**GATES OF YULETIDE**

by

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Draft # 1:July 23,2018

Registered: July 24, 2018

INT.--BAR--AFTERNOON

In the lightly crowded bar, MARK (41 years old, 6-3” tall, medium brown complexion, neatly groomed, and dressed in business attire) sips on a glass of bourbon. He looks at his watch and goes into a panic.

MARK

I’ve got to get out of here!

He gulps down the last of the drink and hurries outside to his truck. Snow is falling and the roads are icy. He starts the truck and hastily pulls off.

CUT TO:

EXT.--CHICAGO CITY STREET--AFTERNOON

A red Toyota Prius containing undistinguished passengers waits at the red light. The light turns green and the car proceeds. As it crosses the intersection, Mark’s truck skids and slides, crashing into the Prius and overturning it. Traffic begins to halt as a crowd begins to gather around the accident.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

TEN MONTHS LATER

EXT--CHICAGO CITY STREET--DAY

Mark (unshaven, and wearing ragged clothing) is walking the street. He walks into a local grocery store. As he enters, the store manager (white male) glues his eyes to Mark.

MARK

(irritated)

Peek a boo! I see you too!...All that

I need is a box of cereal! Is that alright

with you, Sir?

MANAGER

(rudely)

That’s fine. Cereal is on aisle five.

MARK

I know! Thank you!

Mark walks on towards the aisle.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.--GROCERY STORE--MINUTES LATER--DAY

Mark is in next in the line as the clerk (young black female) finishes keying in STEPHANIE’S (24 years old, slender, and old clothes) items.

CLERK

That will be $34.86.

Stephanie gives the clerk her debit card, and the clerk swipes the card, but it declines.

CLERK (CONT’D)

I’m sorry, Ma’am, but your card didn’t

go through.

STEPHANIE

(irritated)

What do you mean it didn’t go through?!

CLERK

(calm)

Your card declined, Ma’am.

STEPHANIE

Why?! I know that there’s money on my card!

CLERK

I don’t know. You may want to check

with your bank.

STEPHANIE

I don’t have time for all of that! I have a

daughter at home who needs to eat!

CLERK

(firm)

I’m sorry, Ma’am, but your card declined.

STEPHANIE

So in other words, my daughter has to go

to bed hungry tonight?!

CLERK

I’m sorry, but there is nothing that I can

do.

MARK

Excuse me….

(They both turn to Mark)

I got it.

STEPHANIE

(confused)

What do you mean? This is $34.00.

MARK

(takes out the money)

I have it covered. Give her the food.

Just add in my cereal.

STEPHANIE

(touched)

Thank you, Sir!

MARK

(sincerely)

You are welcome. But please….Feed

your daughter.

CLERK

(keys in cereal)

That brings the total to $36.19.

Mark gives the clerk the money, and Stephanie puts her bags into the shopping cart and heads for the door.

STEPHANIE

(turns back to Mark)

Thank you again.

MARK

You’re Welcome.

Mark takes his cereal and heads for the door, as the store manager stops him.

MANAGER

(speechless)

Sir...That….That was...a..really nice thing

that you just did.

MARK

` (not wanting to hear it)

Mm-hmm….I got my cereal. I’m leaving now.

Mark turns and leaves the store.

CUT TO:

EXT.--STEPHANIE’S APARTMENT--MINUTES LATER--DAY

Mark unnoticeably follows Stephanie as she enters into her old and run-down apartment building with her grocery bags. Once inside, Mark goes into the building still unnoticed. He watches Stephanie go into apartment 2B, as she closes the door. Mark walks up to the door getting ready to knock but changes his mind and walks away in heavy thought.

DISSOLVE TO:

Mark approaches an old abandoned house. The front door is boarded with a crossbar and a rusted padlock, and all of the windows are boarded with wooden panels. Mark walks to the side of the house and squeezes in through a basement window.

CUT TO:

INT.--ABANDONED HOUSE--NIGHT

In the house filled with trash and debris, ceiling caving in, old dusty and dirty furniture, big holes in the wall, and roaches crawling, Mark lights a candle, and then lights a kerosene heater and rubs his hands together to warm himself. He then takes out his wallet and takes out a picture of BRIAN (5 years old, light brown complexion, and heavy set) and LESLIE (3 years old, light complexion, long curly hair, and green eyes). He gazes at the picture and gets tearful.

MARK

I'm so sorry kids! I'll make this up to you!

I promise!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.--ABANDONED HOUSE--MORNING

Mark is asleep on the floor and then awakens. He slowly gets up and gets the box of cereal. As he pours cereal into a bowl, roaches fall out of the box. Mark angrily tosses the box across the room.

CUT TO:

EXT.--ABANDONED HOUSE--MINUTES LATER--MORNING

Mark climbs out of the basement window and starts walking down the snowy street.

CUT TO:

EXT.--CHURCH--MORNING

The church is giving out free food and hygienical supplies. Mark stands in line with his friend GREG ( 31 years old, 5 feet 9 inches tall, dark complexion, and worn out clothing).

GREG

What's going on Mark?

MARK

Nothing much. Same old pancakes,

different syrup.

GREG

(chuckles)

I hear you! Same thing here. I hear

that they’re serving breakfast here

today.

MARK

Yeah...That’s why I came. I’m hungrier

than a pit-bull! I almost had cereal with

no milk this morning.

GREG

(confused)

Almost? What stopped you?

MARK

Well, the roaches decided to have their

annual family reunion in the box!

GREG

(laughs)

It ain’t funny, but dag! That's crazy!

MARK

Crazy enough to keep me hungry!

A minister walks up to Mark and Greg.

MINISTER

Sirs, we are also giving out free clothes

today. After you eat, please feel free to

help yourselves.

MARK

Thank you. I will. I appreciate it.

MINISTER

Follow me right this way for your meals.

Mark and Greg follows the Minister to the inside of the church.

MARK

Are you going to pick out any clothes,

Greg?

GREG

Nah...The kids are waiting to eat, so

I’m just going to get a bag and get back

home.

MARK

Cool. Well, I’m going to stick around. I

can use a new suit for Christmas.

GREG

Well, I’ll catch up to you later on.

MARK

(slaps hands with Greg)

Alright, Greg. Be easy, Man.

CUT TO:

EXT.-- CHURCH--DAY

Mark browses through clothes that are laid out on the table. He find a modern grey suit and holds it up to himself.

MARK

This is it! I’m not wearing this suit

until Christmas!

He browses through shoes until he finds a pair that matches the suit.

MARK (CONT’D)

Oh, yeah!...I'm going to be ready!

Mark then finds a pair of jeans, a hoodie, and a pair of nice tennis shoes. He then walks up to a minister standing behind a table.

MARK

This will be it for me. May I have a bag for

this please?

MINISTER

Absolutely, Sir. This suit is going to look

good on you when you come to visit us

on Sunday!

MARK

You’ve got a deal!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.-- ELEMENTARY SCHOOL--DAY

The bell rings and kids run out of the school building. STEVE (9 years old, heavy-set, old clothing, and old tennis shoes) comes out alone and begins walking home.

CUT TO:

EXT.-- CITY STREET-- MINUTES LATER-- DAY

As Steve is walking, three other boys from the school follow him.

BOY NO. 1

Steve! Wait up!

Steve turns to see the boys, but instead, speeds up his walk. The boys are running after him.

BOY NO. 1

C’mon, Steve! Wait! We’re not going to

mess with you!

(they catch up)

BOY NO. 2

Why you ain’t stop? We just wanted to

ask you something.

STEVE

(upright)

What!

BOY NO. 2

We just wanted to ask you about your shoes!

Where you get’em from? They hot!

(the boys laugh)

STEVE

Y’all leave me alone!

BOY NO. 1

Let me get those! My dog can use some

new chew toys!

STEVE

(infuriated)

I said leave me alone!

Steve quickly turns and slugs Boy No. 1 in the jaw, sending him to the ground. Boy No. 2 pushes Steve to the ground as Boy No. 1 gets up, and the three boys attack Steve. As they are fighting, Mark is passing by, drops his bags from the church, and runs over to break up the fight.

MARK

(pulling boys away)

Get off of him! Leave him alone!

The boys back off.

BOY NO. 2

You better keep your hands off of

me, you bum!

MARK

(firmly)

Go home!

The boys walk away while teasing both Mark and Steve.

MARK

(helping Steve up)

You alright?

STEVE

(brushing off)

Yeah.

MARK

So, what was that all about?

STEVE

They’re always messing with me.

MARK

Why?

STEVE

Mostly about my clothes. My momma

can’t afford all that stuff that they be

wearing, and so they laugh at me.

MARK

Well, have you told anyone about it?

STEVE

All the time, but nobody ever does anything

about it.

MARK

Well, I will. Come on. I’ll walk you home

everyday to make sure they don’t bother

you again.

Mark and Steve walk off together.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.--RHONDA’S APARTMENT--FRONT DOOR--MINUTES LATER--DAY

At the door of the old but well kept complex, RHONDA (29 years old, heavy-set, dark complexion, uncombed hair, and smoking a cigarette) is very irate as Mark stands with Steve.

