

**12 STEPS OF CHRISTMAS**

Written by

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ACT ONE

CELL PHONE ADVERTISEMENT:

SELFIES FLASH ON THE SCREEN --

Young, stylish, always surrounded by friends and having a time so great they need to share it with the world.

SPOKESMAN (V.O.)

The new MePhone 13-GD with *Mondo Friend Finder* and *Past Perfect* is your new best friend -- to stay connected with friends.

HERO SHOTS of the phone confirm its social importance.

We launch into testimonials --

CALIFORNIA BEACH - DAY

THROUGH THE PHONE CAM: NEO-HIPSTER GIRL snaps a selfie.

NEO-HIPSTER GIRL

*Past Perfect?* It's the only way to be your story.

THE IMAGE: Boom! A filter turns her into what appears to literally be a TOTALLY DIFFERENT PERSON.

NEARBY

THE IMAGE: DUMPY BOY took a selfie. Boom! The filter turns him into what is FOR SURE a different, radically better person.

FORMERLY DUMPY BOY

*Mondo Friend Finder?* I swear, the number of new friends you get just keeps growing and growing!

HIS SELF-IMAGE JOINS OTHERS TO FORM A PYRAMID ON THE SCREEN

This is looking and sounding like the pyramid scheme it is --

FORMERLY DUMPY BOY

The more kids that wanna be my friend? I get all their friends too! Then their friends!

(MORE)

## FORMERLY DUMPY BOY (CONT'D)

And then their friends -- It just keeps going! Friends!

Some selfie images aren't included and drift alone pitifully.

## NEO-HIPSTER GIRL

I can't imagine having a self-image outside of the friendship pyramid.

ZOOM IN: ON ASTRAY SELFIES NOT PART OF PYRAMID. These lost souls seem so sad and alone.

PULL OUT: and see the ad is playing on --

## INT. REED APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING

A laptop in front of an awed JAKE REED (13, mixed-race, tough), one of these lost souls it seems.

Jake ignores a hot breakfast while his mom ASHLEY (34, nursing scrubs) rushes around their low-rent, row-house apartment.

## JAKE

You know, if you promise I'm getting a new GD-13 with *Mondo Friend Finder* and *Past Perfect*, that could be my topic for class.  
(sarcastic)

A solid presentation is just the shot in the arm my grades need.

Ashley searches bare cupboards. On the counter, open delivery boxes with products to improve a home: Christmas decorations, sheets, candles, and every cleaning product that exists.

## ASHLEY

Did you eat all the soup? That's my lunch.

## JAKE

I left the ones in back.

## ASHLEY

(frightened)  
The dollar-store three-for-one's?

She reads the label on one and almost pukes.

## JAKE

All I know is that every other Christmas I got my one big present.

ASHLEY  
You sure about that?

JAKE  
(alarmed)  
What do you mean?

ASHLEY  
You done with breakfast? Let's go.  
Grab your stuff.

Jake gathers his things, including headphones --

JAKE  
You got me these *Beats* last year.

ASHLEY  
Ha! You think I bought *Beats*?  
Sorry, Dre. Ugandan knockoff.  
Interestingly, sold to me by a lady  
from Papua New Guinea.

JAKE  
Downtown? The lady with the rug?

ASHLEY  
Yep. The lady with the rug.  
(heads to door)  
Hurry up, we're already late. I  
gotta get back.

Jake ignores her, stops to pull his bike off a big pile of clutter under the stairs.

JAKE  
What about my bike?

ASHLEY  
Your cousin Jane's. Pink until we  
spray painted it Christmas Eve.

JAKE  
No way!

Ashley has the door open, but Jake dives back into the mess.

ASHLEY  
I can't tell you how much I love  
dragging you to school on my break.

Jake holds up a large LEGOS box.

JAKE  
What about my LEGOS?

ASHLEY

You mean LOGOS. Yugoslavian. You never noticed the blocks only came in those drab browns and greens? The only color was in the propaganda posters.

CLOSE ON: the box shows a LEGOS-like set of a communist-era concrete factory with propaganda posters above the workers.

JAKE

(reads box)

"Uncle Tito's Self-Managed Metallurgy Factory." I guess the pieces never did really fit together.

Ashley futilely gestures out the door as Jake digs deeper.

ASHLEY

Technically, they even call this my "meal break." Because nothing warms the palate for discount soup like patients oozing from all sorts of surprising places for eight hours. Still, I'd like a chance to eat.

JAKE

Ew, gross!

Ashley smiles with a plan. She starts sneaking up on Jake.

ASHLEY

Yeah, I didn't even have time to change scrubs.

Jake doesn't notice her. He's focused on the UNHOLY *TICKLE ME ELMO* KNOCK-OFF he holds.

JAKE

I always knew somethin' was wrong with *Zelmo*.

Jake squeezes the deranged plush doll to prove his point --

ZELMO

(old Jewish man voice)

*Hey kid, stop with the tickling!*

ASHLEY

What? *Tickle Me Zelmo* is totally real.

Jake jumps back surprised.

JAKE  
Ah! What the hell?

ASHLEY  
What? I just want a hug.

Jake uses *Zelmo* to shield Ashley and her nasty scrubs.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)  
(looks at stains)  
This one on my shoulder? Do you know  
what a perforated bowel is? Oh, and  
this here -- know what this one is?  
We don't! All I can tell you is that  
a lot of it was coming from poor  
Miss Yount. What'dya think?

JAKE  
Ew! Stop! Okay, I'll go!

Ashley lunges. Jake tosses *Zelmo* at her and uses the chance  
to escape out the door. She gives *Zelmo* a final squeeze --

CLOSE ON: *Zelmo* shakes with pained laughter and coughing fit.

ZELMO  
(old Jewish man voice)  
*Joy to the world, your guy is born.  
Mazel tov! Now go tickle yourself,  
ya' pervert.*

EXT. REED APARTMENT - DAY

This small New England city is covered with snow. Jake uses  
his forearm to brush off the windshield of their Ford Fiesta  
Hatchback while Ashley works the ice scraper.

ASHLEY  
What's with all the black?

We see Jake is dressed entirely in black.

JAKE  
There's a big basketball game. We're  
all supposed to wear the same color.  
(then)  
It's a school pride thing.

Next door neighbors MARY and CHRIS call in unison --

MARY AND CHRIS  
Hey neighbors, Merry Christmas!

With their THREE DAUGHTERS, they are the perfect Protestant family. In front of a NATIVITY SCENE, they wear matching "Food Drive" shirts and load donation bins into their SUV.

ASHLEY

Gearing up for the food drive?

MARY

The pep rally is always huge. Even if each kid only remembers one can, that's 900 from Jake's school alone.

Ashley gives Jake an ugly look for not mentioning any of this --

ASHLEY

Right. Yeah, of course...  
 (remembers her lunch)  
 Well, it's not much but...  
 (tosses soup in empty bin)  
 I'll pop your charity cherry.

DAUGHTER #1

What does that mean? You got cherries? I love cherries!

Ashley can't believe what she said. DAUGHTER #2 grabs the can --

DAUGHTER #2

It's not cherries, it's soup.  
 (reads)  
 "South Delaware Pork Chowder." Yuck!

Ashley smiles awkwardly at Mary. Jake laughs to himself.

INT. FORD FIESTA HATCHBACK - DAY

You can see their breath as they get in.

JAKE

Just "pork"? That's a little vague.  
 What kinda pork you think?

ASHLEY

(with pride)  
Delaware Pork. And none of that North Delaware bullshit, either.

INT. FORD FIESTA HATCHBACK - MOVING - LATER

Ashley drives silently until, seemingly out of nowhere --

ASHLEY

I wish you mentioned the food drive. I look like a horrible mother... and person.

JAKE

I forgot.

ASHLEY

You know they actually built that thing in their yard? Like with wood and paint and everything. How do you compete with that?

JAKE

What are you talking about?

ASHLEY

The neighbors... the uhm...  
(can't find the word)  
You know like when Jesus was born. I forget the name... The Jesus... farm thing.

JAKE

Wow, Mom. Like organically grown Jesuses? Little heads of Christ cabbage? Pretty sure you mean the "manger."

ASHLEY

Don't we just call those barns now, or is it something different? Point is they made it.  
(realizes)  
We need a Jesus somewhere for my mom to see.

JAKE

You're way too stressed about Grandma coming over. She's not gonna notice stuff like that.

ASHLEY

Trust me, ever since I was little, my mother's been very good at... noticing things.

JAKE

Shall I add it to the list then?

ASHLEY

Sure.

JAKE  
 (reads as he writes)  
 Order one Baby Jesus... Christ...  
 Our farm-fresh Lord and Savior...

Jake reads down the rest of the list.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 This is a lot of fancy crap you're  
 buying: "Nebulizing diffuser with  
 bluetooth." Whatever "dem-i-tasse  
 spoons" are. Okay, "Ultra Plush  
 toilet paper with Aloe and Vitamin  
E"? Really? T.P. vitamins?

Ashley turns into the school parking circle and begins  
 battling for position.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 Why don't we do Christmas at  
 Grandma's like always?

Ashley is hurt, becomes defensive --

ASHLEY  
 I think it can be just as good at  
 our house. Don't you?

Jake nods, feigning confidence.

EXT. SPIRO T. AGNEW MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Ashley SLAMS on the breaks INCHES short of hitting RYAN THE  
 RHINO, the high-energy baby-blue school mascot.

ASHLEY  
 The hell is that?

Ryan continues dancing to "WHO LET THE DOGS OUT" as if  
 nothing happened.

JAKE  
 That's Ryan the Rhino. We used to  
 be the Redskins but we had to  
 change it. They wanted the new one  
 to be an endangered species. And  
 so: Ryan the White Rhino.

ASHLEY  
 But he's a Blue Rhino.

JAKE

Turns out him being white was also  
oppressive -- but in like the  
opposite way.

ASHLEY

Oh. Why's a Rhino dancing around to  
a song about dogs? Isn't that  
species-ist?

JAKE

On game days he comes around to  
every class. You have no idea how  
pumped up people get. It makes me  
want to puke.

Ashley looks at students socializing outside the two-story  
brick school. They all wear the school color: baby blue.

ASHLEY

Everyone's in blue.  
(quotes Jake)  
"A school pride thing"?

JAKE

What? Lack of school pride is a  
form of "school pride."

INT. SPIRO T. AGNEW MIDDLE SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Jake sits in the back wearing black in a sea of pastel school  
spirit. Presentations are underway. On the whiteboard: "What  
are you celebrating this holiday season?"

SOPHIA (13, too peppy) presents --

SOPHIA

I'm celebrating Spiro T. Agnew  
Middle School! Where I get to spend  
all day with all my friends.

Her FRIENDS in class beam.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

I'm celebrating today's pep rally,  
for Ryan our beloved Rhino, and for  
our basketball team!

A few jersey-wearing BASKETBALL PLAYERS beam.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

And I'm especially celebrating Life  
Management Skills with Mr. Bucket!  
(MORE)

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

Because you help us manage school  
and life and stuff!

MR. BUCKET (40, red-faced, bucket-like) beams.

Jake plays the game SNAKE on his old Nokia under his desk.

CHAD (basketball player, a dick) and MIA (cute, also a dick)  
are laughing at Jake. To them it looks like he's jerking off.

MIA

I swear. Look, he's jerking off!

CHAD

Do you think he can even get porn  
on that thing?

JAKE

Porn? I don't need porn. And yeah,  
you caught me.

(to Mia)

I am fapping. Now, can you please  
lean back again? That's the angle  
that got me going.

They have zero idea how to respond.

MIA

You're so freaking gross.

Mr. Bucket notices the disturbance.

MR. BUCKET

There a problem back there?

JAKE

Yes. These two aren't being very  
sex-positive, for one. I'm feeling  
very shamed.

MR. BUCKET

Then why don't you come up front  
where you'll be safe?

Jake reluctantly heads to the front.

MR. BUCKET (CONT'D)

Okay Jake, you're always so good at  
telling us what you don't like. Can  
you think of one thing you do?

JAKE  
 (struggles)  
 Well, Sophia pretty much covered  
 it, right? It's all worth so much  
 appreciation. Yay, all of it.

Jake doesn't know what to say. He's vulnerable and exposed.

Suddenly: "WHO LET THE DOGS OUT" announces Ryan as he *Jock-Jam* dances into the classroom.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 (to self)  
 You gotta be effin' kidding me.

Jake tries to use the moment to flee but Ryan molests him with a pumped-up mascot dance.

MR. BUCKET  
 Come on, Jake. Where's your spirit?

Kids laugh as Ryan playfully charges Jake with his horn. Jake decides to engage --

JAKE  
 Okay, personally I wanna celebrate  
 Ryan the Rhino here, because unlike  
 our basketball team he isn't too  
 white to be great!

Jake knocks Ryan back with a hard elbow to the chest.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 I wanna celebrate spending all day  
 with all of you, my friends!  
 (to Mia)  
 Especially Mia. You think I'm gross?  
 You're so freakin' gross that when  
 you masturbate it's non-consensual.

No more dancing. The mood has changed.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 And I for sure wanna celebrate Life  
 Management Skills with Mr. Bucket. To  
 your credit, you do get us to study --  
 because holy fuck, ending up like you  
 scares the shit out of us!

Ryan shoves Jake and turns off the boombox.

It could end here, but when Jake looks around he doesn't see one kind face. They all record with their nice cell phones --

So Jake snaps and rushes Ryan.

Rhinoceros are surprisingly agile fighters with thick protective skin. Jake is caught by its mighty horn, but then he lands an uppercut under the mask -- and that ends it.

Ryan falls back, the mascot head falling off as he hits the floor, revealing ERIKA CROSS (14, stout): a girl.

By the time Jake has processed that he just hit a girl, Chad is already helping her up.

Jake can't believe what he did.

INT. PRINCIPAL MCGRIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Jake sits across the large desk of PRINCIPAL MCGRIFF (30's).

PRINCIPAL MCGRIFF

You have an attitude problem. I see it in kids every day. But they don't follow through with things like you do.

JAKE

That sounds like a positive thing, though. I have follow through.

PRINCIPAL MCGRIFF

(not impressed)

You're one of the smartest kids in your class. But you fight, you swear, you don't seem to care about anything at all.

Jake likes that list.

PRINCIPAL MCGRIFF (CONT'D)

You seem to be at war with everything and everybody all the time. Isn't that exhausting?

This one hits Jake, but he plays tough --

JAKE

No. I don't care.

PRINCIPAL MCGRIFF

We've already tried suspending you. Maybe it's time we look at changing your environment.

JAKE

Like expelled? No way. My mom would freak!

Jake anxiously watches Principal McGriff decide his verdict.

PRINCIPAL MCGRIFF

For now we'll say you're suspended until break. That's a couple days to cool off.

JAKE

I can be good, I swear!

PRINCIPAL MCGRIFF

I'm not sure you can.

Jake takes this in.

PRINCIPAL MCGRIFF (CONT'D)

Get control of yourself. Any more of this and we'll have to look at more extreme measures. This is your final warning.

Principal McGriff picks up the phone and dials.

INT. REED APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ashley storms in with Jake following.

JAKE

It's not fair! Kids made fun of me and --

ASHLEY

Clam up! They react to your reactions. You react to that. You have the mentality of a little jihadist.

JAKE

I'm just supposed to take it?

ASHLEY

Life has bullies, Jake. And disappointments, God knows. Get used to it.

Jake feels guilty.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

By the way, leaving work to pick you up from suspension does not help you get some super expensive phone. That's not looking great right now.

Jake is selfishly alarmed, and he begins to play an angle --

JAKE

I'm sorry. Honest, I'm sorry, Mom.

Ashley needed this, not sensing Jake's intent.

