

ANYTHING BUT CHRISTMAS

Written By

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Full script

PINK

1 EXT. GRACE'S HOUSE - DAY

1

A car pulls up in the driveway of a large, suburban home. Inside are JOHN BROOKING, 30, and ZACHARY, 9. Both are tense, ready to run.

 JOHN
 This time, you're going to lose.

 ZACHARY
 You think?

 JOHN
 Are you ready get set GO!

They jump out of the car and race to the front door. John trips on the front step, and Zachary gets there first - just.

 JOHN (CONT'D)
 Oh, every time! You win, I unload.

 ZACHARY
 It's okay, I'll help.

2 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

2

Inside the house is GRACE, 29. She is strong, blonde, and beautiful. As she is dusting, she watches them unload the car, and smiles.

3 EXT. GRACE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

3

John and Zachary head for the front door, overloaded with grocery bags.

 JOHN
 It's getting cold.

 ZACHARY
 You think it's going to snow for
 Christmas?

At the mention of that word, John loses concentration, and a carton drops to the ground.

 JOHN
 Yeah. No. I don't know.
 (about the carton)
 I'll come back for that.

 ZACHARY
 You going to dress up as Santa
 Claus?

JOHN

NO!

That was louder than he intended, and he drops another item.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I mean, I'm not so good at...

ZACHARY

Dad always did. He used to love Christmas. But not as much as Mom.

4 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, ENTRANCE HALL AND KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS 4

A central entrance hall with a staircase up to the bedrooms. A living room is on one side, and on the other, a large kitchen.

John opens the front door, Grace puts her arms around his neck, and kisses him. His arms are full of grocery bags.

JOHN

Grace, that's not fair, I can't grab you.

GRACE

I only want you for your groceries.

ZACHARY

Mom's crazy about Christmas. Isn't that right, Mom?

GRACE

Hey, little man, that's against the rules, we don't talk about it until December.

(to John)

On the kitchen table, please.

JOHN

Me or the groceries?

She flashes him a smile.

ZACHARY

It's December tomorrow, then just 25 days. Can John be Santa Claus?

JOHN

No way, I mean, that is so dumb.

GRACE

Playing Santa is dumb?

JOHN
I didn't say that, I just... I'll
go get the rest.

He goes out. Zachary is a little concerned.

ZACHARY
Did I say the wrong thing? I told
him Dad used to dress up as Santa.

She glances at a photograph of a man, on the wall.

GRACE
Zach, it's never wrong to talk
about your Dad. John's a writer,
he's got things buzzing in his head
all the time. That's why he falls
over things.

ZACHARY
And drops things.

GRACE
And trips on the front step.

ZACHARY
No, he does that to let me win.

GRACE
Oh, you think so?

John comes back in with the dropped groceries.

GRACE (CONT'D)
You'd look good as Santa Claus.

As John talks he manically fills the cupboards with the
groceries. It is almost as if he believes what he is saying.

JOHN
Nobody looks good as Santa Claus.
Grown men dressed up in red coats
and white fluff, stupid boots, that
ridiculous hat. I mean, what is
attractive about a bright red nose?
Why do we it year after year, and
so many of them, every street
corner, it's like a plague of fat
red men with rosacea...

Grace and Zachary are staring at him. They start to laugh.

ZACHARY
You're funny!

Zachary runs from the room.

GRACE

Just to warn you, I put a surprise in the closet for Zach. And hey, be careful how you joke about Christmas, we take it seriously around here.

John covers the fact that this is bad news.

JOHN

Oh? Why?

GRACE

Why? It was always the biggest thing when I was a kid. Wasn't it for you?

JOHN

Yeah... It was big.

GRACE

And I always make it extra specially *huge* for Zach. To make up for...

JOHN

For his Dad not being here.

Grace puts her arms around John's neck.

GRACE

Yeah. But you'll be here. I'm looking forward to that.

JOHN

I love you.

Grace takes a breath, but somehow, can't say it.

GRACE

Good.

Zachary comes back in.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Hey, Zach, our first Christmas with John. Do you think he'll fit in?

ZACHARY

Sure. But we're not supposed to talk about it.

GRACE
That's right. Not until tomorrow,
Then we can. YAY!!!

Grace and Zachary go into the crazy dance routine that they do together when they are *really* excited. She chases him out of the room.

John puts away the last groceries, and opens the closet door.

HO HO HO! Something like a life-size plastic Santa Claus, with lights, music, jerky arms and rotating head, wishes him "*Merry Christmas*". John is terrified, and flattens himself against the wall. John shuts the thing off, and sighs.

5 EXT. GRACE'S HOUSE - DAY 5

FAITH carries a box from her car to the front door. She is 28, small, dark, fiery, highly strung, and talks non-stop.

6 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, OFFICE SPACE - CONTINUOUS 6

John is in the OFFICE SPACE, writing on his laptop. Faith enters, puts the box on his table, and opens it.

JOHN
Morning, Faith. How are you.

FAITH
The apartment is a nightmare, the kids upstairs, the home improvement downstairs, I have complained repeatedly, it's a wonder I get any sleep at all. Here, hold that.

Faith takes an armful of tinsel and Christmas ornaments from the box, and thrusts it into John's chest. He reacts badly.

JOHN
Oh no, take it away. I'm allergic!

FAITH
To what, Christmas?

JOHN
Yes, no, tinsel attracts dust.

She pulls out a large plastic Angel. John shrinks away.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Euuw... That is really...

FAITH
What is the matter with you? It's
for the top of the tree, Grace will
love it. Is the coffee on?

JOHN
Is that a good idea?

FAITH
Are you being judgemental?

JOHN
I'll get you some coffee.

FAITH
No you won't, you don't know how I
take it. Nobody understands how I
take it, it's exactly the same at
work, I have to stop what I'm doing
and get it myself.

JOHN
Okay, calm down...

FAITH
NOBODY TELLS ME TO CALM DOWN!

A beat.

JOHN
Bad day, huh?

FAITH
Are you going to pretend that you
are interested in my day?

JOHN
Faith, I try.

FAITH
Well why bother?

JOHN
Because I love your sister.

FAITH
Is that official? Are you part of
the furniture now? When Momma
died, I wanted to sell this place,
and everything in it, but Grace
insisted on keeping it.

(a beat)
We had such happy times here.
(MORE)

FAITH (CONT'D)

We always had the perfect family Christmas. You better get ready, it's a madhouse here for the holidays. She invites anybody, waifs, strays, the homeless, the broke, complete strangers, total losers. She makes such a big deal of it.

JOHN

I wanted to ask you about that...

Zachary enters, with a warning.

ZACHARY

Aunt Faith, Charlie Smythe is here.

FAITH

Oh no, I cannot stand that man.
Even you are an improvement on him.

Faith heads for the front door. John and Zachary follow her outside.

FAITH (CONT'D)

Zach, say hello to your Mom and tell her I want my blue coat back, she always borrows stuff from me, I never get it back.

7

EXT. GRACE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

7

CHARLIE SMYTHE stands outside, his classic car in the background. He is English upper-class, 46, and wears a wig. Faith rushes to her car to avoid him, and drives away fast.

CHARLIE

Faith, darling!

FAITH

Got to go, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Oh, shame. Zachary, dear boy, Where is your lovely Mother?

ZACHARY

She's in the backyard, I'll get her.

Zachary goes. A moment of awkwardness between the two men.

CHARLIE
So er... John isn't it, yes, where
are you living now?

JOHN
I moved in here three months ago,
why is it a surprise every time I
tell you?

CHARLIE
Oh yes, right. So how's business?
Journalist, aren't you?

JOHN
Novelist, and no, I'm not published
yet.

Grace and Zachary come round the corner from the back yard.
She wears a blue coat.

CHARLIE
Oh, Gracey pacey pudding and pie!
You look good enough to eat.

JOHN
It's the coat. Faith wants it
back, she came over.

GRACE
I heard. I hid.

JOHN
Sneaky.

CHARLIE
Well it makes you look very sexy,
doesn't it Zach?

Zachary winces, and Grace avoids Charlie's big hug.

GRACE
Thanks Charlie, always good to see
you, but you know...

CHARLIE
Just popped in to tell you, I have
a load of Christmas trees. I'm
saving the biggest for you, just
like always.

He chuckles, Grace and John share a look.

GRACE

Thank you so much, but that's John's department now. He's already chosen a tree.

JOHN

I have? Yes, I have. And I got a really big one.

CHARLIE

That's a shame. I have whole plantation, just bought a few more acres of woodland for the estate.

JOHN

Charlie, can I ask, are you rich, or very rich?

CHARLIE

Stinking rich. Inherited most of it. But you know how it is, you get money, you have money, you have money, you get money. And you get the girls too, they love all that. You should try it yourself.

JOHN

Thanks, I have the girl. And my tree is big enough...

GRACE

Charlie, we're in a rush, we're all going out...

CHARLIE

Righto. But Gracie pie, you simply must come for tea. Juliette is redecorating the guest wing, she needs your advice.

GRACE

I'd love that. Bye Charlie.

Grace and John watch, arm in arm, as he walks to his car.

JOHN

Is that a wig?

GRACE

Never got close enough to find out. So do you really have a tree?

JOHN

Of course not.

She giggles, teasing him.

GRACE

Better get one now, or I'll have to take Charlie's.

JOHN

Listen, "Gracey pie", I never asked, but that guy? I just don't know how you ever...

GRACE

I know. It was a year after Jose died, I needed a break. Charlie took Zach and me on a vacation. He wanted me to be his third wife.

JOHN

You'd be stinking rich.

GRACE

Especially after the divorce. He's a hopeless case, he'll never find the right woman. He even went after Faith. Another hopeless case. Are you ready? We really are going out.

JOHN

Where?

GRACE

It's the thirtieth. We thought you might want to join us?

JOHN

Oh...

8

EXT. CEMETERY, WALL OF REMEMBRANCE - DAY

8

Grace, John and Zachary walk through a cemetery towards a Wall of Remembrance, where stands Mrs EMILIA RODRIGUEZ. She is 55, and, as always, dressed in black.

ZACHARY

Hi Grandma.

EMILIA

Zachary! Come give me a kiss.
(seeing John)
You brought him?

JOHN

Good afternoon, Mrs Rodriguez.

ZACHARY

Is that alright, Grandma?

EMILIA

Of course. Good afternoon Mister
Brooking. Go and show him, Zachary.

Zachary takes John to a spot on the Wall of Remembrance.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Is this a good idea?

GRACE

It was Zachary's idea. Which makes
it a good one. Do you really not
like John, or do you just pretend
not to?

Emilia gives a dismissive shrug.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Nobody is ever going to take Jose's
place in my heart. But it's not
about me, or you. Zach needs a man
to look up to. John is caring, and
kind, and they like each other a
lot.

EMILIA

I suppose he's better than Charlie.

At the Wall, Zachary points out a plaque with the symbol of
the United Nations on it. John reads it.

ZACHARY

They gave my Dad a special stone.
He was a Doctor, in Africa. He was
treating refugees.

Zachary takes out a notebook computer, and turns it on.

JOHN

"In memory of Doctor Jose
Rodriguez, who gave his life that
others might live."

ZACHARY

Some soldiers attacked his
hospital. He could have got away,
but he stayed with his patients. He
saved their lives.

JOHN

He was a hero.

ZACHARY

Yeah. Dad sent me a video every week he was away. I always play one here.

Zachary holds up the notebook, which plays a video.

JOSE (ON SCREEN)

Hey Zachary, how you doing? Just a couple of weeks to Christmas, are you excited? Thomas, come say hello to my boy.

A big black man comes on screen beside Jose. This is SERGEANT THOMAS SMITH, a UN peacekeeper in fatigues and a blue UN beret.

