

ONCE UPON A CHRISTMAS PAST
1st 20 Pages

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FADE IN:

EXT. DOWNTOWN AREA - DAY

The streets and stores all decorated for Christmas. People dressed for the cold walk to and fro. Reminds one of downtown Stars Hollow from Gilmore Girls. A banner across main street reads FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS DEC 1 TO 24.

CLAIRE BORNE (33) and her son SAMUEL (8) walk along the sidewalk. He's bundled up in a coat and scarf and in awe of the Christmas décor. With them are her parents ROBERT and DANIELLE (early 60s).

SAMUEL

They really got things decked out for Christmas, mom. Don't remember this from last time.

CLAIRE

You were only four then.

DANIELLE

Last few years people really been wanting to get back to normal.

ROBERT

And there isn't nothing as normal as a good o'l fashion Christmas.

SAMUEL

For reals gramps. Isn't that right, mom?

She seems disinterested in the holiday surroundings as Samuel takes in the store front decorations.

CLAIRE

(painted smile)

Sure. Sure is. I'm glad you like it.

SAMUEL

You gonna make cherry pie again too, gramps?

ROBERT

You bet, kid. A great big special one!

SAMUEL

Hear that mom?

CLAIRE

Yep. Nice of your grandpa to do that.

DANIELLE

And this year I made sure I got a good ham early.

CLAIRE

Yeah. Don't want a repeat of the last visit. Christmas Eve- The Quest for Ham.

They come upon the main square.

SAMUEL

Wow mom! Look at that big tree!

LARGE DECORATED TREE. FOUNTAIN adjacent. People mill about in the square.

CLAIRE

It's nice son.

Sam looks at her. She's looking elsewhere.

SAMUEL

Can we go see it?

ROBERT

Why don't I take him over.

SAMUEL

Please, mom.

CLAIRE

Okay. But you stay with grandpa? We'll be right behind you.

SAMUEL

You bet, mom.

Robert grabs his and and they head towards the square.

Claire and Danielle follow as Robert and Samuel race ahead.

DANIELLE

Need to pick up some stocking stuffers for Sammy.

CLAIRE

You two spoil him every Christmas. More so when we actually visit.

DANIELLE

That's what grandparents do. Last time he was here his dad was still-

CLAIRE

I appreciate it mom. I really do.

For a few moments, Claire looks happy.

DANIELLE

Least we can do for our kid. And only grandchild.

CLAIRE

Yeah. Don't expect you'll see any more.

Danielle wraps her arm around Claire's

DANIELLE

I know there was a time when I saw you with a nice house, several kids, great career.

CLAIRE

One out of three ain't bad. But I may have a promotion coming up so... you can add nice house. Or reasonably priced condo.

DANIELLE

Regardless, your dad and I wouldn't have it any other way than what we have today.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

LYNDON HUANG (33), a sharp dressed man, stands near some vendors. He looks around as though mildly bored.

LUCINDA HUANG (32), his sister, bob haircut, tattoos around each wrist, various piercings, pops out through the crowd.

Lyndon eyes her.

LYNDON

Thought you were going to get some lattes?

LUCINDA

From that national chain?

STARBUCKS LOOKING COFFEE SHOP. Looks busy.

LUCINDA (CONT'D)

I don't contribute to corporate greed.

LYNDON

Well, are there any others that meet your high standard of fairness?

LUCINDA

Shockingly no. Guess they got squeezed out.

He turns away in disgust.

LUCINDA (CONT'D)

Isn't that how the holiday's works nowadays? Highest bidder? Biggest bucks? Bad enough they start bilking people of their holiday cash in the middle of October.

LYNDON

News flash. Been that way for a while. And we're still getting along just fine.

LUCINDA

Yeah. Keep those stockholders happy. Surprised some of these local vendors can even get a foot--

LYNDON

Your jab at my profession is noted. Nothing wrong with creating a financial security blanket or stable future for those willing to take risk.

LUCINDA

Really? And you're how close to that million you were gonna make by 30?

LYNDON

About as close as you are to saving the world. Thanks for the reminder.

Anger fills their faces. They stare at each other.

Both relent. Shamefaced, they turn and scan the crowd.

LYNDON (CONT'D)

This is the first time we've both been here for Christmas in years. So why don't we try and make the best of it. For mom and dad.

LUCINDA

Guess we own them that much.

LYNDON

Where are they anyway?

Lucinda looks around.

LUCINDA

Last I saw--

Her eyes go wide and mouth agape.

Their parents LEE and ANN (early 60s) approach. Mile wide smiles. Oozing holiday cheer. Each wears an oversized Santa hat. Mom holds up one in each hand.

