

WRECKING BALL

by
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“Now, I know I’ve got a heart because it’s breaking.”

- The Tin Man

FADE IN

ON A LITTLE GIRL

CORINNE CORKE (5). Beautiful, but with the devil in her. Rambunctious like a boy. Cunning like a girl. She slams every door. Breaks every heirloom. Trips on every rug.

She's in the kitchen of an upscale home wearing a pink parka, snow pants, boots, goggles and mittens. She sings --

CORINNE

*You are my sunshine. My only
sunshine.*

She pauses briefly at the ADVENT CALENDAR, then takes off her mitten, opens the remaining three doors and shoves the chocolates into her mouth.

She waddles to the cupboard, undoes the security latch, and takes out a COOKIE SHEET.

CORINNE

*You make me happy when skies are
gray.*

She lumbers into the living room, brushing the CHRISTMAS TREE. It rocks back and forth, but doesn't tip over. It's strapped to the wall. Look closely. There are safety straps and pads on every possible hazard.

Corinne climbs the steps. One at time -- managing the cookie sheet and the cumbersome winter attire. She trips, then regains her footing. Keeps climbing. Fourteen steps up.

CORINNE

*You'll never know, dear. How much
I love you.*

At the top of the stairs, she turns around and sits on the cookie sheet. It is a sled and this is her mountain. She lowers the goggles. Prepares to launch.

REVERSE ANGLE on the piano at the bottom of the steps. The brass pedals. No safety pads around them.

Back at the top, Corinne scoots toward the ledge.

CORINNE

Please don't take my sunshine away.

And Corinne hurls herself down the stairs. She's flying. Squealing with joy. Barreling toward the piano. Oblivious to any sort of danger.

At the bottom, just inches before crashing into the steel pedals, a hand reaches in and snatches her from the sled. The cookie sheet CLANGS into the piano.

LAURA

Corinne! What are you doing?!

Corinne's mother, LAURA CORKE (39), is a structured woman. Elegant in appearance, steadfast in beliefs. The sort of person you don't pick a fight with because you'll lose.

CORINNE

I was sledding.

LAURA

We don't sled in Southern California.

CORINNE

But Mom, I need to practice for Grandma and Grandpa's house.

LAURA

The only thing you need to practice for Grandma and Grandpa's house is manners. And patience.

(under her breath)

And how to endure pain. Listen, no more sledding. You could get hurt. And what's Mommy's job?

CORINNE

Architect.

LAURA

No, that's my work. But, what's my most important job in the whole wide world?

CORINNE

Keep me safe.

LAURA

That's right. My job is to keep you safe. So, stop trying to get me fired.

Corinne lights up and runs into the kitchen.

CORINNE (O.S.)

Mom! Come on. I think it's time!

KITCHEN

Laura enters and finds Corinne jumping up and down next to the pantry.

CORINNE
Can I have my fruit snacks now?

LAURA
You know the rule.

LAURA
But, Mom! Pleeease?

LAURA
What time is it?

Corinne looks at the digital clock above the microwave.

CORINNE
One oh one eight.

LAURA
Then I don't want to hear about it
for another twelve minutes.

Laura unplugs the toaster and the coffee pot. Then, wipes the already spotless counter.

CORINNE
Now is it time?

LAURA
Have you seen your brother?

INT. LOFT - MORNING

A giant playroom that's covered in toys. Model airplanes. Board games. An Etch-A-Sketch. Light Brites. A fish mural on the wall and cartoon sketches everywhere.

Laura opens the door and sticks her head in.

LAURA
The car will be here soon and our
plane is on time. So you need to
come finish packing.

SPIN AROUND to find Laura's husband, CHARLIE (40). Happy, innocent, predictable. Like a golden retriever. This is his office. He's tosses a Nerfball to Laura.

CHARLIE
I'll just wrap up a few things.

LAURA
(catching the ball)
Says the man who's missed a hundred
planes.

She walks the Nerfball back to him. He pulls her to his lap.

CHARLIE
You know, Santa says you've been
way too nice this year.

LAURA
Well, we can't both be naughty
because nothing would get done.

She gives him a quick kiss. After eleven years of marriage,
these two are still a good fit.

LAURA
Twenty five minutes until the car
gets here. Get moving.

On her way out, something about the crown moulding catches
her eye. She runs her finger across it -- upset.

LAURA
It's starting to come apart.

CHARLIE
Laura, it's fine.

LAURA
It's that glue. I told Carlos not
to use it.

CHARLIE
It's one tiny crack.

LAURA
(beat)
That's how it all starts.

On her way out --

LAURA
Hey, have you seen Oscar?

CHARLIE
Last I knew he was ironing.

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT STEP

OSCAR CORKE (9) is sitting on the front step next to his suitcase, wearing a tie and khakis. Laura opens the door.

LAURA
There you are. Whatcha doing?

OSCAR
Waiting for the car.

LAURA
You're a little early.

OSCAR
Better early than late. Hey, guess what? I have a loose tooth.

LAURA
You do? Let's see.

She sits down next to him.

OSCAR
My lateral incisor.

Laura wiggles it. It's just a tad loose.

LAURA
Well, I'll be.

OSCAR
If I lose it in West Virginia, do you think the tooth fairy will still find me?

LAURA
I think the tooth fairy's pretty connected. I mean, with the internet and all.

CORINNE (O.S.)
Mom, it's time!!

Laura checks her watch. Ten thirty on the dot.

OSCAR
I just don't get it. Fruit snacks don't have any nutritional value and they get stuck in your teeth. What's the big deal?

Corinne throws open the door and jumps up and down -- out of her mind with excitement.

CORINNE
Fruit snacks! Fruit snacks!

LAURA
(to Oscar)
I think she likes the hippo shapes.

INT. TOWN CAR - LATER

Laura, Charlie, Oscar and the DRIVER are waiting in the car.

LAURA
Corinne, come on. Right now.

Outside, Corinne is petting the neighborhood DACHSHUND.

CORINNE
You're so cute. Wanna come on the plane with us?

LAURA
Charlie.

CHARLIE
I'm on it.

Charlie gets out, swoops up Corinne and climbs back in. The driver starts the car. Pulls away from the curb.

CHARLIE
All right. Let's get this vacation started.

LAURA
Vacation? A vacation is daily yoga classes and grain alcohol served in coconuts. Not Christmas with my father and his new wife.

CHARLIE
Laura, they've been married for seventeen years. Stop calling Alice his new wife.

CORINNE
Can we get a dog?

LAURA
No.

CHARLIE
But, Grandma has a kitty.

CORINNE
She does? What's kitty's name?

CHARLIE
Sugar.

LAURA
Did you at least pack the grain
alcohol?

Laura looks out the window -- filled with dread.

INT. AIRPLANE - LATER

Charlie and Corinne are in the same row, with Laura and Oscar
in the row in front of them.

Charlie is reading to Corinne from the book "*Germs*."

CHARLIE
"Later that morning the bubonic bus
arrived to take Pox and the other
cadets to Germ Academy - where
minor infections are turned into
real germs."

Corinne is kicking Laura's seat.

CHARLIE
"Once Pox had passed his physical
to prove that he was unhealthy, he
was shown to the dorm where he met
his new roommates." See, that's
Pus. And Scab. And Rash.

CORINNE
What about that one?

CHARLIE
That's Snot. "After lights out the
other germs gathered about Pox to
tell stories. Each boasted of a
terrible outbreak which a relative
had started.

Laura turns around and pops her head over the seat.

LAURA

Hey, I have an idea. Why don't we read the letter Grandma Alice sent.

OSCAR

What letter?

Laura pulls A LETTER out of her pocket.

LAURA

The dreaded annual Christmas letter.

CHARLIE

When did that come?

LAURA

Last week. It always puts me in a bad mood, so I saved it for the flight.

CHARLIE

Gee, thanks.

LAURA

Oscar, would you do the honors?

It's one sheet of snowflake paper. Typed.

OSCAR

Dear Friends and Loved Ones. The Good Lord has blessed us with another sacred year...

Laura rolls her eyes.

INT. JAEGER AIRPORT - DAY - LATER

While they disembark from the plane, WE continue to hear the Christmas letter, but now in a older, saccharine voice. With a hint of a southern lilt --

GRANDMA ALICE (V.O.)

The renovation on our house is finally complete. After a year of work, we have gotten rid of the moldy, old house that was here and replaced it with a real winner.

The family makes their way to baggage claim.

GRANDMA ALICE (V.O.)
 Pierce continues his practice at
 Hope Memorial Hospital. I remain
 active in the church and remind you
 it's never too late to accept Jesus
 into your life. And last June, my
 fudge brownies took first place in
 the Springdale baking contest.

INT. WOMEN'S RESTROOM

While Corinne uses the bathroom, Laura examines a small red
 spot starting to form on her chin.

GRANDMA ALICE (V.O.)
 This year we are blessed to have
 our family with us over the
 holiday. Grandkids Oscar and
 Corinne are absolute delights who
 seem to grow by the minute. We're
 so proud of their father, Charlie,
 a successful animator in Hollywood.
 If you like crime fighting sea
 monkeys, be sure to tune in on
 Saturday mornings. And Pierce's
 daughter, Laura, has *finally* traded
 in her architectural career to be a
 stay-at-home mom. Good for her!

ON Laura's face. Already irked.

INT. JAEGER AIRPORT - BAGGAGE CLAIM

They come down the steps and Laura walks straight toward the
 DRIVER holding the sign with their name on it.

GRANDMA ALICE (V.O.)
 We are happy and healthy and
 basking in the Lord's delight.
 Love, Pierce and Alice Atkins.
 P.S. Our beloved Sugar is now in
 heaven with the Lord Almighty. We
 miss her dearly.

BAGGAGE CLAIM

Laura, Charlie, Oscar and Corinne scan the carousel for their
 bags, while their driver waits in the wings.

CHARLIE

I never know what to say to your father.

LAURA

Talk about the weather.

CHARLIE

The weather? That's so boring.

LAURA

That's what everyone does. If you attempt anything else, he'll slaughter you. Besides, it's not like you have anything in common.

CHARLIE

We have you in common.

LAURA

Leave me out of it.

Laura points to the bump on her chin.

LAURA

What's this?

CHARLIE

VD?

Not in the mood for jokes.

LAURA

It's a pimple. I can't remember the last time I had one.

CHARLIE

Actually, I think it was the last time we were here.

She SIGHS. Dreading all that's to come.

CHARLIE

Come on. It's four days. How bad can it be?

EXT. JAEGER AIRPORT - DAY

They come out the automatic doors, luggage in tow and follow their driver to his car.

DRIVER

The car's up here on the left.

Then they hear --

ALICE (O.S.)

Charlie! Laura!

ALICE ATKINS (63) is at the curb. She's cheery. Excited. Big, warm smile. Cross around her neck.

LAURA

Oh my god.

CORINNE

Grandma Alice!

Corinne runs and hugs her. Alice smothers her in kisses.

ALICE

Oh, let me look at you. Look how big you've gotten.

CORINNE

Is the kitty here?

ALICE

The kitty?

LAURA

Alice. What are you doing? I told you we'd meet you at the house.

ALICE

I know, but we're so excited. Besides, a car service isn't family! Gimme a squeeze.

Alice opens her arms. Laura gives a fake smile and walks into the embrace.

ALICE

Don't you look pretty.

LAURA

You sound surprised.

ALICE

Oscar. Look at you!

OSCAR
(formal, distant)
Hello, Grandma. Pleasure to see
you again.

Alice hugs Oscar, then Charlie.

CHARLIE
Hi, Alice. Merry Christmas.

ALICE
Oh, merry Christmas, Charlie.
Thanks for *finally* bringing your
family out this way. Corinne.
Come here and give me another
squeeze. I've missed you. Tell me
-- what do you want for Christmas?

CORINNE
A princess costume.

ALICE
Oh yes.

CORINNE
And a trampoline!

LAURA
Oh no.

CORINNE
And a pogo stick. And Spiderman
roller blades and a scooter, and...

CHARLIE
Where's Pierce?

ALICE
He's circling. They charge three
dollars to park, so he likes to
circle. He's so excited to see you.

LAURA
(quietly, to Charlie)
Please. My father hasn't had an
emotion in twenty years.

CHARLIE
Behave.

CORINNE
Is the kitty in the car?

PIERCE ATKINS (69) pulls up in his spotless BMW SUV. An exceedingly intelligent man. Unemotional. The alpha male in every group. Deservedly so. He doesn't get out of the car.

PIERCE
Climb in before I get a ticket.

INT. BMW - DAY

Pierce and Charlie are in the front seat. Everyone else rides in the back.

PIERCE
How was the trip?

CHARLIE
Great. The kids love to fly. You travel much?

