

TINY HOUSE, BIG CHRISTMAS

Written by

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FADE IN:

We see NEWS FOOTAGE of a large house burning down, and hear a POLICEWOMAN'S (30s) voice on a police radio.

POLICEWOMAN (V.O.)

Another house up in flames! We suspect it's the work of the serial arsonist we call the Flame, who has ravaged our county sporadically over the past three Christmases! Report any suspicious activity immediately...

INT. SHERIFF'S JEEP - DAY

On a steep, winding, bumpy muddy road, SHERIFF LUCY (50), a strict African-American professional in full uniform, turns off the police radio. She's witty and snarky.

The Sheriff escorts a fiercely unhappy couple, TRICIA (30s) and BEN RAWLINGS (30s) being tossed from side to side in the backseat. Tricia is beautiful when she's not angry or sarcastic; and Ben, a big man, would be handsome if he wasn't so lazy and unshaved.

BEN

Judge Thomas's cabin in the middle of nowhere?

TRICIA

(snickers)

Middle of nowhere was too close to town. Judge built it on the far edge of nowhere.

The Sheriff laughs at the joke.

SHERIFF LUCY

Least no one's gonna hear you disturbing the peace way out here!

Tricia sends an elbow into Ben's ribs.

TRICIA

Benjamin Rawlings! You're lucky the judge booked you for disturbing the peace, and not domestic violence.

BEN

(smiling)

You're the least domestic person I know, Tricia, and he sentenced you, too. Over Christmas Break, no less!

The Sheriff slams on the brakes, turns, and yells.

SHERIFF LUCY

I've had it with you two! Bickering for an hour. You're both lucky the jail is full, and the judge is letting you stay in his cabin in woods to sort things out.

BEN

Three-week sentence! No car. Can't leave. I'll kill her!

Tricia snickers.

TRICIA

I'd feed him to the wolves, but they protect their own.

SHERIFF LUCY

(smiles)

Hope you can have a sense of humor about this. You'll need it. I'll bring your mail every third day. Okay?

TRICIA

(pleading)

We need the mail. Still have to pay the bills.

(points at Ben)

Thanks to my lazy husband!

Ben looks out the window and mutters.

BEN

Poor real estate sales. Down market! Not all my fault!

The Sheriff shakes her head in disgust and drives on.

SHERIFF LUCY

Don't get blood on the carpet!

(beat)

And remember, if you leave before the three weeks are up, Judge is sending you to a real jail for three months! To a real jail!

(MORE)

SHERIFF LUCY (CONT'D)
Imagine not seeing your kids for
Christmas!

Ben shrugs like it wouldn't bother him, so Tricia elbows him
in the ribs again, while looking sadly out the window.

TRICIA
Aunt Martha will drive them to
visit. They'll want to be with us
for Christmas!

BEN
Maybe not. Short on gifts.

SHERIFF LUCY
They can visit any time. Surprised
they picked your Aunt Martha's!

Ben, angry, looks out the other window.

BEN
Probably destroying her mansion
now. Polluting the heated swimming
pool and hot tub. Snowballing the
tennis court. Why couldn't we be
sentenced there?

The Sheriff sounds sinister, while she laughs.

SHERIFF LUCY
Judge gave you one last chance to
turn your lives around for the sake
of your marriage and your kids!
You're lucky he puts as much faith
in humanity as he does the
Almighty.
(beat)
You can't go on fighting and
tearing up your house!

TRICIA
I suppose.

BEN
She started it!

Tricia elbows Ben.

BEN (CONT'D)
Ow! That's gonna leave a mark!

SHERIFF LUCY

If it wasn't for the kids, Judge would have given y'all three months. But three weeks of solitary confinement might do it!

The Sheriff skids to a stop in front of a Tiny House (200 square feet of sheer living hell) surrounded by trees.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

Tricia and Ben look stunned as they exit the jeep. The Sheriff opens the back and takes out two large suitcases.

TRICIA

Solitary confinement! Can't be serious. A jail cell is bigger than this.

SHERIFF LUCY

Jail is full. Judge says you'll have time to reflect, rediscover what's important. Values.

BEN

The Judge bought this tiny dump?

TRICIA

Way out here? What do you get for murder, four weeks here?

BEN

It's not a house, it's not even a cabin, it's an outhouse.

SHERIFF LUCY

They don't get further out. Never make it back to town. This is home for three weeks. Try to leave, and Judge sends y'all away for the three months to a real jail!

Tricia circles the tiny house.

TRICIA

Where's the rest of it?

SHERIFF LUCY

Alternative is sharing a jail cell with a bruiser named Bertha, and your husband would get a bully named Bubba!

Tricia smirks sarcastically.

TRICIA
Love to see the inside.

The Sheriff opens the unlocked door.

BEN
No lock?
(sarcastic)
That's comforting.

TRICIA
What would they rob? The toilet
paper?

SHERIFF LUCY
The great outdoors. Under the
stars. The trees, the wildlife...

TRICIA
Wildlife?

SHERIFF LUCY
Forest birds, chipmunks, maybe a
raccoon or two.

BEN
Running wild?

SHERIFF LUCY
Like those kids of yours, as I hear
tell.

TRICIA
They're sitting in a hot tub,
probably being waited on hand and
foot by the maid.

BEN
Ha! Just like at home!

Ben and Tricia laugh, but avoid eye contact.

TRICIA
They're lucky to miss this little
experience. Emphasis on little.

SHERIFF LUCY
They'll be okay for three weeks
without you?

BEN
At crazy Aunt Martha's? Yeah.

TRICIA
 (mumbles)
 If they don't kill each other.

BEN
 They'll call us every few hours, I
 bet.

The Sheriff snickers, unconvinced.

SHERIFF LUCY
 Uh huh. Let's check out your deluxe
 accommodations.

The Sheriff leads them into the tiny house. The suitcases
 barely fit in the door, much less the house.

INT. TINY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

There is barely room for the three adults to stand up.

SHERIFF LUCY
 Kitchen's to the left. Dining table
 folds out to the right. Loft on
 either side is where you sleep.

Ben hits a knee on a cabinet, and grunts.

Tricia stares unconvinced at the tiny sink and appliances in
 the kitchen.

TRICIA
 Lofts?

SHERIFF LUCY
 Honeymoon suite. Stayed her with my
 hubby, the bailiff. Six-four, two-
 sixty. Hit his head a lot on the
 roof during...

BEN
 I've heard enough. Running water?
 Electricity? Stove?

Ben hits his head on the loft, and grunts.

SHERIFF LUCY
 Both. 'Cept it's more like
 dribbling water. Lights are dim,
 but the stars are bright. Range is
 propane.

Tricia opens the tiny refrigerator. It holds one bottled water and an apple.

TRICIA

Saw the propane tank out back. How do we get food?

Everyone stares at an ancient rotary phone.

SHERIFF LUCY

Easy. Landline phone takes any calls coming in, but outgoing calls are restricted to the grocery store in town and 9-1-1.

TRICIA

That one little store we saw an hour ago?

SHERIFF LUCY

Delivers pizza too. Best pizza in town!

BEN

What about that serial arsonist on the loose?

SHERIFF LUCY

The Flame? Hasn't struck in this neck of county yet! Probably long gone by now. I'm worried more 'bout you two killing each other!

Ben hits his other knee and grunts. Tricia glares at Ben.

TRICIA

Don't feel safe way out here, but at least the kids are safe at Aunt Martha's.

SHERIFF LUCY

Try to escape, and I'll let Bertha and Bubba know you're on the way for three months of fun!

Tricia gets in the Sheriff's face.

TRICIA

We're sorry for all the trouble we caused. Can we go home?

Ben gets angry.

BEN

We won't fight again! Honest!

SHERIFF LUCY

Y'all better learn to get along or this is going to be the hardest...

TRICIA

Wait? How do we call the kids?

SHERIFF LUCY

Should have thought about that before you got arrested. You two gotta be the worst examples of parenting in the world.

(beat)

Judge says children are mirrors to your souls! If you got 'em! Judge didn't do this to you!

Ben has a moment of reflection.

BEN

We did it to ourselves.

SHERIFF LUCY

You did it to your kids! And the Judge was protecting them from you! Get it? Mirrors to the soul. Didn't want them to turn out like you!

Silence.

TRICIA

I'm worried about 'em now.

The Sheriff squirms her way to the door.

SHERIFF LUCY

Little late, but I'll give 'em the number, so they can call you -- if they want to! Remember, you can get incoming calls.

Ben and Tricia are worried, as they check their smartphones.

BEN

They'll call.

TRICIA

Of course, they'll call.

SHERIFF LUCY

I'd call the store for food before
they close. I'd get a pizza, too.
They take credit cards.

Tricia begins yelling and pacing. Then, Ben does. They both
bump furniture, appliances, and each other as they pace.

TRICIA

No cell service here! May as well
bait in the arsonist in a wooden
house surrounded by trees!

SHERIFF LUCY

Told ya. Y'all can always dial 9-1-
1 from the landline.

BEN

Lot a good that'll do, arsonist in
the county, and the sheriff's an
hour away!

Tricia and Ben follow the Sheriff out.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

The Sheriff turns to them before getting in her jeep.

SHERIFF LUCY

Try to leave. I dare y'all! I'll
let Bertha and Bubba know. I'll see
y'all in three days with the mail.

Tricia turns on Ben and they fight.

TRICIA

All your fault!

BEN

You yelled first!

TRICIA

Rather take my chances with Bertha!

The Sheriff shakes her head in disgust, as she drives away.

The fight rages on, as they squeeze into the house screaming
and carrying on.

INT. TINY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

They toss the contents of their suitcases around.

BEN
No closets!

She pushes him.

TRICIA
Or we're in the closet. There is no
house!

They push each other. Ben hits his head again.

BEN
Ow.

TRICIA
I'll put my stuff up in the loft.
You're sleeping down here!

Ben looks around in disbelief. He takes a step and hits his
knee again.

BEN
Ow! Down here? Where? On the floor?

TRICIA
Head in the toilet, feet in the
oven for all I care.
(beat)
Is the easy-bake oven gas or light
bulb?

Tricia tries to lift her suitcase to the loft, but can't.

She climbs up the ladder, as Ben eyes her butt.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
Hand it up to me, will ya?

Ben stares.

BEN
Don't think so.

TRICIA
Darn it, Ben! Hand it up!

Ben reluctantly hands her suitcase up.

Tricia sits up on the bed, opens her suitcase, and hits her
head on the roof.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
Ow!
(beat)
(MORE)

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Like camping in a tent, except
tents have taller and softer roofs.

Ben sounds worried as he looks out the window.

BEN

No car. No way out!

TRICIA

Your Swiss Army knife has a can
opener on it. Cut your way out.

Tricia motions like a can opener with her fingers. Ben turns
to her angrily.

BEN

Three weeks?! Better call down for
pizza and beer!

Tricia is angry. She climbs down the ladder in a foul mood!

TRICIA

Groceries, you idiot. We'll need
eggs, bread, salad goods, and
fruit! Can't eat pizza and drink
beer for three weeks!

BEN

Watch me.

TRICIA

I'll call in the order.

Tricia stares at the dial phone. A sticky note reads, "Store
is 1-2-3. Sheriff is 9-1-1."

Tricia dials 1-2-3.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Hi, we're Tricia and Ben Rawlings
up in Judge Thomas's tiny house...

We hear LAUGHTER from the GROCER (60s).