RHONDA

What’chu mean, my son is being bullied?!

MARK

I saw the boys beating him up myself,

and so I stopped them. Steve said that

this happens all the time.

RHONDA

And just who are you, McGruff The Crime

-dog, or something?! Batman?! Going around

fighting crime in the city?!

MARK

Ma’am, please calm down. I just saw a

child in trouble, and so I helped.

RHONDA

And how come you never told me about

this, Steven?!

STEVE

(nervous)

Because I didn’t want you to go to the

school trying to beat up any of the kids.

RHONDA

Boy, get in this house!

(turns back to Mark)

And Batman?.....Thank you.

(plucks cigarette away)

Rhonda goes into the house and slams the door.

FADE OUT

EXT.--GREG’S HOUSE--DAY

Greg opens the door of the old one-story house for Mark, who is wearing the jeans outfit from the church, but still unshaven and dirty.

GREG

(surprised)

Mark! What’s up, Man?

MARK

S’up, Greg. I didn’t come to stay. I’m

out taking care of some things, and just

stopped by to warm up for a minute.

GREG

(welcoming)

Yeah! Yeah! For sure! Come on in!

Mark comes in and sits down on the sofa.

GREG (CONT’D)

I was just making some hot coffee.

You want a cup?

MARK

That would be great. I appreciate it.

GREG

I got’cha. But uhh….Let me ask you

something.

MARK

Yeah. What is it?

GREG

I hope that I’m not prying too far, but

you had everything. How’d you get like

this? And Elaine and the kids...What happened?

MARK

(deep breath)

She kept telling me to stop drinking so

much. I mean, she warned me over and

over again. I just wouldn’t listen. I stopped

by Rozzie’s one day during lunch, and I

had one too many. I was rushing to get back

to work and tried to make a yellow light.

It was too late. My truck skidded on the ice

and T-boned that car. That was just the last

straw for Elaine.

(getting teary)

She took the kids and left me...She left me.

I got my third D.U.I., lost my job, and here

I am today ten months later. No job, no home,

(hangs his head)

And no family.

GREG

Man, I am so sorry to hear that!...So,

what’re you gonna do about it? I mean,

Christmas is in a week. You should at least

try to reach out to them. You’ve got to

spend Christmas with your family.

MARK

(in thought)

Yeah...You’re right. Christmas with the

family.

(getting up)

I gotta go. Thanks a lot.

(heads for the door)

GREG

Oh, you’re welcome. Stop by anytime.

MARK

Will do. Thanks again.

Mark nwalks out and Greg closes the door behind him.

CUT TO:

INT.--BANK--MINUTES LATER--DAY

Mark (with a backpack) is next in line, and the signal for the next available window lights. The teller (middle-aged white female) cautiously examines Mark as he approaches the window.

TELLER

(nervous)

May I help you, Sir?

MARK

Yes. I would like to close out my account.

TELLER

Yes. Sir. And your account number?

MARK

021937.

The teller pulls up his account on the computer. She then looks at Mark in confusion.

TELLER

All of it?!

MARK

Yes, please.

TELLER

Ok..Mr. Rollins….And do you have your

ID or driver’s license?

MARK

(taking out his wallet)

Yes. I have it right here.

Mark gives the teller his license, but the teller looks more nervous when she looks at it.

TELLER

Give me just a minute. I am going to

have to clear this with my manager.

Just a minute. I’ll be right back.

MARK

Not a problem.

The teller walks away, and comes back with two security officers.

SECURITY

Sir, I’m going to need you to come with

us, please.

MARK

Why? Is there a problem?

SECURITY

(takes Mark by the arm)

Sir, just come with us.

MARK

(snatches away)

Look! Don’t grab me! I do know how

to walk by myself! Just tell me where

I need to go!

Mark is escorted to the back offices.

CUT TO:

INT.--BANK--OFFICE--SECONDS LATER--DAY

Mark is sitting in front of the bank manager’s (middle-aged white male, salt and pepper colored hair and bald on top, and dressed business-casually) desk.

MANAGER

Do you think that I am some kind of

fool?! Just what is it that you’re trying

to pull, here?!

MARK

The only thing that I’m trying to pull

here is my money. What’s the problem?

MANAGER

The problem is jokers like you! Do you

know how many homeless people walk

in off of the street claiming to be someone

else trying to fraudulently pull money, especially

at this time of year?

MARK

Fraud?! This is my money in my account!

MANAGER

(skeptically looks at computer)

So you mean to tell me that you have $25,000

here in this bank...you?!

MARK

(irate)

Yeah, me! What’s that supposed to mean?!

Just because I’m homeless I can’t have money?!

MANAGER

So, Mr. Rollins, and I say that loosely, if you

have so much money, why are you living on

the streets?

MARK

That is really none of your business, and I say

that tightly...Sir.

The manager slouches back into his seat and lets out a deep breath.

MANAGER

So you really want to play this game, huh?

Fine...What is your social?

MARK

124-29-0012

MANAGER

Your date of birth….

MARK

November 16, 1977.

The manager sits up straight and looks at the computer.

MANAGER

You may have the information correct,

but you can’t tell me that this is you in

this picture on this license that you’ve

obviously found.

Mark covers his mouth and forehead with his hands.

MARK

Look at me! That is me!

The manager alternates looking at Mark and the license. He realizes that it is Mark in the picture.

MANAGER

(dumbfounded)

You know what? I think that I owe you

an apology.

MARK

I’m listening.

MANAGER

Mr. Rollins, please accept my humblest

apologies. We take pride in treating all of

our members with the up-most respect and

integrity, whatever their background may be.

MARK

Even if they’re homeless, huh?

MANAGER

(ashamed of himself)

Yes Sir...How much would you like to

withdraw today?

MARK

All of it.

MANAGER

All of it? Is there anything that I can do

to keep you as a member? We really value

you here.

MARK

After the way that I was treated here

Today? Not even if Pope John Paul

asked me to stay.

MANAGER

Again, I apologize for doubting you, and I

wish that I could take it back.

MARK

It’s okay, but I would just like to close out

my account and be on my way. I have a lot

to do.

MANAGER

Yes Sir, Mr. Rollins. Just see the teller, let her

know that the withdrawal is approved, and I

will see to it that you are taken care of.

MARK

(getting up)

Thank you!

Mark walks out of the office.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.--ABANDONED HOUSE--LIVING ROOM--LATER--DAY

Mark walks into the room removing the backpack from his back. He opens the bag, rummages through the money, zips it back up, and then shoves the bag into a big hole in the wall.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

EXT.--SCHOOL YARD--AFTERNOON

Mark is leaning against a lightpost. Seconds later, the bell rings for school dismissal, and the kids began to exit the building and disperse. Steve hastily comes out, constantly and nervously looking over his shoulder, trying to lose himself in the crowd. Seconds later Boys 1,2, and 3 come out searching for Steve. Once they spot him, they go into pursuit. As Steve is being chased, he sees Mark and runs over to him. Mark stands in front of Steve to guard him as the boys approach, but loses the zeal to fight, and turns to walk away.

BOY NO.1

Superbum to the rescue!

(others boys laugh)

BOY NO.2

Yeah! It’s alright, though! We’ll see you

tomorrow in class, Homeboy!

The boys walk away laughing.

STEVE

Thank you, Mr. Mark! I’m glad you

were here!

MARK

I told you that I would be, and I meant it.

Those boys won’t bother you as long as

I’m around.

(they begin walking)

STEVE

It really feels good to know that somebody

actually cares. Especially a man. I just don’t

have since my daddy’s been in jail.

MARK

(curious)

How long has he been in?

STEVE

Four years. He has eight more years to go.

MARK

What happened?

STEVE

He lost his job at the freight company, and

Didn’t have no food in the house, and so to

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT’D)

feed us, he went out and held up a gas station,

And when the police came, he beat one of them

up real bad. I haven’t seen him since I was five.

I don’t know what it’s like to have a father.

MARK

(stops)

I am so sorry….Look, I’m not your daddy,

But I will always be around if you ever need

to talk, need lunch money...anything. Okay?

STEVE

Okay.

Mark stares at Steve with sympathy for a few seconds.

MARK

Come on. Let’s get you home.

Mark puts his arm over Steve’s shoulder and they walk off down the street.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INT.--STEPHANIE’S APARTMENT--LIVING ROOM--DAY

The living room is filled with old and torn furniture, the curtains blow from the breeze of the broken windows, the walls are dirty and filled with holes, and Stephanie is decorating a small Christmas tree with Larisha (five years old, medium brown complexion, long hair with a lot of pig-tails, and wearing heavy clothing and heavy coat).

STEPHANIE

Larisha, we’re going to make this the most

beautiful tree in the world!

LARISHA

Mommy, why do I have to wear my coat

in the house?

STEPHANIE

(embarrassed)

So we can pretend that the tree is outside.

LARISHA

(excited)

Oh! I can’t wait for Christmas, Mommy!

STEPHANIE

Yes! There’s going to be lots of toys and

gifts, we are going to have a big dinner,

and we are going to have lots of fun!

LARISHA

Yaaay!! I’m excited! I want Boxy Girls!

