

THE PREACHER'S WIFE

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1 EXT. NEW HAVEN - DAY

HELICOPTER SHOT of the city. It lies in deep winter snow. The SOUND of SINGING can be heard, a GOSPEL CHOIR. The CAMERA SWOOPS over the city, descending from the heavens to isolate a mid-town street. The VOICE of a YOUNG BOY leads us into his story:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

My mom and dad say this never happened. They say stuff like "the imagination of a lonely kid" and "young kids can't tell fantasy from reality." But I swear a solemn oath: that's a lot of crap. It happened.

The Gospel SONG continues. The SOLOIST'S VOICE soars over the harmonies. The CAMERA'S FINAL SWOOP takes us to a church.

2 EXT. ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH - DAY

Snow-covered ground. The building is decaying. Two windows are boarded over. There is graffiti on the church, its denomination (Baptist) and the name of the pastor: Reverend Henry Brown.

3 INT. ST. MATT'S - DAY

We BURST in on the CHOIR singing. The PARISHIONERS file past two collecting plates, adding their gift. The choir is led by JULIA BROWN.

HENRY BROWN listens, his head bowed, perhaps in prayer, perhaps in awe at her ability to weld her faith to her talent.

Two of the church deacons, SAUL and OSBERT, stand alongside the filled collection plates.

As the hymn ends, Julia and Henry glance towards each other and in that fleeting exchange of glances, we may realize that all is not well between them.

The CONGREGATION shuffles as Henry moves to the pulpit.

JEREMIAH, five year old their son, sits next to MARGUERITE, his grandmother, and his best friend, HAKIM, watching his father intently and occasionally imitating the gestures Henry makes with his hands and arms.

HENRY

Thank you all for your generous donations...

(more)

HENRY (Cont'd)
and thanks especially to those
who volunteered to help paint the
church for the holidays. As you
know, this old place needs all
the help it can get.

A smattering of laughter. Henry opens his sermon.

HENRY
I'd like to talk to you today
about hope. Hope is something we
must have. We are lost when hope
is lost.

The congregation responds with "Amen." They're into their
preacher, even if their preacher seems to be going through
the motions rather than speaking with passion.

HENRY
Six days from now we will
celebrate the birth of Jesus.
(his speaks without
flair)
Christmas is a time for
reflection and a time for
remembering those less fortunate
than ourselves....But it's also
a feast of hope. Because
redemption offers hope and
redemption was brought to us by
the life, the suffering and the
resurrection of our Lord.

Saul and Osbert at the side of the church stack the
collection boxes and whisper to each other:

OSBERT (whispers)
I don't know what's going on with
Henry.

SAUL (whispers)
Maybe Joe Hamilton's right.
Maybe a change would do him good.

Henry continues, his voice rising in imitation of an
impassioned preacher.

HENRY
But what does God care about
hope? Why should he reach out to
fallen Man and offer him eternal
life?

Somehow only the rhetoric remains.

4 INT. VESTIBULE, ST MATT'S. DAY..

Julia is in the vestibule as Henry enters.

HENRY

You sounded very lovely today,
Julia.

She acknowledges the compliment as they take off their robes.

JULIA

Thanks, hon. Am I dreaming or
did I hear that "lost hope"
sermon last year?

HENRY

Now you are a very impressive
woman. Here was me figuring
nobody listened any longer.

She is concerned at his despair.

JULIA

It was good.

Neither of them believe her statement. As Julia hangs the robes in a closet, Henry exits quickly.

5 EXT. OUTSIDE ST MATT'S. DAY.

The congregation has dispersed. Jeremiah has been watching A BOISTEROUS FAMILY with several KIDS playing tag as Julia and Henry emerge from the church. He tugs them over to look at the little Bethlehem scene by the main door.

A rough-hewn stable block, six carved figures grouped around the baby Jesus in his straw crib. A light bulb POPS and goes out as they approach it.

JEREMIAH

Did Baby Jesus have brothers and
sisters to play with?

Julia waits for Henry to answer, but Henry is still lost in his own thoughts.

JULIA

No, hon, baby Jesus was the only
child.

JEREMIAH

Wasn't he lonely?

JULIA

No, he was busy.

JEREMIAH

Maybe Santa Claus will bring me
a brother for Christmas?

JULIA

He doesn't do that kind of
delivery.

Henry smiles faintly at this.

JEREMIAH

Can Hakim have lunch with us?

JULIA

I bet his grandma would like to
have Hakim around today.

JEREMIAH

She just sleeps all the time.
And he only gets to eat out of
cans.

JULIA

Well I guess she wouldn't miss
him for a half hour...

(as Jeremiah runs off)

Careful crossing the street.

Jeremiah runs across the street where his friend, Hakim, is
sitting in the window of the ramshackle row house directly
across from the Browns house. Jeremiah gestures to come on
over, and Hakim races over the road as Julia and Henry enter
their home.

6 INT. KITCHEN, BROWNS' HOUSE. DAY.

As Julia starts preparing lunch, MARGUERITE COLEMAN, her
mother enters.

MARGUERITE

Somebody stole the communion
wine.

JULIA

No, Mother, somebody put it out
of temptation's way.

MARGUERITE

I'm not tempted. I'm thirsty.
You know I always have a drink
with Sunday lunch.

JULIA

That's why I bought you a bottle
all to yourself.

Julia lifts a brown paper bag from the table.

MARGUERITE
You sweetheart.

As she takes the bag, she glances out the window.

MARGUERITE'S P.O.V. Hakim - the same age as Jeremiah and is his best friend - is building a snowman with Jeremiah in the front yard of the house.

Marguerite turns away from the window.

MARGUERITE
Poor Hakim. That sick old lady
can't keep up with a four-year
old!

JULIA
Tell you one thing, ever since
his momma ran off - between us
and his grandma, Hakim's eating
six square meals a day.

Marguerite smiles at the remark. Henry, sharing kitchen chores, enters with a covered food dish. Puts it down without a word and exits again.

MARGUERITE
What's his problem?

JULIA
He's running on empty. What's
new?

MARGUERITE
Cut that out, Julia.

JULIA
Cut what out? It's the way he
is.

MARGUERITE
You gotta problem - deal with it
before it gets too late.

JULIA (still light)
Mother - I have to deal with it,
okay?

Marguerite shrugs, as Julia opens a window and calls the boys in to lunch. Marguerite lifts the bottle out of the bag. It is Manichewitz Kosher wine.

MARGUERITE
Very ecumenical.

7 EXT. NEW HAVEN - DAY.

RESUME helicopter shot. The swooping CAMERA moves down on a city center street. A CHRISTMAS CAROL can be heard.

8 EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY.

Julia scoops up Jeremiah and whirls him over the sidewalk, plunking him down outside the corner store with its Christmas trees spilling out into the street. Jeremiah laughs, begging her to do it again. The street is bustling with SHOPPERS. The Christmas Carol is coming from one of the store loudspeakers. City lights dance and dazzle.

A SALVATION ARMY COLLECTOR stands on the sidewalk collecting from passersby as other SALVATION ARMY MEMBERS unpack their simple instruments and prepare to sing.

9 INT./EXT. STREET & LOT ENTRANCE - DAY.

Julia puts Jeremiah down by the Christmas Tree lot as the owner, RAJ, emerges from his shed.

JULIA

Hey, Raj, how're you doing?

RAJ

Hi there, Mrs. Brown.

JULIA

How's Janet?

RAJ

Coming home tonight. Maybe you'd let me give you a tree this year? If it wasn't for you and the Reverend, she'd never've gotten that scholarship.

JULIA

No no, she's there because she belongs there, Raj. She's got talent.

RAJ

I can't deliver till Christmas Eve but I'd be glad if you'd pick one out...

JULIA

Well - thank you - that's really kind. I could pick it up tomorrow. School's out till the New Year.

Jeremiah stares at the trees, letting the branches flick and tickle his face.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

It started that day. I was the first one to see him.

As Julia goes off to make her selection, Jeremiah pushes his face among the branches, suddenly recoiling with a yelp of surprise.

A MAN'S FACE stares back at him from the opposite side of the trees. The face is smiling. It is the face of a good-looking man, DUDLEY.

Jeremiah hesitates, deciding whether to call his mom or not. Decides not. And when he looks back, the man has gone.

10 EXT. CROSSLEY APARTMENT BUILDING. DAY.

At the far end of the street stands an old apartment block draped with protest banners all over the building: "SAVE OUR HOMES," "SAY NO TO THE CITY," "HANDS OFF OUR HOMES," etc.

11 INT. CROSSLEY APARTMENT BUILDING, LOBBY. DAY.

A tenants' meeting in progress. Twenty or thirty HOUSEHOLDERS fall silent as Henry steps onto the improvised platform. There are a handful of catcalls as he looks around.

HENRY

I came to tell you I tried.

(utter silence)

But people like you and me....don't make much difference anymore.

He waits for the murmuring to subside.

HENRY

The city's relocation offer to you is on the noticeboard. More space, good heating, security. They're good homes.

(quietly)

Just not here, that's all.

He steps down, hunched inside the failure he feels. One or two of the TENANTS slap him on the shoulder sympathetically.

TENANT

You did your best, reverend.

TENANT 2

Thanks for trying, reverend.

He finds the sympathy unbearable and hurries out.

12 EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT.

Night has fallen. In another part of the downtown area, DUDLEY stands in front of a building which has been scaffolded for construction. Large signs hang from the scaffolding: "HAMILTON REALTY - CARING ABOUT THE THINGS YOU CARE ABOUT." The scaffolding is draped with Christmas lights.

Dudley lets the crowd move past him, gazing into people's eyes, smiling at them as if he'd been away a long time and was pleased to be back. His attention is caught by a harried, package-toting MOTHER who lifts her four-year old out of a stroller and goes to peer into a store window.

The SALVATION ARMY band strikes up, drowning out the Muzak from the nearby stores.

The child's stroller starts to roll towards the street.

The Salvation Army Collector sees the stroller heading into the traffic. She lurches forward, but stops as...

...the stroller bumps to a halt against a fire hydrant.

Dudley and the Collector share a glance of relief: whew!

Dudley approaches the stroller and removes it from the fire hydrant, pushing it three feet away and braking it with some packed snow.

The Collector looks puzzled: Why interfere with it now?

Dudley looks to the Collector and motions with his fingers, directing him to move away to the right.

The Collector frowns - what does this guy want? But he steps to his right anyhow.

And at that moment a scaffolding pole at the top of the building breaks its clip and begins crashing down. Banging against the metal scaffolds, ripping the Christmas lights which fuse in a shower of sparks, the pole lands exactly where the Collector was standing only seconds earlier and bounces, smashing to a halt against the fire hydrant where the stroller had stopped.

The Collector stares at the smiling Dudley: How did you know?

The harried Mother rushes out and grabs the stroller.

Dudley gives the Collector a smile and turns to walk off.

As he starts down the sidewalk, he almost collides with Julia and Jeremiah coming out of a grocery store. They face him for a moment, shuffling to left and right before figuring how to pass him.

Jeremiah gazes open-mouthed up at the man he recognizes from the Christmas tree store. Dudley puts his finger to his lips in a gesture to silence Jeremiah, who frowns and walks on with his mother.

JULIA (o.s.)

.. Okay - let's get home.

Dudley turns, walking backwards to see them swallowed by the crowd. A MAN carrying a sign, JESUS SAVES, obscures our view of him for a moment, and when it has passed, Dudley has vanished.

13 INT. JULIA'S CAR - NIGHT.

Julia and Jeremiah, heading home, are singing a little song she is teaching him.

14 EXT. BUILDING SITE. NIGHT.

A huge building site, arc lights throwing long shadows, the foundations of a new church, with signs declaring it to be "HAMILTON REALTY - CARING ABOUT THE THINGS YOU CARE ABOUT." The site is almost deserted, with the last MEN and TRUCKS leaving.

JOE HAMILTON, self-made millionaire, an inner-city kid who made good, is walking back to his waiting limousine, throwing a hard hat to his DRIVER. Hamilton waves at Saul, who is carrying some lumber off the site.

HAMILTON

Saul - c'mere a minute.

Saul approaches and they bend in quiet conversation, obscured from CAMERA VIEW as a vast truck rumbles by them.

15 EXT. CITY STREET. NIGHT.

The lumber protruding from a charter bus driven by Saul. It moves past Jefferson Street Mall and as it does so, the CAMERA REMAINS on the Mall.

16 EXT. JEFFERSON STREET MALL. NIGHT.

Dudley stands on the corner, scooping up snow to fashion into a snowball. Fifty feet away from him, BILLY ELDRIDGE, a sixteen-year old, is returning a video through the return slot of a video store. It is a small, busy mall that includes a liquor store and other operations. Another Christmas Carol is PLAYING in the mall.

A souped-up car REVS its engine. Suddenly there is shouting from within the liquor store. The car ACCELERATES, making the loop around the mall and pulling up on the main street.

Two TEENAGERS wielding guns come running out of the store. The STORE OWNER is in pursuit. The ALARM has been set off.

One of the Kids shoots twice wildly. The liquor store window SMASHES. The Store Owner dives for safety. The Kids run across the mall - one of them slips and falls heavily, the gun flying from his hand and skeetering across the concrete. He scrambles upright and leaps into the waiting car which drives off.

Billy, silhouetted against the video store window, hunches away from what's happening.

The Store Owner emerges again, staring around wildly. The distant whoop of SIRENS.

Billy turns round again, sees the handgun and in two strides he stands, pointing to it.

BILLY

Look, they dropped the...

STORE OWNER

That's one of them!

His finger points accusingly at Billy. The lights of the arriving cop car flash over the scene.

BILLY

No, no, I just...

STORE OWNER

There! He's right there!

The COPS drop to their knees with their guns drawn.

BILLY (a wail)

No-o-o-o-o....!

(pained by the
inevitability)

Aw, man...

He raises his hands in surrender. The CAMERA PANS to the place where Dudley was standing. He is not there. Nor are his footprints in the fresh snow. But the snowball he made lies on the ground.

17 EXT. OUTSIDE ST MATTHEWS CHURCH. NIGHT.

Henry is on a ladder outside the church, hammering some of the freshly-delivered lumber over a broken window. Saul is hauling a remaining load of lumber from the back of his spanking new charter bus, which is badly parked alongside the church. He dumps this in the yard alongside the Bethlemlen scene.

Henry finishes his task and comes down the ladder.

HENRY

The bus still looks brand new.
How's business?

SAUL

I'll say this, being your own boss you work for somebody who's real good to you. How're things with you?

HENRY (curtly)

Just fine.

SAUL (hears the despair)

What is it, Henry?

HENRY

I guess my boss never sleeps. I'm tired, that's all.

SAUL

Henry, I just came from Joe Hamilton. You know, he's offering you your own private ladder to heaven.

HENRY

And here I was figuring heaven was public access.

Henry hauls the remaining lumber against the wall and covers it with a tarpaulin.

SAUL

You gotta come by, see what he's offering you. It's got....

HENRY

Saul - I have a parish. I don't want to move just to preach in some fancy uptown shrine to the greater glory of Joe Hamilton.

Henry beats his hands against the cold. One of the bulbs on the Bethlehem scene pops. Like an omen. Saul looks at this and at the church and shrugs.

SAUL

You say you want to make a difference, Henry. I look around. I don't see it.

Henry doesn't reply because he doesn't either. In the frozen moment, they are interrupted by ANNA ELDRIDGE, and her younger son, DARYL running towards them.

ANNA

Reverend! Reverend Brown!

Henry and Saul look round.

ANNA

Anna Eldridge. It's my boy,
 Billy... They're holdin' him
 downtown. He says he was just
standin' there! And then they
 took him away! My poor Billy...

Henry reacts quickly, throwing his tools into the church
 doorway and locking the door.

HENRY

Saul - we need a ride.
 (to Anna)
 Where is he?

ANNA

Elbow Street Precinct.

They pile into the bus.

18 EXT. STREETS. NIGHT.

The bus takes a corner at speed, heading downtown.

19 INT. SAUL'S BUS. NIGHT.

Anna and her son sit behind Saul and Henry.

ANNA

You'll talk to them, Reverend.
 You'll tell them...

HENRY

I'll do everything I can.

The bus pulls up outside the precinct. Henry jumps out,
 leans back in the open door.

SAUL

You're a minister not a welfare
 worker. If you get this kid out,
 you don't really think he's going
 to be any closer to God, do you?

HENRY

Maybe not. But I will be.

Then with a faint wave goodbye, he turns and follows Anna and
 Daryl into the station.

20 INT. POLICE STATION. NIGHT.

ARLENE CHATTAN - the public defender - is talking quietly to
 Billy Eldridge. Anna and Daryl sit nearby. Henry is on the
 phone just outside the prison cell. We HEAR an ANSWERING
 MACHINE pick up.

21 INT. BROWNS' HOUSE, LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Jeremiah is gazing at the answering machine as it CLICKS and WHIRS. Then he jumps back, startled, as his father's voice comes on the loudspeaker.

HENRY (ON MACHINE)
Julia? Marguerite? Could one of
you please pick up?

JEREMIAH
Mom! It's Dad!

HENRY (ON MACHINE)
Billy Eldridge got arrested and
they're holding him overnight.
I'll be another hour maybe.
Hello! Is anyone there?

JEREMIAH
I'm here.
(shouts at machine)
Hi, Dad!

HENRY (ON MACHINE)
Julia? Pick up, please!

JEREMIAH
Mom!

He jumps off the table and scuttles out, returning a moment later with Julia in tow. The machine CLICKS OFF just as she picks up.

JULIA
Henry?
(no reply, she hangs
up)
Shoot!

She rewinds the machine. The other messages play.

ANSWERING MACHINE (A MAN)
Henry? It's David Bowmore. I
checked out the boiler. It's
dangerous. Nothing that four
thousand dollars can't fix. Call
me.

