

Siss-Mas: A Sisseton Christmas

by

Gregory L. Heitmann

1924 Thomas AVE
Santa Fe, NM 87505
(505) 470-5291

g_mann_jr@yahoo.com

www.gmannproductions.com

© 2020 Gregory L. Heitmann. All Rights Reserved.

BLACK SCREEN:

JEANNIE (V.O.)

(tersely)

What do you mean you're in Texas?
You don't even want to see your
daughter for Christmas?

SUPER: SIOUX FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA, 1975

JEANNIE (V.O.)

You know what James? I'm done
talking to you.

FADE IN:

INT. SMALL APARTMENT - NIGHT

JEANNIE JORGENSEN (28) slams the phone into it's wall-
hanging cradle.

JEANNIE

Aargh!!

Jeannie Jorgensen is a cute, petite, blonde of
Scandinavian heritage. Her teeth grind as she seethes in
anger.

BRANDI

Mommy, was that Daddy?

BRANDI JORGENSEN (4) a tiny version of her mother looks
up at her mom with a frown.

JEANNIE

Huh? Yeah, how did you know?

BRANDI

You always yell into the phone
when it's Daddy.

Jeannie kneels and puts her hands on Brandi's shoulders,
looking her in the eye.

JEANNIE

I'm sorry, honey. I'll try to do better to control my temper when it comes to your father.

Jeannie pulls her daughter close, hugging her tightly.

BRANDI

(whispering)

Promise?

JEANNIE

I promise.

Jeannie pats her child's back, not letting loose of her hug.

JEANNIE

It's just gonna be me and you this Christmas. I'm sorry you won't see your father this Christmas, but he's in Texas with *Charlotte*.

Jeannie pushes Brandi back and locks eyes with her, as she still maintains a grip on her shoulders.

JEANNIE

But, guess what?

BRANDI

What!?!

JEANNIE

Tomorrow, we're going to Sisseton to see Grandma and Grandpa.

BRANDI

Really? Christmas is finally here?

JEANNIE

Really! And, because you are such a good girl, you get to open a present tonight?

BRANDI

Oh, boy! I already know which one.

JEANNIE

After supper, and after your bath.
Come on, help me pick out a frozen
pizza.

Jeannie stands and Brandi holds her mom's hand as she skips by her side to the kitchen, unable to contain her excitement.

INT. KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM - DAY

The bell rings and the kids line up.

JEANNIE

Ok, kids. Line up. Get lined up!
Have a Merry Christmas and we'll
see you next year.

The children march out into the hallway.

MARY PICKETT (40) enters Jeannie's classroom. Mary is a nerdy, librarian-type. She teaches the first graders in the neighboring room.

MARY

Thank God. Two weeks of freedom.
You going to Sisseton?

JEANNIE

On my way.

Mary hugs Jeannie.

MARY

Have a great break. We'll see
you.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

A roadside sign amidst a snowy landscape shows "SISSETON;" in smaller letters underneath it shows "pop. 2572." A beige 1972 Plymouth Volare motors past the sign. The sun shines but a bank of clouds is rolling in from the west.

INT. SWENSON HOME - NIGHT

In their cozy home ED SWENSON, JR. (A.K.A. THE COLONEL, JUNIOR, and OLDTIMER) (55) and his wife BETTY JEAN SWENSON (52) listen together on the phone. Ed looks out the window as snow streaks horizontally, whipped by the wind, under the streetlight.

JEANNIE (O.S)

I'll be there.

ED

Be careful. The weather is supposed to break, but could be slippery in spots, and get here before it's dark, just to be safe.

JEANNIE (O.S.)

You too, Dad, be careful. I'll be there as soon as I can. Bye. Love you. Wait, somebody wants to say 'hi.'

BRANDI (O.S.)

Hi, Grandma and Grandpa. See you tomorrow! I love you!

BETTY JEAN

Love you too, Dear.

JEANNIE (O.S.)

Ok, bye.

The phone clicks and Betty Jean places the receiver on the wall hanging phone mount. Ed moves closer to the window as he looks out.

ED

It's a snow globe out there..
(whispering)
Rosebud.

BETTY JEAN

Huh?

ED

Citizen Kane?

BETTY JEAN

What?

ED

Never mind.

INT. SWENSON KITCHEN - NIGHT

The darkness is thwarted as the kitchen light clicks on. Ed enters the kitchen, dressed for work. He opens the fridge and removes his sandwich and places it on the counter as he grabs his thermos from the top of the fridge. He begins to make coffee. He glimpses something in the corner of his eye and starts.

ED

Jeepers! You scared me. What are you doing up?

BETTY JEAN

I figured I better get started on the meal planning and tonight's supper. Big day for you?

ED

You know it. The biggest. Day before Christmas, every mailbox is going to be full. Merry Christmas Eve.

Ed kisses his wife.

ED

What time are Donna and Christopher gonna be here?

BETTY JEAN

Donna said mid-afternoon. She says mid-afternoon, you can guarantee it will be mid-afternoon.

Two cats walk into the kitchen slowly, low to the ground, nervously looking around. Ed laughs.

ED

Cats know company is coming. They are on edge.

Ed pours the finished coffee into his thermos and packs his sandwich and a few other snacks into his lunch pail.

ED

Be home as soon as I can.

Ed kisses his wife good bye, and he is out the back door.

INT. SISSETON POST OFFICE - DAY

Ed sorts mail, bundling letters with rubber bands. MEL NEDMORE (50) enters the sorting room, a bland government office.

MEL

Morning, Colonel.

Mel is a generic-looking man, except for his comical Elmer Fudd cap, now with the earflaps down.

ED

Good morning, Mel. How bad the roads gonna be today?

MEL

The usual garbage. This winter's been a bitch already...pardon my French.

EXT. COUNTRY GRAVEL ROAD - DAY

The sun shines brightly off the blanket of snow, leveling out the fields and roadside ditches. The landscape is a smooth white blanket mitigating the tilt of the land rising to the western prairie hills of the Coteau Des Prairie. Ed's beige Plymouth, a blight in the white shroud of a landscape, scoots down the almost imperceptible road.

INT. ED'S CAR - DAY

ED

Come ol' girl you can do this.

Ed pats the dashboard, urging his vehicle forward, studded snow tires spinning as he punches through snow

drifts on his rural route mail delivery. The AM radio provides a steady stream of news and weather.

ED

There goes Deputy Dave. Wonder what he's doing out here this early.

Ed waves as the Roberts County Deputy Sheriff meets him on the narrow road, each driver lifting a finger off their respective steering wheels in acknowledgement of the other.

INT. DEPUTY DAVE SHERIDAN'S SHERIFF'S BLAZER - DAY

DAVE SHERIDAN (27) peers in his review mirror at the postman and his seemingly ill-suited delivery vehicle, caught in a wake of swirling snow behind him. Dave is a nice-looking young man, his Native Lakota heritage Sisseton-Wapheton Tribe, prominent in his dark features.

INT. ED'S CAR - DAY

The Plymouth begins to fishtail as the drifts continue to crumble under the chassis of the car.

ED

Whoa, boy. Come on Ed. Nice and easy. Gonna be a long day, but slow and steady wins the race.

INT. SWENSON HOME - DAY

DONNA CHENEY (32) assists her mom in the kitchen, washing dishes. Donna is seven months pregnant, but looks like she's ready to give birth any minute...she's huge. She is a brunette version of her younger sister.

DONNA

Careful, Mom.

Betty Jean tries to lift a large pot of water full of potatoes.

DONNA

No, Mom. Don't lift it. Christopher, help.

CHRISTOPHER CHENEY sits at the kitchen table keeping the cooks company and reading the Sisseton Courier newspaper. He drops the paper on command and is up assisting, moving the full pot to a burner on the stove. He could be a Bee Gee, a member of the Brothers Gibb. He sports the same style of the pop band, leisure suit, gold chain, and all.