PIERCE
I hate flying. I always get stuck by the john -- between the hippie motormouth who's opposed to deodorant and the overweight slouch who needs to have his adenoids taken out. Then I pay six dollars for some Craisins, watch a movie about talking chickens and correct the crossword puzzle that five people before me answered incorrectly.

CHARLIE
O-kay. So, what's the temperature here?

Laura chokes back laughter in the back seat.

OSCAR
What's an adenoid?

PIERCE
You'll learn that when you get to medical school.

LAURA
Easy now. No brainwashing on the ride home.

OSCAR
It's okay, Mom. I want to go to medical school. Just like Grandpa.

CORINNE

I want Daddy to sit in the back.

LAURA

He's already in the front, Corinne.

CORINNE

Mommy, you sit in front.

LAURA

No one's switching seats.

CORINNE

I want Daddy to sit here!

LAURA

If you mention it again, you're getting a time out.

ALICE

Laura, did you get our Christmas letter?

LAURA

Sure did. Congratulations on the brownies.

CHARLIE

You know, Laura's actually going back to work in the new year.

ALICE

You are?

LAURA

That was always the plan. It's just taken longer than expected.

OSCAR

She has to work. She was voted best architect in southern California.

PIERCE

That was five years ago.

ALICE

Boy, if I had these children, you wouldn't be able to tear me away from them.

CORINNE

Daddy sit in the back!

LAURA
Just ignore her.

PIERCE
(disapproving)
Doesn't she get a time out? You
said if she mentioned it one more
time...

LAURA
I can handle it, thank you.

ALICE
I read that children need
discipline and --

LAURA
Please don't second guess me,
Alice. If you wanted to be a
parent, you should have had kids.

Awkward silence. Then, Pierce nods at Laura's pimple.

PIERCE
I see you've got a little spot
there on your chin.

Laura freezes. In the rear view mirror --

PIERCE
No nervous breakdowns on the ride
home.

CORINNE
Can Daddy sit in the back now?

INT./EXT CAR - DUSK

As they turn down the lane, Laura takes in the old
neighborhood.

OSCAR
Hey, look. Arbor Lane. That's the
street Mom grew up on.

LAURA
It sure is.

Laura sees a CONSTRUCTION CREW bulldozing a vacant lot.

LAURA

Dad, what happened to the Wollers's house?

PIERCE

An oncologist bought it and tore it down. He's building a mansion.

ALICE

An eyesore, if you ask me.

LAURA

What a waste. The Wollers built that house by hand. It took years to put up.

PIERCE

And one day to come down.

At the end of a cul-de-sac, Pierce turns into a driveway. A Victorian home surrounded by sugar maples and white pines. Weathered, but elegant.

INT. HOUSE - DUSK

They file in and take in the newly remodeled house. It's definitely a grandma's house. Doilies. Lace curtains. Candy bowls. And cluttered like it's been there a thousand years. Plenty of crosses, too.

LAURA

(yuck)

Wow.

CHARLIE

It's nice.

PIERCE

Alice did it herself.

LAURA

I can tell.

ALICE

Oscar, you're in your mom's old room, which is now my workout area. And Corinne, dear, you're in the old sewing room. At the top of the stairs.

CHARLIE

I'll get the kids settled.

As the kids head upstairs, Corinne calls out --

CORINNE (O.S.)
Sugar? Sugar!

ALICE
Oh, Sugar's...

LAURA
We know. We haven't told her yet.

ALICE
So, Laura, what do you think?

LAURA
I think you've made a lot of changes.

ALICE
That was the point. It was time for an update. Don't you think?

LAURA
I don't know, Alice. What happens under this roof has nothing to do with me anymore.

Alice picks up a nearby plate of BROWNIES.

ALICE
Brownie?

LAURA
No, thank you. I try to stay away from sweets.

Alice blanches -- couldn't be more offended.

ALICE
I'm sure the kids will have some.

Alice takes the plate and heads upstairs.

Alone, Laura looks around the room.

This used to be her house. Her home. Her world. But, nothing is familiar now. Certainly not the people.

She picks up a PHOTOGRAPH of a dark-haired WOMAN whose smile could light the world. She's laughing. Wearing a cowboy hat. The face of someone you wish you knew.

Pierce enters.

PIERCE

I put your bags in the guest room.
You need anything?

LAURA

What happened to the china hutch?

PIERCE

It's in storage.

LAURA

And the dining room table?

PIERCE

It's all there. All her stuff.
You might want it someday.

LAURA

Don't you?

PIERCE

Alice and I have new things.

LAURA

(re the photo)

I'm surprised you're allowed to
have this up. Did you have to get
permission?

PIERCE

You will be respectful of Alice
while you're in her house.

LAURA

Her house?

PIERCE

Don't start, Laura. I didn't put
that picture there. Alice did.
This morning.

Pierce turns to walk away.

Laura puts the photo back on the shelf.

LAURA

How come we didn't take more
photos?

Pierce stops. Without turning back --

PIERCE
Because we thought we'd have more
opportunities to do so.

INT. WORKOUT ROOM - A BIT LATER

Laura peeks her head in and finds Oscar meticulously unpacking and making the room his own.

LAURA
Hey.

Laura looks around. A treadmill, recumbent bike, hand weights and a scale. The wallpaper is an overbearing floral pattern.

OSCAR
Grandma said this used to be your
room.

LAURA
Yeah, before it became a Curves.

OSCAR
What was it like?

LAURA
I had a canopy bed, Pat Benatar
posters everywhere and really cool
rainbow wallpaper. And my mom used
to say I was the pot of gold.

Oscar smiles. He likes hearing his mom's stories.

LAURA
Actually...

Laura walks over to the corner. She examines the new wallpaper. Then takes her fingernail and behind a curtain, so no one will see, Laura peels back the floral wallpaper, revealing a slight bit of the OLD RAINBOW PAPER.

LAURA
Come here, Oscar. Look.

OSCAR
Cool. Why's it still there?

LAURA
Lazy workers. They papered right
over the old stuff.

OSCAR
I'm glad they left it up. It's
proof you were here.

A wave of nostalgia washes over Laura.

LAURA
Yeah. I guess so.

OSCAR
Like a fossil!

LAURA
Watch it.

Charlie sticks his head in the door. He's got Corinne on his
back, piggy back-style.

CHARLIE
Happy hour and touch football down
at the stream in five minutes. All
in favor say "team" on three.

CHARLIE
One, two...

ALL
Team on three!

EXT. BACK YARD - DUSK - LATER

Behind the house is a greenbelt that bellies up against a
simple stream.

Oscar and Charlie are tossing a FOOTBALL back and forth.

LAURA
Grandma says dinner's in five
minutes!

Laura walks over to Pierce, who's watching Corinne throw
rocks into the water.

PIERCE
Any chance we'll get a white
Christmas?

PIERCE
Hell, I don't know. This is the
warmest December in years.

Laura looks at the landscape.

LAURA

That willow's getting old. She's weeping more than I remember.

PIERCE

She spent her entire tree life sobbing. What do you expect? Hey, what's that thing on Corinne's neck?

LAURA

Huh?

PIERCE

She's got a -- thing. A bump.

LAURA

What bump?

PIERCE

Hey, Corinne. Come here.

CORINNE

I'm not hungry!

LAURA

Corinne, you have to the count of three to get over here. One.

Corinne doesn't budge.

LAURA

Two.

Still not moving.

LAURA

Three.

Corinne runs over. Her pants soaking wet. Hands, muddy.

CORINNE

I don't know how my socks got wet.

LAURA

Corinne, let me see something.

Laura squats down and takes a look.

On the side of her neck, next to the jugular vein, is a LUMP about the size of a quarter.

PIERCE
See it?

LAURA
Yeah. What is that?

Pierce touches it.

CORINNE
Stop!

PIERCE
Does that hurt?

Corinne squirms away and runs off.

PIERCE
How long has it been there?

LAURA
I don't know. That's the first
time I've seen it.

Charlie walks up.

CHARLIE
Seen what?

LAURA
Corinne has a thing on her neck.

PIERCE
It's a lump.

CHARLIE
She fell off her bike last week.

PIERCE
No, it's not a bruise. Has she
been sick?

Laura shakes her head.

PIERCE
Fever? Anything?

LAURA
No.

CHARLIE
Why?

PIERCE
That's where the lymph nodes are.
If she's been sick, that would
explain why it's swollen.

CHARLIE
Do we need to do something, Pierce?

PIERCE
We'll just keep an eye on it.

CHARLIE
I'm sure it's nothing. Hey, Oscar!
Go deep!

He chucks the football -- a bomb if ever there was one.

INT. HOPE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - EXAM ROOM - NEXT DAY

Corinne's on the table, in her clothes. While Alice dotes on her, Pierce is showing Oscar how to use a STETHOSCOPE. Laura and Charlie spring to their feet when the door opens.

DR. TOM LANCASTER (58). Seasoned. Head of the department.

DR. LANCASTER
Pierce.

PIERCE
Tom. Thanks for coming in on such
short notice.

DR. LANCASTER
Please. You saved my mother's
life. It's the least I could do.

PIERCE
This is my daughter, Laura, and her
husband, Charlie.

CHARLIE/LAURA
Hi. / Nice to meet you.

Turning his attention to Corinne --

DR. LANCASTER
And you must be Corinne. Can I
take a look at your neck?

CORINNE
No. Everyone's been poking it.

DR. LANCASTER
Please? I'll be gentle.

CORINNE
No.

LAURA
I'll get you a something from the
vending machine.

CORINNE
Okay.

Pierce glances at her -- disapprovingly.

LAURA
Yes, I use bribes. I also use the
TV as a babysitter and Happy Meals
as a bargaining tool. Got a
problem with it?

Pierce turns his attention back to Dr. Lancaster, who's
looking at Corinne's neck.

PIERCE
There's no fever. No recent
history of the flu, a cold,
anything. And --

His voice trails off.

DR. LANCASTER
And?

PIERCE
It was half that size yesterday.

All business now --

DR. LANCASTER
I'll order the blood test. And
let's schedule a biopsy for this
afternoon, just in case.

LAURA
Biopsy? Wait. For what?

DR. LANCASTER
We just need to get more
information. That's all.

CHARLIE
But it's almost Christmas.

DR. LANCASTER

And I want to do it before the holiday.

LAURA

What do you think it --

PIERCE

There's really no point speculating until we have the blood work back.

DR. LANCASTER

That's exactly right.

PIERCE

Tom, I'll walk you out.

And they leave. Laura looks at Charlie -- shell-shocked.

INT. OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

Dr. Lancaster talks to Laura, Charlie and Pierce. Laura drums her fingers on her leg.

DR. LANCASTER

The blood work wasn't what I was hoping for.

Laura's face drops. She grabs Charlie's hand.

PIERCE

Okay.

LAURA

Okay? What does that mean?

DR. LANCASTER

Corinne's lymph node is reacting to something and we don't know what.

CHARLIE

Well, what could it be?

DR. LANCASTER

A viral or bacterial infection. There's a chance it could be something called Cat Scratch Fever. Maybe mumps. Mono. Or --

He doesn't want to say it. Pierce says it for him.

PIERCE
Lymphoma.

DR. LANCASTER
I'm afraid so.

Lymphoma. LAURA That's --

Cancer. PIERCE

The color drains from Laura's face.

CHARLIE
She doesn't have cancer.

DR. LANCASTER
Is there a history in the family?

The brief pause means yes.

My wife. PIERCE My mother. LAURA

PIERCE
She had a brain tumor.

CHARLIE
This is ridiculous. Corinne's
perfectly healthy. We'd know if
something was wrong with her.

DR. LANCASTER
That's what we need to find out. I
moved my schedule around. I'll do
the surgery this afternoon.

LAURA
This afternoon?! Just wait a
goddamn minute. Shouldn't we get a
second opinion or something?

PIERCE
I'm the second opinion. And we're
wasting time here.

LAURA
No! You're not making decisions
for me. Not anymore.

PIERCE

Fine. Bring in someone else.
They'll tell you the same thing.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Corinne's been admitted. Laura holds a HOSPITAL GOWN in front of Corinne. Charlie watches from the corner.

CORINNE

I don't want to!

LAURA

Corinne, you have to wear it. The nurse said so.

CORINNE

Noooo! It's yucky.

A NURSE pokes her head in the door.

NURSE

All set?

LAURA

Not quite.

CHARLIE

Just give us a few more minutes.

The nurse leaves. Charlie takes over.

CHARLIE

You know, I wouldn't want to wear this, either. It's just a boring old hospital gown. But what if it was a princess dress?

CORINNE

Huh?

He takes a magic marker out of his back pocket and he starts to draw on it, putting his animating skills to work.

CHARLIE

Like you're going to the ball. It should have big, poofy sleeves, don't you think?

She smiles and nods. He draws sleeves on it.

CHARLIE
And what else?

CORINNE
Lace.

CHARLIE
Lace. Of course.

He draws a V-neck, lace bodice down the front.