TRICIA (CONT'D)

We were told you deliver?

More laughter, then mumbling.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Great. Dozen eggs...

(beat)

Yes, I know it's a bumpy road.

Ben smirks.

BEN
Order them scrambled.

Tricia glares at Ben.

TRICIA
Salad goods, fruit, nine-grain
bread...

She and Ben hear laughter from the Grocer.

Ben turns angry.

BEN
Don't forget the beer!

TRICIA
My lush of a husband would like a
six-pack of any micro-brew, IPA if
you have it.

More laughter from the Grocer. Ben yells back.

BEN
Better make it a twelve-pack. Geez!

TRICIA
A bottle of Chardonnay. Something
in the fifteen to twenty dollars a
bottle range.

Again, Tricia hears laughter from the Grocer.

BEN
Be happy with whatever they have.

Tricia glares at Ben.

TRICIA
Make it two bottles of wine.

BEN
Don't forget the pizza!

Tricia covers the phone with her hand, but yells at Ben loud enough to be heard in the next county.

TRICIA
That's it! I've had it with you!

Tricia removes her hand from the receiver, but the phone is dead.

BEN

What?

TRICIA

Idiot! See what you've done.

BEN

When that delivery guy gets here,
I'm going to hijack his truck and
get the heck out of here.

Tricia looks around, disgusted.

TRICIA

Not if I hijack it first!

They sulk. The clock reads 2 PM.

LATER

The clock reads 5:45 PM. They hear the putt-putt of a motor scooter.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Ben and Tricia race out of the tiny house, furious and hungry, to see PAULY (16) "the pizza guy," ride in on antique motor scooter, struggling to make it up to the tiny house. A box for groceries is strapped on the back. Pauly wears raggedy clothes, and has long hair hanging from the back of a tiny helmet.

Pauly shuts off the motor, and removes his helmet.

PAULY

You must be the new prisoners!

BEN

You delivering our food on that thing?

PAULY

Name's Pauly. They call me Pauly the Pizza Guy, but I got all your food.

Tricia inspects the box.

TRICIA

Several eggs are cracked, and I don't see the wine and beer.

PAULY
I'm sixteen, lady. I can't deliver
liquor!

Ben is furious.

BEN
I'm calling the store.

TRICIA
No wine? I'm calling 9-1-1.

PAULY
Good luck with that. Sheriff Lucy
acts nice, but she don't warm up to
prisoners.

TRICIA
Quit calling us prisoners! I'm
Tricia, this is Ben. We have to
settle things, that's all.

BEN
Only for three weeks.
(beat)
Salad goods don't look very fresh.

PAULY
My boss gets as close as he can to
the stuff ordered, but it's a small
store, lady! Gotta make do!

TRICIA
Bet they eat better at the jail.

Tricia elbows Ben in the gut, while smiling at Pauly.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
Isn't there some way to sneak me
that wine?

BEN
And beer?

PAULY
I could get in big trouble.

Ben punches Pauly lightly on the arm.

BEN
Take one for the team, huh, pal?
Little extra cash?

Pauly glares at Ben.

PAULY
Don't think you could afford me,
pal!

Pauly pulls out a phone with a credit card reader attached.
He hands Tricia the paper receipt.

PAULY (CONT'D)
Credit card?

Tricia hands him a credit card.

BEN
You get service here?

PAULY
What, are you nuts, Mister? But the
payment app saves it in memory 'til
I get back to the store.

Tricia examines the receipt.

TRICIA
Charged us for the beer and wine.
Boxed wine? Cheap lite beer?

PAULY
Yep. All we carry. Pick it up
anytime you're in town. They tossed
on a couple of pizzas. Course, they
charged you for 'em. Best pizza in
town!

Tricia holds up two pathetic looking frozen pizzas.

PAULY (CONT'D)
One's our Meat Lover's Surprise.
The surprise is in the unknown
meats. And the other is the Gourmet
Vegetarian Surprise.

TRICIA
Surprise is naming the vegetables
used?

PAULY
Surprise is finding the vegetables
at all. Really just cheese.

BEN
Best pizza in town?

PAULY
(laughs)
Only pizza in town.

Ben stares at his phone.

PAULY (CONT'D)
You get to add as much of a tip as
you'd like.

TRICIA
We didn't rob a bank!

Ben stares at the receipt.

BEN
Twenty-dollar delivery charge?

Pauly shakes his head in disgust.

PAULY
Last time I ride this far for you
two losers!

Tricia has an immediate change of heart.

She races to hug Pauly, who smiles devilishly.

PAULY (CONT'D)
Oh baby, Oh baby, Oh baby!

Tricia struggles to pull away.

Ben forms a fist.

TRICIA
You pervert. Had you delivered the
wine, it be a different story. I'll
throw on another twenty bucks if
you get us the booze tomorrow!

PAULY
Can't tell the Sheriff. She'll lock
me up...again!

BEN
Deal! Now get outta here, you
little perv!

Pauly rides away on the bumpy road.

Tricia glares at Ben in an angry tone.

TRICIA
He's just like you, only younger!

They carry the groceries into the house.

INT. TINY HOUSE - NIGHT

Ben sleeps on the floor, freezing, and covered by one blanket. There are empty beer cans and frozen pizza boxes scattered around. Clothes and underwear hang everywhere.

SUPER: "One Week Later."

We hear the rumbling of a car approaching.

Tricia, in the loft, sits up and bumps her head.

TRICIA
Ow! Darn it. All your fault!

She pushes a "box of Chardonnay" aside, and climbs down the ladder in ugly sweat clothes.

She kicks Ben.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
Wake-up, idiot. I think we're being
set free early for bad behavior!

Ben struggles to wake, as Tricia struggles to step over him to get out the door. Ben follows, half-asleep.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A fancy SUV pulls up to the tiny house and slams on the brakes. Out steps AUNT MARTHA (35), an unattractive, rich, spoiled, she-devil in fancy clothes and who is fuming mad. A cigarette bobs in her mouth.

AUNT MARTHA
I've had it! Worst week ever! Never
again. Worst kids in Hell are no
match for them!

TRICIA
Martha, you promised to keep them
the full three-week sentence! What
did they do?

AUNT MARTHA

Last time I ever take 'em. That's for sure! I know why all your other relatives moved away!

BEN

That's unfair. They're great kids!

Aunt Martha opens the back door and yanks out SARAH (13), a blonde tomboy with a dirty face and perennial frown.

AUNT MARTHA

Old one, Sarah, who you call Sassy, is just that! I went for my facial and spa day yesterday...

TRICIA

(mumbles)

Doesn't show.

Ben snickers.

AUNT MARTHA

And she put an add out on social media for an estate sale. At my house. Told everyone I died. I about died when I came home, and saw my house filled with strangers.

Sarah looks away.

SARAH

I was making good money on the silver. Not so much on the boring paintings.

TRICIA

Sassy!

AUNT MARTHA

I would have choked her, if the Sheriff didn't stop me.

SARAH

Was gonna give the money to you and Daddy!

AUNT MARTHA

Common, ordinary thief -- and a sloppy dresser!

TRICIA

Sassy!

Aunt Martha yanks out MIKEY (9), a shorter version of Sarah with a devilish grin. Sarah and Mikey hit each other.

AUNT MARTHA

And Mikey, who you call Vegas, was running dog races with pets from miles around. He made a killing until they found out he was fixing the races.

TRICIA

How could Vegas fix the races?

AUNT MARTHA

He found the one Great Pyrenees that wouldn't eat liver-flavored dog biscuits, bet on that dog, and then put the biscuits all around the neighborhood.

BEN

Smart boy.

AUNT MARTHA

Dogs went everywhere. Still looking for a Schnauzer and a Labradoodle. Owners are furious.

BEN

Maybe not that smart.

AUNT MARTHA

They're your kids!

TRICIA

Can't you keep 'em two more weeks?

Mikey and Sarah are slapping each other and grinning.

Ben grabs the kids by their ears, just as Sheriff Lucy drives up behind Aunt Martha's car, and sees the assaults, while Aunt Martha tosses her lit cigarette on the ground.

SHERIFF LUCY

Everybody, freeze!

Ben takes his hands away from the kids' ears.

Immediately, Aunt Martha starts tossing out the kids' suitcases and backpacks.

The Sheriff gets in Aunt Martha's face and points to the burning cigarette.

SHERIFF LUCY (CONT'D)
You, put out that cigarette! That's
a five-hundred-dollar fine next
time!

Aunt Martha grumbles as she crushes the cigarette out.

AUNT MARTHA
Happy now?

SHERIFF LUCY
(points to Tricia and Ben)
I don't like them, but they just
hurt themselves.
(points to Aunt Martha)
But, you I don't like even more!

Aunt Martha grunts and gets in the driver's seat.

TRICIA
Stop her, Sheriff! The kids can't
stay here!

BEN
Not enough room for us!

TRICIA
Let alone, all of us!

Aunt Martha lights another cigarette.

AUNT MARTHA
Your kids. Your problem! Horrible.
They're just horrible...

The Sheriff sighs at Aunt Martha.

SHERIFF LUCY
Guess I can't force her. Y'all only
have two weeks to go!

TRICIA
We haven't got food! No TV. No DVD
player! No radio.
(mumbles)
No cell service or Wi-Fi!

Sarah and Mikey go ballistic. They yell.

MIKEY
No cell service!

SARAH

No Wi-Fi! That's why you didn't get our phone calls, email, and texts, asking for money!

Mikey stares at the tiny house.

MIKEY

Where's the rest of it?

SHERIFF LUCY

You'll survive. Came by to say I gave Pauly the Pizza Guy a warning. Absolutely no... adult beverages, or I'm telling Judge Thomas! Got it?

Ben and Tricia straighten up. The kids see this.

TRICIA & BEN

Yes, Ma'am.

SHERIFF LUCY

Next time, Pauly the Pizza Guy loses his license and his job! Corrupting a teenager! I don't know what your kids did to deserve you two!

TRICIA & BEN

Yes, Ma'am.

SHERIFF LUCY

Oh, here's your mail!

Tricia grabs the letters (bills overdue) from the Sheriff.

TRICIA

Thanks.

(mumbles at the bills)

I guess.

SARAH

It's Hell. We're dead, and this is where they sent us!

Tricia and Ben guide the kids to the door.

BEN

Watch your language, Sassy. And, you ain't seen nothin' yet!

TRICIA
Hope you like what we've done to
the place.

Tricia leads them into the house.

INT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

Sarah and Mikey stand completely still as they look around in disgust. Beer cans, wine boxes, and laundry are everywhere.

Ben begins bagging up the garbage, while Tricia grabs the laundry off every appliance, chair, and from the loft.

The kids still don't budge.

SARAH
We can't stay here. There's not
enough air. I can't spend my
Christmas Break way out here!

BEN
We made one week without killing
each other. We can all make it two
more weeks.

MIKEY
Two more weeks! That's all I got
left of Christmas Break too! I saw
prisons like this on TV. The
slammer. The pen! I'm busting out
of here, you dirty screws!
(looks around)
And, I'm closet-phobic.

TRICIA
Fear of closets? Not a problem. We
don't have one.

SARAH
The whole thing is one walk-in
closet, except it stinks. Smells
like a fart in a spacesuit, or
(looks into the kitchen)
really bad pizza.

Mikey pouts.

MIKEY
Worse than prison. Solitary
confinement! The hole! Guards, get
me out of here!

Tricia and Ben freeze, and address Mikey.