ED(O.S.)

Anybody home?

Ed enters through the back door. Christopher sticks his head into the living room.

CHRISTOPHER

Grandpa's here.

Christopher sticks out his hand and receives the firmest of handshakes.

CHRISTOPHER

Oldtimer.

The SCAMPING of children's' footsteps clamor to the kitchen.

ED

Good to see ya, Christopher.

Ed smiles wryly and gives a nod and a wink to Christopher.

ED

Quick on the dog whistle there.

CHRISTOPHER

(grinning)

Brace yourself. Here they come, pups are on the way.

Donna hugs her father.

ED

No sign of your sister? It's already almost four. Not much daylight left.

Donna shakes her head. Ed is enveloped by his grandsons in a whirlwind of arms and legs.

ED

My knee!

BETTY JEAN

Dad.

ED

I fear for my bad knee.

Ed touches her daughter's belly.

ED

Hopin' for a girl?

DONNA

(nodding)

Everyone out! Only cooks allowed in the kitchen. Out. Shoo. Lawrence, and Jeffrey. Be good. Take it easy on Grandpa and his bum knee.

Grandpa, LAWRENCE (9), JEFFREY (6) shrink away, exiting the kitchen. The boys could be twins, but for the few inches of size difference.

INT. SWENSON HOUSE - DAY

Ed moves through the dining room towards his den.

ED

(mumbling)

What's up with those women?
Kicking me out of my own kitchen.

LAWRENCE

What'd you say, Grandpa?

ED

Nothing, guys. I just need to get off my feet for a second. Get rid of these work boots.

INT. GRANDPA'S DEN - DAY

Ed sits in his recliner and unlaces his boots. The small windowless room is a museum of taxidermy surrounding the large 30" inch console color TV. The kids climb on the couch and are entranced by their grandfather's every move. Jeffrey points at the large deer head mounted on the wall above him.

JEFFREY

Tell us about Sam again, Grandpa.

ED

(smiling)

You guys weren't even born when I got Sam. It was right over in Peever Slough. I didn't make a good shot, but at the end of the day, we found him and got him home.

The phone RINGS and someone in the kitchen answers it.

Ed stands, reaches up and pets the deer. Donna stands in the doorway of the den.

DONNA

That was Jeannie on the phone. She's not going to make it for supper, but she'll be here around seven or so.

ED

(grimacing)

I wish she wouldn't be driving in the dark.

DONNA

It'll be ok.

ED

Come on, boys. One of you grab my boots and follow me to the laundry room. You guys got your winter clothes? We got a few minutes to work on shoveling the driveway before supper.

INT. SWENSON HOME - NIGHT

Grace is said before supper and a full meal of roast beef and potatoes is served and handed around the table. It's a difficult task for the boys to concentrate on eating with a tree brimming with presents below in full view.

Before supper is over, Jeannie bursts through the front door, entering the kitchen.

DONNA

Oh, my God! You made it! We were starting to get worried.

Everyone moves from the dining room to the kitchen to greet Jeannie.

INT. SWENSON LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It's a whirlwind of greetings and hugs. Gifts weighting her down and Brandi by her side, Jeannie makes a bee-line for the tree to drop the gifts with Brandi trailing behind dragging her Barbie suitcase.

ED

Let me take those.

DONNA

No, no. Let me just set them down. No sense in dropping the whole thing.

BETTY JEAN

You hungry? Let me re-heat some roast.

JEANNIE

Mom, no. We had McDonald's in Watertown.

The group moves toward the kitchen as food and dishes get put away.

INT. SWENSON KITCHEN - NIGHT

DONNA

Where's James? Does he need help getting stuff from the car?

Jeannie kneels and pulls off Brandi's jacket.

JEANNIE

Honey, go find your cousins and check out the gifts under the tree. I want a count on my gifts in ten minutes.

BRANDI

Ok, Mommy.

Jeannie pushes Brandi out of the kitchen, stands, and faces her family.

JEANNIE

There's something I've been meaning to tell you. James and I separated. It's been about six months.

DONNA

What? Why didn't you say something? What about Thanksgiving? You said he was sick.

JEANNIE

Yeah, lovesick. He's got a new girlfriend. Charlotte. He's with her in Texas right now. Can you believe it? He didn't want to have anything to do with his daughter during Christmas.

Donna hugs her sister.

DONNA

I wish you would have told me. I'm sure you could have used an ear. Someone to vent to.

JEANNIE

I know. I'm sorry I didn't say anything.

The shock registers and lightens with Jeannie, always the ball of energy and personality-straw-that-stirs-the-drink in the family.

JEANNIE

Hey, Dad. Where's my Baileys?

ED

Coming right up, Honey.

JEANNIE

Scratch that, Dad. We got to go to Grandma Pearl's. My car is warm.

Jeannie tosses the keys to her dad. She snaps her fingers and points to the air.

JEANNIE

Let's go. Let's just take my car.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The group moves out the front door, piling into the Dodge Charger. Donna hangs back. She kisses her husband and wags an admonishing finger at him.

DONNA

Don't let them open any presents. Thanks for volunteering to watch the kids.

CHRISTOPHER

Volun-told, you mean.

DONNA

Same thing. We'll be right back.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Squeezed into the backseat side by side, bundled up in winter jackets, the two sisters chat quietly on the short trip.

DONNA

Merry Siss-mas, Sis!

Donna and Jeannie giggle.

JEANNIE

Merry Siss-mas to you too!

More giggling.

JEANNIE

It's good to see you. I wish you would have told me about James. You know I always support you. What can I do to help?

JEANNIE

I know you do. It's just hard.

DONNA

You got a lawyer? Can I do anything?

JEANNIE

I hate to ask again, but I could use a few bucks. I don't want to ask Mom and Dad. I got some bills to manage, including the insurance on this car, just like last month.

DONNA

I like this car.

JEANNIE

It was way too expensive and a "James" purchase. You know me, I would never be this sporty. And it's terrible in snow.

On cue the car fishtails on the snow packed street.

ED

Sorry, ladies.

Ed looks in the rearview mirror.

Ed takes a detour around the small town of Sisseton, pointing out Christmas decorations on the homes.

ED

It wouldn't be Christmas without
the McNamara's spread.

Ed slows and everyone oohs and ahhs.

A few turns to the left and the car is front of the
retirement center.

ED

We're here!

They pull up next to the curb of the retirement center.

ED

I'm just going to leave it
running. You got an extra set of
keys?

JEANNIE

No, Dad.

ED

Ah, it'll be fine. Who's going to
bother on Christmas Eve. We'll
just be a few minutes.

The doors open and the crew practically falls out of the
tightly packed car.

INT. RETIREMENT CENTER - NIGHT

The group surrounds PEARLIE SWENSON (80) in her recliner.
Hugs are exchanged and gifts are opened by Pearlle.

PEARLIE

Thanks for coming to see an old
lady. This might be my last
Christmas.

BETTY JEAN

Oh, stop. Pearlle, you say that
every year. You'll probably
outlive us all.

PEARLIE

Betty Jean, I doubt that!

BETTY JEAN

We'll see you tomorrow too.

PEARLIE

I'm pretty tired. You should probably get home. I hear it's cold out.

ED

Ok, Mom.

Ed kisses his mother's cheek.

ED

Merry Christmas! Love you. We'll see you tomorrow.

Ed holds up a hand.

ED

Let me go pull the car around. Stay in the warmth for a couple more minutes.

BETTY JEAN

Oh, Dad. It's not that far. We'll walk with you.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Outside the retirement home, the crew walks to where the car should be, but it's gone.

ED

Where's the car?!?

Ed runs to where the car was parked and examines the tracks.

JEANNIE

Oh no!

Jeannie's shoulders slump and she covers her face.

JEANNIE

I knew we shouldn't have left the car running!