ANSWERING MACHINE (A WOMAN)
Julia, you did it, you genius!
Mary found a daycare center for
the baby. She's keeping her job.
Talk to me soon.

Julia is smiling as she hears this, but her smile fades when she hears:

ANSWERING MACHINE (A CHILD)
 Okay, if God's so good, how come
 my momma got cancer? You hear
 this?

ANSWERING MACHINE (HAMILTON)
 Henry, it's Joe Hamilton.
 There's a meeting at eleven
 tomorrow morning, my office.
 Don't be late - I've got
 something to show you.

Julia makes a face at this call - she doesn't like the man.

ANSWERING MACHINE (HENRY)
 Julia? Marguerite? Could one of
 you please pick up? ... I'm
 going to be late...

Julia stabs the button and the machine resets. Marguerite
 appears in the doorway, wearing a night robe.

MARGUERITE
 Henry not back?

JULIA
 He's running late.
 (to Jeremiah)
 Okay - choir practice. And it's
 Grandma's night off, so you gotta
 come with me.

Jeremiah accepts this, running obediently to take her hand.

22 INT. CHURCH, SIDE ROOM. NIGHT.

A kind of improvised day-care center for the CHILDREN of
 choir members. A WOMAN is reading the kids - including
 Jeremiah - a story. We can HEAR the choir, offscreen,
 practising.

Beyond the day-care area, we can see several PARISHIONERS,
 mostly husbands of choir members, are hard at work painting
 the walls of the church.

23 INT. CHURCH MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

Julia is conducting the CHOIR rehearsal. An uptempo gospel
 number, curiously underscored by a CLANKING and BANGING from
 an unknown source as Julia and the Choir sing their hearts
 out.

24 INT. LIVING ROOM, BROWNS' HOUSE. NIGHT. (LATER)

Marguerite, alone in the house now, sits at a table repairing
 the Christmas tree decorations. Henry looks in.

HENRY
Good TV tonight?

MARGUERITE
Just the usual Christmas crap.

There is a commercial on TV which catches Henry's eye.

TV COMMERCIAL: JOE HAMILTON is pitching for one of his real estate dev elopments, a fancy golf-course development. The pitch concludes with: "Hamilton Realty. Caring about the things you care about."

MARGUERITE
Yeah, sure.

The commercial slogan repeats and the TV resumes its movie.

HENRY
Jeremiah asleep?

MARGUERITE
Julia took him with her to choir practice. It's my night off.
(takes a sip of wine)
Happy Chanukkah.

25 INT. KITCHEN, BROWNS' HOUSE. NIGHT

Henry switches on the oven and SLAMS some food in.

26 INT. CHURCH HALL. NIGHT.

The singing of the choir is gradually becoming drowned out by the RUMBLING and BANGING heard earlier. The whole room begins to vibrate. Choir members run for cover - and run to "rescue" their children as with a final EXPLOSION, STEAM shoots into the room.

CHOIR MEMBER
The boiler!

27 INT. KITCHEN, BROWNS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Henry takes down a dinner plate and rummages for a knife and fork. The phone rings.

MARGUERITE (O.S.)
Telephone!

Henry hesitates between switching off the oven and going to answer the phone as he hears Julia's panic-stricken voice on the answering machine.

JULIA (ON PHONE)
Henry! The boiler's just blown up! The whole place is flooding!

He runs from the kitchen.

28 EXT. OUTSIDE BROWNS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Henry stumbles on an icy patch as he turns onto the sidewalk towards the church, which is half a block away.

29 EXT. SAINT MATTHEW'S CHURCH - NIGHT

The church is in darkness as Henry approaches. Bright lights burn in the Meeting Hall, a low building to the left of the church. Snow is piled in graying heaps on the pathway to the church door. Members of the CHOIR are coming out as Henry races up.

CHOIR MEMBER

You got the devil in the basement there.

He scurries past them into the building.

HENRY

Careful on the ice. Don't worry...

30 INT. BOILER ROOM, CHURCH - NIGHT

The place has an inch of water in all directions. The boiler has been switched off, tiny vents of steam still emanating from broken pipework near the ceiling. Henry runs into the room, stares at the catastrophe.

HENRY

Oh dear God.

He reaches to shut off a valve, burns his fingers, jumps back and stares at it. It is an ancient installation with vast piping. It HISSES and CLUNKS like a grumbling old man. Henry speaks to it as if it were human:

HENRY

You could have hung on. Why'd you do this to me now?

Julia enters and stands behind him silently for a moment.

JULIA

We can fix it. We've done it before.

(reaching for a valve)
Last time, remember, I just shut the....

HENRY

Don't! There's nothing you can do.

JULIA
You don't know if you don't try.

HENRY
I tried. I burned my hand.

He stops her from touching the pipework. Julia looks at him. Henry touches her sympathetically before leaving the room.

31 INT. MEETING HALL - NIGHT

Jeremiah is waiting for Henry as he emerges.

JEREMIAH
Momma was crying.

Henry picks up his son.

HENRY
She got a little scared, that's all. She'll be okay.

JEREMIAH
She was running all over the place, asking God to help us.

Julia enters, picks up her coat and closes the piano lid. Henry switches out the lights, plunging the place into darkness.

32 INT. KITCHEN, BROWNS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Henry, Julia and Jeremiah enter by the rear door of the house. There is smoke pouring out of the oven as they enter. Henry rushes to switch it off, checks the burned food inside. Jeremiah laughs at and blows the smoke in the air. Domestic accident, no danger. As Julia takes Jeremiah's hand and leads him upstairs, Henry strides towards the living room.

HENRY
Marguerite!

33 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Marguerite is sound asleep on the chair.

34 INT. JEREMIAH'S ROOM - NIGHT

Jeremiah lies in bed, his eyes clenched tightly shut, Julia at the bed beside him.

JEREMIAH
... and Mom and Dad and Hakim,
Amen. I'm going to be sad
tomorrow.

JULIA
We all will.

Julia bends and kisses him goodnight, turning to find Henry, in his pajamas, standing in the doorway.

JEREMIAH

I prayed every night for Hakim to stay. How come God didn't answer?

Henry steps to the bedside.

HENRY

He did, son, he did.

JEREMIAH

But he's going away!

HENRY

God answers all prayers. It's just that sometimes His answer... is no.

Jeremiah is silent.

HENRY

We don't know why, but He has a reason. And one day, He'll reveal it to us.

Julia is moved by this answer. She puts a hand of comfort on Henry's arm.

HENRY

Goodnight.

Jeremiah turns over to sleep.

JEREMIAH

Leave the door open.

Julia and Henry step out of the room, half closing the door.

35 INT. BROWN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A pair of skates stand on a chair in the bedroom. There are photos of Henry in a hockey outfit, posing with his team and alone.

HENRY

Why did they have to find him a foster home on the other side of the state! There must be good couples in the next block.

Julia has been searching through a drawer for a nightgown she likes. She looks over to Henry, already in bed. She sits on the bed and as part of their routine he reaches up and undoes the back of the necklace she has been wearing.

JULIA
You did everything you could,
hon:

Her hand touches his hand at the back of her neck.

HENRY
It wasn't enough. It never is.
She gets up and pulls on a pair of thick woolly pajamas.

HENRY
New pajamas?

JULIA
You gave them to me for my
birthday two years ago.

HENRY
Oh-oh.
(she laughs)
Guess you don't wear them too
often.

JULIA
Yes I do. Far too often.

HENRY
Oh-oh.

JULIA
(starts in earnest)
You know I've been thinking....

Henry sees she wants to talk. But he doesn't.

HENRY
Can we do this in the morning?
I'm beat.

Julia is stopped. She studies him a moment and replies:

JULIA
In the morning's fine.

She gets into bed and switches off the light.

HENRY
Goodnight.

JULIA
Goodnight.

They lie side by side in a cold peace.

36 INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Julia takes the wine and corks it, putting it on a shelf. The phone RINGS and the machine picks up. Julia peers out the window.

HER P.O.V.: Jeremiah and Hakim are playing in the snow, putting finishing touches to their snowman.

37 INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Henry looks at his clerical collar - it is badly frayed. He opens the laundry basket and picks out the cleanest one. Then he pours coffee as Julia enters.

HENRY

I'm sorry, hon. I was completely out of it last night. The boiler was just the last straw...

He looks up, to realize that Julia is standing there in tears. She half turns away, to conceal her tears as Henry crosses and folds her into his arms.

HENRY

Oh, come on Julia, don't cry. It'll be all right.

She sobs loudly.

HENRY

I know it's been tough. My fault.

The phone starts to RING again.

JULIA

If only saying it made it all right.

HENRY

If you listened, you'd have heard an apology, Julia. Not a big one, but a start.

JULIA (with resignation)

No. What I heard was a man saying: How do I deal with this fast enough to get on with the rest of my day?

HENRY (overreacting)

That's unfair and I resent it.

JULIA (reasonably)

Honey, you said "Can we do this in the morning?"

(more)

JULIA (Cont'd)
Like getting around to dealing
with a bad smell.

HENRY
That's enough, Julia! Cut it
out!

Marguerite bangs open the door in time to hear the angrily
raised voice.

MARGUERITE
Anna Eldridge on the phone. The
Public Defender will be at her
house at nine thirty.

HENRY
(checks his watch)
Nine thirty!

He looks at Julia once, then turns, grabs his coat and runs
out of the house. Julia reaches for a Kleenex under
Marguerite's baleful stare.

MARGUERITE
Just when things were looking up
for the two of you, huh?

38 EXT. OUTSIDE BROWNS' HOUSE - MORNING

Henry wipes the dusting of snow off the family's car and gets
in. The engine GROANS and FAILS. Flat battery. He drops his
head onto the steering wheel.

HENRY
Everything's going wrong.

He gets out, opens the hood and stares at the engine.

HENRY
Dear God, I can't take one more
thing... Please, help me!

Then as he lowers the hood again.....DUDLEY IS REVEALED,
standing right there, smiling pleasantly. Henry jumps with
surprise.

HENRY
What can I do for you?

DUDLEY
That isn't the question.

HENRY
What is?

DUDLEY
What can I do for you?

Henry, puzzled by this stranger standing there, finally moves around him, opens the trunk of the car and takes out jumper cables.

He lifts the hood, lays the leads beside the battery and then walks back to a power point in the front yard.

DUDLEY

You asked for help.

As Henry returns to the car and connects the charging leads, Marguerite opens the front door and calls out:

MARGUERITE

Joe Hamilton on the phone.

HENRY

Could you ask Julia to...

MARGUERITE

You know Julia won't talk to him.

HENRY

Then can you find out what he wants?

MARGUERITE

He's confirming the meeting at eleven.

HENRY

Tell him I'll be there.

Marguerite remains a moment, puzzled perhaps at the man standing talking to her son-in-law, then returns to the house. Henry checks the jump leads, uneasily aware of Dudley's still presence.

HENRY

Look, if it's church business, my office opens at nine thirty. I'm in quite a hurry right now.

DUDLEY

By the time you get there, the lawyer will be leaving.

Henry stops in his tracks. Astounded.

HENRY

Who are you?

DUDLEY

It's a little difficult to explain.

Henry lowers the hood gently.

DUDLEY

If I tell people the truth, it
always has consequences. So on
the whole I don't.

HENRY

Okay, that's fine.

Henry locks the cars and prepares to walk.

DUDLEY

Of course I'm permitted to tell
you.

HENRY

Goodie.

DUDLEY

My name is Dudley. I'm an angel.

HENRY

I beg your pardon?

DUDLEY

An angel.

HENRY

Of course you are.

DUDLEY

I know. It's hard to believe,
even for you. But angels can't
lie, we're not allowed to.

(holds up a small book)

It's in the angel handbook. Not
even little white lies.

(smiles at Henry)

I was sent in answer to your
request.

HENRY

My request.

DUDLEY

For help.

Henry is silenced, remembering his prayer.

DUDLEY

You're known to be a good man,
Henry. And your call was heard.
There's a rotation of us and my
number came up. First time in
ages.

HENRY

Bronze age? Iron age?

DUDLEY

No, no. I died in 1952. But I haven't been back to earth since - I'm no good with dates - "Sugar Shack" was a hit.

(hums a little)

Sixty-three was it?

HENRY

Uh-huh. Dudley.

(Dudley nods)

I never heard of an angel called Dudley. Must be from part of the Bible that's missing.

DUDLEY

We use the names we had here, on earth. It's only Gabriel and them - archangels - in the Bible. I'm just the regular kind.

HENRY

A regular kind of angel.

They reach the nearby bus stop, as the MTA pulls up.

DUDLEY

Look, I know it's difficult to believe. But the fact is we're sent down all the time. Helping people in distress who pray for help.

HENRY

Great, then why don't you fix my car?

Dudley can't answer because the MTA bus door opens and Henry scrambles on board.

39 INT. MTA BUS - MORNING

Henry pays the fare and moves down the bus. Dudley climbs on but turns out his pockets to show the DRIVER he has no money. The Driver pushes Dudley in the chest and Dudley backs off the bus again. The doors close and the bus ACCELERATES. Henry looks through the window at Dudley, standing forlornly on the street, as the bus drives off.

40 EXT. ELBOW STREET - DAY

Henry gets off the bus and heads down a side street. He checks a piece of paper in his pocket for the address. And to his utter astonishment finds Dudley standing right in front of him.

DUDLEY

The Eldridge house is on the corner.

Henry checks and realizes this is correct. He stares at Dudley.

DUDLEY

Let me guess. You think I must be nuts. Either that or you are.

HENRY

You're in the right ball park.

DUDLEY

Look, you're busy right now...

Henry walks down the street, Dudley keeping up.

DUDLEY

... I just need to explain the rules.

HENRY

There's a rotation, it was your number, I know.

DUDLEY

Right.

(checks his handbook)
But we can't do anything that you should be doing.

HENRY

(humoring himself)
I should hope not. If I'm doing it, that'd be two of us doing it.

DUDLEY

I'm sorry?

HENRY

Forget it.

DUDLEY

Anyway, anything you do has to be done by your own free will.
That's number one.

They have reached the corner. Henry gapes as ARLENE CHATTAN, the Public Defender, exits the Eldridge house and walks off.

DUDLEY

(checks book again)
Number two is when I leave, you know, mission accomplished, you won't have any memory of me.

HENRY

Well, number two's a blessing.

DUDLEY

It saves complications.

HENRY

Of course. Life is complicated enough, right? Well, drop by again sometimes. Maybe then you'll be Saint Peter or Moses or Elvis.

DUDLEY

I'm afraid Elvis isn't even up there.

HENRY

Merry Christmas.

He turns away.

DUDLEY

We need to talk, Henry!

HENRY

My office is open. Gloria will make you an appointment.

Henry runs up the steps of the apartment building. Presses the top doorbell and looks back to the street. Dudley has vanished.

Henry is so surprised by this that he steps back into the street to look. No sign of Dudley. Anna opens the door and Henry steps inside.

41 INT. KITCHEN, BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

Jeremiah sits at the kitchen table, his legs kicking the air, staring gloomily into his cornflakes. Across the table, Hakim, in a bomber jacket, sits in an identical position, just as unhappy. Julia looks at them both with a grimace of pity.

JULIA

We can phone Hakim sometime and I'll teach you how to write so you can send letters to him.

JEREMIAH (to Hakim)

The house you're going to has a mom and dad?

Hakim shrugs.

JEREMIAH
Will you have brothers to play
with?

Another shrug.

JEREMIAH
Jesus didn't.

42 INT. HENRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Dudley looks around the room, which is very untidy. He sees a notepad with scrawled shorthand on it. Decides this is a task he can help with. He sits in front of the computer, pushing at keys but baffled that nothing is happening. Presses a switch - and leaps back, startled, as the computer BEEPS and boots up. He smiles with childish delight, watching the opening menu appear. Then he delicately presses a key. The computer BUZZES angrily.

PASSWORD?? appears on the screen.

Dudley closes his eyes and concentrates. The password is disclosed to him. He types it and the computer opens a document file. Dudley smiles, getting the hang of this.

43 INT. KITCHEN, BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

The kitchen door opens and GLORIA DUBOIS enters. Gloria is in her mid-twenties and is Henry's secretary, a job for which she is only marginally qualified. If she were blonde the word "dumb" might be used. But her dreadlocks and ready smile give her a kind of sweet seriousness.

GLORIA
Morning, Julia. Hi, boys.

No one replies to her greeting.

GLORIA
I brought the mail in.

She holds up a bundle of letters as if it were an achievement. Still no response.

GLORIA
Anyone want to open it?

An offer which is usually taken up enthusiastically, but on this occasion is not.

GLORIA
Well. I'll just take it straight
to the office, then.

Gloria, baffled by the gloom, exits through the living room.

JULIA
You could have said good morning
to Gloria.

Jeremiah studies her a moment.

JEREMIAH
You didn't.

44 INT. HENRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Gloria enters, startled to find Dudley examining the framed awards and commendations on the walls. He beams a greeting.

DUDLEY
Hello, there.

GLORIA
You waitin' for the Reverend?

Dudley uses his finger to dust off a framed newspaper page:
"LOCAL REV GALVANIZES NEIGHBORHOOD AGAINST CRIME."

DUDLEY
I'm his new assistant. My name's
Dudley.

Gloria, feeling her job threatened, crosses to her desk.

DUDLEY
I did the letters he dictated
yesterday. Once I figured out
that fancy typewriter.

GLORIA
Oh, my Lord, a new assistant. Am
I going to get fired?

DUDLEY
No, no, I'm only temporary.

GLORIA
You did these? By yourself?

She gazes at the beautifully printed letters, all neatly
pinned together, ready for signature.

DUDLEY
I made some coffee.

GLORIA
You make coffee, too?

DUDLEY
Once I got the hang of it.

Her anxiety isn't entirely abated as he pours from the coffee
machine in the corner.