CHARLIE
And you gotta have a fluffy skirt.

Charlie continues to draw -- transforming the gown into something magical.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Laura, Charlie and Corinne (now in the gown) walk down the hallway, hand in hand.

CHARLIE
And it'll be just like Snow White.
You lie very still. And before you
know it, you'll be sleeping and
dreaming.

CORINNE
I'm gonna dream about Santa!

LAURA
Okay. Santa, it is.

A nurse awaits. She takes Corinne's hand.

CORINNE
Hey, Daddy. You wanna come with
me?

ON Charlie's face. All the things he can't say.

CHARLIE
I can't. I got my own dreams.

CORINNE
Like what?

CHARLIE
Like your wedding.

CORINNE
(laughing)
You're silly.

Laura gives Corinne a kiss. Trying to hide her concern.

LAURA
Want to say "team" on three?

CORINNE
But, Oscar's not here. We're not a
team unless we're all together.

CHARLIE
That's right. Now, Corinne, you go
with...
(to the nurse)
What's your name?

NURSE
I'm Claire.

CHARLIE
Well, Claire. This is the fairest
princess in all the land. You take
good care of her.

NURSE
I sure will.

CHARLIE
Hey. What rhymes with Claire?

CORINNE
Bear!

NURSE
That's right. What else?

The nurse takes Corinne hand, walking her down the hall.
Away from Charlie. Away from Laura.

CORINNE
Chair.

NURSE
Yep.

To the operating room.

CORINNE
Hair.

They round a corner and she's out of sight.

Charlie turns to Laura. He rubs the wrinkle between her brow.

CHARLIE

Come on now. We spent a lot of money to have that removed.

-- and she falls into his arms, crying.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - LATER

Laura's arranging the magazines in alphabetical order.

Charlie and Oscar do a crossword puzzle.

Alice sits off to the side, reading "*The Daily Prayer*."

INT. OBSERVATION DECK - SAME TIME

Pierce watches the surgery. Not bothered at all. May as well be a stranger on the table.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - HOURS LATER

Dr. Lancaster comes down the hall, removes his surgical cap.

Laura, Charlie, Pierce, Alice and Oscar spring to their feet.

DR. LANCASTER

Okay. She did great. Everything went exactly according to plan.

LAURA

Why did it take so long?

DR. LANCASTER

The tumor was larger than I expected.

PIERCE

How much larger?

DR. LANCASTER

About the size of a golf ball.

LAURA

But, she's so tiny.

DR. LANCASTER

Her body's definitely reacting to something. She's got ten stitches that I put right along the jawline. I had to put a drain in, but if it's looking good in a few hours, she can go home tonight.

LAURA

Okay. So, what happens now?

DR. LANCASTER

Now we wait.

CHARLIE

We wait?

DR. LANCASTER

I sent the tissue to the lab. Unfortunately, everyone's gone for the holiday. So we won't have the results until the 26th.

LAURA

And it's either cancer or it's not?

DR. LANCASTER

Basically.

LAURA

If you had to guess --

DR. LANCASTER

I can't tell. Like I said, the tumor was much larger than I expected. And the white blood cell count was off. But I don't like to jump to conclusions.

PIERCE

I'll stop by the lab and see if we can get those results sooner.

DR. LANCASTER

I already checked. They're gone. But, I'll call the house on the 26th. Let's hope for the best. Merry Christmas.

LAURA

Yeah, right.

INT. BARNES & NOBLE - LATER

Laura is going up and down the aisles -- a bit frantic. She stops in front of the Health section. Scans the titles. Then grabs every book on the topic.

ANGLE ON the titles. "*Conquering Kids' Cancer*," "*When Someone You Love Has Cancer*," "*Malignant Lymphomas*," "*Hodgkin's Lymphoma*."

REGISTER LINE - JUST LATER

Laura's impatiently waiting in line with the last minute Christmas crowd.

MAN (O.S.)

Laura?

She turns around. Behind her is MATT MERRIMAN (39). Tall. Receding hairline. A kind, but weathered face.

LAURA

(no clue)

Yes?

MATT

Matt Merriman.

LAURA

Oh my god. Matt. Hi.

She goes to shake his hand, but as she does, a book drops from her stack to the floor.

Matt picks it up. Glances at the title. "*Treatment for Hodgkin's Lymphoma*." Hands it back to her.

LAURA

Last minute Christmas shopping.

MATT

I heard you were coming to town.

LAURA

Oh?

MATT

My mom gets the Christmas letter.

LAURA

Great.

CASHIER (O.S.)
Next customer in line.

LAURA
Well, nice to see you. Merry
Christmas.

MATT
You, too.

Laura walks up to the cashier. Hands her the book --

LAURA
(loudly, for Matt)
And I need a gift receipt for all
of those. Thank you.

CASHIER #2 (O.S.)
I can help the next person in line.

Matt walks up to the register next to Laura. She flashes him
an uncomfortable smile.

MATT
So, you and your husband live in
California.

LAURA
Yep.

MATT
You like it?

LAURA
It's great. Very sunny. How's
Janie?

He's used to telling this story --

MATT
Lost her three years ago. Drunk
driver.

LAURA
Oh god, Matt. I'm so sorry.

He holds up his book. "*Slow Cooking Secrets*."

MATT
It's okay. Me and my Crock-pot
have never been closer.

LAURA

I was so jealous of you guys in high school. You were the perfect couple.

MATT

Well, you only get perfect for so long, right?

ON LAURA -- thinking of Corinne.

They take their bags and walk to the front door.

MATT

The strangest thing is -- the world just keeps spinning. I see people in line at Starbucks. And I get invited to weddings and poker parties. Turns out the world didn't stop after all. Just mine.

An uncomfortable beat. Then, to lighten the mood --

MATT

And apparently I got really bad at small talk. I'm sorry.

LAURA

No. It's okay.

MATT

Hey, are you coming to the Santa Switcheroo?

LAURA

The what?

MATT

It's a gift exchange with an evil twist. Your dad and Alice come every Christmas.

LAURA

I don't think so.

MATT

Oh, come on.

LAURA

You shouldn't count on us.

MATT

I don't count on anything these days. You look great, by the way.

LAURA

(just being polite)
Thank you. So do you.

MATT

For a bald guy.

LAURA

Come on. You're not bald.

MATT

I might be by Christmas.

A quick wave and he's off.

INT. HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Corinne and Alice sit in a large sunken tub filled with bubbles. Alice is in her BATHING SUIT and SHOWER CAP. Corinne plays with dolls, splashing her.

ALICE

Okay. Try not to splash Grandma.

-- which only encourages her.

ALICE

I'm so glad you came to visit. I used to spend the summers with my Grandma Alma and those are some of my best memories.

CORINNE

You have boogies.

ALICE

Excuse me?

CORINNE

You have boogies.

Alice wipes her nose.

CORINNE

No. BOOGIES.

She doesn't get it.

CORINNE
(poking her boobs)
One. Two.

ALICE
(totally embarrassed)
Oh! Goodness.

CORINNE
It's okay. My mom has 'em, too.
They're for feeding babies.

ALICE
That's right.

CORINNE
Who are your babies?

Alice looks shocked. Stammers a bit.

ALICE
Ah, well, I -- I don't have any of
my own.

CORINNE
Why not?

ALICE
Because I didn't have any.

CORINNE
You didn't want babies?

ALICE
No. I didn't.

Corinne takes one of her dolls and offers it to Alice.

CORINNE
Here. You can have one of mine.

She looks at Corinne -- touched. The bubbles on her chin.
The bandage on her neck. Alice gets choked up.

ALICE
Thank you, dear. I love you,
Corinne. And you're going to be
just fine. I know it. The Lord
would never do this to me. Never.

She grabs her and pulls her into a tight embrace.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Pierce, Charlie and Oscar are at the kitchen table when Laura comes in from the book store.

LAURA
Where's Corinne? Is she awake?

CHARLIE
She's taking a bath with Alice.

LAURA
What?

OSCAR
I thought it was gross, too.

CHARLIE
You want dinner? Alice saved you a plate.

LAURA
No. I can't eat.
(to Pierce)
Is it okay for her to take a bath?

PIERCE
As long as she doesn't get the bandage wet. Say, Oscar, I have rounds at the hospital tomorrow. Would you like to go?

OSCAR
Cool. Can I see an operation?

LAURA
No.

Pierce gives Oscar a wink.

LAURA
I saw that.

Oscar dumps a JIGSAW PUZZLE out of its box. Pierce, Charlie and Laura all stare.

CHARLIE
Wow. That's a little daunting.

OSCAR
A thousand pieces. Will you help?

CHARLIE

Sure, buddy. Let me see that.

Oscar hands him THE BOX the puzzle came in.

It's a scene from "*The Wizard of Oz*." Dorothy, Toto, Scarecrow, Tin Man, Cowardly Lion, Wicked Witch of the West, the Wizard, the rainbow and even the tornado.

LAURA

I can't believe this is still here.
Alice must have overlooked it when
she was throwing away everything
from my childhood.

OSCAR

Grandpa, will you help?

PIERCE

Those things give me a headache.

OSCAR

Mom?

LAURA

No, honey. Not now.

Corinne streaks through the room. Alice chases after her.

ALICE

She slipped away before I could get
her pajamas on.

LAURA

Corinne! Slow down! Alice, she
shouldn't be running around after
what she's been through today.

CHARLIE

You'd never know she had surgery.

LAURA

That's good right?

PIERCE

On the 26th we'll know what's good.

INT. OSCAR'S ROOM - LATER

Oscar's in bed. Laura walks in and takes his book away.

LAURA
Rumor has it, it's past your
bedtime, young man.

She kisses him.

LAURA
Good night.

OSCAR
Night.

She's at the door. About to turn off the light.

OSCAR
Mom. Will you lay down with me for
a little while?

LAURA
No, sweetie. I'm going to tuck
Corinne in.

OSCAR
But Dad always does that.

LAURA
Not tonight. See you in the
morning.

ON Oscar's face. Hurt. The light goes off. All is dark.

INT. CORINNE'S BEDROOM - JUST LATER

Laura is curled up in bed next to Corinne.

CORINNE
How will Santa get a trampoline
down the chimney?

LAURA
Ah -- well, you know how Mommy's
job is to keep you safe? Well, if
Santa doesn't think a trampoline is
safe, he might not bring it.

CORINNE
But I asked for it.

LAURA

Well, sometimes we get things we ask for and other times we get things we don't ask for but actually need.

Corinne looks around the room.

CORINNE

Sugar! Here, Sugar! How come Sugar won't come out? Grandma Alice said she's hiding.

LAURA

She's not hiding, sweetie. She was very old and now she's in heaven.

CORINNE

She is?

LAURA

Yes.

CORINNE

With Grandma Corinne?

LAURA

That's right.

CORINNE

I'm named after her you know.

LAURA

You look like her, too.

CORINNE

We have the same color hair. And the same eyes. I saw a picture.

Laura's touched. She brushes Corinne's bangs to the side.

CORINNE

I want to go to heaven.

LAURA

(alarmed)

What? No, you don't.

CORINNE

I do.

LAURA

Corinne. You don't.

CORINNE
My Grandma's there. And so is
Sugar. Why can't I go?

LAURA
Because I want you here with me.
Now get some sleep.

Laura kisses her and gets up.

CORINNE
Daddy's turn.

LAURA
You already said good night to him.

CORINNE
I'm thirsty.

LAURA
There's water right there.

CORINNE
Can I have a snack?

LAURA
Not after eight.

CORINNE
(pouty)
When I get to heaven, I'm gonna
have snacks all day long!

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Laura and Charlie are in bed. She's in his arms, snuggled
against his chest. He's drifting off.

LAURA
Are you awake?

CHARLIE
No.

LAURA
How can you sleep? I keep thinking
about Corinne. Charlie, what if --

CHARLIE
She's fine. There's nothing to
worry about.

LAURA
You don't know that.

CHARLIE
Yes, I do.

Laura sits up. Leans against the headboard.

LAURA
Do you remember two years ago on
Easter when I told you the upstairs
toilet was making a funny noise?
And you said "I'm sure there's
nothing to worry about." And the
next day I was sweeping poop out of
the basement.

CHARLIE
That wasn't my fault.

LAURA
What about the dunk tank? You said
everything would be fine and --

CHARLIE
Who knew a five year old could
throw a fastball?!

LAURA
And the oil cap on the Jeep?

CHARLIE
What's your point?

LAURA
My point is -- I don't take any
consolation in you saying there's
nothing to worry about.

CHARLIE
You know what you need?

LAURA
Medication...

CHARLIE
You need to relax.

LAURA
...it's true. Everyone says I
should be on anti-anxiety drugs.
Gail swears by Lexapro.

CHARLIE
You don't need that stuff.

LAURA
I know. I need to be sharp.
Especially now. But, a Valium
would be nice. Or Klonopin.

CHARLIE
I can help you relax.