ZACHARY

That's Sergeant Thomas. He did security at the hospital. He was Dad's best friend. He helped Mom a lot after Dad died.

THOMAS (ON SCREEN)

Zach, how's it going, bro? Your Dad's doing a great job, the people all love him here. You should be real proud.

JOHN

Zachary, I'm grateful. It's an honor to be here with you, and your Dad.

JOSE (ON SCREEN)

You know I won't be there for this Christmas, but you'll have a great time. I chose some presents for you with Mom, some seriously cool stuff.

ZACHARY

Are you and Mom going to get married?

John is taken by surprise. The DVD plays on.

JOHN

Wow. I don't know. What would he say about that?

JOSE (ON SCREEN)

Your Mom is the best woman in the world, and all I want for Christmas is for her to be happy. And you, Son. I love you both, so much.

ZACHARY

I think he'd like you. I do, and Grandma says I'm just like him. Will you take me to the toy store after? I need to make a Christmas list.

JOHN
Sure, let's do that.

ZACHARY
Excellent!

Zachary turns off the notebook, and runs to Emilia, who is nearby. Grace joins John at the Wall.

JOHN
Thank you for bringing me here. Is she okay with it?

GRACE
Nothing I can't handle. She's coming to stay for Christmas. I want to ask Faith too. Hope that's okay?

JOHN
Sure. My two best friends.

Grace laughs.

9 EXT. TOY STORE PARKING LOT - DAY

9

John and Zachary get out of the car. Awful jingly music blasts from the toy store. The windows have a gaudy Christmas display, and fake styrene snowmen stand at the entrance. At the doors is a live Santa Claus, ringing a bell, and "ho-ho-ho"-ing. John hesitates.

JOHN
Oh boy. First live Santa of the season. Always a bit of a shock.

ZACHARY
Isn't it great? Look, there's an Elf! Come on!

There are stalls outside the store, selling Christmas junk. A salesperson is dressed as an Elf. As they approach the door, John hangs back, nervously trying to avoid the Santa Claus.

JOHN
You go in, Zach, make your list. I'll join you in a minute.

ZACHARY
Okay!

Zachary runs to the door. The Santa Claus "ho-ho's", rings his bell, and showers him with fake snow.

John looks at the stalls. He winces at the tasteless displays. He picks at the decorations, which disgust him.

The music changes, and the Elf waves some jingly bells, and does a little dance, grinning inanely. John is appalled.

From inside the store, John sees Zachary gesticulating for him to come in. John nods his head and sticks up his thumb.

JOHN

Okay! I can do this.

DONG! A bell rings next to his ear. It is Santa Claus, who "ho-ho's" and throws fake snow all over him. John spits it from his mouth, and backs away, knocking over a fake snowman.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Alright, alright! I'll go in!
Just back off!

He hurries in. The Santa and the Elf share a surprised look.

10

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

10

Emilia is at the sink. Grace is at the table, opening mail.

GRACE

First Christmas card.

EMILIA

Grace, you know this is your house,
and you can do exactly what you
want...

Grace opens another letter.

GRACE

Yes, John is staying, it will be
our first Christmas together, and
you know how important that is to
me. Is that what you wanted to ask?

EMILIA

Actually, no!

Grace's Cellphone rings, and she answers it.

GRACE

Hello, this is Grace.
(a beat)
Oh you have?
(a beat)
Say that again?

What Grace hears on the phone is something she does not want to share with Emilia. She covers up.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Oh. Okay. Thank you so much.

Yes, good bye.

(to Emilia)

Sorry about that.

EMILIA

I was going to suggest that this Christmas, you take it a little easier. You always get so anxious about it. I mean I understand why...

She turns to see the look on Grace's face.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

GRACE

Nothing. Nothing's wrong.

EMILIA

You don't have to tell me, but don't lie to me.

Zachary runs in with his Christmas list.

ZACHARY

Hi Mom, Grandma, I got the list, I'm going to make copies for you!

GRACE

Great idea.

Zachary runs out. Grace looks at her cell phone. She walks to the stairs, just as John puts his head round the door, surprising her.

JOHN (WHISPERS)

Is he gone?

John comes in, with a large bag, which he opens to reveal his purchases.

GRACE

Yes, how was it at the store?

JOHN

It was a nightmare. A recurring one.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Look, I sneaked these into the car while he wasn't looking. This one's a Zyklon Tri-blaster.

GRACE

You got him a gun? That's not what Christmas is about.

*

JOHN

He's a kid, he doesn't know what it's about. I don't know what it's about.

GRACE

Will you stop saying things like that, it's not a joke any more.

JOHN

No it's not a joke, that's what I've been trying to...

(he takes a deep breath)

Grace, listen. I have a serious problem with Ch... With the festive, yuletide, noel event. So serious that I think I should go away for the holidays.

GRACE

What?

JOHN

Well, I have so much work to do, and you'd be better off without me, I don't want to spoil your...

CRASH! Grace slams a plate hard down on the table. John has never seen her so angry, and is astonished.

GRACE

Now you listen to me. In this house, there is nothing so important as Christmas, absolutely nothing. It is a totally and completely wonderful time, and you do not have the option to believe anything else. From now until Christmas this is going to be Happy House, and everybody in it will be happy, very, very happy. So I'm not going to listen to you whine about it, even for a second, you got that?

Grace picks up the plate again, and throws it to the floor. This time it smashes. She walks out of the kitchen.

JOHN

Grace please... Sweetheart...

She is gone. He looks at the smashed plate, and at Emilia.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Does every mother do this?

Emilia gets a dustpan to clean up the mess.

EMILIA

You're an idiot.

JOHN

Well, you're not usually so blunt. What is it about December 25th? It's like if we don't get it perfect, the whole world collapses in chaos. It's ridiculous.

Emilia looks away, and doesn't speak - which is unusual.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Is there something else going on here? Some secret I don't know?

EMILIA

You are the one with secrets. You prefer to spend Christmas with your parents?

JOHN

No, no way.

EMILIA

Why not, are they in jail? All this time you've been fooling around with my daughter-in-law, how come she never met your parents? And how come you hate Christmas? That seems "ridiculous" to me.

She dumps the plate in the trash and walks out, past John.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

You are the one with secrets.

John takes this in. And clearly, it is true.

11 INT. GRACE'S BEDROOM - DAY

11

Grace is on the phone, listening, open-mouthed.

GRACE (ON PHONE)

What do you mean? You said it was
a routine blood test.

(she whispers)

Pregnancy is not routine.

(she listens)

Is there any chance of it being a
false reading?

(she listens)

No, I'm sorry. Yes, I should be
pleased. Okay, thank you, goodbye.

She hangs up. She sits. She sighs. Clearly not pleased.

12 EXT. GRACE'S HOUSE - DAY

12

John's car pulls up in the drive. It is completely covered
by the huge Christmas tree he has strapped to the roof.

13 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, ENTRANCE HALL - CONTINUOUS

13

On the wall hangs an Advent calendar. The date is December
17. John opens the front door, and walks straight into a
step ladder. He stands in amazement. The entrance hall is
already plastered with Christmas decorations, and Grace is
pinning more up.

JOHN

You're not worried about overdoing
it?

GRACE

Not funny. Christmas gets closer
every day, we still have a ton of
things to do. Did you get the tree?

JOHN

It's huge, I could have been pulled
over...

GRACE

So get a saw and cut the bottom
off, we use the long branches for
decoration, and the short ones for
wreaths.

He notices another Christmas tree in the living room.

JOHN

Wait, you already have a tree.

GRACE

Yes, that's the fake one, there's a tinsel one in the shed, you'll need to get it, and the sparkly one in the attic, Zach will help you with that. And there are boxes of ornaments up there, and in the garage is the sleigh, the crib, and the lawn inflatables. And priority, we got to find the indoor Christmas lights, not the outdoor ones, we do those later.

JOHN

Right.

He doesn't move, and Grace gets impatient.

GRACE

So get the saw!

JOHN

Okay, okay...

14 EXT. GRACE'S HOUSE - DAY

14

SCENE: John wrestles the tree from the top of the car. It falls on him, and he gets stuck with needles.

SCENE: The tree rests on an outdoor table, as he tries to saw the top. The saw sticks, the tree falls off the table.

15 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

15

John drags the tree through the front door. It gets stuck.

JOHN

It's too big, I said.

GRACE

So trim it. What's wrong with your hands?

JOHN

Sap, I can't get it off, I got a rash from the needles.

GRACE

Wear gloves. And get the base from the shed. Did you order the turkey?

JOHN

I'll do that as soon as I...

GRACE

Oh no, the biggest turkeys sell out fast, I'll do it myself.

JOHN

The biggest turkey? They cost a lot.

GRACE

This is Christmas, we don't think about money.

JOHN

Hah! It seems to me that's all...

GRACE

Don't! Shut up and keep shut. This is no time for jokes.

JOHN

What? I wasn't...

But Grace has moved on. John sighs.

16

EXT. GRACE'S HOUSE - DAY

16

The GARAGE opens. There is no room for a car, it is stacked with Christmas decorations and displays of every kind.

JOHN

I don't believe it.

ZACHARY

I know, isn't it great?

SCENE: John pumps up the inflatable figures with a hand pump. It is exhausting. One reaches capacity, then bursts.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)

It's okay. Here's the repair kit.

JOHN

Thanks.

SCENE: John opens the door to the SHED, and narrowly avoids an avalanche of stuff.

ZACHARY

Look, there are the outdoor lights.
Where are the indoor ones?

17 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, GARAGE - DAY

17

John is on a ladder, covered in dirt. He hands boxes down to Zachary, who stacks them on the floor, already covered with boxes and bags, overflowing with decorations.

ZACHARY

Be careful of that one, it's a Christmas village.

JOHN

A what?

ZACHARY

It goes round the base of the tree.

The box is covered in dust, and John has a sneezing fit on the ladder, but just hangs on.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)

Don't drop it!

Swish pan to Grace next to a large object covered in a table cloth.

GRACE

Hey Zach, got you something special for this year.

Grace unveils the electronic Santa from the closet. It moves, and says "HO-HO-HO". John sees it, screams, and falls backwards into the pile of stuff. Some bags tear open, and John is entangled in endless loops of Christmas lights.

GRACE (CONT'D)

What is the matter with you?

ZACHARY

We lost a few decorations. But we found the lights!

GRACE

(to John)

Will you stop wasting time?

She goes, taking the Santa with her. From the attic, Zachary grins at John.

18 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

18

John brings the last of the boxes down, exhausted. He smiles at Grace, but she hurries by, not even noticing him.

JOHN
Grace, what is wrong with you?

GRACE
No, you! What is wrong with you?

JOHN
Nothing.

She goes into the kitchen. John takes a moment, puts down his boxes, then follows.

19 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

19

Grace has her back to him, preparing food.

JOHN
Actually, sweetheart, there is something wrong. The seasonal, noel, festive, yuletide thing.

Grace is very still.

JOHN (CONT'D)
It's much more than just a problem. My shrink said I have a phobia about Chr... He told me I should take a holiday from the holiday. I know it seems crazy, I thought maybe this year I could cope with it...

CHOP! Grace's knife smashes down into a carrot. CHOP! CHOP! John realizes that she is listening to loud music through earbuds. She hasn't heard him. He leaves the room, quietly.

20 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

20

John is on a ladder, reaching to hang up a festoon of lights.

GRACE
Are you sure you wired them right?

JOHN
There's a wrong way? They're fine.

She plugs them in. The lights explode. John loses balance and grabs for the wall. As he falls, he brings a mass of decorations down on top of him. Grace loses it.

GRACE
For heaven's sake, now we got to redo the whole wall! We're behind schedule as it is.