Ed runs to the street and crouches to find the tracks of the car. His eyes rise, scanning the end of the empty street. He stands and bolts into a run, as bloodhound catching the scent of its quarry, as if he is going to catch up to the car.

ED

(breathlessly over his shoulder)
Call the police!

INT. SWENSON LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Brandi, Lawrence, and Jeffery are dressed in their pajamas. They are bundles of anticipatory energy, surrounded by the stacks of presents.

BRANDI

You guys have the same pajamas.
Are you twins?

Jeffery and Lawrence look at each other with disdain.

JEFFERY and LAWRENCE

(simultaneously)

No!

JEFFERY

I wonder if I'm gonna get my G.I.
Joe!

Jeffery leans on a footstool with his hands, his feet bounce up and down like a mountain climber running in place.

BRANDI

I know I'm getting a Barbie. I
saw my mom's shopping bags. Then
I saw the wrapped box under the
tree at home.

Brandi points.

BRANDI

It's that one right there.

Jeffery stops bouncing for a minute as he and his brother look on, amazed at their cousin's scientific breakdown of the gifts. Lawrence turns his focus back to Brandi.

LAWRENCE

Where's your dad?

BRANDI

He's in Texas.

LAWRENCE

Texas? Why isn't he here with us?

BRANDI

He is spending Christmas with his girlfriend.

LAWRENCE

What? Your dad has a girlfriend?
What does that even mean?

BRANDI

I don't know, but Mom is mad.
Every time they talk on the phone,
it ends with her yelling.

LAWRENCE

You wanna come stay with us?

BRANDI

Where do you live?

LAWRENCE

Aberdeen.

BRANDI

No. I want to stay with my mom.
I don't want to go to Blabberdeen.

Lawrence bursts out laughing and is joined by Jeffery, who is not sure what is so funny.

LAWRENCE

Not Blabberdeen. Aberdeen!

BRANDI

I don't want to go to Aberdeen.

LAWRENCE

Maybe you can come visit us in the summer? We can go swimming!

BRANDI

I hope so! That sounds fun.

LAWRENCE

(whispering)

My dad's not paying attention, should we open a present?

JEFFERY

(loud-whispering)

Yeah!

Brandi looks around guiltily.

BRANDI

(whispering)

I don't think we should.

LAWRENCE

(whispering)

You already know what that one is.

Lawrence slides over to the tree and taps the Barbie box.

CHRISTOPHER (O.S.)

It's pretty quiet in there.
What's going on?

JEFFERY and LAWRENCE

(simultaneously)

Nothing!

Lawrence cranes his neck, trying to see in the other room.

LAWRENCE

What the heck? How did he know?

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Christopher reads the paper, chuckles, and shakes his head as he looks up at the doorway to the living room, knowing something's going on. He sips from a beer.

CHRISTOPHER

If I come in there, am I going to
find a big mess?

JEFFERY and LAWRENCE (O.S.)

(simultaneously)

No!

Christopher chuckles again.

CHRISTOPHER

Ok.

The phone RINGS and Christopher is able to reach it from where he sits at the small kitchen table.

CHRISTOPHER

Hello.

Christopher listens.

CHRISTOPHER

Oh, Jesus. I'll be right there.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Christopher enters the living room catching the kids by surprise as they sort through the gifts. Jeffery fully under the tree, digging out gifts, searching for his name on the tags.

LAWRENCE

Hey, Dad.

CHRISTOPHER

Something has happened.

Christopher pulls his heavy coat from the closet near the front door.

CHRISTOPHER

I have to go pick everyone up from
Grandma Pearlle's.

LAWRENCE

Did she die?

CHRISTOPHER

What? No! Why would you ask that?

LAWRENCE

I thought maybe getting gifts was too exciting for her. Maybe she had a heart attack. She's pretty old.

Christopher laughs.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, no. She is old, but she's fine. Something happened to the car.

LAWRENCE

Dead battery.

CHRISTOPHER

No, much worse. Somebody stole it.

LAWRENCE

Somebody stole the car?! Oh my God! Are the cops coming? Are they going to come here?

CHRISTOPHER

Calm down. The police are going to find it.

Christopher dons his coat and zips it. He extends his arm and points a finger at Lawrence.

CHRISTOPHER

Lawrence, you are in charge. I'll be gone just a few minutes.

Christopher steps to the door.

CHRISTOPHER

You two.

Christopher extends an admonishing finger toward Jeffery and Brandi.

CHRISTOPHER

You listen to Lawrence. He's in charge.

Christopher holds up one finger.

CHRISTOPHER

I want each of you to grab one gift. Ready? Go.

The kids dig through the stacks of presents, already knowing what they each had their eye on. In a matter of seconds, they each have a gift in hand.

CHRISTOPHER

Ok. Take a seat in the middle of the floor. I'm leaving. I'm going to lock this door behind me. Do not open this door until you hear the secret knock.

Christopher knocks, shave and-a-haircut, two-bits.

CHRISTOPHER

Do not leave this room. Open your one gift and play with it.

Christopher opens the door to leave, but closes it, turning back to the kids.

CHRISTOPHER

Oh, and if you are not good while I am gone, you are going straight to bed, and nobody is going to open gifts at all. We'll just return them to the store.

Christopher forces back a smile as he tries to remain stern.

CHRISTOPHER

Any questions?

The kids sit cross-legged on the floor, holding their gifts. Jeffery's hand shoots up.

CHRISTOPHER

Yes, Jeffery.

JEFFERY

What if we have to go to the bathroom? Can we leave the room?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes. If you have to use the bathroom. Go to the bathroom. But, then come right back. Got it?

All the kids nod in agreement.

CHRISTOPHER

Any other questions?

(pause)

One gift. That's it.

Christopher raps the secret knock and heads out the door.

CHRISTOPHER

Be right back. Don't burn the house down.

The door shuts behind him.

JEFFERY

I thought he was never going to leave.

Jeffery shreds the paper from the box.

JEFFERY

I hope it's the G.I. Joe I wanted!

Lawrence and Brandi watch the human-tornado fling the wrapping paper off.

JEFFERY

It is! It is G.I. Joe!

Jeffery tears into the action figure's box. He's up off the floor dancing around.

LAWRENCE

Jeffery! Sit down. Don't get us in trouble.

Lawrence turns his glare from his brother to Brandi and his face lights up with a smile for a moment, before he notices a frowning Brandi.

LAWRENCE

What's wrong?

BRANDI

The tag says it's from my Dad.

LAWRENCE

I'm sure your dad wants you to enjoy his gift he got you. Open it.

Brandi peels the wrapping paper off without enthusiasm.

JEFFERY

Lite Brite! That is so cool!

Jeffery winds back up much to the chagrin of his brother. He is up and dancing around Brandi.

JEFFERY

Open it! Let's play with it!

LAWRENCE

Jeffery! Sit!

Jeffery drops to the floor as commanded. Brandi smiles, unable to not be lifted by Jeffery's enthusiasm.

LAWRENCE

We better not open that. All those small pieces. My mom might have a heart attack if she sees that and if we make a mess.

Lawrence turns back to his brother.

LAWRENCE

Just stick to your G.I. Joe,
Jeffery. At least for a while.

Jeffery eyes more gifts under the tree his from cross-
legged position. Oblivious to his brother.

JEFFERY

Huh?

LAWRENCE

I'll open mine.

Lawrence opens his gift.

LAWRENCE

It is a Disc Gun, like on Star
Trek. Wow!

INT. RETIREMENT CENTER LOBBY - NIGHT

The crew crowds by the front door waiting for law
enforcement to arrive. Red and blue flashing lights
appear down the street and a sheriff's deputy Chevy
Blazer pulls to the edge of the sidewalk.

ED

They're here.

The deputy exits his vehicle and briskly walks to the
building. Each breath momentarily visible before being
dragged away by the cold wind. Hands in his pockets, he
reaches and tugs down his black knit cap to better cover
his ears. Ed opens the door and let's the deputy inside
to the warmth.