STEPHANIE

Okay! You know what would be fun? You

can go in your room and write Santa a letter

to tell him what you want, and when you are

done, I will put it in the mail to make sure

that he gets it on time!

LARISHA

(running to her room)

Yaaay!

Larisha goes into her room and closes the door, and Stephanie gets teary as she goes over and sits down on the sofa.

STEPHANIE

Lord, help me!

CUT TO:

INT.--STEPHANIE’S APARTMENT BUILDING--CORRIDOR--SECONDS LATER--DAY

Mark walks up to Stephanie’s door, and mentally debating with himself trying to decide on knocking on the door. He then reluctantly taps on the door. He thinks twice and turns to walk away, and after a few steps, Stephanie opens the door.

STEPHANIE

Yes? May I help you with something?

MARK

(nervous)

Uhhh….Hi. We met the other day.

Stephanie looks at Mark with high curiosity.

STEPHANIE

Wait a minute! You’re that guy that paid for

my groceries the other day, aren’t you?

MARK

Yes, that was me.

STEPHANIE

Look...I really appreciate what you’ve done,

but what are you doing here, and how do

you know where I live?

MARK

I saw that you needed help that day at the

store, and I wanted to offer that help to you.

STEPHANIE

And just how can you help me? Looks

like you can’t even help yourself!

MARK

(compelling)

Ma’am...If I can just have a minute of

your time, I can explain!

STEPHANIE

You don’t need a minute of my time. If

I knew that I was going to owe you anything,

I would’ve never taken the groceries. You

can’t tell me that you’re just doing this out

of the kindness of your heart!

MARK

You don’t owe me anything. Just

listen for a minute….Please.

Stephanie thinks about it and then gives in.

STEPHANIE

What is it? What is it that you think that

you could possibly do for me?

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INT.--ABANDONED HOUSE--LIVING ROOM--DAY

Mark is pacing the floor as he takes out his cell phone and dials Elaine’s number.

MARK

Hey Elaine. It’s me….

(desperate)

No wait! Don’t hang up! Please! I

just need to talk to you for a minute!...

About the kids. I was hoping that you’ll

let me buy them gifts….What do you

mean by “why”?! I know that I’ve messed

things up and have been a terrible father,

and I just need to do my best to make things

right! Can I do that?!

(sincerely)

Elaine….It would Mean so much to me…

Thank you.

Mark puts the phone into his pocket, takes the backpack from the hole in the wall, takes out a stack of money, and walks into the basement.

CUT TO:

EXT.--ABANDONED HOUSE--BASEMENT WINDOW--DAY

Mark crawls out of the basement window, and walks off down the street.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.--TOY STORE--CHECKOUT--DAY

Mark has a shopping cart full of toys for boys and girls, and the clerk (young black female) is ringing up the last few items. The last two things that she rings up is a Boxy Girls collection, and a remote controlled red Ferrari.

CLERK

That will be $600.32. How are you

paying today, Sir?

MARK

(takes money from pocket)

Cash.

Mark counts out seven one-hundred dollar bills and gives it to the clerk.

MARK (CON’T)

Here is $700.00. You keep the change.

CLERK

(speechless)

Sir...Ummm...That’s $100.00 change.

Are you sure?

Mark is loading the cart.

MARK

Yes, I’m sure...Merry Christmas to you.

Mark is walking out of the store with the cart.

CLERK

(heartfelt)

Merry Christmas to you too, Sir.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.--ABANDONED HOUSE--LIVING ROOM--DAY

Mark is putting the gifts in the closet. When done, he closes the door and looks at it.

MARK

I’ll make your Christmas happy, Kids.

He then goes over and sits on the sofa.

CUT TO:

EXT.--PLAYGROUND--DAY

Brian and Leslie are on the swings laughing as Mark is pushing them.

LESLIE

Higher, Daddy! Push me higher!

BRIAN

Me too! Push me higher than Leslie!

MARK

Alright! Y’all better get ready, because

I am going to push both of you up into

the sky so you will never come down!

KIDS

(laughing)

NOOOOO!!!!

MARK

Yes! Here we go!

Mark joyfully alternates pushing the kids.

CUT TO:

INT.--ABANDONED HOUSE--MEANWHILE--DAY

Mark is on the sofa as he smiles at the memory.

CUT TO:

INT.--ROLLINS’ HOME--LIVING ROOM--DAY

In a two-story modern brick home, Mark is playfully chasing Elaine and the children around. Elaine trips and falls to the floor, and Mark runs to her and tags her while the kids laugh hysterically.

MARK

You’re it!

ELAINE

What?! That wasn’t fair! I tripped over

the rug!

MARK

Well, that ain’t my fault! You should watch

where you’re going!

ELAINE

(laughing)

Okay! That’s the way that you want to

play? I got’cha. Help me up.

Mark helps Elaine up, and when she is completely on her feet, she immediately tags Mark.

ELAINE (CONT’D)

You’re it, Sucker!

MARK

(slaps his forehead)

I can’t believe that I fell for that mess!

The family laughs.

CUT TO:

INT.--ABANDONED HOUSE--MEANWHILE--DAY

Mark chuckles at the memory.

CUT TO:

INT.--ROLLIN’S HOME--BEDROOM--NIGHT

Mark is groggy from too much drinking as he sits on the edge of the bed.

ELAINE

(seriously)

Mark, are you even listening to me?! Your

drinking is getting totally out of control, and

you need to stop!

MARK

(careless)

Whatever. It ain’t nothing wrong with

me having a few drinks after work.

ELAINE

It is when you’re coming home like this!

As a matter of fact, you know what? I’m

not even going to argue with you about

it anymore! Either you get some help and

stop drinking, or I’m taking the kids and

leaving you!

MARK

Leaving? Girl. don’t be silly! You know

that you ain’t going nowhere. You know

you can’t make it without me!

ELAINE

(firm)

I mean it. Don’t make me do it, Mark.

Elaine heads for the bedroom door.

MARK

Where you going?

ELAINE

I’m going to sleep in the guestroom

until you learn to take me serious.

(leaves the room)

MARK

(chuckles)

She kills me with that stuff.

CUT TO:

INT.--ABANDONED HOUSE--MEANWHILE--DAY

Mark hangs his head in shame.

MARK

I just wanted another chance.Why couldn’t

I have just one more chance?! Why?!

Mark slouched back in the seat and covers his face with his hands, holding in a cry.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

EXT.--OPEN FIELD--DAY

Steven and two other boys are having a snowball fight with four boys. The other team has the advantage as they are throwing more snowballs, and Steven and the boys go into a slight retreat. Mark is walking in their direction from the distance.

STEVE

We gotta think of something fast, because

they’re killing us!

BOY

What can we do? They are bigger than

us, and there’s four of them.

By this time, Mark is close enough to be spotted by Steve.

STEVE

I think that we just got our answer!

BOY 2

(confused)

Him?! Are you serious? That man is

homeless.

STEVE

So?! We are losing. He can help us

out. Besides...That’s My friend.

BOY 3

I don’t know...You actually know him?

STEVE

Yeah...and right now, he’s our only hope!

(calls out)

Mr. Mark!....Mr. Mark! C’mere!

Mark walks over to them.

MARK

Hey Steve. What’s going on?

STEVE

Mr. Mark, we need you.

MARK

For what?

STEVE

(pointing)

See those boys over there?

MARK

(looks)

Yeah. So?

STEVE

So, they are beating us is a snowball fight,

and we need one more person to even

it out.

MARK

(reluctant)

Nah...I couldn’t. I’m forty-one years old.

How am I going to look throwing snowballs

at children?

STEVE

C’mon, Mr. Mark!...Please!

MARK

(walking away)

Sorry, Steve. I just can’t.

As Mark is walking away, a snowball hits him in the back of the head. He freezes in his steps, looks back, and sees the other team of boys laughing and taunting.

MARK (CON’T)

But you know what? In this case I’ll

make an exception!

Mark intensely turns back to join Steve and the boys, and begins throwing snowballs. Mark and the boys gain the advantage as the other team runs of in retreat. Steve and the other boys surround Mark with laughter and excitement.

BOY 2

You are the greatest!

MARK

(walking away)

Yeah...Those boys had it coming!

But listen...I gotta get going.

Steve and the boys stays back in celebration, and the Steve runs after Mark.

STEVE

Mr. Mark! Wait up!

(catches up)

Thank you!

MARK

(laughing)

No problem! And I must admit…

I haven’t had that much fun in a long

time, so thanks to you!

STEVE

At first the other boys didn’t want

me to ask, but I had to ask you.

MARK

Why?

STEVE

Well, because...Sometimes I…..

MARK

(curious)

Sometimes you what?

STEVE

(embarrassed)

I wish you were my daddy.

Mark freezes in his steps.

MARK

Me?! Why would you wish that?

I am just an old homeless man with

nothing to my name.

STEVE

But you do things that my real daddy

has never done. You are there for me

everyday after school, I can talk to you

about everything, and you are a great

snowball fighter!

MARK

(laughs)

I guess those are just my father instincts

that kicks in when I need them.

Mark and Steve are walking again.