ASHLEY

You really think I can pull this off?

Jake walks over, seeing behind her that the place is a wreck.

JAKE

Don't worry. We'll get everything super nice. I can help out. We can totally show this place off.

(hugs Ashley)

But why don't we give ourselves a bit more time? Something more realistic like Easter. Or even just New Year's. We can start a whole new tradition.

ASHLEY

(hurt by his game)

What? Oh, I get it. As long as nothing messes with Christmas at Grandma's? Or your "one big present," right?

Jake is caught and they both know it.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Unbelievable. Jake, if we can't even have each other's backs...

JAKE

But who cares where we have it?

Ashley does, very much.

ASHLEY

Not for nothing, now that it's just you and me here, I thought we could host for once.

Jake walks over to the boxes of stuff Ashley ordered --

JAKE

Why spend so much money on this fancy stuff? Plus then being all bitchy with me like any of this is my fault.

Ashley doesn't know how to respond. She checks the time.

ASHLEY

Now I suppose I'm a bad mother because I need to get back to work?  
(throws up her hands)  
Maybe this is all my fault. I'm not around enough or patient enough or something. Crazy bullshit like this doesn't happen with other moms.  
(shakes her head)  
Only me, man. I know I never had fights like this with my mother.

JAKE

Exactly. You're doing all this stuff to make our place as good as Grandma's. Why pretend?

This hits Ashley hard.

JAKE (CONT'D)

It's perfect there.

Ashley is at a loss, then is struck by something --

ASHLEY

Christ, it feels like I'm fighting with your father.  
(then)  
At least the court could force him to change with A.A. I don't know what to do with you.  
(beat)  
At this rate, you're never getting a fancy smartphone.

Ashley walks away -- and moments later a door SLAMS. An old CERAMIC SANTA STATUE falls off the mantle and breaks. Santa's rosy-cheeked smile is shattered into pieces.

Jake bolts.

EXT. REED APARTMENT - DAY

Jake flies out the door and takes off --

EXT. TOWN STREETS - DAY

Running down a street lined with row houses --

Cutting across front yards and baseball fields, until --

A red light stops him at a crosswalk with other PEDESTRIANS. He can't stand waiting. He tries to clear brown slush but falls short and splashes everyone.

No time to apologize. He dodges traffic, continues his sprint.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

The whole town is beautifully decked out for Christmas. Lights hang on small trees. Christmas MUSIC plays in the air. Shoppers and cars create the usual holiday hustle and bustle.

Jake cuts in and out of the excitement, until --

EXT. MALL - DAY

He finally arrives at his destination: the mall.

INT. MALL - LINE FOR SANTA - DAY

Underneath a frumpy elf costume, CARL (38, puts the "fun" in functional alcoholic) keeps OVER-EXCITED KIDS under control.

You can tell Carl loves Christmas, but all that good cheer snaps sour when he sees a disturbance in line --

IN LINE

Two BULLIES (kids too cool for Santa) cut in front of excited YOUNGER KIDS (full of Christmas spirit).

YOUNGER KID  
Cutter! Hey, no cuts.

They turn and tower over the terrified protester.

BULLY #1  
What'd you say?

YOUNGER KID  
I... Uhm... I just...

A voice from behind --

CARL  
 (to Bullies)  
 Hey you, tiny townies.

Carl is one righteously pissed elf. As the bullies turn, Carl digs into his pocket and pulls out a soiled bar napkin.

CARL (CONT'D)  
 See this? Know what this is? This is the naughty list. And do you know what happens when you do bad shit? Bad shit equals bad results.

BULLY #2  
 (re: napkin)  
 That's not real. It's all dirty.

CARL  
 Of course it's dirty. It's the naughty list, for Christ's sake.

Logic checks out, can't deny it. Carl checks the list --

CARL (CONT'D)  
 (to Bully #1)  
 And you ain't getting shit, loser.

BULLY #1  
 You're not Santa! You're an elf.  
 You don't know.

CARL  
 Yeah, I'm a fuckin' elf. The head elf. I report directly to Santa. I handle every thing from his gambling debts to suppressing talk of union.  
 (holds up paper)  
 This list tells me all sorts of things! It can even tell the future! You know what it says about you? It says you're peaking. Look around. What're you, like seven? Eight? This is as good as it gets for you, kid.

BULLY #1  
 (sniffs)  
 You smell funny.

CARL  
So do you. We all smell funny. Maybe you think some toy can make you forget the stench of your failed little life --

BULLY #1  
I want a Y-Flanker Scooter.

CARL  
-- But it can't. No toy can do the  
trick. Look, you're in the  
caterpillar stage. Soon you'll spin  
a cocoon out of your own bullshit  
and your fear of anyone with  
purpose until you emerge: a  
beautiful, fully-formed townie.

NEARBY

Jake isn't sure what to think, but he's definitely amused.

IN LINE

Carl continues to lay into Bully #1 --

CARL (CONT'D)  
-- A classic townie. You'll know  
the exact price of gas all over  
town, even though you can't drive  
because you rolled your mom's Ford  
Escort and got your third DUI.  
(then)  
You'll get out of hand at all the  
JV football games even though you  
don't have a kid on the team.

This could be the end of it, but Carl takes it too far --

CARL (CONT'D)  
(to Bully #2)  
Twice as bad for you. Pretty soon  
you'll figure out the reason you  
look like a water buffalo is  
because Mommy liked off-brand  
Schnapps more than she liked being  
pregnant with you.

Bully #2 begins to cry.

ANGEL (20's, Mexican mall Santa) pulls Carl away. He has a  
THICK ACCENT and is difficult to understand.

ANGEL  
C'mon, bro. Shift over. *Cálmate mi  
elfo*. What we talk about, bro?  
(to Kids)  
Merry Christmas, kids! Ho, ho, ho!

CARL  
 Look children, it's Santos Claus!  
 Ay, ay, ay!

Angel leads Carl toward a nearby hallway.

ANGEL  
 Don't say that. Kids think you  
 racist.

CARL  
 I'm not racist. Santa is the racist.  
 All the fine, fine gifts for the  
 well-scrubbed lily-white children of  
 Connecticut -- now compare that to  
 what Paco, a village boy in western  
 Bolivia, what he will be opening up  
 Christmas morning.

ANGEL  
 Remember? What we talk about? Your  
 P.O., man. Can't get fired again.  
 Don't fuck up!

Jake hurries to follow Carl into --

#### HALLWAY TO BATHROOMS

Jake watches an exhausted Carl take off his green jacket and  
 elf hat, then kick off his elf shoes. He takes a big swig  
 from a bottle of soda as he leans against the wall.

JAKE  
 Hey there, Santa's overgrown little  
 helper.

CARL  
 Sorry, kid. This elf is off his  
 merry clock.

Carl turns and sees: his son, Jake.

CARL (CONT'D)  
 Holy shit, Jake!

Carl rushes over and hugs him. Jake is not super huggy.

They talk past each other, Jake launching into his problem  
 and Carl confused but happy to see his kid --

JAKE  
I only came because I have a huge problem.  
(tries to focus Carl)  
Stop, just listen to me.

CARL (CONT'D)  
Look at you! You're looking damn good. Man, it's been a whole year! What's wrong? Your balls fallin'? Getting hard in class? Chaffing from too much of the too-much?

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Jesus, it's nothing to do with my dick!

CARL  
Just figured it's gotta be something your mom can't help with.

JAKE  
Listen to me -- I'm not gonna get what I want for Christmas.

CARL  
You know I'm not really an elf, right? And this whole Santa song and dance is truthfully...

JAKE  
No, no -- I need your help. I need Mom to like me so I can get what I want this year. Teach me how I can make her happy.

CARL  
I'm probably the worst pick for that one.

JAKE  
Exactly. I need you to teach me how to not be you.

This hits Carl.

CARL  
Wow. I'm flattered you want my help, but it's for literally the most insulting reason possible.

JAKE  
We're fighting really bad.

CARL  
Everyone fights with their mom. How bad can it be?

JAKE

It's like you guys used to.

Carl knows how bad that is.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I'm sorta afraid I can't change. But you were able to. Mom said so.

Ashley's opinion of him is big news to Carl.

CARL

She said that?

JAKE

Yeah, that you're way different now. Because of that Twelve Step thing, right?

Carl confirms with a small, uncertain nod.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Teach me. Switch drinking with whatever I do that pisses off Mom. If it worked for you, then it could work for me.

CARL

We can't even be seen together. My P.O. would flip. It was part of the whole divorce shebang.

JAKE

We can sneak. We have less than a week. Can you help me or not?

CARL

The Twelve Steps aren't really designed for kids --

JAKE

Do you even care that I might not get my MePhone? Do you care about me? Or are you the same as before?

Carl looks at his son's pleading face.

CARL

Of course I care. I can help. You said it, I'm a changed man.

Jake lights up and smiles at an unsure Carl.

INT. REED APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Ashley folds a mountain of laundry. Behind her, Jake puts on his coat and heads to the door.

JAKE

Mom?

ASHLEY

Do you not understand how this whole "being grounded" thing works?

JAKE

I do. I just...

(lies)

I really want to help with the food drive. I figure I have all this extra time now.

Ashley is surprised, then considers. Jake displays the can of soup in his hand.

ASHLEY

Okay. I'll be at work when you get back. You'll need to handle dinner on your own.

(jokes)

Maybe be on the lookout for something tasty in the collection bin. You're needy too, ya know.

JAKE

Thanks, Mom.

Jake smiles and heads out.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

"IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS" BY BING CROSBY plays as --

CAMERA navigates artifacts of an alcoholic's life: discarded shirts on their third round of booze sweat; confusing trash; one elf shoe; empty bottles of Seagram's 7 whiskey.

CAMERA FINDS the MUSIC we hear is Carl's phone alarm, which he's ignoring. He sleeps in the wrong direction on a stained mattress, wearing boxers and one remaining elf shoe.

The cell RINGS. He closes one eye to read: "BLOCKED NUMBER."

CARL  
 (to self)  
 Fuck, I think I know this blocked  
 number.

He turns over and ignores it until, DING! Voicemail alert. He curses to himself and plays it on speaker --

JORDAN (V.O./PHONE)  
*Carl, missing a meeting with your  
 parole officer is a very bad thing.  
 Why? Because I'm judge, jury, and  
 bribable prison guard who could let  
 fellas take turns on you.*

Carl sits up, looks around at his life, and sighs.

JORDAN (V.O.)  
*It also means extra work for me. I  
 hate that. It puts me in a mood.*

Carl gets on his feet.

#### BATHROOM

Toiletries and laundry are everywhere. The counter is covered with loose change, gum, lighters, and bits of garbage.

Carl inspects his face in the mirror. He tests from different angles but there is no hiding his wrecked appearance.

JORDAN (V.O.)  
*Lucky for us, for me anyway, you're  
 so consistent in missing your  
 performance markers, I don't feel  
 the need to come out.*

#### KITCHEN

Carl discovers a half-eaten breakfast sandwich in a Dunkin' Donuts wrapper. He brushes it off before taking a bite --

CARL  
 Hey, it is breakfast.

JORDAN (V.O.)  
*Let's go down our list here.  
 (reading)  
 Number one: "General Upkeep."  
 (then)  
 I envision a new layer of clutter  
 on top of the old one.  
 (MORE)*

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

*I could count them like rings on a tree to date the last time you tidied up.*

Looking around, Carl must concede: Jordan nailed it.

EXT. CARL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jake puts down his bike and knocks on the door.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Carl finds a glass of whiskey coke and inspects it against the light. He grabs a coffee mug and pours the drink back and forth between the two cups like a science experiment.

JORDAN (V.O.)

*Number two: "A.A. Meetings." Been to any?*

*(then)*

*I actually miss hearing you lie. It allows me to pretend you take this seriously.*

Carl drinks from the mug, grimaces at the taste.

JORDAN (V.O.)

*Three: "Job Search."*

CARL

I have a job, thank you.

JORDAN (V.O.)

*A budding career as a mall Santa's lackey isn't what I'm looking for.*

EXT. CARL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jake fogs the window as he cups his hands and peeks inside.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Carl collapses onto the couch.

JORDAN (V.O.)

*Fourth, and most importantly: "New Offenses."*

CARL

None!

JORDAN (V.O.)  
*Not one. Proud of that, are we?  
 Until I met you I didn't know a  
 person could be so smug in defeat.*

Carl drinks.

JORDAN (V.O.)  
*Hell, what's the point? Even if you  
 tried to be less of a fuck-up you'd  
 probably just fuck that up too.*

LOUD ANGRY KNOCKS startle Carl.

EXT. CARL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jake waits. Carl opens the door, still in the middle of putting on one of those dirty tee shirts from the floor.

Jake can only conclude --

JAKE  
 You forgot!

CARL  
 What?! Don't always assume the worst. That's crazy. Boy do you need help. We should get started right away. Come in.

Jake walks in, pissed off.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Carl scrambles to hide signs of drinking. He notices the soup.

CARL  
 You brought a lunch?

JAKE  
 Mom thinks I'm helping with the canned food drive.

CARL  
 Okay, well here...  
 (takes soup)  
 They do donations at the mall.

JAKE  
 Okay, good. I felt bad about that part.

CARL  
 (sips from "coffee" mug)  
 Sorry it's a tad messy. Got a bit  
 of a late start, but I got my  
 coffee here and am ready to roll.

JAKE  
 (looks around)  
This is the new you? You sure you  
 can help me?

CARL  
 (searches mess)  
 I'm just looking... Found it!

Carl triumphantly holds up a RED NOTEBOOK --

CARL (CONT'D)  
 My old A.A. notebook. Look,  
 underneath all the real Twelve Steps,  
 I wrote a modified one just for us.  
 You're not hooked on the hooch, you  
 just gotta be a better kid.

Indeed, beneath the actual Twelve Steps, Carl wrote his own.

JAKE  
 Okay, hit me. What's Step One?

CARL  
 (looking at list)  
 Step One might be too hard for you  
 right now. That's okay, though. We  
 can skip around. Why not? We make  
 the rules.

JAKE  
 You can do that?

CARL  
 Which brings me to Step Three!  
 (reads)  
 "Remembering the shitty job you did  
 on your own, surrender some control  
 and give yourself over to a higher  
 power." That's me!

JAKE  
 You don't strike me as a higher  
 power.

CARL  
 Have some faith. I've been through  
 this all before.

Carl puts on parts of the elf costume. It's actually substantial garb, nice 25 years (and 100 mall workers) ago.

JAKE

Gotta say, the elf cosplay is alarming.

CARL

Disguise. That legal business is no joke. They'd have me spending Christmas in jail.

He adds a Santa hat and beard, flashes a Santa-like gang sign.

CARL (CONT'D)

"Ho" to the third power. Ready to obey your Higher Elf?

Carl throws on big mirrored aviators to finish his disguise.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Jake walks while Carl rides the too-small bike.

JAKE

Looking good, but watch out, my front wheel is busted.

The warped front wheel struggles over the snow and slush.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Why no car anyway?

CARL

It's such hypocrisy: A successful person rides a bike, they're called "progressive" or a "bicycle enthusiast." But when I do it, it's just called "too many DUI's."

Jake sees swatches of original pink under the bike's paint.

CARL (CONT'D)

It's time for you to make some amends. Repair your harm with responsibility and love, baby. It'll cover Steps Eight and Nine.

JAKE

Amends for what?

CARL

Start small, my disciple. What made your mother so upset?

Jake doesn't want to say, but --

CLOSE ON: CARL'S SHITTY CELL SCREEN, Jake plays social media post of the classroom incident, picking up after we left off --

JAKE

(shouting at Mr. Bucket)  
 -- And let's not forget Missus Bucket, that community treasure. Some old guys outside the VFW said she can suck patriotism off a flag. That cockeyed substitute told our English class she can suck meaning off a word. A disgraced zookeeper went into great detail --

The video cuts off.