GLORIA

Yeah, this one took me six weeks to figure out.

DUDLEY

Perhaps, after coffee, you'd introduce me to Mrs. Brown.

GLORIA (relieved)

Julia? sure.
(after a moment)
Who let you in?

DUDLEY

I went with Henry to one of his parishioners who's in trouble.

GLORIA

Oh.

DUDLEY

(changes the subject quickly)
Now you have a daughter, I believe?

GLORIA

Camille. She's almost two.

Gloria reaches for a photograph to show him. She likes this guy. He looks at the photo over her shoulder.

DUDLEY

You smell wonderful. What's that called?

GLORIA

Soap.

DUDLEY

Oh. It's just... I haven't smelled a woman's perfume in quite some time.

GLORIA

I'll get you a bar for Christmas.

45 INT. KITCHEN, BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

The two kids are working on writing. The front door bell RINGS. They all freeze, knowing it's the moment for Hakim's departure. Julia goes to answer it.

JEREMIAH

You could hide.

Hakim shakes his head sadly, resigned. Jeremiah jumps off the chair and goes to raid a kitchen cupboard.

He returns with six Hershey bars which he stuffs into Hakim's coat.

JEREMIAH

Here. They might starve you.

Hakim accepts these, tucking them away solemnly as Julia returns with ROBBIE, from Children's Protective Services.

ROBBIE

Hi, guys. Hakim gets to ride in a train today. We're running a little late...

Julia picks up Hakim's suitcase from the corner where it has been stored.

JULIA

We'll go say goodbye out front.

Hakim struggles against tears. Robbie gently touches his shoulder and steers him towards the doorway. Jeremiah folds himself into his mother's skirt.

46 EXT. OUTSIDE BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

Dudley is watching from the office window.

Hakim sits in the back of Robbie's car, staring out at Jeremiah. Jeremiah raises an arm to wave farewell.

Hakim responds with a sad wave.

Julia bites back her own tears.

47 INT. HENRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Dudley, pained by the sight outside, turns away from the window.

DUDLEY

(aloud, to himself)
For all good and all merciful,
sometimes You're just a little
tough to figure.

Gloria looks around, assuming he's talking to her,

GLORIA

Not once you get to know me
better.

48 EXT. OUTSIDE BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

The car drives off. Hakim looks out through the back window and then the car turns a corner and is gone. Jeremiah fights back tears. He faces the snowman he made with Hakim. Then kicks it until it collapses before rushing inside.

49 INT. ENTRANCE HALL/LIVING ROOM, BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

Jeremiah passes Marguerite on the stairs and runs into his bedroom. Julia stands in the hallway, undecided whether to follow him. Her thoughts are interrupted as the office door opens and Dudley emerges with Gloria.

GLORIA

Julia, this is the Reverend's new assistant, Dudley.

JULIA

(distracted, her mind
still on Jeremiah)

Assistant? Well, that's just wonderful. I've been praying for someone to help him.

DUDLEY

And your prayers were heard.

JULIA (frowns)

Henry never said a word about....you work for The Church Council?

DUDLEY

Not exactly, but I was assigned by the country's top man himself. "You are needed," he said. So here I am, Mrs Brown.

JULIA

Julia.

There is a beat where they both gaze at one another. The moment is interrupted by Marguerite's arrival.

GLORIA

This is Julia's mom, Mrs. Coleman.

DUDLEY

Of course. You can see where Julia's beauty comes from.

Marguerite melts at this compliment, quickly glances into the nearest reflective surface.

MARGUERITE

And me with my hair looking like this!

Julia takes her mother's arm and leads her towards the living room.

JULIA

Well Mr....

DUDLEY

Dudley.

JULIA

Dudley. You're very welcome
here. Excuse us.

Gloria returns to the office as Julia and Marguerite enter
the living room. Dudley looks up the staircase.

50 INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY.

As the door closes, Julia looks to her mother for comfort,
but Marguerite is still pondering her meeting with Dudley.

MARGUERITE

Now that's what I call good
looking.(Julia hasn't caught
up)

Mr Charm, the new assistant.

(Julia nods agreement)

Henry needs all the help he can
get.

JULIA

I keep trying to be there for
him. But if he doesn't even tell
me....(thoughts tumbling out
of her)Ever since they went and closed
the Youth Center, Henry just gave
up on everything.

MARGUERITE

So get right in there and help
lift him up again.

Julia accepts the reprimand without comment, giving her
mother a quick kiss on the cheek.

JULIA

I gotta go lift Jeremiah up
first.

MARGUERITE

What?

Julia pauses at the door, half opening it.

JULIA

The agency took Hakim to his
foster home.

MARGUERITE

His grandma went to the hospital?

JULIA
(shakes her head)
This afternoon. They didn't want
him seeing her go off in an
ambulance.

51 INT. HALLWAY, BROWNS' HOUSE. DAY.

Gloria comes out of the office, a sheaf of papers in her hand.

GLORIA
Would you look at these letters
he typed? Works of art.

JULIA
Gloria, I've just got to.....
where did Dudley go?

GLORIA
He went upstairs to get
acquainted with Jeremiah.

She frowns, puzzled, and runs upstairs.

52 INT. JEREMIAH'S ROOM - DAY

Julia stops in the open doorway, pulling back as she sees
Jeremiah happily chattering to Dudley, both of them on the
floor examining a toy ambulance.

JEREMIAH
The battery got stoled. The
lights don't work.

Dudley takes the ambulance and examines it.

DUDLEY
Oh yes, this is nice.

Julia, seeing her son is content, slips away again.
Suddenly, the ambulance's flashing red lights FLICKER to
life. The tiny SIREN which starts to WAIL. Jeremiah reacts,
enchanted.

JEREMIAH
It never had a siren.

Dudley grimaces at his mistake and then speaks gently:

DUDLEY
I'm sorry about your friend,
Hakim.

Jeremiah looks up at Dudley, trust and hope in his eyes. As
Dudley begins to speak, we FADE SOUND OUT on the scene.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I don't remember what he said.
But I know it was the only time
in my life I ever felt... there
was a reason for everything.

53 INT. BAIL COURT - DAY

Arlene Chattan, the Public Defender, sits alongside Billy. On his other side is a CHILD WELFARE OFFICER. Behind them in the busy courtroom are Henry and Anna. The JUDGE, a thin woman, looks up.

ARLENE

My client, Billy Eldridge, was
sent by his mother to return a
video rental when he...

JUDGE

It's all here, Miss Chattan.

ARLENE

The Reverend Brown is willing to
testify to character... and post
bail.

The Judge peers over her mountain of case files at Henry, who rises to his feet. He is tired, defeated.

HENRY

Billy Eldridge is a good kid,
judge.

She smiles frostily. Henry sits down. The CLERK whispers with her briefly.

JUDGE

This is a serious felony. I need
forty-eight hours for reports on
his background, police record.

(Henry tries to speak
again)

Meantime, I'm ordering the remand
in custody to be continued. Next
case.

Henry gets to his feet once more.

HENRY

Can I address the Court?

JUDGE

Thank you, Reverend, but we're
moving right along here.

HENRY

You may have noticed with all the decorations in the streets and in the houses that it's almost Christmas! Whatever he may or may not have done, this is not a hardened criminal....

JUDGE

You'll be keeping him company, if you say another word.

HENRY

But...

JUDGE

(raps her gavel)

One word!

Henry is frustrated and completely defeated.

CLERK

Case number eight-O-two, the State versus Jaskan...

Henry walks, slumped, out of the court, not even catching Billy's eye as he leaves.

54 INT. HENRY'S OFFICE - DAY

The front door BANGS hard, o.s. Almost at once the office door opens and Henry strides in, still beaten by his impotence to help. He is astounded to find Dudley, crouched on the floor amidst the tidal wave of papers, magazines, bulletins, etc., with Jeremiah. They are building a Bethlehem scene from soap boxes and cardboard, the tiny village, the stable and a tottering star above. Henry stumbles to a halt.

HENRY

So much for rule two. I remember you!

(calls out)

Gloria?

(louder)

Gloria, I need you!!

DUDLEY

I gave her time off to do some Christmas shopping.

HENRY

You gave my...?

JEREMIAH

Dad... Hakim went away. To his new family.

Henry crouches down, taking his son's shoulders between his hands.

HENRY
I know, I'm sorry.

JEREMIAH
(looking to Dudley)
He'll be okay when he gets used to it.
(to Henry)
I was sad.

HENRY
We're all sad.

Henry cradles his son's head, but remains fixed on Dudley who picks up the file of typed correspondence to show Henry, who gazes at it in astonishment.

HENRY
What are you doing here?

DUDLEY
Answering your request, I told you. And Julia's. Here she is.

Henry looks around. No Julia. But in that instant, the door opens and Julia enters.

JULIA
Hi, Dudley!

Henry frowns at the warm smile which Dudley flashes at Julia. And contrasts this with her chilly greeting to himself.

JULIA
You're back.

HENRY
I work here.

JULIA
What happened with Billy Eldridge?

HENRY
They're holding him.

JULIA
In juvie? But if he's innocent...

HENRY
Look, I tried. But the truth is Billy's been in juvenile court before....

JULIA
Five years ago. He was a child.

HENRY
I've done everything I could.

JULIA
Poppa used to say: "even enough
isn't enough when somebody's
still hurting."

HENRY (flaring)
What do you expect me to....?

He cuts himself off, not wanting to have a row in front of
Jeremiah. Julia turns to Jeremiah:

JULIA
C'mon, sweetie, you and me and
Grandma've got the Christmas
baskets to get ready.

JEREMIAH
Daddy's taking me ice skating
tomorrow.
(spells it)
I-C-E... ice.

DUDLEY
Right! So "nice" is..?

JEREMIAH
N-I-C-E... nice.

DUDLEY
Mice?

JEREMIAH
M-I-C-E... mice.

Julia beams with delight.

JULIA
That's great! Were you ever a
teacher, Dudley?

DUDLEY
No, actually I was a piano
player. Knocked around a while.
Then I was just getting some real
paying gigs when the good Lord
stopped me dead in my tracks.
But that's a whole other story.

JULIA
Well, you surely have a gift for
teaching.

DUDLEY

Nah, I just spent a little time with him this morning.

JULIA

Time is what it takes.

(to Henry)

You won't forget you're taking him shopping.

HENRY

Hmn? Oh, yes. One o'clock. Hermans.

Julia exits with Jeremiah, who repeats the spellings aloud. Henry turns away to busy himself in something else. He examines the file of typed letters with growing astonishment.

HENRY

These are perfect.

DUDLEY

Oh good.

HENRY

Gloria never typed a perfect letter in her life.

DUDLEY

I did those. Once I'd figured out that new-fangled typewriter...

HENRY

Look, let's get this straight - I don't appreciate some stranger coming into my office and...

DUDLEY

Angels are hardly strangers, Henry.

HENRY

Oh, please. You're not going around telling my family this angel story...?

DUDLEY

No. Just you.

Henry stares at the letters again, as if they held a secret.

DUDLEY

By the way, I made a list...
(holds up a typed sheet)
Things to fix.

Henry looks at the list with astonishment.

DUDLEY

The boiler's there. But I put
Julia, the church, stuff like
that a little higher up.

HENRY

Is that what you've got to offer?
A list??

DUDLEY

(taps his handbook)
Henry, I'm here to get you up and
running again. Put you and Julia
back on track. Show you that you
haven't been forgotten....

HENRY (angry)

Oh, would you stop this!? I'll
deal with my own problems!

DUDLEY

Can I say one thing?

HENRY

I don't want to hear it!

Dudley is serene as he quickly slips in:

DUDLEY

... You're going to be late for
your meeting with Joe Hamilton.

Henry is stopped in his tracks.

HENRY

Oh God.

(looks at the chaos of
the room)

This place is a mess. When
Gloria gets finished shopping...

DUDLEY

I'll take care of...

HENRY

Don't! Just leave me alone!

As he stomps out, Dudley can be heard calling after him:

DUDLEY

You don't mean that, Henry!

55 EXT. OUTSIDE BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

Henry has disconnected the jumper cables and now stows them
in the truck.

He glances at the house as he gets into their car. It STARTS first try. Henry drives off as Dudley appears on the front porch and waves. Henry doesn't see him.

56 INT. LIVING ROOM, BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

Julia, Marguerite and Jeremiah are preparing Christmas baskets; little baskets of items for giving to selected members of the parish. The gifts are inexpensive tokens. Julia calls out to the hallway:

JULIA

Dudley!

Dudley steps - instantly - into the doorway, startling her.

JULIA

Oh. Hi. Uh, why not give us a hand? You could take the price stickers off.

Dudley pulls athletic socks from a box and removes the sticker.

MARGUERITE

Gym socks! Nothing says "Merry Christmas" like gym socks.

Marguerite puts the item into the tiny basket, Julia twists Xmas paper around it and Jeremiah adds the ribbon flowers.

Julia looks at her son, sees that Jeremiah is still thinking of other things. She ponders a moment, then makes a move to cheer him. She starts singing softly:

JULIA

(sings)

On the first day of Christmas My
true love sent to me... gym
socks in a pear tree.

Jeremiah laughs at this. Marguerite, picking up on the idea, searches for a different item and holds it up.

JULIA

(sings)

On the second day of Christmas My
true love sent to me Two cocktail
nuts And gym socks in a pear
tree...

Marguerite joins in the singing. Jeremiah is enjoying this.

57 INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Gloria returns, puts some packages down and, hearing the singing, heads to the living room.

58 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dudley has joined the mini-production line as Gloria peers around the door, smiles at the sight of them all singing and working away.

MARGUERITE/JULIA/DUDLEY

(sing)

On the fifth day of Christmas My
true love gave to me Fiiiive cans
of Spam!

Still smiling, Gloria exits.

59 INT. HENRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Gloria gasps at what she sees: the office is immaculately tidy.

60 EXT. HAMILTON'S OFFICE - DAY

We PAN UP to the top floors of a sleek downtown highrise. .

61 INT. RECEPTION AREA - DAY

The hallways are cluttered with real estate posters, announcing dream developments and schemes. MEN and WOMEN in business suits bustle in and out of offices. Henry enters. The RECEPTIONIST greets him and escorts him towards a large double door.

62 INT. HAMILTON'S OFFICE - DAY

Joe hamilton is seated at his desk, a VIDEO CAMERA and CREW in front, as he completes his to-camera pitch for another real estate commercial: "I care about the things you care about." The session winds up and Hamilton leaps to his feet, to greet Henry warmly.

HAMILTON

The guys are next door. C'mon.
Thanks, everyone.

He turns and introduces Henry to an attractive woman, DEBORAH PAIGE.

HAMILTON

Henry, this is Debbie Paige, the station manager at WRKL. They're televising your Christmas sermon this year.

DEBORAH

We need to get your text for the teleprompter, Reverend.

HENRY

Yes. I'm working on...

HAMILTON

Later, Debbie.

He jerks Henry away, moving towards the Conference Room.

63 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

There are five people in the room, male and female TRUSTEES AND DEACONS of the church, several seen in Henry's congregation, together with his friend, Saul. They are grouped around a center table that carries a superb scale model of a modern church complex. Hamilton leads him to look down at the model.

HAMILTON

That's what it'll look like when it's finished. Three, four months. What do you think?

Henry is dazzled. His fingers brush lightly over the spire.

HAMILTON

A new city landmark.

(pleased with Henry's reaction)

With everyone here we can once and for all persuade you to move into the new world.

HENRY

All we need is a boiler that works and then we'll be fine in the world we're in.

HAMILTON

Oh, come on. Look.

(opens hinged model to reveal interior)

Daycare facilities, a senior citizens' club.

(turns to him)

What I'm offering you here - with TV cameras and lighting built right in - is a pulpit to preach to the world. Your voice'll be heard from New Haven to Honolulu, from Magnolia Hill to Maine.

Henry looks from the model to Hamilton and the hopeful smiling faces of the others.

HAMILTON

All you have to say is: I'll do it.

Henry is silent, but impressed.

HAMILTON

But don't say anything until
you've heard from your friends.
From your own trustees.

Henry is surrounded, his face a picture of uncertainty.

64 INT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY

Jeremiah is riding on an electronic rocking horse. Julia, standing a few feet away, stares in the window of a lingerie store. She is gazing at a diaphanous pink nightgown.

DUDLEY (V.O.)

It's beautiful, isn't it? Go
ahead, try it on.

JULIA

We're supposed to be finding a
gift for Henry.

DUDLEY

I'd say you in that nightgown
would be all the present Henry
could want.

JULIA

A gift from Jeremiah. He decided
a New England Patriots day to day
planner would be appreciated.

Julia has another glance at the night dress.

DUDLEY

Go on. A Patriots planner and a
knockout wife would be
appreciated more.

Julia reaches around the store window and looks at the price
tag, disappointed.

JULIA

You know what they pay pre-school
teachers?

DUDLEY

No.

JULIA

One nightgown a month.

DUDLEY

Ouch.

65 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The room has fallen silent as Henry prowls around the scale
model of the new church once again.

SAUL

Out of the minor leagues and into
the hearts and minds of millions.

Henry looks him square in the eye, then turns to Hamilton.

HENRY

Joe, tell me something. What do
you get out of this deal? I
mean, you haven't been to Saint
Matt's in years.

HAMILTON

What I get is the best preacher
in the best church in New
England.

(points to model again,
pressing it home)

Remember that Youth Center they
closed? Risen from the ashes.

Henry stops, blinks at this. He's tempted.

HENRY

But my parishioners. They'll
lose....Saul, how can you....?

HAMILTON

They'll be happy to trade up,
like all of us.

SAUL

It's only a bus ride or two up
here.

HENRY

Build us a church, sure, but
build it where people live, in
their own neighborhood. Who's
going to use the Youth Center?