Lyndon sees them. Lucinda looks as though she wants to run away.

LYNDON

Oh dear God.

LEE

Look what we got for you!

Lyndon and Lucinda paint on smiles that fool no one. Except their parents.

ANN

Here you go! One for each of you!

Lyndon takes his with concealed reluctance. Lucinda crosses her arms and shakes her head ever so gently.

Lyndon motions for Lucinda to take hers. She scowls.

LEE

It'll be like old times.

She relents and takes it. Lyndon and her put theirs on.

ANN

Don't you look both look so cute.

LEE

I still remember how you two used to camp out in front of the Christmas tree. Wait for St. Nick to show up.

LUCINDA

Before I got woke.

She gets a scowl from Lyndon.

ANN

I would have those days again.

Lyndon and Lucinda paint on smiles. Their Santa hats just don't look right on them.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Samuel emerges through the crowd with Robert in tow. Points at the tree.

SAMUEL

Wow Grandpa!

ROBERT

She's a beauty. The City Council went the whole nine yards this year!

SAMUEL

I wish ours was that big.

Robert lets out a hardy laugh. Samuel looks around.

RAISED STAGE. BANNER ACROSS TOP reads:

A Christmas Carol. Christmas Eve 5 pm. Performed by the Graduating Class of...

Below this:

Followed by Santa Clause!

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Look grandpa, there's gonna be a play then Santa!

Robert looks over as Samuel goes on. His smile drops away just a bit.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

We gonna go see it all?

ROBERT
We'll a... we'll see what your mom
says.

Samuel looks confused.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Ann leads Lyndon, Lucinda and Lee through the crowd towards
the tree.

ANN
...and the City put up a big tree
this year.

LEE
Much better than years past. A
great big pine.

ANN
So that's why we decided to get a
real tree this year too.

LUCINDA
And reduce our forests--

LYNDON
(scowling at Lucinda)
It looks real great, mom.

The group emerges onto the square.

Ann spots Robert.

ANN
Bob!

Robert and Samuel turn.

ROBERT
Ann! Lee!

Ann and Lee walk up. Lyndon and Lucinda follow. Samuel looks
on.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Merry Christmas!

Claire and Danielle appear.

CLAIRE
There you guys are--

She stops dead. Eyes grow wide.

Lyndon and Lucinda turn to her. Lucinda pulls off her Santa hat. Claire puts on a half-hearted smile.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Lyn... Lucy. Hey.

LYNDON
Claire.

LUCINDA
Hey.

She gives Claire a hug.

Samuel watches. Despite her feigned smile his mother doesn't look all that happy.

CLAIRE
Wow. How... unexpected. Been a...
while.

LYNDON
Too long.

Gives her a hug also.

Samuel looks on.

CLAIRE
Oh. And this little guy here is
Samuel. My son.

LEE
Oh! Merry Christmas little man!

SAMUEL
Merry Christmas.

ANN
(to Claire)
Such a cute kid. We don't have any
grandkids yet.

Looks at Lyndon and Lucinda. Both look embarrassed.

Samuel goes to Claire.

SAMUEL
There's gonna be a play here
tomorrow on Christmas Eve then
Santa. Can we go?

Everyone looks over at the stage and banners.

Claire, Lucinda and Lyndon give each other awkward stares in the midst of silence.

Samuel gives each a puzzled look. Then...

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Can we mom? Please?

CLAIRE

We'll... we'll see. Don't want to stay up too late and... miss Christmas morning.

ANN

The seniors are all boasting how they're going to put on the best play ever.

CLAIRE

Good. Good for them.

ANN

(pointing at each)

And you three did a good job with your Christmas play after those others abandoned you at the last minute.

LUCINDA

Seriously? It was horrible--

Another scowl from Lyndon stops her.

SAMUEL

(to Claire)

You were in a play? Wow!

As Samuel and Claire speak, the would-be-thespians exchange looks of reluctance with more stone-cold silence. The parents are just as hesitant.

CLAIRE

Yes, Sammy. A long... time ago.

SAMUEL

Then we gotta see it before Santa.

CLAIRE

We'll see, hun. We'll... see.

SAMUEL

(to Robert)

I bet she was great, wasn't she gramps?

His hesitant lips morph into a smile.

ROBERT
You bet kid. You all were. Every
one of you.

DANIELLE
(taking Claire's hand)
Same here.

LYNDON
Thank you, Mr. Bourne. Mrs. Bourne.

Lucinda gives him a half nod of thanks.

CLAIRE
I... I think Sammy here need to
warm up with some hot chocolate.

She takes his hand.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
(to her parents)
I'm gonna take Sammy here to get us
something to drink.