CARL

You kids know about Mrs. B? Man, she used to suck off regulars at Bing's Bowlerama with commitment like it was noble, like it would help us win the war. Lord knows, that woman never pays. *Pa-rum pum pum pum...*  
 (remembers himself)  
 But yeah, your incident is pretty ripe for some amends.

Jake mounts the back pegs of the bike and they take off.

EXT. JO-JO'S HEN HOUSE FAMILY EATERY - PARKING LOT - DAY

Carl walks ahead of a tentative Jake.

CARL

How do you know this Erika is here anyway?

JAKE

Her Snapchat story.

CARL

So that's why you want a phone? So you can join your friends as a social media zombie?

JAKE  
 (overly defensive)  
 No. Definitely not. I don't care  
 about friends.

Carl starts joking around with Jake to loosen him up --

CARL  
 Snapchat, huh? That's the porn one.

JAKE  
 Seriously? No.

CARL  
 So that's it then. You can tell me.  
 You wanna send out your digital dick?

JAKE  
 What? No!

They arrive. Carl opens the door for Jake.

INT. JO-JO'S HEN HOUSE FAMILY EATERY - DAY

As they enter, Carl doesn't see TEEN HOSTESS ZARA nearby.

CARL  
 Wish we had dick pics when I was  
 younger. All we could do is take a  
 Polaroid and send it in the mail --  
 like with a stamp, ya know? It  
 didn't just show cock n' balls, it  
 showed heart. It was much more  
 personal but also much more  
 intrusive -- for the same reason.

Carl finally notices his hostess, Zara, who heard everything.  
 A nearby FAMILY with young CHILDREN are also scandalized.

CARL (CONT'D)  
 (tries to save face)  
 Oh, so the lesson is: Don't show  
 your penis to a lady unless you're  
 super sure. Like positive. Like get  
 a notary involved. Right?  
 (to Family, re: Hostess)  
 Because otherwise, "hashtag, her."

ZARA  
 What's wrong with you? What kind of  
 sick freak dresses up like some elf-  
 Santa hybrid and talks about cock  
 in a family eatery?

CARL  
 (quietly)  
 Hey, keep it kid appropriate. Watch  
 the Santa talk.  
 (regular voice)  
 And before you offer, we don't need  
 a table, thank you.

Jake wants out, but Carl nudges him --

JAKE  
 I actually just need to talk to  
 Erika real fast. Erika Cross?

Zara stares Carl down --

ZARA  
 Employees can't have visitors while  
 on duty. Sorry elf-Santa.

CARL  
 You think you can lord over this  
 place because you're better than  
 us? Maybe I am an elf. That means I  
 know shit about you. Like how the  
 relationship with your husband  
 pillow has taken a romantic turn. I  
 read all about it on my list.  
 Checked it twice. Then six times  
 since then, girlie. It's a pretty  
 hot read, if you catch my drift.

ZARA  
 We'll see who's tough once Marc  
 gets here!

Zara storms off to the back.

CARL  
 Remember, it doesn't matter what  
 someone else did. You're fixing  
 what you did. Do you see her?

Jake scans the place. None of the waitresses are Erika. Then  
 he zeroes in on: JO-JO THE HEN MASCOT.

JAKE  
 Got her.

CARL  
 Speaking of cosplay, she must have  
 a mascot complex or something.  
 (then)  
 Now go! Hurry!

Jake hurries across the restaurant to --

BACK TABLES

Jake approaches, then stops before the great bird. Jo-Jo is stumped, but then does a dance for Jake.

JAKE

Damnit, Erika. Stop dancing for a second. Or, actually, keep it up... because, you see, I realized that mascots are important. I'm sorry I had a problem with Ryan the Rhino.

Jo-Jo opens her bird wings noncommittally.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I mean it. Mascots remind us when to cheer. And it must be really hot in there. And you answer the age-old question: "Who let the dogs out?" A rhino did! That's actually really clever!

Jake spots Zara emerge with TEEN MANAGER MARC (19, can almost grow badass teen facial hair he's going for).

JAKE (CONT'D)

I'm legit sorry I punched you. Please accept my apology.

Jake waits for a response as Jo-Jo scratches her head, before --

He sees Erika clearing the table next to him.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Oh. Hi, Erika.

JO-JO THE HEN

(raspy male voice, to Erika)

You know this fruity kid?

HOSTESS STAND

Carl gets into it with Marc --

MARC

-- Even if Santa-elves were real and you were one? I'd still fuck you up, son.

Zara is so impressed.

MARC (CONT'D)

What! You gonna attack me while  
sugar plums dance in my head?

CARL

(pauses to think)

Nah... You wanna know what I'm  
gonna do? I'm gonna find out where  
you live. I'm gonna go to your  
mom's room... And I'm going to love  
her -- tenderly and well. I'm gonna  
show her a gentle reciprocative  
love she stopped dreaming of years  
before you crawled out.

This was a show-stopper. They don't know how to respond.

CARL (CONT'D)

(to Zara)

You could've just been reasonable.  
But now?

(points at Marc)

This guy is gonna spend Christmas  
deciding if his hot-piece mother's  
glow is from holiday cheer -- or  
from this elf's special delivery.

BACK TABLES

Fiery hatred in Erika's eyes as she steps toward Jake.

ERIKA

(to Jo-Jo the Hen)

This is the violent little  
patriarch I told you about.

The enraged hen puffs out its magnificent chest as it  
advances on Jake, looking like it might peck him to death.

JAKE

(to Erika)

I didn't mean to.

ERIKA

Don't victim-blame me!

JAKE

(to Jo-Jo the Hen)

Listen, it was a mistake! I --

ERIKA  
Don't man-splain to Jo-Jo!

Jake doesn't know what to do. He looks up front and sees Carl feuding with Zara and Marc.

When Jake turns back around --

BAM!

Erika slams him in the face with a server's tray.

JAKE  
Ow! Fuck! I swear, I don't hit girls!

ERIKA  
Don't give me that gender binary  
crap!

Holding his bloody nose, Jake staggers away.

EXT. JO-JO'S HEN HOUSE FAMILY EATERY - PARKING LOT - DAY

Jake comes out fuming, Carl following behind.

JAKE  
Making amends sucks! Fuck all those  
people. Why even try?

Carl sits on the curb. He packs a snowball and offers it.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Not exactly in the mood.

CARL  
No, for your face.

Jake holds it against his face, and he calms some.

JAKE  
You don't get it -- my school is  
full of assholes.

CARL  
(laughs)  
Of course it is! Some people totally  
deserve bad shit. That's what  
school's good for. Not to teach you  
about logarithms or Teapot Domes or  
the righteous men of the Whiskey  
Rebellion -- it's there to prepare  
you for a world of assholes.

JAKE  
That doesn't seem right.

CARL  
Come here. Sit down.  
(sits on curb)  
Let's look around.

Jake joins Carl on the curb as they scan their surroundings. Carl points at an ADORABLE FAMILY walking down the sidewalk.

CARL (CONT'D)  
That adorable family. They're probably assholes. Mom cheats on Dad, but it ain't her fault because, I dunno, he can only get off to some very specific type of Vietnamese porn or something. And they both know their daughter's real father is one of a dozen potential men, none of whom she currently calls "Dad."

Jake points at an INNOCENT OLD MAN shambling along.

JAKE  
What about him?

CARL  
That guy? He's an asshole too. I'm sure of it.

JAKE  
He's just an innocent old man.

CARL  
No one that old isn't very racist. And weirdly specific racism, like distrust of those thieving Danes, or something.

The old man gives them a polite wave, shuffles on harmlessly.

CARL (CONT'D)  
Hell, being angry can even be fun if someone deserves it. But then you spend your whole day judging people. It's a trap.

Jake understands this deeply. He throws the snowball.

CARL (CONT'D)

Life can be shitty, but you're way  
too young to believe it's not gonna  
be okay.

(hands over list)

Two down. Cross 'em out.

Jake crosses off Eight and Nine. He can't help feeling proud.

**END ACT ONE**

ACT TWO

PODCAST RECAP OF ACT 1:

*NOTE: PODCAST DUDE voice should probably be (or appear to be) different from Narrator. I say this bc he gets progressively drunker in his recaps and wouldn't want a drunk narrator.*

*I hear him as a Phil Hartman type, FWIW. But delivery could totally be something else entirely.*

With Christmassy sounds and music --

## PODCAST DUDE

LOGLINE: 12 STEPS OF CHRISTMAS – a filthy Christmas comedy. When a rebellious kid is denied his dream Christmas present by his mom, he goes to his estranged alcoholic father (who lies about being sober) with an idea: adapt the 12 Step program to teach me how to not be you.

Music cue --

## PODCAST DUDE (CONT'D)

In Act 1, we learned Jake is afraid he can't change. However we also learned that his father Carl's "sobriety" is the non-existent kind that features a handle of that sweet, sweet daily hooch...

Podcast Dude snaps back from brief alcoholic reverie --

## PODCAST DUDE (CONT'D)

Adapting the 12 Steps from a recovery he did not achieve and from a program he did not complete, Carl uses negative credentials to create an adapted Christmas-themed list to help Jake reform his own aggressive behaviors.

Music cue --

## PODCAST DUDE (CONT'D)

We ended with Jake being humiliated and beaten by a giant hen -- yet somehow also completing Step 2 and Step 3. Can Jake complete more? Can he somehow learn something from such a fuckup father? We're uncertain.

Podcast Dude increasingly falls in love with his drink, his need for it becoming clear --

PODCAST DUDE (CONT'D)

So text your sponsor and fill a cup  
with -- *CLINK! CLINK!*

(sound of 2 ice cubes hit  
bottom of glass)

Two perfect ice cubes and -- *PLASH!*  
*PLASH!*

(sound of liquor plashing  
into glass twice)

Canadian Rye... Watch how it swirls  
differently against the cubes,  
clouding ever so slightly... Oh,  
God --

(sound of drinking; then)

Add more, to taste or tolerance --  
*PLASHY-PLASH-PLASH-PLASH!*

(sound of liquor glugging  
into glass)

Oh yeah, Momma...

(sound of drinking; sound  
of glass hitting table)

-- That's the stuff...

Podcast Dude remembers himself --

PODCAST DUDE (CONT'D)

-- And join me--and us for Act Two!  
As two of the least qualified  
people in the world try to stumble  
into lessons of empathy and  
personal responsibility.

INT. REED APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Jake inspects his black eye and smashed nose in the mirror. He checks it from different angles. There's no hiding this thing.

KITCHEN

Jake goes through the mail. He opens an envelope and smiles at the picture on the card: the perfect inviting Christmas home.

He fist pumps when a check falls out.

MOMENTS LATER

Jake gazes at the picture of the house, phone to ear --

JAKE  
 (into phone)  
 Just wanted to say thanks for the  
 money and everything. So thanks.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - NIGHT

GRANDMA (60's, a woman who can be described as "handsome")  
 pushes her cart down an aisle of holiday decorations --

GRANDMA  
 (into phone)  
 Well, I hope you get yourself  
 something nice you want.

Grandma reaches for a figure of ADOLESCENT JESUS in his often  
 ignored awkward teenage years. But a STRESSED MOM (35) grabs the  
 last one while her SCREAMING CHILD (4) has a tantrum.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)  
 How are you? Is your mother there?

JAKE  
 Take a wild guess. She's at work.

GRANDMA  
 Your mother... Honestly, I don't  
 know what to do... I pray to the  
 Lord for you both every night.

Grandma sees Mom distracted and swipes Jesus from her cart.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)  
 I'm always here, okay?

JAKE  
 I know.  
 (then)  
 I think I hear the door. I gotta  
 go. Thanks! Love you!

CLOSE ON: AWKWARD ADOLESCENT JESUS LANDS IN GRANDMA'S CART.

INT. REED APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Ashley enters, home from work.

ASHLEY  
 Hi, sweetie. Ooh, mail. Anything  
 for me besides pre-approved credit  
 they won't approve?

Ashley sees Jake in the fridge, seemingly ignoring her.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)  
 Not even a hello?  
 (misinterpreting)  
I'm the one who should still be mad  
 here. Not you.

JAKE  
 (stays hidden in fridge)  
 I just never took the time to read  
 and appreciate this stuff.  
 (reads)  
 Did you know "this cran-raspberry  
 flavored juice cocktail is a  
 refreshing way to get the nutrients  
 you need for an active lifestyle"?

ASHLEY  
 You won't even look at me?

Jake emerges, but hides his face behind a jug of juice.

JAKE  
 (reads)  
 We have "five percent juice from  
 concentrate for optimum taste and  
 vibrant color." "Water and high-  
 fructose corn syrup"? Two faves!  
 (reads)  
 "Bottled in Battle Creek, Michigan."

ASHLEY  
 Stop acting like this. Talk to me.

Ashley lowers the jug exposing Jake's beat up face.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)  
 Jesus, what happened to your face?

JAKE  
 (lies)  
 There were these really big cans...  
 Like heavy ones, way up on a shelf.

ASHLEY  
 They fell on you?

JAKE

I volunteered to get 'em down. And yeah...

ASHLEY

Damn, you're really getting into volunteering. Let me get some ice.

Ashley opens the freezer. The lie worked, but Jake feels bad.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Carl watches from the couch as his parole officer, JORDAN (50's, dour, wears heavy overcoat), studies three small, plush Christmas elves on the windowsill.

JORDAN

These elves look demented.

CARL

The wife and kid gave me one every year. Sorta lost the others...

JORDAN

That figures...  
(reflects)  
This will be my first Christmas without my wife, you know.

CARL

Same here.

JORDAN

I know that. Difference is I don't see mine because of some unpronounceable cancer. You don't see yours because you're a continual fuck-up. You, Carl, are your own cancer.

Jordan clicks his pen and makes notes next to a checklist.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

(examining apartment)  
Let's see who's been naughty or nice.

CARL

So you're all alone this year?

JORDAN

Nah, I got family in. Nieces, nephews, whatever.

CARL  
That's good.

JORDAN  
No, they insisted. I'm being suffocated by the goddamn Christmas spirit.

CARL  
Been worried about you, man. Since your wife, you haven't been your normal buoyant self.

JORDAN  
You've known me to be buoyant?

CARL  
No. No, always very grave. But differently so.

Jordan looks up from his report --

JORDAN  
You don't need a list to see how bad this place is. You just need eyes.

Jordan is knocked back by something he smells.

JORDAN (CONT'D)  
-- and a nose. What the hell's that smell?

CARL  
(considers)  
Is it better if I know what it is or don't know what it is?

JORDAN  
Look around. Would you treat someone you care about as badly as you treat yourself?

Carl shrugs.

JORDAN (CONT'D)  
The answer's beyond me as well. So guess what? You're going to a meeting. Go figure something out.

CARL  
But I've tried all that dumb shit!

JORDAN

Reminder: I'm the one who decides your value to society. Don't fuck with me.

Carl is shook. Jordan throws a copy of the report at him.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

You say it's "dumb," but I know you're just scared. Better find a way to get over that fear.

Carl thinks about how.

HOURS LATER

Carl sits on the couch fidgeting nervously, looking back and forth between the door and the drink in his hand.

CARL

(to his drink)

You know, I was hoping for a bit of that "liquid courage" you advertise.

Carl drinks. He looks at the door --

CARL (CONT'D)

(to his drink)

Is this like a self-interest thing? Instead of "getting up the nerve," you fray my nerves so bad I'm too weak and afraid to go?

All at once Carl stands, aces his drink, and heads out the door -- grabbing his elf coat off a chair on the way.

INT. REED APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ashley comes home carrying a pizza and looking exhausted.