STEVE

(surprised)

You have kids?

MARK

Yeah. I have a daughter and a son

about your age.

STEVE

Where are they now?

MARK

They went with their mother earlier

this year. I haven’t seen them since.

STEVE

Are you going to see them for Christmas?

If you do, they are some lucky kids!

MARK

That would be nice, I don’t think that

their mom will allow it.

STEVE

Well, if she doesn’t, will you spend Christmas

with me and my mom?

MARK

(touched)

I couldn’t do that.

They are approaching Rhonda’s apartment.

STEVE

Why not? My mom really likes you.

She talks about you all the time to her

friends, saying what a good man and

role-model that you are to me. She

won’t mind.

MARK

I don’t know, Steve. It just wouldn’t feel

right, but if it’s okay with her, I might.

STEVE

I can ask her right now.

(opens apartment door)

Momma!...Momma, Come here!

Rhonda runs to the door.

RHONDA

(panicking)

What?! Is there a fire?! A gang-war?

Godzilla’s coming?! What’s going on

out here?

STEVE

Nothing. I just wanted to ask you if

Mr. Mark could spend Christmas with

us.

RHONDA

(in disbelief)

What?! Boy, what’s wrong with you?!

Don’t be calling me like that! I thought

that you were getting attacked by a dog

or something! Get in here!

As Steve walks past Rhonda, she slaps him across his head, and Mark laughs.

RHONDA

And what’re you laughing at, Batman?

It ain’t nothing funny!

MARK

You’re hilarious!

RHONDA

(lightens up)

Whatever! Boy done lost his mind!

And what’s this about Christmas?

You too scared to ask for yourself?

MARK

No. But that was Steve’s idea. I didn’t

know that he was going to ask you right

now.

RHONDA

Well, I’mma tell you like this...I don’t

mind you coming by, but I’m struggling

just to feed me and Steve. I may not have

enough food to share, and there would

be no gifts. I don’t even know how I’m

going to get gifts for Steve.

MARK

That’s okay. I am not expecting anything,

but it’s important to Steve, so I don’t mind

dropping by for while.

RHONDA

(impressed smile)

Okay...Okay. You are more than welcome.

Stop by around 12 if you can. That’s when

we are going to sit down to eat.

MARK

(walking away)

You’ve got a date! I will see you on Christmas.

RHONDA

See you then, Batman!

Rhonda watches mark with a impressed smile as he walks down the street, and then she turns to go into the apartment.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INT.--THRIFT STORE--DAY

Mark is browsing through the men’s clothes department, and picks out a pair of Khakis, a heavy peacoat, and a shirt.

CUT TO:

INT.--THE SLEEP INN MOTEL--OFFICE--MORNING

The hotel office is old and cheap, and Mark is checking in with a small duffel bag. The clerk is an older West Indian male with a bad English accent, and is behind the counter behind plexiglass.

MARK

I will need a single room, please.

CLERK

You need how long?

MARK

Three days. I will check out the day

after Christmas.

CLERK

You need smoke or no smoke?

MARK

(confused)

Excuse me?

CLERK

You smoke in room?

MARK

(understands)

Oh no. I don’t smoke. Non-smoking, please.

CLERK

Okay...For three day, you pay $172 dollar.

You pay cash?

MARK

(taking out money)

Yes. That will be cash.

Mark counts out the money and gives it to the clerk. The clerk counts the money, puts it into the cash register, and gives Mark the key to the room.

CLERK

You room 304. Go to stairs end of

hall, and go to other side on third

floor.

MARK

Thank you.

CLERK

You welcome. Enjoy stay.

Mark walks off down the hotel corridor.

CUT TO:

EXT.--THE SLEEP INN MOTEL ROOM--MORNING

Mark opens the door to his room. The room is very small, dirty carpet and sheets, old television set, and the lamp flickers from the lack of proper power.

MARK

Home sweet home….Welp...let’s do this!

Mark walks into the room and closes the door. He puts his bag down by the dresser, and then looks at himself in the mirror and examines himself.

MARK (CONT’D)

You need some work, Buddy!

CUT TO:

INT.--HOTEL ROOM--BATHROOM--MORNING

Mark turns on the water in the tub. The water initially comes out of the faucet in a dark brown color.

MARK

What is that?! Am I taking a tea-bath here?!

The water clears, and Mark turns on the shower.

CUT TO:

Mark is in the shower thoroughly scrubbing his body, and washing his hair.

CUT TO:

INT.--HOTEL ROOM--VANITY AREA--MORNING

Mark’s lower body is wrapped in a towel as he takes out a razor and shaving cream from a small travel bag. He turns on the water, and begins shaving his face.

CUT TO:

INT.--HOTEL ROOM--VANITY AREA--MORNING

Freshly shaven, Mark is running his fingers through his hair, and then begins combing it.

CUT TO:

INT.--HOTEL ROOM--VANITY AREA--MORNING

Mark is brushing his teeth.

CUT TO:

INT.--HOTEL ROOM--VANITY AREA--MORNING

Mark examines himself, smiles, and nods his head, being pleased and impressed.

MARK

God, I’m good looking!

He then grabs the duffel bag and takes out the clothes from the thrift store.

CUT TO:

INT.--HOTEL ROOM--VANITY AREA--MORNING

Mark stands in front of the mirror being clean, dressed, and socially presentable.

MARK

(proudly)

Now I’m ready!

CUT TO:

EXT.--CITY STREET--MORNING

Mark is walking down the street in a heavy trench, skull cap, and sunshades. He walks past two women going in the opposite direction. Still walking, the women turns back to check him out.

WOMAN 1

Nino Brown!

WOMAN 2

He can make me go Duh-Duh-Duh all

night long!

Both women burst into a flirtatious giddy scream, as Mark walks without turning back, smiles with a proud face.

CUT TO:

EXT.--CHURCH---AFTERNOON

Mark is walking up the steps leading to the entrance of the church that gave the free food. As he Enters, PASTOR ELAM (black, 50 years old, tall, slender, bald head, and full beard) is walking in the sanctuary, placing Bibles into the pew compartments. He stops when he sees Mark.

ELAM

May I help you, Sir?

MARK

Uhh...Yes. I want to repent from my

sins and give my life to the Lord.

Elam walks over to Mark and shakes his hand.

ELAM

Absolutely! I am sure that is the best

gift that you could give Jesus for His

Birthday, huh?

MARK

(chuckles)

I guess so.

ELAM

And what has compelled you to make

this step today, Mr…

MARK

Rollins...Mark Rollins.

ELAM

Mr. Rollins.

MARK

Well, I have made some bad decisions

in life, and because of those decisions,

I’ve lost everything….my family, my

job, my home….I’ve just come to realize

that the only way that I can make things

right is to repent and be born again. Only

Jesus can save me.

ELAM

I see. Because of your heart’s desire to

be God’s child, I will be more than happy

to pray with and for you.

(extends hand)

Take my hand Mr. Rollins.

Mark takes Elam’s hand.

ELAM (CONT’D)

Repeat after me….Father God…

MARK

Father God…

ELAM

Forgive me of my sins….

MARK

Forgive me of my sins….

ELAM

I believe that Jesus died and rose on

the third day….

MARK

I believe that Jesus died and rose on

the third day….

ELAM

And I accept Him into my heart, and I

am no longer a sinner….

MARK

And I accept Him into my heart, and I

am no longer a sinner….

ELAM

I am now saved, set free, and accept the gift

of eternal life. Amen.

MARK

I am now saved, set free, and accept the gift

of eternal life. Amen.

ELAM

Do you believe and receive that, Brother?

MARK

Yes. Yes I do.

ELAM

Well, you are now born again.

(embraces Mark)

Welcome to the body of Christ!

MARK

Thank you! Thank you for praying with

me.

ELAM

You are certainly welcome...Would you be

interested in making this your church home?

MARK

Yes. I will join right now.

ELAM

You are already a member! See you Sunday?

Sunday is Christmas, you know?

MARK

(walking out)

I will be here in my new suit that I picked

up from here last week.

ELAM

I will see you on Sunday, Brother! God

bless you!

MARK

God bless you, too.

Mark walks out of the church.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

EXT.--GREG’S HOUSE--FRONT DOOR--AFTERNOON

Mark knocks on the door and waits. Greg opens the door not recognizing Mark.

GREG

Yes?

MARK

Greg...It’s me.

GREG

(confused)

Me who?

MARK

Me….Mark.

GREG

(looks closer)

Me Mark who?

MARK

(frustrated, taking off glasses)

` C’mon, Man! It’s me...Mark.

GREG

(disbelief)

What?! No way! Mark...You look great,

Man!

MARK

Thanks, but can I come in?

GREG

(snaps out of awe)

Oh! Oh yeah! I’m sorry! You just

caught me off guard. Come on in!

Mark goes in, Greg closes the door behind him and follows him.

GREG (CONT’D)

What’s up?

MARK

I came by to ask you for a favor.

GREG

For sure! What’s going on?

MARK

Well, I’m about to call Elaine to see

about going over tomorrow. It will

be Christmas Eve, and we need to talk

about Brian and Leslie.