JOHN
Schedule?

GRACE
What is wrong with you? Normal
people would enjoy all this.

JOHN
I haven't said a word!

GRACE
You don't need to, I can hear what
you're thinking.

JOHN
Then cover your ears.

GRACE
It's time you joined in the spirit
of Christmas. So just shut up,
suck it up, or get out right now
and do NOT come back.

John is astonished at the attack.

JOHN
What did you say?

GRACE
I was right, you just don't
understand what Christmas is about.

John cracks. Slowly at first, then wide open. Without
pausing for breath, he gathers his briefcase and coat.

JOHN
Yes... I... do... It's about
usually sensible adults behaving
like idiots. It's about insane
extravagance, consumer madness, and
the mindless pursuit of tasteless
garbage. All it does is break up
families, increase the suicide
rate, give people heart attacks
from stress and hernias from
carrying useless presents for
ungrateful kids who always end up
wailing because they want more. And
yes, I hate Santa Claus.
(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

I hate his elves and his reindeer,
I hate jingle bells and baubles and
tinsel and tacky tacky, and if you
are so addicted to this nonsense
that you can't even see that's what
it is, then you are not the person
I thought you were, and this is not
the house I want to be in for one
moment longer.

21 EXT. GRACE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

21

John's tirade has taken him out of the front door and into
his car. Grace stands on the front step.

GRACE

Where are you are going?

JOHN

Even staying with my parents is
better than this.

GRACE

Oh, so they do exist?

John drives away. Zachary comes out of the house.

ZACHARY

Is John going away?

GRACE

We just had an argument, you know,
grown-up stuff. Maybe... I've been
a little snappy lately. I think
maybe I pushed him too hard.

ZACHARY

He'll be back for Christmas, right?

GRACE

I don't think he likes it.

ZACHARY

I thought that was a joke. I mean,
who doesn't like Christmas?

22 INT. THE BROOKING HOUSE - DAY

22

The sound of a door knocker echoes through the Brooking
House. It is more like a funeral parlor than a home. Grand
but faded furniture, dark wood, dimly lit and not a single
Christmas decoration. In the LIVING ROOM sits HENRY
BROOKING, playing solitaire. In the KITCHEN, AGNES BROOKING
is a little younger, once beautiful, now thin and gaunt.

They are the two unhappiest people you would never want to meet.

Another knock on the door, and they shout from room to room.

HENRY

DOOR!

AGNES

I am not deaf, why do you never get the door?

HENRY

Because I am busy and what else do you have to do? It's not going to be a friend of mine is it?

AGNES

Well that's for sure.

23

INT. THE BROOKING HOUSE, ENTRANCE HALL - CONTINUOUS

23

Agnes opens the front door, and is surprised to see John.

JOHN

Hi Mom.

AGNES

John? Henry, it's John!

HENRY

So what's wrong?

JOHN

Something has to be wrong? Can I come in or not?

AGNES

Of course. Don't listen to your father.

John comes in.

HENRY

You never did before, why start now?

AGNES

We weren't expecting you. Especially not at this time of year.

HENRY

I heard you were living with some Hispanic woman. Rodriguez.

JOHN

That's her married name.

HENRY

She's a married Hispanic woman?

JOHN

Oh please...

HENRY

I got nothing against Hispanics.

AGNES

No, it's just women you hate.

JOHN

It doesn't matter anyway, because I just left her. I also left my wallet, but lend me a hundred bucks and I'll stay in a motel.

HENRY

You still haven't sold your novel?

JOHN

I need to finish it first, I thought maybe I could get on with it here.

AGNES

Use your old room, John.

John goes upstairs, as the bickering continue behind him.

AGNES (CONT'D)

He's been in the house thirty seconds. Why can't you leave him alone?

HENRY

Well maybe if you hadn't left him alone so much he'd have made something of himself.

AGNES

What, like you did?

HENRY

Dinner's at eight, John, if your Mother can be bothered to cook it.

AGNES

When did I ever not cook it? And
how much help do I get from you?

John enters the bare, depressing bedroom. He slams the door.

24

INT. THE BROOKING HOUSE, JOHN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

24

It is night. John sits at a desk, writing. CHARLENE enters, quietly. A sexy, busty woman of 30, not bright, but single-minded. She sneaks up on John and overwhelms him with a lip-smacking kiss.

JOHN

Charlene!

CHARLENE

You going to turn into a frog now?

JOHN

What are you doing here?

CHARLENE

They called me over. I guess they
thought you might be needing me,
now you're single again.

JOHN

I see. Listen, Charlene...

CHARLENE

Fortunately I am too. Single. I
dumped the jerk.
(she points to the laptop)
How's it coming?

JOHN

Nearly finished, but right now...

CHARLENE

I know, you never could work at
Christmas. I always understood
that. Come on, it's dinner time.

John looks at his watch.

JOHN

No it's not. It's going to be
late.

25

INT. THE BROOKING HOUSE, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

25

Charlene lays the table, feeling right at home. Henry sits, fuming, while Agnes fusses over the hot plates.

HENRY

It's *always* late. If I eat late, I don't sleep well, she knows it.

AGNES

It's good to see you, Charlene. Sorry about your man.

CHARLENE

It's no loss. I wanted marriage, he didn't, I wanted babies, he didn't, end of story.

AGNES

Isn't that why you broke up with John?

JOHN

Mom!

HENRY

You want babies with him?

JOHN

Dad!

HENRY

Well it's about time you did. A man of your age...

CHARLENE

Oh Mister Brooking, I'm sure you sowed a few wild oats, before you met this wonderful lady.

AGNES

Not just before.

HENRY

What is that supposed to mean?

Charlene notices car headlights out front.

CHARLENE

Someone coming up the drive.

HENRY

What kind of damn fool comes visiting at this time of night?

JOHN

I'll check.

John goes to a window. He sees a familiar car. It is Grace.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I don't believe it. It's...

He turns to the room, and sees Charlene.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Charlene!

CHARLENE
It's not me, honey, I'm already here.

JOHN
You can't be! It's Grace! My girlfriend. How did she know where... You gotta go, right now.

CHARLENE
I beg your...

JOHN
It's Grace in the car, she's here, she can't see you.

AGNES
You're asking Charlene to go because your ex...

JOHN
Please, I just can't... She wouldn't understand. Please, I'll do anything.
(the doorbell rings)
Oh no!

CHARLENE
Well, fine. I'll go.

She walks towards the front door.

JOHN
No, go out the back door. I'll make it up to you, I promise.

HENRY
Now wait a minute, Charlene. John broke up with this woman. You stay right where you are.

CHARLENE
No, it's okay, back door.

26

INT. THE BROOKING HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

26

Charlene goes into the kitchen, with John following. She turns suddenly and gets John in a clinch.

CHARLENE

Tomorrow morning. That's when you make it up to me. You meet me in the garage, just like we used to do.

JOHN

Sure, whatever, just go!

She kisses him on the lips, and goes out.

27

INT. THE BROOKING HOUSE, ENTRANCE HALL - CONTINUOUS

27

John hurries to the front door, past his parents.

HENRY

You mind telling me why you are doing this?

JOHN

Because I love her. Okay?

He opens the front door. He feigns surprise.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Grace. Hi.

GRACE

John.

JOHN

Come in. This is my mother Agnes, and my dad, Henry.

She takes a few steps in. They just stare at her, awkwardly.

GRACE

How do you do.

JOHN

How did you find out where to come?

GRACE

Charlie Smythe. He used to know you, Mister Brooking. And you're just the other end of town, so...

(to John)

You left your wallet, and phone.

(MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)
I packed your stuff, it's in the
car, if you want to come get it...

She turns back to the front door. John grabs her hand to stop
her turn.

JOHN
No, leave them! I want you to stay,
for the night. Is that alright Mom?

AGNES
Sure. John, you clear out of your
room, go in the office.

JOHN
It's okay, Grace and I can share...

AGNES
No you can't. This is an old-
fashioned kind of house, separate
rooms, if you don't mind. If it's
good enough for your father, it's
good enough for you.

GRACE
Of course.
(to John)
I'll call Emilia and ask her to
look after Zach.

AGNES
Later. Dinner's getting cold.

JOHN
Come in and sit down.

28 INT. THE BROOKING HOUSE, DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

28

They go into the Dining room. They all sit except Agnes, who
serves dinner, to Grace first.

GRACE
Oh. You have a place laid already.

JOHN
Yeah, they always do that.

AGNES
We had a maid, he argues with them
all, so I get to do the cooking.

HENRY

If you weren't so damn lazy, we wouldn't need a maid in the first place.

AGNES

Hope it's not cold.

HENRY

It always is.

GRACE

Charlie said you were a politician?

HENRY

For a while. Waste of time.

AGNES

You were the one who wasted it.

HENRY

I would have been fine with a little support.

AGNES

I thought that's why you had all those nineteen year old interns with the short skirts.

She nonchalantly throws a glass over her shoulder and it smashes to the floor.

JOHN

There goes another one. Can we stop the war just for dinner?

He smiles weakly at Grace, who tries to recover.

GRACE

So are you in business, Mister Brooking?

HENRY

Lawyer. My father's company. I hate it.

AGNES

You hated him.

HENRY

It's natural to hate your father. That's why I got out. I got elected too.

AGNES

For a while. He never got on with anybody. Ever since then he's been trapped in the family business.

HENRY

At least it paid for his fancy college. Lot of use that was. You know he never had a job?

Grace eats, and glances at John, who suffers in silence.

AGNES

He worked at the publishers.

HENRY

They went broke.

AGNES

Then at the library.

HENRY

That wasn't a job.

GRACE

This is very nice, thank you.

HENRY

No it's not, she's a lousy cook.

AGNES

I would offer you wine, but he's even worse when he drinks.

HENRY

Funny. So if this is a serious thing you have with my son, how come we never met you?

Grace tries to make light of it.

GRACE

I thought he was ashamed of me.

JOHN

No!

AGNES

No.

(a beat)

He was ashamed of us. He always has been.

John just looks down at his plate.

Grace sits on the bed, in the bare room. She listens to the Brookings arguing, downstairs. There is a knock on the door. John enters, wearing oversized pajamas and a robe.

JOHN

What an evening.

(off her look)

My dad's pajamas. This house is always so cold. In every way.

GRACE

They're trapped in it, aren't they? It must be terrible for them. They just can't escape it.

JOHN

That's why I had to. This was always the worst time of year.

GRACE

John, I want to tell you something. My behavior, lately... It's not just that I'm nuts about Christmas. The thing is, I found out that I'm...

JOHN

You don't need to apologize to me, I'm the one with the problem, you don't know the half of it. My Dad used to dress up as Santa Claus, for a whole week. He thought it was funny. Then He'd get drunk. The drunker he got the meaner he got. When I was thirteen, I ran away.

GRACE

But you came back?

JOHN

No. After that I stayed with relatives, friends. But they always insisted I come back for the holiday, like some punishment. I dreaded it, for the whole year. Arguments, fights, slamming doors, smashing china, ruined meals. Him drunk in his Santa suit, her yelling, in tears, and me... Ever since then, I have had this phobia.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Anything connected to Ch... Chr...
Ex-mas.

GRACE

My God, you can't even say the
word.

JOHN

I'd better let you sleep. I'm
sorry.

GRACE

No, I understand it now.
(touching his arm)
Let's talk in the morning. We can
work this out. I think. I want to.

JOHN

Me too. Good night.

He kisses her, and heads for the door. He stops.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I'll do anything to keep you Grace.
Anything but...

GRACE

Anything but Christmas.

John smiles, and she smiles back. John closes the door.