BEN

You watch way too much TV, Vegas!
I'm afraid Judge Thomas said your
parents lost their privilege to
stay in our house for three weeks,
because we were arguing.

TRICIA

Very loudly. So loudly, the
neighbors called the sheriff.

Ben glares at Tricia.

SARAH

Disturbing the peace. We know!

BEN

The Sheriff saw the broken dishes.

Tricia glares at Ben.

TRICIA

Empty beer bottles.

SARAH

Regular night at the Rawlings'!

Tricia and Ben glare at Sarah.

BEN

Point is, Judge Thomas gave us a
time out instead of sending us to
jail. He's got faith in us!

TRICIA

Lucky, the jail was full.

MIKEY

Couldn't be fuller than this place.

TRICIA

Point taken.

Anger rises all around.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

And you two had an opportunity to
stay at your Aunt Martha's mansion
for three weeks, and you blew it!

MIKEY

She hates kids. The whole place
smelled like cigarette smoke.

SARAH

We had to eat meals at the table.

MIKEY

Without our phones. Even jail
inmates get one phone call. Aunt
Martha's a worse warden than you
two.

TRICIA

Nothing wrong with...

SARAH

Made us make our beds every
morning!

BEN

I had to make...

MIKEY

She has a maid!

SARAH

But the maid hates her.

Tricia throws her hands up, and yells at Mikey.

TRICIA

You were fixing dog races?

Ben points at Sarah menacingly.

BEN

Some example you were setting for
your younger brother! An estate
sale! She's not even dead yet!

TRICIA

That was wishful thinking!

Silence. They all hang their heads.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Now look where we are!

SARAH

Judge sent you here. Not us. I'm
going home!

MIKEY

Me too. I'm leaving!

TRICIA

You gonna walk? We don't have a car!

BEN

Can't be there alone at thirteen years old and nine years old. Child Services would take you and put you in a foster home 'til the Judge lets us out of here.

TRICIA

Hate to say it, but your father's right -- for once.

SARAH

Can't stay here! It's too small! I had a doll house bigger than this!

Mikey looks around in disgust.

MIKEY

Where we gonna sleep?

(beat)

And, I'm hungry!

BEN

Chill, Vegas. We'll call down to the general store for food and supplies, and tidy up the place, while we wait for the delivery.

SARAH

Wait for the delivery?

TRICIA

Takes an hour, or four, depending on Pauly the Pizza Guy's other deliveries.

MIKEY

But I'm hungry now.

BEN

There's an egg and an apple in the refrigerator.

TRICIA

All it holds.

(beat)

(MORE)

TRICIA (CONT'D)
 Come on, help us clean up, and
 we'll figure out the sleeping
 arrangements later. I'll call the
 general store for groceries.

Sarah glares at her parents.

SARAH
 This is all your fault, for
 fighting and being bad parents!

TRICIA
 We know it's our fault. We're so
 sorry!

The mood is sour as Tricia calls the store.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: "Two hours later."

The unhappy family sits on the ground outside the tiny house.
 They glare at Ben, who is more embarrassed than angry.

BEN
 I had to go. I'm sure it was the
 meat-lover's frozen pizza.

Mikey holds his nose, as everyone shivers in the cold.

MIKEY
 Pew!

SARAH
 It was inconsiderate.

TRICIA
 Sassy, don't overreact! We'll just
 let the place air out a bit.

SARAH
 How long? Two, three days maybe?

BEN
 Normal bodily function.

TRICIA
 I agree with the kids. That was not
 normal.

They hear the putt-putt of a motor scooter.

BEN

Here comes Pauly the Pizza Guy!

Pauly laughs as he cruises up to the family of four. He takes off his little helmet.

PAULY

Take in some strays?

MIKEY

Cool motorcycle. Bet it can't do ninety!

TRICIA

Pauly, this is Mikey. Nickname is Vegas. Bets on everything.

BEN

He bet you'd be two hours getting here. I owe him a buck.

PAULY

Hey, Vegas. Give you a ride sometime.

SARAH

Give me ride home?

TRICIA

And this is Sarah. We call her, Sassy. Hasn't had time to clean up.

Pauly glances at, then ignores, Sarah, which aggravates her.

BEN

None of us have. Kids just showed up.

SARAH

I hate it here.

Pauly ignores Sarah, and turns to Tricia.

PAULY

How long are the children here? For, like, the day?

TRICIA

No. They'll be joining us the next two weeks for Christmas Break!

PAULY

That's why the big order.

Mikey starts digging in the box on the back of Pauly's scooter.

PAULY (CONT'D)
Bet he's hungry. Better pay up Mrs. Rawlings.

Tricia hands Pauly a credit card. Pauly eyes three garbage bags on the side of the house.

TRICIA
Here you go.

PAULY
Can't leave garbage out like that.

BEN
Oh?

PAULY
Attracts bears. Specially the meat-lovers!

Mikey jumps back, and looks around afraid.

TRICIA
What day do they pick up the garbage around here?

PAULY
They don't. I can take one bag back each day and throw in the dumpster at the store, for an extra five bucks.

Ben is upset.

BEN
You're going there anyway!

PAULY
You almost cost me my job, turning me into a booze-delivering mobster!

TRICIA
Sorry about that.

PAULY
Price just went to ten bucks a garbage bag!

SARAH
That's piracy!

TRICIA

Sassy!

Pauly ignores Sarah.

Ben and Tricia stare at each other.

BEN

We'll think about.

Pauly hands Tricia the receipt.

PAULY

Suit yourselves.

(stares at Mikey)

See ya, Bear Bait.

Sarah stands and stomps over to Pauly as he starts up his motor scooter. She kicks him in the shin.

PAULY (CONT'D)

Ow!

SARAH

Don't ever threaten my brother Vegas again, you pirate, you!

PAULY

Don't worry. I ain't coming back!

Pauly races away.

BEN

That was our food supplier you kicked, Sassy!

MIKEY

And the only one who could save us from bears.

TRICIA

And one of our two only contacts with the outside world. What do we do, now?

SARAH

Is it too late to start planning our worst Christmas ever?

Their chins drop.

INT. TINY HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is a mess again. The kids have their suitcases open, and clothes are scattered about.

Tricia tries to do dinner dishes for four in a tiny kitchen sink.

The bored kids can't get their cell phones to work.

Ben hits his knee, as he picks up garbage in a plastic garbage bag, while sidestepping the kids and the suitcases.

TRICIA
Only room for one hand in the sink.

SARAH
Any service yet, Vegas?

MIKEY
No, and I'm on low battery.

SARAH
Plug it in, stupid.

BEN
No garbage disposal. I'm worried about the garbage out there after that talk of bears.

Sarah and Mikey freeze.

SARAH
Bears? Idiot on the scooter was serious?

BEN
This is the forest.

TRICIA
That's where bears... you know what!

MIKEY
Wanna go home!

Mikey plugs in his cell phone adapter and the overhead light dims.

Everyone freezes.

TRICIA
Did we forget to feed the hamster running around on that wheel?

BEN
I think he's dead.

SARAH
He tried the pizza?

MIKEY
If it killed him, it might kill the
bear!

Tricia finishes the dishes, and dries her hands with a tiny
towel.

TRICIA
Everything is smaller here but us.

SARAH
Impossible to sleep here!

Everyone freezes.

TRICIA
You don't like the arrangements?

Tricia tries to pace as she thinks. Everyone is in her way.

MIKEY
How have you been sleeping?

Ben is sad.

BEN
Down here on the floor? Lousy.

SARAH
Ma? You've been sleeping in the
loft?

The kids sense the anxiety.

TRICIA
Not well.
(upbeat)
Girls upstairs, boys downstairs?

Ben pouts, as Tricia climbs to one loft and Sarah climbs to
the other.

BEN
I'll take out the garbage.

SARAH
We're used to having our own rooms!

Ben steps outside with the garbage bag.

Sarah climbs down from her loft, and up to her mom's loft. They barely fit in it. Sarah whispers to her mom, worried.

SARAH (CONT'D)
You and Dad okay?

Tricia pouts.

TRICIA
Just a rough patch. We'll be fine.

Ben returns to see Tricia and Sarah hugging.

BEN
There's something ya don't see every day.

MIKEY
You see a bear out there?

BEN
No, I was just... never mind. Vegas, bet you can't climb up to Sarah's loft.

MIKEY
Bet a buck.

BEN
Okay. One dollar.

MIKEY
Shake on it.

Ben and Mikey shake their entire bodies like dogs after a bath. Tricia and Sarah shake their heads in disgust.

BEN
You're on.

Mikey climbs the ladder effortlessly, but there's little room.

MIKEY
Too closet-phobic for me.

He sits up on the bed, and doesn't hit his head.

BEN
I owe you one doll hair.

MIKEY

Wait! You said dollar.

BEN

Slow it down. What have you got?

MIKEY

Doll hair? That's cheating!

BEN

Like you cheated by putting those liver dog biscuits all around Aunt Martha's neighborhood to win the dog races.

Mikey is upset, and climbs down the ladder.

MIKEY

That's different!

Tricia turns on Sarah.

TRICIA

How much did you haul in on Aunt Martha's estate sale?

SARAH

Came home before anybody bought anything.

Tricia looks disappointed.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I was doing it for you guys. I know money's been tight.

TRICIA

How do you know that?

SARAH

You cut back on the cable channels. Dad started taking the recycling to the recycling center instead of putting it curbside, all the mail is pink, and we started eating more, you know, healthy meals at home.

MIKEY

Eww! Like fruit and vegetables.

TRICIA

Good for you.

SARAH

Probably just a rough patch.

Tricia soulfully confides in the kids.

TRICIA

The pink mail? Everything keeps going up. Medical coverage, home insurance, interest rates on the credit cards...

BEN

The house we could afford ten years ago, we can't afford to buy today.

TRICIA

Just a little stretched is all.

BEN

Salaries didn't keep up with expenses.

TRICIA

We could always sell the house and buy something smaller, like this!

BEN & SARAH & MIKEY

No!!!!!!

They snicker, but it's a nervous snicker.

They hear raccoons rummaging through the garbage outside.

MIKEY

Bears?

Ben leaps to the door. He's so anxious, he falls out the door, tumbles, and lands flat on his face scaring the raccoons away.

BEN

Darn, raccoons! What a mess!

Tricia, Sarah, and Mikey peek out the door to see Ben flat on his face.

TRICIA

Sure showed them!

Ben slowly gets to his feet.

BEN

We'll all help to bag the garbage in the morning.

MIKEY

Dad, won't the garbage smell
attract bears tonight?

Ben is angry.

BEN

Forget about the bears. Worry about
getting a good night's sleep!

Sarah turns back into the house, and mumbles.

SARAH

Yeah. That should help!

Tricia tries to change the subject.

TRICIA

I'll help fold the little couch out
into Vegas's bed.

She kicks the suitcases away, and unfolds a "tiny bed" that
is about 4 feet x 4 feet.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Isn't it perfect for Vegas?

SARAH

But not big enough for Dad.

Ben lays on the tiny bed which is comical. It's clear the
floor is now too small for him to sleep.

BEN

We'll be fine down here.

TRICIA

Sassy, time for bed. Climb up!

Sarah climbs up to her loft.

SARAH

(sadly)

Sure.

Sarah climbs up the ladder, and sits in the middle of the
bed, and her head just barely fits. She looks at her dad with
a sad face.

SARAH (CONT'D)

This is fine.

