARETAKER

For me, it is. I'm an old man.

KEVIN

Shouldn't give up so easily.

CARETAKER

You have.

KEVIN

Excuse me.

CARETAKER

Wouldn't be here right now if you hadn't.

KEVIN

You know nothing about me, or what's going on in my life right now.

CARETAKER

Maybe we're more alike than not. Don't know. Me, I wanted my family to be something they weren't. Was angry with them 'cause I wanted more. Was never happy 'cause I was always wanting something else.

KEVIN

Wanting summer when it's winter.

CARETAKER

Something like that. Look, son, life's short. Expectations ain't what it's all about. Forgiveness is. Especially when it comes to your family, 'cause that's all there is.

KEVIN

What's done is done.

CARETAKER

Not really. Only one thing set in concrete.

The caretaker touches the headstone.

KEVIN

Where were you in the birth order?

CARETAKER

Oldest.

EXT./INT. NICK'S PLACE - NIGHT

Kevin stops in the dark doorway of the downtown bar. On the front door sags a broken wreath.

Kevin enters and stops just inside. He looks around. It's one of those bars where they serve serious drinks to serious drinkers. It's dark and smoky.

At the tables, at the bar, at the pool table, at the jukebox, there are MEN and WOMEN nursing drinks. Every one of them is alone. Alone on Christmas Eve.

Kevin turns on his heel and leaves.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREETS - NIGHT

As Kevin walks, he looks up at the office buildings on either side of the street. Dotting each one are brightly lit windows.

In each one, there's a single MAN or WOMAN still at work, crunching numbers, finishing correspondence, dictating memos.

Kevin gazes up the street. The light turns green and a rusted-out car accelerates through the intersection. The PROFILE OF THE WOMAN driving looks very familiar.

Kevin turns a corner. A HOMELESS FATHER and his FIVE CHILDREN huddle in the doorway of a closed toy store. The lights in the front display window spotlight a collection of this year's got-to-have toys.

The oldest child, a boy, presses his grimy face against the glass. His splayed paw, flattened against the window, tries to reach through the glass to the wonderful, magical things just out of reach.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Kevin walks past the large, plate glass window of an upscale restaurant.

In the window seat, Julie sits at a table for two. Across from her sits a handsome, well-dressed, self-assured MAN. They hold hands and stare into each other's eyes.

Kevin suddenly stops, then backs up, trying not to be seen.

Julie is distracted by the movement. She glances out the window, then back to the man's eyes, then back out the window. She sees and recognizes Kevin. She looks worried a moment.

Kevin smiles a crooked smile, back-pedals, and pushes on down a side street.

Julie leans closer to the window to see where he's gone. Her breath frosts the window. Seeing nothing, she turns her full attention to the man, her husband. She shakes her head and mouths the word, "Nothing," in answer to his question.

EXT. OLDER NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Kevin trudges down the sidewalk in one of the established neighborhoods that border the edge of Modesto's downtown.

A horse-drawn wagon approaches. He hears voices singing Christmas carols. Several FAMILIES and FRIENDS sit on hay bales, sip hot drinks, and sing joyously.

Kevin takes a shortcut down an alley. He trips on something. He bends to take a closer look. It's an abandoned bicycle. Both wheels are bent and broken. He hears something and looks up.

In the shadows, he sees a HOOKER propositioning a JOHN. The man hides his face. The two outcasts move deeper into the darkness.

EXT./INT. SENIOR CENTER - NIGHT

As Kevin passes the center, he hears a rousing, big band version of a traditional Christmas carol.

He enters and peeks through the lobby door. The hall is packed to the rafters with ELDERLY MEN and WOMEN dancing to a big band. They swing like they did back in WWII. Their infectious smiles are bright enough to light the night.

EXT. 10TH STREET PLACE - NIGHT

Kevin walks past the city's Garden Clock in the renovated section of downtown. The clock reads ten o'clock.

Kevin passes an electronics store. The window is filled with television sets. Something catches his eye as he moves by. He stops and walks back. He looks at the screens.

Each TV shows a YOUNG GIRL wrapped in a blanket being carried by a POLICE OFFICE, who places her in the waiting arms of her TEARFUL MOTHER.

A HANDCUFFED MAN, with his head averted from the camera, is led away by OFFICERS.