GREG

Yeah….Yeah. But what do you need

from me?

MARK

If she says yes, I’mma need you to take

me over there, and stay with me, because

this is going to be hard. I mean, I’ve talked

to her every now and then, but I haven’t seen

her face to face since she left, and that’s been

ten months ago.

GREG

(nodding)

I got you, Man. You gonna call her now?

MARK

(heavy sigh)

Yeah.

Mark takes out his cell and dials Elaine’s number.

MARK (CON’T)

(nervous)

It’s ringing.

ELAINE (V.O.)

Hello?

MARK

Elaine, it’s me.

ELAINE (V.O.)

What do you want, Mark?

MARK

Elaine, I need to see you.

ELAINE (V.O.)

See me?! For what?! We are done!

MARK

Listen..I know. I just need the final

chance to talk to you face to face to

try to make this right. I miss you and

the kids!

ELAINE (V.O.)

I don’t know what you could possibly have

to say, but if you are bold enough to call

me, it must be pretty entertaining. You can

come over, but you only have ten minutes

of my time! Do you understand me?!

MARK

Yeah, I understand. That is all the time that

I need. Thank you.

ELAINE (V.O.)

When are you coming?

MARK

I’ll be over tomorrow afternoon around

two-ish?

ELAINE (V.O.)

(nonchalant)

Fine, Mark.

MARK

Thank you, Elaine. I’ll see you then. Bye.

Mark hangs up and turns back to Greg.

MARK (CONT’D)

She said yes, so I want to go over around

two tomorrow, and I am going to need

to get back. She said that I only have ten

minutes. Is that okay with you?

GREG

Yeah. I got you. I’ll be ready to go

when you get here.

Mark is heading for the door as he slaps hands with Greg while giving a quick embrace.

MARK

Thanks, Greg man. I appreciate this.

GREG

No problem. See you tomorrow.

Mark walks out of the door.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

EXT.--ROLLIN’S HOME--FRONT YARD--AFTERNOON

It is snowing heavily, and Greg pulls into the driveway with Mark. Greg puts the car into park and turns to Mark. The car is loaded with the toys and gifts for Brian and Leslie.

GREG

(concerned)

This is it, Mark. You ready for this?

MARK

(extremely nervous)

Wow! I haven’t seen this house in ten

months! She’s keeping it up.

Mark sits there looking at the house in almost a daze.

GREG

You going up there, or are you just

going to sit in the car?

Mark snaps out of his daze and anxiously opens the car door.

MARK

Yeah...yeah….I’ll be right back.

Mark walks up to the door, gathers his courage, and rings the doorbell. Elaine answers, but stands there with no words.

MARK (CONT’D)

Hi.

ELAINE

(nonchalant)

Hi, Mark. Ten minutes.

MARK

Are the kids here?

ELAINE

They’re at Mom’s so you can get the

gifts in without them seeing you.

MARK

Yeah...They are in Greg’s truck. I was going

to get him to help me bring them in if

that’s okay.

ELAINE

Yeah. Bring it in so we can hurry this up.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.--ROLLINS’ HOME--AFTERNOON

The Christmas tree is set up, but the lights on it are not on. All of the gifts are in, and Greg is heading for the door.

GREG

That’s all of it, and so I’ll be waiting

out in the car so you two can talk.

ELAINE

Thank you, Greg. It was nice seeing you.

GREG

You too...Mark? Work it out, Dawg.

(walks out)

ELAINE

So...What is it, Mark? What do you have

to say that is so important?

MARK

Elaine, this has gone on long enough.

I know that I messed up, but I still deserve

to be a father to my children.

ELAINE

Mark, it’s been ten months. They both

have had birthdays. Have you even called,

sent a card, or stopped by to check on them?

MARK

No, I haven’t.

ELAINE

So how do you explain that?

MARK

Umm...You wouldn’t let me. You

told me to stay out of your and the

kid’s lives. Remember?

ELAINE

So you pick that one time to listen to me?!

MARK

(chuckles)

You know what? I deserve that. When

you’re right, you’re right, And so I will

humbly take that one.

ELAINE

(shocked)

What?! You mean, you’re actually agreeing

with me?! You really have my curiosity

up now! What’re you up to?!

MARK

I’m just trying to right my wrongs.

ELAINE

How are you going to do that? I know

that you haven’t changed.

MARK

No. I really have. I am not the same.

ELAINE

What’re you talking about?

MARK

Well, for one, I quit drinking. Second,

I’ve been born again.

ELAINE

(frustrated)

Look...you’re not going to be coming

in here with all of your lies to try to

win me back, Mark.

MARK

But...But I’m not lying! I gave my life

to God!

ELAINE

You know what?! You play too much!

Either you tell the truth, or get out, and

I mean now!

Mark does not move, and Elaine looks at him in disbelief.

ELAINE (CONT’D)

You’re not moving.

MARK

(seriously)

That’s because I’m telling the truth, Elaine.

ELAINE

(curious)

You really are being serious, aren’t you?

MARK

Yes!

ELAINE

So help me to understand why you’re

living in the streets. You have money.

MARK

Because I just did not care about anything

without my family. I messed up! I didn’t

deserve anything...not even a place to live.

I need you and the kids to make my life

complete again. I will be the man that I need

to be get my family back.

ELAINE

(turns away)

I can’t believe this!

MARK

Believe it. And if you don’t, give me

the chance to prove it.

ELAINE

(turns back to Mark)

How do you propose on doing that?

MARK

Let me spend Christmas with y’all

tomorrow.

Elaine stands there shaking her head not knowing what to do.

ELAINE

You leave me so confused. I want to

give you that chance, but I know it’s

only a matter of time before you go back

into your old ways.

MARK

No. I can’t go back. All that I want is

you….Elaine...I still love you. I want

nothing more than to have my family

back. What we had was too good to

throw away. Just give me tomorrow,

and I will not bother you again.

ELAINE

(discombobulated)

Yes, Mark. I’m only doing this because

it’s Christmas, and I don’t want to make

this the first Christmas that you don’t spend

with the kids.

Mark goes over and embraces Elaine.

MARK

Thank you!! Thank you so much!!

ELAINE

I’m scared, Mark.

MARK

Honestly?….I am too.

Mark ends the embrace.

MARK (CONT’D)

Are you going to need help wrapping

these gifts. I am more than willing to help.

ELAINE

Thought you’d never ask. Yes! Help me!

MARK

(smiles)

My pleasure...hold on.

Mark opens the front door and gestures to Greg to go ahead and leave. Greg blows the horn, and backs out of the driveway. Mark goes back into the house and sits down on the sofa.

MARK (CONT’D)

I forgot how comfortable this sofa was.

ELAINE

Well, don’t get too comfortable. You used

to fall asleep on that sofa after work

every night before dinner, and you aren’t

falling asleep in here today! We have gifts

to wrap, so get yourself up, go into the closet

and get the wrapping paper!

MARK

(laughs)

Yes, Ma’am!

Mark gets up, gets the paper and scissors from the living room closet, grabs a few gifts, returns to the sofa, and begins wrapping. As he is wrapping, he chuckles.

ELAINE

What’s funny?

MARK

Nothing. It’s just that us sitting here alone

On Christmas Eve wrapping gifts reminds

me of our first Christmas together.

ELAINE

You mean the Christmas when you gave

me fishing poles, a bowling ball, and a power-drill?

MARK

(laughs harder)

Wait a minute now! You gave me Tupperware!

ELAINE

Yeah I did, but you used the Tupperware

for cereal bowls, but I have yet to use that

power-drill, and that was twelve years ago!

MARK

Touche..touche. So I’ll admit, I brought

those gifts for you for me!

ELAINE

So the truth finally comes out!

MARK

Guilty as charged!

ELAINE

(laughs)

You have not changed a bit! You always

could make me laugh.

MARK

Yeah, yeah, yeah...But can I ask you

something else?

ELAINE

Sure.

MARK

Do you mind if I stay here tonight so

I can be here when the kids wake up?

ELAINE

(sympathetic)

Mark…..I…..

MARK

Elaine, please….I will sleep in the

guest room if I have to.

ELAINE

(gives in)

Fine...Fine. Guest room. I’ll just make

adjustments to make room for you. I really

wasn’t expecting this.

MARK

Great! I will leave after we wrap the

gifts and come back around ten tonight.

ELAINE

Sounds good. Let’s get these gifts wrapped…

And you know, when I pick the kids up

later on, I will pick up something for you too.

MARK

Elaine, you don’t have to do that.

ELAINE

No Mark. I want to. For the first time

in ten months, I can see that you are

really trying. I appreciate that, and I

want to show it.

Mark and Elaine continues to wrap the gifts.

ELAINE (CONT’D)

Hand me the tape.

Mark gives Elaine the tape and they continue to wrap.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INT.--ROLLINS’ HOME--BEDROOM--MORNING

Elaine is asleep in the bed alone when there is knocking on the door. She turns over to wake up.

ELAINE

What is it?

BRIAN AND LESLIE (V.O.)

Merry Christmas, Mommy!

ELAINE

Merry Christmas. I’ll be out in a few

minutes. You guys wait for me in the

living room.