HAMILTON

That whole St Matt's neighborhood
is on its way down.

HENRY

Except for the people. They were
born in the parish. You were,
too.

HAMILTON

That's right. But we moved on.
On and up.

SAUL

It's the American way.

HENRY

You own a bus charter, Saul, not the Celtics.

SAUL

We're talking about progress.

HENRY

And maybe Saint Matt's just had something to do with your success.

Saul cannot deny this.

HENRY

You too, Joe. Didn't Saint Matt's give you a hand up way back? And you, Osbert? Saul?

HAMILTON

Henry, this is all irrelevant. The trustees have made their decision. Forget Saint Matt's - there's nothing you can do.

HENRY

You can't just.... tear it down!

HAMILTON

Before it falls down, sure you can.

Henry is backed into a corner.

HAMILTON

Now, I'm offering you one heck of a deal. All this. By Easter when it opens.

(the knockout punch:)

Say yes and I'll throw in the new boiler you need. Stop Saint Matt's from freezin' over Christmas if that's the price I have to pay to get you.

Henry faces him, torn with indecision.

HENRY

And if I accept...

(looks at all of them)

.... what price am I paying?

No answer. But Hamilton's a skilled horse trader.

HAMILTON

Henry - what you're looking at there - is the answer to all your problems. Now isn't it?

Henry gazes at the model church.

66 INT. HERMAN'S SODA FOUNTAIN - DAY

Julia checks her watch, looking from Dudley to the door of the store. Jeremiah drains his milkshake noisily. He is puzzled by the fact that it seems to fill up by two inches each time he drains it. But this is not only delicious, it is fun.

DUDLEY

Henry has a lot on his mind.

JULIA (sighs)

He's such a good man.

(Dudley nods)

But sometimes good isn't enough.

DUDLEY

Oh yes it is. Always.

(she doesn't argue)

How did you meet him?

JULIA

We were in adjoining strollers.
I took his pacifier and he made
a big noise about it.

DUDLEY

Who wouldn't?

JULIA

My father used to say we were
born friends.

DUDLEY

Your father and Henry got along?

JULIA

Oh sure. Poppa got him his
scholarship....

DUDLEY

Helped him get it...

JULIA

Right. Then when Henry went into
the church, poppa gave him the
parish.

Jeremiah pushes the milkshake glass away. He's had enough,
even if there is still some in the bottom.

JULIA

My father was the greatest.

DUDLEY

Poor Henry. It isn't easy being compared to a man like that. Maybe if...

The door opens and Henry comes running in. He is not pleased to see Dudley in deep conversation with Julia which, as she sees Henry enter, she breaks off almost guiltily and stands up.

HENRY

Okay, Jer, let's go shopping.

JULIA

Wait - what happened?

HENRY

I'll tell you about it later.

(to Jeremiah)

Got your wallet? Let's go.

DUDLEY

You and Julia need to talk. Why don't I take Jeremiah shopping?

Dudley, who seems to know what Henry has to tell her, looks over at Jeremiah.

DUDLEY

I'm a pretty good gift consultant.

JEREMIAH

Yes. Dudley! I want Dudley.

Julia hands Jeremiah a \$20 bill.

HENRY

Wait a minute...

(whispers urgently)

We don't even know who he is!

JULIA

Would you stop it? Dudley was assigned by the top man....they'll be just fine.

DUDLEY

I'll bring him back to the house, okay?

JULIA

Don't be late.

Dudley and Jeremiah are out of the door.

JULIA (to Henry)

Well?

Henry sits down. Then stands up. Then sits down.

HENRY

Julia...

(finally lets it out)

I've accepted Joe Hamilton's offer.

Julia bites her lip in pained surprise.

HENRY

Did you hear me?

JULIA

I heard you but I can't believe you.

A WAITER approaches.

WAITER

Can I get you anything?

HENRY

No thank you.

JULIA

Why, Henry? How could you?

HENRY

Saul was there. Turner and Mary Halford and Andy and Osbert.

JULIA

What were they doing there? They're with our church!

HENRY

And every one of them begging me, arguing with me, urging me... blackmailing me.

JULIA

Blackmail? What are you saying?

HENRY

We get a new boiler fitted tomorrow.

JULIA

He bought you? For a boiler?

Other CUSTOMERS look round at her raised voice.

HENRY

Of course not! He's building the most beautiful church you ever saw. It'll have a day-care...

JULIA
He's building a shrine to
himself!

HENRY
... with a day care centre, a
youth center, choir stalls for
over...

JULIA
(forcing herself to be
quieter, aware of the
people in the place)
How could you do this? You've
been at St Matt's more than
twelve years....

Henry is resolute with his decision.

HENRY
Twelve years - and what do I have
to show for it? A church that's
falling apart so fast we can't
keep up!

JULIA
So this is how you solve it?
Leave all the problems behind and
move uptown? Turn your back on
the people you were...

HENRY
I can't go on being the only one
to fight for the parish!

JULIA (hisses furiously)
You aren't the only one, Henry.
I'm here, fighting right
alongside you!

He is numbed by her righteous anger.

JULIA
You gave up our lives....without
even talking to me?

HENRY
Look, it solves all our problems,
don't you see that?

JULIA
And what about all our people?
They're paying a hell of a price
for a parking lot and a new
shopping mall! You plan on
letting them carve their names in
the asphalt as a memorial?

She is between tears and fury as she continues:

JULIA

My father trusted you with Saint
Matt's! How dare you walk out on
it like that?

HENRY

Okay, I'm sorry! Your father was
a saint! I'm not! But I'm here
and he isn't. Now just listen to
me, Julia...

JULIA

I can't Henry. I don't even know
who you are anymore.

She turns and runs out. Henry starts to go after her, then
stops. He stands in the restaurant, oblivious of the people
watching him. Alone.

67 EXT. OUTSIDE BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

Jeremiah and Dudley are repairing the snowman which Jeremiah
kicked down. As Julia approaches, Jeremiah runs to greet his
mother, showing her the package they bought.

JEREMIAH

I got Daddy's present. And... I
bought a fire engine for Hakim.
(whispers)
It was on sale!

They start towards the front door.

68 INT. KITCHEN, BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

Marguerite is making dough as Julia, Dudley, and Jeremiah
enter. Jeremiah jumps on a chair and starts to wash his
hands. He's done this before. Marguerite looks at her
daughter.

MARGUERITE

What is it?

JULIA

What's what?

MARGUERITE

Hey, I'm your mother.

Julia sits heavily. The wrapped gifts fall to the floor.

JULIA

Henry's taken the job at Joe
Hamilton's new church.

She looks to Dudley for consolation, wisdom or comment, but all he says is:

DUDLEY

Poor Henry.

Dudley picks up the fallen packages.

MARGUERITE

Okay, Julia, you gotta support him now. You hear me? Now is when he needs you.

Julia takes the packages from Dudley and gives them to Jeremiah.

JULIA

Hon, put these under the couch, will you? We'll wrap them...

Jeremiah scuttles off as bidden.

JULIA

C'mon, Dudley, you're coming with me to get the tree.

MARGUERITE

You hear your mother?

JULIA

I heard you, Momma. But I can't support what's wrong.

MARGUERITE

Teaching God's word is never wrong, no matter where you do it from.

JULIA

Walking away from your own people isn't right, either. Nor is making the decision without even discussing it with your wife!

MARGUERITE

Henry is the minister - it was his decision.

JULIA

Oh sure - father made decisions like that without talking you?

MARGUERITE

Sure he did.

JULIA (dismissive)

Well, it was different in those days.

MARGUERITE

Julia - Henry is his own man.
Love him for who he is.

Julia, seeing she's got no support in that quarter, scoops up her purse, pausing in her anger as Jeremiah runs back into the kitchen and bites back any more angry words.

JULIA

You two be okay?

MARGUERITE (letting it go)

We'll bake these and then...

JEREMIAH

Then do writing!

JULIA

Sounds good to me.

MARGUERITE

If baking and writing sounds good
to you - you've led a sheltered
life. I blame myself.

Dudley is smiling his approval of Marguerite as Julia exits.
He has to run to catch up.

69 EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

They finish strapping the tree to the roof of the car. One of the branches catches Julia and she hits out at it. Dudley looks across to her.

DUDLEY

Getting angry with a dead tree
won't help.

She is about to respond, then laughs at herself, sucking her finger where she pricked it on the tree. Dudley reaches for her hand to examine it. Not serious.

DUDLEY

Would you like to have your palm
read?

She half withdraws then, as if on a dare, she relaxes, her eyes sparkling. Dudley looks into her eyes. Then he looks away quickly.

DUDLEY

I see a beautiful woman who if
she opens her eyes will see that
everything she wants is right
there, close, right in front of
her.

She jiggles her hand in his.

JULIA
Oh sure. And what about Saint
Matt's? You see it as a shopping
mall?

DUDLEY
Hard to tell. It's not very
clear.

JULIA
(shivers in the cold)
And us? Can you see Henry and
me?

DUDLEY
Henry? Oh well... see...
(very gently)
Love is like a fire in the
hearth. You need to add good
fuel every day. If you throw
some dry sticks on - it'll burn
bright, but it'll die quickly.
And it won't be warm any longer.

Julia smiles faintly, enjoying his metaphor.

JULIA
So if you can read the future
in...

She breaks off, realizing that he hasn't looked down at her
hand. She pulls it away.

JULIA
You didn't even look at my hand!

Dudley smiles serenely.

DUDLEY
No, but I held it.

Julia, realizing this might be edging towards a come-on now,
moves away, starting to get into the car.

JULIA
Dudley, maybe we better...

DUDLEY
C'mon. Let me show you
something.

He gets into the car.

JULIA
Show me what?

DUDLEY
Just a few blocks away.

She looks at him - hesitates - and then with a smiling shrug, she gets into the car.

70 INT. BOILER ROOM, ST. MATTHEW'S - DAY

A SQUAD OF WORKMEN, their breath clouding the chill air, have disassembled the old boiler, stacking it against the wall where it seems to be sulking as it watches them install an upstart new system. Henry, wrapped in an overcoat and as cold as everyone else in the room, stands amidst the mess gazing at the imminent arrival of warmth. THE FOREMAN acknowledges Henry's presence as he studies a wiring diagram.

FOREMAN

It'll be running Christmas Eve.
You know what this is costing?

Henry stares at the Foreman for a long moment before replying:

HENRY

Yes. Thirty pieces of silver.

The Foreman doesn't get it. Henry remains a moment longer, then steps over the debris and exits.

71 INT. ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH - DAY

Henry kneels for a moment in silent prayer then walks slowly out, noticing as he goes that the rear pews are falling apart. He pushes the back of the pew with his hand and it collapses. He looks at the altar, almost accusingly. Then he exits.

72 INT. ENTRY LEVEL, JAZZIE'S - DAY

A lively restaurant-club kind of place. A JAZZ QUINTET plays on the stage. People venture in for music, seafood, atmosphere, and dancing. The room is large yet intimate, with booths around the outside and a customary DRUNK at the bar.

As Julia and Dudley enter, she turns to him.

JULIA

How did you know about....?

DUDLEY

I knew.

JULIA

Did Henry tell you?

Dudley is stumped. Angels can't tell lies. But he is saved by the arrival of the MAITRE D who gestures them to follow him downstairs.

73 INT. LOWER LEVEL, JAZZIE'S - DAY

Dudley TINKS glasses with Julia. But he does not drink. Their eyes meet and Dudley looks away.

DUDLEY

Henry asked you to marry him
right at that table over there.

Julia looks to where he's indicating. Dudley studies her again, approvingly.

JULIA

How on earth did you...? He did
tell you!

DUDLEY

You two were together all the
time.

JULIA

Couldn't squeeze a dime between
us.

Slowly she looks back at him, momentarily startled by the fact that he immediately averts his gaze again.

JULIA

What happened, Dudley? It isn't
the same.

DUDLEY

Everybody changes. It's called
growing.

Julia doesn't notice, but Dudley isn't drinking. The liquor in his glass gets imperceptibly lower.

JULIA (reflectively)

Then he's growing into somebody
who doesn't even see me.

DUDLEY

He just doesn't know where to
find you.

JULIA

I'm right here! The woman he
looks through.

They are interrupted by a SHADOW falling on them.

BRITSLOE

Jules?!

She turns and sees WILLIAM "BRITSLOE" JACOBS standing behind her, in his sixties, manner smooth as silk.

JULIA
You're here! I thought you were
working in Paris.

BRITSLOE
I've been back awhile. You two
never come by these days.

Britsloe slides into the booth next to her, smile a mile
wide, putting his beeper down on the table in front of him.

JULIA
Well, Henry's been real busy.
But it's great to see you.

BRITSLOE
You, too. Your old man changed
my life. I surely owe him.

Dudley watches Julia's reaction. She smiles sweetly.

JULIA
You call him and tell him.

Britsloe slides closer to Julia.

BRITSLOE
How you doing, sweet thing?

JULIA
Britsloe, this is my new friend,
Dudley. Dudley, Britsloe.

BRITSLOE
Pure pleasure.

Dudley, hearing Britsloe's name, reacts like a star-struck
fan.

DUDLEY
Britsloe Jacobs! I used to have
all your LPs.

BRITSLOE
My "LPs"? Tell me we're both too
young to remember vinyl.

DUDLEY
I was a piano player, too. Not
like you. I mean, just... but I
played a couple of gigs with
Berry Gibson - he was your
drummer on "Summertime Blues!"

BRITSLOE
He was the thief stole my first
wife.

DUDLEY

Oh.

BRITSLOE

You married, Dudley?

DUDLEY

No, no. You know what it's like on the road. I never was lucky enough to meet someone like Julia.

BRITSLOE

That's a widely held opinion.

(to Dudley)

She used to come here when they was steppin' out. Used to torch the place down singing to him. Like there was nobody else here.

Julia smiles fondly at the memory, but doesn't deny it.

BRITSLOE

Now she just sings for the Lord.

(quickly)

Not that that's bad!

(smiles at her)

But you ever want to know what loving really sounds like - she has the secret in her voice. Now come on up and remind us, sweet thing.

JULIA

Oh, no, Britsloe, no-no.

He laughs then shakes his head.

BRITSLOE

You hear that "no-no?" It means yes-yes.

Suddenly Britsloe's beeper goes off. Dudley stares at it, surprised and perplexed by the SOUND. Britsloe looks at the screen on it.

BRITSLOE

Maxine. Calls six times a day to make sure I'm being a good boy. She knows about bein' on the road.

DUDLEY

(still staring in
astonishment)

That's a telephone?

(covering his surprise)

I've never seen...

He tapers off, not knowing how to explain his ignorance.

BRITSLOE (to Julia)
C'mon now. You still do it in B
flat?

Britsloe entwines his arm around Julia's.

JULIA
I don't do it at all.

BRITSLOE
It's gonna be very unsightly if
I got to take your arm out of
your socket.

She looks to Dudley for help. He glances at the palm of his
hand.

DUDLEY
Says here you torch the place
down.

JULIA (laughing)
Says it on your hand?

DUDLEY
I'd like to know what loving
really sounds like. Please.

She is released somehow, fearful but able to do it, to follow
Britsloe up as a few of the people in the half-empty room
APPLAUD, her eyes staying pinned on Dudley as she goes.

74 FRONT STAGE. Britsloe sits at the piano, adjusts his mike,
crooks a finger at Julia to get her to approach the center
mike. The crowd quiets.

Julia searches for Dudley in the audience.

ON DUDLEY: There for her, nodding, giving her strength.

ON STAGE: Britsloe PLAYS the intro to a sweet, romantic
ballad.

She SINGS the song, Britsloe fading in the background just
the way he did years ago. She sings from her heart, setting
every hair in the house on end (even the Drunk at the bar
rouses himself to approve), torching the place right down.

Dudley shakes his head in love, disbelief and wonder as he
speaks aloud, softly:

DUDLEY
Why didn't you warn me this could
happen?
(no apparent response)
Hey! Wake up! I said...

Britsloe segues into a fierce jazz solo as Dudley watches Julia return to their booth with a smile of sublime content.

75 EXT. OUTSIDE BROWNS' HOUSE - NIGHT

The Browns' car is parked half a block away. The Christmas Tree is being marched towards the house. It has started to snow. Dudley and Julia carry the tree aloft as they walk with happy steps.

76 INT. LIVING ROOM, BROWNS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Henry is sprawled on the couch with Jeremiah; the two of them are stringing popcorn for the tree decoration.

JEREMIAH

One for you... one for me.. one
for the tree.

He pops one popcorn in Henry's mouth, one in his own, and then hands the third for Henry to string.

JEREMIAH

I got your present today.

HENRY

You did?
(gesturing to popcorn)
Another one.

Jeremiah hands one over, eats one and feeds his father one.

JEREMIAH

What're you giving Mom?

HENRY

I don't know yet. What do you
think I should get her?

JEREMIAH

I think she'd like to go to bed.

HENRY

Excuse me?

JEREMIAH

She was looking at a nightie in
the store window with Dudley.

HENRY

Was she now?

The SOUND of the front door opening, Julia calling out. Jeremiah jumps off the couch. Julia and Dudley enter, carrying the tree between them, they prop it in the corner.

JULIA

Hi, guys. What're you two up to?

Jeremiah holds up the popcorn strings. Dudley and Julia dust the pine-needles off their clothes as Henry straightens.

JULIA

We had the greatest time.

HENRY

Getting a tree? You went to the forest?

JULIA

We went to Jazzie's.

She tells him, knowing it will hurt and is pleased by Henry's look of crestfallen surprise.

HENRY

You've been at Jazzie's!?

JULIA

Britsloe was there.

DUDLEY

Julia got onstage and...

HENRY

Wait a minute! You went singing at Jazzie's all afternoon?

She flashes a look at Henry for spoiling the moment.

JULIA

We had fun. Remember what that used to be?

Henry growls.