The report then cuts to various NEWS ANCHORS with a still frame image of the little girl and the supered words: "Melissa Found!"

EXT. DOWNTOWN - CITY/COUNTY CENTER - NIGHT

In the section of downtown populated by government and social service facilities, Kevin wanders across the lawn of a large building.

He enters a long, shadowy corridor lit by mercury vapor lights. ORDERLIES in rumpled, white tunics nod at him as they pass.

COURTYARD

Kevin stops at the entry to a circular courtyard. In the center, a Spanish-style fountain bubbles and splashes.

A MAN sits on the flat benches surrounding the fountain. His legs are tucked up against his chest, his arms are wrapped around his legs. His chin rests on his folded knees. He rocks back and forth to the rhythm of the water. The man looks vaguely familiar.

Kevin moves into the courtyard and stops beneath an orange tree.

The rocking man hears Kevin and looks up, trying to determine the location of the noise.

The lights from the building illuminate his face. We can see the man more clearly. We recognize him from the photo Kevin's grandfather showed him. It is Kevin's Uncle Bill.

EXT. THOUSAND OAKS PARK - NIGHT

Kevin trudges through a small urban park edging town. He stops and stares across Dry Creek at the brightly decorated houses that line the ridge overlooking the creek.

He hears a MUFFLED WHIMPERING. His head swivels around, searching for the source of the sound. He hears a SHARP SOB. It seems to be coming from behind the cinder block restroom building.

Kevin moves off in that direction. As he gets closer to the restroom, he hears . . .

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

No, please, don't.

Then a SHARP SLAP.

Kevin quickens his pace. He creeps up to the edge of the building, stops, and peeks around the corner.

A DARK, HULKING SHAPE straddles a PRONE BODY. The moonlight glints off the blade of the small knife the man holds in his right hand, pointing at the woman he has pinned to the ground. He slugs her with his left hand. The CRUNCH is sickening.

Kevin ducks back around the corner, flattening himself against the wall of the building and wrestling with what to do. He makes a decision and starts scanning the surrounding area.

In the sand pit of the playground straight ahead, he sees a broken limb shaped like a walking staff. He tiptoes over to the stick, grabs it, and hustles back to the restroom. He peeks around the corner.

The man lays the point of the knife against the woman's neck, then begins to unbuckle his belt.

Kevin slips around the corner and dashes toward the man.

The man unzips his pants and reaches for the woman's skirt.

Kevin whacks him across the back of the head.

The man barrel-rolls off the woman.

The woman scrambles to her feet.

Kevin motions for her to take off.

She nods and starts running for the street.

The man struggles to his knees.

Kevin leaps at the man and whacks the knife out of his hand with the staff, driving it into the bottomless ravine.

The man YELPS, then staggers to his feet, shaking his hand. He slowly pulls up his pants and zips them.

The man leers at Kevin, flashing stiletto-sharp teeth. The man circles in a slow arc, forcing Kevin to move backward toward the edge of the ravine.

Kevin glances around him, looking for an escape route. With the ravine in back and the man in front, he can run to his right to the street, or to his left and go deeper into the park. He begins to inch to his right.

RAPIST

Meat.

The man pulls a .22 caliber pistol out of his jacket.

Kevin stumbles back, closer to the lip of the ravine. He drops the tree limb and holds his hands up.

The man levels the gun and fires.

In that split second, it all flashes before Kevin's eyes.

Kevin hurtles backward and disappears over the edge of the ravine.

NIGHT SKY

The halo around the moon is now complete, unbroken.

Far off in the silent night, a SIREN moans.

EXT. CITY HOSPITAL - NIGHT

An ambulance pulls up to the emergency room entrance. PARAMEDICS hustle to the rear, yank a gurney out of the back, and wheel it into the emergency room.

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - ICU - NIGHT

Gary chats with one of the NURSES, flute in hand.

Just then, a GRIMY HAND reaches in and grabs him by the shoulder.

Gary turns and frowns.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Don't you have some place to go?

GARY

What happened to you?

Kevin, covered head-to-toe in muck, his face bruised and scratched, looks like death warmed over.

Kevin holds open his jacket and sticks his index finger through the bullet hole.

KEVIN

Reality check.

Gary squints at his friend, stunned.