The kids can be heard running off to the living room, and Elaine gets out of the bed, puts on a housecoat, goes into the bathroom in the bedroom to wash her face.

CUT TO:

INT.--ROLLINS HOME--LIVING ROOM--MINUTES LATER--DAY

Elaine come out of her bedroom fully dressed and goes into the living room. The Christmas tree is lit, and Brian and Leslie are excitedly sitting on the sofa.

ELAINE

Okay, you guys. We are not opening any

gifts yet.

BRIAN

Aw, Mommy! Why not?! We’ve been

waiting.

ELAINE

Before we open the gifts, you need to read

the tags to see who they are from, and

when you see, I want you to say who it’s

from really loud, Okay?

BRIAN

This one is from MOMMY!

LESLIE

This one is from MOMMY!

BRIAN

This one is from….DADDY!

When Brain says daddy, Mark sneaks out of the guestroom and unnoticeably stands behind him and Leslie.

ELAINE

And who is your gift from, Leslie?

LESLIE

It’s from…..DADDY!

MARK

You called?

Brian and Leslie turns to see Mark and screams in excitement.

BRIAN AND LESLIE

DADDY!

Both Brian and Leslie run into Mark’s open arms, and he embraces them both at the same time.

MARK

I’ve missed y’all so much! I love you!

LESLIE

I love you too, Daddy!

MARK

Oh, you do, do ya?

LESLIE

Yes!

MARK

Well, I have something for you in

my pocket. Do you want it now?

LESLIE

Yes.

MARK

Okay.

Mark reaches into his pocket and pulls nothing out.

MARK (CONT’D)

Here it is!

Mark tickles both Brian and Leslie, as Elaine stands watching with joy.

MARK (CONT’D)

Okay...That’s enough! Let’s open these

gifts and have a good time today!

Brian and Leslie run to the gifts and begins ripping the wrapping paper.

BRIAN

OOOOO!! A remote controlled car.

LESLIE

I got an Easy Bake oven! I’m going to

bake Mommy and Daddy a big cake!

Brian begins frantically jumping up and down and screaming.

ELAINE

What’s the matter with you?

BRIAN

Daddy brought me a Playstation 5 with

the new Madden! Daddy, can you hook

this up now? I can’t wait to play!

MARK

I will hook it up after dinner, and beat

you in a few games.

BRIAN

You can’t beat me! I’m the best!

MARK

We will see. Go on and open the rest

of your gifts.

Brian and Leslie continue to open more gifts.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.--ROLLINS’ HOME--DINING ROOM--AFTERNOON

The family is sitting at the table which is covered with the traditional Christmas meal entrees.

MARK

Mmm-MMM...This food looks good! I

haven’t had a meal like this in so long

that I don’t even want to eat it. I just

want to look at it!

ELAINE

You’d better eat this food! I’ve spent

over fifteen hours cooking it!

Everyone laughs, as Mark extends his hands to his sides.

MARK

You win! Let’s bless this food and eat!

Everyone holds hands and bow their heads.

MARK (CONT’D)

Dear Lord, we are thankful for the food

that we are about to receive, and we ask

that you You will be in the midst of us,

bless us, and bring us closer together as

a family as we enjoy one another in love.

we ask this blessing in Jesus’ name, Amen.

EVERYONE

Amen.

Elaine stares at Mark in awe.

MARK

What? Why are you staring at me?

ELAINE

You never cease to amaze me, Mark.

That was the first time that you’ve ever

led the family in prayer.

MARK

Well, it’s like I’ve told you...It’s time

for me to step up and be the man that

my family needs.

ELAINE

(falling for Mark)

I am really impressed. I love it!

Mark is getting up from the table, and walking into the living room.

ELAINE

Where you going?!

MARK

Well, we are about to eat, and we’re

not going to break the tradition!

ELAINE

No you didn’t!

MARK

Yes I did!

Mark puts a CD into the player.

MARK (CONT’D)

Elaine? Pass the peas like we used to

say!

ELAINE

Pass the peas like we used to say!

BRIAN

Pass the peas like we used to say!

LESLIE

Pass the peas like we used to say!

Mark starts the CD, and ‘Pass The Peas’ by the J.B.’s play as Mark returns to the table, and the family is happily passing the entrees to one another.

As the music continues, the family is having fun eating.

Mark points away from the table, and Elaine turns to look in that direction. When she does, Mark steals a yam from her plate. Elaine turns back to catch him, gets playfully angry, gets some ice from the dish on the table, and puts it down Marks’ shirt. Mark frantically jumps up out of his seat to get the ice out as the family erupts with laughter.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.--ROLLINS’ HOME LIVING ROOM--LATER--EVENING

Elaine and Leslie are mixing ingredients into a bowl from the Easy Bake oven as Mark and Brian are totally engaged in a game of Madden on the Playstation 5.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.--ROLLINS’ HOME LIVING ROOM--LATER--EVENING

Brian and Leslie are asleep on the floor, and Mark and Elaine are cuddled together on the sofa.

ELAINE

So, are you ready for your gift?

MARK

Sure.

Elaine gets up from the sofa and walks over to the window and opens the drapes to heavy falling snow.

ELAINE

It’s over here. Come here and look.

Mark goes over to the window, and looks out of it.

MARK

What is it? I don’t see anything but snow.

ELAINE

(laughs)

You’re looking in the wrong place. Look up.

Mark looks up to see mistletoe hanging over the window. His breath is taken away as he gazes at Elaine.

ELAINE

Merry Christmas.

MARK

Elaine, why are you playing with me

like that?

ELAINE

I am not playing, Mark. Like I’ve said,

I see the real change in you, and you

are back to the man that I fell in love with.

Now shut up and just kiss me!

Mark grasps Elaine’s body, pulling her in close and kissing her passionately.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INT.--ROLLINS’ HOME--BEDROOM--MORNING

Fully dressed, Mark and Elaine are asleep in the spoon position. Mark awakens and begins to gently caress Elaine’s body. Elaine awakens and turns to Mark. They engage in a small kiss.

MARK

Good morning, Beautiful.

ELAINE

Good morning, Handsome. Merry Christmas.

MARK

(confused)

Merry Christmas?! Christmas was yesterday!

ELAINE

Well, Christmas isn’t over yet.

MARK

What do you mean?

ELAINE

Mark. I want you to come back home.

MARK

(sits up straight)

Wait….What?! Are you serious?

ELAINE

Yeah. You;ve more than proven that

you are a new man. You have nothing

else to prove. It’s been a long time since

I’ve said this, and thought that I would

never say it to you again, but Mark…

I love you. I love you so much.

Elaine initiates a passionate kiss, and they are getting into the moment, however, the mood is interrupted by a slight knock on the door.

BRIAN (V.O.)

Mommy?

Both Elaine and mark try to ignore Brian by continuing to kiss, but he knocks more intensely.

ELAINE

(bothered)

What, Brian?!

BRIAN (V.O.)

When are you coming out? We’re hungry!

ELAINE

I’ll be out in a minute! Go watch TV!

BRIAN

Okay!

ELAINE

(deep sigh)

Mark, we can pick this up later.

MARK

(desperately kissing Elaine’s neck)

Aw, come on, Baby! Those crumb-snatchers

can be hungry for another ten minutes!

ELAINE

(weak)

Mark...I can’t. My babies are hungry. I’ve

got to feed them. Besides, I haven’t had a

shower yet, but I’ll make it up to you. I promise.

Mark rolls over onto his back in disappointment.

MARK

Alright....When are we going to tell

the kids?

ELAINE

(getting up)

We can tell them during breakfast.What

do you want to eat?

MARK

How about those pancakes that you used

to make? I miss those.

ELAINE

Alright. I guess that I can hook you up.

(walks out of the room)

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.--ROLLINS’ HOME--DINING ROOM--MORNING

Mark and the kids are sitting at the table as Elaine brings a platter of pancakes to the table. She then goes to the refrigerator and takes out some orange juice and begins pouring it into the kids’ glasses.

BRIAN

Can I sit next to you, Daddy?

MARK

(excited)

Yeah! Come on! You can sit next to me

anytime so that you can start learning

to be the head of your house as a man!

Brian sits next to Mark with a smile.

BRIAN

Daddy, I’m glad that you spent Christmas

with us! I wish that you you could stay

everyday.

MARK

(looks at Elaine)

Well Son...That’s something that me and

your mom needs to talk to you kids about.

LESLIE

Are we in trouble? We didn’t mean to eat

all of that candy.

MARK

(laughs)

No, Baby. You are not in trouble. We just want

to tell you that Daddy’s coming home to stay.

BRIAN

You’re going to stay with us from now on?!

MARK

Yes. Daddy is home, and I am never

leaving you all again.

KIDS

YAAAAY!!!

BRIAN

When are you going to move back in?!

MARK

Today. I just need to take care of somethings

and I will be back before it’s dark outside.

LESLIE

Daddy, Go now so you can hurry up and

come back!

MARK

How’d you get to be so smart?! I’m going

to do that just because you told me to.

Mark gets up from the table, grabs his coat, and heads for the door.

MARK

Kids, come and give me a hug.