ED

Deputy Dave.

Dave takes his knit cap off and shakes Ed's hand. He
spins his cap on his finger.

DAVE

Colonel.

ED

Sorry to ruin your Christmas Eve.

DAVE

Don't worry about it. I'm on duty. I'm sorry for your trouble, but for me, this makes the night go faster. I hate to say it. Something to occupy my time. No offense. Glad to be here.

ED

I'm glad you're here.

Dave gazes out to the empty street.

DAVE

Isn't this a fine how-do-you-do? A guy would never expect this on Christmas. Sorry about your car. They took your Plymouth?

ED

(laughingly)

I wish! No, they got Jeannie's car. It's a nice new Charger.

DAVE

Jeannie's here?

Dave looks past Ed

DAVE

Is that you, Jeannie?

JEANNIE

Dave Sheridan? You're Deputy Dave

Jeannie steps forward.

DAVE

Geez, I haven't seen you since graduation. How are you, besides your car?

JEANNIE

Fine. Wow you. You're a deputy? That uniform. You look...

DONNA
(whispering)
Handsome?

Jeannie gives side-eye to her sister, embarrassed.

INT. SWENSON HOME - NIGHT

Lawrence, Jeffery, and Brandi sit on the floor in the middle of the room, they glumly eye the gifts. Impatience bubbling up. It's Tinker, the black cat with the white underbelly and chin that slinks into the room and under the tree, semi-hidden amongst the gifts.

LAWRENCE
Hey, watch this.

Lawrence aims his disc gun at the cat and pulls the trigger. The disc bounces harmlessly in front of the cat. Tinker extends a paw and clamps down on the disc playfully throwing it in the air and chasing it. The kids burst into laughter.

Lawrence attempts another shot from his toy pistol and Tinker lurches toward the new disc, capturing it and biting it, while toppling gifts. Uproarious laughter bellows from the kids.

Now it's Jeffery. He has found a rubber band from the packaging of his G.I. Joe. He launches it at the cat with all the accuracy of a six-year old. It falls harmlessly to the side and the cat jumps on the rubber band before leaping up into the artificial tree, knocking off a few ornaments. It's bedlam for a few moments, the tree teeters precariously.

JEFFERY
I know Grandpa's got a bunch of rubber bands in his desk. I'm going to get some more and we can all play.

Jeffery runs and brings back a brimming handful of rubber bands.

BRANDI

Why are there so many rubber bands?

LAWRENCE

They are from Grandpa's job at the post office. Take some. Launch them like this.

Lawrence fires a rubber band into the tree. A cat paw swipes at the harmless band that falls below the cat perched in the tree's bottom branches.

It's chaos for a few minutes as rubber bands are flung all over the tree. Meecy, the Siamese cat, innocently strolls through the room only to be bombarded by bands bouncing all around her feet. She tears through the room and Tinker bursts from his perch on the tree. The tree rocks and wobbles from his leap, shaking ornaments to the floor.

LAWRENCE

Stop! Stop the rubber band shooting!

The tree settles down.

LAWRENCE

Come on, we gotta get these ornaments back up. We don't want to get into trouble.

A rubber band flung by Jeffery zips by his ear.

LAWRENCE

Rubber band fight!

It's chaos again as rubber bands fly around the room. Cries of pain are heard periodically before each cousin has a found a hiding spot and a truce is called.

The last of the rubber bands are gathered just as the secret knock on the door gets everyone's attention.

Lawrence unlocks and opens the door and the parents and grandparents trudge into the room, stomping their feet to shed the snow from their boots.

BETTY JEAN
I'll make some coffee.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The adults are in the kitchen sipping coffee.

BETTY JEAN
We're never going to forget this
Christmas.

ED
You can say that again. We'll get
a hold of Morgan at the insurance
company tomorrow. Not tomorrow,
the 26th.

JEANNIE
What am I going to do for a car?

ED
Don't worry about that, Honey.
We'll get it sorted out. We can
drive through Brooks' lot
tomorrow, just in case. I'm
guessing the sheriff's office will
find it with an empty tank of gas.
Probably some joy-riding kids.

Jeffrey pokes his head into the kitchen. He has fire in
his eyes and he holds the doorway and bounces.

JEFFERY
Are we going to open the presents?

Donna grins at her son.

DONNA
Why don't you, your brother, and
Brandi sort the gifts. We'll be
in shortly.

Jeffery bolts from the door.

JEFFERY (O.S.)
Sort the presents! They'll be in
shortly?

BETTY JEAN
 Anyone need a refill?

Christopher stands from the kitchen table.

CHRISTOPHER
 Just a splash. We better get in
 there and let those kids open
 their gifts. I'm afraid their
 heads are going to explode if they
 have to wait much longer.

Lawrence makes an appearance in the doorway to the
 kitchen and makes eye contact with his dad. Christopher
 nods and the silent signal sends Lawrence back into the
 living room.

LAWRENCE (O.S.)
 (breathlessly)
 They're coming!

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Montage:

-Kids open gifts:

-Jeffery and Lawrence each get socks and those
 are readily tossed aside.
 - Jeffery gets an O.J. Simpson action figure.

JEFFERY
 It's the Juice!

Flash photo of Jeffery striking the Heisman pose, holding
 the O.J. doll as if it were a football.

-Lawrence gets a pocket fisherman

LAWRENCE
 I saw this on TV!

Flash photo of Lawrence casting his pocket fisherman.

-Brandi opens her Barbie

BRANDI

Thank you, Mommy!

Flash photo of Brandi hugging her Barbie.

-Lawrence and Jeffery get matching Minnesota Vikings pajamas.

The adults open their gifts:

-Donna and Christopher open a cuckoo clock.

-Christopher opens a holiday set of English Leather Cologne.

-Jeannie opens an oversized purse.

JEANNIE

Thanks, Mom! You shoulda got me the big one.

The sarcasm gets a big laugh from the adults.

-Donna opens a nightgown.

-Jeannie opens a gift and it's a matching nightgown to Donna's

JEANNIE

Mom, open this one.

Jeannie tosses a box to her mother. Betty Jean opens it and it is an identical nightgown to her daughters.

Flash photo of mother and daughters lined up wearing their nightgowns.

-Jeffery and Lawrence open a shared gift of a Stretch Armstrong.

Flash photo of Jeffery and Lawrence stretching Stretch Armstrong.

-Brandi opens a Spirograph.

Flash photo of Brandi holding up her Spirograph.

-Ed opens a can of Folgers Coffee.

Flash photo of Ed cradling his Folgers Coffee can like a baby.

Montage Ends.

The fun winds down. A couple gifts remain under the tree, against the wall.

DONNA

What about those gifts?

LAWRENCE

We didn't know what to do with them. Those are for James.

JEANNIE

We'll just take them back.

Lawrence scoots one of the gifts over as he crawls and pushes the box through the traffic of paper scraps.

LAWRENCE

This was for J & J.

Jeannie opens the gift.

JEANNIE

Oh, nice.

ED

There it is! Each family now has the traditional cuckoo clock!

JEANNIE

Thanks, Daddy!

There is some commotion outside the front and a knock at the door startles everyone.

ED

Criminently! Who could that be?

Ed springs to the door. He cautiously opens it.

ED

Oh, it's Deputy Dave, everyone.
Hi, Deputy. Come on in.

Donna leans over and whispers in her sister's ear.

DONNA
Hubba-hubba.

JEANNIE
(teeth gritted)
Shut up.

DAVE
Sorry to barge in so late on
Christmas Eve, but I was passing
by, and I have some good news and
bad news.

ED
Oh, really! You found the car?

DAVE
Yes! We did, that's the good
news. Bad news is that it's
totaled. I just spent the last
hour with Clint getting it loaded
so he could take it to the
junkyard.