JULIA

Maybe I sang at Jazzie's because I won't be singing in any Joe Hamilton church!

She takes Jeremiah's hand and exits with him. Dudley faces Henry, trying and failing to avoid a look of reproach.

DUDLEY

We had a really good talk. You'll be glad.

HENRY

We don't need advice from you.

DUDLEY

You're the ones called for help. I was just sitting up there waiting on rotation....

HENRY

I did not ask for somebody to come and take Julia out for a good time.

DUDLEY

You heard of mixing work with pleasure? I had to get her to remember stuff. Like why she fell in love with you.

(adds briskly)

And no easy chore at this point, I might add.

HENRY

You are entirely crazy.

DUDLEY

Okay, I'm crazy. But that doesn't change what you are.

HENRY

Oh, and what's that?

DUDLEY

A man who used to fight for the things he believed in. Now... you don't even believe in Billy Eldridge's innocence.

Henry is stopped in his tracks.

HENRY

Of course I do.

DUDLEY

You do? I don't see you fighting for him.

(Henry is silent)

Did you ever ask Billy if he was innocent?

HENRY

No, but kids lie all the time. He doesn't even come to church.

(to Dudley)

I just don't believe that some...

DUDLEY

That's your problem, right there, Henry.

HENRY

What?

DUDLEY

You "just don't believe." Oh sure, you believe in God. But not in Henry Brown any more.

(Henry is silent again)

Just because you had a few setbacks doesn't mean there aren't still things worth fighting for.

HENRY

Guess I'm just too busy having fun. I'll be damned if I'm going to listen to you.

DUDLEY

Don't then. But listen to Julia. She needs you. Listen to Jeremiah. He's hurting. Start with them.

Henry strides angrily to the door and jerks it open. Then thinks better of leaving and turns to finish the argument. He stops in his tracks. Because Dudley has gone.

Henry checks the windows, the drapes, a closet, behind the tree. No Dudley. Marguerite puts her head round the door.

MARGUERITE

We baked the pot pies you like.

HENRY

Did Dudley go out that way?

MARGUERITE

No. Goodnight, Henry.

She exits. Henry looks despairingly at a PHOTO portrait of Reverend Coleman. He shakes his head faintly.

HENRY

I'm sorry.

77 INT. JEREMIAH'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Julia is watching through the open door as Jeremiah kneels on a stool, facing the mirror and brushing his teeth at the same time as he finishes his prayers:

JEREMIAH

...and Mom and Dad and Hakim.

He bounces off the stool.

78 INT. JEREMIAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jeremiah bounces onto and into the bed, grinning up at his mother.

JEREMIAH
I did my prayers 'cause I was
already on my knees.

JULIA
(laughs, then)
Sleep well, baby.

JEREMIAH
Mom - Hakim's still my best
friend, isn't he?

Henry stands in the shadows by the doorway, listening.

JULIA
Of course he is, hon.

JEREMIAH
You're Daddy's.

JULIA
Yes.

JEREMIAH
But you can still talk to him any
time you want.

JULIA
Best friends don't have to talk.
They just have to know they're
still close wherever they are.

Her words are filled with a kind of yearning. She speaks to
Jeremiah, but her words are for Henry:

JULIA
For the rest of their lives. For
better or for worse.

Henry is moved.

HENRY
Goodnight, son.

Henry exits and Julia bends to kiss Jeremiah. He reaches for
her hand.

JEREMIAH
Can I keep a light on?

JULIA
This one?

He nods solemnly. Julia sees he is anxious still. She looks
at him, watching her closely. She knows what he wants and is
too shy to ask for.

She starts picking up and folding clothes etc. As she does so, she begins to sing. The melody is Brahm's "LULLABY" with modern lyrics. It is a simple, haunting melody.

79 INT. HENRY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Henry sits in the dark. Finally he stands up, peering in the faint light from the hallway at the photograph on the wall of his wedding day. He looks at the other memorabilia, involving St. Matt's and his life. He stands alone for a silent moment then he exits.

80 INT. JEREMIAH'S ROOM. NIGHT.

As Julia finishes singing the most beautiful lullaby ever written, she starts to leave, blowing a kiss.

JEREMIAH

Leave the door open!

She leaves the door ajar, a wedge of light coming in.

81 INT. BROWNS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Julia is asleep as Henry enters quietly. He looks down at her. Starts to reach out to touch her, then pulls his hand back. And remains standing, looking at her, as we DISSOLVE TO:

82 EXT. ST. MATTHEW'S - MORNING

Some new graffiti has been added to the church notice board. Fresh snow has fallen during the night, bathing the place in a clean white blanket. We hear the SOUND of a TRUMPET blasting.

83 INT. BROWN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Henry and Julia are woken by another TRUMPET BLAST, sounding from close by.

84 INT. KITCHEN, BROWNS' HOUSE - MORNING

Jeremiah and Dudley are both on the floor, erecting a Lego set of four walls around a small toy castle. When the walls are complete, Jeremiah sounds a BLAST on the (toy) trumpet. He laughs as the walls tumble down onto the carpeted floor.

Henry appears in the doorway, tugging on his bathrobe and watches them silently. Jeremiah, as he starts rebuilding the walls, is listening to Dudley conclude a story.

DUDLEY

...so David brought his sheep back to the fold. And he was so happy that he wrote a song all about his new friend.

JEREMIAH

What's the song?

DUDLEY

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He gives me green fields to lie in; he leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul and shows me how to do right in His name. And though I may walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil...

JEREMIAH/DUDLEY

...For He is always with me.

DUDLEY

You knew it! You know what "lord" means?

JEREMIAH

It means God.

DUDLEY

Yes. But it also means "love."
God is love.

Henry is unaware that Julia has arrived downstairs and stands behind him watching.

DUDLEY

If Love is my shepherd, I shall not want. Love restores my soul.

JEREMIAH

My daddy taught me.

DUDLEY

Your daddy's a good teacher.

Dudley stands up, touches Jeremiah's forehead as if in blessing.

DUDLEY

And tonight, you say a special prayer for your daddy. Because God hears children better than he hears anybody else.

JEREMIAH

Yeah. We talk louder.

DUDLEY

Oh, he can hear you whisper. You try.

At the door, Henry, deeply moved, gazes in silence. Both he and Julia, behind him, are startled when Dudley greets them without even looking around.

DUDLEY

Good morning, Henry. Good morning, Julia.

Henry spins around to see Julia behind him as she passes him, stepping into the room.

JULIA

Good morning, Dudley.

Henry kisses Jeremiah on the forehead, then turns and reaches for the coffee pot. Julia takes out a coffee cup. Henry puts milk on the table. Pours some coffee.

DUDLEY

So, everyone have a busy day today?

JULIA

Nativity play rehearsal.

HENRY

You can't rehearse. It's freezing in there.

JULIA

I got Nathan to loan us a room.

She pours herself a cup and starts out of the kitchen. Henry dumps his bowl of cereal in the sink as Gloria enters through the outside door.

GLORIA

The TV station called again. They need the sermon you haven't written. If I was you, on TV for the first time, I'd get writing.

Henry makes a noise in his throat and exits without reply. Jeremiah TOOTS the trumpet. But this time the walls don't fall down. He blasts again. No action.

JEREMIAH

It's broke.

Gloria exits. And the instant the door closes behind her...
...the walls of Jericho fall magically down.

85 INT. UPPER HALLWAY, BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

Julia throws a wrap around herself and calls out:

JULIA
Don't forget you're skating at
McKissack Pond. You made a
promise to your son.

HENRY (emerging, dressed)
Thank you for the reminder,
Julia. I'll be there, one
o'clock.

Jeremiah runs out of his room to give his father a hug.

HENRY
They'll have cleared the snow off
it by lunch.

JULIA (remembering)
The skates!

She steps into the bedroom and re-emerges with the skates,
handing a pair to Henry, who takes them, turns and exits.
Jeremiah slithers downstairs as Marguerite emerges, her eyes
fixed on her daughter.

MARGUERITE
Okay?

JULIA
Morning, Momma.

MARGUERITE
I said: Okay?

JULIA
No, you didn't. You said: How
are things between the sheets and
in general with that husband of
yours? And I said: Morning,
Momma.

She walks away.

86 INT. HENRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Dudley looks up brightly as Gloria enters.

DUDLEY
Gloria, you look wonderful.

She straightens her dress and sits at her desk. Dudley
continues to look at her, admiringly. Watching as she
untidies half the room looking for something she's misplaced.
Then with a grunt of triumph she lifts up the notepad with
Henry's notes scrawled on them. They were in a tidily marked
file which Gloria treats as if it were the stupidest place in
the world to hide anything.

GLORIA
I can't read his handwriting.
Look at this.

Dudley glances at the notes.

GLORIA
"Vegetables are mince sags the
lub."

DUDLEY (reads)
"Vengeance is mine says the
Lord." This is for Christmas?
(sits at the computer)
Why don't I try a draft?

He starts typing. Dudley gazes at the words appearing on the screen. It's all still magic to him. They hear Julia, o.s., calling out:

JULIA (O.S.)
C'mon, Jeremiah, we're late!

Dudley, as if suddenly drawn by a magnet, moves to the door.

DUDLEY (points)
Gloria - there's a bible, just
type in Chapter two from Luke.
I'll work it in later.

Dudley runs out to catch up with Julia as the front door
BANGS.

87 INT. NATHAN'S DISCOUNT MATTRESS WAREHOUSE - DAY

There are mattresses floor to ceiling. Queen size, double, Cal-king, striped, floral, and plain. KIDS sit, hop, roll, and bounce as an electric piano is set up for MRS. HAVERGAL, one of the church quartet. Most of the kids are in costume, shepherds, kings, sheep, etc.

Dudley watches with quiet amusement as Julia tries to organize something out of the chaos.

JULIA
Could I have the Magi out here?
Hey, Magi!

Three of the kids tumble to her feet and stand up. Jeremiah, dressed as a sheep, sits quietly watching the older children. Julia claps her hands and gets some kind of attention as the kids tumble to their pre-rehearsed places.

JULIA
We'll take it from the Magi's
entrance. Positions everyone.

A scramble to change positions and places, adjust costumes, etc. One of the girls is in a handstand, her legs arched back against the wall.

JULIA

It's a position, but not the position I had in mind, Meg-Anne.

MEG-ANNE

I get dizzy like this.

She rights herself, then stumbles around feeling dizzy and whirling her arms in all directions.

KID #

I gotta go bathroom, Miss Brown.

JULIA

You just went, Timothy.

KID #

I didn't do anything.

JULIA

Well...

(decides not to ask)

Hurry up then.

Julia looks across to Dudley, laughing indulgently at the chaos.

JULIA

Mrs. Havergal?

MRS. HAVERGAL

(at electric piano)

Let's rock and roll.

JULIA

Where's Michael? We can't do this without our Virgin Mary.

KID #

Michael ain't here.

JULIA

I see that. Where is he?

KID #

Michael hit me.

JULIA

He couldn't have hit you if he's not here.

KID #

It was Edward.

KID #
I didn't touch him.

They squabble among themselves.

KID #
Michael didn't want to be a girl.

JULIA
We talked about that. He sang it
beautifully.

Dudley finally steps forward. The squabble instantly calms
and stops. Dudley holds up the palm of his hand.

DUDLEY (to Julia)
Says here you sing Michael's part
just to get them going.

A chorus of approval for this idea from the kids.

JULIA
You keep volunteering me to do
stuff.

DUDLEY
Okay, then.

He catches the children's attention, pointing dramatically to
the ceiling.

DUDLEY (to kids)
Look up there! See that?

They all look up to beams and insulation. Dudley is
inspiring.

DUDLEY
It's a star. A bright star
burning in a wintry sky to
welcome the Son of God.

The KIDS gasp because there, suspended in space below the
ceiling, is a BRIGHTLY BURNING little star.

Julia, puzzled by the kids' reaction, looks up - but it is
evidently something only children can see. She figures that
Dudley has simply captured their imaginations.

DUDLEY
And below it, the mother with her
newborn baby in the crib. The
cattle lying in the straw...

The kids are rivetted. Julia is impressed by the magic
Dudley appears to be weaving on the kids.

DUDLEY

And the three kings who have
travelled the world, finally
finding the Messiah in this plain
little stable...

Julia gestures to Mrs. Havergal who plays the intro. Julia, filling in, begins to SING. The Magi respond. Julia's voice fills the warehouse. The Shepherds are the chorus. Dudley smiles and leans back. The song is wonderful.

He falls in love with Julia all over again. And sometimes it seems as if she is singing for him alone.

88 INT. HALLWAY, MUNICIPAL COURT. DAY.

Billy sits on a bench, handcuffed. Henry sits next to him.

BILLY

You're wasting your time, you
know that?

Henry frowns, disturbed by this fatalism.

HENRY

You ever pray, Billy?

BILLY (derisive)

Oh, yeah, right...

HENRY

Oh, too hip for that, right? Let
me ask you something. When you
play basketball, don't you hope
when you shoot that your ball
goes into the net?

BILLY

Yeah.

HENRY

Well, that's all praying is.
Hoping.

BILLY

What's the point when no one
believes me anyway?

Henry sits down, leaning in close to the boy.

HENRY

Billy - I just need you to tell
me one thing. Were you part of
this or not?

BILLY

I swear, Reverend, it was like I
said.

Henry looks into his eyes - and listens with his heart.

HENRY
When was the last time you said
a prayer, Billy?

Billy is embarrassed to reply. Henry waits patiently.

BILLY
I don't know..

Henry stands up.

HENRY
Why don't you try right now?

Billy faces him for a moment, then closes his eyes in some kind of prayer.

89 INT. MUNICIPAL COURTS, JUDGE'S CHAMBERS. DAY.

Henry enters. The Judge looks up from behind her desk.

JUDGE
Reverend Brown.

HENRY
Billy Eldridge is innocent.

JUDGE (ironic)
I have your word on that.

HENRY (feisty)
What does it take to show you?
Before he returned the video, he
got \$10 from an auto -teller.
There's a time stamp right on the
receipt.

JUDGE
The victim identified him,
Reverend.

HENRY (passionate)
No. The victim saw him standing
there! He was. Judge, you got
a million things on your docket,
but I'm here to tell you that...

JUDGE
To tell me?

HENRY
(laughs, switching to
charm as a weapon)
I work for a higher court, judge..

JUDGE (smiles faintly)
And you were going to "tell me"
to let him out on your
recognizance?

HENRY
No. He's innocent. Innocent!
I was going to tell you to drop
the charges.

JUDGE
But that's a matter for the
District Attorney.

HENRY
The DA won't prosecute if you
don't buy the evidence, judge.
And you know it isn't there!

JUDGE
(a beat)
I guess I could tell the DA that
a higher court advised me to let
him go?

Henry smiles, vindicated. The Judge smiles right back.

90 INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JUDGE'S OFFICE - DAY

Billy rises as Henry approaches.

HENRY
See? Two points. Try it again
tonight, Billy.

The Cop looks to the judge, nodding in her doorway, and moves to release the handcuffs. Henry looks down the corridor and sees Robbie, from Childrens Protective Services. He signals Billy he'll be right back and heads down to talk to Robbie.

91 EXT. MCKISSACK POND PARK - DAY

Julia, Jeremiah, dressed brightly, and Dudley in his gray coat emerge from a cab and walk through the gates into the white, frozen world of the park, resembling the stick figures in an L.S. Lowry landscape.

JEREMIAH
C'mon, Mom. Get your skates on.

JULIA
It's been a year since I... Maybe
we should wait for your father.

She looks at Dudley.

DUDLEY (innocently)
Traffic was pretty bad getting
here...

JULIA
Yes, we could freeze to death
waiting for him.

JEREMIAH
Teach me, Mom; then he can see me
skating!

Julia gives in, reaches for the bag of skates.

92 INT. BROWNS' CAR, OUTSIDE COURTHOUSE. DAY.

With Billy Eldridge beside him, Henry starts the car. The lights change to green just as Henry pulls into the traffic. He accelerates, glad his way is clear. But he brakes as the lights suddenly change again - to red.

93 EXT. MCKISSACK POND - DAY

The ancient clock above the pavilion at the edge of the pond, shows the time as 1.20. SKATERS swirl, stumble and dance on the ice. Hurdy-gurdy MUSIC plays, mingling with the LAUGHTER of the skaters. A small stand rents skates and sells hot drinks.

94 EXT. MCKISSACK POND - DAY

Julia and Jeremiah, supported by Dudley, laughingly teeter over the ground towards the ice.

JULIA
Look at this... I'm falling
already.

DUDLEY
You're not on the ice yet.

They step onto it. He glides around in front of her, holding Jeremiah's hand. She wobbles and almost falls.

JULIA
Oh-oh, I'm a mother, Dudley, I
can't die like this. Where is
Henry?

She steadies herself, then takes Jeremiah's other hand and they set off, the three of them.

JULIA
Hey, I can still do it!
(to Jeremiah)
That's the way. Gli-ding...
That's good.

Laughing and exhilarated, she leads them over the ice, through the dizzying whirl of other skaters.

95 EXT. ELBOW STREET - DAY

Henry's car pulls up and he and Billy Eldridge step out. Billy runs up the steps of his house and presses the DOORBELL. A handful of NEIGHBORS have come out to celebrate Billy's release. They call out:

NEIGHBORS

Way to go, Preacher Man! Hi there, Billy!

Moments later, Anna opens the door, throwing herself into her son's arms. Henry watches with a benign smile. Anna's sobs echo down the street, embarrassing her son. Henry mingles with the neighborhood, spotting acquaintances amongst them.

HENRY

Hey, Otis, you're too busy for the Lord on Sunday? He isn't too busy for you.

Henry sees an ELDERLY MAN from the Crossley Apartment Building.