Brian and Leslie goes over to Mark and he hugs them both. Mark takes two one hundred dollar bills out of his pocket and gives one to Brian and one to Leslie.

MARK (CONT’D)

I want you to take this in your rooms,

put it in a safe place where no one can

find it, and don’t spend it, and you will

always have money.

LESLIE

Thank you, Daddy.

MARK

You’re welcome.

BRIAN

Thank you, Daddy.

MARK

You’re welcome. Now go on and take

it to your rooms and then come back

and eat your breakfast.

Brian and Leslie head for their rooms, and Elaine goes over to Mark. She kisses him passionately.

ELAINE

Your daughter is right. Hurry back.

MARK

I will. I’ll be right back.

Mark turns to the door, but stops, turns back and goes over to the table and stuffs an entire pancake in his mouth.

MARK

Mmmm...I miss these things!

Elaine laughs as Mark walks back to the door, kisses her again, and then walks out of the house, and Elaine closes the door.

CUT TO:

INT.--RANDOLPH HOTEL--MARK’S ROOM--MORNING

In the same second that Elaine closes the door, Mark’s eyes pop open, and he is in the bed laying on his back. He looks around in confusion.

MARK

Elaine?....Brian?....Leslie?

Mark then closes his eyes in a melancholy state as he realizes that he was only dreaming. He lays there for a few seconds before he regains his senses, and then hastily gets out of the bed.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. --ROLLINS’ HOME--DAY

The house has a wheelchair ramp attached to the porch, and Mark walks up to the door and rings the bell. Seconds later Elaine opens the door, confined to a wheelchair, and Mark gasps.

MARK

(speechless)

Elaine….I….

ELAINE

(cuts him short)

Save it, Mark. I don’t want to talk about it.

MARK

What can I do? I’ll do anything to help.

ELAINE

Like what? Act like Jesus and heal

my body? I don’t think that is possible.

MARK

I know that, but I would be less than

a man if I didn’t offer you some kind

of help.

ELAINE

I’ve made it for ten months without you,

and I can make it without you now.

Something that you said that I wouldn’t

be able to do. Remember that?

MARK

Elaine, I was a fool! I didn’t mean that.

I was half-drunk. People say stupid things

when they are angry and drunk.

(bundles in his coat)

Look...It’s freezing out here. Can I come in

so that we can talk?

ELAINE

You are doing just fine out there. You can take it.

MARK

You are not being fair.

ELAINE

Look at me, Mark! Were you being fair when

you did this to me?

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK:

EXT.--CHICAGO CITY STREET--AFTERNOON

A red Toyota Prius containing undistinguished passengers waits at the red light. The light turns green and the car proceeds. As it crosses the intersection, Mark’s truck skids and slides, crashing into the Prius and overturning it. Traffic begins to halt as a crowd begins to gather around the accident. Mark gets out of his truck, rushes to the car, and frantically tries to open the door.

MARK

(frantic)

NO! God, no!! No, no, no!!

CUT TO:

EXT.--CITY STREET--MINUTES LATER--DAY

Elaine is laying on a stretcher with tubes and an oxygen mask as the paramedics are rolling her into an ambulance. Mark is walking alongside the stretcher, wailing and holding Elaine’s hand.

MEDIC

Sir, I assure you that we are going to

take good care of her, and will get her

back on her feet in no time.

MARK

I’m sorry!! Elaine, I’m so sorry! Don’t

do this! I love you!! Forgive me!

ELAINE

(utters)

The kids were in the car, Mark.

The paramedics roll her into the ambulance, gets in and closes the doors, and the ambulance pulls of with blaring sirens.

CUT TO:

PRESENT

EXT.--ROLLINS’ HOME--DAY

ELAINE

Was that fair, Mark? I will spend the

rest of my life in this wheelchair because

you couldn’t put the glass down.

MARK

I can’t apologize enough, but I am sorry.

ELAINE

(fed up)

Why did you even come here, Mark?!

MARK

Because I love you! I love my children!

Why does this have to be the first Christmas

that we don’t spend together?

ELAINE

` Again...take a good look at me! You call

this love?! And how could you ever explain

to Brian and Leslie that you did this to us?!

MARK

(shamefully)

I can’t.

ELAINE

(tearful)

That’s right, Mark...You can’t! And

because of this...You will never see

them again! You don’t deserve to!

MARK

(desperate)

What is it, Elaine? You want me to beg

you?! I will! Please Elaine! You know

that I would do anything to spend Christmas

with the kids!

ELAINE

(emotion of stone)

You know? So would I, Mark. I don’t

want or need anything from you.

Elaine closes the door, and Mark stands there in hurt and shame, and then goes back and gets into Greg’s truck.

GREG

Didn’t go to well, huh?

MARK

No. She can’t find it in herself to forgive

me...I just don’t know what I’m going

to do.

GREG

I’m sorry, Man.

MARK

It’s alright. But the favor isn’t over. I

need you one more time...tonight.

GREG

(turns to Mark)

What is it?

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INT.--STEPHANIE’S APARTMENT--LIVING ROOM--MORNING

There is a big Christmas tree lit and carols playing on the radio. Larisha sleepily walks out of her room rubbing her eyes. When she stops and opens her eyes, the living room is filled with toys and new clothes. Larisha screams and runs to Stephanie’s bedroom door.

LARISHA

(knocking)

Mommy! Mommy! Santa Claus got my

letter! Come out here and see!

Stephanie comes out of her room in a housecoat.

STEPHANIE

(excited)

He did?! What did you get?! Let’s see!

The two run into the living room, and Larisha begins looking through the toys. She sees the Boxy Girls collection and burst into excitement.

LARISHA

Mommy! Santa Claus brought my

Boxy Girls just like I asked!

STEPHANIE

Wow!! That is nice! Just what you wanted!

Larisha begins to hastily open the box as Stephanie looks on with joy. As she is watching, there is a knock on the door. Stephanie goes to open it to find Mark there wearing the suit from the church.

MARK

Hi, Stephanie. Just stopped by to check

up on you. Everything’s good? Does your

daughter like her gifts?

Stephanie steps out into the corridor and closes the door behind her.

STEPHANIE

(hugs Mark)

Yes! She loves them!...Mark, I just want

to thank you for all that you’ve done. From

helping me with my groceries the first day

that we’ve met, to making my baby the happiest

little girl on Christmas! What do I owe you?

MARK

You don’t owe me anything. I have done

my job. But I do have something for you,

too.

Mark goes into his pocket, takes out a rectangular-shaped wrapped box, and gives it to Stephanie with a warm smile.

MARK (CONT’D)

Here. This is for you, but don’t open it

(MORE)

MARK (CONT’D)

until you go back in.

(turns to walk)

You take care.

STEPHANIE

You too, Mark.

Mark begins walking away.

STEPHANIE (CONT’D)

Mark wait….

Stephanie goes over to Mark, hugs him, and kisses him on the cheek.

STEPHANIE (CONT’D)

Thank you again.

MARK

You’re welcome.

Mark leaves and Stephanie goes back inside of the apartment. She closes the door and leans her back on it being nervous about the gift. She opens it to find a box containing $10,000 dollars and a note that reads, “Take care of your daughter. She is Precious. Love Mark.” Stephanie breaks into a cry as she holds the money and watches Larisha happily play with her dolls.

STEPHANIE

God, I did ask You for help, and you

gave it to me in the strangest way….

from a homeless man off of the street.

Thank You for the help!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.--CHURCH--MORNING

Pastor Elam is dressed in his Clergy clothing, the church is packed with members, and Mark sits and enjoys the message.

ELAM

(very intense preaching)

Turn with me if you will to the book of Matthew

Veres twenty through twenty-three, where

Brother Joseph did not have the faith to believe

that his wife who he never touched intimately

was having a child who was going to save the world!

That just did not seem possible, but the Word says,

But while he thought on these things, behold,

the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a

dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear

not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which

is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.And she

shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name

Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which

Was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying, Behold,

a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son,

and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being

interpreted is, God with us! Lift your voices and tell the

Lord thank you!

The congregation erupts with praise, and Mark closes his eyes and lifts his hands in thanks. He then opens his eyes, and to see Pastor Elam looking at him with a warm smile and nodding his head. Mark returns the same gesture.

DISSOLVE TO:

RHONDA’S APARTMENT--MORNING

Rhonda and Steve are sitting on the sofa as Steve is crying in her arms.

RHONDA

I’m sorry that I couldn’t afford nothing

for you for Christmas, but try to understand

that it’s been hard since your daddy’s been

locked up. I’ve been doing my best. You

know that, right?

STEVE

Yes Ma’am.

RHONDA

It will get better. I love you.

STEVE

I love you, too.

As they sit there, there is a knock on the door. Rhonda goes to open it, and Mark stands there with a Santa hat on and carrying a huge box of gifts.

MARK

Ho Ho Ho! Merry Christmas!

STEVE

Mr. Mark!

Steve runs over to Mark and embrace him.

MARK

Hi Steve! I told you that I’d be here!

RHONDA

I’m glad you came! Come on in!

Mark comes in, puts the box down on the floor, and pulls out a new pair of Jordans.