Charlie rolls over and fiddles with her nightgown.

LAURA
You've got to be kidding.

CHARLIE
What?

LAURA
You're horny?

CHARLIE
Why do you sound surprised?

LAURA
Our daughter might be dying!

CHARLIE
Okay. Not horny anymore.

LAURA
It must be nice to be a man. Life
would be so much easier if all of
my problems could be solved just by
getting off!

Laura throws the covers off and gets out of bed.

Charlie watches her go -- frustrated.

INT. DINING ROOM - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Laura sits at the table working on the jigsaw puzzle.

Pierce shuffles in. Apparently, he can't sleep, either.

LAURA
You, too?

PIERCE
Indigestion. I can't eat a goddamn
thing anymore.

He pulls up a chair.

LAURA
I hate this puzzle. I've been here
for an hour and I've only found
three pieces that fit.

He picks up a piece and puts it exactly where it belongs.

PIERCE
Look at that.

LAURA
(with contempt)
I have a system here! Start with
the outer edge and work your way
in. You can do the Tin Man. I'm
in charge of Dorothy.

They work on the puzzle in silence for a few minutes.

LAURA
If it's cancer, what are the odds?

PIERCE
Odds are good. If we caught it
early, eighty percent survival.

LAURA
And twenty percent death. What
about treatment?

PIERCE
Immediate radiation and
chemotherapy. Probably six weeks
at a time. Hair loss. Vomiting.
It'll damn near kill her. But,
it's better to be aggressive.

The reality overwhelms her. She breaks down.

LAURA
(sobbing)
How can you just say that? How can
you be so matter of fact? Because,
honest to god, this is killing me.
I don't know what I'll do if
something's wrong with her.

PIERCE
 (stone cold)
 You'll survive. It's what we do.

INT. GUEST BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

A high-pitched SCREAM comes from downstairs. The sort of scream that implies something is seriously wrong.

CORINNE (O.S.)
 AAAHHH! No! No! No!

Laura bolts up from a dead sleep and runs to the --

INT. MASTER BATHROOM

-- where she finds Pierce and Corinne in the corner.

CORINNE
 (hysterical)
 No! No!

Laura, still hazy, runs to Corinne's side.

LAURA
 What's going on?

CORINNE
 Mommy -- NO!!

PIERCE
 I need to change the dressing.

CORINNE
 NO!

Pierce grabs Corinne and puts her on the counter.

PIERCE
 It's going to get infected. Hold
 her down.

Corinne kicks her legs, trying to get away.

LAURA
 Corinne, honey, Grandpa just needs
 to --

CORINNE
 NOOOO!!

She flails about, kicking Pierce in the stomach.

PIERCE
Goddammit. Just hold her already.

Together, they pin her down. Corinne SOBS.

CORINNE
Ow. Mommy, stop! It's hurting.

Pierce removes the old bandage, revealing a bright red SCAR with ten black stitches holding it together.

CORINNE
STOP! STOP!

He rubs ointment on the scar, then puts on the fresh bandage.

Corinne's choking on tears in the back of her throat. Her face -- red with fury.

Pierce steps back.

PIERCE
There. All finished. See?

LAURA
(opening her arms)
Come here, sweetie.

But, Corinne's not that forgiving.

CORINNE
(screaming)
YOU HURT ME!

Corinne hits her, beating Laura with her fists. Corinne runs out of the room, WAILING.

Pierce is calmly picking up the band-aid wrappers and putting the ointment away.

PIERCE
We'll have to do it again Monday.
Remind me to wear a cup.

LAURA
(shaken up)
Dad. You shouldn't have done that!

PIERCE
I didn't hurt her.

LAURA
 You should have waited for me. I
 could have talked to her.

PIERCE
 You mean *reason* with her? That kid
 doesn't listen to you. Besides,
 talk is overrated and it doesn't
 change a damn thing.

He slams the medicine cabinet and storms out.

INT. KITCHEN - JUST LATER

Alice gently rocks Corinne in her arms.

ALICE
 Ssh. It's okay, dear. I won't let
 it happen again. I promise.

Laura comes in, sees Alice comforting her daughter.

CORINNE
 Can I have my fruit snacks now?

ALICE
 Of course.

Laura looks at the clock. 8:24 AM. It's hard for her, but
 she stays the course.

LAURA
 No.

CORINNE
 Mom!!

ALICE
 Laura.

LAURA
 I'm sorry, Alice. We have rules.
 We're on a schedule and Corinne
 knows that.

CORINNE
 I hate you!

-- and Corinne runs out of the room in tears.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Pierce is with a patient, TONY FIORE (56). TONY'S WIFE sits in the corner flipping through *People* magazine.

Oscar watches quietly from the corner. Proud. In awe.

PIERCE
(reading the chart)
How's the pain today, Mr. Fiore?

TONY
Better. Like a dull throb now.

PIERCE
Good.

Pierce takes out a stethoscope and listens to Tony's heart. THUMP, THUMP. THUMP, THUMP. When he removes it, you can see the stitches across Tony's chest. Eighty or more.

TONY
How's it sound, doc?

PIERCE
A lot better than the last one,
that's for sure.

TONY'S WIFE
When can he come home?

PIERCE
Maybe a week. I just want to make
sure his body doesn't reject the
new heart.

Pierce gestures to Oscar.

PIERCE
Come here. I want you to listen.

Pierce puts the stethoscope on Tony's heart and lets Oscar listen.

PIERCE
How does it sound?

Echoing his grandfather --

OSCAR
A lot better than the last one,
that's for sure.

Everyone smiles -- amused.

HOSPITAL HALLWAY - JUST LATER

Oscar and Pierce walk down the corridor. Oscar wiggles his tooth with his tongue.

PIERCE
(re the tooth)
How's that coming?

OSCAR
Getting closer.

PIERCE
I'll pull it out for you.

OSCAR
That's okay. It's almost out.

They turn a corner. Oscar tries to keep up.

OSCAR
Where did his new heart come from?

PIERCE
Connecticut.

OSCAR
Huh?

INT. WALK-IN COOLER - DAY

Pierce slides open the door and they step inside. Tubes, temperature gauges and monitoring devices everywhere. Oscar rubs his arms to keep warm.

PIERCE
Close the door behind you.

He does.

PIERCE
There was a car accident in Connecticut and a man died. His heart was a perfect match for Mr. Fiore, so I had it flown up here and I put it in him three days ago. This is where we store the organs until they're ready to be implanted.

(MORE)

PIERCE (cont'd)
(pointing)
That's a pancreas right there. And
a liver.

Realizing this is a storage facility for human parts, Oscar
goes pale.

OSCAR
These are all from dead people?

PIERCE
That's right.

Pierce picks up a CHART. Reads from it.

PIERCE
Stroke. Suicide. Drowning. A lot
of car accidents. Doesn't matter
how we get it. If the organ works
and it's a match -- we use it.

Oscar looks a little shaky. Needs to get out.

OSCAR
I -- I just need a sip of water.

And he runs out.

HALLWAY - JUST LATER

Pierce finds Oscar on a bench, wiping tears.

PIERCE
What's the trouble?

OSCAR
Nothing.

PIERCE
You know, if you want to be a
doctor, you're going to have to
grow a set of balls. You have to
switch off your emotions. Take
your heart out of it. You think
you're capable of that?

OSCAR
Yes, sir.

PIERCE
We'll see about that.

Pierce turns and walks down the hall. Oscar follows two steps behind. Pierce stops briefly outside a door.

THE LABORATORY

-- where they're running Corinne's test. Clearly closed for the weekend. Pierce stops a beat, then keeps walking.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY

Alice and Charlie are braving the malls, doing their last minute Christmas shopping. As they window shop --

ALICE

I can't believe how organized Laura is. I mean, she shipped me the kid's presents back in October.

CHARLIE

I, on the other hand, prefer to go out on December 24th and buy her whatever's left on the shelves.

As they pass Game Master, Charlie picks up the BOARD GAME *"Pass-Out The Adult Drinking Game."*

CHARLIE

Yes?

Alice shakes her head. Definitely no. They keep walking.

ALICE

Does it bother you?

CHARLIE

What?

ALICE

The way Laura has to control every little detail.

CHARLIE

Nah. It's who she is.

They stop outside Wet Seal. Charlie picks up a pink, leopard-print BUSTIER.

CHARLIE

Va-va-voom.

ALICE

No.

CHARLIE
Not for Laura. For me.

Alice puts it back. They keep walking.

ALICE
You know why she's that way, right?

CHARLIE
Alice, I don't like talking about
her when she's not here.

ALICE
But, we're the outsiders.

Charlie looks confused.

ALICE
We married into this family. As
outsiders, it's our duty to
complain about the insiders.
Personally, all that stuff was
twenty years ago. You'd think
she'd just get over it already.

CHARLIE
Pierce, too.

ALICE
Fat chance.

Charlie stops in his tracks. He sees something up ahead.

CHARLIE
Oh my god.

ALICE
What?

Alice follows his gaze. She GASPS in awe.

Outside Kaybee Toys, there's a large, round TRAMPOLINE.
Fourteen feet in diameter. The Power Bounce. Holds ten
people at once. The mother of all trampolines.

ALICE
We couldn't.

CHARLIE
Of course not.

But slowly, deviously, they turn and look at one another.

INT/EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Laura opens the door and smiles.

LAURA

Hi. Thanks for coming over.

It's Matt Merriman and his daughter, NATALIE (9).

MATT

I'm just glad you called.

LAURA

You're not going to believe the stuff I found. Yearbooks, senior photos, old test. Everything.

MATT

Natalie, this is Laura. She knew me back when I was cool.

NATALIE

Doubt it.

MATT

Hey, now.

LAURA

Come in. Corinne's excited to have someone to play with.

INT. BASEMENT - LATER

Laura's digging through a box of high school memorabilia.

MATT

I brought you a little something for old time's sake.

LAURA

Oh?

He takes two COLT 45's out of his bag.

LAURA

Ohmygod. We used to drink that, didn't we?

MATT

All the time. Here.

He cracks one open and offers it to her.

LAURA
Seriously? No. I can't. The
sun's still up.

MATT
Just like high school.

LAURA
I never have more than one drink a
day and I'll probably have wine
with dinner. Thank you, anyway.

Matt stares at her in disbelief. OFF his look --

LAURA
What?

MATT
Are you kidding? You're were the
most reckless person I've ever
known.

LAURA
I was?

MATT
You were drunk through all of high
school, you never studied, dumped
every hot guy and still graduated
with honors. Bitch. Come on.

She takes it. They toast and throw it back. *Blech.*

They hear the girls RUNNING above them.

LAURA
Ohmygod. She's got to stop running
around. Corinne!

MATT
They're fine. Natalie's in charge.

LAURA
Natalie's nine.

MATT
Yeah, but she grew up fast when
Janie died.

Matt takes a swig.

MATT
Hey, what's with the bandage on
Corinne's neck?

A beat, then Laura starts digging through the box.

LAURA
Um...

MATT
I'm sorry. It's none of my
business.

LAURA
It's okay. She had some surgery
yesterday. We found a lump...

MATT
Oh god. Laura.

LAURA
...and we're waiting to get the
test results back. So, I'm trying
to stay busy and act normal. How
am I doing?

He takes her hand in his.

MATT
Whatever the results are, I wish
you didn't have to go through this.
You've been through enough in your
life.

LAURA
Thank you for saying the perfect
thing.

MATT
What can I do?

LAURA
(holds up her beer)
This is a good start.

MATT
And Charlie?

She shakes her head.

LAURA

He doesn't get it. It's like he doesn't think anything bad could ever happen.

MATT

It just hasn't happened, yet. But, everyone gets that moment when their life is demolished. Mine was when Janie died.

LAURA

When my Mom died.

MATT

I remember. You came back from school and I saw you at the funeral and you were --

LAURA

(interrupting)

Let's not talk about death. Okay? It's the one conversation I can carry on by myself.

Their eyes lock. A moment. A connection over shared experience. Then --

MATT

Hey, do you remember when I tried to feel you up at Junior Prom?

They LAUGH. A loud CRASH comes from upstairs.

INT. KITCHEN - JUST LATER

Laura and Matt run up from the basement and find Corinne and Natalie out of breath and LAUGHING.

LAURA

Hey. What's going on up here?

CORINNE

We're trying to catch Sugar.

LAURA

What?

NATALIE

The cat is crazy!

LAURA
Corinne, I told you, Sugar's in
heaven.

CORINNE
She came back!

And just then, a CAT darts through the room. The girls
SQUEAL and chase after her.

Laura looks at Matt. No clue what's going on.

And Alice rounds the corner, looking very guilty.

LAURA
Alice?

ALICE
(whispering)
A bit too much catnip. Isn't the
resemblance remarkable?

Laura looks at Matt and rolls her eyes.

ALICE
Hi, Matt. Would you like to stay
for dinner?