Dave frowns and looks at the stunned crowd before him.

DAVE
It was a young Indian kid, 14-year
old. He's one of my cousins. He
just got out of reform school, TJ
Warner?

BETTY JEAN
TJ? He was a nice boy in my
class.

JEANNIE
Mom, they're all nice at that age
and you've taught every one of
these kids around her for the last
25 years.

DAVE

I remember you as my kindergarten teacher like it was yesterday. You made it fun.

BETTY JEAN

Oh, Dave.

DAVE

I'm sorry to bring such bad news on Christmas Eve. Will you be around the next couple days? I can bring the paperwork by for your insurance, and maybe I can take you over to see the car and get any items you might still want. Ice scraper, gloves, etc., whatever can be salvaged.

The news is a deflating blow. Shoulders sag around the room and the silence is deafening. Jeannie stands.

JEANNIE

Sure, Dave. I'll bet you could use a cup of coffee.

DAVE

Sure! But, I don't want to be interrupting..

JEANNIE

No, no. Come on, follow me.

Cleanup starts in the living room. Torn wrapping paper is wadded up, ribbons are saved, and order is restored.

Laughter emanates from the kitchen and family in the living room looks to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dave sits across from Jeannie at the tiny kitchen table. They sip coffee.

DAVE

Where's James?

JEANNIE

You are the first person outside the family to hear this. James and I are separated. We are getting a divorce.

DAVE

Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

JEANNIE

Don't be sorry. James is in Texas right now with his new girlfriend.

Dave forces a smile.

DAVE

Speaking of sorry, I am not sorry that they stole your car. I got to see you.

Jeannie cocks her head suspiciously.

JEANNIE

Wait a minute, did you put your cousin to steal my car just to see me?

Jeannie laughs.

DAVE

(laughing)

You got me. Wouldn't that be something if I did?

Dave downs his cup of coffee.

DAVE

You need to get back to your family.

Dave stands. It's awkward for a moment.

JEANNIE

Well, hey, let's go look at my wrecked car...not tomorrow, it's Christmas after all.

Jeannie stands and reaches for Dave's arm. She interlocks her arm with his, steering him out the back door.

DAVE

It's a date!

JEANNIE

Let me walk you out.

She tilts her head towards the living room.

JEANNIE

Probably easier to avoid the crowd.

INT. DEPUTY DAVE'S SHERIFF BLAZER - DAY

Deputy Dave and Jeannie look out the windshield at the Christmas decorations lining the streetlights as they travel down Veteran's Avenue of the central business district. The sign on Roberts County National Bank alternates the time and temperature. It's a crystal blue sky, but the 12 degrees shown on the sign belies the bright sunshine. Traveling to the edge of town they come to Jenk's Salvage Yard, and a young man in coveralls waves them through the gate. Before them is the wrecked carcass of Jeannie's Charger.

DAVE

There it is. Looks pretty bad. TJ got banged up pretty good. He was in the hospital a couple days, but he's home now.

JEANNIE

Oh, my goodness.

DAVE

Well, it's not going to get any better for him. He's going to be arrested again, and probably will be back to reform school until he's 18.

Dave pulls some papers from his clipboard.

DAVE

I don't want to forget to give
these to you.

Jeannie takes the papers.

DAVE

You'll need them for your claim.

JEANNIE

By the way, when we're done here,
can you drop me off at Mitchell's
Mutual Insurance?

DAVE

Sure.

Dave opens the door, but pauses.

DAVE

Bring your box and we'll recover
your belongings.

EXT. SALVAGE YARD - DAY

Dave and Jeannie pick through the car collecting items.

INT. DEPUTY DAVE'S SHERIFF BLAZER - DAY

Back in the vehicle, Dave fires up the truck and he blows
on his hands.

DAVE

It's been a bear of winter
already.

Jeannie shivers in the passenger seat.

JEANNIE

Tell me about it.

DAVE

Well, let's get you over to
Morgan's, so you can work on that
thrilling paperwork of an
insurance claim.

They travel through Sisseton, the downtown is bustling with shoppers braving the cold, returning gifts or spending gifts of money. Stavig Brothers Department Store is roaring with activity. They pass by the bank where they see the temperature.

JEANNIE

It's really heating up. Fourteen degrees now.

They laugh as Dave pulls off onto the side street in front of Mitchell's Mutual Insurance and puts the truck in park.

JEANNIE

Thanks so much. I'll call my mom and have her pick me up.

Jeannie begins to open the door.

DAVE

Wait, before you go. I know it's a bit awkward, but what are you doing New Year's Eve? You're probably stuck here in Sisseton? No car and all...

JEANNIE

Why, Dave, are you asking me on a date?

DAVE

Well...

JEANNIE

I'm a married woman.

Jeannie extends her hand and removes her glove, flashing her wedding ring.

DAVE

I didn't mean...

Jeannie dramatically slides the ring from her finger.

JEANNIE

I just checked my calendar and I am available that night. What did you have in mind?

DAVE
(grinning)
You had me there.

Jeannie grins sheepishly, as she shrugs. She slides the ring back on her finger.

JEANNIE
I'm just gonna put this ring back on for safe keeping.

DAVE
Good idea.

JEANNIE
So, what were you thinking for New Year's Eve?

DAVE
Nothing too much. My sister and a couple of her friends go bowling at Lanny's Lanes. We've been doing that the last couple years. It's pretty fun...tame, but fun. You could bring your daughter.

JEANNIE
It's a date!

Jeannie exits the vehicle.

DAVE
Talk to you later.

JEANNIE
Bye.

Jeannie waves and shuts the truck door.

INT. MITCHELL'S MUTUAL INSURANCE - DAY

MORGAN MITCHELL (55) the proprietor of the business sits across the desk from Jeannie. He's a husky, graying man with distinctive bushy sideburns.

JEANNIE

I'm sorry to bother you on your Christmas Holiday.

Jeannie hands over the police crash report.

MORGAN

You know what they say, insurance never sleeps, it is 24 hours a day.

Morgan laughs at his joke.

MORGAN

I got your folder right here. Let's take a look at the account. I'm so sorry to hear about your car. What a bummer.

JEANNIE

It's not the best way to end a year.

MORGAN

Uh-oh.

Morgan flips through the pages in the manila folder.

MORGAN

The file indicates your policies have lapsed. Your car. And you and James' life insurance. We didn't get payment last month. The November payment.

JEANNIE

What?

Jeannie starts to hyperventilate.

JEANNIE

That can't be!

Jeannie's eyes well with tears.

JEANNIE

I paid it. Donna paid it for me,
actually.

MORGAN

It's not showing up in the file.
You can see where we stamped past
due on the policy. We sent a
letter to the bank, because you
have to have insurance on the car
for the loan. That's right there.

Morgan shows her the file and Jeannie begins to weep.

JEANNIE

You are not going to pay?

MORGAN

I'm sorry we can't pay. The
policy lapsed. Please, Jeannie,
don't cry. Let's call James,
maybe he can help straighten
things out.

JEANNIE

No!

Jeannie snaps and points at the phone.

JEANNIE

Can I use your phone? I'm going
to call my mom.

MORGAN

Sure.

Jeannie dials the rotary phone, seemingly endlessly as
Morgan observes.

JEANNIE

Donna? Good, it's you.

Jeannie's voice breaks and she starts to cry again.

JEANNIE

I need your help.

DONNA (O.S.)

Jeannie? What's wrong? Are you crying?

JEANNIE

I'm here at Mitchell's and Morgan told me that my insurance lapsed and they can't pay for the wrecked car.

DONNA (O.S.)

No! That is not right. You stay right there. I'm on my way. See you in a minute.

JEANNIE

Ok. Don't tell Mom. Bye.

Jeannie hangs up the phone.

MORGAN

I'm sorry, Jeannie.

JEANNIE

Donna is on her way.