KEVIN

It's okay. It's all okay.

Gary smiles. The two friends hug. The nurse leaves.

GARY

You just scared off my date for New Year's Eve.

Kevin smiles in spite of himself and shakes his head in disbelief.

KEVIN

Where are the girls?

GARY

You just missed them.

KEVIN

Got something for you.

Kevin rummages around in his inside coat pocket. He pulls out a small, wrapped package. It's a little smashed.

Gary opens the package. He pulls out a Rudolph-shaped Pez dispenser.

KEVIN

Thanks. For being crazy enough to be my friend for all these years.

GARY

Had to. Nobody else would take on your pathetic ass.

KEVIN

Hope the rest of them will be as easy.

GARY

Just give them a chance. It's not that hard.

KEVIN

Really think I blew it this time.

GARY

Look, Kevin, they're your family. They'll always be your family. Let them be who they are and let it be what it is. That's all you can do.

Kevin playfully punches his friend's shoulder. Just then, Joan emerges from Tim Senior's room. She gestures for Kevin.

KEVIN

Damn.

GARY

Catch you later.

The two friends hug and Gary heads after the nurse that just left.

Kevin slowly walks over to Joan. She looks tired and sad. He stops in front of her. She holds Tim Senior's unfinished needlepoint in her hands. Her eyes are red. She looks up at Kevin from the needlepoint.

JOAN

I just spoke with the Doctor.

Kevin swallows.

Joan sobs.

JOAN

He said.

(she breathes deeply)

He said it's going to be okay. He can go home tomorrow.

It takes a minute for what she just said to register because it was not at all what Kevin expected to hear.

Joan starts crying.

Kevin puts his arm around her shoulder. He walks her back to his father's room.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's midnight, Christmas Eve.

Kevin enters the front door of his house. A clock chimes twelve times and plays a reprise of "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear."

Kevin takes off his coat, hat, and scarf, drops them on the entryway tile, and enters the living room.

The tree is still lit and a low fire is burning. As his eyes adjust to the light, the first person he sees is Rory. Then he sees his brothers, Timmy and Willy. Then his sisters, Diane and Cheryl.

Rory goes to Kevin. She notices his scratches, then crinkles her nose at the smell. He shrugs. They kiss

Kevin looks at her, his eyes asking who's responsible for this gathering. Rory turns. Cheryl steps out of the shadows.

Kevin walks up to Cheryl. She grabs him in a headlock and rubs his head with her knuckles.

Rory hands her a glass of cider. Cheryl holds it up in toast.

CHERYL

To the best big brother a family could ever have.

Diane gives Kevin a cookie and glass of milk, then hugs him, almost spilling it all.

DIANE

Thanks for always being there.

Willy hands his brother a CD in a jewel case.

WILLY

Finished ahead of schedule, bro. Didn't want you sweating it.

Kevin claps his brother on the shoulder.

Timmy hands Kevin a piece of paper.

TIMMY

Travis's soccer schedule. It's good having you on the sidelines. Even if you are more obnoxious than me.

Willy grabs his guitar from its case behind the couch and begins strumming. Willy sings the song he and Polly wrote for this year's Christmas; the song about family. Everyone sings along.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - OFFICE - NIGHT

It's just before daybreak, Christmas Day.

Kevin sits alone in the dark. Again, the only light comes from the tree and the edit system monitors. He crosses his fingers and hits "play."

The "White Christmas" sequence plays without a hitch.

EXT. MODESTO - SUNRISE

Christmas day dawns bright and clear.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - OFFICE - MORNING

Kevin attaches a label to a DVD and puts it in a white, gift box with a red bow. It's one of several gift boxes stacked on the built-in work table.

INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - MORNING

On the dining room table, Kevin wraps the last of the shadow boxes in brightly colored Christmas wrapping paper. He sets the gift next to the other, similar-shaped packages.

INT. TIM SENIOR'S HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - MORNING

The entire Woodworth clan has gathered. Tim Senior sits in his easy chair, umbilicaled to an oxygen tank. He looks tired, but happy. Joan sits next to him.

The grandkids open their presents. In birth order, youngest to oldest.

Kevin leans in close to Rory.

KEVIN

(whispers)

Wish everyday could be like Christmas.