30 INT. THE BROOKING HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

30

In the morning, John enters the kitchen, in pajamas. There is a knock on the window. Charlene is outside, pointing towards the backyard. John hears somebody coming down the stairs, He quickly nods "yes", and Charlene goes.

Henry enters the kitchen.

JOHN

Oh, it's you.

HENRY

Yeah, it's my house.

John runs to the back door, and out into the backyard. Henry watches him, and sees Charlene go into the garage.

31 EXT. THE BROOKING HOUSE, GARDEN - DAY

31

John, freezing in pajamas and bare feet, hurries across the lawn.

32 INT. THE GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

32

As John enters, he sees that Charlene has removed her coat to reveal a sexy, low cut sweater.

JOHN
Charlene, this is really awkward.

CHARLENE
No, it's just like old times...

JOHN
It's like an icebox in here.

CHARLENE
Remember how we used to steam up those windows? Here, let me get you warm.

She wraps him in her arms, but he disentangles himself.

JOHN
No, please! You got to go.

CHARLENE
Oh. So you made up?

JOHN
No, not exactly. Charlene listen, you've always been a friend.

CHARLENE
We were a lot more than that.

JOHN
I really like you, I always have...

33 INT. THE BROOKING HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

33

Grace comes downstairs. She goes into the living room, expecting to see John. Henry sits there, playing solitaire.

HENRY
You ready to go?

GRACE
Yes.

HENRY
Is he leaving with you?

GRACE
To be honest, I don't know.

HENRY
You love him, or what?

GRACE
I don't mean to be disrespectful,
but that's not your business.
Where is he?

HENRY
That is disrespectful. He's in the
garage, out through the kitchen.

34

INT. THE GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

34

John sits, shivering. Charlene rubs his shoulders.

CHARLENE
John, I understand. You're
terrified of commitment. With this
family, who can blame you?

Through the window, Charlene sees Grace walking towards the
garage. Charlene moves out of sight, to beside a large
watering can.

JOHN
But maybe this time there's a
chance. If I could just get over
this... ex-mas thing.

CHARLENE
Come stay with me a while, we'll
work it out.

JOHN
Charlene, I have to work it out
with Grace.

Charlene tips the watering can, and pours ice cold water over
John. He jumps up and gasps loudly, his pajamas soaked.

OUTSIDE, Grace hears the gasp.

INSIDE, Charlene removes her top.

CHARLENE
Take them off! Quick!

John rips off his soaking pajama shirt. He is in the act of
untying his pants when he turns, and sees in the open
doorway... Grace. She looks at him, half-naked. Then she
looks at Charlene, who holds her top in her hand, and stands
there in a sexy bra.

CHARLENE (CONT'D)

Oh.

Grace leaves without a word. John looks at Charlene, astonished at her undress. She holds out her sweater top.

CHARLENE (CONT'D)

I was going to give you this.

JOHN

Oh no..

He heads for the door. Charlene pulls the rug from under him, and he falls. He struggles to his feet, to find Charlene barring his way, with a towel. She starts drying with a painter's cloth.

CHARLENE

You can't go out like that, you'll freeze.

JOHN

No... Charlene... Will you stop!

35

INT. THE BROOKING HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

35

Grace hurries in from the backyard, and heads for the front door.

GRACE

Goodbye Mister Brooking.

As she goes out of the front door, Henry smiles.

HENRY (TO HIMSELF)

Good riddance.

John runs in, holding up his pajama pants.

HENRY (CONT'D)

She went upstairs.

John runs out of the room.

36

INT. THE BROOKING HOUSE, UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

36

Misdirected by Henry, John runs up the stairs to check the bedrooms, passing Agnes.

JOHN

Grace! Grace please!

AGNES

What on earth...

Through a window, he sees Grace outside, by her car.

JOHN

Oh no...

He races downstairs, and out of the front door.

37

EXT. THE BROOKING HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

37

Grace has unloaded his cases, and now gets in her car.

JOHN

Grace, listen, it's not what you think...

GRACE

At least I know why you don't want to spend your time with us.

JOHN

You're not going to believe this...

GRACE

You're a writer, John, you'll come up with a great story.

JOHN

I probably wouldn't either, but...

GRACE

It was never going to work anyway. Anything but Christmas? Christmas is everything! A relationship that can't deal with that is not worth having. You don't see Zach or me ever again, I won't take your calls, and if you come to the house, I will have you arrested.

Grace drives away. John sinks to the ground beside his cases. Charlene appears, and wraps him in a painter's cloth.

CHARLENE

John, you'll get over this. Now we can do what we always used to do. Go hiking, or sailing, or mountaineering, or take a vacation in Saudi Arabia. They don't do Christmas, why should we? Right?

John looks at her, and sighs.

Zachary is playing in his room with a small squirt gun, when his computer beeps. He logs on to a Skype call with John.

JOHN

Zach?

ZACHARY

Hi, John. Are you okay?

JOHN

No, Zach, your Mom and I had a misunderstanding. I'm not allowed to see her, or you. But she didn't say anything about the internet. I got to meet her, I got to explain things.

ZACHARY

You need an intermediate.

JOHN

A what?

ZACHARY

What do you call it. A meditator.

JOHN

A mediator?

ZACHARY

Yeah. Grandma will do it.

JOHN

No! No, Zach, we don't want to bother her.

ZACHARY

Okay, what about Aunt Faith? She's come to stay.

Out of the window, he sees Grace get out of her car.

JOHN

You know, I don't think...

GRACE (O.S.)

I'm home!

ZACHARY

Mom's here. I'll call you later. I have a plan!

He logs off and runs into the UPSTAIRS HALLWAY. He passes by Faith.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)
Aunt Faith, can you take me to the
mall later? I want to buy a
Christmas present for Mom.

FAITH
Good idea, so do I.

39 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

39

Grace comes in and sits at the table. Emilia is baking cookies. She turns, and sees Grace's grim face.

EMILIA
I won't even ask.

Zachary runs in.

ZACHARY
How was it, Mom?

GRACE
Everything will be just fine, Zach.

Zachary glances at Emilia, who looks away.

ZACHARY
Mom, you don't need to protect me.
I like John a lot, but if you
don't, I understand.

*

Grace is taken by surprise. She sobs.

GRACE
Don't you want a father? Brothers
and sisters, a real family?

ZACHARY
Only if it makes you happy too. As
long as we spend Christmas
together, we'll be okay.

He kisses her, and leaves the room. She shakes her head.

GRACE
Your grandson is amazing.

EMILIA
So was his dad.
(she sighs)
(MORE)

EMILIA (CONT'D)
No, it's not my business, but are
you sure you want to lose this guy?

Faith enters the kitchen.

FAITH
How did it go?

GRACE
Gone. It's over.

FAITH
Good.

Grace sobs, but controls it. She is good at that.

FAITH (CONT'D)
Bad. Bad but good.

GRACE
I drove him away. He doesn't do
Christmas.

EMILIA
Maybe you do it too much.

GRACE
You know why that is.

EMILIA
But he doesn't. Why don't you...

GRACE
He has another woman.

The air leaves the room.

FAITH
Oh no.

EMILIA
Well, that settles it. And I was
actually beginning to like him.

She goes out.

FAITH
I never met a man I liked,
including him. But I didn't figure
him for a womanizer.

GRACE
Faith, I'm pregnant.

Faith goes into her usual panic mode.

FAITH

What! But that's wonderful. Oh no, it's not, it's terrible. Oh my goodness, is it his?

(off Grace's look)

Yes of course it is. Does he know? No of course he doesn't. Oh my.

GRACE

I was going to tell him, as a Christmas present. Now I'm going to have two children without a father.

FAITH

Well that's okay. I mean what kind of father would he be anyway?

GRACE

He'd be a wonderful father.

FAITH

Yes, of course he would, but what kind of husband would he be?

GRACE

Just be quiet, Faith.

FAITH

Don't tell me to be quiet! NOBODY tells me to be quiet!

Faith heads for the door, then instantly returns.

FAITH (CONT'D)

I apologize. Oh my goodness. Do you actually love this idiot?

GRACE

I thought so.

FAITH

Well then he is an idiot, doesn't he know that?

GRACE

I never told him.

FAITH

You never...

GRACE

I couldn't bring myself to say it to him, not after Jose. Maybe that's why he went elsewhere.

FAITH

Grace, just go tell him about the... the thing.

GRACE

So he leaves another woman and comes back to me just because I'm pregnant? Then goes back to her again when he stops feeling guilty? No way. I've lost him.

40

EXT. TOY STORE PARKING LOT - DAY

40

Zachary is outside the toy store, inspecting the outdoor stall. The Santa Claus and Elf salesperson are there, as before. Faith passes by, shopping bags in hand.

FAITH

Come on Zachary.

ZACHARY

I'll meet you at the car, Aunt Faith, just a couple of minutes.

Faith goes to her parked car. Zachary raises a kid's walkie-talkie.

ZACHARY (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

Target approaching intercept, over.

IN HIS CAR, John answers on a similar walkie-talkie.

JOHN (ON PHONE)

Okay. Thanks for this, Zach. Er... over.

Faith opens the trunk, and unloads her shopping. She can't resist taking some of her purchases out and looking at them.

ZACHARY (ON PHONE)

Target in position. Execute!

John gets out of his car, and heads for Faith.

JOHN

Faith?

Faith turns, and gives a little scream.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Faith, I know that we didn't always
get on, but I want you to know...

John registers that both her hands are full of baby clothes.
She desperately tries to hide them.

FAITH

Get away from me! Go away!

JOHN

Are you having a baby?

FAITH

No! My sis... niece... nephew. My
nephew's having a baby.

JOHN

Zachary's nine years old.

FAITH

I got another one. Secret one, in
Australia. How dare you approach
me! Get away from here, right now.
Go back to your fancy woman.

JOHN

Faith...

FAITH

There is nothing you have to say
that I want to hear.

She gets in the car, and drives towards Zach. John looks
after her, mystified. He picks up an item of baby clothing
that she has dropped, and looks at it. And it dawns on him...

JOHN

No. It can't be.

Faith has pulled up beside Zachary.

FAITH

Zachary, get in right now.

Zachary gets in the back seat and puts on his seat belt.
Faith takes off, then immediately SLAMS on her brakes, and
SCREAMS. John is standing in the middle of the road. She
misses him by inches.

JOHN

Get out of the car, Faith.

She gets out of the car, and hurries over to him.

FAITH
Now you listen to me...

JOHN
Is Grace having a baby?

FAITH
Aaaaaa! No. I didn't tell you
that. Absolutely not.

JOHN
I'm coming home right now.

FAITH
No! If you go back to her now,
she'll never believe you really
want to. She'll think it's just
because of the... the thing. If she
knows that you know, she'll never
know, you know that!

Behind her car, horns blare. She is causing a traffic jam.
She hurries back to her car, then back to John.

FAITH (CONT'D)
And she'll kill me if she thinks I
told you. You say anything, I'll
kill you after she kills me.

More horns. She goes back to the car, then back to John.

FAITH (CONT'D)
And how dare you take up with
another woman, you creep. After
all she's been through. Just stay
away!

This time she gets in the car. She drives away, but brakes
again, nearly colliding with another car pulling out.

Through the back window of the car, Zachary's hopeful,
questioning face. John sadly shakes his head. Zachary's face
falls, and he turns away, as Faith drives off.

41 EXT. THE BROOKING HOUSE - DAY

41

John gets out of his car, and walks towards the house. He
can't face going in. He sits on the front step. Charlene
comes out of the house.

CHARLENE
Aren't you coming in? I baked some
cookies.

JOHN

I've ruined everything. My whole life. I'm heading for misery, just like them in there.

CHARLENE

Not with me, you wouldn't be. John, I don't want to spend another Christmas all alone...