MORGAN

Where is James? Maybe we can get a hold of him and straighten things out, you know, with the finances and all.

Jeannie dabs her eyes.

JEANNIE

Morgan, I'm only going to say this once. James is out of the picture. We are going to divorce. It's painful enough, and to have you talk down to me about this, I find it disrespectful.

MORGAN

I'm sorry, Jeannie. I don't mean to offend. It's just, most

people, you know, the men handle these matters.

Jeannie tries to compose herself. She stands.

JEANIE

I know. Times are changing.
Could I use your restroom?

MORGAN

Sure.

Morgan points to the back.

INT. INSURANCE OFFICE - DAY

Donna enters the insurance office in flourish, shadowed by Christopher.

DONNA

I do not appreciate this!

Donna wags a finger at Morgan, who stands up from his desk hands up.

DONNA

I wrote that check and mailed it
to your office for Jeannie.

Donna looks around. Christopher looks at his wife in surprise, as his folded arms drop to his side.

DONNA

Where is she? Where's Jeannie?
Did you run her out of here?

Morgan points to the back, where Jeannie emerges from the bathroom. Donna rummages through her purse, pulling out her checkbook and shoving her purse into Christopher's belly.

DONNA

Here, right here.

Donna flips to the check register and points holding up the check book for Morgan to see.

DONNA

You have a lot of nerve accusing this young lady of not paying her bills. Let me read it to you. Mitchell Mutual Insurance, in the amount of 31.35 dated November 16.

MORGAN

Donna, it's not showing up in our records. I don't know what to tell you.

DONNA

Wait 'til my dad hears about this. You are going to lose all of our business. My whole family. I'll get the cancelled check, and you'll pay.

Donna steps forward, grabs a pen, and opens her check book. Leaning on Morgan's desk she glares at the man.

DONNA

What does she owe?

MORGAN

Donna...

DONNA

What. Does. She. Owe. We want to be square in case something happens between now and when we take our business elsewhere.

Morgan picks up the folder.

MORGAN

We are showing a missing payment on the car insurance and no payment on the life insurance policies for James and Jeannie. Total is \$77.90.

Jeannie scribbles out the check and tears it from the booklet.

DONNA

There, we're square. We'll get this sorted out and after that, you won't have to deal with my family ever again. Come on, let's go.

Donna shepherds Christopher and Jeannie out leaving with a final glare at Morgan.

INT. SWENSON KITCHEN - DAY

Donna is on the phone as her mom works in the kitchen preparing lunch and washing a few dishes.

JEANNIE

This is an emergency. The car is wrecked.

JAMES (O.S.)

I'm only saying this is a long-distance call and nobody is hurt. We can talk about this when I get back. I gave you this number for something serious. I really didn't expect you to actually use it.

JEANNIE

I'm sorry I called. I just wanted you to know.

JAMES (O.S.)

I can't believe your dad left the car running.

JEANNIE

I know, James. We shouldn't have left the car running. You don't have keep saying that.

JAMES (O.S.)

You don't have to yell.

JEANNIE

I am not yelling. I'm just telling you that you were supposed

to pay for the life insurance policies, but you didn't.

JAMES (O.S.)

I forgot, and with Christmas...and I'm kinda short of money.

JEANNIE

Not short enough on money to fly down to Texas.

JAMES (O.S.)

I know I am in Texas.

JEANNIE

This is a mess with the insurance. They said they can't pay on the claim and we still owe \$5000 on the loan for a mangled and twisted piece of junk metal.

JAMES (O.S.)

What are we going to do?

JEANNIE

We? Me! I am handling it. Luckily, I have people who care about me. Donna paid up the premiums and she is going to find the cancelled check. She paid the last premium for me too.

Christopher and Donna listen to the conversation until this point. Christopher stands and signals Donna to come with him.

JAMES (O.S.)

Ok. Good.

JEANNIE

Good? Don't you even care about our daughter? Life insurance is for her, just in case you don't understand how that works.

JAMES (O.S.)

I'm sorry. It's been hectic.

JEANNIE

Just so you know, I've had my lawyer draw up the divorce papers. They'll be filed as soon as I get to Sioux Falls.

INT. SWENSON LIVING ROOM - DAY

Christopher hold his wife's hand.

CHRISTOPHER

Honey, I thought we talked about this. You said you weren't going to keep giving her money.

DONNA

I did not give her money. I paid some of her bills. She needs help.

CHRISTOPHER

You know she can't manage her money. Did you see her shoes? Those are expensive. This is just like before. You gave her money, and she bought those expensive disco boots.

DONNA

I know.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, now, instead of wasting our money on luxury items, while you pay her bills, she wastes her own money. You've got to stop this.

DONNA

I have to help.

Donna breaks down into tears.

DONNA

She's my sister. I can't help it if she married a loser.

There's a commotion on the stairs leading to the second floor. The three cousins disappear up the steps.

DONNA

Were they there, on the steps,
listening the whole time?

Donna wipes at her eyes. Christopher pulls his wife close, enveloping her in his arms.

CHRISTOPHER

It's ok. I'll go talk to them.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Donna is still on the phone. Angry.

JEANNIE

Fine! Goodbye!

Donna slams the phone down onto his holder on the wall.

JEANNIE

Aaarrgh!

She falls into a chair. She slouches forward, head in her hands. The phone RINGS. Jeannie's head slowly lifts as her eyes lock onto the phone. Her fists clench. She stands, and stomps over to the phone.

JEANNIE.

What now, James?!?

There is silence on the line.

Betty Jean turns from her position at the sink washing dishes with a look of surprise and disappointment. Jeannie gives an embarrassed wave to her mom.

JEANNIE

Hello?

DAVE (O.S.)

(timidly)

Is this Jeannie? This is Dave.

JEANNIE

Oh, my God. I'm so sorry, Dave.
I just got off the phone with my
soon to be ex-husband. Sorry,
sorry, sorry.

Dave laughs.

DAVE

It's ok. I understand.

JEANNIE

What's up? What do I owe the
pleasure of a phone call from you?

DAVE

I'm off tomorrow and I was
wondering if you'd like to go to
the old ski hill and do some
sledding? My sister wants to go.
You could bring your daughter. It
might be fun.

JEANNIE

You know what? That sounds great!

Betty Jean turns from the sink.

BETTY JEAN

Who was that?

JEANNIE

That was Deputy Dave. He's taking
Brandi and I sledding tomorrow.

EXT. SKI HILL - DAY

On a bright, sunny day, Jeannie, Brandi, Dave, and ANDREA
"ANDY" SHERIDAN (30), Dave's sister frolic in the snow
sledding down the hill on plastic or metal saucers and
cheap plastic toboggans. It's cold making for perfect
sledding conditions.

MONTAGE:

- Andy and Brandi sled down together screaming.

- Dave and Jeannie attempt a dual ride, but crash horribly, laughing all the way to a snowy stop.
- Jeannie's improper cold-weather gear is stuck with snow after her crash and she looks like a snow-woman.
- Everyone gets a solo run, followed by a long trudge back up the hill.
- Trudging up the hill, Andy is bowled over by Brandi speeding down on her sled.

END MONTAGE:

The group stands at the bottom of the hill looking up.

DAVE

What do you think? Last run of the day?

JEANNIE

I am soaking wet. I don't have fancy snowsuits the rest of you.

DAVE

Come on. You and me. A race to the bottom.

BRANDI

Yeah, Mommy. Race!

ANDY

Yeah, Brandi and I will watch from down here at the finish line. We'll judge the winner.

JEANNIE

Fine. But, this is the last one.

Jeannie and Dave climb up the hill, huffing and puffing. They reach the halfway point.

JEANNIE

(breathlessly)

This is good enough. Race from here. This is as high up as I've been all day.

Jeannie looks down the hill at her daughter in the distance with trepidation. She swallows hard.

DAVE

Ok. You want a head start?