HENRY

Larry? I had an idea when I was with the judge who let Billy out. I went and saw a high court judge - and filed an affidavit on the eviction. If it isn't answered within four days - the eviction order lapses! Now let's see if those landlords in their Florida condos wants to spend the holiday working with their lawyers!

The Elderly Man slaps him on the back. Anna crosses the street and embraces him warmly, then she, too, is swallowed up in the crowd of neighbors celebrating the prodigal's return.

96 EXT. MCKISSACK POND - DAY

Dudley watches Julia take Jeremiah around the ice. She holds him level, from time to time letting him skeeter ahead on his own, scooping him up before he falls. They both tumble into Dudley almost knocking him down. They are having a wonderful time.

97 INT. BROWNS' CAR. DAY.

Henry, now alone in the car, is once again moving through traffic, but every light seems to be a stop light. He is slowed down.

98 EXT. MCKISSACK POND. DAY.

Dudley and Julia support Jeremiah between them. As they swoop around the pond, Dudley starts to sing.

DUDLEY

(sings)

We three kings of Orient are
Tried to smoke a rubber cigar It
was loaded It exploded We didn't
get very far.

Julia joins in.

DUDLEY & JULIA

(sing)

Oh, oh, cigar of wonder Smoke of
might...

And they continue with their goofy song. Julia meets Dudley's gaze as they move with increasing fluency, passing magically through the other SKATERS, as if they weren't even there.

JEREMIAH

Time out!

Their song comes to an abrupt halt.

JEREMIAH

My feet's sore.

JULIA

C'mon, we'll get you a hot drink.

JEREMIAH

Chocolate, yeah!

She steers him towards the stand. As they wait in line:

DUDLEY (to Julia)

Want to try some more?

CONCESSIONAIRE

Can I help you?

JEREMIAH

Hot chocolate, please.

JULIA

(paying, to Jeremiah)

You be okay, hon?

JEREMIAH

Yup.

As Dudley leads Julia back onto the ice:

JULIA
Nothing too fancy now.

99 EXT. DOWNTOWN NEW HAVEN - DAY

Henry TOOTS his horn in a futile attempt to get the traffic moving. A snow-clearing VEHICLE is holding up a long line of cars.

HENRY
You were s'posed to be finished
clearing by one!

As he manages to get around the snow-clearing vehicle he comes to lights....just as they turn to red.

100 EXT. MCKISSACK POND - DAY

Jeremiah sits, cozily wrapped, sipping his hot chocolate.

On the ice, Dudley takes Julia's hand, they bow to each other, then begin to dance. Jeremiah gazes at the beautiful scene, completely rapt. Julia is fearless now, her movements fluid, her eyes locked onto Dudley's as they swoop, turn and swirl. Jeremiah claps his approval.

Julia wobbles and rights herself only by falling into Dudley's arms. He holds her around the waist, weaving backwards, smelling her hair, feeling her body next to his.

JULIA
It's like flying.

DUDLEY
Next best thing.

They skate faster now, circling each other, flowing seamlessly, sensually. It's magic and dreamlike, and the other skaters seem to fade away as if Dudley and Julia were alone in their twirling world.

Jeremiah is entranced watching his mother and Dudley.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I sat there and watched them. It
was great. It was like my mom
had become an angel, too.

Julia, shining with happiness, twirls, firmly held by her dance partner, all motion and grace. Beautiful.

JULIA
It's heaven. I'd forgotten.

DUDLEY (sourly)
Me too.

Holding hands, they skate towards Jeremiah on the bank. The other skaters whirl round them in a pattern of color.

101 INT. HENRY'S CAR - DAY

Henry can't find anywhere to park. He sees a car pull out of a space and zips towards it... only to find a fire hydrant right alongside.

HENRY

Come on, Lord, give me a hand.
This is for you.

A car pulls out of a parking space, concealed from Henry's view by a large double-parked truck.

Henry does not, therefore, see that the TAXI CAB pulling away contains Dudley, Julia, and Jeremiah. As he pulls around the truck, he sees the newly vacated space and starts to reverse into it.

HENRY

Thank you.

102 INT. TAXI CAB. DAY/DUSK

Dudley, Julia, and Jeremiah on their way home. They are singing.

JULIA/DUDLEY/JEREMIAH

Oh-oh, star of wonder, star of
night Star with royal beauty
bright Westward leading, still
proceeding Guide us with thy
perfect light.

Dudley looks straight into her eyes. She smiles. Because now he doesn't look away any longer.

103 EXT. MCKISSACK POND - DAY/DUSK

Henry runs to the edge of the pond and tugs on his skates, glancing at the faces nearby. As soon as he's ready, he launches himself onto the ice.

Skaters swirl around him. He skates through the crowd, looking for his family. But there is no sign of them. Very gradually he realizes that they have left. He is isolated amidst the crowd of swirling skaters.

104 INT. HALLWAY, BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY/DUSK

Julia struggles with removing Jeremiah's outdoor clothes. The SOUND of the TV can be heard.

105 INT. LIVING ROOM, BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY/DUSK

Marguerite dabs her eyes with tissue as she weeps, flicking between watching "MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET," "SANTA CLAUS, THE MOVIE" and "IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE" on the TV. Dudley stands behind her, watching the film as it reaches its climax.

MARGUERITE
(weeping)
I hate these movies.

Dudley watches it for a moment.

DUDLEY (scornful)
Clarence! It's easy for
Clarence!

Julia and Jeremiah enter just Marguerite switches channels again, dabbing at her tears.

JEREMIAH
Grandma's crying.

JULIA
Grandma cries at those movies
every Christmas.

The answering machine, ignored as usual, is responding to a call. Dudley stares at it, amazed and impressed by the voice in the machine. Shakes his head in wonder.

VOICE (ON MACHINE)
Henry, It's Saul. Please call
me.

Julia helps Jeremiah out of his outdoor clothes.

MARGUERITE
So skating was good, huh?

JULIA
It was wonderful. Just... magic.
Wasn't it, Dudley?

DUDLEY
It really was. Magic.

Marguerite swivels to look at her daughter sharply.

MARGUERITE
Oh my lord.

DUDLEY
We should do it again tomorrow.

MARGUERITE
Oh my lord.

Dudley now starts towards the door.

DUDLEY

I've just got a couple of chores
in the office.

As Dudley exits, Julia's eyes follow him from the room. And Marguerite sees her looking at him. She stares at her daughter, eyes narrowing.

MARGUERITE

Oh, my lord.

JULIA

What?

MARGUERITE

I'm your mother. Don't play
innocent with me.

Julia is like a child caught in a lie.

MARGUERITE

Now that... is trouble.

JULIA

No, it isn't. He's been very
kind, that's all.

MARGUERITE

That's all - and the Pope is six
months pregnant.

JULIA

Well Poppa had time for you
outside his work. Poppa wasn't
always....

MARGUERITE

Julia! You're not married to
your father! And he was no
saint, let me tell you.

(muttered aside)

Maybe now he is, but not then.

JULIA

What are you saying?

MARGUERITE

Your father had faults. He was
human.

JULIA

Are you saying father.....?

MARGUERITE

Hey, you want dirt - read The National Enquirer. All I'm saying is everybody has problems. Now you better pull yourself together, young lady. You're a married woman.

JULIA

I can look in the store window, even if I don't buy.

Julia starts out of the room and Marguerite calls after her:

MARGUERITE

Just don't go window shopping with money in your pocket!

Jeremiah hops onto the couch, gazing out the window solemnly.

106 EXT. OUTSIDE BROWNS' HOUSE - DUSK

Henry has parked a few doors away and passes the front of Saint Matthew's as he strides purposefully towards his home. He scowls at the additional graffiti scrawled over the church's notice board.

107 INT. HENRY'S OFFICE - DUSK

Dudley crumples up the pages of Henry's scrawled notes and tosses them in the fireplace. Then, cradling the phone in his ear, he looks at the computer screen where Gloria has, exactly as asked, typed in.....

ON VDU SCREEN: "LUKE, CHAPTER TWO."

Dudley smiles and then, as he talks on the phone, the words of a sermon magically appear on the screen, scrolling down, written at impossible speed.

DUDLEY

(into phone).

... Well, Saul, I'm glad you feel that way, I really am. But you were one of the parishioners that met with Mr. Hamilton, weren't you? See, I think we need to talk.

He riffles through the pages of a reference book.

DUDLEY

... No, the trustees' decision is not final...they can be outvoted by the congregation.

108 INT. BROWNS' HOUSE/HALLWAY & LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Henry scoops up his son as Jeremiah runs to greet him.

HENRY

I'm sorry, Jer, I really am. I just can't understand why the traffic was so bad. We'll go tomorrow, okay?

JEREMIAH

I did skating, Dad!

HENRY

Good for you. And I...
(a proud announcement)
I got Billy Eldridge home for Christmas!

JEREMIAH

Yay, yay! Who's Billy Eldridge...?

Julia puts aside the Christmas baskets she's working on to approach Henry.

JULIA

They dropped the charges?

HENRY

Yup.

Julia is impressed, revising her earlier harsh remarks about him.

JULIA

Oh, that's great, hon. How did you do it?

HENRY

I remembered God hears the innocent... So it wasn't that hard.

JEREMIAH

Skating isn't hard, neither!

HENRY

It isn't? Mom taught you?

JEREMIAH

Dudley and Mom. It was cool.

HENRY

Dudley went skating with you?

JULIA

Well we waited for you, Henry...

HENRY
You and Dudley?

JULIA
Yes. And Jeremiah.

HENRY (insincere)
Oh, good. I'm so glad for you.

JULIA
Henry, I'm sorry you didn't get to join us.

HENRY
Sure. But you had a good time.

JULIA
I'm sorry.

Henry exits, unwilling to talk further. Julia, feeling a little guilty, has to call out after him.

JULIA
But that's great about Billy!

Henry has left.

109 INT. HENRY'S OFFICE - DUSK

Dudley shuts down the computer with one hand while he tries to get off the phone with the other.

DUDLEY
(on phone)
So why don't you do something?
Call some people, convince them
to vote against Mr Hamilton, too.
Get them to call others.
(listens, then)
Thank you, Saul. Merry Christmas
to you.

He is putting the phone down as Henry storms into the room, closing the door firmly behind him. High noon at dusk.

DUDLEY
Ah, Henry, I'm glad you're back.
I've just been...

HENRY
Keep away from my wife!

Henry looks at several crumpled pages, balled-up paper, which lie on the desk, looking out of place in the immaculate office.

DUDLEY
What am I supposed to have done?

HENRY

You take her to lunch. You take her to Jazzies. You take her skating. What kind of man do you think I am? She happens to be my wife. And I happen to love her. Just keep the hell away from her!

DUDLEY

Henry! You're a man of God.

HENRY

Doesn't mean I'm blind! I've seen the way she looks at you.

DUDLEY

(pleased at this)

Really?

(corrects himself)

I mean: really?

HENRY

And the way you look at her.

DUDLEY

Oh...well, she's a beautiful woman...

(recovers)

And I think she likes me, a lot. But - unfortunately - it's you she loves.

HENRY

You got that right.

DUDLEY

If it was me - I'd be telling her sometimes. I'd be showing her how I appreciate her love, her loyalty. See your problem is...

HENRY

This is my family. Go fix the problems in your own.

DUDLEY

Mine? No, I never had a family.

HENRY

Well, I'm sorry.

DUDLEY

I grew up on my own.

HENRY

Well....

DUDLEY (persistent)
Looking through the windows at
all the other families in the
street.

Henry is sympathetic at this glimpse of emptiness.

DUDLEY
Know what I learned? You gotta
stand back to see the whole
picture.

HENRY
Look, forget what I said....

DUDLEY (pressing home)
Right now you're crowded right up
against it. Those families used
to argue and fight and hassle
each other....but they had what
this boy would of killed for.

HENRY
Okay. I have to step back to get
the view. But you - from now on
you have to step back right out
of my life!

DUDLEY
I'll get out of your life when
you've got a life!

HENRY
You're not listening! I want you
to leave. Now.

DUDLEY
Now? No, no, I can only leave
when... I don't know what the
rules are....
(checks handbook)
You can't tell me to leave till
I'm through.

HENRY
You're through!

Dudley flourishes the handbook.

DUDLEY
No, there's more!

HENRY
Don't be ridiculous!

Julia enters.

JULIA
What is going on in here?

HENRY
I am terminating Dudley's
services. I want him to go.

DUDLEY (to Julia)
Is that what you want?

HENRY
Hey, it isn't a question of what
she...

(realizes he's about to
make the same mistake)
All right. Yes. Julia, you're
part of this. You say.

JULIA
What are you talking about?

HENRY
I'm talking about your current
escort.

JULIA
Henry!

DUDLEY
At least I talk to her, listen to
her.... hear her. At least I
ask her what she wants.

HENRY
You wouldn't know!

DUDLEY
I know when a man starts becoming
a stranger to his own wife!

JULIA (feeling guilty)
No, that's not true!

HENRY
I've had enough - just get out!

DUDLEY
I told you I'll leave when you
and...

JULIA (shouts)
Stop this, both of you!

The two men stop. Facing her. As if demanding that she
choose between them. Julia can't take the pressure. She
jumps up, hiding her emotion, and runs from the room.

DUDLEY
Look what you did.

HENRY
What I did? You... you...

DUDLEY
She keeps trying to open the door, and you keep on slamming it in her face.

He SLAMS the door as he exits, giving eloquent expression to his metaphor. Henry drops into a chair, exhausted by his own anger, pondering what Dudley has just told him.

The door opens and Dudley reappears. He hands Henry some typed sheets of paper.

DUDLEY
Here. Your Christmas sermon.

HENRY
You wrote my sermon?

DUDLEY
Yeah. You don't even know what to say anymore.

Before Henry can respond, Dudley exits again. He doesn't notice the crumpled notes in the fireplace break into flame and burn.

110 INT. LIVING ROOM, BROWNS' HOUSE - NIGHT

The last two Christmas baskets are stacked as Dudley puts his head around the door. Marguerite has put on her outdoor coat.

DUDLEY
Good night all.

JEREMIAH
You leaving?

Dudley nods. Marguerite sees her opportunity:

MARGUERITE
Walk me to the bus, handsome.

DUDLEY
Delighted.
(cross to stairs, calls up)
Thanks for the skating.

MARGUERITE

Come on. Didn't your momma tell
you it's rude to keep a lady
waiting?

Dudley waves a farewell to Julia, who has now appeared at the
top of the stairs. Marguerite hold his arm firmly.

MARGUERITE

I won't be late.
(mutters)
Unless I get real lucky.

JEREMIAH

See you tomorrow, Dudley!

JULIA (now composed)

It was a wonderful day, Dudley.

Marguerite almost jerks Dudley off his feet as she drags him
to the door.

JEREMIAH

'Bye!

Marguerite and Dudley exit, and Julia comes back down the
stairs.

JEREMIAH (to Julia)

I wish Hakim could meet Dudley.
When do we put all the junk on
the tree?

JULIA

"Trimming" sounds a bit more
festive, doesn't it? We'll do it
tomorrow, Christmas Eve.

There is the SOUND in the hallway of Gloria arriving and
exchanging greetings with Dudley and Marguerite. A moment
later, Gloria enters the living room, her two-year old
daughter, CAMILLE, scampering ahead of her. The little girl
runs right up to Jeremiah and gazes at him silently. Henry
enters behind them, his overcoat on.

HENRY/JULIA

Hello, Camille.

The little girl is only into men. She runs up to Henry and
gets a kiss. Julia hands Henry three of the Christmas
baskets. They don't say a word to each other.

GLORIA (to Jeremiah)

So, what are we going to read
tonight? I brought Flopsy Bunny
and the Twins.

JEREMIAH

Yuk.

But he sits happily beside Gloria, Camille on her other side, as she takes out the book. Julia and Henry, laden with baskets, move to the door.

111 EXT. STREET/BUS STOP BEYOND BROWNS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Marguerite and Dudley have reached the bus stop and turn to watch as Henry and Julia drive off in the other direction in their car. Marguerite finally turns to him:

MARGUERITE

What are you doing to my daughter?

DUDLEY

Mrs. Coleman, it's all right, I promise you.

MARGUERITE

Nothing is all right when I see a married woman look at a man that way.

DUDLEY

I'm trying to help them.

MARGUERITE

Hah.

DUDLEY

I am. I definitely am. She's a wonderful person who deserves...

MARGUERITE

She is Henry's wife.

DUDLEY

I know, I know.

(grimaces)

Look, don't worry, she'll forget me as soon as I leave.

MARGUERITE

She'll forget herself if you go on like this.

The bus arrives to interrupt her.

MARGUERITE

You're a charming person, Dudley. Charm somebody else, will you?

And she gets onto the bus. It drives off, momentarily blotting Dudley from our view, and when it has passed, Dudley has gone.

112 INT. BROWNS' CAR/SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

The back seat is crowded with Christmas baskets. Henry waits behind the wheel as Julia hands one over to an ELDERLY WOMAN, standing in a brightly lit front door. Julia waves goodbye, returns to the car. Henry pulls back onto the street. There are a few beats of icy silence - he's still fuming about Dudley, she's still fuming about both of them. Finally, Julia reaches for another basket.

JULIA

The Keeleys. Take a left.

HENRY

The Keeleys live on Sixth.

JULIA

No, they live on Woodlawn.

JULIA

You're jealous.

HENRY

I am not jealous! I may be a lot of things, but jealous is not one of them! Sixth!

JULIA

Make a right.

HENRY

Julia, they live on Sixth. I've known them my whole life.

JULIA

So have I. My father used to teach him math. Woodlawn.

HENRY

Why do you always bring up your father when you're mad at me about something? Sixth.

He turns left at the corner on Sixth, pulls to the curb, has a look at what he thought was the Keeley's house.

HENRY

(after a beat)

Woodlawn.

He pulls out again. WE can SEE the faintest traces of a smirk on Julia's face as they drive.