TRICIA

Of course. We'll be fine. We'll all
be fine!

(mumbles)

Two more weeks.

LATER

They try to sleep: Tricia and Sarah in the lofts, and Ben and Mikey on the bottom floor. It's dark, and everyone is uncomfortable.

MIKEY

I can't sleep. It's too small here!

TRICIA

Do the best you can.

BEN

I slept here. Not too small for me,
and I'm bigger than you.

MIKEY

Can't see out. It's like one of
those things they put you in when
you die.

SARAH

A coffin?

MIKEY

An urn.

BEN

It's not that small. It sleeps
four.

MIKEY

Not yet!

TRICIA

Point taken. What bugs you the most
about the tiny house, Vegas?

SARAH

The children's easy-bake oven?

MIKEY

No.

TRICIA

The refrigerator that holds one
bottled water and an apple?

MIKEY

No.

BEN

The toilet in a cupboard?

MIKEY

No.

Tricia lifts her head up, excited.

TRICIA

You can't see your stars.

Silence.

BEN

What stars?

TRICIA

The stick-on stars we put on the ceiling in his room at home. That's it, isn't it?

MIKEY

They glow in the dark.

SARAH

Like a hundred night-lights.

MIKEY

I like counting them.

TRICIA

We all have things at home we miss.
(beat)
I bet your Dad misses his pillow.

BEN

My favorite pillow since we got married. Love that pillow.

Silence.

Tricia looks sad. In a moment, her mood sours.

TRICIA

Figures!

BEN

What? What did I say?

Silence.

Sarah tries to reverse the mood to uplifting.

SARAH

I miss my diary. Wrote in it every week. Didn't take it to Aunt Martha's 'cause she would have stolen it and read it.

BEN

Never trusted her.

SARAH

What do you miss most at home, Mom?

Silence.

TRICIA

Nothing. I mean, no possessions.

BEN

Nothing?

TRICIA

Tough question. Each of you came up with something right away, but I can't come up with anything. Give me a day to think about it.

MIKEY

Well, if Dad can live without his pillow, and Sassy can do without her diary, and Mom can do without everything, I guess I can do without my stars!

Ben stands and picks up Mikey in his arms.

BEN

No son of mine is going to sleep without counting his stars.

MIKEY

What?

Ben packs Mikey outside the door.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

It's freezing, but Ben carries Mikey to a clearing in the forest as Mikey looks up.

MIKEY

Wow! Must be millions of them.

BEN

Billions.

Tricia and Sarah are right behind them.

SARAH

Trillions.

TRICIA

Quadrillions. Mikey, take a picture with your eyes. Count them to sleep.

MIKEY

Okay, Mom.
(he blinks several times)
And, thanks, Dad!

Freezing, they race back to the house.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

SUPER "Three Days Later"

The family cleans up another garbage mess.

BEN

Darn raccoons. Every night!

TRICIA

I'll call the general store and apologize. Anything special you want?

SARAH

Another delivery boy?

TRICIA

Food-wise.

MIKEY

Fresh fish.

TRICIA

Your dad can take you fishing. Poles are behind the house, behind the ladder.

BEN

We'll go when we're done here. Trish, I'll need lemon and flour to cook 'em.

TRICIA
I'll tell Pauly.

MIKEY
Bet I catch the biggest fish...

Ben is upset.

BEN
(interrupting)
It's not always about betting!
We're gonna fish for fun!

Mikey looks like a scolded puppy. He looks away and mumbles.

MIKEY
Right! Fun!

LATER

Pauly delivers groceries to Tricia and Sarah, who are splitting wood. They are both grungy from the work.

Pauly glances at Sarah, then purposely ignores her, speaking directly to Tricia.

PAULY
Boss made me deliver.

TRICIA
I'm glad you came, Pauly.
(glances at Sarah)
You remember our daughter, Sass...,
Sarah.

Sarah, looks disapprovingly at her appearance, and glares at her mom.

Pauly glances quickly at Sarah.

PAULY
Uh huh.

TRICIA
We were running out of food, and
kids will turn on you if you don't
feed them.

PAULY
I can take a bag of garbage back
to. For free, I mean.

TRICIA
Boss making you do it?

PAULY

No. I'm just doing it, okay?

Tricia hands the credit card to Pauly, who charges her, gives a receipt.

Tricia takes the box of food, while Pauly loads up one of the three garbage bags onto the back of his scooter.

TRICIA

We really appreciate it. Couple raccoons rip 'em open every night. Spend every morning cleaning up.

PAULY

Lucky it wasn't a bear.

Pauly puts on his helmet, and begins to drive away, as Tricia waves.

TRICIA

Thanks, Pauly. Thanks a lot.

The Sheriff drives up with a sad look on her face. She steps out of her jeep.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Hi, Sheriff. Sarah, take the groceries inside.

Sarah grabs the groceries and heads through the door.

SARAH

Hi, Sheriff. Bye, Sheriff. Wow. Real human interaction!

The Sheriff is sad.

SHERIFF LUCY

Hi, Tricia. Hi, Sarah. Thought I'd warn you that the serial arsonist struck again. Other side of the county this time, but I'm warning everyone I can.

TRICIA

Something else bothering you, Sheriff?

Tricia looks terrified.

The Sheriff pulls out a red letter with the words "Foreclosure Notice" on the outside. She secretly hands it to Tricia, who knows exactly what it means.

Tricia folds it, shoves it in her front pocket, and forces a smile. They speak loudly, so Sarah can hear them.

SHERIFF LUCY

Wanted to make sure the kids are going to be okay here for the next ten days.

TRICIA

They'll be fine. Real troopers. Adjusting fine.

The Sheriff forces a smile.

SHERIFF LUCY

Good to hear. Take care now, and keep the wood and brush away from the house. Fire hazard, ya know. See y'all in three days.

The Sheriff gets in her jeep and drives off slowly with a worried look in the rearview mirror.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - NIGHT

The mood is sad at the campfire circle.

The family cooks four breaded trout on a frying pan with a few lemon slices. Tricia sits next to Ben.

BEN

Should have been a happy night! Thanks for buying the packaged farmed trout from the general store.

TRICIA

Just as a back-up.

MIKEY

We almost caught one. Then I asked dad why Pauly the Pizza Guy don't look at Sassy. Then dad said something about girl trout laying eggs in the stream, and boy trout swimming by...

SARAH

Daddy! How could you?

MIKEY

Then I stopped fishing. Daddy got mad, and one foot fell in the water, then...

BEN

(interrupting)

Let's just say, fishing didn't go as planned.

SARAH

At least cooking around a campfire is better than being cramped up in that ridiculous kitchenette, right?

The mood lifts with half-smiles.

TRICIA

Feels a little less like a prison out here in the yard.

MIKEY

How many more days left?

BEN

Ten.

(beat)

Unless the Judge wants to use his place for Christmas.

Silence.

TRICIA

We'll tell him the fishing's great!

Mild chuckles.

SARAH

What are we gonna do for income? Mom's off from teaching, and Dad can't sell houses from up here on Christmas Break.

Tricia stands and paces angrily around the campfire.

TRICIA

I love the kids, but sometimes being a third-grade teacher sucks! Haven't gotten a raise in eight years. I buy all my art supplies, song books, and flash cards. They've all doubled in price.

SARAH

I know, Ma!

TRICIA

I help with your father's real estate business, but that had to be put on hold for this three-week sentence.

BEN

We still have a few houses on the market...

Tricia kicks Ben in the ankle as she sits down. Sarah notices the kick.

TRICIA

Difficult times. Interest rates on the rise.

BEN

High inventory -- houses on the market. Nobody moves at Christmas!

MIKEY

So, we don't have money.

TRICIA

Housing market will improve. Teacher's salaries, not so much.

BEN

A rough patch, is all.

Silence. Sarah is saddest of all.

SARAH

That why you guys argue every night?

Silence.

BEN

Fish is done.

Sarah stands and stomps toward the house.

SARAH

I'm not hungry.

TRICIA

Sassy, come eat!

Mikey gets up and stomps into the house.

BEN

Vegas?

TRICIA

I'll fix them plates.

Ben looks down.

BEN

I'm sorry. 'Bout everything.
Failing as a provider. Fighting
about money. Everything.

Tricia scoops up two plates, and heads towards the house.

TRICIA

Yeah. Me, too. Mostly for failing
our kids.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

Everyone is clearing brush, firewood, and branches and twigs
away from the house.

MIKEY

Why we doing this, again? We'll be
gone in nine days.

BEN

It's called 'defensible space.'
Clear all flammable materials at
least thirty feet from a structure.

SARAH

I don't see how a wildfire is going
to find this one tiny house in a
giant forest.

TRICIA

Your father's right. We don't want
to be responsible if the Judge's
house burns down.

MIKEY

Is this like a prison work detail?
Like picking up trash along the
highway?

TRICIA

Ben, we could get them orange
jumpsuits for Christmas?

BEN
Decorative red and green leg irons?

The kids laugh.

SARAH
That would be lit.

Ben and Tricia freeze, and look confused.

TRICIA
Lit?

SARAH
(snooty)
I believe ancient people used the
words 'cool' or 'chill'.

BEN
Huh? Lit.

MIKEY
Like, that party was lit.

SARAH
Exactly.

TRICIA
Cool.

SARAH
See what I mean?

They chuckle.

INT. TINY HOUSE - NIGHT

They lay down asleep (same spots as before).

Outside the house, a bear SNORTS.

Mikey shakes his dad, and jumps up. He whispers, shaking
everyone awake.

MIKEY
That's not raccoons!

Ben jumps up, and takes a large step to the kitchen, and hits
his knee. He screams in pain.

He grabs metal pots and pans, and spoons, and hands them out.

Mikey's eyes are wide-open.

BEN

On the count of three, we start
pounding and yelling.

(beat)

One, two, three.

They pound the pans and scream for five seconds.

Ben holds up his spoon and pan, and they stop.

Silence.

MIKEY

Don't hear him.

TRICIA

Only one way to tell.

Tricia charges out pounding her pan and screaming. The others
peek out the door.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - NIGHT

We see Tricia doing a happy dance.

TRICIA

Gone before I got out the door.
Great idea, Ben. Hit a cabinet with
your knee and scream!

Ben comes out proudly, but limping. Sarah and Mikey follow.
They aren't so happy.

The garbage bags are torn open, and it's a mess.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Little bit of a mess to pick up in
the morning.

MIKEY

Means a real bear was two feet away
from our cardboard closet!

BEN

Bear ran away. No problem.

Sarah gets in Mikey's face.

SARAH

I get the jitters, too, Vegas. We
never went camping. Summers were
the time for our parents to sell
houses.

TRICIA

We have jobs, Sassy.

SARAH

You had kids, too. I liked chopping wood, getting dirty, and seeing chipmunks. Even picking up after the raccoons is fun!

BEN

Your mother and I never got to do that before, either.

TRICIA

First bear we ever scared off!

MIKEY

Not helping! What if he comes back?

BEN

We do it again.

No one looks too happy going inside.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: "8 days remaining on the sentence."

The Sheriff drives up to see the garbage scattered in front of the house. She doesn't look happy.

She steps out of the jeep, and checks her watch: 10 AM.

She leans into the jeep, then leans on the horn.

The family slowly emerges from the house. They look ragged, dirty, and exhausted.

BEN

Hi, Sheriff. Wasn't our fault, we had a bear come by again last night.

TRICIA

We all lost a little sleep.