MATT
Sorry. I promised my parents I'd
help them set up for the Santa
Switcheroo. You're coming, right?

ALICE	LAURA
Absolutely.	Probably not.

MATT
(game show host voice)
Ding. Ding. Ding. And Alice is
on the board with the correct
answer.

He grabs his jacket and goes in search of Natalie.

INT. GARAGE - LATER

Pierce has unfolded the PING PONG TABLE. Everyone is
gathered around; Laura, Charlie, Alice, Oscar and Corinne.

PIERCE
I'm glad you're all up for a little
friendly competition.

LAURA

Like we have a choice.

PIERCE

As always, we'll play rounders-style. You hit the ball and run around the table. If you miss the shot, you're out. Last man standing wins.

ALICE

It's just for fun, right?

The look on Pierce's face says otherwise.

LAURA

I don't want Corinne running.

CHARLIE

You know what? We'll be a team.

CORINNE

Everybody say team on three.
One...two...

LAURA/OSCAR/CHARLIE/CORINNE

Team on three!

PIERCE

Team? Are you kidding? This is one on one. Each man for himself.

Laura shoots him a look.

PIERCE

I'll start.

Pierce serves the PING PONG BALL to Alice, then runs around the table to the other side.

ALICE

Oh dear.

Alice gently hits it back. Her shot is meek, but good. She runs around the table.

Charlie carries Corinne. Both holding the paddle, they hit Alice's ball. It's a good shot. Corinne SQUEALS with delight as Charlie runs around the table.

Laura's turn. She returns the ball with ease. She's a pro. Learned from the best.

Oscar's up. He hits the ball, but it goes into the net.

PIERCE
Take a seat, Oscar.

OSCAR
But, I didn't even get to warm up.

PIERCE
None of us did.

LAURA
It's okay, Oscar. I'll beat
Grandpa for you.

Oscar sulks as he sits on a nearby bench.

The game resumes. It's high-energy. With one less person, there's more running. They go through the line up again.

Alice is the next to miss.

ALICE
That's okay. I'd rather sit next
to my grandson, anyway.

Alice sits next to Oscar, who is still reeling from being the first one out.

The game continues. More running. It's a frenzied pace.
PING. PONG. PING. PONG.

Charlie and Corinne are the next to miss.

It's down to Pierce and Laura. They take a minute to catch their breath.

PIERCE
Ready?

LAURA
Bring it on.

And they play. This isn't ping pong for fun. This is for vengeance. For the past. For wallpaper. For the passive-aggressive comments. For people who can't communicate.

Pierce SMASHES it past her. She lunges, but misses it.

PIERCE
Yes! Good game. Play again?

LAURA
(with venom)
Absolutely.

ALICE
I should put the ham in the oven.
Alice starts to leave, but Pierce stops her.

PIERCE
Not yet. We're playing again.
They all get up. Assume the positions.

PIERCE
Loser serves.
Pierce hands the ball to Oscar.

CHARLIE
Come on, Pierce. Go easy.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE OF THE GAME

Again, Oscar is the first to sit down.
Laura and Pierce are the last two standing. Pierce wins.

LAURA
Again.
They roll their eyes. Pierce hands the ball to Oscar.

PIERCE
Put some umph behind it this time.
Oscar serves. Into the net. He sits down.
Laura and Pierce are still going at it. Laura is furious.
Pierce wins again.

LAURA
Again.

PIERCE
Fine.

ALICE
I quit. I've got dinner to make.

Pierce hands the ball to Oscar, still the loser.

PIERCE
Why don't you get it over the net
for once.

CHARLIE
Okay, Pierce. Give him a break.

LAURA
You can do it, sweetie.

Oscar serves and misses again.

LAURA
Let him do it again.

PIERCE
That's not how we play.

CHARLIE
Well, that's how we play. Try
again, Oscar.

LAURA
Keep your eye on the ball, honey,
and just hit it a little harder.

Oscar winds up... pauses... and puts everything he has into
the serve. He SMASHES it! It clears the net and goes
straight into Corinne's eye.

CORINNE
Aaahh!

Corinne grabs her eye and SCREAMS. Everyone runs to her.

LAURA
Ohmygod!

CHARLIE
Corinne.

LAURA
Oscar! What's wrong with you?!

OSCAR
She was in the way!

PIERCE
At least you got it over the net.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Christmas eve dinner. Tension all around. Corinne's eye is swollen and she's milking it.

ALICE
Laura, dear, would you pass the
mashed potatoes?

Just the sound of forks SCRAPING.

ALICE
I have an announcement.

LAURA
Bake sale prices went up?

ALICE
I would like us all to go to church
tonight.

Everyone's got an excuse.

CHARLIE
I have last minute Christmas
wrapping to do.

PIERCE
I have charts to work up.

LAURA
I didn't bring anything dressy.

CORINNE
I don't like church.

OSCAR
Everyone knows the Catholic church
is corrupted.

All heads turn to Oscar.

OSCAR
What?

ALICE
Where did you hear that?

Oscar looks at Laura, who smiles sheepishly.

ALICE

There's a candlelight service at seven and I'd like everyone to go. Especially during this trying time.

There's no getting out of it.

INT. OSCAR'S ROOM

Oscar is getting dressed for church. He's wearing a CANDY CANE TIE and is combing his hair in the full-length mirror.

Laura comes in.

LAURA

Hey.

Oscar's still pouting from the ping pong incident.

LAURA

Your sister's eye is going to be just fine. I know you didn't mean to do it. You're a good boy and it was an accident.

Oscar keeps combing his hair in the mirror.

Laura looks at her own reflection. She points to the bags under her eyes.

LAURA

You see these? That's what you call bags. You know why they call them that?

Oscar shakes his head.

LAURA

Because I carry a lot of stuff in there. Sleep-deprivation, sodium, worry. I haven't slept well since we got here. And I know that's not a very good excuse, but that's why I snapped at you.

OSCAR

It's okay, Mom. I know you're worried about Corinne. What's wrong with her?

LAURA

We won't know until Monday.

OSCAR
My tooth might be out by then.

LAURA
Do you have any questions for me?
I'll give you the most honest
answers I can.

Oscar takes a pensive beat. Something on his mind.

OSCAR
Do you think I need to grow a set
of balls?

LAURA
What?!

OSCAR
Grandpa said if I want to be a
doctor, I have to have balls.

LAURA
I think the most important thing a
doctor can have is heart. God
knows it's what your grandpa lacks.
You, on the other hand, are all
heart. And that's a good thing.
You hear me?

OSCAR
Yes.

LAURA
You're perfect exactly as you are.
Loose tooth and all.

OSCAR
Just like you. Bags and all.

LAURA
Watch it.

INT. CHURCH - DUSK

The family, now all dressed up, sits in a church pew.

PRIEST
A joyous welcome to all who have
come to celebrate the birth of our
Lord, Jesus Christ.

The organist PLAYS a brief prelude into --

CONGREGATION
*Oh come, all ye faithful, joyful
 and triumphant...*

MOVE ALONG the six of them in the pew.

Charlie is holding a cold compress on Corinne's swollen eye.

Oscar is working on his loose tooth.

Alice is hanging on every word.

Pierce looks annoyed.

And Laura is nodding off.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - JUST LATER

Laura is getting a drink of water from the fountain. The priest's SERMON can still be heard in the background. On her way back, she sees the confessional.

INT. CONFESSIONAL

Laura sits inside. It's dark. Quiet.

LAURA
 Hello? Excuse me? Anyone home?

Long beat. Then the window slides open.

LAURA
 (startled)
 Aah!

PRIEST
 Sorry. I didn't mean to scare you.
 Are you here for confession?

LAURA
 No. Yes. I mean, I don't know.

PRIEST
 Well, is there something you'd like
 to get off your chest?

LAURA
 Yes.

PRIEST

Okay. How long has it been since your last confession?

LAURA

Jesus, who the hell knows.

PRIEST

Language.

LAURA

Sorry. See, I've been having these thoughts. Terrible thoughts. And I just need to tell someone. To get them out of my head.

PRIEST

What kind of thoughts?

LAURA

Guilt.

PRIEST

For?

LAURA

For something I feel. See, there's a chance my daughter might be sick. Really sick.

PRIEST

I'm sorry.

LAURA

And I want to believe she's going to be okay. But if she's not --

Her voice trails off.

PRIEST

You'll get through it.

LAURA

I don't want to get through it. This is supposed to be my time. After all the breast feeding and bedtime stories and play dates, I'm finally going back to work. It's just -- it's not fair.

She covers her face with her hands. Ashamed.

LAURA

Besides, I've done my job. I kept her out of harm's way. I taught her discipline and put structure in her life so she'll make smart decisions. I've done everything to keep her safe and *this* happens.

PRIEST

They're kids. You can't protect them from everything.

LAURA

Bullshit! I'm sorry, but that's my job. And do you have any idea how hard it is? Do you know how many decisions I make everyday? What's the best toy for my daughter? What's the safest street to live on? What's the best way to teach her compassion? What's the best example I can set in every single situation? It's exhausting!

PRIEST

You can't control everything in life.

LAURA

Yes, I can. I have to.

PRIEST

Why do you have to?

Long beat. This goes to her very core.

LAURA

Because the one time I didn't make my own decision, the one time I let someone else control my life -- something --

PRIEST

What?

LAURA

(long beat)

I'm sorry. I can't.

She gets up and leaves.

INT. BMW - NIGHT

Pierce drives while Alice beams.

ALICE

Wasn't that beautiful? I just love
a candlelight service.

They all GRUMBLE.

ALICE

And because you all did something
for me, I have a little surprise
for you. Oscar, honey, do me a
favor. Reach in the back and look
under the blanket.

Oscar turns around and pulls a blanket off to reveal a
CHRISTMAS WREATH.

CHARLIE

Whatcha got there, buddy?

OSCAR

It's a wreath.

ALICE

A grave wreath! I thought we'd go
by the graveyard and say hello to
someone you all loved very much.

ON Laura's face -- in miserable disbelief.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

They are all huddled around the grave. The wind whips in
their faces and attempts to carry the wreath away.

CHARLIE

Boy, Pierce, it's gotten cold. You
think we'll get some snow tonight?

PIERCE

Why does everyone keep asking me
that? What do I look like -- a
freaking meteorologist?!

ANGLE ON the headstone.

CORINNE DIXIE ATKINS
 1939 - 1987
Beloved wife and mother

ALICE

Does anyone have something they'd
like to say?

Long, awkward silence.

ALICE

Well, I'll start. Corinne, I never
met you, but I like to think we
have similar hearts. You've given
me these wonderful grandchildren
and I try to love them the way you
would. And give them encouragement
and support and I spoil them
rotten. And every time I hug them,
I'm doing it for both of us.
Wherever you are, Merry Christmas.

CORINNE

She's in heaven. Do you think they
have birthday parties in heaven?

CHARLIE

Of course, sweetie.

Alice looks at Laura -- who is about to boil over.

ALICE

Laura. Why don't you say
something.

That's a bad idea. And Charlie knows it.

CHARLIE

You know what? We can just stand
here and not say anything.

LAURA

Alice, here's what I'd like to say.
WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING?!

ALICE

(blanches)
I beg your pardon.

LAURA

What are you doing at my mother's
grave? Why are you here?

CHARLIE
Let's all calm down.

ALICE
I -- I just thought...

LAURA
Go back to the car!

ALICE
Pierce? It's Christmas eve and I
just thought it would be nice to...

PIERCE
Go on, Alice. Go wait in the car.

Her bottom lip quivering, Alice runs back to the car.

CORINNE
Mommy. You said "fuck."

LAURA
I sure did.

CHARLIE
Okay, maybe we'll go wait in the
car with Grandma Alice.

Charlie takes Oscar and Corinne and walks away. Before he
leaves, Oscar leans down and kisses the grave.

OSCAR
Hi, Grandma. Wish you were here.

CORINNE
Don't be sad, Oscar. Grandma can
come back and visit us anytime.
Just like Sugar.

Charlie leads the kids back to the car. Just Laura and
Pierce now. Pierce shakes his head.

LAURA
Did you know about this?

PIERCE
Of course not. Why would I want to
come here? I hate it here.

LAURA
Why do you hate it?

PIERCE

Because it's a waste of time.
She's not here. It's just dirt and
a headstone.

LAURA

Where do you think she is?

PIERCE

What are you talking about? She's
dead. Gone. Nowhere.

LAURA

But, that energy. That light. It
had to go somewhere.

PIERCE

That's why people invented religion
-- because they can't stand the
thought of it all just going away
without a moment's notice.

LAURA

Does Alice know you feel that way?

PIERCE

I try not to rain on her Jesus
parade. Now, can we go? It's cold
out here and this isn't exactly my
idea of a good time. If you have
something to say, spit it out.

LAURA

Let's see. Do I have something to
say? Well, I wish I could have
said goodbye to my mother when she
was dying.