ASHLEY

(calls out, joking)

I'm back from the break-dancing finals. I didn't win, but it was a valuable experience, I think. My popping is excellent. My locking needs work.

Jake greets her wearing a Christmas sweater, hair combed, and offering egg nog. It's his best impression of a good kid.

JAKE  
 (hands drink; takes pizza)  
 Some delicious nog?

ASHLEY  
 Wow, so helpful. And did you bathe?  
 (jokes)  
 I know a mother's love is supposed  
 to be unconditional -- but I think  
 I like you more right now.

LATER - KITCHEN

Jake and Ashley sit sharing the pizza.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)  
 Hope you weren't too hungry. I feel  
 like other homes are full of pies,  
 fresh baked cookies, whatever a  
 yule log is... and a Christmas  
 pheasant, maybe?

JAKE  
 This food in this home is as good  
 as any other -- even if that home  
 is in Southern Delaware.

Ashley laughs, but the moment is ruined when the phone RINGS.  
 She answers, and Jake watches her good mood turn sour as she  
 shoots him a stern look. She covers the phone --

ASHLEY  
 It's Mr. Elfman? Did you blow off  
 the food drive just to hang around  
 the house?  
 (hands him phone)  
 Very not cool, Jake. People starve  
 so you can eat pizza? Take some  
 cans with you.

Jake knows what's going on here, and he's royally pissed.

INT. OFICINA INTEGRUPAL HISPANA - NIGHT

Jake and Carl join HISPANIC ALCOHOLICS sitting in folding  
 chairs while CHILDREN race around the room.

JAKE  
 What the hell are we doing at a  
 Mexican A.A. meeting?

Carl

Do this next thing and you'll be done with Steps Four and Five and Six and even Seven. That's two birds with one stone.

(realizes his math)

And then two more again. Dead birds all around. Fuck 'em.

JAKE

I really needed to lie to Mom for this? She finally seemed okay. Now she's back in crazy bitch mode.

CARL

(shows in notebook)

You're too hard on her. That's why you need to be here. Step Four: "Name ways you're a flawed fucker, emphasizing times you've been Crazy Fuckerratic, Dumb Fuckerroneous, or Violent Fuckeruptive."

JAKE

(sticks to his point)

Other kids don't deal with such crazy bullshit. It just doesn't happen with other moms. It's only her, that's all I know.

Carl spots Angel on his way to the front and gives a wave.

JAKE (CONT'D)

That's your mall colleague Santos Claus, if I'm not mistaken.

CARL

I asked *Papá Noel* to share some of his story so you can see something: Your mom isn't as messed up as you think because the world isn't as pure as you think.

The group CLAPS as Angel gets behind the lectern.

JAKE

I'm not gonna understand him anyway.

CARL

It's okay, he said his niece agreed to translate.

Angel WHISTLES over to the children --

ANGEL  
 (calls out)  
 Maria! Maria, ven aquí.

MARIA (10, the MOST DARLING little kid ever) hustles over.

MARIA  
 ¿Sí, tío Angel?

Maria smiles, super excited. Jake is still on edge.

SERIES OF SHOTS - MARIA TRANSLATES ANGEL'S STORY

As Maria translates for Angel, she PLAYFULLY ACTS OUT what she says. Her VIVID LANGUAGE and DICTION is very STARTLING.

--Maria listens, then pretends to steal something.

MARIA  
 When things were bad, I was a real boozehound, sniffing out vulnerable bodegas all over town.

--Maria listens, then pretends to whisper a lie.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
 I lied to everyone. My lies led to more lies. I even lied to myself about how I felt about things.

CARL  
 (to Jake)  
 You ever guilty of that? I wanna hear some character flaws by the end.

Jake doesn't look up for it.

--Maria listens, then pretends to fight.

MARIA  
 My bag of cans was stolen by a Filipino man named Lou. I snapped. Blacked out because of rage and discount gin. When I came to, there was blood on my hands. My cans were gone, but there was seventy dollars in my pocket. Far more than the cans were worth. But roughly the street value of an unlucky Filipino corpse.

--Maria listens, then gyrates awkwardly.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I conceived my baby daughter in a  
porn store dumpster.

--Maria listens, then pretends to be a kitty, licks her paw.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I ate a cat out of spite.

--Maria listens, then squats and strains her face.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I pooped on the leeward side of a  
pitcher's mound.

--Maria listens, then translates Angel's closing remarks.

MARIA (CONT'D)

They tell us that no one recovers  
in isolation. My family is there  
for me. Thank you.

Carl is deeply affected by these words as the group claps.

CARL

(shows in notebook)

You just saw Step Five right there:  
"Have the integrity to own your  
shit -- otherwise head to the Lube  
Emporium because it's just  
pointless moral masturbation.  
(A.K.A. Don't be a bitch.)"

Jake feels put on the spot.

JAKE

This isn't fair. I don't see what  
some crazy drunk has to do with me.

CARL

You seriously can't own one  
weakness? That's pretty sad.

JAKE

(raises voice)

What about you? You're nothing but  
weakness. I'm the sad one?

CARL

You can't keep going until you grow  
some balls and name some faults.

JAKE

(even louder)

I don't care about you and your stupid Dr. Suess-sounding Steps. How am I supposed to learn from someone more 'effed up than me?

Carl considers, slowly nods as he realizes his move.

CARL

I'll show you.

Jake is surprised when Carl answers with action: Carl stands, hands the notebook to Jake, and heads to the front.

CARL (CONT'D)

(from lectern)

*Hola. Mi nombre es* Carl... Uhm, I don't really know where to start.

(jokes)

Hey, that's one good thing about drinking, you don't even remember a lot of the bad shit.

(no one laughs)

Yeah, not funny... I wanna talk about Steps Six and Seven.

Jake sees his father struggling.

CARL (CONT'D)

When someone's always upset with you, you protect yourself and think: no, there's gotta be something majorly wrong with them. It's the most selfish dickhead thing you can do, especially to family, your wife, your mom... anyone you love.

Jake sees himself in this, looks down ashamed.

CARL (CONT'D)

That's where these two Steps come in and ask: Do you believe someone can change? Because if you don't, there's no point. Just stop.

(gathers himself)

Sorry, this is my first time up here. I couldn't do it before. I guess that's proof of small change, no?

(looks at Jake)

Actually, I couldn't do anything before.

(MORE)

CARL (CONT'D)

Finishing one step was impossible,  
let alone twelve. I said I did  
but...

Jake leaves the notebook and heads for the exit.

CARL (CONT'D)

I thought I could fix things now if  
I told a small lie about back then.

Jake begins to run as he bursts through the doors outside.

EXT. OFICINA INTEGRUPAL HISPANA - DAY

Carl exits to see Jake jump on the bike and ride away.

CARL

Wait! Fuck.

Carl runs after him, notebook in hand --

EXT. TOWN STREETS - DAY

Jake pedals as fast as he can, but the busted front wheel  
keeps Carl within shouting distance --

CARL

Jake, I'm sorry!

JAKE

You lied to us! You're exactly the  
same!

Jake picks up speed on a hill and begins to pull away until:  
The faulty wheel buckles and he goes flying, landing hard.  
Carl races over, but Jake pushes away any aid or comfort.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Fuck off, loser.

They sit collecting their breath -- and their thoughts.

JAKE (CONT'D)

So you don't care about anything?  
You just get drunk all the time?

CARL

When I drink, I don't get drunk. I  
get normal.

(beat)

Then I get drunk.

JAKE

Staying normal makes you drunk?  
That doesn't make sense.

CARL

Sometimes you drink just to forget  
you're drinking. None of it makes  
sense.

Jake is absorbing this when he notices something on his bike --

JAKE

You guys spelled "Huffy" wrong.  
(squints)  
Also "mountain." Good job nailing  
"bike," though.

CARL

That'd be me. It was my job to  
stencil the words. I was a bit too  
sloshed for more than that.

JAKE

Mom spray painted it?

CARL

Yep. We actually ran out of paint.  
Christmas Eve and your mother runs  
into the night... then somehow,  
insanely, she returns with cans.

JAKE

From where?

CARL

She wouldn't say. But the next  
morning I noticed your bike had the  
same color scheme as the robes of  
Mary and Joseph next door.

JAKE

(can't believe it)  
The nativity scene? Mom stole spray  
paint from the neighbors?

Jake limps over, picks up his bike to assess the damage.

CARL

Un-stealing them was actually way  
harder. Ended up mailing 'em back.

JAKE

Can you do that?

CARL

Mail aerosol cans? No. No, that would be her second felony of the story. She really wanted you to have that bike.

Jake untwists bent handlebars to find a detached break line.

JAKE

Some of what you said up there sounded right. Like when you said you're a selfish dickhead.

CARL

Glad that landed, the part about me being terrible.

JAKE

No, because I've been like that too, like with Mom.

CARL

Yeah?

JAKE

(checks bike chain)  
You don't become better if you're chasing phone bullshit. It could be called selfish-dickhead behavior.

Jake looks up to see Carl holding a pen up to Step Four --

CARL

So I'm hearing you say you were wrong about something?

JAKE

Yeah, for sure.

Carl crosses off Step Four, puts the pen to Step Five --

CARL

And you're owning it?

JAKE

Yeah, screw the cell. I just gotta get right with Mom.

Carl crosses off Step Five.

CARL

So we still doing this?

Jake nods, but when Carl goes in for a hug Jake stops him --

JAKE

But there's a condition. If you're gonna help me, you gotta let me help you.

Jake pulls a liquor bottle from Carl's jacket, pours it out.

CARL

God it pains me to watch that.  
(considers)  
You have a deal.

Jake moves to give Carl a big hug, but --

CARL (CONT'D)

(holds up a finger)  
Hold on.

Carl pulls a half-pint from his sock, tosses it in the woods. Again, Jake moves to give Carl a big hug, but --

CARL (CONT'D)

(holds up a finger, again)  
One more.

Carl pulls a tequila mini from the fold of his elf hat. Again, Jake moves to give Carl a big hug, but --

CARL (CONT'D)

(holds up a finger, again)  
Almost done.

Carl pulls yet another mini from inside the other sock.

JAKE

Sort of losing the impulse to hug you here.

CARL

That's it. I'm unarmed.

Carl opens his arms, defenseless, boozeless. They hug.

INT. REED APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jake decorates the tree, looks over at Ashley --

JAKE

I'm almost done over here. You gonna do your side?

Ashley's half is barely touched. She sits, depressed and detached. It worries Jake.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I think we still have enough time,  
like before Grandma comes... if  
that's what's wrong...

ASHLEY

I just haven't been able to sleep,  
even though I'm exhausted... I only  
have a few hours before I leave.

JAKE

Your schedule is nuts.

ASHLEY

I'm covering somebody else's shift.  
She helped me out a few days ago  
when I needed to leave, so...

JAKE

Oh, when you had to pick me up...

ASHLEY

It's a full, so I'll be back around  
two or three.

Ashley's depression makes her hard to read.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jake dons the Higher Elf hat. Carl is sprawled out on the  
couch in a cold sweat.

CARL

These withdrawals are hell.

JAKE

Higher Elf commands, sit up!

CARL

Forget me. Focus on your mom.

JAKE

You said Six and Seven are about  
believing a person can change. I'm  
only asking you for one amends to  
prove it to me.

(opens A.A. notebook)

Shouldn't you already have a list  
in here? Oh, here we go.

Carl shoots up and lunges for Jake, but he plays keep away --

JAKE (CONT'D)

"Amends: Compensate Tahitian whore Nanihi."

(dodges Carl; reads)

"Repay Alex for whiskey horrors."

(grabbed by Carl; reads)

"Apologize to the Polish community of East St. Louis."

Carl yanks the notebook away and looks at his old list.

CARL

(reads)

"Apologize to Ronny because of that thing with his sister." Most of these are expired.

JAKE

If I can't make excuses then neither can you.

CARL

Do you think they want that? Me busting in while they decorate the tree? "Hey, Ron, haven't seen you in a decade. Sorry about that thing with your sister. Man, you should see the list she ended up on!" No one needs that.

JAKE

How about this: Why'd you have to go to jail?

Carl doesn't want to answer but needs to --

CARL

Telecommunications fraud. "Telecom fraud," we call it on the streets.

JAKE

Seriously? Like Robocalls?

CARL

Yeah, but I wasn't swindling old ladies out of their tithing money. I only hit bad people, and my scams were ALL FAKE.

Carl takes off his shirt to wipe flop sweat off his face.

CARL (CONT'D)

I'd think of the most despicable shit I could -- really repulsive stuff -- then I'd offer a chance to get in on the action. You can't even call them victims.

JAKE

That's bull. What could be so bad?

CARL

Nazi gold do anything for ya? That's the one I was busted for. "Gold bullion exchange-traded funds... Invest now for huge guaranteed returns!"

(then)

Oh, and also they get a free boat.

JAKE

Why the boat?

CARL

Always offer a boat. People love a boat.

Carl chugs water, painfully battling his withdrawal.

CARL (CONT'D)

My P.O. thinks there was more than one scam, but he can't prove it. It drives him crazy. I just never left any evidence.

JAKE

How'd you get caught then?

CARL

One night, I was drunk... I fucked up. Somehow instead of having a nice wide range like always, all the calls went local. Couple thousand townspeople got an identical call about Himmler and an "ultra-low four percent premium" on wartime loot.

JAKE

This like a Cayman Islands thing?

CARL

No, too obvious. They expect an offshore account.

(MORE)

CARL (CONT'D)

Instead, do the opposite:  
Liechtenstein, enclosed by an  
entire continent on all sides. I  
got a guy there.

Carl picks up a shirt and smells it, throws on an old Colt 45  
tee with Billy Dee Williams promising "It Works Every Time."

CARL (CONT'D)

Not sure we found our amends yet.

JAKE

(repeats Carl earlier)  
Start small, my disciple. What'd  
you do with all the money?

Carl doesn't want to say, but --

EXT. ABE'S LIQUOR LOCKER BAR - NIGHT

Jake and Carl stand in front of a dive bar. Carl doesn't wear  
his Santa hat or beard.

JAKE

Wow, you blew it all at a place  
called "Abe's Liquor Locker."

CARL

A lot of memories here... they're  
all blank, but I recall there were  
a lot of them.

Carl opens the door but stops Jake from following.

CARL (CONT'D)

Considering the tidbits I do  
remember, you should probably wait  
outside.

JAKE

No way. I'm your sponsor here.

CARL

Fair enough.

Carl holds the door, but Jake stops to question him --

JAKE

By the way, no beard? No hat?

CARL  
 People around here are used to  
 seeing me all scraggly, never clean  
 shaven like now. It'll totally  
 throw 'em. Oh, and this.

Carl slaps on a yarmulke.

CARL (CONT'D)  
 (affected tone)  
 "Who's that smooth Jew? Ain't Carl,  
 that's for sure."

Carl follows Jake inside.

INT. ABE'S LIQUOR LOCKER BAR - NIGHT

It's dark and smells like stale beer. Drunk BARFLY MIKE  
 (looks just like Carl in 15 years) calls over --

BARFLY MIKE  
 Hey... Hey Carl... What's up, man...

CARL  
 Hey my man, what's good? How's that  
 shit with your landlord going?

Mike GROANS, so drunk he struggles to keep his head up.

CARL (CONT'D)  
 Mike? Hey, Mikey?  
 (to Jake)  
 He's uhhh... shy. An introvert.

Jake is alarmed to see Carl's natural environment.

Owner and operator ABE (70, folksy, seen it all) is behind  
 the bar melting last night's ice well when he notices Carl --

ABE  
 Carl! Good to see you, my friend.  
 Look at you, you look like hell.  
 Though you seem far more upright  
 than normal. Less surly, perhaps?  
 (pours drink)  
 Seven and Coke. Sorry it's last  
 night's ice, but I'm guessing you  
 don't mind terribly.