JEANNIE

No!

DAVE

Loser buys dinner?

JEANNIE

You're on.

DAVE

How about a kiss for luck?

Jeannie rolls her eyes. She leans in for a peck on Dave's cheek. He grabs her with one arm and pulls her in for a full on the mouth kiss. Surprised, Jeannie drops her sled. The sled goes down the hill by itself. She pulls away, embarrassed.

JEANNIE

Dave! You made me drop my sled!

Dave laughs.

DAVE

Sorry, not sorry. Jump on, we'll have a tandem run. It'll be a tie.

Dave sits on the sled, holding his arms out in the snow, restraining the plastic toboggan as Jeannie climbs aboard. She snuggles in close wrapping her arms tightly around Dave.

DAVE

Ready?

JEANNIE

I'm scared.

DAVE

You should be. We're going for
it. Ready?

JEANNIE

Just go.

Dave pulls his arms in and the sled starts to pick up speed and soon they are zipping along, Dave doing his best to steer the plastic vehicle. Dipping and diving over the undulations, they are periodically airborne and Jeannie SCREAMS as she jostles along, squeezing ever-tighter against Dave.

They slide across the finish line drawn by Andy and Brandi waiting below.

DAVE

You can let go now.

Jeannie's grip loosens and she opens her eyes.

JEANNIE

Yay. We made it.

Jeannie crawls off the sled and dramatically kisses the snow.

JEANNIE

It's good to be alive.

DAVE

Oh, great, we got Bette Davis and
her all-star, academy award
winning acting here.

Dave claps.

DAVE

It wasn't that bad.

Andy approaches with Brandi's hand in hers.

ANDY

Congratulations, you're both losers. The winner is the empty sled.

Andy sweeps her hand to the plastic sled a little way a way.

DAVE

Yeah, we had a slight malfunction at the top of the hill. But, I'd say it worked out fine.

Dave extends a hand and pulls Jeannie up into his arms.

DAVE

Jeannie, you're a real trooper. I'll buy dinner.

Jeanie moves in close to Dave and cradles his face in her wet gloves. She kisses him.

JEANNIE

That's for not killing us on that ride down.

Dave grabs Jeannie's hands.

DAVE

Come on, let's get you home. Your gloves are soaked. You are going to get cold quick. Let's go! Back to the truck!

The group trudges down the last of the slope.

DAVE

How would you like to go for a snowmobile ride tomorrow?

BRANDI

Yeah! I want to go.

The group walks a bit further.

BRANDI

What's a snowmobile?

EXT. DAVE'S TRAILER HOUSE - DAY

Dave pull starts the old Arctic Cat snowmobile for Andy. He gives a thumbs up to his sister. He lifts Brandi onto the back of the snowmobile. She is like a bobblehead doll with her large helmet.

DAVE

Hold on tight!

Dave places Brandi's hands around Andy's waist. Dave taps Andy's shoulder and she gives the snowmobile some gas and they ease along the bottom of the snow-filled ditch, carefully maneuvering along.

Dave looks to Jeannie.

DAVE

You ready?

Jeannie nods, her helmet bobbing.

DAVE

Tighten that thing up. We're going to give them a head start and then we're going to catch them.

Dave pulls the starting cord on the Arctic Cat and it ROARS to life. He jumps on and signals to Jeannie. She crawls on behind him as he straps on his helmet.

DAVE

(yelling)

Here we go!

They are off like a rocket bouncing along the ditch bottom in Andy's track and in no time, they catch and pass them. Jeannie squeezes Dave tighter and tighter.

Back at Dave's house the snowmobiles pull up and everyone dismounts and removes their helmets.

JEANNIE

That was amazing! Did you have fun, Honey?

Brandi struggles to get her helmet unstrapped but her head nods.

JEANNIE

Thanks so much, Andy. What do you say? Should we go to the Dairy Queen for ice cream? My treat!

Brandi has her helmet off and the words are barely out of Jeannie's mouth.

BRANDI

Yes!

INT. DAIRY QUEEN - DAY

Everyone orders an ice cream cone. Each receives their treat and Jeannie pays as the others mill about deciding on where to sit.

Jeannie shoulders her purse and points.

JEANNIE

How about that booth over there?

Her purse connects with Dave's elbow. The jolt of the blow knocks his chocolate dipped ice cream from the cone and it SPLATS on the floor. The stunned group is silent before bursting into laughter.

JEANNIE

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

Dave is paralyzed looking down at his lost snack.

Jeannie grabs a napkin and scoops it up, attempting to put it back on the cone. Dave pulls the empty cone away before she can set it down. Dave laughs and Jeannie laughs at what she is doing and tosses the napkin filled with the ice cream into the trash.

JEANNIE

This is my mom's fault. She gave me this huge purse for Christmas, and I am banging it into everything.

Jeannie shakes her head in surrender.

JEANNIE

Come on, Dave. I'll get you a new one.

The rest of the group heads to the booth, Jeannie and Dave get back in line.

DAVE

Don't forget, I gotta work the next two days, twelve-hour shifts, so I'm not going to see you, but then it's New Year's Eve. I got an eight-hour shift, but the evening off.

JEANNIE

I remember. You told me twice already. This has been great. I'm glad they stole my car. I might not have met you if they hadn't.

Jeannie puts her arm around Dave. She kisses his cheek.

JEANNIE

Thank you.

EXT. ICE SKATING RINK - DAY

Jeannie and Brandi are attempting to ice skate on the community skating pond on a cold, bright, sunny day. Their breath produces clouds of moisture as they hold each other barely moving around the ice on skates as other glide past.

JEANNIE

Let's take a break, Honey.

The pair manages to make it to a bench and Jeannie plops down, hoisting Brandi onto the bench next to her.

BRANDI

Do you think Dave would like to come skate with us?

JEANNIE

I think so. We can ask him. Do you like Dave?

BRANDI

Yeah.

JEANNIE

I need to tell you something.

Brandi picks up on Jeannie's tone.

JEANNIE

Your Dad and I, we are not going to be together anymore.

BRANDI

You're going to get a divorce?

JEANNIE

How do you know that word?

BRANDI

I've heard you say that to Daddy on the phone.

JEANNIE

Oh, well, you are right. Your dad has a new girlfriend. He's still going to be your dad, and sometimes you will go spend time with them.

BRANDI

Is Dave your new boyfriend?

JEANNIE

I don't know if I'd say he's my boyfriend. He's a friend. He's your friend too, right?

BRANDI

Yeah. I like Andy too. She's nice.

JEANNIE

Good. Come on. Let's try to skate some more.

Jeannie gingerly stands and gets back on the ice. She extends her hand to Brandi and pulls her to the ice.

Jeannie falls and drags Brandi down too.

JEANNIE

Oh, boy. We're going to have to get much better before we ask Dave and Andy to come skate with us.

Brandi nods in agreement.

INT. LANNY'S LANES BOWLING ALLEY - NIGHT

Dave, Jeannie, Brandi, Andy, and two of Andy's friends from work bowl and have a fun time laughing and drinking a few beers.

Midnight comes and bowling alley staff hand out horns and hats. The countdown occurs and the entire crowd at the alley sings Auld Lang Syne.

Dave and Jeannie kiss in the New Year. They sway to the music in the background, holding each other close.

JEANNIE

(whispering to Dave)

How about if after I get Brandi put to bed, I sneak out and come over to your house to continue the New Year's celebration.

DAVE

Sounds good. I'll park just down the block from your house, over on Oak Street. I'll drop you off, pull down the street, and wait for you.

JEANNIE

I like it. It sounds exciting. It's like high school.

DAVE

You? You snuck out of your
parent's house in high school?

JEANNIE

Once or twice.

INT. SWENSON HOUSE GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jeannie tucks Brandi into bed. The little girl is tired
and she's asleep as her head hits the pillow.