PIERCE

Aw shit. Here we go.

LAURA

You robbed me.

PIERCE

We thought she had more time.

LAURA

You should have told me.

PIERCE

You had classes! A freshman can't
just pick up and leave!

LAURA

Mom was dying and I asked you if I should come home. I trusted you to make the decision for me and you said, "No. She'll pull through. You'll see her this summer."

Laura's face cracks. Tears she can't hold back any longer.

LAURA

How could you?! How could you deny me the right to see her one last time? To hold her hand. To hear her voice.

PIERCE

I didn't want you to see her like that.

LAURA

It wasn't your decision to make!

PIERCE

Don't pretend for a minute you know how I feel or what I went through, because you don't!

And he turns and heads back to the car.

INT. HOUSE - GUEST ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Charlie and Laura are mid-argument.

CHARLIE

I just think you're being a little hard on Alice.

LAURA

You're going to take *her* side?!

CHARLIE

This isn't about sides. You just seem irrational and that's not good for anyone right now. You need to eat something and get eight hours of sleep and just put all of this behind you.

LAURA

Ohmygod. You are clueless! Put this behind me? I don't even know what this is yet.

(MORE)

LAURA (cont'd)
And I think I'm doing a pretty good
job keeping it together considering
what we might find out Monday.

CHARLIE
I told you, everything's going to
be fine.

She explodes.

LAURA
OH FOR FUCK'S SAKE, CHARLIE! I
dare you to say that one more time!
Go ahead. Say it again. Don't you
get it?! Everything's fine until
it's not. And just for once I'd
like to have a partner in this
marriage, instead of someone who
lives in denial!!

CHARLIE
What am I denying?

LAURA
You're denying me the right to be
afraid. That something might
actually be wrong. Just tell me
this. When something does go
wrong, when your life doesn't go
exactly according to plan -- how
are you going to handle it?

CHARLIE
How the hell do I know.

Getting an idea --

LAURA
You know what?

She opens the door.

LAURA
Let's find out.

CHARLIE
Laura. Wait. Where are you going?

EXT. HOUSE - DRIVEWAY

The tires SQUEAL as Laura backs out of the driveway and
speeds down the street.

REVERSE ANGLE on Oscar looking out his bedroom window.

OSCAR

Mom?

INT/EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT - LATER

The front door opens. This is Matt Merriman's house.

MATT

(surprised)

Hi.

LAURA

I know it's Christmas eve and you
and Natalie are probably singing
carols or roasting chestnuts or
whatever, but --

She holds up a BOTTLE OF WINE.

LAURA

I'm about to break the drinking
rule and I didn't want to do it
alone.

MATT

(smiling)

The rebel returns.

INT. HOUSE - STUDY - NIGHT

Pierce and Alice sit on the love seat in his office.

ALICE

When the kids have gone to sleep,
you'll have to help me get the
boxes down from the attic. All of
Santa's elves have scattered off to
god knows where.

PIERCE

Typical.

Oscar enters. He looks a bit off. Disturbed.

OSCAR

Excuse me.

ALICE

What is it, dear?

OSCAR
Do you have a tool kit?

PIERCE
Why?

OSCAR
There's -- there's a screw in the
bathroom that fell off the cabinet.

PIERCE
(standing)
I'll get it.

OSCAR
No! I want to. I need to learn to
do things on my own.

Pierce looks at him. Sizes him up.

PIERCE
In the back hall closet.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Laura and Matt sit on the floor in front of the fireplace.
Her shoes are off. Drinking. Laughing. Forgetting.

LAURA
Do you stay in touch with Randy?

MATT
Mm hm. He and his partner, Jim,
live in Florida.

LAURA
His *partner*?!

MATT
Yep. Gay as a french horn.

Laura's cell phone RINGS. She checks the number. Ignores
it, then turns her phone off. OFF Matt's look --

LAURA
I don't want to talk about it.

She grabs the wine. Pours another glass.

MATT
Laura.

LAURA

What? We're different, that's all. Charlie's very simple. He doesn't have the emotional depth to deal with anything. I mean, he's never even lost someone.

MATT

Really? What about grandparents?

LAURA

Alive. All four.

MATT

Bastard.

LAURA

Tell me about it.

MATT

So he's had an easy life. But, tragedy will find him. And that's when he'll need you.

LAURA

But, what if it comes Monday in the form of a phone call?

MATT

Then you'll deal with it.

LAURA

I can't. Not again.

MATT

You will and you'll come out better for it. Because when you know pain, the world goes from black and white to technicolor. You see all the shades. You learn to appreciate a thunderstorm. A decent cup of coffee. A good conversation. Because, fuck, they're hard to come by. And one day, Charlie will understand that.

LAURA

Stop saying his name. I didn't come here to talk about Charlie.

MATT

(beat, softly)
Why did you come here?

She looks at him. His eyes. His lips. And in the moment, this one single moment, she kisses him. He doesn't pull away. He's not even surprised. It's one, long, sensual kiss. And then she stops. Sits up straight.

MATT

God, you don't know how long I've wanted to do that.

He goes to kiss her again, more impassioned.

LAURA

Stop.

Still trying to kiss her --

LAURA

Matt. Stop it!

She pushes him off and gets up. He's totally confused.

MATT

What?

LAURA

I'm sorry. This was wrong.

-- and she grabs her shoes and leaves.

INT. GUEST ROOM - SAME TIME

Oscar stands in front of the full-length mirror. He's pale.

PAN DOWN to his hand. He holds a PLIERS.

He raises the tool to his mouth. His expression -- unwavering. He opens his mouth and reaches in with the pliers. His loose tooth. The lateral incisor.

He grabs it with the pliers. It slips off a few times. He readjusts. When he gets a good, solid grasp -- he yanks it out. He WHIMPERS and drops to the floor. A small pool of blood forming on the carpet.

PUSH IN on the tooth. On the floor. Finally free.

INT. HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Laura tip-toes in the front door. She sees all the presents under the Christmas tree. The stockings are full. Santa has been hard at work.

INT. GUEST ROOM - JUST LATER

Laura tosses the THROW PILLOWS on the floor and slips into bed next to Charlie. He stirs. Rolls over.

CHARLIE
I was worried. I went looking for
you. Where did you go?

She's silent.

CHARLIE
Laura?

She starts crying. Guilty tears.

LAURA
I'm sorry.

CHARLIE
Hey, now. Come here.

He opens his arms and she curls into them.

CHARLIE
It's okay. Whatever happens. Our
family is perfect, because we have
each other.

He kisses the tears. Her eyelids. Her cheeks. And then his mouth finds hers. It's raw, passionate, real. As Charlie unbuttons her blouse and pulls her in tighter --

PAN DOWN to a NOTE on the floor. Hidden amongst the discarded pillows.

"Mom. Dad. My tooth came out! It's under my pillow for the tooth fairy. I love you. Oscar"

EXT. CORINNE'S BEDROOM - CHRISTMAS MORNING

The door opens and Corinne, in her nightgown, peeks her head out. Her eyes, wide with excitement. A devilish grin on her face. She walks over to the banister and looks down.

CORINNE
(in awe)
Santa came.

INT. GUEST ROOM

Corinne throws open the door and runs to the side on the bed.

CORINNE
Mom! Santa was here!

LAURA
(groggy)
He was?

Laura stirs. Smiles. Stretches.

LAURA
I slept! Oh, thank god.

Laura rolls over to wake Charlie.

LAURA
Merry Christmas, Char --

No Charlie.

CORINNE
Daddy's downstairs. He said I
should wake you and Oscar.

LAURA
I'll get your brother and we'll be
down in a minute.

OSCAR'S ROOM - JUST LATER

Laura opens the door.

LAURA
Merry Christmas, Oscar.

Oscar's in the middle of the room. All of the floral wallpaper has been torn down, leaving the old rainbow pattern. Oscar sits amongst the SCRAPS of wallpaper. He's destroyed the entire room.

LAURA
What the hell happened in here?!

OSCAR
(bitter, changed)
Merry Christmas, Mom.

LAURA

Oscar, what's going on? Why did you do this?

OSCAR

Because I hate it here! No one bothers with me. Not even the tooth fairy.

He opens his palm. Shows her THE TOOTH. A wave of guilt.

LAURA

Oh Oscar, that's not true. It's just, I think maybe the tooth fairy got caught in really bad traffic. I mean, there were a lot of people flying around last night. Rudolph and all his friends. And Santa. And who knows, maybe a million other little boys lost their teeth last night. You can't hold it against her, can you?

He looks off. Of course he can.

LAURA

Maybe she deserves another chance.

OSCAR

That's not the way it works.

She tries another angle.

LAURA

Well, Santa didn't forget you.

Oscar looks up. A hint of interest in his eyes.

LAURA

That's right. I think you've been a very good boy this year.

OSCAR

I have.

LAURA

Do you want to go see what Santa brought you?

Oscar shrugs his shoulders. Slightly tempted.

LAURA

Come on. Let's just peek.

INT. LIVING ROOM - JUST LATER

Alice, Pierce, Corinne and Oscar survey the presents Santa left behind.

ALICE
Good morning, everybody. Merry Christmas!

Charlie enters and hands Laura a cup of coffee.

CHARLIE
Merry Christmas, my love.

Guilt. Guilt. Guilt.

PIERCE
Let's get this shit over with.

MONTAGE OF CHRISTMAS MORNING

- Corinne opens a PRINCESS COSTUME and SQUEALS with delight.
- Charlie opens a CASHMERE SWEATER. Not the most personal gift, but he's happy with anything. He kisses Laura.
- Alice opens a KITCHEN-AID MIXER and gushes.
- Oscar opens LEGOS. The Construction Site Kit. A gift from his mother. He immediately starts putting it together.
- Pierce holds up a homemade TREE ORNAMENT Corinne made out of pipe cleaners. He forces a smile to Corinne, then rolls his eyes to the rest of the room.
- Corinne opens another PRINCESS COSTUME. More SQUEALING.
- Laura opens A LEATHER BRIEFCASE with her initials on it. The perfect gift. She smothers Charlie in kisses.
- Oscar and Pierce open matching TIES.
- Oscar has put together the entire construction site. As the WRECKING BALL crashes in and tears down the house...

INT. LIVING ROOM - HOURS LATER

All the presents have been opened. Paper is strewn about and Alice is gathering the bows for next year.

CORINNE
Is that all?

PIERCE
Is that all?! You just opened five
hundred presents.

LAURA
Yes, sweetie. I think that's all.

Charlie and Alice trade devious looks.

CHARLIE
Actually, there might be one more.

CORINNE
Really?

LAURA
(worried)
Really?

Alice is so excited she can barely contain herself.

ALICE
Santa left me a note saying there
was something for Oscar and Corinne
he couldn't fit down the chimney,
so he had to leave it in the back.

Corinne SCREAMS with anticipation. She and Oscar take off
toward the backyard. Laura's really hoping it's not what she
thinks it is.

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD - MORNING

Corinne and Oscar find the TRAMPOLINE. Red bow and all.

CORINNE
I knew it! I knew it! I knew it!

OSCAR
Oh, wow!

Charlie and Alice are beaming.

Laura's livid. She looks at Pierce.

PIERCE
I had nothing to do with it.

Laura takes a deep breath and prepares for battle.

CHARLIE
Don't do this, Laura.

But she does.

LAURA
Kids, I'm sorry. Santa made a
mistake.

OSCAR
What?

CORINNE
No!

LAURA
This isn't for you. Santa dropped
it off at the wrong house.

ALICE
Laura.

LAURA
Stay out of this, Alice. They're
my children, not yours!

Charlie steps up.

CHARLIE
They're our children. You seem to
forget I'm a parent in this family,
too.

LAURA
Then start acting like one! Do you
know how many kids get hurt on
these? We're not keeping it. End
of story.

Maybe for the first time ever, he challenges her.

CHARLIE
Yes, we are.

LAURA
Everyone inside right now!

Corinne starts CRYING.

CORINNE
Mom, no! I want it. It's mine.

LAURA
What's Mommy's job?

CORINNE
I don't care!

LAURA
Go inside! You, too, Oscar.

Oscar shoots her a nasty look and they go in the house.

Alice, Pierce, Charlie and Laura remain.

PIERCE
(dripping with sarcasm)
Everybody say team on three.
One...two...

ALICE
Fuck you, Pierce.

They all look to Alice in disbelief.

ALICE
And that goes for you, too, Laura.
You should be ashamed of yourself.
You're so busy trying to control
the world, you've forgotten what
it's like to be a kid. Well, this
is my house and you're not
controlling me. I'm in charge! I
say what goes. You will apologize
right this instant.

Like a tennis match, all heads turn to Laura.

LAURA
I'm sorry you exercised bad
judgement in buying a trampoline
that my children will never set
foot on!

ALICE
You're trying to ruin Christmas to
spite me.