Carl's reflex is strong, but he looks at Jake and resists.

CARL  
 Thanks, but no. And it's not the ice.

Abe is puzzled, then notices Jake.

ABE

What's with the kid? He can't be in here.

CARL

(searches for a lie)  
I mentor him. *Big Brothers* type thing.

ABE

One of those deals for kids without a father?

(laughs)

I can't imagine you'd be much improvement. They didn't know what they were doing.

CARL

I've turned over a new leaf.

ABE

...since Wednesday?

CARL

Yes. Wednesday... it was a pivotal hump day. A lot can happen on a Wednesday.

ABE

You don't even remember do you?

Carl does not -- and that drink looks really good.

ABE (CONT'D)

Hell, you challenged each person in the place! Shouted that they were wasting their lives, drinking it away and such. "I'm the only one willing to fight for more!" You kept yelling that. You really wanted to fight someone! You were swinging like a mad man.

CARL

That's sort of why I'm here. I wanna apologize for stuff... I'm not sure how --

ABE

I've watched you for years now. I swear to God, you pick fights just to lose 'em.

Carl motions for Abe to shut up in front of Jake.

BARFLY MIKE

Hey, that's right. You're a real asshole. I remember now. You're a real... and a real piece of shit.

Carl turns to find a resurgent Mikey inches from his face.

CARL

Listen, I'm sorry if we fought. I --

BARFLY MIKE

(notices Jake)

This your old man?

Jake blows their cover to defend his dad --

JAKE

Yeah, what if he is?

BARFLY MIKE

Well he's a real asshole. He's a real... and a real...

JAKE

A real piece of shit?

BARFLY MIKE

Yeah. And he's a bitch. And worthless. He's a punk ass drunk.

JAKE

Sounds exactly right, actually.

BARFLY MIKE

(surprised; to Carl)

Even he knows you're a fuck-tard.

JAKE

That's not all. He's scraggly. He drinks away the bad and the good. He can barely stand straight most the time. What else?

(thinks)

No friends? Has a meaningless life, right?

(sniffs Mike)

And smells like drippy farts?

BARFLY MIKE

Fuck yeah, exactly.

JAKE  
 Thing is, he's changed now.  
 (to Carl)  
 Tell him.

BARFLY MIKE  
 Bullshit.

CARL  
 Things are different now, yeah. I  
 mean... I'm sober now.

Abe is shocked. Mike is defensive --

BARFLY MIKE  
 Oh, so you think you're better than  
 me? Fuckin' sober? You're not  
 better than me. We're the same,  
 asshole. Don't fuckin' forget it.

JAKE  
 "The same"? So he's just like you,  
 and you just described all the ways  
 he was a total loser.

Mike is twisted around.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 He was like that, and to be honest  
 I literally just started describing  
 you. That's how bad he was: as bad  
 as bein' you!

Before anyone reacts, Abe slides Carl's drink down the bar.

ABE  
 Mikey, you weren't even here that  
 night.  
 (points to drink)  
 Go drink that and shut the hell up.

Mike slinks away, collapses back onto a bar stool.

ABE (CONT'D)  
 (to Carl)  
 You said you wanna apologize but  
 don't know how. Try this: Just say  
 it. Tell me you're sorry. Then what  
 for.

CARL  
 Okay. Sorry for being a flake or an  
 asshole and whatever else, on and  
 off, for much of the past decade.

ABE

"Make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others." Not as easy as it sounds.

(then)

Twenty years sober.

CARL

Seriously?

ABE

But amends are more than just words. You gotta stick to shit.

(shakes Carl's hand)

So get the fuck out. Happy to see you go. Merry Christmas.

Carl appreciates the moment. He and Jake head out.

ABE (CONT'D)

(sees yarmulke)

You're Jewish now too? When'd that happen?

CARL

Told you it was a hell of a Wednesday, man. *L'Chaim!*

Abe watches them go.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Carl is altering his elf jacket, tailoring it and cutting off frills. Jake sits racking his brain.

CARL

You need the mother of all amends.

JAKE

What do you do for the woman who carried you around inside her for nine months... and then all that other stuff since?

CARL

How is she?

JAKE

She's been super depressed. Before, she was totally freaking out about impressing Grandma, now it's like she doesn't care.

CARL  
Does she ever just tell you what  
would make her happy?

JAKE  
We don't talk much. She's at work  
or she's mad at me because I  
"ruined another day."

Jake reflects -- before having a lightbulb moment.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
That's it! She always wishes for it  
out loud. "I just wish I could have  
one nice day..."

Jake stands, excited. Carl completes it --

CARL  
"One nice day, where nothing goes  
wrong and no one gets upset."

JAKE  
It sounds so easy, but we always  
fuck it up.

CARL  
This is true.

JAKE  
This will be different. I'll give  
her one nice day, tomorrow on  
Christmas Eve.

Jake deflates and sits back down.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
How the 'eff do I give her that?

CARL  
What does she yell at you for?  
She's probably directly letting you  
know what she wants.

JAKE  
(stunned)  
Huh. That never occurred to me  
before.  
(then)  
It's a lot of small things, I guess.  
You think that stuff matters?

CARL  
What do you think?

JAKE

Yeah. Maybe a lot, actually. I can start super early after she leaves for work.

They share an awkward moment wondering the same thing.

CARL

(holds up finished jacket)  
I guess I won't need this snazzy jacket now...

JAKE

No, I can still come over. It won't take all day if I'm fast. We still have Steps to finish, right?

CARL

Of course we do. You're still super fucked up, right?

Jake nods a serious "of course" before laughing.

INT. REED APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING

Jake enters while Ashley runs through her morning routine.

ASHLEY

You're up early.

JAKE

Christmas Eve... biggest day on the Christmas food drive calendar.

ASHLEY

I'll see you later tonight. Dinner with Grandma is gonna be late, so grab a snack or something.

JAKE

Okay, Mom.

Ashley heads out. Jake springs into action --

MONTAGE - JAKE GIVES MOM "ONE NICE DAY" & CARL STRUGGLES

Jake at home using Ashley's to-do list from the car:

--He cleans EVERYTHING, using all the products Ashley bought.

--He changes the sheets, poorly. Does laundry, also poorly.

--He launches into DECORATING the hell out of the place.

--He sees one item remains: "Baby Jesus Christ."

--He stands in front of the neighbor's nativity scene. Mary and Joseph are indeed enrobed in the same colors as his bike.

--He steals baby Jesus from the manger and replaces him with a Red Sox era David Wells bobblehead.

#### CARL'S APARTMENT

Carl opens "DEAL WITH CRAVINGS" on his addiction recovery PHONE APP, follows the list of un-Carl like recommendations:

--"EAT HEALTHY." He throws out all his food, orders something healthy. One bite and he gags, tosses it and orders pizza.

--"LEARN A HOBBY." He finds a guitar and smiles, loads Yngwie Malmsteen "REH Master Series" instructional VHS -- epically fails to follow the poodle-haired Swede in purple blouse.

--"MEDITATE." He tries to focus with eyes closed -- but there is a game on TV, then a cell ALERT from PornHub, then a call.

He watches TV next to a now-broken guitar.

--"TALK TO LOVED ONE." He thinks a moment, then skips it. He closes the app and checks his PornHub alert instead.

#### JAKE'S APARTMENT

--Jake sits with broken pieces of the CERAMIC SANTA STATUE. With a determined look, he unscrews a tube of super glue.

--He has some success with his painstaking reconstruction, but

--It collapses, OVER and OVER and OVER it breaks into pieces.

--He's blitzed by aggravation and he wants to ERUPT, but

--He gathers himself and begins again every time.

#### INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jordan enters to find an organized, spotless apartment.

JORDAN

This is different. This place  
actually looks...

CARL  
Habitable, no? Praiseworthy even?

JORDAN  
We'll see.

CARL  
Not exactly the response I was  
expecting.

JORDAN  
Expect less.

Carl trails Jordan around as he makes his appraisal.

CARL  
I'm glad you have family visiting.  
They can teach you the true meaning  
of Christmas, you prickly pear.

JORDAN  
Ha! Bullshit.

CARL  
"Bah, humbug!" That's you. You're  
just like Scrooge.

JORDAN  
What?

CARL  
You said "humbug." Literally, the  
translation for the word "humbug"  
is "bullshit."

JORDAN  
The family dragged me to Stevens  
Park yesterday. I despise that  
place. And with them around I feel  
guilty about it. I feel wicked,  
like it's a crime for me to hate  
Christmas cheer.

CARL  
Stevens Park. What a great idea!  
Couldn't you feel how excited the  
kids were? Some vicarious mirth?

JORDAN  
You have no idea how jolly they  
get. It's absolutely crushing me.  
(sighs)  
It used to be just me and Carol, ya  
know?

CARL  
She loved Christmas?

JORDAN  
No. Hell no. She hated Christmas  
more than me.  
(fondly remembers)  
It was heaven. We would just be  
together, aggressively not  
celebrating...

Carl still tails Jordan, hopeful and proud of his apartment.  
Jordan sees Carl's cut up, self-tailored elf jacket.

JORDAN (CONT'D)  
What happened there?

Carl shrinks, searches for a lie --

CARL  
You know, fashion and stuff... new  
look for today's modern elf.

JORDAN  
That so? Still have the job? Or you  
just walk out again?

No response.

JORDAN (CONT'D)  
Carl, how the hell can you be so  
self-serving and so self-  
destructive all at once?

Jordan marks the list then tosses Carl's copy on the floor.

JORDAN (CONT'D)  
For your records. Humbug.

EXT. STEVENS PARK - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Jake and Carl approach the holiday excitement of the big  
annual Stevens Park Christmas Festival.

CARL  
Welcome to Step Two! But instead of  
"finding the Holy Spirit," your  
step is: "Believe in the  
motherfuckin' Spirit of Christmas!"

JAKE

Stevens Park? I've hated this place since I was kid. Didn't feel the spirit then. Really doubt I will now.

Still, Jake follows as Carl heads in.

EXT. STEVENS PARK - INSIDE - NIGHT

A big celebration, the park is full of lights, music, and kiddie rides. The whole town is there.

CARL

(seemingly unprompted)

In World War One, the Western Front suddenly went silent. No guns firing, no death. Why? The Germans began decorating their trench with candles and wishing the English a merry Christmas. The Brits sang back "The First Noel," the Krauts performed "Silent Night." Enemy soldiers emerged, met in no-man's land to drink and celebrate...

Carl loves this story. Jake has heard him tell it before.

CARL (CONT'D)

That's the Christmas Truce of 1914, spontaneously springing up from nothing but death, mustard gas, and trench foot. So if you can't feel the Christmas spirit in this place? Then I've truly failed.

TICKET GIRL (17) working the entrance stops Carl --

TICKET GIRL

Sir? We ask that you take off the Santa hat.

CARL

What?

TICKET GIRL

We don't want to make anyone uncomfortable.

She points to a sign: Santa's hat is one many forbidden Christmas symbols. Then she points to the banner above:

SECULAR WINTER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION!

Carl takes off his hat as he realizes they totally stripped away the Christmas: no red and green, no elves, no Rudolph... Volunteers wear shirts with a pagan moon goddess on them.

CARL

What'd they do to the Christmas magic?

Carl is incredulous. He swigs on a BOTTLE OF SODA he carries.

JAKE

I guess they're sort of with me on the whole spirit thing.

Carl is in denial. He spots a bake sale and rushes over.

CARL

Whatever, who needs decorations? A bake sale is chock full of Christmas spirit --  
 (sees label)  
 But not nuts, gluten, or sugar?  
 What the hell's left after that?

HOMELY VEGAN LADY

(from behind her cookies)  
 A more nourishing alternative, that's what.

CARL

No, no. This should be chocolate chip, snowball -- and sugar cookies, damnit, the loud and proud cookies that don't hide what they're about.

JAKE

We got healthier snacks now because of childhood obesity.

CARL

But isn't that just fat shaming?

JAKE

I honestly lose track of these things.

Dismayed, Carl steps away and drinks his soda in a way that makes us suspect the truth: it's HALF LIQUOR.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Relax. You're just on edge because you're not drinking.

CARL

No, this is important. You don't get it.

JAKE

I remember coming before. I get it.

CARL

No, no. Every Christmas is new and totally unique. The whole season is a big reset. There's nothing else like it. That's the Christmas spirit. It's about hope.

Carl can barely handle it. He is chugging more soda when he spots: in the shadows, a spidery structure looms.

CARL (CONT'D)

Hosannah in the fuckin' highest.

Carl approaches. It's an old kiddie carnival swing ride.

JAKE

Oh wow... Too bad it's not running.

CARL

Oh it will. Just needs some juice! I know you remember the Rudolph Ride!

JAKE

Yeah, you puked on me when I was eight.

Carl walks around the ride inspecting the base.

CARL

A bit too much eggnog with my whiskey that day.

JAKE

Don't you mean the opposite?

CARL

No, if it was just a cup of whiskey, I'da been fine. 'twas the night of too much nog.

Jake notices clean-cut HUMDRUM DAD (Carl's age) there with his WIDE-EYED DAUGHTER (8). They don't know what to make of Carl.

JAKE

You know what's up with this?

HUMDRUM DAD

Yeah, it was our favorite. They shut her down last year.

(to Carl)

He's right. It's not operating.

CARL

Just needs some juice!

Carl triumphantly hoists thick wires running to the ride.

CARL (CONT'D)

Christmas is magical if you make it. You gotta want it. The spirit works if you work it.

Carl spots a large green pad-mounted utility box, heads over.

CARL (CONT'D)

Here we go, one of those big green box things!

(inspects it)

Shit, it's locked?

HUMDRUM DAD

I'd hope so. There's a power distribution transformer in there.

CARL

(kicks open)

Of course. Exactly. Well, perfect! "Power distribution transformer."

HUMDRUM DAD

You really shouldn't touch that if you don't know what you're doing. You got ground wire for the whole park running through that thing.

Carl has pulled up some sort of how-to article on his phone.

CARL

Damn straight.

(looks at article)

Ground wire, that's what's called the "primary high voltage."

(to Humdrum Dad)

Did you know that?

Humdrum Dad and Wide-Eyed Daughter give Jake a nervous look.

CARL (CONT'D)  
 (compares to phone)  
 This doesn't seem like standard wiring. That's okay, just gotta strip off the top thingy... piggy-back bare wires onto our plug here...

Carl whips out an impressive pocket knife and strips wires.

JAKE  
 This really isn't worth it.

CARL  
 Christmas isn't always blow-your-mind-amazing. Sometimes you just gotta buckle in and enjoy a rickety holiday ride.

Carl has created a jumble of exposed wires.

JAKE  
 What are we celebrating here? I only remember bad shit like you and mom fighting. Something always went wrong. So just stop it.

Carl strips the large, powerful ground wire.

CARL  
 That's exactly why we need to do this. It's absolutely about getting this up and running.

Jake softens.

CARL (CONT'D)  
 Let me make amends. This is one bad memory we can fix.

Carl steadies his hand and concentrates as he gets ready to give it that juice --

CUT TO:

THROUGHOUT PARK

Lights surge, dim, and flicker, flashing in and out --

At the bake sale, CHILDREN AND PARENTS look around confused --

At the entrance, Ticket Girl fields concerned looks --

Under a parking lot light leaning on his cruiser, OFFICER SCHMULLA (50, bloated) is alarmed, looks out and sees --

A small EXPLOSION on the far side of the park before --

BRIGHT CHRISTMAS GLORY, the Rudolph ride lights up the sky.