MARK

These are for you, Young Man. Those

kids won’t be teasing you anymore.

STEVE

OOOHH!! The new Jordans! Thank you,

Mr. Mark!

MARK

You’re welcome. Go ahead and see what

else is in the box for you.

Steve excitedly goes through the box as Rhonda and Mark walk to the middle of the room.

RHONDA

Mark, I don’t know where you came

from or how you’ve come to find my

son, but you have been more than a

friend to him...you’ve been more like

a father, and I just want to say thank

you from the bottom of my heart.

MARK

No need to thank me. I’ve come to

love Steve as if he were my own son,

and if there’s anything that you ever

need, please don’t hesitate to call me.

And speaking of calling me...Did you

just call me Mark?

RHONDA

(laughs)

I don’t know. Did I?

MARK

I think that you did!

RHONDA

Sorry, Batman! Going around the city

fighting crime!

They both laugh.

RHONDA

I’m about to finish up dinner, so

if you want to, you can spend a

little time with Steve.

MARK

Sounds good. I’ll do that.

Rhonda goes into the kitchen and Mark is walking over towards Steve.

MARK

So Steve...What’ve we got here?

STEVE

You got me a remote controlled Ferrari!

MARK

And I’ve already charged it up. Let’s see

how fast this baby can go!

Steve put the car on the floor, and begins steering it around in the living room.

CUT TO:

INT.--RHONDA’S APARTMENT--KITCHEN--MEANWHILE--DAY

MARK (V.O.)

Hey...Slow it down! Watch out for that…

(crashing glass heard)

Vase!

RHONDA

Hey!! I’mma come out there and smack

the black off of both of y’all!...Tearing up

my house!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.--RHONDA’S APARTMENT--DINING AREA--LATER--AFTERNOON

Rhonda, Steve, and Mark are sitting at the table getting ready to eat. On the table is fried chicken legs, Collards, rice, and cornbread.

RHONDA

Well, it ain’t much, but we’re glad to

share it with you.

MARK

(grateful)

This is just fine. It looks delicious.

RHONDA

Thank you…..Steve, go in the ‘frigerator

and get the Kool-Aid.

STEVE

Okay.

Steve goes into the kitchen and opens the refrigerator.

STEVE (CONT’D)

Momma, there’s two pitcher’s in here!

Which one do you want the grape or

the red?

RHONDA (V.O.)

Boy, just pick one!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.--RHONDA’S APARTMENT--LIVING ROOM--EVENING

Mark is putting on his coat as he is heading for the door.

MARK

I’d better get going. I’ve got the itis,

and if I stay longer, I’mma fall asleep.

RHONDA

So what if you do? I don’t care.

MARK

I appreciate it, but no thank you. I

would feel like I’m in the way. Besides,

I’m paying for a hotel room.

RHONDA

Oh. Okay. Well, you can stop by anytime.

You’re always welcome.

MARK

Thank you. By the way...This is for you.

Mark goes into his pocket and gives Rhonda an envelope. Rhonda opens it to find $10,000 dollars in a stack of one hundred dollar bills.

RHONDA

What is this?!

MARK

That’s 10,000 dollars.

RHONDA

(fidgety)

Oh Lord! I think I’mma bout to pee on

myself!

Rhonda frantically hugs Mark and then runs into the bathroom and begins screaming hysterically. She is screaming the entire time that Steve and Mark is talking.

STEVE

(hugs Mark)

Bye, Mr. Mark. Thank you for everything.

MARK

You got it.

STEVE

I still wish that you were my daddy.

I sure love you like one.

MARK

(touched)

I love you, too. I’ll see y’all later.

Mark leaves the house.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.--CITY STREET--MINUTES LATER--EVENING

Mark is walking along and reaches the curb to cross the street. Traffic is light, but difficult to cross. Mark sees a car coming from the distance, and decides to try to run across. As he is crossing, he slips on a patch of ice and falls to to ground. The car tries to stop by slamming on the brakes, however, the car skids, slides, and hits Mark. When the car comes to a complete stop, the driver gets out to aid Mark.

DRIVER

(frantic)

Sir! I am so sorry! I tried to stop!

MARK

I know. I slipped and fell. It wasn’t your

fault.

DRIVER

(takes out his phone)

Hello! I need an ambulance on the corner

of State Street and North Avenue! A man

has been hit by a car….Yes, I am here

with him. I was the driver!

Mark is blanking out.

DRIVER

Stay with me! Help is on the way!

MARK

(weak)

I’m going to be okay. I’ll make it. I

gotta be there with my kids.

The sounds of the ambulance sirens are heard in the distance.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK:

INT.--ROLLIN’S HOME--BEDROOM--NIGHT

Mark is groggy from too much drinking as he sits on the edge of the bed.

ELAINE

Mark, are you even listening to me?! Your

drinking is getting totally out of control, and

you need to stop!

MARK

(careless)

Whatever. It ain’t nothing wrong with

me having a few drinks after work.

ELAINE

It is when you’re coming home like this!

As a matter of fact, you know what? I’m

not even going to argue with you about

it anymore! Either you get some help and

stop drinking, or I am taking the kids and

leaving you!

CUT TO:

PRESENT

EXT.--CITY STREET--EVENING

The driver is still assisting Mark as a crowd begins to gather with some watching, some recording on their phones, and others going into a panic, as Mark is blanking out again.

DRIVER

Come on! Please! Just a few more minutes.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK:

INT.--ABANDONED HOUSE--LIVING ROOM--DAY

Mark is pacing the floor as he takes out his cell phone and dials Elaine’s number. The phone display is seen this time showing Mark hitting ‘End Call’ instead of send, and he imagines talking to Elaine.

MARK

Hey Elaine. It’s me….

(desperate)

No wait! Don’t hang up! Please! I

just need to talk to you for a minute!...

about the kids. I was hoping that you’ll

let me buy them gifts….What do you

mean by “why”?! I know that I’ve messed

things up and have been a terrible father,

and I just need to do my best to make things

right! Can I do that?!

(sincerely)

Elaine….It would Mean so much to me…

Thank you.

CUT TO:

PRESENT

EXT.--CITY STREET--EVENING

The medics have arrived and has Mark on a stretcher as they are rolling him into the ambulance.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK:

EXT.--ROLLINS’ HOME--FRONT PORCH--DAY

Mark is having the conversation with Elaine concerning the situation.

MARK

(desperate)

What is it, Elaine? You want me to beg

(MORE)

MARK (CONT’D)

you?! I will! Please Elaine! You know

that I would do anything to spend Christmas

with the kids!

ELAINE

(emotion of stone)

You know? So would I, Mark. I

don’t want or need anything from you.

CUT TO:

PRESENT

The ambulance is transporting Mark to the hospital as the medics are trying to revive him.

MEDIC

We’re losing him! Come on! Stay with us!

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK:

EXT.--CITY STREET--DAY

The medics are rolling Elaine into the ambulance.

ELAINE

(utters)

The kids were in the car, Mark.

The paramedics roll her into the ambulance, gets in and closes the doors, and the ambulance pulls of with blaring sirens. Mark runs over to the car to see about Brian and Leslie. Police officers and medics surround the car and stops Mark.

OFFICER

I’m sorry, Sir. Please step back. We

can’t let you past this point.

MARK

Those are my kids!

Mark pushes through the officers to see Brian’s and Leslie’s bodies being covered. Mark runs over to the bodies, drops to his knees, and wails horrendously.

MARK

NOOOOO! These are my kids!!

Somebody help me!! No!!! NO!!

Officers come over to try to console Mark, however, he goes into a meltdown.

CUT TO:

PRESENT

INT.--AMBULANCE--EVENING

The medics are still trying to revive Mark, but he takes a deep breath, his breathing stops, his eyes roll to the back of his head, and everything fades to a bright and glowing white light.

BRIAN AND LESLIE (V.O.)

Merry Christmas, Daddy!

MARK

Merry Christmas! Daddy’s here, and

I’m here to stay!

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

EXT.--GRAVESITE--DAY

A group of people are surrounding Mark;s casket, including Elaine, Greg, Rhonda and Steve, and Stephanie and Larisha. Who are very nicely dressed.

ELAM

The Bible reads from Genesis 3:19, “In

the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,

till thou return unto the ground; for out of it

wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto

dust shalt thou return.” Ashes to ashes, dust

to dust. May the Lord receive his servant

Mark Joseph Rollins into his bosom as we

commit his body back to the ground.

As the body is being lowered, Steve breaks into a cry as Rhonda comforts him.

RHONDA

It’s alright, Son...It’s alright.

Stephanie puts her hand on Elaine’s shoulder.

STEPHANIE

I am so sorry, Mrs. Rollins.

ELAINE

Thank you. I will be okay. I just keep

thinking that this is for the better. He

got his Christmas wish...To spend it

with his children, and I find peace knowing

that they all are happy now.

Elaine and the rest of the family and friends are placing long-stem roses on the tombstone and dispersing. On the tombstone is a picture of Mark, Brian, and Leslie together, smiling and happy.

FADE TO BLACK

END

ROLL CREDITS