113 EXT. KEELEY HOUSE - NIGHT.

Dudley is standing, sheltered beside a billboard, watching from across the street as the car pulls up.

Henry reaches into the back seat, gets a basket and starts up the walk.

Dudley breathes out softly.

Henry walks right onto an icy patch. He slips, landing right on his fanny, still clutching the basket. Julia, sitting in the car, puts her hand on her mouth and turns away, trying to stifle her laughter. Henry turns back and glares at her, then just sits there a beat on the ice, and starts to chuckle himself. Presently they are both sharing a good laugh.

JULIA

Here, let me help.

She gets out, tries to help him and slips herself. Now they're really laughing, and it's obvious they both needed to. They start up the walk together.

ANGLE - KEELEY FRONT DOOR

JOHNSON KEELEY, a big, elderly man, opens the door just as they arrive, and breaks into a delighted grin.

KEELEY

Reverend!

HENRY

Merry Christmas, Johnson.

CHILDREN, GRANDMOTHERS, and other FAMILY MEMBERS cram into the doorway, wheeling around inside and outside the doorway as Henry and Keeley speak.

KEELEY

Thank you, thank you. You're very kind.

HENRY

See you all on Christmas Day?

KEELEY

We'll be there. Merry Christmas... and thanks again.

They start back towards the car. Julia slips just a bit, he takes her hands. They pause, look at each other, almost as if they're trying to find something hidden that they know is there. They continue down the walk, leaving the younger family members dancing in the snow behind them.

As they get to the car something makes Henry glance towards the billboard across the street. But no one is there.

114 INT. BROWNS' CAR - A LITTLE LATER

The mood has lightened a little. Henry takes a turn as Julia checks the tags on the remaining baskets.

JULIA
The Lloyds, O'Connors, Hornings,
the Travises... That's it.

HENRY
Seems like we've been doing this
forever.

JULIA
Yeah.

HENRY
You used to sing all the way,
driving from house to house,
remember?

She smiles with nostalgia.

HENRY
I don't hear you any more, not
here, not at home....

JULIA
Oh I'm singing all the time.
It's just lately you don't hear
me.

She speaks softly, but with a world of sadness and
uncertainty in the faintness of her smile.

JULIA
I'm not sure I know who you are,
Henry. I'm not even sure if
we're living in the same
neighborhood anymore.

Then as the car pulls over, she jumps out with one of the
baskets, as if running away from the remark she has just
made. Henry is struck forcibly by her words. He ponders
them deeply as he watches the door of the house open and
Julia greeted.

At that moment, A TINY WOMAN with a BURLY HUSBAND walking
down the street, spot Henry and come up to him.

TINY WOMAN
I hear rumors, Reverend. Tell me
they ain't true. Please tell me.
(Henry can't respond)
You helped Billy Eldridge and
you're going to walk away from
the rest of us?

BURLY HUSBAND
No, honey, I know Henry Brown and
he's no quitter. Right?

Before Henry can reply, Julia returns to the car. The Couple greet her and she wishes them Merry Christmas as they walk on.

115 EXT. BROWNS' HOUSE. NIGHT.

Julia enters the house and leaves the front door open, its warm light spilling onto the front pathway. Henry locks the car. But he doesn't go into the house. He stands for a moment in the semi-dark, pondering. He looks up as a light goes on in an upstairs window. Then he walks slowly towards his church.

116 EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET. NIGHT.

Dudley is walking alone, head bent as he, too, ponders.

117 INT. BOILER ROOM, ST. MATT'S - DAY

The new boiler is installed and hums with quiet efficiency. It is sleek, its pipes concealed behind a bland exterior. Like an overweight model who doesn't understand why she isn't being photographed. This boiler is silent (except for a faint hum) and dull, as if it had no conversation. Henry stands staring at it.

118 INT. LIVING ROOM, BROWNS' HOUSE - NIGHT

The room is empty and dark. There has been some attempt to decorate the tree, but it has been abandoned. A SHADOW, caused by the light from the street, falls in the room.

Dudley stands in the center of the room, peering at the semi-trimmed tree. The house is silent. He walks over to a framed PHOTO of Julia and Henry on their wedding day.

For an instant, the picture DISSOLVES INTO one of Dudley standing beside Julia, radiant in her white dress.

DUDLEY

(aloud, to himself)

I know, I know.

The PHOTOGRAPH reverts to its normal state. Dudley stands up and approaches the Christmas tree.

DUDLEY

Just this, then?

(a pause, then)

Thank you.

As he walks o.s. towards the window. The CAMERA PANS TO FOLLOW him, but Dudley has gone. The window to the street is empty.

119 INT. LIVING ROOM, BROWNS' HOUSE - MORNING

Jeremiah and Camille enter the room and gasp at what they see:

The Christmas tree, fully trimmed, glowing with lights and decorations. Even the silver-wrapped miniatures seem to glitter brightly. At the side of the tree is the painted and finished model of the little Bethlehem scene which Dudley and Jeremiah built.

At the top of the tree, the angel is a tiny figure of a man in a suit. Dudley.

Jeremiah turns as he hears FOOTSTEPS behind. Marguerite, in her robe, stands in the doorway gazing at the tree.

MARGUERITE

Wow!

JEREMIAH

It's beautiful.

MARGUERITE

C'mon. Let me take a picture.
Where's the camera?

She hunts for it and finds it in a drawer.

JEREMIAH

I'll take one of your, Grandma!

He takes the camera as Marguerite and Camille pose beside the tree. Julia enters, takes in the decorations, but is puzzled after she checks the kitchen.

MARGUERITE

You should have seen these two.
Any cuter you'd have been sick.
(touching Jeremiah)
This one needs company.

JULIA

We're working on it, momma.
Anybody seen Henry?

The kids examine the tree as Marguerite looks at her daughter.

MARGUERITE

You two have a fight last night?

JULIA

No. We delivered the Christmas baskets. The gym socks were a big hit.

(more)

JULIA (Cont'd)
(goes to hall and calls
out)
Henry?

She heads towards the kitchen.

JULIA
I'll have to leave him a note.
This is one thing he can't
forget.

She exits, her mother remains with the kids.

120 EXT. HAMILTON MANSION - DAY

Henry is ushered into the house.

121 INT. LIBRARY, HAMILTON MANSION - DAY

Joe Hamilton is seated at a desk, an ARCHITECT and two ASSISTANTS flanking him, studying plans of yet another real estate development. He gets up as Henry enters.

HENRY
Joe, I need to speak to... can
we, uh...?

HAMILTON
Go ahead. No secrets from my own
people here.

He sits Henry in a chair alongside the desk and perches himself on the edge.

HENRY
I've reconsidered. I don't want
the job.

HAMILTON
What?

HENRY
I don't want... I'm sorry.

HAMILTON (yells)
Sorry isn't good enough!

HENRY
I can't leave my own people, Joe.

The echo of Julia's words seem to give strength to his purpose.

HAMILTON
A deal is a deal, Henry.

HENRY

What's the problem? You can just go hire another minister. We'll pay you back every cent for the boiler. We'll survive...

HAMILTON

I don't care about the boiler! You don't get it, do you? I don't care about St. Matt's. It's where we've been - not where we're going.

HENRY

Only if people like you abandon it, Joe. And that's your choice. But it'll always be where you came from. And all the people who live there and aren't going anyplace.

HAMILTON

I've already announced you're coming. I'm a public figure in this city. Public figures don't go back on their word.

HENRY

(a hollow laugh)

In the words of Santa Claus: "ho, ho, ho." I'm sorry, Joe. You may be able to walk away from St. Matt's. But I can't. And I won't.

HAMILTON

Look, I'm trying to be nice to you, Henry, because you and the old Reverend were always good to me. But this is going to happen whether you want it or not.

Henry stands up, looks at Joe with withering scorn.

HENRY

What is? The St. Matt's shopping mall and amusement arcade? Not if I...

HAMILTON

You know why I'm a trustee of a church I never go to? Because your people - your trustees and deacons all came begging to tell me how broke the church was... I bought the mortgage! I can close that place down in a day!

Henry recoils, shattered by this.

HENRY

You care about the things we care
about?

Henry starts to move away just as Hamilton lunges across the desk to strike him. But all Hamilton hits is air. And then Henry is gone.

122 EXT. OUTSIDE BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

Henry walks from the church towards his home. His step is light as he prepares to tell Julia his news.

123 EXT. FRONT DOOR, BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

Henry reaches to open the door and sees a large note pinned to it: "YOU'RE DUE THERE BY 2.30. DO NOT FORGET. DO NOT BE LATE."

Henry rips the note off the door, stuffs it in his pocket and walks to the car. Dudley stands beside the car, waiting.

DUDLEY

Well, at least you did one thing
right.

HENRY

What're you doing here?

DUDLEY

I brought this. For Julia.

Henry takes the small wrapped package Dudley hands him.

HENRY

I thought I told you to...?

DUDLEY

Now you've just got a mortgage
and a marriage to deal with.

HENRY

You keep out of my marriage. And
I'll deal with the mortgage.

Henry pushes him aside and gets into the car. He gives Dudley a last look, slams the door and drives off.

124 INT. BROWNS' CAR - DAY

Henry is half a block down the street when he glances over at the gift-wrapped package on the seat beside him. Curiosity piqued, he tries to lift a corner of the paper and see what's inside. Then he tears the paper and finally rips it off.

125 EXT. STREET NEAR BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

The CAR SCREECHES to a halt.

126 INT. BROWNS' CAR - DAY

Henry is gazing at the contents of the package:

It is the sexy nightgown which Julia saw in the store window and could not afford.

HENRY

No no no no!

He puts his hand into it to examine the sheerness of the material. Then he bangs the steering wheel in fury.

HENRY

I need help. Dear God give me
help! NOW! Right this minute!

(a roar)

Dud-ley!!

The smiling face of Dudley approaches strolling down the street from the house.

127 EXT. STREET NEAR BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

Henry jumps out of the car.

DUDLEY

Hallelujah - a believer at last.

HENRY

You got... This is... How dare
you??

He flourishes the nightgown.

HENRY

(making a fist)
Come on, put 'em up!

DUDLEY

(backing off)
No, no... It's Christmas Eve,
Henry.

HENRY

I don't care!

He takes a swipe but misses badly, stumbling over the sidewalk and hurting himself in the half tumble he takes.

HENRY

You bought my wife a see-through
nightgown!

DUDLEY

I got it for you! Well, not for you to wear. She will wear it for you. You don't seriously think Julia and I...

HENRY

What? What? Are you saying you're not attracted to her?

DUDLEY

Well, I....

HENRY

Look me in the eyes and tell me you're not!

Dudley stares at him, without replying.

HENRY

Boy, if Billy Eldridge looked like that when I asked him if he was innocent - he'd be doing life by now.

DUDLEY

I can't lie, Henry. It's just...I never dealt with this before.

(groping out of his confusion)

I'm an angel, not a mortal.

HENRY

Oh, give me a break!

DUDLEY

I came to solve a problem and I seem to have created one.

HENRY

One? Who's keeping score?!

(takes a beat to compose himself)

Okay... okay, let's make the big buy. You're an angel. Is this what angels do? Is it the Lord's wish that they come down and move in on another man's wife? Is that in the angel handbook?

DUDLEY

Of course not. I told you - this shouldn't have happened.

HENRY

So what in God's name do you think you're doing? Work with me here.

DUDLEY

I shouldn't be having these feelings. They're all wrong.

(perplexed)

It's just....they felt so right. And when we started skating together...by the way I'm sorry about that.

He checks a page in his handbook.

HENRY

About skating?

DUDLEY

All those stop lights.

HENRY

What??

DUDLEY

I needed the time.

(closes the book)

She's your wife.

(Henry says nothing)

Guess I shouldn't have...

(a last thrust)

But if I was a mortal, I'd be giving her a lot more than you're giving her.

HENRY

Oh please.

DUDLEY

Loving.... is giving, Henry. Julia gives all the time. Listen to her - listen to her with all your heart.

HENRY

(a beat, then)

Why don't you just go write a lonely hearts column someplace?

DUDLEY

I can't wait till you're an angel and have to do this stuff.

HENRY

Oh get a life.

DUDLEY
Henry.... I really....

HENRY
No! No more.

Henry gets into the car without a further word. Dudley remains, head bent in sorrow as the car accelerates away.

128 INT. BROWNS' CAR - DAY

As Henry pulls into the street, he looks in the rear-view mirror. Inevitably, there is no sign of Dudley.

HENRY (mimicking)
I'm an angel, not a mortal. I'm
an angel not a mortal...

129 INT. KITCHEN, BROWNS' HOUSE - DAY

Julia is giving Jeremiah his supper. As Marguerite enters, Jeremiah hops off his chair and goes out to fetch something.

MARGUERITE
The room's ready.

JULIA
Shouldn't they be back by now?

MARGUERITE
Maybe he found someone to go
skating with.

JULIA
Momma, why are you on my case?
I need you on my side right now.
You stood by poppa, now stand by
me.

MARGUERITE
Stood by him, yes, begging him to
pay attention to his little girl.
Who used to run after him all the
time, trying to get him to stop
being so busy and give her the
love she kept trying to earn.

Julia is shattered at this bleak reminder.

MARGUERITE
Not Henry. Sad, stupid, busy, he
just goes on loving you. He's
there for you all the time no
questions asked, ever.

Julia is deeply moved, recognizing that her father was not so perfect. Jeremiah runs in, a page of script flourished.

JEREMIAH

"Hark - it is the angel of the Lord." That's what I say.

JULIA

(distracted, pensive,
barely thinking)
Only louder.

JEREMIAH (practising)

Hark - it is the angel of the Lord! Then mom comes on and sings a really slow song.

The kitchen door opens and Henry peers around.

HENRY

Hi there!

JEREMIAH

Dad - Jason got sick and I'm gonna be in the nativity play!

Julia doesn't take her eyes off Henry, as if seeing him in a new light.

HENRY

You are?

(as Jeremiah nods
proudly)

Well I guess we can make room for one more in the audience.

JEREMIAH

Huh?

HENRY

Mom and I figured out what you'd like best as a Christmas gift, son.

JEREMIAH

Is it wrapped up?

HENRY

I'm afraid not.

He opens the door. Hakim comes in. Jeremiah whoops for joy.

JEREMIAH

Hakim!

They do a little ritual dance together.

JEREMIAH

Is he going to stay forever?

HENRY

One step at a time.

JULIA

He's here till the New Year.
After that... we'll see.

JEREMIAH

Yay!

Hakim and Jeremiah race off out of the room. Julia reaches for Henry's hand.

130 INT. HAMILTON'S MANSION, HALLWAY - NIGHT

The Butler stands in the doorway, facing Dudley.

BUTLER

Is Mr. Hamilton expecting you?

DUDLEY

I'm Reverend Brown's assistant.
My name is Dudley, I have an
appointment.

BUTLER

I don't believe so, sir. It's
quite late.

DUDLEY

If you check your appointment
list, you'll see me on it.

BUTLER

No, sir, I checked it at
breakfast time.

DUDLEY

Check again.

The Butler picks up the appointment diary. Frowns at what he
sees.

BUTLER

Perhaps you'd wait in the
library, sir.

131 INT. LIBRARY - HAMILTON MANSION - NIGHT

The Butler shows Dudley into the room. Dudley goes straight
to the grand piano, opens the keyboard and begins to play,
savoring the memories. Hamilton strides into the room,
belligerence in every pore.

HAMILTON

I ain't buying. For Christ's
sake - it's Christmas Eve!

DUDLEY

For the sake of Christ, indeed.
What better time to help a man
achieve wealth beyond his dreams.
In the hereafter.

HAMILTON

Henry Brown sent you over? I
told him he's through. To hell
with him.

DUDLEY

No. To heaven with him. That's
the plan not even you can
interfere with.

HAMILTON

Look, I don't know who you are,
but...

DUDLEY

I'm an angel, Joe. Not yours.
I'm afraid yours is a long way
off.

HAMILTON

(dismissing this)

Look, I'm a busy person. If it's
about Saint Matt's, you're
wasting my time. I'm giving them
a new church. Saint Matt's is
over. It's...

Dudley stops playing, gets up and faces him... but the piano continues to play. Hamilton stares at it, stunned.

HAMILTON

What is... this?

DUDLEY

See, Joe? It's like your past.
You can walk away from it, but
it's still there.

Hamilton quickly SLAMS down the lid on the keyboard.

ANGLE - BOOK SHELF

A vintage clock-radio, circa mid-1960s, seems to occupy a
special place on one of the built-in shelves along the wall.
The moment the keyboard is slammed shut, the piano music
stops and the radio's dial lights up. We HEAR:

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 ... spectacular autumn afternoon,
 as the Patriots try to slip out
 the back door here at Fenway Park
 with a twenty-one to twenty win
 over the division-leading
 Cleveland Browns...

Hamilton whirls around to look at the radio, then crosses
 over to it as the BROADCAST CONTINUES.

HAMILTON
 (gestures at radio)
 This thing is broken. It's not
 even plugged in.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 ... Parilli back, he fakes, pitch-
 out to Nance, there goes Jim
Nance!! Fifty, forty-five,
 forty, thirty-five, down he goes
 on the Brown's thirty yard line!!
 Ohhh, mercy!!

Hamilton reacts, turns back to Dudley.

HAMILTON
 And that game was played thirty
 years ago.

Dudley is now leaning on Hamilton's desk. He picks up a
 photograph of the model of his brand new church.

DUDLEY
 Looks great, Joe. Day care,
 youth center... is that a
 basketball court?
 (looks up at him)
 Youngsters'd love a place like
 this. It's a hard town to grow
 up in... so many kids, looking
 for a safe place just to be kids.
 (crosses to him)
 You remember, don't you? That's
 all you ever wanted.

HAMILTON
 Who are you? Why are you here?