RUDOLPH RIDE

Carl's clothes are smoking and his Santa beard burned off, exposing his face. He's in great shock, rattled but wired.

CARL

Whoo, lotta juice.

JAKE

You should be dead.

CARL

I'm fine. I'm possessed by the spirit!

HUMDRUM DAD

No, you are severely electrocuted.  
I'm going to get help.

WIDE-EYED DAUGHTER

Look, Daddy.

She points up at Rudolph, brightly lit with nose so bright.

THROUGHOUT PARK

Children start flocking to the bright red and green lights. Officer Schmulla heads over with them to investigate.

RUDOLPH RIDE

Carl jumps up onto the control platform.

CARL

No music? It used to play Christmas music, remember?

Jake spots a switch behind a locked cage.

JAKE

I might have it, but it's locked.

He thinks, then kicks until it breaks open like Carl did.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Got it!

Children excitedly rush to get on the ride.

HUMDRUM DAD

Fuck it.

Humdrum Dad helps his thrilled daughter onto a swing.

CARL

(to Jake)

Not bad, huh?

Jake smiles, feeling the Christmas energy.

CARL (CONT'D)

You know, if you get on this ride  
then you can cross off Step Two.

Jake smiles and runs to the last open swing. The ride begins playing an instrumental "TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS."

Carl takes a triumphant swig of "soda," dons his Santa hat, and begins belting his own lyrics, FORCED INTO THE MELODY --

CARL (CONT'D)

(sings)

*On the First Step of Christmas my  
true love gave to me: a partridge  
in a pear treeeee... for some  
reasonnn...*

Jake buckles himself in.

CARL (CONT'D)

*On the Second Step of Christmas my  
P.O. said to me: in this cup you  
must peeee... and here are a couple  
more partridgeees...*

Carl starts the ride, but before Jake is out of earshot --

CARL (CONT'D)

*On the Third Step of Christmas my  
child gave to me: a second final  
chaaance...*

Jake hides his face in embarrassment but is cracking up.

CARL (CONT'D)

*On the Fourth Step of Christmas my  
body gave to me: shakes like  
Aliiiii...*

(MORE)

CARL (CONT'D)  
*talking about Muhammaaaaad... and  
 three more goddamn partridgesss...*

The ride goes full tilt, and children love Carl's singing.

CARL (CONT'D)  
*On the Fifth Step of relapse, a  
 booze hound gave to me: boooooze...*  
 (comments)  
 He was like, "You need this because  
 here's even more birds, buddy."

Jake takes it all in: the ride, music, lights -- and Carl.  
 Jake has to smile, kid-like, affected by Christmas cheer.

Carl speaks from the controls to someone on the ground --

CARL (CONT'D)  
 Fine. Traditional lyrics from now on.

It's Officer Schmulla he's talking to, and he is not amused.

OFFICER SCHMULLA  
 Shut it off and come on down.

CARL  
 Be decent, man. Have some holiday  
 cheer.  
 (to Children)  
 You guys want me to stop the ride?

CHILDREN  
 No!

Jake is flying by on his swing when he sees Carl talking to a  
 cop. His joy is replaced by familiar disappointment.

OFFICER SCHMULLA  
 I think you're drunk.

CARL  
 Don't you know the rules? When you  
 wear a Santa hat you're not drunk,  
 you're jolly.

Jake can only see what's happening when he passes on his  
 swing. Each time he does, things look worse.

Carl hops down and Officer Schmulla moves to detain him.

OFFICER SCHMULLA  
 We've done this before, Carl. When  
 you refused to surrender the  
 pavilion for the Lilac Festival?

CARL  
 (doesn't remember)  
 That doesn't sound like me... I  
 must've had a good reason.

Jake jumps from the moving ride and runs over in time to see --

Officer Schmulla reaches in Carl's jacket and pulls out a  
 bottle of vodka, then opens the soda bottle and sniffs.

OFFICER SCHMULLA  
 (points to cruiser)  
 We're right over here. Let's go.

CARL  
 You're not serious.

Officer Schmulla takes Carl away, passing Jake.

CARL (CONT'D)  
 (to Jake)  
 I'm sorry.

Humdrum Dad shuts off the ride. The lights go dark and the  
 music goes silent as Carl is led away.

Jake is left alone, exposed, noticed. We recognize some of  
 Jake's classmates, including Chad.

CHAD  
 (shouts out)  
 Hey Jake, they're taking away your  
 drunk homeless friend!

CHAD'S FRIEND #1  
 I think that's his fucking dad.

Jake looks around and -- like in class before -- doesn't see  
 one kind face. Again they record with their nice phones.

CHAD'S FRIEND #2  
 (shouts out)  
 Aren't you gonna freak out, freak?

Jake doesn't fight. He blocks it out and pushes past everyone.

CHAD'S FRIEND #1  
 (shouts out)  
 What's wrong? Where's your  
 Christmas spirit?

Now Jake snaps. He turns and charges, so emotional he attacks  
 the wrong kid, starts beating on CHAD'S FRIEND #3.

Chad peels him off. Jake stands, ready to fight them all -- and he tries, swinging like a madman. But one guy can't beat three, and they start getting some good shots in.

Jake falls back onto the ground, hitting the legs of an intervening adult. He looks up, face dirty and cut, to see Principal McGriff wearing a moon goddess volunteer shirt.

PRINCIPAL MCGRIFF

This is getting control of yourself?

Jake doesn't have an answer.

PRINCIPAL MCGRIFF (CONT'D)

Do you have someone to take you home?

INT. POLICE CRUISER - MOVING - NIGHT

MOTHERLY FEMALE OFFICER (Ashley's age) drives with Jake slouched in the back seat, angry and embarrassed.

MOTHERLY FEMALE OFFICER

Try not to be too upset. It's still Christmas Eve after all.

JAKE

(lies)

I'm not upset.

The cruisers ROLL PAST EACH OTHER and --

Jake sees Carl in the back seat. They manage brief eye contact before looking away, both in trouble and ashamed.

LATER

Jake looks out the window as they turn down his street.

MOTHERLY FEMALE OFFICER

This it?

JAKE

Yeah.

MOTHERLY FEMALE OFFICER

That your mom?

Jake sees Ashley getting home. She struggles to open the door while carrying bags full of groceries for dinner.

INT. REED APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ashley stays by the door, closes her eyes as she processes.

JAKE

It's not what you think.

ASHLEY

It's not just getting in this kind of trouble, having a cop bring you home, for Christ's sake. With your Grandmother coming later tonight...

(beat)

There's the other thing: obviously you weren't helping at the food drive. You blew it off for the park?

Jake doesn't know how to answer.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Tell me the truth for once.

JAKE

I didn't volunteer tonight.

ASHLEY

I'd say I'm in disbelief, but you can only be shocked so many times before you realize it's just how things are.

JAKE

I never volunteered... ever.

ASHLEY

As in ever, this whole time?

(then)

Where've you been going? What've you been doing?!

JAKE

(can't expose Carl)

Nothing.

ASHLEY

So then all the rest of this stuff, how you've been lately, is this just an act? Some setup to get a stupid phone out of me?

JAKE

No, that's not it.

ASHLEY

What are we doing here? Who am I  
raising?

She walks off, not mentioning the decorations or work he did.

JAKE

(calls out)

Fine, believe what you want. Maybe  
I really am that bad.

Jake hides his frustrated tears as he wipes them away.

LATER

Jake places the reconfigured CERAMIC SANTA STATUE on an end  
table near Ashley napping. He covers her with a blanket, then --

Grabs his coat and sneaks out into the night.

**END ACT TWO**

ACT THREE

PODCAST RECAP OF ACT 2:

Podcast Dude, it becomes increasingly obvious, drank a bit too much of that sweet, sweet hooch --

With Christmassy sounds and music --

PODCAST DUDE

LOGLINE: 12 STEPS OF CHRISTMAS – a filthy Christmas comedy. When a rebellious kid is denied his dream Christmas present by his mom, he goes to his estranged alcoholic father (who lies about being sober) with an idea: adapt the 12 Step program to teach me how to not be you.

Music cue --

PODCAST DUDE (CONT'D)

Have you been drinking along at home? That's not just your liquor talking, Act 2 hit a little harder and left us all in our whiskey feels -- ending with Jake bolting from his Mom's apartment into the night.

PODCAST DUDE (CONT'D)

Will Ashley find him? Can they reconcile after such a big fight? What about Carl? He and Jake had their own falling out. Carl also needs to win over Mr. Humbug himself, his dour P.O. "River" Jordan. And what about me? Will my ice freeze in time for my next drink?

Podcast Dude becoming a semi-belligerent, musing drunk --

PODCAST DUDE (CONT'D)

Just slow down, you say? Humbug! Drink up! Bah -- What are ya, a woman? Statistically, yes! You podcast listener, you... I think that's super, personally...

(sound of drinking)

I love women.

(drinks)

The wrong ones love me, though. Or at least they loved my money or maybe my looks...

(MORE)

## PODCAST DUDE (CONT'D)

inherited both from a vindictive Mother -- for what?! Lost 'em both... to increasingly younger versions of her, no less...

(then)

But look at me now: a face on the radio, baby!

(remembers himself)

Anywho! Enjoy Act 3. As Jake and Carl try to give Ashley one nice day.

(then)

I need some ice...

(sound of wet slushy ice  
cube tray cracking; then,  
under his breath)

Fuckin' ice, fuckin' cold water  
more like it....

EXT. TOWN STREETS - CITY BUS STOP - NIGHT

Jake waits with others. It's scary for a kid. Christmas is bursting all around, but the mood is not cheery. Even the warm expressions are tired and worn down.

INT. REED APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ashley's ALARM goes off, and she is just waking up when she is ATTACKED by --

SHEER HORROR, assaulted by the site of Jake's reconstructed CERAMIC SANTA STATUE. Santa's face is disturbing, off-kilter, ungodly, and wrong. (Still, Jake tried his best.)

Ashley screams, then regains herself.

ASHLEY

Oh my god, Jake. You... fixed it.  
It's... thank you so much! This is  
such a great present. Jake?  
(gets up to search)  
You hear me? The whole place...  
really, it's amazing.

We see in full glory -- the apartment is bedecked with every Christmas decoration possible. Jake decorated like an 11-year-old boy might: poorly, but with unrestrained enthusiasm.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

You really put out all the  
decorations. I mean all.

(squints)

Is that a menorah?

(MORE)

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

I didn't even know we had one of those.

(getting nervous)

Jake, where are you?

She sees his coat is gone.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Carl is passed out on the couch. A handle of Seagram's 7 Whiskey stands on a table littered with the empty cans of the Delaware Pork Chowder he's been eating cold.

His cell RINGS, startling him.

CARL

Jesus's Birthday! The hell?

He answers, sits up straight like it'll help hide his state.

CARL (CONT'D)

Ashley. Merry Christmas.

(listens; becomes alarmed)

Wait, are you sure?

ASHLEY (V.O./PHONE)

*We had a big fight. I only napped a few minutes but when I got up... He's not here.*

Carl knows his role in this and hates himself.

ASHLEY (V.O.)

*He lied to me. A cop had to bring him home --*

CARL

I know. And it's my fault.

ASHLEY (V.O.)

*What are you talking about?*

CARL

I was there. Jake's been coming by. We've been hanging out together.

ASHLEY (V.O.)

*What, did you forget what it felt like to fuck with your family?*

CARL

I'm coming over... No, I'm coming right now.

Carl hangs up and looks around. The apartment is clean except for evidence of recent reckless, shut-in drinking. Carl throws an empty 2-liter across the room.

EXT. TOWN STREETS - NIGHT

Carl battles the beginning of a snowstorm, navigates ice and slush as wind blasts his face. He wraps his green jacket tight as we realize this might be the only coat he owns.

Carl dips into an alley and drinks from his handle of whiskey. He sees HOMELESS WOMAN looking at him from her tent.

CARL

You drink?

She nods. Carl gives her the rest of his bottle.

HOMELESS WOMAN

Merry Christmas.

Carl smiles.

EXT. REED APARTMENT - NIGHT

Carl collects himself, knocks. Ashley answers and he takes off his hat, hair matted some places, sticking up in others.

A few beats without words. Ashley steps aside to let him in.

INT. CITY BUS - MOVING - NIGHT

Jake looks at his phone to distract himself from troubling stuff in the seats around him -- until it suddenly shuts off.

JAKE

You were just fuckin' full!

He desperately tries to turn it on. It works and he exhales -- before it inexplicably dies again, like old phones would do.

The bus comes to a stop and everybody begins to get off.

Jake is confused. Over the PA the DISINTERESTED BUS DRIVER says something unintelligible except for the word "transfer."

EXT. CITY BUS STOP - NIGHT

Everyone but Jake hurries off into the cold. Jake is left alone looking at a huge map of bus routes. It's impossible to figure out and the wind is brutal.

The only person around is a ONE-LEGGED DRUNK in a wheelchair.

ONE-LEGGED DRUNK

You okay?

JAKE

(scared)

Yeah, I just...

ONE-LEGGED DRUNK

Do you know your transfer, brother?

(reads Jake)

Do you need to call somebody?

The drunk offers his phone. Jake takes it, relieved.

JAKE

I don't know the number. Do you have Facebook messenger? Or really I just need Facebook to call.

ONE-LEGGED DRUNK

(laughs)

Facebook? You can put it on there. But no, I don't exactly keep in touch with the family. My Christmas letter would be a real bummer.

He smiles and drinks liquor from a brown paper bag. Jake realizes the man's situation in life.

JAKE

What about you? What're you gonna do?

He gives Jake a small cheers before he takes another swig.

ONE-LEGGED DRUNK

Make your call. Call home.

Jake nods as the drunk wraps his jacket tighter.

INT. REED APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ashley paces in front of Carl.

CARL

He wanted help being a better person.

ASHLEY  
Why would he pick you, of all people?

CARL  
I'm his dad.

ASHLEY  
You thought you could make up for eleven years of shitty parenting in one week?

CARL  
Maybe I did, yeah.

ASHLEY  
I lied to him. I told him you cleaned up, so he didn't think his father was...  
(sees Carl's shame)  
How have you been anyway?

CARL  
Well... that lie you told about me being okay? That'd be a big one.

They see the snowstorm picking up out the window.

CELL PHONE ADVERTISEMENT:

For MePhone 13-GD, same style as the ad from earlier --

PARK - DAY

A group of SPARKLY TEENS pose for an epic pic. Unseen by them, a nearby LANDSCAPER pushes his lawnmower their way.

THROUGH PHONE CAM: Steadies on the teens... snaps a pic --

THE IMAGE: It's ruined by this landscaper who came into frame, looking so tired and overworked and sweaty. Yuck!

SPARKLY TEEN BOY (V.O.)  
Life can get in the way of your  
real story.

THE IMAGE: Boom! The landscaper DISAPPEARS in an instant.

SPARKLY TEEN GIRL (V.O.)  
Now you can crop out the noise.

FAMILY ROOM - DAY

An ABOVE-IT MOM and her UNEXCEPTIONAL FAMILY pose for a pic. Mom is pissed at her CRYING NEWBORN.

THROUGH PHONE CAM: Steadies on the family... snaps a pic --

THE IMAGE: It's ruined by this crying newborn.

ABOVE-IT MOM (V.O.)  
Show friends your true self.

THE IMAGE: Boom! Mom's frown is replaced with a smile. Boom! The crying newborn is replaced with a thriving houseplant.

ABOVE-IT MOM (V.O.)  
The MePhone 13-GD -- it's worth it  
if you are.

PULL OUT: and see the ad is playing on --

INT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

A laptop in front of Jake. He's on the Me-Phone website customizing a phone to order. Grandma is by the front door checking her appearance in a mirror as she waits for someone.