JOHN

I love her. I thought she loved me.

CHARLENE

Did she tell you that?

JOHN

No, she never...

CHARLENE

So she doesn't. If she did, she'd say so, why wouldn't she?

JOHN

She won't even answer my calls.

CHARLENE

And there's the proof. John, I know you and me could work things out...

JOHN

If only she wasn't so obsessed with the seasonal yuletide noel thing.

CHARLENE

She's got a kid, she does that for him. And I'm sure he's a nice boy, but he's not yours, John, you should have your own kids.

JOHN

She's pregnant. Grace is pregnant. I love her, she's having my baby, and I can't even talk to her.

Charlene sits beside him, deflated.

CHARLENE

Oh. I didn't know that. I guess I did a bad thing. You really love her?

JOHN

Completely.

Charlene tries a pep talk, as much for herself as him.

CHARLENE

Okay. Come on, pick yourself up.
You'd be crazy to let yourself go,
and even crazier to let her go.
John, if you want to win her back,
you got to do anything. *Anything*.
Even Christmas.

42

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE GRACE'S HOUSE - DAY

42

Emilia walks from the house onto the street. John steps out,
surprising her.

JOHN

Mrs Rodriguez... Emilia...

EMILIA

You louse! You go anywhere near
this house, she will get a
restraining order.

JOHN

I am not having an affair.

EMILIA

You're probably having two or
three, a pervert like you.

JOHN

Mrs Rodriguez, I love Grace. You
don't want to believe that...

EMILIA

The thought of it makes me sick.

JOHN

Yes, I am a little weird, because I
don't do the festive seasonal event
thing, otherwise none of this would
have happened. I need her, and no,
she may not need me, but your
grandson needs a father, and I love
them both. Please help me, I got
to discuss this with her.

EMILIA

You want me, to ask her, to talk to
YOU!

JOHN

You're my last hope.

EMILIA

Then you must be desperate.

JOHN

I am. Can't you see I am?

She looks at him, and she does. She takes a breath.

EMILIA

I can't help you. When my son was killed, she grieved. But I didn't, I was too angry to grieve. I even blamed her, said some terrible things. She never rejected me, because I was Zachary's Grandma. But now she doesn't listen to a word I say, and with good reason.

JOHN

I can't even get near her.

EMILIA

She'll be at the cemetery.

JOHN

No, she only goes there on the first day of the month.

EMILIA

Today is the twenty-first of December. She'll be there.

43

EXT. CEMETERY, WALL OF REMEMBRANCE - DAY

43

John arrives at the Wall of Remembrance. He looks around for Grace, but the only person there is the big, tall, black figure of SERGEANT THOMAS SMITH, around 30.

JOHN

Sergeant Thomas?

THOMAS

Just Thomas, now. Do I know you?

JOHN

I saw you in one of Jose's videos.

THOMAS

Any friend of Jose's is a friend of mine. What's your name?

JOHN

John Brooking.

THOMAS
Nice to meet you.

JOHN
I thought Grace would be here.

THOMAS
She will be. I'll see you at the grave.

Thomas walks into the cemetery.

JOHN
Grave?

44

EXT. JOSE'S GRAVE IN THE CEMETERY - DAY

44

CUT TO THOMAS, standing in front of a grave. John joins him. The inscription on the headstone reads "Jose Rodriguez". The lettering beneath that is obscured by a vase of flowers.

THOMAS
I had to leave him. The hospital was almost surrounded. I took the nurses and the patients who could walk. But he wouldn't abandon the rest. He barricaded the doors. The rebels broke through just as we got back. They shot him before running away. He saved his patients but... How did you meet Jose?

JOHN
I didn't actually meet him.

THOMAS
What?

JOHN
It's Grace I know. Why did she never mention the grave? Why doesn't Zachary come here?

THOMAS
You don't know that? Wait a minute, does Grace know you are here?

JOHN
We had an argument. I'm not allowed at the house. I need to talk with her.

Thomas towers over John.

THOMAS

Let me get this straight. Are you stalking my best friend's widow?

JOHN

I just got to see her.

THOMAS

Does she want to see you?

JOHN

I don't think so.

THOMAS

Then get your ass out of here.

JOHN

I'm not stalking her, I love her.

Over John's shoulder, Thomas sees Grace approaching.

THOMAS

She's coming. You take cover over there, I'll talk with her. If she wants to see you, fine. If not, I am going to pick you up and throw you a very long way. Go!

John hides beside a pick-up truck, belonging to a GARDENER, who notices him behaving oddly. John gives him a nervous smile.

John takes a peek, and sees Grace arrive at the grave, and hug Thomas. They are obviously old friends, and the mood is cheerful, not solemn.

GRACE

I can't believe it's been a year since we were last here. And you, you drive 6 hours just to be here.

THOMAS

And three years since we were first here. Does time heal?

GRACE

A little bit. Grief can be hard to let go.

THOMAS

That's true. It can get to be a nasty habit. How's Zachary?

As Grace talks, she walks around the grave - which means that John has to move around the back of the pick-up truck to stay hidden. He trips over the Gardener's tools, stacked there. The Gardener give him another look, as John gestures "sorry".

THOMAS (CONT'D)

No, I'm still single. Not found the right one. You?

GRACE

I thought so... But I'm not looking for anybody to fill Jose's shoes.

THOMAS

Not possible.

GRACE

No. But it must be tough for any guy... Anyway it didn't work out. Thomas, there's somebody hiding behind that truck.

THOMAS

Yes, there is.

John is flattened against the back of the pick-up truck. The Gardener approaches, ready to question him. John tries to wave him away. He jumps at a deep voice right beside him:

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Hey! She wants to talk to you. I can't imagine why.

John comes out, and approaches Grace. Thomas hangs back.

GRACE

I owe you an explanation.

JOHN

You don't owe me anything.

GRACE

I have never let Zachary come here. Not yet. I didn't want him to see...

She takes a breath, and tells her story. She kneels, and takes the old flowers out of the vase, revealing part of the inscription: "Died December 21st...".

GRACE (CONT'D)

Jose was wounded December 15th. I heard the same day. He died six days later, December 21st.

(MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)

Zachary was so looking forward to Christmas, I just couldn't ruin it, and every Christmas in his life, by telling him. So I kept it secret, from Zachary, from Faith, even from Emilia. I told them he was in the bush, out of contact. All through that Christmas, I just kept smiling, and pretending.

*

JOHN

That must have been hell.

GRACE

Jose's body came back on December 30th. That's when I had to tell them. You know, we're not so different. For you Christmas is a time of argument and bitterness. For me it's grief and despair. You escape it, deny it. I'm desperate to celebrate every part of it. Maybe if I do Christmas just right, everything will be okay, maybe Zachary won't miss his dad so much.

JOHN

Grace, I love you...

GRACE

No John. Jose is my past, Zachary is my future, and that is all. There's no place for you, I was a fool to think there might be. Besides you have another woman now.

JOHN

There is nothing between me and Charlene...

GRACE

I don't want to hear about it. I can't love you, I can't love any other man. And one who can't even do Christmas, forget it.

JOHN

But what if I could? If I got over this phobia thing, I could be with you and Zachary. Who's that Dickens character, who thinks the whole thing is humbug?

GRACE

Scrooge.

JOHN

Right, he changed his mind, he saw the mistakes of his past, he saw how the future could be, he got another chance.

Grace considers it.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Look, if it's over between us, let me come to your house as a friend. For you and Zach. I love that boy, and he likes me, doesn't he?

GRACE

He misses you.

JOHN

I could just be a house guest. Please?

GRACE

If you can *really* do Christmas, then you can stay. But just for the holiday, then you leave.

JOHN

Thank you.

GRACE

So go on home, I want to be alone.

John walks away, with a new lease of life. He meets Thomas.

JOHN

Okay, I'm leaving.

THOMAS

Uh-huh.

JOHN

Life is good, isn't it?

Thomas looks at the solitary Grace.

THOMAS

Not for her.

JOHN

We'll see about that.

45

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

45

The front door swings open. The entrance hall is now completely covered in Christmas decorations, as is every available inch of the house.

John looks at it all, and gulps. Boldly, he walks in. A life-sized Santa Claus with a motion sensor comes to life, and says "Merry Christmas!" It is the one from the closet, and John is totally spooked. Then Charlie enters.

CHARLIE

Gracey pacey! Oh... I thought you and Grace had broken up.

JOHN

So you came right over to get some pudding and pie.

CHARLIE

Not exactly. I broke up too, with Juliette. So Grace invited me to stay for Christmas.

JOHN

You're staying here?

CHARLIE

Well, you know how generous Grace is. She's being kind to the ex-boyfriend.

JOHN

You are not the ex. I am the ex. You are the ex-ex. As long as you understand that, we'll get on just fine.

Emilia enters, triggering the Santa Claus again.

EMILIA

What are you doing in this house?

JOHN

It's alright, I...

Faith enters.

FAITH

Oh my God. Shall I call the cops?

JOHN

No! Look she knows I'm...

Zachary runs down the stairs to John, triggering the Santa.

ZACHARY

John, are you back, did it work out?

JOHN

No. Listen, I'm a house guest. That's all.

ZACHARY

You mean, like Charlie?

JOHN

Yes. Exactly like Charlie. I'm here for the holidays, and I'm going to try and join in the whole seasonal, yuletide, noel stuff.

(he points at himself)

Ex.

(he points at Charlie)

Ex-ex.

(he points at the decorations)

Ex-mas. Okay?

EMILIA

The woman is insane, and so are the pair of you. Zachary, you keep out of their way.

She pulls Zachary into the kitchen.

CHARLIE

Well, I'd love a cup of tea.

FAITH

So go make one.

CHARLIE

Righto.

Charlie goes into the kitchen.

FAITH

Did you..?

JOHN

No. She doesn't know that I know.

FAITH

Keep it that way.

Faith leaves. John heads for the stairs, once more triggering the Santa's "Merry Christmas!" John winces, then gets right in its face.

JOHN

I can do this. I CAN do this!

SCENE CONTINUATION.

Zachary sneaks in, and whispers conspiratorially.

ZACHARY

John! She got you back, I knew she would. She wants to marry you.

JOHN

No, Zach, she doesn't. She thought it would make you happy if I was here for the holidays. After that, I go.

ZACHARY

But I thought you loved her.

JOHN

I do.

ZACHARY

I don't get grown ups. If I want something for Christmas, I just put it on my list. I know I won't get everything, but at least I say what I want.

JOHN

It really should be that simple, shouldn't it.

ZACHARY

Dad said...
(he swallows it back)
No, I'm sorry.

JOHN

Don't be sorry, Zach, I want to hear. What did your Dad say?

EMILIA (O.S.)

Zachary?

ZACHARY

Got to go. He said love isn't just what you feel, it's what you *do*. He said "Don't just feel it, show it".

Zachary scampers away. John turns away, and then back to Santa Claus, to unplug him.

46

I/E. GRACE'S HOUSE - DAY

46

SCENE: John and Zachary set up illuminated figures on the lawn. Snowmen, angels, elves, and tree shapes, all in lights. Inflatable reindeer fight for space other seasonal figures. John shakes his head, but can't help laughing.

SCENE: On the kitchen table, Zachary, Grace and John stick together a mass of paper chains. John has them glued to his fingers, and they taste so disgusting, he cannot close his mouth. He walks like a monster, his tongue and fingers dripping paper chains. Zachary screams with laughter.

SCENE: John is setting up a huge display of Santa, sleigh and reindeers, with gift-wrapped boxes spilling out. He looks at Grace, who gives him a half-smile.

47

I/E. GRACE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

47

SCENE: John places Faith's Angel ornament at the top of the big Christmas tree, It is now fully decorated, with flashing lights, and a train set circling the base. Charlie does a silly dance to celebrate. Grace laughs, and John is jealous.