She turns to the Huangs.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
It was nice meeting you all...
again.

LYNDON
Same here, Claire.

LUCINDA
Dido.

ANN
(at Samuel)
Hope you get what you asked for
this year.

Claire leads Samuel off. He looks confused as everyone waves
goodbye.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Baristi scurry behind the counter. People waiting to order.

PATRICK CASTILLO (33), 6'-something, chiseled looks, hair
just so, stands listening politely, if not warily, to
JOANNA, an older woman. Beside her stands her daughter
MONICA, who can't take her eyes off him.

JOANNA

... and we are so proud of you.
Making it to the major league and
all.

MONICA

Show what a big guy from our small
city can accomplish.

PATRICK

Thank you. Thank you both.

JOANNA

And Monica here has made us proud
too. Works with her father at his
advertising agency.

PATRICK

(feigned interest)

Wow. Nice of you--

JOANNA

Gave up an offer from one of those
big East Coast firms after she
graduated from Georgetown.

PATRICK

Oh? I bet--

Monica steps closer to him.

MONICA

I decided family was more important
than money. Although... daddy does
very well with his agency.

Patrick tries hiding his discomfort at her proximity to him.

PATRICK

That's... nice of him.

JOANNA

And with her brains and income
potential, she has every guy in
town chasing after her--

She lets out a hardy laugh.

MONICA

But I'm concentrating on my career.
I'm sure you can relate to that?

Patrick shrugs, about to answer but...

MONICA (CONT'D)
And being single does leave my
possibilities open.

Patrick gets the hints from them both.

PATRICK
Ah... yes. It can be tough--

As Monica drones on about she feels like Rachel Green, he eyes Claire and Samuel next to the counter. She's handing him a cup. Both then head away from the counter.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
If... you'll excuse me there is
someone I really... really need to
talk to.

He flees and makes his way towards Claire and Samuel.

Claire holds Sam's hand as they weave through the crowd.

PATRICK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Claire?

She stops. Looks around. Eyes widen.

CLAIRE
Pat. Hey.

Patrick has a mile wide smile. Becomes gregarious. A stark contrast to his chat with Monica and Joanna.

PATRICK
Been a while. How you been since
graduation, you sly girl?

CLAIRE
Yeah, it... it has. Been... okay. I
haven't seen you around the
holidays here before.

PATRICK
Guilty as charged. In fact, my
first trip back for a few years.

Samuel looks him over.

CLAIRE
I heard you... play ball now?

PATRICK

Yes *sirrry*! After college got a spot with the Springfield Cards then called up to St. Louis. Been doing great since! No MVP yet but gimme time!

He lets out a laugh. Looks down at Samuel.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

And who's this little guy?

CLAIRE

My son Samuel.

She leans down to Samuel.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

This is another old friend of mine, Patrick.

PATRICK

(offers hand)

Put'er there Sam!

They shake hands.

SAMUEL

Hello.

PATRICK

A firm handshake! Sign of confidence!

Done, he looks around the coffee shop.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

And where's your lesser half? Ha ha...

CLAIRE

Well... my... husband...

SAMUEL

They're not married anymore--

CLAIRE

Sam--

Samuel's eyes go wide.

Patrick's smile disappears.

Claire puts a half smile on her face.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Ah... long story.

Patrick becomes more somber.

PATRICK
My apologies. I... guess I've been
out of the loop for a while.

CLAIRE
That's alright. Things... happen.

Awkward smiles and staring.

PATRICK
Well... if you two aren't busy
would love to catch up with some--

CLAIRE
We need to head back to the square
and find mom and dad. Got some more
errands to finish up.

Hides his disappointment.

PATRICK
Of course. Say hello to them.

CLAIRE
I will.

PATRICK
(to Samuel)
And nice meeting you slugger!
And... Merry Christmas to you all.

CLAIRE
Same.

SAMUEL
Merry Christmas, Mr. Patrick.

PATRICK
Back at ya kid!

She leads Samuel off through the crowd out the front door.

Patrick stands with a sadden look. Joanna and Monica
approach from behind. Joanna taps his arm.

JOANNA
We were wondering if you'd like to
join us for some coffee? We'd love
to hear how your career's going.

Part of him wants to run away. His answer is half hearted.

PATRICK
Of course. Would be... an honor.

EXT. DOWNTOWN SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Once a few feet from the door Claire pulls Samuel off to one of tables outside. Sets down her cup and bends down. They talk as she straightens out his scarf and coat.

SAMUEL
Why didn't you ever say you were in a Christmas play?

CLAIRE
Oh, just... wasn't that important.

SAMUEL
Why?