Rory gives him that look, then kisses him.

FAMILY ROOM - LATER

The family room is a shambles. Wrapping paper is strewn everywhere, along with bows and ribbon, empty food plates and drinking glasses. Gifts are stacked neatly, or gathered loosely in little piles.

The shadow box Kevin created for his father sits in the center of the fireplace mantle. The needlepoint of the family portrait Tim Senior was working on perches on a work-stand near the fireplace.

Everyone sits in rapt attention, watching the TV screen. Kevin stands nearby, watching the reaction as everyone gazes at his other gift to the family.

DVD ON THE TV

It is a montage of Christmases past, present, and yet to come. It is a tribute to family, in all its hope and pain, comfort and messiness, warts and glories.

As the music reaches its final climax, the image changes to an old photograph of the family. The kids are all young and their mother, Carol, is still alive.

That photograph transitions to a more recent photograph of the family that includes Joan.

Kevin's father catches Kevin's eye and winks at his son.

As the last image fades to black, we hear the DOORBELL CHIME.

BACK TO FAMILY ROOM

JOAN

Now, who could that be?

TIM JUNIOR

Don't they know it's Christmas.

CHERYL

We're all here.

KEVIN

I'll get it.

Kevin gets up and leaves the room.

Joan, Diane, Cheryl, Rory, Linda, and Polly begin cleaning up the mess.

Kevin re-appears at the doorway to the family room. He hesitates at the threshold a moment. Everyone looks up. He gestures for someone behind him to come in. He steps back.

Sally appears in the doorway. She holds a wrapped package in her arms.

Behind Sally, Gary appears next to Kevin. They put their arms around each other's shoulders like old times.

Hesitant, Sally enters the room. She looks around.

Joan stands and opens her arms.

JOAN

Come in, Sally. We've been waiting for you.

Sally walks to Joan.

SALLY

I brought this for you ... and dad.

Sally hands Joan the wrapped present.

Joan opens it. It's a painting of Joan and Tim Senior's home.

SALLY

I painted it from one of the photos you sent me.

Joan embraces Sally.

Tim Senior struggles to his feet.

TIM SENIOR

I'm glad you're here.

Sally sobs, rushes over, and hugs him.

FAMILY ROOM - LATER

Sally sits facing the half-circle of her newly recovered family.

She stares at the shadow box she cradles in her hands. It includes a photograph of her with the family at the time of the kidnap, a Marine Corps. insignia brass pin, a poinsettia, a paintbrush, the photograph of her and Grampa Otto, and a postcard from Scottsdale.

Kevin hands her a photograph.

KEVIN

Something I was playing around with on the computer.

It's a photograph of the Woodworth kids posing in birth order. Sally stands at the head of the line.

Sally slides open the glass cover of the shadow box and adds the photograph.

SALLY

It will remind me of all of you each time I look at it.

CHERYL

We're not going anywhere.

SALLY

But, I am. I'm going back to Scottsdale tomorrow.

JOAN

So soon?

SALLY

The doctors still want to run some tests.

KEVIN

What about Stent?

SALLY

It wasn't what I thought it would be.

TIM SENIOR

We're happy you did this.

SALLY

Me, too.

DIANE

I hope you can forgive us for what happened.

SALLY

Things happen when they're supposed to happen.

TIM JUNIOR

You're welcome any time.

SALLY

It's nice knowing that.

WILLY

You'll stay in touch, right?

SALLY

You'll always be my family.

Sally looks at Tim Senior and Joan.

KEVIN

How about next Christmas? If you can stand all this craziness.

SALLY

We'll see. That's a long way away.

KEVIN

It'll be here before you know it.

Rory shoots him that look again.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Kevin's nephew, James, plays with a brand new solar system model.

The entire family, including Sally, sits in a circle surrounding the young boy and his toy. The siblings again sit in birth order. This time, Sally is the oldest.

Gary sits with them. He leads them all in the singing of a Christmas carol.

James turns the crank and the moon effortlessly circles the earth.

KEVIN (V.O.)

The family is the one thing you take for granted when it's the one thing you should treasure the most.

And then it's over. And he can't wait until next Christmas.

Through a frosted window, we see a full Winter's moon high in the night sky.

A ring circles the bright moon. It begins to rain.

FADE OUT.

THE END