SCENE: Outside, they count down to the big switch-on. The entire house and yard are lit up. Grace looks beautiful in the flashing lights. John reaches out a hand to her, but stops. Not noticing, she suddenly looks sad, and walks away.

SCENE: Standing on a chair, John hangs up some mistletoe. He steps down, and looks at Grace. She avoids him, and moves on.

48

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

48

It is morning. John comes down the stairs.

ZACHARY

Morning, John. What are we going to do today?

JOHN

What do you normally do on Chr... the day before the main day?

ZACHARY

On Christmas Eve? Just hang out and wait for Christmas Day, I guess. And we do Carol Singing!

JOHN

That is one thing I won't be...

Faith comes in from the kitchen, already wired and frantic.

FAITH

John, I couldn't sleep all night,
are you certain those lights on the
roof are safe?

JOHN

I think so.

A knock at the front door, and Faith goes to answer it.

FAITH

You think so? That could be a
public liability, they're calling
for snow, have you considered the
extra weight, is the roof insured,
the risk of electrocution... OH!

Faith opens the door, and jumps back in alarm at the six foot
six of black hunk standing there.

THOMAS

Guess who's coming to dinner.

ZACHARY

Sergeant Thomas!

Zachary pulls him inside. Faith is astonished. As the others
gather, Thomas picks up Zachary and holds him above his head.

THOMAS

Hey! What are you doing up there?

GRACE

Thomas, so glad you could make it!

THOMAS

Hope you got room for me?

GRACE

Of course we have.

They have a big hug. John smiles uneasily. Thomas looks at
the decorations.

THOMAS

Holy Moly. You don't take this
seriously at all do you?

As Thomas greets Emilia, Grace whispers to John and Charlie.

GRACE
John, can you move in with
Charlie?

THOMAS
Good to see you again, Mrs
Rodriguez.

JOHN
With Charlie? Sure.

EMILIA
You can call me Emilia.

GRACE
Thomas, this is Charlie.

THOMAS
Charlie.

GRACE
And you know John.

THOMAS
Uh-huh. And this must be Faith.
Heard a lot about you. Christmas
hug for Faith!

He slaps away her proffered hand, envelopes her tiny body in
his huge hug, and slaps her on the back.

GRACE
Come on, have some breakfast.

They all go, except Faith, who is speechless.

49 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALL AND CHARLIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

John carries clothes from his old room to his new one. He
opens the door, and jumps in shock. Santa is in the room.

ZACHARY
Ho-ho-ho!

It is Zachary, standing on the bed. The Santa pants are
tucked into his own, and reach the floor. He holds the Santa
jacket in front of him, and the Santa hat covers his face.

JOHN
What are you doing?

ZACHARY
It's a Santa costume.

JOHN
Very nice, let's put it back in a
closet somewhere.

ZACHARY
I was thinking... I know this isn't
easy for you. Christmas and all.
(MORE)

ZACHARY (CONT'D)

And Mom isn't treating you special like she used to, so...

JOHN

Your Mom's being great, but let's put that away.

ZACHARY

I didn't want to ask Sergeant Thomas, too small for him anyway, and Charlie really wants to wear it, but I thought it should be you.

JOHN

Me?

ZACHARY

You see...

(he hesitates)

It was my Dad's. Nobody's worn it since he did.

JOHN

And... you want me to wear it?

ZACHARY

It's just that... I think it would fit you.

Zachary runs from the room. John stares at the costume. Fighting his revulsion, he picks up the hat with two fingers.

50

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

50

Zachary and Emilia build a gingerbread house. Grace, Thomas and Charlie play a board game, loudly and with much laughter and accusations of cheating. Emilia turns and sees something remarkable.

EMILIA

Oh my goodness...

The others turn to see John. He stands in the doorway, in the Santa outfit, without the beard. He is rigid with fear.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

That costume, is that..?

ZACHARY

It was my idea! Now we got a live Santa, just like before!

Emilia and Grace exchange a look, as the others laugh. Thomas puts a cushion under the Santa coat.

THOMAS
You need some padding.

CHARLIE
Good, now we're all gathered, let's
do some practice.

He hands round sheets of music. Grace approaches John.

GRACE
Are you okay?

JOHN
Not sure. Can't quite do the
beard.

GRACE
Let me help you.

She hooks the beard on his ears. They get a little too close.

GRACE (CONT'D)
You'll have to wear it for the
carol singing tonight.

JOHN
Oh no, I can't do...

GRACE
We do it every year for charity,
everyone joins in.

He takes a deep breath.

JOHN
Carols. Sure, why not.

CUT TO LATER. They are all enjoying practising the carols.

ALL (SINGING)
Good tidings we bring to you and
your kin
Good tidings for Christmas and a
Happy New Year.
We wish you a Merry Christmas
We wish you a Merry Christmas
We wish you a Merry Christmas
And a Happy New Year.

Charlie notices something wrong.

CHARLIE
John, can you take the beard off?

John removes the beard, behind which he was hiding.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
And give us the chorus? One-two...

JOHN
(he sings)
We wish you a merry C....
We wish you a merry... mas
We wish you a merry... ex-mas
(he speaks the next line)
And a Happy New Year, okay?

CHARLIE
Ex-mas? You make it sound like a disease.

JOHN
I have a problem, I'm dealing with it, I'll get there.

CHARLIE
Well until you do, just mouth it.

Faith bursts in, completely frazzled.

FAITH
Grace, do not ever ask me to drive to that mall again, so much traffic, I couldn't even get near it, and every one of those drivers is a complete lunatic.

CHARLIE
Never mind. Come practice, we're carol singing tonight.

FAITH
Carol singing? Are you out of your mind? In the middle of the night, in the freezing cold, collecting money from total strangers, a magnet for every gangster, hoodlum and mugger for miles around, and you with a nine year old boy, are you seriously going to...

THOMAS
Faith, be quiet.

Faith stops dead. All except Thomas know how Faith will react, and wait for the ignition. Faith takes a breath, but before she can explode, Thomas faces her.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
 Nobody's going to hurt you. I'll
 be right there beside you. You want
 to go for a walk?

FAITH
 What?

THOMAS
 Let's walk down to the mall.

GRACE
 It's couple of miles away.

THOMAS
 That's right. You coming?

Thomas goes. Faith looks at them all, and without a word,
 follows him.

Emilia, Charlie and Zachary run to the window. They see
 Thomas step outside, putting his coat on. Faith joins him.
 He offers his arm, Faith hesitantly takes it. They walk away.

ZACHARY
 Wow...

51 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

51

Grace and Emilia are busy cooking. John is tying tinsel bows
 around champagne glasses.

JOHN
 I can do this. Look, I can do
 this!

Faith comes back in, bringing a bag of groceries.

GRACE
 Thank you, Faith. How was the walk?

Emilia and Grace look at her expectantly.

FAITH
 Just a walk, just an ordinary walk.
 (off their look)
 It was a walk.

She leaves the room, and the women smile to each other. The
 phone rings. Grace cleans her hands.

GRACE
 Can somebody get that?

John picks up.

JOHN
The Rodriguez residence.

INTERCUT WITH:

52 I/E. CHARLENE IN HER CAR - DAY

52

Charlene is on the phone in her car. She is upset, but tries not to sound it.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
Yes hello, can I speak to Grace Rodriguez please? My name is Charlene Davis.

JOHN (ON PHONE)
What? No! No, you can't! Wrong number!

Grace looks at John, and walks towards him.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
John, is that you?

JOHN (ON PHONE)
No it isn't. You can't call here.

GRACE
What are you saying? Give it to me.
(to phone)
Hello?

Grace listens. John whispers.

JOHN
I didn't ask her to call. I don't know why she's...

GRACE (ON PHONE)
Oh... Yes it's me, go on.

She takes the phone out of the room. John paces up and down, and visibly frets.

53 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, ENTRANCE HALL - CONTINUOUS

53

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
The thing is... There's something I want you to know. That scene in the garage.

GRACE (ON PHONE)
I really don't need to...
(she listens)
You what? Why did you..?

As Grace listens, a weight seems to lift from her.

GRACE (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
No, that's alright, thanks for
telling me.

IN THE KITCHEN, John is still fretting. Zachary enters.

ZACHARY
Are you okay?

JOHN
Oh sure. Your Mum's just having a
chit-chat with a friend of mine...

SCENE EXTENSION

ZACHARY
Well that's good, isn't it?

JOHN
No, it's going to ruin everything!

John sits, with a sigh. Zachary runs to a drawer, and runs
back with scissors.

ZACHARY
Cut the phone wire!

JOHN
I wish I'd thought of that before.
It's too late. Sometimes your fate
is decided for you. If you try and
intervene, it just makes it worse.

ZACHARY
Bull!

JOHN
I beg your pardon, young man.

ZACHARY
I've worked too hard on this to give
up now. Get up!

He pulls John to his feet.

IN THE ENTRANCE HALL.

GRACE (ON PHONE)
Okay. Good. Bye.

Grace hangs up. She smiles. Then she straightens her face, as John enters the Hall.

JOHN
Grace, I don't even know how she got this number.

GRACE
Were you with her for a long time?

JOHN
Yes, for a while. What did she say?

Zachary runs out of the kitchen. They wait until he passes.

GRACE
I told her the truth, that we are not back together. So that option is still open, if you want.

JOHN
I don't want!

Emilia comes out of the kitchen, carrying a bowl. They wait.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Can't we go somewhere to talk?

GRACE
There isn't anywhere, full house. And there's nothing to talk about. That's all in the past, right?

She goes back into the kitchen. John is despondent.

JOHN
Right.

54

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE BROOKING HOUSE - NIGHT

54

Two cars pull up in the street outside the Brooking house. Out of them come Grace, Zachary, Emilia, Faith, Charlie, Thomas, and John, unrecognizable in his Santa costume. They are all ready to sing carols.

JOHN
What are we doing here?

GRACE
Alright everybody, big houses here, big contributions.
(MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)
Let's start with that house, and
work down the block.

They all walk up the drive to the Brooking House.

JOHN
No, we can't, are you kidding?
That's my parents' place.

GRACE
We're here to spread joy. Can't
think of any house that needs more
joy than this one.

CUT TO THEM SINGING a carol at the front door. It is slowly
opened by Agnes, who listens, sadly, until Henry appears.

HENRY
Go! Get off my property, don't come
back.

Henry goes, leaving them stunned. Agnes looks at them with a
terrible sadness.

AGNES
I'm sorry. We just don't do
Christmas.

Slowly, she closes the door.

THOMAS
Win some lose some. Next house!

They go, except Grace and John. There is a tear on his cheek.

GRACE
I apologize, that was a terrible
idea.

JOHN
Not one of your best.

GRACE
I know how hard all this is for
you.

JOHN
I don't care. I'll do anything.
Even wear this really, really
uncomfortable beard.

She allows herself to laugh.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 I love you, Grace.
 (beat)
 But you don't want to hear that.
 (beat)
 And obviously you can't respond to
 it.

She takes a breath to speak. But she can't.

GRACE
 Come on.

She takes his arm and leads him away.

55 INT. UPSTAIRS HALL AND CHARLIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 55

Charlie is in his pajamas, arranging the double bed. There is a stuffed animal on the pillow. John enters, and sees it.

CHARLIE
 Well, I'm ready to tuck in.

JOHN
 So it's three in a bed.

CHARLIE
 That's Mister Pongo. I'll go this side, you go that side, he goes in the middle. Alright?

JOHN
 I hope he doesn't get fresh. If he does, I'll smack you both.

John takes his wash kit, and walks along the hall.