SHERIFF LUCY

Lost the soap, too? Y'all look awful!

They look at themselves, and nod in agreement.

SHERIFF LUCY (CONT'D)
 Brought y'all's mail, and some
 Christmas cookies from the general
 store.

The Sheriff pulls a bag out her jeep, and the family goes
 into a feeding frenzy.

TRICIA
 Thanks, Sheriff. They're acting
 like they hadn't eaten in days,
 but...

SHERIFF LUCY
 They haven't found the berry
 patches just a hundred yards up the
 creek? Dried on the vine, but good.

BEN
 Didn't see it when we went fishing.
 Thanks for the Christmas cookies,
 Sheriff. The kids haven't done much
 exploring, or thinking about
 Christmas.

SARAH
 I'd like to explore other options.
 Eight days to go. Maybe we could go
 stay with friends.
 (sadly)
 Except Maria is at Disney World
 with her parents, and Jackie's
 family took a Caribbean cruise.
 They're all on real Christmas
 vacations.

MIKEY
 I could stay with Jimmy, except
 he's visiting his grandparents in
 Phoenix, 'cause they have a
 swimming pool.

Ben is upset.

BEN
 I get it. You don't like it here!
 Too bad!

They all turn nasty.

TRICIA
 You'll be staying with us. We'll
 serve our time together.

BEN
Come on, kids. Inside. Let's get
you cleaned up!

SARAH
Why? We just have to clean up
garbage later. It's all we ever do.

MIKEY
That, and not sleep!

Ben herds the kids inside like cattle, while the Sheriff
confides in Tricia.

TRICIA
We'll clean this mess up right
away. Join us for coffee?

SHERIFF LUCY
Can't stay. Got an arsonist to
catch, but I'm worried 'bout y'all.
If the Judge dropped by, he'd be
very disappointed in you.

TRICIA
Doing what we can!

The Sheriff hands Tricia several letters.

SHERIFF LUCY
Here are your collection bills for
today.

Tricia grabs them with a sad face.

The Sheriff gets in her jeep.

TRICIA
Maybe we'll start a fire with these
to keep warm.

SHERIFF LUCY
Not funny! But, not getting along.
That's worse than the smell of the
garbage!

TRICIA
Wait! Please, Sheriff! I've got
some payments and letters inside,
if you wouldn't mind dropping them
off at the post office.

SHERIFF LUCY
Hurry, then.

Tricia runs inside, and out again, holding a stack of letters and bill payments, and three large manila envelopes, which she sadly hands to the Sheriff.

TRICIA

Might be going from the tiny house
to the poor house.

SHERIFF LUCY

I'll mail 'em.

(beat)

Keep your hopes up! And better yet,
keep their hopes up!

The Sheriff smiles weakly as she speeds away.

Tricia looks at the garbage with disgust, then stares at the tiny house with a very sad face.

LATER

The family finishes bagging up the garbage (now four bags) like forced labor. Tricia tries to cheer up the family.

TRICIA

Come on! Let's go find that dried-
up berry patch.

BEN

Better bring a pot to carry the
berries.

The kids race into the house for pots, and the family hikes off to find the berry patch.

EXT. BERRY PATCH IN THE WOODS - DAY

The family picks and eats tiny dried berries, but enjoying the great outdoors. Still, every few minutes, Mikey looks around for bears.

TRICIA

Never did this before.

SARAH

What? A family activity?

BEN

Think she means picking dried
berries. Yes, as a family.

MIKEY

Bears eat berries?

TRICIA
They eat everything.

Mikey freezes.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
I mean, I read they are omnivores.
They eat plants and animals.

Mikey glares at his mother.

BEN
They'll eat grass in the spring, to
clean out their system after
hibernation.

TRICIA
In the summer, they eat fruits,
nuts, insects, honey, trout, small
mammals and dead animals. They
don't have a long hibernation in
warmer forests, so they eat
whatever they can find. Like our
garbage!

SARAH
They can kill a deer, can't they?

MIKEY
Not helping.

Mikey looks around.

BEN
They will occasionally kill young
deer or moose calves, but rarely.

MIKEY
Not helping at all.

BEN
If we happen to see a black bear,
we stand together to look like an
imposing, bigger predator, and wave
our hands and yell. Ninety-nine
times out of a hundred, they run.

SARAH
It's that one time...

TRICIA
Sassy! Stop it.

SARAH

Just saying, Vegas knows the odds
are with us big time.

Mikey nods, semi-convinced.

MIKEY

Never thought of it that way.
Ninety-nine times out of a hundred.
You gotta like them odds!

TRICIA

But we're not going to bet! We're
going to pick berries.

SARAH

Let's pick enough to make jelly!

BEN

I'm in!

Ben picks faster and faster. They all do.

Behind them, way off in the distance, they hear a bear GROWL.

TRICIA

Think we have plenty. Let's go!

They don't panic, but they walk quickly to the house.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

As the family returns to the house, they are arguing. Sarah and Mikey push each other. They don't see JUDGE THOMAS (60), a pompous, curmudgeon standing with his arms folded and a mean look on his face. The garbage bags are ripped open.

TRICIA

Vegas, I know you hate it here. So
does Sassy, but don't take it out
on us.

SARAH

It's you two that got us sentenced
here!

BEN

Worst mistake of my life. Damn it,
Tricia, I blame us, too!

Ben sees the Judge, and stops in his tracks.

MIKEY

Uh oh!

The Judge speaks in a gruff voice.

JUDGE THOMAS

Still not getting along?

TRICIA

Judge Thomas, didn't expect to see you today.

Judge Thomas points to the scattered garbage and torn plastic garbage bags.

BEN

Honest, Judge, we picked it all up before we went berry-picking.

TRICIA

As a family activity.

BEN

Getting along much better.

TRICIA

Sassy, Vegas, garbage detail -- stat!

Sarah and Mikey race into the house.

JUDGE THOMAS

Sassy? Vegas?

TRICIA

Pet names. Given names are Sarah and Mikey.

(beat)

Judge, we can't thank you enough for letting us stay in your second house, instead of jail.

The kids race out with two new garbage bags.

They wink at each other (which the Judge sees), and Sarah hugs Tricia, and Mikey hugs Ben before they race to pick up all the garbage.

BEN

Yeah, Judge. We're getting along a lot better...

JUDGE THOMAS

Hmmm! Sheriff Lucy is tight-lipped about your progress, or lack of progress, but I've been inside the house...

TRICIA

Haven't had time to put away the laundry. Longer to dry when it's cold.

BEN

Or the dishes.

TRICIA

We didn't expect the kids to join us.

Mikey steps toward the judge, and yells out with a smile.

MIKEY

Lots of jails and prisons are overcrowded these days!

Sarah pulls him back before he can say any more.

BEN

Somewhat of a surprise that their Aunt Martha dropped 'em off.

JUDGE THOMAS

Surprise?

TRICIA

Yes, Judge. They were staying in a mansion.

BEN

Swimming pool. Hot tub. Tennis court. Like the Ritz.

JUDGE THOMAS

Like the Ritz?

Sarah and Mikey put on exaggerated, fake smiles.

SARAH

Yes, sir, but we missed our parents.

MIKEY

Couldn't live without them.

The Judge looks unconvinced.

SARAH

Nothing like a cabin in the woods.

MIKEY

Even if it has raccoons and bears
ripping into our garbage every
night.

The Judge is upset, but paces to control his emotions.

JUDGE THOMAS

I'd like to hear from each of you.
What one thing bothers you the most
about the place?

Mikey yells out!

MIKEY

It's too small! Not enough windows.
All crammed inside where everything
is small but us. We trip over each
other all day and night. You bag up
the garbage, then a bear or a
raccoon comes by and rips it open.

JUDGE THOMAS

Hold on, son. Mikey, is it?

MIKEY

Yep. Okay. One thing. I get, it.
Okay. Bears. Don't like 'em!

JUDGE THOMAS

Well, Mikey, I knew I built my home
in the middle of their home. Bears
lived here thousands of years
before me.

MIKEY

So, it was their home first?

JUDGE THOMAS

Exactly. But like an idiot, I
didn't install a bear-proof garbage
can. I used the place for a weekend
at a time, and took my garbage with
me. I'll get a bear-proof garbage
can up here right away.

TRICIA

Thanks, Judge. That's very kind of
you.

JUDGE THOMAS
What don't you like, Sarah, is it?

SARAH
Yes, Judge.

Sarah looks at her mom and dad.

JUDGE THOMAS
It's okay. Tell me the truth.

SARAH
Well, Judge, I'm not saying my
parents argue, but when they do, we
kids hear it a whole lot better in
a tiny house.

Tricia and Ben look away.

JUDGE THOMAS
I see.
(laughs)
Kind of like 'a fart in a
spacesuit,' as they say. Can't
escape the smell!

Sarah and Mikey laugh out loud.

SARAH & MIKEY
Exactly!

Tricia and Ben are forced to snicker with guilty looks.

BEN
Guess we didn't appreciate the
magnitude of the issue.

TRICIA
Guess because we were used to
arguing in a big room, in a big
house, or when the kids weren't at
school -- inexcusable.

BEN
Amplified here. Didn't consider
that.

JUDGE THOMAS
That's why you're here. Ben, what
one thing is it that you don't like
here?

Ben pauses to think.

BEN

I miss my car. The ability to escape for hours on end when I get frazzled.

JUDGE THOMAS

That suggests you're a prisoner of your own mind. These three weeks may not make a difference.

Ben pauses to think.

JUDGE THOMAS (CONT'D)

And, Tricia, what one thing do you dislike most?

Tricia surprises everyone by laughing.

TRICIA

It's easy to joke about micro-microwave oven, the other tiny appliances, and hitting my head on the roof in the loft, but the truth is, there is nothing I dislike about the place.

JUDGE THOMAS

(suspicious)

Really?

TRICIA

We haven't been this close, geographically speaking, in a long time, and it's only a matter of time until we become closer emotionally.

JUDGE THOMAS

(unconvinced)

Hmmm! I wish I could believe that for all of you.

(beat)

Can you guess why I'm here?

BEN

Make sure we didn't completely destroy your investment?

JUDGE THOMAS

Not exactly.

Tricia raises her hand. Judge Thomas nods.

TRICIA

Judge, it's because you invest in people. You invested in us. And your investment isn't paying off.

The judge smiles.

JUDGE THOMAS

That, I believe! You're getting there, teacher!

(beat)

But, let me tell you about my cabin in the woods. I could have bought one ten times the size! Twenty times the size. But, I bought this little thing. Can you guess why?

BEN

To live within your means?

JUDGE THOMAS

Naw! I make plenty of money.

SARAH

To get away from it all?

JUDGE THOMAS

On the contrary. Partly to be surrounded by it all!

(beat)

All the things that are most dear to me.

MIKEY

You really like it way out here?

JUDGE THOMAS

(smiles)

I love it. It teaches me humility, humanity, and a connection to nature, and my faith.

(disappointed)

I was hoping it would teach you the same things. But, I don't see it. Yet! You've got eight days to clean up your act!

The family has their chins on their chests.

The Judge slowly trudges to his nice SUV.

JUDGE THOMAS (CONT'D)

I'll get you that bear-proof garbage can.

(MORE)

JUDGE THOMAS (CONT'D)

If not for the kids, I'd make you complete your incarceration in the county jail starting Christmas Day, when we let our well-behaved prisoners out early!

The family sadly groups together to wave good-bye.