Grandma's house looks exactly as her card promised: so inviting, seemingly perfect, and in total contrast to the spaces Jake spends with Ashley or Carl.

GRANDMA  
Did my credit card work okay? Did  
you order what you wanted?

On the screen, the cursor hovers over PURCHASE. It feels like a significant move, and he doesn't click it yet. He lies --

JAKE  
Yeah, it totally did. Thanks again.

GRANDMA  
See? Things don't always have to be  
so hard. Honestly, some people just  
make it that way.

Grandma answers the DOORBELL, greets KATHY (smug, pious, 55).

GRANDMA (CONT'D)  
Well, that was fast.

KATHY  
Not much traffic tonight.

GRANDMA

Of course. Thank you so, so much,  
especially on Christmas eve.

KATHY

I'm happy to help. It's my duty to  
serve, especially on Christmas.

Grandma and Kathy approach Jake.

GRANDMA

This is my friend Kathy. We belong  
to the same congregation.

JAKE

Okay... Hi.

GRANDMA

(takes deep breath)  
Why don't we sit?

Jake is flanked on either side as they sit.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

I've been worried about you.  
Actually, I've even been telling  
Kathy about your situation for a  
few months now. With everything  
that's happened tonight, I thought  
she should come over.

KATHY

My job is to help families when  
they need it.

GRANDMA

Remember all the times you told me  
about your mom never being there or  
how she's always snapping at you? I  
mean like really angry, almost like  
she's unstable.

Jake remembers.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

You don't realize it, but that's  
not okay. It's scary, honestly.  
(beat)  
What would you think about living  
here for a while?

INT. FORD FIESTA HATCHBACK - MOVING - NIGHT

Ashley drives aggressively even as the storm picks up.

ASHLEY

The only way to have a nice day  
with me is with some grand  
production?

CARL

No, I'm just saying that was his  
plan. It wasn't about the phone.

ASHLEY

Text him again.  
(shakes her head)  
I really thought I could host a  
simple family Christmas. We  
should've done it at my mom's.

CARL

(shrugs)  
She's better than you.

ASHLEY

(bit taken aback)  
Yeah, well that's what I'm saying.

CARL

Because according to you she's  
perfect, right? By definition,  
there's no beating that. And you,  
we know, are definitely not  
perfect.

(beat)

Well that's all shit. I hate  
watching her make you crumble.

ASHLEY

I don't crumble.

CARL

Isn't this the same "perfect" woman  
who needed me to pick up her  
irritable bowel *slash* constipation  
*slash* colon *slash* something-else-  
gross medication at Eckerd? I know  
for a fact that woman is full of  
shit. Except when she isn't. Then  
she poops too much! See, point is:  
there's just no pleasing that lady.

ASHLEY  
(laughs)  
Shhh!

CARL  
Next time you feel inferior, just remember her bowel meds. She takes a cocktail of those things like she's Magic Johnson.

ASHLEY  
All I know is crazy bullshit like this doesn't happen with other moms. Only me, man.

Carl is struck by something, jolts up in his seat --

CARL  
That's exactly what Jake said at AA. Same words, even. Trash about "other moms" and "crazy bullshit" only happening with you.

ASHLEY  
(alarmed)  
You took Jake to A.A.?

Carl stays with his big eureka moment --

CARL  
I think he's at your mom's.

ASHLEY  
I told you, she the first one I called.

CARL  
He bought into this negative shit about you. And he's for sure all in on your flawless Grandma theory. I know that kid pretty well, Ash.

Ashley considers.

INT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jake sits with Kathy, ADOLESCENT JESUS awkwardly looking down.

JAKE  
If you work for the city, that's the government. So can you make my mom do whatever you say?

FLUSH! Grandma exits the bathroom drying her hands.

GRANDMA

(winded)

Sorry for the long wait. I had to adjust my makeup. Then, would you believe it, I got an eye lash in my eye! Twice. Anywho, how's it going?

KATHY

Jake wants to know if I could force protective custody.

(to Jake)

Given the circumstances... yes.

GRANDMA

Hopefully it won't come to that. We can all just agree on a plan.

DOORS FLY OPEN as Carl and Ashley fall in from the storm.

Grandma jumps back, then moves in front of Jake protectively.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

Ashley sees Jake. She rushes over and forces a hug.

ASHLEY

(to Grandma)

Why would you lie to me?

GRANDMA

I didn't. When you called, I didn't know where he was. He didn't either. Just that he was somewhere stranded alone at a bus station... in single digit windchill.

ASHLEY

(shocked, to Jake)

What? Are you all right?

Jake shoos away her mothering.

GRANDMA

Then when I heard everything else that's going on...

ASHLEY

Going on with what?

(to Kathy)

Who are you?

KATHY

I'm just here to ensure health and safety. And to make sure everyone understands their options, per county rules.

ASHLEY

You really called CPS on me?

GRANDMA

What if we just agree that Jake stays here a while?

ASHLEY

Hell no, he's not staying here. You think I'm that bad of a mother?

GRANDMA

The things I hear sound bleak.

ASHLEY

(to Jake)

Did you know about all this? Is this what you want?

JAKE

(lowers head)

I don't know.

Carl sees Jake torn apart and Ashley crushed by judgement --

CARL

(to Kathy)

You're picturing something way worse than --

GRANDMA

(shuts him down)

You're why she's here. Did you figure that out yet?

KATHY

(explains to all)

The state considers Carl a threat. That's why we can have a conversation about removal.

(to Ashley)

Really, the lack of supervision to not know Jake was in such danger?

Ashley hands Carl her keys.

ASHLEY

Just leave.

Carl wants to act but he's neutered, leaves totally debased.

EXT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Carl stands in the cold, a broken man. He watches through the front window. It's agony seeing Jake and Ashley so distraught.

CARL  
Fuck you, Carl...

He grips the keys tight and heads toward the car.

INT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ashley and Grandma wait for Jake's answer to something --

KATHY  
What do you think about all this  
Jake? I know it's a lot. Do you  
know what you want to do?

Jake MAKES HIS CHOICE and MOVES TO GRANDMA, just as --

A voice from behind --

CARL  
No fuckin' way this happens, not  
because of me.

ASHLEY  
Will you just leave us alone?

GRANDMA  
There's nothing you can do.

CARL  
Humbug.

Carl grabs Jake and drags him out like a hostage.

JAKE  
Hey, let me go! Stop!

EXT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Carl forces Jake toward the car.

CARL  
Get in there.

Jake relents and gets in the passenger seat.

INT. FORD FIESTA HATCHBACK - MOVING - NIGHT

Carl speeds away panicked, checking his mirrors and misjudging the road. The storm has eased but roads are slick.

JAKE

What the hell are you doing?

CARL

If I gotta kidnap you to talk, then fuckin' fine!

Carl jumps the curb on a turn. Jake holds on tight.

JAKE

When was the last time you drove a car?

CARL

Scared? Good. You should be a little scared of Dad, especially when you're being such a dumb punk.

JAKE

You can't scare me into liking Mom.

CARL

Do you know how much she loves you? Do you have any goddamn idea? She loves you so much that she puts up with you.

JAKE

Whatever. I hate her.

CARL

(furious)

And I love you enough to take your ass out. You did not just say you hate your mother.

(Jake looks out window)

You hear me?

Carl takes his focus off driving and --

They run off the road, over yards, plowing Christmas displays --

They SCREAM in terror --

Carl turns the wheel and guns it. Crashing decorations blind them as sudden traction sends them speeding back to the road --

The windshield clears just in time to see the STOCKY MAN (winter coat and hat) who --

THUMP --

They RUN OVER.

They slide to a stop. They're silent a beat, until --

CARL (CONT'D)  
Oh my god, oh my god...

Carl gets out and sprints over to the man.

EXT. TOWN STREETS - NIGHT

Jake arrives to see Carl on his knees over what remains of --  
The SNOWMAN they just killed. Carl holds a carrot and top hat.

CARL  
I really thought I killed a guy.

Carl takes a moment, still kneeling.

JAKE  
I woulda helped you bury the body,  
if that helps.

CARL  
Look at me, on my knees mourning  
this snowman... his judgmental kids  
staring at me...

REVEAL: a fatherless SNOW FAMILY stands in judgement.

CARL (CONT'D)  
Jesus, I even tear apart figurative  
families. That caseworker bitch is  
right, I am a threat.

JAKE  
No you're not. They just don't know  
the whole story.

This really strikes Carl.

CARL  
You think it'd matter?

JAKE  
Yeah, of course. They'd see the  
real you. I wasn't ever in danger.

Carl jumps to his feet with a plan --

INT. FORD FIESTA HATCHBACK - MOVING - NIGHT

Carl speeds, a man on a mission.

CARL

My P.O. is the one who decides if I'm a threat. I just need him to change his mind about me.

JAKE

What about what I want?

CARL

If I can get him out tonight, hopefully that won't matter.

JAKE

Do you even know where he is?

CARL

Home with his family... wherever that is. And he blocks his number.

JAKE

What're you gonna do?

CARL

I can't call him -- but I might be able to call everybody.

The Fiesta fishtails as Carl flies through an intersection.

INT. CARL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Carl sits at his computer hunting for a program, finds it --

CARL

Oh, it's been too long, my baby.

(to Jake)

With this right here, I could run any scam I wanted, any way I wanted.

Jake watches Carl navigate with skill and familiarity. Carl loads files for various scams.

JAKE

You weren't lying, these look super fucked up.

CARL

I only rip off the deserving... This time they'll all be from our little town.

Carl opens a map feature. He narrows the range and zooms in on just their town.

JAKE

You said if you don't spread 'em out you get caught.

CARL

Exactly. I need to get his attention.

Jake realizes what Carl is willing to do for him.

JAKE

This is crazy. There's no way this ends okay for you.

CARL

(ignores Jake's comment)  
I also need him to call me. A chance to bust me on all this? I imagine he might want a word.

Carl pulls up a master list of scams. The cursor hovers over the SEND button for the top one -- He CLICKS it.

JAKE

You mean all of them?

Carl moves down the list clicking SEND on scam after scam. Jake reads the final one --

JAKE (CONT'D)

"Ivory dealer"?

Carl hits PLAY. Behind the scam message, the sound of a PIANO --

CARL (V.O.)

*Ever fantasize about being an Ivory Dealer?*

Carl is lost remembering the message as he hears it.

CARL (V.O.)

*So many of us do. Everyone loves cool, white ivory, but no one wants the hassle of acquiring it...*

SERIES OF SCENES - CALLS SPREAD ACROSS TOWN ON CHRISTMAS EVE

In each, someone on a phone reacts to hearing the scam:

--In an upper-class home, MULTI-GENERATIONAL FAMILY enjoys a Christmas pheasant feast.

CARL (V.O./PHONE)  
*Thanks to an exclusive relationship  
 with friends in the Congolese  
 government and the Holoholo people  
 of the South Kivu province...*

--An ELDERLY COUPLE lovingly sit next to each other and watch a black and white Christmas movie in the dark.

CARL (V.O.)  
*You have an invitation-only high-  
 yield investment opportunity in the  
 lucrative ivory market...*

--A LYFT DRIVER watches in his rearview as two DISSIMILAR PASSENGERS on their cells react in opposite ways to the scam.

CARL (V.O.)  
*Just listen, nothing like bo-na-  
 fide ivory piano keys. And did you  
 know you can use ivory for pool  
 balls, knick-knacks, or as a  
 substitute for white plastic?*

--Mr. Bucket listens to the message in bed.

CARL (V.O.)  
*Act now and get a free boat!*

MR. BUCKET  
 (gushes with joy)  
 Baby, we finally got a boat.

MRS. BUCKET ignores him from the other side of the room, continues salacious webcam flirting with strange men.

MR. BUCKET (CONT'D)  
 (chuckles)  
 A thing like that, a free boat...

INT. FORD FIESTA HATCHBACK - MOVING - NIGHT

Jake looks out the window while Carl drives. The storm left a blanket of fresh snow. It's a beautiful Christmas night.

HORRIBLE SCREECHING TONES repeat from Carl's cell on the dash.

JAKE  
 (grabs phone; reads)  
 "Ford Fiesta Hatchback..." Hey,  
 wait a minute. That's me! I'm an  
 Amber Alert.

CARL  
Yep. You've been 'napped, kid.

JAKE  
Yay, I get to deal with the cops,  
just like last time.

CARL  
Last time... Yeah, we need to talk  
about the park.

JAKE  
It's okay.

CARL  
No, it really isn't.

Jake responds by reading from the notebook --

JAKE  
Step Ten: "Promise to stay  
disciplined and call out all  
bullshit, matter not size, stench,  
texture, nor viscosity." I figure  
that only works if you can forgive  
somebody.

CARL  
You got it. Then the idea is to  
keep it going.

JAKE  
That's the only Step about the  
future.

CARL  
Next one too.

JAKE  
(reads Step Eleven)  
"Promise to rely on your Higher Elf  
during your countless and  
stupendous future fuckups."

Jake falls silent.

CARL  
It's just a promise to use me  
whenever you need anything.

Jake looks out the window, still not committing.

CARL (CONT'D)  
It's okay if you don't want to.

JAKE

I do. I want to...

CARL

(realizes the problem)

But this one's sort of a two-way street, huh?

JAKE

Yeah.

CARL

You gotta have an elf who's there holding up his side of things.

(beat)

All I can do is promise -- and hope you ignore any common sense telling you not to trust that.

Jake considers, then crosses off Steps Ten and Eleven.

Out the window, he sees a shocked family in church clothes checking their Amber Alerts and staring. Jake waves.

CARL (CONT'D)

(notices family)

Shit, get down!

Carl shoves Jake's head down out of view. He speeds away.

SERIES OF SCENES - CALLS SPREAD ACROSS TOWN ON CHRISTMAS EVE

In each, someone on a phone reacts to hearing the scam:

--A YOUNG MAN sits alone with his DOG on ZOOM with FAMILY.

CARL (V.O./PHONE)

*Windowless Sweatshops. Like noise-cancelling headphones for the rest of you! Keep out the world -- and keep your mind on your work...*

--In a nice kitchen full of pie, cookies, and whatever a yule log is, a PERFECT FAMILY has a huge fight over a board game.

CARL (V.O.)

*Bet against window producers in select East Asian markets while investing big in local concrete contractors...*

--Teen Manager Marc watches his HOT-PIECE MOTHER talk on the phone. She's absolutely glowing. He's suspicious and totally grossed out.

CARL (V.O.)  
Act now and get a free boat!

MARC  
Why are you glowing?! Gross!

MARC'S HOT-PIECE MOTHER  
What? Oh, I think we just won a boat.

INT. FORD FIESTA HATCHBACK - MOVING - NIGHT

Carl jumps when his cell lights up --

CARL  
Is it him?

Jake checks and shakes his head, reads --

JAKE  
"Holocaust? What Holocaust?  
Seasonal work as a Holocaust Denier  
is a great way to earn loads of  
easy cash now!" Oh, and I get a  
free boat.

SERIES OF SCENES - CALLS SPREAD ACROSS TOWN ON CHRISTMAS EVE

In each, someone on a phone reacts to hearing the scam:

--Angel and MULTIPLE GENERATIONS OF HIS FAMILY cook, eat, and drink. His niece Maria is lost in the fun with other kids.

CARL (V.O./PHONE)  
Always dreamt of Selling Nuclear  
Secrets but never found the time?  
Now you can do it right from home!

--Neighbors Mary and Chris get back from church. The girls kick off shoes that match this year's Christmas dresses.

CARL (V.O.)  
"Foreign adversary"? Let us deal  
with the legalese. Just answer  
this: Can I sell you a secret?

--Barfly Mike watches TV on his couch with beer cans all around him, drunker than when he challenged Carl at the bar.