56 INT. GRACE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS 56

Grace's bedroom door is open. John sees her lying on her bed, with a pile of small gifts and a stocking. She has fallen asleep.

John enters, and puts the cover on her. She wakes a little.

GRACE
 Hi John.
 (suddenly aroused)
 What are you...

JOHN
 It's okay, go to sleep.

GRACE
I got to do these for Zach, for
tomorrow. His Christmas stocking...

JOHN
I'll do it, I promise. You sleep.

She closes her eyes, and is almost immediately asleep.

GRACE
Merry Christmas.

JOHN
Yeah.

57 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, ZACHARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 57

Zachary is fast asleep. John looks at him, smiling.

57 A. INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

John hangs the stocking full of gifts over the fireplace.

58 INT. CHARLIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 58

John gets into bed beside Charlie and Mister Pongo. He turns out the light. Charlie is almost asleep.

CHARLIE
She's a stunner, isn't she?

JOHN
What?

CHARLIE
Gracey pie. I dream about her. Do
you think I'm in with a chance?

JOHN
This is not the kind of thing the
ex-ex should discuss with the ex.

A snore from Charlie.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Oh no. Do you snore?

Charlie rouses slightly.

CHARLIE
Mmm? No, no. Never.

He shuts his eyes and instantly snores. John lies, listening. He turns to look at Mister Pongo, on the pillow beside him.

JOHN
Don't tell me. You love her too.

59 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, CHARLIE'S BEDROOM - DAY 59

BANG! The door bursts open. It is morning, and Zachary leaps on top of the bed. John wakes with a start, and removes the tissue from his ears.

ZACHARY
Wake up! It's Christmas! I got a stocking full of stuff! You got to come outside! Come on, right now!

60 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, ENTRANCE HALL - MOMENTS LATER 60

John staggers to the front door in his pajamas and a robe. He opens the door.

61 EXT. GRACE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS 61

SPLAT! A snowball hits him in the face. Stunned, he sees snow all around.

ZACHARY
Snowman! We got to build a snowman.

JOHN
Okay, I'll get dressed.

CUT TO LATER. Everybody is outside. Snowball fights. Snowman building. Collecting icicles.

Faith falls flat on her ass, and Thomas picks her up.

Zachary, on John's shoulders, triggers an avalanche of snow onto Grace, standing under the eaves.

A snowball hits Charlie's head. Everyone stops dead, but the wig survives, and Charlie flicks the snow off it.

THOMAS (QUIETLY)
Is that his own hair?

JOHN
It is now. He paid good money at the bad wig shop.

62 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 62

Everybody warms up by a roaring fire, and drinks punch. Faith sits on one of Thomas's knees.

Emilia comes in. She is wearing a figure hugging dress. It is bright, bright red. They turn to look at her, in surprise.

GRACE

Emilia!

EMILIA

A woman can get tired of black.
Nothing personal, Thomas.

They laugh, and pull her into the group.

CHARLIE

Champagne! I brought some, just
waiting for an excuse.

He goes out.

THOMAS

You look fantastic! You want this
other knee?

EMILIA

No!

A muffled knock.

GRACE

Was that the door?

JOHN

I'll get it.

INTERCUT WITH:

63

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, ENTRANCE HALL - CONTINUOUS

63

John opens the front door, to reveal Charlene. He is
horrified.

JOHN

Oh no! Please, you can't...
Charlene, you got to go.

GRACE

Come on in.

JOHN

What?

Everybody follows Grace into the entrance hall, as Charlene
enters, carrying a small case.

GRACE
This is Charlene, she's come to
stay. Zachary, coat?

Zachary takes Charlene's coat, and introduces her to everybody. John appeals quietly to Grace.

JOHN ZACHARY

Why have you done this? This is my Grandma...

GRACE (CONT'D)	ZACHARY
She told me she was alone for	And Aunt Faith, and Sergeant
Christmas. Alone. So I	Thomas.
invited her.	

GRACE (CONT'D)
Okay, let's get back to that fire.

Grace, Emilia, Faith and Thomas return to the living room, as Charlie comes out of the kitchen, carrying champagne.

ZACHARY
Oh, this is Charlie.

Charlie and Charlene catch sight of each other, and stare.
Charlie holds out his hand.

CHARLIE
Charlie.

Charlene. CHARLENE

CHARLIE
No, Charlie.

CHARLENE
No, I'm Charlene.

CHARLIE
Oh I see, Charlie, Charlene. I
mean, the other way round.

He laughs. She laughs. They seem to be locked together.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Sorry, ignore me, I'm English,
totally you know... I still drive
on the wrong side of the road
sometimes. That's how I got the
bump in the car.

CHARLENE
That's your car outside? The classic?

CHARLIE
You like cars?

CHARLENE
Daddy was a race mechanic.

CHARLIE
Really? I got tons of them, half of them don't work.

IN THE LIVING ROOM, Grace pulls Faith away from Thomas.

GRACE
Faith, I know you're going to hate this. We haven't shared a room since we were kids, and that was a disaster...

FAITH
It's okay, I'll come in with you.

Grace is amazed.

GRACE
You will?

FAITH
Sure. And I...

GRACE
What?

FAITH
I love you. Does that sound alright?

GRACE
Yes. I love you too.

Faith hugs her, and instantly returns to Thomas. A little stunned, Grace smiles and returns to...

THE ENTRANCE HALL, where John and Zachary witness the bubbling chemistry between Charlie and Charlene.

CHARLENE
Oh, I love antiques.

CHARLIE

You should see my place, jam-packed with them. Well the house here is. The Monaco place is all modern.

CHARLENE

You have an apartment in Monaco?

JOHN

Wait a minute. Charlene, he snores.

CHARLENE

Do you? My first boyfriend did that. You know how I cured it?

She whispers in Charlie's ear, and he roars with laughter.

CHARLIE

Really? Did that work? Can't wait to try that! You like champagne?

CHARLENE

I adore champagne.

They go into the kitchen, arm in arm. John watches them go, astonished. He looks at Grace, who smiles and goes upstairs. He looks into the living room and sees Thomas and Faith in front of the tree, holding each other tight.

JOHN

What is happening here?

ZACHARY

It's always like this at Christmas. Mom brings people together. She says she likes to spread the joy.

JOHN

What about her own joy?

ZACHARY

I think that's up to you.

John takes that in. Then he follows Grace up the stairs.

64

INT. GRACE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

64

Grace is getting out yet more sheets and bedding.

JOHN

Grace?

GRACE

Real busy right now.

JOHN

This is it, it's here, the big day,
you should enjoy it. Can't you stop
for a moment?

GRACE

No. If I stop, I'm likely to...

For a split second, she allows herself a single, tearing sob.
John moves in to comfort her, but she quickly moves away.

GRACE (CONT'D)

No, nothing you can do. When I was
a kid, Christmas was just magic.
There was Mom and Dad, everything
was warm and safe, nothing bad
would ever happen, my life would
always be happy. Because however
bad things got, we would always
have Christmas. That's how I want
it for Zach. But I... Well, this
time of year, I just hurt a little.

JOHN

For him?

GRACE

For the man I lost, for the life I
lost, for the family I would have
had.

JOHN

So let it out.

GRACE

Can't allow myself to. That's why I
fill my home with people, and
tinsel.

JOHN

And it works. I've seen things here
I can't believe. You got me to do
things I never could, even as a
kid. I care, share, join, give,
risk, enjoy. I never did any of
that before. Never had to.

She looks at him.

GRACE

You were always a nice guy, John.

JOHN
 You make magic, Grace, for all of
 us, for me especially. Can't I
 share some of it with you?

A loud banging on the front door downstairs.

GRACE
 What on earth is that?

JOHN
 No more house guests, you don't
 have room.

65 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, ENTRANCE HALL - CONTINUOUS

65

Grace and John come down the stairs into the entrance hall,
 where everyone is crowded around somebody in a chair.

GRACE
 What's going on?

CHARLENE
 It's your mother.

Agnes Brooking is revealed.

JOHN
 Oh no, please...

AGNES
 John! I can't stand it anymore,
 I've left him. We had such an
 argument, worse than ever. That's
 it, I'm finished with him. You're
 going to have to look after me.

JOHN
 What am I supposed to do? This
 isn't my house.

AGNES
 Then take me to a motel.

GRACE
 No, you must stay here.

JOHN
 Are you out of your....

AGNES
 Oh, I couldn't possibly...

GRACE (CONT'D)
 No more discussion, my house is
 yours, you stay with us.

AGNES
That's very kind.

JOHN
Grace, you can't be serious?

EMILIA
Emilia Rodriguez, how do you do.

AGNES
Agnes Brooking.

EMILIA
You need a drink, or a coffee, or
one in the other?

JOHN
Just the coffee.

EMILIA
You shut up.

AGNES
He's right, I'd better not drink.

GRACE
Zachary, your room, would you mind
very much...

THOMAS
No way. I'm on the sofa.

GRACE
Thank you, Thomas.

AGNES
Goodness me. What are all these
decorations?

ZACHARY
It's Christmas.

AGNES
Well, I know that, but...

GRACE
This is my son Zachary. I do it
for him.

AGNES
You mean you go to all this
trouble...?

JOHN
Wish you'd done the same for me.

GRACE
John!

There is a loud pounding on the door, and shouting.

AGNES
Oh! It's him. He's come to get me.

HENRY (O.S.)
Open up! Right now!

AGNES
Please, don't open the door.

JOHN
Alright, I'll do this. He's my
Dad, I'm responsible.

As the pounding continues, John is intercepted by Grace.

GRACE
Not you, that won't help.

THOMAS
I'll handle it.

GRACE
No you won't. This is my house.

EMILIA
Stand down, gentlemen, she's
tougher than both of you.

INTERCUT WITH:

66

EXT. GRACE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

66

Grace opens the door, steps outside and closes it behind her.
Henry rages like an angry bear.

HENRY
My wife is in there.

GRACE
And your son.

HENRY
I don't care about him, just get
her out here.

GRACE
She's left you.

HENRY
She wouldn't dare leave me. I gave
her everything she's got, him too,
the ungrateful...

GRACE
You were mean to her.

HENRY
Mean? The world is mean. She's had
long enough to get used to that.

GRACE
You were mean to John, too. When
you sent me to the garage, you knew
what I would find.

HENRY
Don't you lecture me, woman. I know
what this is. All that cozy
Christmas crap. Peace and love,
goodwill to all men. Christmas is a
lie, it builds up your hopes every
year. You think maybe this year
will be different, but it's always
been the same.

INSIDE, Agnes, Emilia and Faith watch at a window.

AGNES
He'll get violent, you got to stop
him!

FAITH
No, wait.

OUTSIDE, Henry rages on.

GRACE
It's never too late to change.
Your son has.

HENRY
My son? What kind of son is he?
Ran away from me first chance he
had. He never understood. He was
damned lucky, compared to what my
Dad did to me...

Henry cracks. He fights against the sobs that rack his body.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Just get her out here. I got to
talk with her...

Grace quickly puts her arms around him, and holds on tight.

HENRY (CONT'D)
What are you doing? Let me go.
Get off me.

GRACE
They could love you, if you let
them.

INSIDE, John, Thomas, Charlie and Zachary watch through
another window.

CHARLIE
What is she doing?

THOMAS
Well, I sure wouldn't have tried
that.

ZACHARY
Is he crying?

OUTSIDE, Grace still holds Henry tight.

HENRY
It's too late. All too late.

GRACE
Start again, Mister Brooking.
Start over. Make a change.

He breaks away from her.

HENRY
I'd better go.

GRACE
No. Agnes is waiting.

She leads him into the house.

INSIDE, John sees what is happening.

JOHN
Oh no...