INT. TINY HOUSE - NIGHT

They lay in their beds (same spots as before). The sleepy kids tune out their parents as they bicker quietly.

BEN

Okay, so we disappointed the Judge! He didn't extend our sentence.

TRICIA

No, but did you see his face?

BEN

I saw it! Like he didn't think we had made any progress since we got here. I've never felt so small.

TRICIA

(joking)

We're the perfect size for the tiny home!

BEN

(angry)

You know what I mean. Judge knows we're smart enough to learn a lesson and get along, but we're too stubborn to change.

TRICIA

I suppose you're right.

Tricia has an epiphany.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

The Golden Rule!

BEN

What?

TRICIA

Treat others like you want to be treated!

(yells)

(MORE)

TRICIA (CONT'D)

We are going to stop yelling at each other!

(whispers)

I mean, we are going to treat each other better from now on! That's my solemn promise to the family, and everyone!

BEN

I'm game! I can do it!

Silence.

Sarah smiles, and chimes in.

SARAH

Vegas, you asleep yet?

MIKEY

(snickers)

No! And how does anybody answer that question with a 'yes'?

They snicker.

TRICIA

Hey, Vegas, I bet Sassy hits her head on the roof tonight.

SARAH

That's not nice.

MIKEY

For a buck! Shake on it.

Tricia and Mikey shake like wet dogs. They giggle.

BEN

Go to sleep! Geez!

SARAH

What if I have to get up and go to the bathroom?

TRICIA

Ladder is on the left side. Remember that, or you'll fall, what, four and half feet?

Ben chuckles.

SARAH

Mom, switch me sides, okay?

TRICIA

Fine.

Sarah and Tricia begin to switch sides in the lofts, and Sarah hits her head HARD on the roof.

SARAH

Ow!

Tricia, Mikey, and Ben laugh.

TRICIA

Vegas, you owe me a buck!

MIKEY

It was worth it.

Everyone laughs again.

Silence.

BEN

Laughter. It's good to hear
Laughter!

TRICIA

Yeah. Pretty cool. I mean, lit.
(beat)

Tomorrow morning, I'll call the
store and ask if Pauly the Pizza
Guy wants to earn a little extra
money in the trash removal
business, until the Judge gets us a
bear-proof garbage can.

BEN

Pay him what he wants to get rid of
the garbage, especially the fish.

SARAH

He's a jerk! Wouldn't look at me!

MIKEY

Dirt all over your face.

TRICIA

Could need a wash.

BEN

Face needs a smile.

Sarah gets upset.

SARAH

Don't gang up on me. Isn't my fault we're here. I didn't get arrested for disturbing the peace.

TRICIA

Okay, relax.

SARAH

No washer and drier in this dumpster! Not my fault, either!

BEN

Okay, Sassy.

MIKEY

Boy, Sassy bumped her head on the wrong side of the bed!

Sarah sobs.

SARAH

And, my name is Sarah!

Silence.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Don't want to be called Sassy ever again! Got it!

Tricia smiles sincerely at Sarah.

TRICIA

Got it. Sorry, bad habit.

BEN

I'm sorry, sweetheart.

MIKEY

How come I still gotta be called, Vegas?

TRICIA

You bet on absolutely everything.

MIKEY

'Cause it's fun to shake on it, but I like the name Mikey, ya know!

Silence.

TRICIA

Okay. Okay. Next time someone calls you Vegas, they owe you a buck!

MIKEY
I'll be rich.

BEN
Didn't shake on it.

Everyone shakes like wet dogs, and they all laugh.

TRICIA
Yes, we can fix this!

We zoom in to see smiles on all their faces as they drift off to sleep.

INT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: "One week remaining on the sentence."

Tricia wakes, and doesn't see Sarah. She screams.

TRICIA
Sarah? Where are you? Sarah.

They rush outside.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

Ben and Tricia race around yelling for Sarah.

TRICIA & BEN
Sarah! Sarah! Sarah.

Up toward the berry patch they see her. She looks grungy and sleep deprived.

SARAH
Over here.

TRICIA
Had us worried sick!

SARAH
I needed some space! I like it out here in nature!

They guide Sarah back to the house.

INT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

Everyone is in sweat clothes, and sitting around a tiny table eating a simple breakfast of granola and dried berries. Tricia and Ben drink coffee. Sarah is still unhappy.

TRICIA

New ground rules! Today is a clean-up day! We're gonna clean up our act. Clean house, clean the yard, and follow the Golden Rule!

Ben kisses Tricia.

BEN

Long overdue. Let's do this!

SARAH

We're going to need some other ground rules around here! Number one: everybody showers!

TRICIA

Fine idea! Girls shower time. Boys wait outside.

BEN

Fine! We'll take out and clean up the garbage!

Ben and Mikey cheerfully take out the garbage.

LATER

We see Tricia and Sarah with towels around them, as they stare at the tiny shower.

TRICIA

You go first. I bet this place has a water heater the size of a coffee thermos. Make it quick.

SARAH

Don't worry, I will! Don't want that creep, Pauly the Pizza Guy, to see me like this!

Sarah gets in the shower.

TRICIA

Pauly's not so bad. Your father was just like him!

SARAH

Ewww!

EXT. TINY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ben and Mikey are busy cleaning up around the house, when Pauly arrives on his motor scooter.

Pauly takes off his helmet.

PAULY

What-up?

MIKEY

Hey, Pauly.

BEN

Hi, Pauly. Just cleaning up, while the ladies shower.

PAULY

There's a shower in that little place?

BEN

More like a tiny sprinkler.

They chuckle.

MIKEY

You said you might take me on a ride someday.

PAULY

Okay with you, Mr. Rawlings? After I get these groceries unloaded. He can have my helmet. Won't go fast.

BEN

Okay, but precious cargo. I'll get the credit card.

Pauly starts to follow Ben in with the box of groceries.

BEN (CONT'D)

Whoa! Not such a good idea. The ladies are showering. Remember?

Pauly acts surprised.

PAULY

Oh. Right. I'll wait out here.

Pauly strains his neck to peek in the door, as Ben disappears, and returns with the credit card.

BEN
They're almost done. Here's the
card.

Pauly runs the card, and hands Ben the box of groceries and the receipt.

PAULY
Okay, Vegas. Let's go.

Mikey stops suddenly and frowns.

MIKEY
Name's Mikey.

PAULY
Okay. Sorry. Mikey, let's go.

Mikey smiles big.

MIKEY
Yahoo!

Mikey puts on the helmet, and hops on the back of the motor scooter.

Pauly hops on and takes Mikey on a gentle ride up and down the dirt road.

Mikey is having the time of his life.

Ben continues cleaning up the garbage.

Pauly returns Mikey to the house, just as Tricia and Sarah exit all dressed up. Sarah looks great, and Pauly can't take his eyes off her.

TRICIA
Hi, Pauly. You remember Sarah.

SARAH
Hi, Pauly.

Pauly is too stunned to speak.

TRICIA
Thanks for bringing the groceries
early. We were out of lunch
supplies.

PAULY

Uh... Uh... Uh...

Mikey takes off Pauly's helmet.

MIKEY

Pauly took me on the most lit ride ever!

Ben shakes his head smirking.

BEN

There's that expression lit again.

TRICIA

Pauly, if you don't have to race back to the general store, you could pick dried berries with Mikey and Sarah.

SARAH

Berry patch is only a hundred yards away.

PAULY

I get a half-hour break when I get back. Suppose I can take it now, and pick some berries.

MIKEY

We heard a bear nearby...

Pauly puffs up his chest, and interrupts.

PAULY

Scared them off dozens of times.

TRICIA

I'll get you some pans.

Tricia hops in the house.

BEN

Thirty minutes. No more. And stay close together.

Now Mikey puffs up his chest, as Tricia returns with the pans.

MIKEY

We're not afraid of a bear, Dad!

Tricia looks bewildered at Mikey's newfound courage.

The kids stride off toward the berry patch.

Ben heads inside.

BEN

Good time for me to shower.

There's a twinkle in Tricia's eyes.

TRICIA

I'll help you get started.

Ben giggles, as he disappears through the door.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

I miss that giggle.

EXT. BERRY PATCH IN THE WOODS - DAY

Pauly, Sarah, and Mikey pick berries, and chat. Pauly can't take his eyes off Sarah, who is playing hard to get. Mikey is oblivious to the game being played.

MIKEY

Yep. Heard him snorting up a storm. Couldn't have been more than twenty feet away.

SARAH

Bear was so far away we could barely hear him.

MIKEY

Probably a Grizzly.

PAULY

Grizzlies are extinct around here.

SARAH

The correct term is extirpated, it means locally extinct, but they live somewhere else, like Yellowstone National Park.

Mikey's eyes open like he's seen a ghost.

MIKEY

That near here?

SARAH & PAULY

No, Mikey!

Sarah and Pauly giggle. They share a moment.

Pauly turns sad.

PAULY
Going home soon?

SARAH
Seven days left on the sentence.
Yesterday, the Judge came by to
warn us.

PAULY
Warn you?

SARAH
He really wants my parents to stop
arguing, and to work things out.

PAULY
You guys like it up here?

MIKEY
I'm liking it more. Except for the
stars. Not many windows in the
house.

Pauly gulps, nervously.

PAULY
How about you, Sarah?

SARAH
The fresh air, the trees, the
simple life. It's growing on me.

Pauly chuckles nervously. Without looking at each other,
Pauly and Sarah smile.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

Pauly, Sarah, and Mikey return as Tricia and Ben exit the
house holding hands. Ben is dressed nicely and is clean-
shaven.

Sarah and Mikey notice this and smile.

PAULY
I better be getting back to work.
More customers to disappoint!

TRICIA
Special thanks for bringing the
groceries, Pauly.

BEN
Yeah. Thanks, Pauly.

PAULY
No problem.

Pauly glances at Sarah.

PAULY (CONT'D)
And I can take back three bags of
garbage, if I load 'em on just
right.

Sarah smiles.

BEN
That would be great, Pauly, but we
don't want to unbalance your load.

PAULY
No problem. And for free! Did I
mention it was for free?

TRICIA
Thank-you, Pauly. If you're sure
it's no bother.

LATER

We see Pauly's overloaded motor scooter leaning this way and that, as he wobbles down the road in a comical scene, trying to wave good-bye to Sarah, while driving away.

SARAH
Pauly said he'd bring me a half-
gallon of my favorite ice cream for
Christmas. Rocky Road. They wrap in
dry ice to keep it frozen. Isn't he
lit. I've got no presents to hand
out.

BEN
None of us do! That's okay!

MIKEY
I want to be Pauly when I grow up.
He's not afraid of grizzly bears!

TRICIA
(sighs)
What I wouldn't give for Rocky Road
ice cream right now!

BEN

Ignore your mother, Sarah. That's an order.

Sarah, Ben, and Tricia laugh. Mikey looks bewildered.

TRICIA

Gonna be a great Christmas. We'll be together! Your turn for a shower, Mikey.

MIKEY

But, Ma!

BEN

(softly)

You heard your mother. Please?

MIKEY

Like going to the electric chair.

Everyone chuckles. Then, Tricia laughs.

TRICIA

Not enough electricity in that house to fry an egg.

They all laugh and step inside.

INT. TINY HOUSE - NIGHT

Dinner looks like a choreographed dance. Sarah and Mikey set the table with plates, silverware, and glasses, but no one bumps into anybody else. Sarah and Mikey sit.