CARL (V.O.)  
*Act now and get a free boat!*

His son is there: Chad, who we normally see bullying Jake.

CHAD  
 Want another beer? There's a bunch  
 still in the drawer.

BARFLY MIKE  
 Shut up, stupid. It's something  
 about a boat.

Chad was hoping to connect, but his dad is too drunk again.

INT. JORDAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jordan sits, miserable while his TOO-CHEERY FAMILY is being  
 exceedingly Christmassy. A few sing carols around the piano.

TEEN NEPHEW  
 Come. Join us, Uncle Jordie.

Before he can say no, DING! -- everyone begins to get texts.

TEEN NIECE  
 (reads scam message)  
 Should I invest in "Black Market  
 Antiquities"? I just got a text.

Jordan's eyes narrow. He recognizes the sound of this.

BROTHER IN LAW  
 I got one for "War Profiteering."  
 (to his sister)  
 What's yours say?

SISTER IN LAW  
 "Invest in Human Trafficking --  
 where life is a highway"?

Jordan's on high alert. His cell RINGS and he quickly answers --

CARL (V.O./PHONE)  
*Do you like puppies? And who  
 doesn't love a good mill? Make your  
 dream a reality and become a player  
 in today's Puppy Mill industry...*

Jordan jumps up and straps on his P.O. badge, commanding the  
 attention of the room. He's ready to kick ass. His ADORABLE  
 FIVE-YEAR-OLD NEPHEW is in awe.

INT. FORD FIESTA HATCHBACK - MOVING - NIGHT

The cell RINGS and Carl sees: "BLOCKED NUMBER."

CARL

I think I know this blocked number.  
(answers phone)  
Holly jolly Christmas, this is  
Carl. Who may I say is calling?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. JORDAN'S OLD VOLVO - MOVING - NIGHT

Jordan's car: lush car seat and steering wheel cover; CD holder on visor; convex blindspot mirrors; tinted windshield; console armrest with storage, cupholder, and phone mounted --

JORDAN

(into phone)  
Do you know what kind of shit  
you're in? I was right goddamnit, I  
knew there was more than one scam.

CARL

Who's to say? I reasonably doubt  
everything I'm hearing right now.

JORDAN

This is mandatory minimums. You're  
doing a virtual tour of the penal  
code.

CARL

Yeah, but getting evidence to prove  
it sounds like lots of annoying  
extra work, which I know you love.

JORDAN

Fucker, are you enjoying this?

CARL

Orrr instead of that, how about:  
meet me and let me talk, maybe I'll  
confess a thing or two.

Carl and Jake anxiously wait as Jordan pauses a few beats.

JORDAN

People buying gifts ask, "What do you get a man who has everything?" I've had the opposite problem: How do I punish a man who values nothing? See, you get a pass. None of this madness affects you, does it? You don't care about anyone.

JAKE

You're wrong. It's different now.

Carl covers the phone and shushes Jake, but it's too late.

JORDAN

What the hell is your kid doing there? You can't do that!

CARL

Yeah, because somebody deems me "unfit," Mr. McDeemer. And, listen, I absolutely get it.

(then)

But you ever consider that maybe... I'm not so unfit?

JORDAN

Before I met you, yes. But then of course... we met. It's a well-earned label, Carl.

CARL

Give me a chance to convince you. Text us. I'll send an address.

JORDAN

You dumb fucker --

Carl hangs up and looks at Jake.

CARL

Maybe he'll cool off.

EXT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jordan joins Ashley, Grandma, and Kathy watching the Fiesta slowly slide to a pathetic THUD against the curb.

Carl gets out and sprints up the small hill to them. Ashley watches Jake make his way up slowly. She gives him his space.

CARL  
 (out of breath)  
 First... Merry Christmas, everybody.  
 (to Jordan)  
 And thanks for letting me talk.

JORDAN  
 I'm not here for you. I'm here for  
 your stupefying parole violations.

ASHLEY  
 Tell me what's happening.

Jordan presides --

JORDAN  
 Apparently, Carl has some things to  
 confess to us... and potentially to  
 the Federal Trade Commission.

Jordan pulls out a pair of handcuffs to dramatic effect.

CARL  
 Okay yes, I may have transgressed.  
 But where I ran afoul, it was only  
 so I could get you here tonight.

ASHLEY  
 This isn't real.

CARL  
 It was the only way I could explain  
 before it's too late.

JORDAN  
 This is exactly why you can't see  
 your son.

CARL  
 I'm no threat. Let me put it this  
 way: I don't want Jake to turn out  
 like me either...  
 (to all)  
 I don't blame you for being  
 worried. But I'm not a threat.

JORDAN  
 Why would you bring him into your  
 world of shit?

CARL  
 It's the only way he'd bring me  
 into his.

Jordan doesn't care. He advances with cuffs as Carl backs up.

JAKE

He was helping me. It's the only way we could do the Steps.

This stops Jordan.

CARL

You're always saying I need to go to A.A. Well, we've been working the Steps together. Good, right?

KATHY

(aghast)

How could you expose him to those sorts of people?

GRANDMA

When did Jake start drinking?!

JAKE

No, it's not for that. I just wanted to be... better, I guess.

Jake can't help but look at Ashley.

JAKE (CONT'D)

(to Jordan)

We're almost done. Just one left.

Jordan handcuffs Carl. He's reluctant to be drawn in, but --

JORDAN

People sometimes think they're almost done, then they try that last Step and find out they're nowhere.

JAKE

Why, what's it say?

JORDAN

Ultimately it's about serving others, but first...

(skeptical)

First you need to reflect on the great spiritual awakening you've presumably just had.

Grandma scoffs.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Then the kicker: You need to figure out what you learned from it all.

Jordan begins to lead Carl away.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

If you don't know that? Then maybe  
it was worthless.

CARL

It wasn't worthless.

GRANDMA

Please, what could Jake possibly  
have learned from you?

Everyone turns to Jake. It's completely overwhelming --

JAKE

I mean I know that... you gotta  
stay tight with your Higher Elf...  
no matter how much he hurts you...  
(pressure growing)

I saw how Dad's a dickhead... but  
he knows it, so it's not okay but  
sorta is...

(buckles)

I don't know what to say... I guess  
I'm not sure what I learned.

Carl deflates, and Jordan leads him toward the car.

GRANDMA

(excited to gab)

I knew he was in trouble when I  
heard "spiritual awakening."

(honks)

Spiritual? Trust me, no.

ASHLEY

Mom -- shut the hell up.

(mounts confidence)

Just because you call it a sacrament  
now, you're still drunk by noon. And  
good job kicking the Benzos, but  
maybe your Jesus addiction is worse.  
Cut the judgmental crap.

Jake moves in a daze to the front steps with the notebook.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

(to Grandma)

How could you possibly know what he  
experienced? I've seen a change,  
and that's good enough for me.

Ashley approaches Jake, who just stares at the notebook.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)  
What's that?

Jake opens it so she can study the list.

JAKE  
Dad wrote his version of each Step.  
I kept track of how far we got.

ASHLEY  
Jesus, look at this... As far as  
I'm concerned you should cross that  
last Step off.

Jake doesn't respond. Grandma comes to look too.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)  
(hopeful)  
Things are getting a little better,  
right? With us.

Jake nods. With small satisfaction, he crosses off the Step.

GRANDMA  
(squints at notebook)  
What about Step One? It's not  
crossed out.

Jake's shocked. She's right. He reads --

JAKE  
Step One: "Admit you're a fucked up  
person and life can never be  
predictable -- you definitely have  
a problem, bitch!"

GRANDMA  
That's garbage. You're fine just  
the way you are.

Something clicks, Jake has a revelation --

JAKE  
I'm not fine, though.  
(stands and shouts)  
Hey, get back here, bitch!

Jordan doesn't hear. He puts Carl in the back seat.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Wait! Stop!

Jake begins firing rocks.

INT. JORDAN'S OLD VOLVO - MOVING - NIGHT

Jordan looks out the back window as he reverses.

CARL

You gotta listen. He's way better  
now. You should have seen him  
before, he was so angry --

BAM! BAM! Rocks strike the car, chipping the windshield. BAM!  
BAM! Even his stick-on blindspot mirror is smashed. As Jordan  
watches it dangle and then fall, he becomes enraged.

EXT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jordan gets out just as BAM! a final rock dents his hood.

JORDAN

(walking up hill)  
What the hell, kid?

JAKE

I needed to get your attention.

JORDAN

You guys have very extreme ways of  
doing this.

JAKE

I did learn something. I learned  
that my dad is very fucked up, sir.

JORDAN

We agree.

JAKE

Step One should've been easy.  
Admitting everything's messed up? I  
already thought that. But honestly,  
I blamed people.

(then)

My dad taught me it can't be  
anyone's fault because everything  
in life is just fucked up to begin  
with. We're powerless.

JORDAN

What's your point?

JAKE

Don't ask my dad to be a normal  
functioning parent. I don't need  
that.

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

I need him because he's fucked up.  
Without him I'll relapse! And he  
needs me.

Ashley is affected by this.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I'm screwed up, dude. So are you.  
And so is my mom. And my Grandma.

Ashley and Grandma share this weird moment of belonging.

JAKE (CONT'D)

It goes for Christmas too, ya know.  
If everything is fucked, you don't  
have to feel bad about hating it.

Jordan reflects.

INT. JORDAN'S OLD VOLVO - NIGHT

Carl tries every angle, contorting his body and pressing  
against the seat, but he can't open the door while cuffed.

CARL

Shit!

EXT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jordan sits on the front steps looking at a wallet photo of  
his wife, the women gathered around comfortingly.

JORDAN

-- That's why I wanted to visit her  
grave, but I was worried it  
wouldn't seem very Christmassy.

JAKE

Yeah, man. Fuck Christmas if that's  
how you feel. Maybe that's even the  
true meaning of Christmas.

JORDAN

I wanna believe it. God, I'd be  
liberated.

Carl arrives. His hair and clothes are a mess from his escape  
efforts. Ashley studies him a moment. He looks absurd.

ASHLEY

And with it all so screwed up,  
who's anyone to judge Carl?

Ashley's support hits Carl. It registers with Jordan too. He lingers on it as they give him time to think.

He stands.

JORDAN

Maybe I'm getting swept up in the magic of hating Christmas, or I'm overwhelmed by the opposite of holiday cheer...

Jake and Carl look at each other, anxiously optimistic.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

If there's one thing fucked up people need, maybe it's each other.

(to Carl)

You finally have value. I hereby declare you're not unfit. You're not a threat -- you're a father as messed up as the rest of it.

(to Jake)

So you weren't in danger.

(to Ashley)

And you weren't negligent.

Jake hugs Ashley. Grandma sees the love and is moved. She puts her hand on Ashley's shoulder.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Merry Christmas, I guess.

CARL

Oh, Merry Christmas, ya' big lump of coal. C'mon, P.O., hug me!

Handcuffed, Carl can only heave himself onto Jordan, who quickly shoves him off each time.

Carl smiles when he sees Jake and Ashley together. It all has the feel of a Christmas miracle.

JAKE

So he's off the hook?

JORDAN

No. God no. Crazy arrested. Federal prison. Whole shebang. Really bad stuff on that front. But you'll be able to talk, this time legally.

(then)

For now, you can come get him but bail is gonna be... imposing. Really something tremendous.

Carl doesn't care. He's rightly proud of himself.

JAKE  
Merry Christmas, Dad.

Jake watches as Carl is led away. He crosses off Step One and takes a moment to appreciate the completed list. He did it.

INT. JORDAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CHRISTMAS MORNING

Jordan tries to endure as all around him -- in matching pajamas, no less -- family celebrates Christmas morning.

REVEAL: Jordan wears the same PJ's. They have a moose on them. He hates this moose. He doesn't want to be here.

Jordan decides on something, then sneaks away.

He puts his overcoat on over his PJ's, but stopping him at the front door is his wide-eyed Five-Year-Old Nephew.

FIVE-YEAR-OLD NEPHEW  
Where are you going, Uncle Jordie?

Jordan prepares to speak with the satisfaction of a man who has settled something important in his mind --

JORDAN  
I'm going to a graveyard.

He's afraid of how this will go over.

FIVE-YEAR-OLD NEPHEW  
(holds up toy)  
I got a truck.

JORDAN  
(genuine)  
That's great. I hope you love it.  
You gonna go play with it?

FIVE-YEAR-OLD NEPHEW  
Yep!

Jordan smiles and leaves.

SISTER IN LAW  
(hearing door)  
Did Uncle Jordie just leave?

FIVE-YEAR-OLD NEPHEW  
Yep!

BROTHER IN LAW  
Did he say where he was going?

FIVE-YEAR-OLD NEPHEW  
Graveyard.

They don't know what to make of it.

INT. LOCAL JAIL - CHRISTMAS MORNING

There are a few JOYLESS PRISONERS around, but Carl sits alone with his thoughts beneath a few sad holiday decorations.

GUARD  
Call me Santa, you got a letter.

GUARD frisks Carl an envelope. He opens it and pulls out the same Christmas card Grandma had sent Jake.

A check falls out.

Carl reads the card:

*"HERE IS MONEY FOR BAIL. DON'T FUCK IT UP!*

*HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS,*

*XOXO GRANDMA"*

INT. REED APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CHRISTMAS MORNING

Carl sits in a chair, eggnog in hand -- Ashley and Jake on the couch.

CARL  
(to Jake)  
I got you a little something.

He hands Jake a folded piece of paper. Inside Jake finds a reloadable debit card with a name and number taped to the back.

JAKE  
(reads)  
"Nikolaus Jürgen von Klaus"?

CARL  
Our friend in Liechtenstein is expecting your call.

ASHLEY  
What is it?

CARL  
Recent ill-gotten gains.

ASHLEY  
What? No.

CARL  
From godless scoundrels.  
(then)  
And enough for a fancy new phone, I reckon.

Jake hands it to Ashley.

JAKE  
I don't want it. It'll help us out.

Ashley begins to object but, in a very obvious move, Jake turns and starts talking before she has the chance --

JAKE (CONT'D)  
(to Carl)  
Soooo, yeah, soooo then... Oh, we got you something too.

Carl is surprised as Jake hands him a wrapped gift. Carl is opening it when he is ATTACKED by --

SHEER HORROR, assaulted by the sight of Jake's CERAMIC SANTA STATUE. Carl inspects the monstrosity. It's even more upsetting than we appreciated before.

CARL  
What in holy fuck is this thing?

ASHLEY  
Actually, Jake worked really hard on that.

CARL  
(feels terrible)  
Oh, I'm sorry --

JAKE  
Yeah, what's your problem?  
(beat)  
I'm just kidding. It's truly disturbing, I know.

CARL  
Okay, good. Yeah it looks like, y'ever see those pictures of birth defects from radiation?  
(MORE)

CARL (CONT'D)

Sorta look like misshapen Play-Doh people? Man, you gotta Google --

ASHLEY

No, actually, we don't have to search that. Call it Step Thirteen.

CARL

You can't just make up Steps.

Carl is putting the statue on the table when --

It BREAKS into a million pieces.

CARL (CONT'D)

I mean... That's sorta fitting, no?

ASHLEY

(teases)

Everything falling apart in your hands?

CARL

(jokes)

Step Fourteen: "Shut up, Ash."

JAKE

Trust me, it happens. We can rebuild it.

CARL

Yes -- but should we?

Jake and Ashley laugh, but --

Carl's expression lingers as he looks at the broken pieces.

The moment turns serious as his comment gathers more weight --

Jake and Ashley react, until --

CARL (CONT'D)

Kidding! We'll do it together.

(then)

Where's the glue?

Jake bolts up to go get it.

Ashley smiles.

Merry Christmas!

**THE END**