LAURA
For the first time, Alice, you're
overestimating me. It's not my
intention to ruin Christmas. I'm
just trying to protect my kids.
(MORE)

LAURA (cont'd)
 Now, aside from letting them commit
 suicide on your so-called toy, is
 there anything else I can do to
 salvage your precious day?

A long, tense beat. Then --

ALICE
 Actually...

INT/EXT. - THE MERRIMAN'S HOUSE - LATER CHRISTMAS DAY

The door opens and an uber-chipper couple BERT and HAZEL
 MERRIMAN (70's) greet them in Santa hats.

THE MERRIMANS
 Merry Christmas!

ON Laura, Charlie, Pierce, Alice, Oscar and Corinne -- all
 miserable. Can't even fake it at this point.

HAZEL
 Come in. We're just about to get
 started with the Santa Switcheroo.

LAURA
 Oh joy.

BERT
 Any snow out there yet, Pierce?

If looks could kill.

INT. THE MERRIMAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

About twenty chairs are set up in a circle. In the center is
 a pile of wrapped PRESENTS. Guests are taking their seats.

Laura sees Matt waving at her from across the room. She
 ducks to avoid him.

CHARLIE
 That guy's waving at you.

LAURA
 What guy?

Matt comes over.

MATT
 Hi.

LAURA
(awkward)
Hi. Hey. Matt, this is my
husband, Charlie.

MATT
Hey.

CHARLIE
Nice to meet you.

A solid handshake.

MATT
Can I get you something to drink?
Eggnog? Hot cider?

CHARLIE
Ah -- I'm good for now.

MATT
Laura?

LAURA
You know what? I'll come with you.

She heads off to the kitchen with Matt.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Once she's out of Charlie's view --

LAURA
Look, you need forget about last
night. I didn't mean it. I just
thought --

MATT
You don't have to explain.

LAURA
Yes, I do. See, I was trying to
prove a point to Charlie, but it
was a mistake. And I'm sorry.

MATT
Laura. You kissed me. It was
beautiful. Why would you deny
that?

LAURA
Because I actually love my husband.

Speak of the devil...

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Laura.

She jumps at the sound of Charlie's voice.

LAURA

Aah. Oh hey. Hi.

CHARLIE

What's going on?

LAURA/MATT

(too quickly)

Nothing.

CHARLIE

Alrighty then.

Charlie grabs a SODA and turns to leave.

LAURA

Does it bother you that I'm talking
to Matt?

Charlie turns back.

CHARLIE

Of course not. You haven't seen
each other in years.

LAURA

Actually, that's not true. Last
night after our fight, I went over
to Matt's house.

CHARLIE

Oh. Whatever.

Charlie starts walking away.

LAURA

(to Matt)

We had a such nice time, didn't we?

MATT

Ah -- yeah.

Charlie keeps walking.

LAURA

We talked. And reminisced. And we even had that little intimate moment when we kissed.

Charlie finally stops. Spins back around.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry. You *what*?

LAURA

You heard me.

MATT

Oh god.

LAURA

See? Everything's not always fine, is it, Charlie. Sometimes life is messy.

CHARLIE

You used him to hurt me.

LAURA

Maybe I have feelings for him.

MATT

You do?

CHARLIE

She doesn't.

LAURA

Maybe I liked kissing him.

CHARLIE

You're lying. I bet you were drunk and it was terrible!

LAURA

So what? It still happened!

Matt blanches -- totally offended.

LAURA

It bothers you.

CHARLIE

Does not.

LAURA

Liar.

CHARLIE
I'm fine with it.

LAURA
I kissed another man!

CHARLIE
To get a rise out of me. And to what end? So I can be like you and overreact to everything? So I can worry and agonize and plan for the worst in life? Think about it, Laura. Do you really want me to be more like you? Because one of you is more than we can handle!

Charlie heads into the living room.

INT. THE MERRIMAN'S LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Bert Merriman goes over the rules of the game.

BERT
Just to recap, you can either open a new present or steal someone else's. But you can only steal a present once. The game ends when the last present has been opened. Let's play. Who drew the ace?

OSCAR
I did.

BERT
Then, you're up.

Oscar opens a present. It's a bottle of GREY GOOSE VODKA. Everyone LAUGHS. Well, except Charlie, Laura and Matt.

OSCAR
Yuck.

HAZEL
Don't worry, Oscar. I'm sure you won't get stuck with that for long. Not with this group.

BERT
So, we continue clockwise. Pierce.

Pierce looks at the vodka, considering it.

PIERCE

Sorry, kid. I'm more of a single malt guy.

He takes a present from the pile and opens it. REINDEER COFFEE MUGS.

PIERCE

Great. Something I can use all year long.

HAZEL

I think they're cute.

PIERCE

Take 'em. Because I'll be really pissed if I end up going home with these.

BERT

Alice. You're up.

Alice looks at the pile of presents and then decides to take the VODKA from Oscar.

ALICE

I think I'll take this.

PIERCE

You don't even drink.

ALICE

Well, neither does Oscar, but this way he can keep playing.

PIERCE

Yeah, but you're stuck with something you don't want!

ALICE

(snapping)

Par for the course these days! Now Oscar, Grandma wants that vodka.

OSCAR

You're not my real grandma. My real grandma's dead.

The entire room just got uncomfortable.

LAURA

Oscar! That's an awful thing to say.

OSCAR
Well, it's true.

Oscar opens another present. It's a bottle of PERFUME. He can't catch a break.

HAZEL
Natalie, sweetie. Your turn.

Natalie walks to the pile.

PIERCE
Take these stupid mugs from me.

NATALIE
I don't want the mugs.

PIERCE
I'll give you five dollars.

MATT
Pierce. She doesn't want the mugs.

CHARLIE
Why don't you stay out of it.

HAZEL
I think they're adorable.

PIERCE
Well, now we know who brought 'em.

Natalie opens a new gift. A BARBIE. Her face lights up.

NATALIE
Awesome. I don't have this one.

Matt's turn. He considers taking the vodka, but opts to open a new present instead. It's a GIFT CERTIFICATE.

MATT
Thirty dollars at Morelli's.

ALICE
Ooh. That's the little Italian restaurant over on State. I hear it's excellent.

MATT
One less meal I have to cook.

It's Corinne's turn.

LAURA
You're up, sweetie.

Corinne shrugs off her mother's touch. Still livid about the trampoline. Corinne marches over and snatches the BARBIE from Natalie's grip.

CORINNE
I want this.

NATALIE
But, it's mine.

BERT
Natalie. I'm afraid those are the rules. If Corinne wants it, you have to give it to her.

NATALIE
Can I take it back?

BERT
No. But someone else can.

MATT
Maybe if you ask nicely, Grandma Hazel will get it for you.

PIERCE
No, no, no. Grandma Hazel's taking the reindeer mugs.

CHARLIE
Nice. Teaching her to steal, Matt.

MATT
Excuse me?

HAZEL
Actually, sorry, Corinne.

Hazel takes the Barbie from Corinne.

CORINNE/PIERCE
No!

But Charlie's already got a plan to sabotage Matt.

CHARLIE
It's okay, Corinne. I'll make you a deal. You get the gift certificate for Daddy and I'll get the Barbie back for you.

MATT
Like hell you will.

Corinne grabs the Morelli's gift certificate from Matt.

Bert and Hazel look worried. The game is quickly losing the Christmas spirit.

CHARLIE
You took something of mine. I took something of yours.

LAURA
I thought you weren't bothered by it.

CHARLIE
This isn't about you, Laura.

Charlie takes the Barbie from Hazel and all hell erupts.

CHARLIE
There you go, Corinne.

NATALIE
IT'S MY TURN!

MATT
What's your problem? You want to take it outside?

CHARLIE
Absolutely!

LAURA
Really?

MATT
Come on, then!

They all watch in horror as Matt and Charlie get in each other's faces -- about to fight.

BERT
(separating them)
Stop it. Right now.

ALICE
What's gotten into you two?

PIERCE
Actually, I'm kind of enjoying it.

NATALIE
Can I have the Barbie?

CORINNE
No!

They tug-o-war it back and forth.

OSCAR
Does anyone want some perfume?

PIERCE
(holding up the mugs)
They'd make a nice pencil holder.

LAURA
Someone pass the vodka.

EXT. THE MERRIMAN'S HOUSE - JUST LATER

The door is slammed. They've officially been thrown out of the Santa Switcheroo.

CHARLIE
Jerks.

OSCAR
Your party stinks!

PIERCE
And I get to go home with the
goddamn reindeer mugs.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Laura's sitting at the dining room table -- working on the puzzle. Alice enters and puts on the TEA KETTLE.

ALICE
Did Charlie go to bed?

LAURA
Without saying good night.

Alice sits at the table. Laura's annoyed at the company.

ALICE
About tomorrow. Your father said
good news will come in the morning.
If it's bad news, they'll want to
run a few more tests and --

LAURA

Alice.

ALICE

I'm sorry. I'm sure you don't want to think about it right now, but...

LAURA

Don't want to think about it? It's all I think about. Every minute of every day! I'd give anything to be able to turn off my brain for a minute. Just one minute of peace and quiet.

Alice looks at her -- getting an idea.

EXT. HOUSE - BACK PORCH - NIGHT - LATER

Alice and Laura sit on the back steps, facing the stream. Alice is holding a FOLGERS COFFEE CAN.

LAURA

Where exactly did you get this?

ALICE

When my friend, Ester, died, a bunch of ladies from church went over to clean out the house. I found this in the freezer.

Alice opens the can and pulls out a BAG OF WEED.

ALICE

She had glaucoma.

LAURA

Or a marijuana habit. Do you have a pipe or something?

ALICE

Don't be silly.

LAURA

So, I suppose a bong would be out of the question?

Long pause while Laura channels her youth. Then --

LAURA

Oh! Springdale baking contest!

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

PULL BACK from a pan of award-winning, half eaten BROWNIES.

Laura and Alice are sitting on the kitchen floor in hysterics. Chocolate on their hands and mouths.

ALICE

...this was your yoga instructor?

LAURA

Yes. And it wasn't a big fart. It was what Corinne calls a fluffy. And he said "It never quite comes out how you expect it to."

-- and they HOWL with laughter.

ALICE

How long does this stuff take to kick in? I don't feel anything.

LAURA

Me, either. Let's have one more.

They cut two more brownies.

ALICE

I can't believe I'm eating marijuana.

LAURA

I can't believe I'm eating carbs!

They LAUGH. Once the laughter dies down --

ALICE

This is fun. How come we don't do this more often?

LAURA

Recreational drugs?

ALICE

No. Spend time together.

LAURA

Because I don't like you.

After a stunned beat, they roar with laughter at the honesty.

LAURA
It's true. You're a total Jesus
freak...

Alice is hysterical with laughter.

LAURA
...you have some weird co-dependent
relationship with my daughter...

Holding the stitch in her side --

LAURA
...and I just don't understand how
anyone can tolerate my father.

Both laughing now.

ALICE
Stop it. You're killing me.

LAURA
He's such an asshole.

ALICE
I know.

LAURA
An emotionally unavailable
cocksucker!

Peels of laughter. Alice wipes the tears from her eyes.

They let the words settle. Calm down. Laura takes a swig of
milk straight from the carton, then passes it to Alice.

LAURA
What was your first husband like?

ALICE
He was fine until he left me.

They both crack up again.

ALICE
I guess four miscarriages was one
too many for him.

Alice laughs, making light of it. Laura straightens up.

LAURA
You -- you had four miscarriages?

ALICE

Yeah.

LAURA

That's not funny, Alice.

ALICE

I know.

Alice looks down. Avoids her eyes.

ALICE

The last one was a girl. I always
wanted a girl.

Laura is frozen. Alice's cards are finally on the table.

ALICE

No matter what happens tomorrow,
you've had a beautiful little girl
for five years. That's more than
some people ever get.

Sitting side by side, with their legs stretched out in front
of them, Laura rests her head on Alice's shoulder. Finally,
a moment of compassion.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MONDAY MORNING

Laura's asleep on the couch and Sugar's asleep on Laura's
head. Corinne nudges her mom.

CORINNE

Mommy, are you awake?

Laura shoos Sugar away.

CORINNE

I am now.

CORINNE

Can I have my fruit snacks?

Laura can't help but laugh.

LAURA

I don't believe you. Come here.

Laura opens up the blanket and makes room for Corinne to
crawl inside.

LAURA

Tell me, what exactly is it about fruit snacks that you find so irresistible?

CORINNE

They make me happy.

LAURA

Don't other things make you happy?

CORINNE

Not as happy as fruit snacks. Can I? Just this once?

LAURA

What time is it?

CORINNE

But, Mom, why can't I just have them if they make me happy?

LAURA

Well, sweetie, because...

Laura has to think about it.

LAURA

...because, you need to eat food that will help you grow big and strong someday.