Tricia and Ben work in the tiny kitchen like a dance, and bring dinner to the table including baked chicken, broccoli and potatoes.

Tricia brings over a small, potted pine seedling, and puts it in the center of the tiny table. The family cheers!

TRICIA

The Christmas tree we picked out together today in the woods.

BEN

To replant after Christmas.

SARAH

Together!

BEN
Best Christmas Tree ever!

TRICIA
Because Christmas is all about
life! At Christmas, we celebrate a
birth, and rebirth.

They sit down to dinner. The kids look surprised, as Ben motions to hold hands.

They do, and bow their heads, as Ben leads the grace.

BEN
Thank you, God for this food. For
rest and home. And all things good.
For wind and rain and sun above.
But most of all those we love.

ALL
Amen.

TRICIA
Thought I'd never see the day!

After just two bites, they hear the Sheriff's jeep race up, and skid to a stop. They hear Jeep door open and close.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
Sounds like the Sheriff.

They hear a KNOCK at the door.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
I'll get it.

Tricia gets up and opens the door. We see a poorly constructed homemade wreath of fir branches on the door.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
Sheriff Lacy, come in.

Sheriff Lacy enters with a second red "Foreclosure" notice. She smiles at the wreath, and puts the notice behind her back, but Ben and the kids see it.

SHERIFF LUCY
I'm interrupting your dinner.

Ben stands.

BEN
What did you want to see us about,
Sheriff?

The Sheriff looks at the mostly tidy house, the home-cooked meal, and the clean kids.

SHERIFF LUCY
Is that Cajon chicken, I smell?

Tricia forces a smile, and grabs a plate and setting from the kitchen.

The kids quickly grab a towel hanging from one loft.

TRICIA
I made extra everything incase
Pauly came back. Have a seat.

SHERIFF LUCY
I shouldn't.

Tricia ushers her to the tiny table.

TRICIA
Silly little place doesn't have a
washer and drier, but can sit five
for dinner.

The Sheriff is stunned.

SHERIFF LUCY
Does so have a washer and drier.
And a tool drawer. Behind the wood
cabinet in the bathroom.

They all race to look. Sure enough, a tiny washer and drier, and a tool chest. They all laugh. Sarah playfully slaps her mom in the arm.

SARAH
And I've been washing my undies in
the shower?

Everyone laughs as they head back to the table.

TRICIA
I'll be darned! Place has
everything!

They sit, and they all smile.

SHERIFF LUCY
Smiling during the toughest times
is hardest of all.

BEN

We face the music together,
Sheriff. What's the bad news?

SHERIFF LUCY

How about after dinner, we adults
could...

TRICIA

Now's fine. We're tough.

The Sheriff slowly removes the red envelope from behind her.

SHERIFF LUCY

Your mortgage company.

The Sheriff puts her arms around the family, and smiles.

TRICIA

But don't you love the Christmas
tree we picked out together?

SHERIFF LUCY

It ain't fair. Came days ago. I
didn't have the heart.

Tricia pats the Sheriff's back.

TRICIA

Ben and I knew. They warned us for
months. We'll be fine. We have each
other!

Tricia addresses the kids directly.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Kids...

SARAH

Rough patch. We know.

MIKEY

Nothin' we can't handle.

BEN

What your mother is trying to say
is, we had to sell our house, and
we're looking to buy a less-
expensive house.

TRICIA

Something more affordable during
the rough patches.

SHERIFF LUCY
I'm sure it won't be this small.

SARAH
Wouldn't matter.

MIKEY
If we can live here, we could live
anywhere!

Everyone eats, and smiles. The Sheriff is amazed, delighted,
and holding back tears.

SHERIFF LUCY
Luckily, y'all got this place for
the rest of the week. And y'all
have the nicest Christmas tree and
wreath I've ever seen.

LATER

Up in the loft, Sarah is reading Jack London's "The Call of
the Wild," while Mikey is reading a book on "21: Beating the
Odds."

Tricia, Ben, and Sheriff Lucy drink coffee at the tiny table.

SHERIFF LUCY (CONT'D)
I better get going. Still have to
catch that arsonist.

BEN
He's been going on rampages
sporadically for three years?

SHERIFF LUCY
It's what makes him so hard to
catch. Long periods, long as a
year, with no activity.

TRICIA
Then flare-ups, no pun intended.

The Sheriff gets up to leave.

SHERIFF LUCY
Then three arson fires at a time.
Exactly three. Always with a
Molotov cocktail.

TRICIA
Then nothing. Like he gets it out
of his system for a while.

SHERIFF LUCY
Thanks for the coffee. It'll help.

BEN
That last fire? Other side of the
county? Who was the target?

SHERIFF LUCY
Giant mansion on a golf course.

Sheriff checks a few pages in her notebook.

SHERIFF LUCY (CONT'D)
Belonged to a Mr. Stanley
Wellington.

Tricia stands alarmed.

TRICIA
Stan Wellington? That was my late-
brother's business partner!

The Sheriff steps closer, excited.

SHERIFF LUCY
You know him? Know anyone who would
want to harm him?

TRICIA
Everybody loved Stan. He's okay,
isn't he?

SHERIFF LUCY
Got out and ran onto the golf
course. Saved his life. Poor guy
watched everything he owned go up
in smoke.

BEN
(mumbles)
I sold him that house.

The Sheriff screams.

SHERIFF LUCY
What? Why didn't you say something?

TRICIA
We been stuck here? In prison? No
TV, no newspapers? No radio?

Ben paces in the tiny house.

BEN

Who would do such a thing?

SHERIFF LUCY

Nighttime. Dark. Security cameras caught nothing.

(beat)

Your brother's business partner?

Now Tricia paces.

TRICIA

My brother, rest his soul, and Stan made a lot of money making the machines that make bubble wrap.

SHERIFF LUCY

Your brother died? Sorry.

TRICIA

Heart attack. So they said!

Tricia pulls the Sheriff out the door.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - NIGHT

Tricia continues pulling the Sheriff toward her jeep.

TRICIA

It was three years ago. My brother was only thirty-five. They did a country autopsy, quick look, and didn't find anything.

SHERIFF LUCY

Y'all sound suspicious.

TRICIA

He was a runner. Strong as an ox. My sister-in-law got the huge life insurance policy, but the business went to Stan.

SHERIFF LUCY

Odd she didn't get half the business.

TRICIA

That's how his will was written. Aunt Martha, as we call her, was pissed.

SHERIFF LUCY
Aunt Martha? Rawlings?

TRICIA
Uh huh.

SHERIFF LUCY
If I got y'all a list of the other
victims over the years, would y'all
take a look at it for me?

TRICIA
Sure. I doubt I'd know anyone else.

SHERIFF LUCY
I'll call you tomorrow morning.
Thanks again for dinner. Family's
making real progress. Judge is
gonna love that!

TRICIA
Thanks, Sheriff, for giving us a
chance.

They hug, and the Sheriff takes off.

INT. TINY HOUSE - NIGHT

This night is different. Ben and Tricia are up in one loft,
Sarah's in the other loft and Mikey has the bottom floor.

SARAH
This is better. Much better.

Tricia smiles at Ben.

MIKEY
I still can't see my stars!

TRICIA
I may have a solution tomorrow.

They all head to sleep with smiles.

INT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: "Christmas Eve: six days remaining on the sentence."

The phone rings as everyone smiles at breakfast.

TRICIA
I'll get it. It's Sheriff Lacy.

She answers the phone, with a pen and notepad handy.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
 Hi, Sheriff. Names of the past
 arsonist victims.
 (beat)
 Yes. Go ahead.

Tricia writes down ten names.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
 None of them ring a bell. I'll call
 you if I think of anything.
 (beat)
 Thanks, Sheriff. Means a lot. Bye.

Sarah and Mikey clear the dishes and wash them together,
 making Ben and Tricia smile and hug.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
 I better call the General Store.
 We're almost out of eggs, milk, and
 bread.

MIKEY
 And frozen pizza! I'm addicted!

Everyone groans.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

Ben is clearing twigs and branches away from the house.

Pauly drives up on his motor scooter. Tricia has the credit
 card ready. Pauly runs the card, and hands her the receipt,
 with Sarah (nicely dressed) and Mikey holding three pots.

SARAH
 Time to pick a few berries, Pauly?

Pauly smiles big at Sarah.

PAULY
 Day off. Christmas Eve! You bet.

MIKEY
 Not anymore, I don't.

They run off. Pauly leaves his scooter, helmet, and keys
 behind.

Tricia hops on the scooter and puts on the helmet.

Ben races over to stop her.

BEN
You can't leave. Three months in
jail, remember!

TRICIA
We need a few other things from the
city. Cover for me!

Tricia takes off.

LATER

SUPER "Three Hours Later"

Tricia races up to the house with a huge box of supplies.

Pauly, Ben, Sarah, and Mikey run to meet her.

PAULY
You stole my scooter.

TRICIA
Filled it with gas. Help me with
the supplies.

They watch as Tricia hands Ben his favorite pillow, Sarah gets her diary, and she hands Mikey a skylight kit and a key saw for the roof. Ben hugs Tricia and his pillow.

BEN
My favorite pillow!

SARAH
My diary! Best Christmas ever!

Sarah clutches her diary.

MIKEY
A skylight kit?

TRICIA
So you can see your stars tonight!

They hug.

BEN
What did you get yourself?

TRICIA

Christmas lights for our beautiful home, a five gallon can of fire retardant paint, five paint brushes, and two fire extinguishers!

(beat)

We have an arsonist out there. We've got to be prepared!

BEGIN MONTAGE

-- Ben is on the ladder cutting a hole in the roof.

-- Mikey is hauling away the scraps of roofing material.

-- Sarah, Tricia, and Pauly are painting the house with fire retardant paint, while singing old Christmas carols.

-- A pickup truck arrives and delivers a bear-proof garbage can. They all marvel at the sight!

-- Ben and Mikey complete installation of the flip-up skylight. It works.

-- Everyone finishes painting, eating berries as they go.

-- They hang a small strand of Christmas lights on their tiny house.

END MONTAGE

EXT. TINY HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Tricia, Ben, and Mikey finish cleaning up, as Pauly starts up his scooter, with Sarah standing next to him.

TRICIA

(yells)

We left you a generous tip for all your help, Pauly.

BEN

Thanks, Pauly.

Sarah leans over and kisses a surprised Pauly on his cheek.

SARAH

Thanks, Pauly.

Everyone's eyes open widely, especially Mikey's eyes.

MIKEY

This has nothing to with trout,
does it, Dad?

BEN

No, son.

Pauly slowly drives away with a smile on his face.

INT. TINY HOUSE - NIGHT

Tricia and Ben clean the dishes, while the kids read in the loft. They smile and giggle a lot.

TRICIA

Place is working out better than I
thought.

BEN

Better than anyone thought.

SARAH

Yeah, who needs all that extra
stuff?

MIKEY

Plenty of extra stuff to do around
here. Can't wait to check out my
new skylight tonight!

BEN

Should be awesome!

Everyone laughs, as Tricia studies the list of names of the arsonist victims. She has an epiphany.

TRICIA

Ben, wasn't Stephen Alberti the
name of my brother's life insurance
salesman?

Ben looks over Tricia's shoulder at the list.

BEN

I think it was.

TRICIA

Can't be a coincidence that my
brother's attorney and insurance
salesman were victims.

BEN

Know anyone else on the list?

TRICIA

No.

Tricia paces in the small house.