CLAIRE
It's a... long story.

As she zips him up...

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
And honey, we don't tell strangers personal things. Okay?

He's shamefaced, but...

SAMUEL
You said he was your friend?

CLAIRE
I know but...

SAMUEL
He seemed a nice man.

CLAIRE
Yes, but... there are things we don't talk to people about. Even... friends.

He notices the sadness in her eyes.

SAMUEL
Why did that one lady call your play horrible?

CLAIRE
Things... just didn't work out
like... we want it to.

SAMUEL
How come?

CLAIRE
That's how the world is sometimes,
honey.

SAMUEL
Is that why you don't like
Christmas anymore?

She looks shocked.

CLAIRE
What?

SAMUEL
Dad not here.

She pauses. Looks around. Mouth agape wanting to say something.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)
Seeing friends. You act like you
don't wanna talk to them.

She sighs.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)
It seems everything makes you sad.

Straightens up holding his hand.

CLAIRE
Let's find Grandma and grandpa.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - MOMENTS LATER

Claire and Samuel find her parents near the fountain.

CLAIRE
Though I might find you here.

ROBERT
You bet, sweetie. One more thing to
do. Gotta share a Christmas
tradition with Sammy.

SAMUEL
What's that, gramps?

He takes his hand from Claire, leads him to the fountain's edge.

ROBERT
You gotta toss in a coin and make a wish.

SAMUEL
Already told mom what I wanted.

Robert digs in his pockets for a coin.

ROBERT
Maybe. But this is a special fountain. Your mother, grandma and me been coming here for a long time. Since we were your age.

Hands Samuel a coin

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Go ahead.

Samuel takes it.

SAMUEL
Did you get what you wanted?

Robert looks up at Danielle and Claire.

ROBERT
You bet, kid.

DANIELLE
I can't remember half the wishes I ever made.

CLAIRE
I remember too many.

Samuel notices she looks sadder.

DANIELLE
Oh, sweetie.

CLAIRE
Things haven't turned out exactly as planned. Wishing well or not.

Samuel looks on.

DANIELLE
Don't let the past get to you.

CLAIRE

Hard not to. Came here to get away from that and all I've done today is get constant reminders.

ROBERT

If it helps, I wasn't pulling your leg when I said you all did a great job back then with your version of the Christmas Carol.

CLAIRE

Lucinda was right. It was a disaster.

As Claire and her parents go on about meeting her classmates and the play, Samuel turns back to the fountain.

COIN IN HIS HAND. He closes his eyes.

SAMUEL

(to himself)

I wish mom and her friends had made the bestest play ever.

Tosses in the coin.

INT. HALLWAY IN PARENTS HOME - NIGHT

Claire gives one last look at Samuel, who's tucked into bed.

She has on that special smile, one we put on when we see something that really makes us happy, however fleeting.

She closes the door and heads downstairs.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Passes by a Christmas tree laced with silver garland.

INT. PARENT'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Danielle finishes putting away dishes. Claire enters.

DANIELLE

You get Sammy all squared away?

CLAIRE

Yep. Should be fast asleep by now. All the activities today tuckered him out.

DANIELLE

Good. I need to start wrapping his gifts. Should go great with what his father sent him.

CLAIRE

Nice to see he found time to tear away from his new girlfriend.

Danielle notices Claire's disappointed eyes.

DANIELLE

Would it help to say try not thinking about that.

She doesn't answer.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Sammy enjoys the holidays. So should you. At least for his sake.

CLAIRE

I know. I know. And I'll... make the best of it. Not be such a humbug.

DANIELLE

Having him here reminds us so much of all those holidays when you where his age. Feels pretty good. He's only a kid once. Then there's no going back.

CLAIRE

That's for sure.

DANIELLE

And by the way... you've yet to let me know what you want.

CLAIRE

Good question, mom.

THAT NIGHT - MONTAGE - VARIOUS PLACES

Lucinda sits up in her bed. On the TV a news program showing various, unpleasant things going on about the world this Christmas season. Her eyes hold sadness with a hint of anger. After a few moments she picks up the remote and turns it off. She then lays down.

Lyndon sits on the couch. Computer tablet in hand. Thereon he scrolls down a stock market page. Behind it he can see the lights of their Christmas tree. He frowns.

Gets up and shuts off the lights. Back on the couch he gets comfortable. Back to the tablet.

Claire takes off her robe, she cast it on a chair, then glances at the mirror above a dresser.

HER REFLECTION: turns sideways then runs her hands down her backside, has on that 'you still got it' look, but it vanishes. She turns away and crawls into bed. There, staring off into the distance, her eyes slowly close.