CORINNE

Why do I need to be big and strong *someday* if I can be happy *today*?

Laura looks at her daughter. *Good question.*

INT. HOUSE - OSCAR'S ROOM - MORNING

Laura goes in to say good morning to Oscar. She looks around at the torn wallpaper.

LAURA

Has Grandma seen this room yet?

OSCAR

I don't think so.

LAURA

Let's keep it that way.

She climbs in bed next to him.

LAURA
Do you mind if I just lay down for
a bit? Sugar pretty much slept on
my head all night.

OSCAR
Sure.

As she fluffs the pillow --

LAURA
Hey. What's this?

OSCAR
What?

She pulls out a GOLDEN DOLLAR.

LAURA
Look.

He looks at the coin.

LAURA
It's from the tooth fairy.

He shakes his head.

OSCAR
No, it's not. It's from you.

LAURA
(beat, then softly)
Well, who do you think the tooth
fairy is?

He looks at her. *Huh?*

LAURA
I was going to tell you when you
were ten. I'm also the Easter
Bunny. And Santa Claus.

He takes a minute to digest it. Then --

OSCAR
So, you forgot.

LAURA
I have a lot of things on my mind
right now.

(MORE)

LAURA (cont'd)
But, I've been thinking. There are all these pretend things. Things we make up. And then there's what real -- like family. And maybe it's time to appreciate the real things.

OSCAR
I do.

LAURA
Well, you were pretty mean to Grandma Alice yesterday.

OSCAR
She's *not* my real grandma.

LAURA
She's the only one you've ever known. She's never missed a birthday or a Christmas. And she would never, never miss a tooth.

OSCAR
But you always say --

LAURA
Stop. I don't want you to fight my battles for me anymore, okay?

He nods a reluctant okay.

LAURA
Hell, I don't even want to fight my battles, anymore.

KITCHEN - LATER

Pierce finds Laura, Corinne and Oscar are at the table having breakfast.

PIERCE
Good morning.
(to Corinne)
We need to change that bandage today.

CORINNE
NO!

PIERCE
Yes.

LAURA
Not now, okay?

Alice staggers in wearing oversized SUNGLASSES. Gingerly holding her head. Clearly hungover.

CORINNE
Grandma!

ALICE
(wincing)
Too loud.

Alice and Laura trade glances. Their secret.

The phone RINGS.

Pierce, Laura and Alice all snap to attention.

Charlie comes sprinting in from another room.

RING.

LAURA
(excited)
Good news comes early.

She pops up and answers it.

LAURA
Hello?

She listens for a long, strenuous beat.

LAURA
I'm sorry. They already get the paper.

She hangs up. Stressed out. She looks at Charlie.

LAURA
Good morning.

Charlie ignores her. Addresses the kids --

CHARLIE
Who wants to play outside?

OSCAR/CORINNE
I do!

CHARLIE
Okay. Get your jackets on.

LAURA
Hey, you guys?

Both kids look at her.

LAURA
Not on the trampoline.

OSCAR
(pouting)
We know.

Charlie shakes his head and leaves.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. KITCHEN - HOURS LATER

The CLOCK reads eleven forty five. Laura and Pierce are at the table, working on the PUZZLE. It's almost finished.

LAURA
You know what I think? I think
"The Wizard of Oz" was a crock of
shit.

Pierce puts another piece of the puzzle in.

LAURA
You want to know why?

PIERCE
Do I have a choice?

LAURA
Dorothy spends the whole movie
trying to get home. "There's no
place like home. There's no place
like home." And then when she gets
home, everything's perfect. When
in reality, there really isn't
anyplace like home. Not even home
is like home.

Pierce pushes his chair back and walks out.

INT. GUEST BATHROOM - LATER

Oscar and Corinne are alone in the bathroom. He's wearing one of Charlie's WHITE OXFORDS with a belt at the waist. Corinne's sitting on the toilet.

OSCAR
(in an adult voice)
So, Miss. Tell me where it hurts.

CORINNE
(pointing to her neck)
Right there.

OSCAR
What happened?

CORINNE
I fell off my bed. Do you think
I'll die?

OSCAR
Well, I'll have to take a look at
it.

Oscar starts to remove the BANDAGE.

CORINNE
No!

OSCAR
Corinne, how am I supposed to learn
to be a doctor if I don't practice?

She thinks about it, then reluctantly takes her hand away.
Puts her trust in her brother.

CORINNE
Be gentle.

OSCAR
I promise.

Oscar slowly removes the bandage. Corinne winces but doesn't
make a sound.

Pierce is quietly observing them from the doorway. Watching
and learning from Oscar's bedside manner.

CORINNE
How does it look, doctor?

OSCAR
Really bad. That must have been
some fall.

CORINNE
Can you fix it?

OSCAR

Yes. The good news is I don't think you'll die. But the bad news is, I'm going to have to operate for a really long time.

CORINNE

Cool.

The door CREAKS. They both look up and see Pierce.

PIERCE

Good work, Doctor. When you're finished there's a patient waiting for a consult in the X-ray room.

Beaming from the morsel of respect --

OSCAR

Be right there.

INT. STUDY - LATER

Charlie and Alice are watching a movie.

ON the TV. *"The Outsiders."*

Together, they share a bowl of popcorn and watch Matt Dillon in his younger days.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

The CLOCK reads two fifteen.

Laura puts in the last piece of the puzzle. Finally complete, although missing a few pieces. She runs her fingers over the holes.

LAURA

I just don't understand what happened to these pieces?

Laura looks under the table. Not there.

LAURA

Check the box.

Pierce opens the box. Empty.

PIERCE

Nope.

LAURA
How could we lose them?

PIERCE
What do you want, Laura,
perfection?

LAURA
Why not.

PIERCE
Because you'll be disappointed
every time.

LAURA
We had it for a little while.
Every piece. All fitting perfectly
together.

Laura grabs the empty box --

LAURA
And then it was gone.

-- and shoves the puzzle into it. Destroying it.

LAURA
Just like that.

She sweeps another handful into the box.

LAURA
You know what I hate? Mother's
Day. I hate the jerks at Hallmark,
and the TV commercials and the fact
that I can't go to brunch on a
Sunday in May because it's all
daughters who still have mothers.

She dumps the last of the puzzle into the box.

LAURA
Don't you miss her?

Pierce avoids her eyes. Hardens.

LAURA
Do you feel anything? Guilt?
Remorse? Sorrow? Lonesome?

PIERCE
I'm not going to do this with you.

LAURA
Why not?!

PIERCE
Because it was twenty years ago!

LAURA
And yet it's right here.

PIERCE
Let it go.

LAURA
You're a selfish man.

PIERCE
You're a selfish brat. Just like
your daughter.

She SLAPS him!

LAURA
DON'T YOU SAY ONE THING ABOUT HER!

PIERCE
WHY? BECAUSE I'M RIGHT?!

The phone RINGS.

They both wait a beat, then jump up in unison and run to the
phone. Pierce blocks her from picking it up.

PIERCE
You want to know why I didn't tell
you to come home?

RING.

LAURA
Dad -- the phone!

PIERCE
It was because she was waiting to
see you. She was only holding on
for you.

RING.

PIERCE
I knew the minute you got there,
she'd be gone. It was selfish. It
was wrong.
(MORE)

PIERCE (cont'd)
But I got two more weeks out of
her. Two weeks that I never would
have had.

RING.

PIERCE
I'm sorry you didn't get to say
goodbye, but I wasn't ready. I
couldn't let go.

ON LAURA. Finally understanding.

PIERCE
And if you think I don't miss her
every moment of every day, then you
don't know me. I'll never love
anyone the way I loved your mother.
Never. I know it. Alice knows it.
It's about goddamn time you knew
it.

RING.

Laura looks at him. Her eyes full of tears that don't fall.
Twenty years of resentment fading. She picks up the phone.

LAURA
Hello?

She looks at Pierce. Nods. This is the call.

LAURA
(listens, then)
Yes. Okay.

Long beat of listening. She gives no indication.

LAURA
I understand. Thank you. Yes,
he's right here. I'll put him on.

In a daze, Laura hands the phone to Pierce.

LAURA
Doctor Lancaster would like to
speak to you.

INT. OSCAR'S ROOM

Laura throws the door open. Oscar and Corinne are playing.

LAURA
(excited)
Hey. I need you guys to come with
me. I have a surprise.

They light up and follow her downstairs.

INT. STUDY

Laura, Oscar and Corinne find Alice and Charlie watching the
end of the movie. The credits are rolling.

CHARLIE
What? Is there news?

Laura smiles -- happy, content.

OSCAR
Hey, Dad. Come on.

CORINNE
Grandma, you too!

ALICE
Where are we going?

LAURA
Outside.

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD

Corinne's eyes are sparkling.

CORINNE
Really?!

They're standing around the trampoline.

LAURA
Go on.

Alice and Charlie look at Laura in disbelief.

OSCAR
Are you sure, Mom?

LAURA
I'm sure. Let me give you a boost.

Laura helps Oscar up.

CHARLIE

Why now?

Laura smiles and shrugs her shoulders.

LAURA

Because I was wrong. Go on,
Corinne.

Charlie lifts Corinne up.

LAURA

Oscar, help your sister.

Oscar takes Corinne's hand. They start to bounce. Slowly at first. In perfect unison.

INT. KITCHEN

Pierce is still on the phone.

DR. LANCASTER (O.S.)

...go back in and make sure we got
it all. And I want to start
chemotherapy right away. Probably
fifteen sessions. I'm so sorry,
Pierce. I can't imagine how hard
this must be for your family. I've
got grandkids and I don't know what
I'd do.

Barely keeping it together --

PIERCE

Thank you.

He hangs up and breaks down in SOBS. Every emotion, every
fear, everything he's kept inside for years comes out now.
He can't catch his breath.

Then, just like that -- he stops. Gets control.

Out the window, he sees --

-- Oscar and Corinne jumping on the trampoline.

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD

Pierce comes out, holding a cup of tea.

CORINNE
Mommy, this is fun!

Pierce walks up to Laura. They look at each other. No words needed. Another hardship they'll somehow get through.

OSCAR
Grandma, come on.

ALICE
Oh no. I couldn't.

OSCAR
Sure you can. I'll help you. Just like you always help me.

Oscar offers his hand to Alice. A peace offering. Alice smiles and gingerly climbs up on the trampoline.

ALICE
Oh my, it's bouncier than it looks.

CORINNE
Daddy, come on! You, too.

CHARLIE
Well, if I get up there, we're going to have to see who can jump the highest.

CORINNE
I can!

OSCAR
I'm older. I can.

Charlie does a somersault onto the trampoline.

Corinne, Oscar, Alice and Charlie are all bouncing.

Pierce puts his arm around Laura. It turns into a hug. He whispers in her ear --

PIERCE
Let's be kind this time.

She nods and drops her head against his chest. And for the first time, she can hear the THUMP THUMP of his heart.

Alice sees it.

Charlie sees it.

They both know the phone call was bad news.

Charlie rushes to the side. Leans over.

CHARLIE

Laura?

But he already knows. A simple nod confirms it.

And after a lifetime of joy, a wave of terror washes over Charlie. Pure, nauseating fear. Buried alive. His face cracks as he fights to suppress the SOBS.

In the background, Corinne bounces up and down.

Laura takes his face in her hands. Now the strong one --

LAURA

Listen to me. You were right.
We're going to be just fine.

He shakes his head. No. No. No.

LAURA

Yes. We are. Now, come on. Are
you going to help me up or not?

She smiles. Content. Free.

He offers his hand. She puts her hand in his and they commit to this journey. He pulls her up and now everyone's bouncing but Pierce.

ALICE

Pierce?

PIERCE

No way. Not on your goddamn life!

OSCAR

Come on, Grandpa. You can do it.

PIERCE

Someone's going to break their neck
and it's not going to be me.

OSCAR

Why don't you grow a set, already?

They all look to Pierce. Pierce is either going to pummel Oscar, or he's going to --

-- LAUGH. The first time he's truly laughed in ages.

PIERCE
Atta boy. That's more like it.

LAURA
Hey, after this it's time for fruit snacks.

CORINNE
But, I already had mine today.

LAURA
Who says you can't have more than one a day?

OSCAR
You do.

LAURA
Well, it seems like a good day to break the rules.

Pierce takes a sip of tea from his reindeer mug. And then he looks up to the sky.

PIERCE
Would you look at that?

They all look up.

It's snowing!

LAURA
Better late than never.

CORINNE
Hey, Mommy, look!

And Corinne takes a bounce that sends her flying off the trampoline. Out of frame.

LAURA
Ohmygod!

PIERCE
Told you.

ALICE
Corinne!

CHARLIE
Sweetheart?

FROM OUT OF FRAME --

CORINNE (O.S.)

I'm okay!

And she is. They all are.

For now, anyway.

FADE OUT.