BEN

Attorneys and insurance salespeople
have hundreds of clients...

TRICIA

But Aunt Martha knew both of them.
(beat)
And hated both of them.

BEN

She wouldn't know how to make a
Molotov cocktail!

MIKEY

What's a Molotov cocktail?

SARAH

Quart-sized bottle filled with
gasoline with a rag hanging out of
it. You light the rag, throw the
bottle, and KABOOM!

Mikey jumps up and hits his head.

MIKEY

I saw lots of empty bottles of
booze in Aunt Martha's garage.

Sarah jumps up and hits her head!

SARAH

Mom, she also has a loaded pistol.
She showed me.

Tricia dials 9-1-1 on the phone.

BEN

Calling the Sheriff?

TRICIA

You bet!

Sarah and Mikey climb down from the loft.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Sheriff. One of the names. Stephen
Alberti! That was my brother's life
insurance salesman.

(MORE)

TRICIA (CONT'D)

The one that got Aunt Martha the policy that she thought should have paid out more! And Judge Thomas sided with my brother's attorney and Alberti! It might be a long-shot, but we think Aunt Martha may be...

(pauses in fright)

Phone went dead!

(hangs up)

Armed and dangerous!

Ben and the kids look worried.

BEN

Aunt Martha probably found out the Judge owns this place, too.

SARAH

She dropped us off!

MIKEY

Why did the phone go dead?

TRICIA

We'll have to prepare for the worst!

BEN

Sheriff can't drive here in under an hour!

TRICIA

We have to stall!

(beat)

Mikey, up to the skylight with the binoculars.

Ben moves the table, so Mikey can stand on it. Sarah hands him the binoculars.

BEN

Can you see anything?

MIKEY

No headlights.

TRICIA

She could park down at the turnaround where the Judge parked.

SARAH

We could make a run for it!

TRICIA
She has a car and a pistol!

BEN
Trapped in a tiny wooden house
could be worse.

TRICIA
I'm not leaving!

MIKEY
Me either!

SARAH
I'll stay!

BEN
Guess we're all in!

Mikey starts shaking.

MIKEY
I see headlights coming.

TRICIA
Kill the lights, quick!

Sarah and Ben shut off the lights. They whisper.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
Sarah, Ben, man the fire
extinguishers behind the house on
either side. If the Molotov
cocktail hits the house, you gotta
hit those flames with everything
you got!

SARAH & BEN
Got it.

TRICIA
Mikey, you stay with your dad! Got
it?

MIKEY
Got it.

TRICIA
The fire-retardant paint might
help, but it's not perfect.
(beat)
Give me our two best flashlights.

BEN

What are you going to do?

TRICIA

We cleared the branches and twigs from all around the house. I'm going to shine the flashlights in her eyes, and try to talk her out of it, or hope she misses the house with the Molotov cocktail. Don't give away your positions.

Tricia steps out confidently and quietly.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - NIGHT

Tricia steps to the side of the house, scanning the dark forest. She looks back to see the Christmas lights are on, rolls her eyes, and chuckles.

TRICIA

That's my family!

Tricia unhooks the strand of lights from the house and stretches the strand to a nearby tree (to look like the tiny house is behind her).

Tricia hears footsteps approaching. Tricia yells.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Aunt Martha?

A black-clad figure approaches smoking a cigarette.

AUNT MARTHA

I got no beef with you, Tricia.
Can't say much for your lazy
husband and rotten kids!

Tricia shines a flashlight on Aunt Martha's eyes. Behind Aunt Martha, Tricia sees Sarah and Mikey sneaking down toward Aunt Martha's car. Sarah carries a quart of eggnog, and Mikey carries a squeeze tub of Hershey's chocolate syrup.

Tricia speaks louder to distract her.

TRICIA

You don't have to do this!

AUNT MARTHA

They were all against me from the beginning. Your brother. Crooked lawyer.

(MORE)

AUNT MARTHA (CONT'D)
 Cheating insurance salesman. And
 that no-good judge, who sided with
 them!

Ben joins Tricia with his flashlight shining in Aunt Martha's eyes.

BEN
 You burned down their houses?

AUNT MARTHA
 Shut up, Ben, you lazy bum! They'll
 rebuild their stinking mansions!

TRICIA
 Not the point. Photographs,
 heirlooms, keepsakes, all gone!
 You're lucky no one was hurt!

AUNT MARTHA
 Didn't care either way.

BEN
 Didn't even warn us!

AUNT MARTHA
 Wasn't planning this tonight!
 (beat)
 Judge's big house was surrounded by
 cops. Who could have warned him?

TRICIA
 All I know is Judge Thomas was kind
 enough to loan us this nice house,
 while we settled some issues.

BEN
 He didn't have to do that!

TRICIA
 I told the Sheriff it was you!

Aunt Martha fires a shot in the air. BAM!

Tricia sees the kids sneaking back behind to the tiny house.

AUNT MARTHA
 I don't care. I'll be in another
 country by sunrise! Had to be
 tonight! Besides, Christmas day is
 a great day to travel. No crowds.
 (beat)

(MORE)

AUNT MARTHA (CONT'D)
Now, get your belongings and your
family, and get the heck out of
that house.

With her arms apart, Tricia and Ben shine both flashlights in Aunt Martha's eyes.

We see the Molotov cocktail under her arm pit, a cigarette lighter in one hand, and a pistol in Aunt Martha's other hand.

Martha shields her eyes, but steps closer to Tricia and Ben.

AUNT MARTHA (CONT'D)
Don't make your kids grow up
without a mom and dad!

Tricia and Ben stand defiantly in front of the Christmas lights, still shining their flashlights at Martha's eyes.

TRICIA
Can't let you do this! Judge Thomas
gave us a second chance at life!
Had faith in us!

Aunt Martha lights the fuse (the rag).

AUNT MARTHA
I'm warning you! Get away!

Ben holds the fire extinguisher behind his back and stands defiantly next to Tricia.

BEN
We're in this together! We have
faith in you!

Sarah and Mikey join them, Sarah concealing the extinguisher behind her back too.

AUNT MARTHA
Get away from there! You'll go up
in flames!

The family stands defiantly.

TRICIA
We're not leaving!

Aunt Martha throws the Molotov cocktail at the Christmas lights. The family dives out of the way.

Aunt Martha races back to her car.

The ground bursts into flames, but only the gasoline is lit.

Ben and Sarah expertly use the fire extinguishers, as Tricia hugs Mikey.

The fire goes out quickly.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
Good work, Sarah. Now hand over the
extinguisher.

Sarah hands her mom the extinguisher, as Tricia and Ben chase after Martha.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
Come on, Ben. Let's slow her down.

Tricia and Ben race down to Aunt Martha's car.

BEN
Think the kids may have helped
already.

EXT. FORESTED ROAD TURNOUT - NIGHT

Aunt Martha is behind the wheel of her fancy SUV, but her windshield is covered with near-frozen eggnog.

We see the windshield wiper blades are covered with chocolate syrup. Aunt Martha doesn't see the syrup, and uses her window spray-and-wipe button.

Chocolate syrup spreads all over her windshield making it impossible for her to see out.

AUNT MARTHA
God, I hate those kids!

Aunt Martha automatically rolls down the front-side windows.

There, Tricia and Ben, on either side of the car, spray Aunt Martha with the fire extinguishers.

AUNT MARTHA (CONT'D)
God, I hate those two!

Sheriff Lucy races up with lights and siren.

EXT. TINY HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: "CHRISTMAS DAY"

The family is outside watching the Sheriff bag up the last of the broken bottle from the Molotov Cocktail.

SHERIFF LUCY

Should be no problem matching the fingerprints, bottles, and gasoline from your Aunt Martha's house. I'm afraid she'll be put away for many years.

TRICIA

Three years she's been at it?! She sure had us fooled.

BEN

We should have known.

SARAH

She didn't like us lovable kids.

SHERIFF LUCY

Especially after that windshield trick.

Mikey and Sarah laugh.

MIKEY

Ninety-two percent of the time, the driver's first move is to use the spray and wiper.

SARAH

They're way worse off when the chocolate syrup gets spread across.

Tricia sounds angry, but isn't.

TRICIA

They were told to stay behind the house.

SHERIFF LUCY

Aunt of y'all's wasn't too crazy about fire extinguishers either.

BEN

We knew she had to roll down the side windows to see the road.

TRICIA

I'm just glad no one was hurt.

The Judge drives up in his nice SUV. He steps out smiling, and with some papers in his hand.

JUDGE THOMAS

How are my favorite fire-fighters doing?

TRICIA

Hi, Judge Thomas. We can't take all the credit.

JUDGE THOMAS

No?

TRICIA

We just painted the place with fire-retardant paint.

JUDGE THOMAS

That stuff's expensive.

BEN

We'll pay it off in time.

JUDGE THOMAS

Won't have to. There was a ten-thousand-dollar reward for information leading to the arrest of the arsonist -- the Flame!

The kids and Ben jump for joy, but Tricia remains calm.

TRICIA

We can't accept it, Judge. We were prisoners at the time.

The smiles disappear from the kids and Ben.

JUDGE THOMAS

Nonsense. You were never sentenced. I dismissed the case. I thought you needed some quiet time away. Was delighted to see the kids here, too. It's all about faith and family!

TRICIA

We weren't prisoners?

Sarah looks sad.

SARAH

We had a great time. I've been writing in my diary every night.

Mikey looks sadder.

MIKEY

Does this mean we have to go? We get five more days! We just put in skylight, so I can see my stars at night.

The judge inspects the skylight with a sour look.

JUDGE THOMAS

Cut a hole in my roof?

BEN

Mikey's...never been happier.

TRICIA

We've all never been happier.

SHERIFF LUCY

I can vouch for that!

TRICIA

We can put the roof back together with the reward money.

The Judge glares at them, then, he smiles.

JUDGE THOMAS

Your tip saved my big house from getting burned to the ground, and you saved my tiny house!

The judge unfolds a Legal Document and hands it to Ben.

Ben sees it's a deed and smiles.

BEN

The deed?

JUDGE THOMAS

Deed to my tiny house. And the thousand or so acres of forest around it! You saved it, and yourselves.

(beat)

Merry Christmas!

Tricia grabs the deed from Ben.

TRICIA

One dollar? You're selling it to us for a dollar?

MIKEY

Give him a doll-hair, Dad! Best Christmas ever!

The family laughs, and hugs Judge Thomas and the Sheriff.

JUDGE THOMAS

Recent fire. Hole in the roof. And it is tiny! Way too small for a family of four!

TRICIA

No, it's just right!

Pauly drives up on his motor scooter. Sarah runs to hug him.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

We didn't order anything?

Pauly takes off his helmet.

PAULY

You're the heroes of the county! The Judge ordered you tonight's dinner! Frozen pizza!

The family groans and smiles, as the Sheriff pulls out a pile of ugly Christmas sweaters from her patrol car.

SHERIFF LUCY

I got us all used Christmas sweaters from the thrift store.

Everyone laughs.

Pauly carefully unwraps dry ice from around a half-gallon of Rocky Road ice cream! Everyone gasps!

PAULY

And Rocky Road ice cream. Merry Christmas, everyone!

Sarah kisses Pauly on the lips.

Tricia moves closer to kiss Ben. It's a longer kiss.

TRICIA

Come in, everyone. Let's make the most memorable Christmas dinner ever!

Everyone laughs and smiles.

FADE OUT.

THE END