67

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, ENTRANCE HALL - CONTINUOUS

67

Grace guides Henry inside. He looks at all the faces, looking at him, then at the amazing decorations. Then at his wife.

HENRY

Agnes. I came to bring you home.

GRACE

No. You came to stay. No way
you're going back to that house.

(to Agnes)

You'll have to share your room.

AGNES

But we don't share...

GRACE

Yes you do. This is an old-
fashioned house too, and married
people stay together. If you two
argue, I am not going to throw you
out, I'll just hit you with
something. So best behavior. Can
you do that?

HENRY

Guess we can try. What the heck is
this place?

CHARLIE

Paradise, old chap. Welcome to
paradise.

ZACHARY

Hi Mister Brooking, you want to see
my presents? I got a Zyklon Tri-
blaster. It shoots precise amounts
of water at long distance with
amazing accuracy.

HENRY

Is that right?

With a glance at Agnes, Henry is pulled into the kitchen by
Zachary. Agnes is guided into the living room by the others.
Grace goes up the stairs, with John at her heels.

JOHN

Are you kidding me? It's hard enough to be in the same house with the woman I love who has rejected me, but now there's your ex-boyfriend, my ex-girlfriend, your sister who disapproves of me, your mother-in-law who despises me, an ex-soldier who thinks I'm a sissy, and both my parents, in whose presence I find it difficult even to breathe. Am I just a stooge for your amusement? Or are you by any chance making it impossible for me to stay?

GRACE

Maybe I am. Or maybe you still don't get it.

JOHN

I still don't get what?

GRACE

Christmas.

She leaves him on the staircase, in total frustration.

68

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

68

In the evening, John has found himself a quiet corner. Zachary finds him, and sits beside him.

ZACHARY

You okay?

JOHN

Just keeping my head down. You?

ZACHARY

It's a little hard. Sometimes I get sad, you know.

JOHN

Because Dad's not here?

Zachary nods.

ZACHARY

But I have to keep smiling, because of Mom, and Grandma. They never talk about him, have you noticed? Not at Christmas.

JOHN
They think of him, Zach, all the time.

ZACHARY
Mom's not going to make it up with you, is she?

JOHN
I don't think so.

ZACHARY
Not such a good Christmas, then.

JOHN
You're wrong. It's the first one I've enjoyed... since I was your age. Go ask Grandma about your Dad, she'd like that.

Zachary smiles, and goes. John stands.

AS IF IN A DREAM, John walks through the house.

He sees Charlie and Charlene, a pair of giggling lovers, holding each others hands, and hearts, by a roaring fire.

He sees Henry and Agnes, sitting close, and talking quietly. Her hand touches Henry's arm, and his hand feels for hers.

He sees Thomas and Faith come in from a walk, with soaking wet hair and flushed faces. Suddenly cold, she dives into his coat for warmth, and they cuddle, and laugh.

He sees Emilia and Zachary, looking through an album of photographs of Jose as a boy. Emilia laughs as she remembers, and tells him the story of every picture.

69

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

69

John faces the kitchen door, and opens it a little way. Two tables are placed end to end, and set for a banquet, loaded with decorations. And there is Grace, looking beautiful. She looks up and sees him.

GRACE
I think we're ready, you want to call them in?

SCENE: All the guests chatter excitedly as they enter the kitchen, and find their place names. Henry and Agnes are on the end, facing each other. Then John and Charlene. Then Faith and Thomas. Then Emilia and Zachary on one side, facing Charlie. Grace is at the head of the table.

While Grace's back is turned, John whispers to Charlie, and they swap place names. When Grace turns back, she notices that Charlie and Charlene now face each other, and John is sitting beside her. She lets it pass.

Grace carries a huge turkey to the table, and everybody applauds. She turns to John.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I hope you can carve?

JOHN

Tonight I can do anything.

SCENE: Christmas Dinner is in full swing. Everybody is having a great time - except Henry and Agnes, who are suddenly cutting away at each other. As they get louder, the others get quieter.

HENRY

Damn it, if it's wrong for me to say what I feel, then what am I supposed to say?

AGNES

You're supposed to behave like a grown-up, not some obstinate ass.

HENRY

And calling me names is going solve things is it? What's the matter with you?

John nods at Zachary, who reaches under the table.

AGNES

You're the matter with me, you always have been, why I ever...

HENRY

Oh sure, blame me for everything like you always do!

With the Zyklon Tri-blaster, Zachary gives Henry and Agnes a full burst, right in the face. Grace is horrified.

GRACE

ZACHARY!

JOHN

I'm responsible. I told him to do it. That is what I always wanted to do, all through my childhood, and I never had the courage.

Henry rises to his feet, his rage about to erupt. But instead, it subsides.

HENRY

Young man.

ZACHARY

Sir?

HENRY

Reload. It's going to be hard to learn new ways. So if we forget ourselves again, you be sure to use that thing.

(to Grace)

I apologize.

Henry hands Agnes his napkin to mop herself.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Agnes. I'm sorry.

Stunned, Agnes takes the napkin. Henry sits. Charlie breaks the silence.

CHARLIE

Cracker?

They all grab crackers and pull them together.

Silly hats, silly toys, food, chatter, laughter, more food. As the meal goes on, the jollity increases, helped by Charles and Charlene, who laugh at every word the other says.

More food, more chatter, more laughter. Faith is glowing as she never has, and clearly in love with Thomas, who gazes at her, and laughs when Grace catches him doing it.

GRACE

Hey! Will you stop staring at my sister?

John smiles, really enjoying himself at last. He looks at Grace, as she talks and laughs. She looks beautiful.

SCENE: Grace brings Christmas pudding, with brandy burning round it. Applause.

More chatter, groaning stomachs, more laughter. Charlie looks at Charlene, and takes a deep breath.

CHARLIE

Charlene.
(she doesn't hear)
CHARLENE!

The table stops. Charlene looks at him.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Charlene, I... I wear a wig!

He grabs at his wig and throws it on the table. Charlene stares at him.

CHARLENE

I adore bald men.

EMILIA

So. Won't be needing that any more.

Emilia puts her fork in the wig, picks it up, and tosses it over her shoulder. Everybody cheers.

GRACE

You look great, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Thank you. I polish up quite well.

CHARLENE

Oh, I can't wait to do that.

More chatter, more laughter. John pours champagne into flutes, and Emilia's objection to another drink is easily overcome. John gets to his feet.

JOHN

I propose a toast - but to what?

CHARLIE

To love.

FAITH

To the world.

HENRY

To the future.

THOMAS

To peace.

JOHN

Those are all good, but I say...

He raises his glass to the picture on the wall.

JOHN (CONT'D)

To Jose Rodriguez. The hero I never met, who should be here, with his wife and child.

Grace gulps. Emilia too. Zachary looks sad. Thomas picks up his glass, and they all toast, led by him.

ALL

Jose Rodriguez.

JOHN

No, Jose won't be here to love Grace, to teach Zachary how to play ball, to comfort Emilia as she grows older. But I am here, and I want to do all those things.

(he turns to Grace)

And though I know I will never take his place in your heart, I'd like a place of my own there. I want you to marry me.

He presents Grace with a ring. Everybody freezes.

GRACE

I cannot believe you would chose such a time to do this, in front of everybody. What are you trying to do, ruin our Christmas?

JOHN

I never knew what it meant before you showed me. And now I want to share it with you and Zachary, and all our future children. Share the love of it, the grief of it, the good times, the bad times, for the rest of our lives. And when our children have children, I want to sit at the end of the table with you, where my own parents are sitting. I will remember you exactly as you are now, and know that I made the best decision of my life, on the best day of the year. But it's your decision too. So I'll go outside and wait for your answer.

He goes out, quickly, leaving them all in shock.

GRACE

I'm sorry, he really... He knows what the answer is, I'll go deal with this right now.

As she heads for the door, Henry speaks up, and she pauses.

HENRY

If I were you I'd be scared. Scared he might turn out like his father. Well, he's not me, and I'm glad, because he'd be a damn sight better husband than I've ever been.

Grace turns back to the door, but is stopped by...

AGNES

Sometimes a woman gives her heart. Sometimes a man takes it. Let him take it. I know he will look after it.

FAITH

I think Christmas is a time of forgiveness.

Grace turns back to the table, and glances at Charlene.

GRACE

No, that was a misunderstanding, there's nothing to forgive John for.

FAITH

I don't mean that. I mean you should forgive yourself. What happened to you, to Jose, it wasn't your fault. You deserve to be happy. We all do. Even me. Right?

She looks at Thomas.

CHARLIE

Well, since we're all chipping in... I didn't believe in love at first sight - until it happened to me.

(a glance at Charlene)

That's why I hated John. Because it was obvious that from the moment you met... you loved him.

CHARLENE

I don't know you, Grace, but I know him. At least I did. Most women marry a man first, then try to change him. That was my plan. It seems to me you worked a miracle. You changed him first. So why not marry him?

Thomas shakes his head.

THOMAS

I know what you want. You and Zach want Jose, but you cant have what you want. John is always going to think he's second best, unless you tell him different. But what he's done tonight is braver than anything I ever did, so I reckon he can deal with that. Maybe you should ask Jose. What would he have said?

EMILIA

I know.

They all look at Emilia, knowing how hard this is for her.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

He would have said yes. He always said yes to life. It's time you did the same.

Grace is astonished.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

What does it matter, she won't listen to any of us, we're not important. But you are, Zachary. What do you think?

ZACHARY

Well...

70

EXT. GRACE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

70

John is outside, shivering in the darkness, when Grace finally comes out, and stands beside him. It begins to snow.

JOHN

Snowing again.

GRACE

Yes.

They look through the window, at the classic, warm, Christmas scene at the kitchen table.

GRACE (CONT'D)

They all told me to say no.

JOHN

Then they are all wrong.

GRACE

How many children would you want?

JOHN

How many rooms do you have?

GRACE

I'm pregnant.

JOHN

I know.

(off her surprise)

Faith let it slip, she didn't mean to. And I didn't say because you might think that's the only reason I came back to you.

(he gulps)

It's the most wonderful thing in the world, Grace. But that's not why you should say yes to me.

GRACE

Then why should I say yes?

JOHN

Because it is freezing, and I have lived my whole life out in the cold, and now I want to come inside, with you.

GRACE

And if I say no?

JOHN

My cases are in the car, I just drive away.

They look through the window again.

GRACE

That in there, is that what you really want?

JOHN
It still scares me, but yes, I want
that in there.

He puts his hand on her stomach.

JOHN (CONT'D)
And what's in there, as well. And
that's *really* scary.

GRACE
I lied. They all told me to say
yes. Even Emilia.

JOHN
Wow. And Zach?

GRACE
He said...
(she weeps)
He said you would be the best Dad
in the whole world.

JOHN
I'll settle for second best. Can
you?

71 INT. GRACE'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

71

Grace comes back into the room. Clearly, she has been crying.
And she is alone. Grace sees disappointment on their faces.

John comes through the door, with his suitcases.

Grace lifts up her hand, and reveals the ring on her finger.

They all erupt with joy, and gather round Grace and John.

Henry puts out his hand, and Agnes puts hers in it. Henry
kisses it.

Faith hugs Grace, then steps back. Thomas takes Faith in his
arms, and they kiss.

Charlene strokes Charlie's head, and pulls him into a kiss.

Grace takes John's head in her hands

GRACE
I won't take second best, John, and
you never will be.

John kisses her passionately.

EMILIA

Zachary, don't look.

THOMAS

Forgive me, but... Take a good
long look, kid. That's what
Christmas is about. Love. And
family.

JOHN

Everybody. I want to wish you all
a very... merry...

They wait for him to say it. He breathes out.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Christmas.

ALL

Merry Christmas!