DUDLEY
 He liked football, too, but he
 had to bus tables weekends, just
 to make the rent. He worked
 angry, drank angry... came in
 that door just looking to hurt
 your mother. Or you.

Hamilton just stares at Dudley, trying to control the deluge of feelings that are suddenly rising inside him.

HAMILTON

Get out.

DUDLEY

Why'd he blame you? You couldn't help it. Lord, you were barely nine years old.

HAMILTON

I said go. Get out of my house!

DUDLEY

"Seven days a week, 'cause these lousy kids gotta eat. I got no life 'cause of you, boy, I got nuthin'. Get out here, or I'll whip you within an inch of your life."

HAMILTON

Stop it...

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

... Parilli scrambles, looking for the open man...

DUDLEY

"Don't hide in that room when I'm talking to you, you hear me?"

HAMILTON

Please stop... I'm begging you.

We HEAR another man's ECHOED VOICE - Hamilton's father - along with BANGING on the door to his study.

ECHOED VOICE AT DOOR

Open this door, boy!! Open it, now!!

HAMILTON

(hands on ears)

Go away!! Leave me alone!! I want to hear the game!!

(fighting tears)

I just want to listen to the game...

Dudley steps up behind him.

DUDLEY

So where'd you go, Joe? Where was it safe?

HAMILTON

Saint Matt's. The Reverend kept his radio there.

DUDLEY

You'd run every play. Each pew was ten yards, wasn't it?

HAMILTON

I hated being poor... what it did to us.

DUDLEY

But it's still a part of you, isn't it?

Hamilton nods, head in his hands.

DUDLEY

Tearing a building down won't change that. Giving something back might. Listen with your heart, Joe. And don't be afraid.

HAMILTON

Who... are... you?

DUDLEY

You won't remember me tomorrow. But I'm the guy who says: Look at the real price, before you close the deal.

Hamilton, tears in his eyes, looks up. The radio is quiet. He is alone in the room.

132 EXT. ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH - NIGHT

A gentle snow is falling. We MOVE PAST the church's notice board - it reads CHRISTMAS SERVICES 9 AM - and MOVE IN to the main doors.

133 INT. ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH - NIGHT

The new boiler is working so well a couple of side windows have been left ajar in back. We SEE the North Star through one of them, then we slowly TILT DOWN to REVEAL Dudley. He's all alone, sitting in one of the pews. He's praying.

134 INT. JEREMIAH'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hakim is in the bed that has been installed next to Jeremiah's bed. Henry and Julia are preparing to leave the room. Jeremiah is rushing through his prayers.

JEREMIAH
 ... and Mom and Dad and Hakim.
 And 'specially Dad 'cause Dudley
 asked me. Amen.

A look from Henry.

JULIA
 Good night, you guys.

HAKIM/JEREMIAH
 'Night.

JULIA
 No talking late now.

As they exit, Jeremiah calls out.

JEREMIAH
 Close the door, please.

135 INT. BROWNS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Julia and Henry descend the stairs and cross to the living room.

JULIA
 He's growing up.

HENRY
 I guess we all are.
 (after a beat)
 I checked the new boiler this
 morning. Works pretty well. God
 knows how we'll pay it off,
 though...

Julia takes a beat to register this. She turns around.

HENRY
 I went to see Hamilton. That's
 where I was this morning. To
 tell him I was staying here at
 Saint Matt's.

Julia puts her hands to her face slowly.

JULIA
 What?

HENRY (smiling)
 I don't need Honolulu and Maine.

JULIA
 You told him "no"! That's
 wonderful! Why? How? I mean,
 what changed your mind?

HENRY

Figured I needed a good wife more than a bad pulpit. I told him I wanted to go on living in the same neighborhood as my wife.

The echo of her words brings tears to her eyes. Henry holds off her impulsive hug of delighted gratitude.

HENRY

But we still have one big problem. Hamilton bought the mortgage.

JULIA

What?

HENRY

And he swears he's going to close down the church.

She stands a moment, facing him, aware that all she can offer him is her courage.

JULIA

Well, don't you worry. There has to be a way we...

HENRY

It's over three hundred thousand dollars.

Julia frowns, then smiles, the solution obvious to her:

JULIA

Maybe we should get Dudley?

Unseen by them, Dudley appears at the window, ready to step into the house.

HENRY

No! Not Dudley.

Dudley moves away.

JULIA

But, why not? I mean, he'll think of something.

Dudley returns to the window.

HENRY

We'll think of something. Not Dudley...

Disappointed, Dudley moves away again.

HENRY

... he's got his own problems right now. We'll figure this out, Julia. You and me.

JULIA

Yes. You and me.

She kisses him gently.

Dudley, at the window having seen it all, turns and throws his handbook away.

136 EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET. NIGHT.

Dudley walks, head bent in thought. When he looks up he finds himself standing outside Jazzies. A CROWD has gathered at the front door. Limos pull up and Dudley is swept aside by the jostling PATRONS.

He steps to the sidewalk when A BLIND MAN pushes into him. Dudley sees the cane and takes the man's arm.

DUDLEY

You want to cross?

BLIND MAN

Oh, thank you, kind sir.

Dudley leads the man into the street. Cars SCREECH to a halt, swerve, and otherwise miss striking them as Dudley crosses with the Blind Man, oblivious of the red light against them.

BLIND MAN

Could you offer a visually impaired old man something for a cup of coffee?

DUDLEY

I'm sorry. I don't have any.

BLIND MAN

C'mon, just a dollar.

DUDLEY

We're not allowed to carry money.

BLIND MAN

Then quit bothering me. Get outta here.

The Blind Man walks briskly away, leaving a slightly perplexed Dudley.

DUDLEY
 (aloud, to himself)
 Permission to go after him, trip
 him, and laugh when he falls on
 his face?

There is a curious plopping SOUND and Dudley recoils as if having received a soft blow. He finds the angel handbook has dropped into his pocket, having been magically returned.

137 EXT. SAINT MATTHEW'S CHURCH - DAY

There is a TV truck outside. Cables crisscross from within the church to a control room in the truck. Dudley edges round the truck and looks at the graffiti-covered noticeboard with disapproval. We can hear the SOUND of singing from within the meeting hall.

138 INT. CHURCH MEETING HALL. DAY.

The Nativity Play is in full session. KIDS crowd the stage with its painted scenery and simple props and costumes. MICHAEL, who was missing, is singing the song which Julia sang at Nathan's in his absence.

Dudley slips into the rear of the improvised auditorium and watches as the song climaxes and the congregation, which now fills the church, applauds warmly.

139 INT. BACKSTAGE - DAY

Julia, wearing a simple veiled costume, pushes three kids into their entrance and leans back as the scene onstage progresses. She is startled by the voice beside her.

DUDLEY
 I wanted to see you. To say
 goodbye.

JULIA
 You're leaving? No. I'll call
 the bishop and tell him we still
 need you.

DUDLEY
 No, this is over the bishop's
 head. Way over.

Julia still isn't ready to buy this. But she sets it aside, cast down by the idea of his leaving.

DUDLEY
 I'll just slip away after the
 service.

JULIA
 You're not going to spend
 Christmas with us?

DUDLEY
No, Christmas is for families.
I'll be moving on.

The kids' song reaches its coda.

JULIA
What'll we do without you,
Dudley?

DUDLEY (smiles)
You'll probably do a lot better.

Dudley is very sad as he takes Julia's hand and holds it.

DUDLEY (to himself)
I don't think I can stand this.

Julia shares his anguish but only for a brief moment. They remain facing each other, smiling faintly, silent in their farewell.

JULIA
Will we ever see you again?

Dudley turns her hand over and looks at it.

DUDLEY
Hard to tell. It's not very
clear.

JULIA
We'll miss you, Dudley. You
helped us more than you know.
How do I thank you? You've been
an angel.

DUDLEY
Tell me about it. I'll miss you,
too.

The nativity play song ends and there is LOUD APPLAUSE from the congregation. The Kids rush backstage. ONSTAGE Jeremiah is saying:

JEREMIAH (O.S.)
Hark - it is the angel of the
Lord.

Julia and Dudley, facing each other in farewell, do not hear.

JEREMIAH (O.S.)
Hark - it is the angel of the
Lord.

Still they remain, unmoving. Then one of the kids nudges Julia.

KID
It's the angel of the Lord, Ms.
Brown!

Julia registers her cue, pulls herself together, tugs a veil over her head and with a final mouthed farewell to Dudley, she walks onstage to warm applause.

140 INT. BACK OF CHURCH - DAY

Henry watches Julia sing the short solo passage. Then as it moves towards its climax, he slips out a side door.

141 INT. BACKSTAGE - DAY

Dudley watches her from the wings, tears brimming in his eyes.

142 INT. CHURCH - DAY

The Kids are taking their bows. The audience applauds. Julia looks to the wings. Dudley is gone.

143 INT. VESTIBULE, ST. MATTHEW'S - DAY

Henry opens the closet where his cassock hangs and reaches for it. Then he looks at the typed sermon which lies on the table. Dudley's sermon.

Henry drops his cassock over his head and looks again at the sermon. He is impressed.

144 EXT. ST MATTHEWS. DAY.

It is a bright Christmas day and CHURCH BELLS have begun to PEAL. Those in the congregation who watched the Nativity Play move into the church directly. Others arrive for the service. Nobody notices the graffiti has disappeared from the board.

145 INT. VESTIBULE, ST. MATTHEW'S - DAY

Henry sits on a chair, a Bible in his lap, his eyes closed. A knock at the door. Deborah Paige puts her head round.

DEBORAH
You're on in two, Reverend.

HENRY
Two? Oh, yes, two. Right.

146 INT. ST. MATTHEW'S - DAY

Henry enters, happy to be back. He walks with quiet confidence and renewed energy. He looks round. Smiling with delight. The church is packed. An ocean of welcoming, smiling faces. His parish. Among the faces we recognize are Saul and Billy Eldridge. He walks to the pulpit.

As the stands, looking out, his first words are spontaneous:

HENRY

It sure feels like a new day.
I'm glad to see you all. Quite
a Christmas present.

He pauses now, looking towards the TV CAMERA which is recording his sermon.

HENRY

I'd like to begin today with
Saint Luke, chapter two....

HIS POV. The beginning of the sermon on the teleprompter. The teleprompter OPERATOR is hunched at her controls. We can SEE the words "And the host of angels said unto them, Fear not; for behold I bring you tidings of great joy...."

Henry looks directly at the camera and begins.

HENRY

"And the host of..."
(cuts himself off;
can't bring himself to
say the next word)
"And the host..."

The teleprompter begins to scroll. Henry can't bring himself to say the word "angels." He looks away from the teleprompter.

HENRY

Through the birth of Jesus, we
were given Hope. His gift is
there to lift despair, to cast
aside doubt, to renew faith.

The teleprompter runs forward, searching for the text, but Henry is speaking from his heart, ignoring what's written completely.

HENRY

Hope - that's all a prayer is.

Billy Eldridge, hearing Henry's words again, smiles to himself.

HENRY

But today we receive not one
gift, but two. The other gift...
is love.

He is looking directly at Julia in the choir stalls as he speaks. Beside her sit Jeremiah and Hakim, equally rapt. The power that was completely lacking in his last sermon, has been restored. He is magnetic.

HENRY

Love in the room, in the house,
in the lives and hearts of your
family and friends. It is the
wealth of the poorest. God's
gift.

The teleprompter Operator has given up. She can't find the
place anywhere and reports this, whispering into her mike.

HENRY

Loving is giving. That's all it
is. Giving hope, giving loyalty,
giving time. There is no other
way to love. When you reach out,
do a favor, help a neighbor,
listen to a friend... you are
giving.

Henry seems to pause. He has seen Joe Hamilton at the back
of the church. Henry stumbles with surprise only a moment,
before continuing.

HENRY

When you share the fruits of your
life, your work, your good
fortune, share them with others -
you are walking in the steps of
the lord and you will be blessed.

Hamilton smiles and nods. Dudley, immediately behind him,
stands up and starts towards the exit. Henry blinks, seeing
him for the first time.

Dudley turns to wave goodbye to Henry, pointing up to heaven
to show him it's time to leave. Henry continues, softer.

HENRY

Whoever you are, no matter what
your confusion or your
mistake.... forgiveness begins
today.

(he is talking directly
to Dudley)

By His own example we are shown
how to make amends with those who
trespass against us. Loving is
giving....and forgiving.

Dudley is moved. Henry has reached out to help him to
resolve his own confusion. Dudley exits the church.

HENRY

It's not hard to do when you
listen with your heart. And
sometimes that is what we forget..

He is looking directly at Julia now. He speaks at first with quiet passion:

HENRY

Those who are closest to us,
nearest to us, dearest to
us....those are the ones we
overlook, forget to cherish.

Julia is listening to him as if there were no one else in the church. Henry's voice rises, stronger:

HENRY

Today we remember....
(voice breaking)
...that when we love someone - we
are loving God. When we hear
someone close to us - we are
hearing His voice.
(with tender passion)
Look in wonder at those you love -
they are the face of God.

Julia has tears. She is unaware of others in the congregation looking at her, aware that Henry is making a public declaration of his feelings from the pulpit.

HENRY

I am blessed today. And
confident in that blessing I
banish doubt. I can make a
difference.
(choruses of "Amen"
from the congregation)
We can save this church. We will
help our poor and our young and
our lonely and our needy.
(more "Amens", they're
worked up now)
Because the lord will direct our
steps towards the light. He will
show us the way. Give us heart.
Make us whole again. How? By
calling on one of his angels -
sitting up there waiting on
rotation - and assign him to help
each and every one of us.

147 EXT. OUTSIDE ST. MATTHEW'S - DAY

Dudley throws his arm into the air in a gesture of victory.

148 INT. ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH - DAY

HENRY

We will not forget. And we will
go forward in love and in hope
into the new days of our lives.

The "Amens" turn to spontaneous applause. Over this tidal wave of sentiment:

HENRY
Julia and I wish you all... a
merry Christmas.

Henry looks at the teleprompter again, stationary at the opening words of Dudley's sermon.

HENRY
You know I can't sing a lick. So
please help drown me out.

Laughter as the closing hymn begins. The CAMERA PANS over the packed church. The hymn is led by Julia. Britsloe is on the piano. As the MUSIC develops, Henry cannot take his eyes off his wife. He begins to move with the rhythm of the music - in sharp contrast to his stillness in the opening church scene.

Julia smiles back at him. Glad to see him swept up by the music - and by her. It is like a private exchange between them. Separated by the stalls, but together in their hearts.

149 EXT. ST. MATTHEW'S - DAY

Jeremiah and Hakim are playing in the snow nearby. Henry and Julia stand in the porch greeting the CONGREGATION as they leave. A word or two for one, a handshake for the next, a greeting of Merry Christmas to another.

Billy shakes Henry's hand and moves shyly on. Henry is just delighted to know the boy came. Saul approaches next.

HENRY
Saul! Still going to be a member
in the Spring?

SAUL
Sure. Figure the Celtics don't
win the pennant every year.
Merry Christmas.

The numbers are thinning out now as Julia and Henry greet the remaining people. And then Henry is facing Joe Hamilton.

HENRY
Merry Christmas, Joe.

HAMILTON
Call me Monday, we'll work that
mortgage thing out.

As he strides towards his limousine, Julia and Henry are left speechless. Then Julia turns, shining, to face her husband. They hold each other in an embrace of relief and renewal.

The last of the congregation has gone. Except Dudley, standing a few feet away. Julia spots him and frowns.

HENRY

Did he come with the Lamberts?

JULIA

Uh-uh. I don't know.

They don't recognize him. Marguerite emerges from the church, joining them for the short walk home. As Henry, Julia and Marguerite pass Dudley they greet him with polite distance:

HENRY

Merry Christmas.

DUDLEY

Merry Christmas.

The formal greeting accomplished, Henry and Julia walk on a while, holding hands. Dudley looks sad. They have indeed forgotten him.

JULIA

C'mon, boys!

Jeremiah scampers out of the churchyard ahead of Hakim and almost collides with Dudley.

JEREMIAH

Hey! Merry Christmas, Dudley.

Dudley smiles warmly, pleased that at least Jeremiah will not forget.

JULIA

Okay. Lunch. And Christmas presents.

The boys run on down the street, colliding with Henry and Julia who are watching them. Together they start along the sidewalk. As they depart, Dudley, still watching from beside the church, looks after them with profound sadness.

JEREMIAH

Mom - did you get Dudley a present?

JULIA

Who's Dudley, hon?

JEREMIAH

Mom!

HENRY

You guys want to go skating this afternoon?

HAKIM

Yay!

JEREMIAH

You know - Dudley.

But she doesn't know - adults have no memory of Dudley at all. Jeremiah scrutinizes his parents to check if they're joking. But they're sincere. He shrugs, then starts to race. All five of them start to race, bundling to the front door together.

Julia and Henry remain a moment on the doorstep.

HENRY

When did he start with this imaginary friend?

JULIA

(shrugs, doesn't know)
He'll grow out of it.

Henry kisses her gently. Then she hold the door open for him. Henry looks at her for a moment, standing with the door open, looking proudly back at the church. Then he walks in and the door closes softly behind them both.

Dudley looks at the house and the door now closed, then he turns and starts to walk away. As he does he gradually disappears in shimmering, heavenly light. And the street is empty.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Sometimes I figure maybe it was just my imagination. It was a long time ago now. I mean at least a year. Even though he doesn't remember either, my brother, Hakim, believes it happened. If it happened. I like to think it did.

150 EXT. NEW HAVEN - DAY

HIGH ANGLE SHOT. The CAMERA pulls up into the sky, away from the city. Upwards until the town is just a small point on the map. Upwards until the whole state becomes a little mark. And upwards until all that remains is the Earth, a blue orb, spinning in the endless void..

FADE OUT.

THE END