INT. SWENSON HOUSE HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jeannie stands in the hallway outside her parent's room.
She opens the door quietly.

JEANNIE

Mom. Mom.

BETTY JEAN

What? What is it? Are you ok?

JEANNIE

Everything is fine. I'm just
going back out with Dave tonight.
Can you keep an eye on Brandi?
She's asleep.

BETTY JEAN

Sure. Don't be out too late.

JEANNIE

I won't, Mom. Bye.

Jeannie pulls the door, quietly shutting it.

INT. SWENSON HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jeannie digs through the liquor cabinet. She snags a
pint bottle of Peppermint Schnapps.

JEANNIE

Here goes nothing.

Jeannie uncaps the bottle and takes a big swig. She
shakes her head.

JEANNIE

Yikes.

She tucks the bottle in her purse and she quietly slips out the back door.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Jeannie carefully trots down the sidewalk slipping as she goes.

INT. DAVE'S TRUCK - NIGHT

The passenger door opens on Dave's truck catching him by surprise.

DAVE

Jesus! You snuck up on me.

Jeannie climbs in the truck and Dave fires up the engine.

JEANNIE

Look what I got.

She pulls out the bottle of Schnapps, uncaps it and tips it back, taking a large gulp.

JEANNIE

Ahhh. I lifted it from my dad's liquor cabinet.

Jeannie offers a drink to Dave as he starts to drive.

DAVE

Just hold on there, rebel without a clue. I am the cops. I can't be breaking the law with an open container and drinking and driving.

Jeannie shrinks down.

JEANNIE

Oooh. You're right. Better leave that up to me.

Jeannie takes another swig.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

In Dave's bedroom the bottle is drained and the lights go out.

INT. DAVE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Andy opens the door to her brother's bedroom.

ANDY

Hey, bonehead, I need the keys to your rig. You blocked me in. I have to get to the hospital for my shift.

Andy sees Jeannie curled beside Dave as he pushes himself up and tries to shush his sister.

ANDY

Oh, Jesus. I am sorry.

Andy shields her eyes. Jeannie's eyes open. She smiles.

JEANNIE

Good morning. Don't worry about it.

She turns her back and nestles into Dave.

DAVE

Keys are in my pocket. Just take the pants, and if you don't mind, get out.

Andy grins sheepishly as she roots around the pockets of the pants she plucked from the floor. Finding the keys, she backs out the door carefully, closing the door as she leaves.

Jeannie GROANS and positions herself on her back, staring to the ceiling.

JEANNIE

This can't be a thing, can it?
I'm still married.

Jeannie covers her face. Dave is up on an elbow looking at the beautiful woman next to him.

DAVE

It's whatever you want it to be.

JEANNIE

I have to get back to Sioux Falls to my classroom. School is starting back up. Oh, my God.

DAVE

I know. Maybe I can come visit?

JEANNIE

I guess.

DAVE

With that resounding enthusiasm, maybe not.

JEANNIE

Oh, shush.

There is silence.

JEANNIE

Dave?

DAVE

Yes.

JEANNIE

I have a confession to make.

DAVE

Oh, really? What is it?

JEANNIE

I didn't sneak out of the house last night. I told my mom I was leaving.

DAVE

Wow. This changes everything.

JEANNIE

I have a daughter for crying out
loud! I can't be sneaking around!

Jeannie hits Dave with her pillow. Dave laughs.

EXT. SWENSON DRIVEWAY - DAY

Jeannie kisses Dave, arms around his neck as Ed watches
uncomfortably.

ED

Ahem.

You can see everyone's breath rise in the cold, still
air. The sun shines brightly as the couple separates,
prompted by the Colonel.

DAVE

Loaning out the Plymouth, eh?

ED

Just for the week. We're going to
get a replacement...nothing like the
Charger, but Jay over at Brooks
promised me something decent.

DAVE

Jay? Oh, yeah. He's a decent
guy...to me. Not sure how he's
treated a lot of my people, but...

Jeannie pulls away and moves around to the driver's side
of the car.

DAVE

You'll call me after you get home
safely? No speeding.

Ed moves closer to Dave as Jeannie moves around the car.
Ed grabs Dave's arm and edges him to his sheriff's deputy
unit. Dave feels the cool dismissal from Ed.

ED

She'll call you right after she
talks to me.

ED

(softly only to Dave)
She's still married.

With a small shove, Ed pushes Dave toward his vehicle.

ED
(loudly)
Alright! Bye, Dave!

Dave pauses a little stunned by the quick dismissal. He watches Ed maneuver to the other side of the car and hug his daughter, assisting her get into the car. Jeannie settles into the driver's seat and looks up to her father frowning.

JEANNIE
Give him a break.

ED
I'll just say to you what I said
to him...you're still married.

Ed quickly looks to Brandi sitting unstrapped in the passenger seat. He waves and smiles.

ED
Bye, Honey.

BRANDI
Bye, Grandpa.

Jeannie grits her teeth and growls. She pulls the door shut with a slam.

DAVE
Ok. See you around, Colonel.

INT. PLYMOUTH - DAY

Brandi looks at her mom.

BRANDI
What's wrong, Mommy? Are you mad?

JEANNIE
Oh, don't worry, Baby. Grandpa
was just being rude to Dave and it

made me a little bit angry. It'll
be ok. You ready?

Jeannie puts the car in reverse and waits for Dave's
vehicle to clear.

EXT. SWENSON DRIVEWAY - DAY

Dave pulls away from the curb, unblocking the driveway
for Jeannie to back out. He waves, and Jeannie waves
back. He makes eye contact with Ed and waves. Ed frowns
and doesn't wave, instead he turns his attention to
Jeannie backing out. He smiles and waves at Jeannie and
Brandi.

INT. JEANNIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jeannie is on the phone, sitting on a chair in her tiny
kitchen.

JEANNIE

The car was fine. My dad always
keeps good care of his vehicles.
They are a huge part of his job.

Dave

Why doesn't your dad like me?

JEANNIE

Oh, stop. He's the Colonel when
it comes to protecting me. When
he's the Colonel, he doesn't like
anyone.

Dave

It just seemed so weird. He's
always so friendly and outgoing.
I've never seen that side before.

JEANNIE

Dave, I'm getting divorced. My
dad is over protective as it is,
now, because of James, it
magnified. Give him time.

There is a KNOCK at Jeannie's door.

JEANNIE

Just a sec. There's somebody at the door.

DAVE

Oh, ok. Just call me back.

JEANNIE

No, it's ok. I have a super long chord on this phone, and this is a tiny apartment.

Jeannie walks to the door and looks through the peephole. She blanches and opens the door, still holding the phone to her ear. Two men in dark overcoats stand outside her door.

JEANNIE

Can I help you?

SGT CAMPBELL

Jeannie Jorgensen?

SERGEANT CAMPBELL (40) is prototypical cop. He's in plainclothes. He's a big White man with short cropped hair and a bushy mustache.

JEANNIE

Yes.

SGT CAMPBELL

I am Sergeant Campbell and this is Officer Dansby. May we come in?

Jeannie backs away from the door, and the men enter. Officer Dansby is a young, pale man. He sports a crew cut and looks like a cop, although his uniform is hidden by a large dark overcoat.

JEANNIE

Sure. What is it?

SGT CAMPBELL

Do you want to sit down?

JEANNIE

No! What? What is it?

Jeannie still holds the phone to her ear. Sergeant Campbell looks to his counterpart, then back Jeannie.

SGT CAMPBELL

I'm sorry to have to tell you this. We were informed by the Texas Rangers that your husband, James, was killed today in a small plane crash outside of Rockwall. They asked us to notify you in order to continue the investigation.

The phone receiver crashes to the floor. Dave has heard every word of the conversation, punctuated with phone smashing one the floor.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE - DAY

Dave raps lightly on the frame of his sister's open bedroom door.

DAVE

Hey, Sis. Got a minute.

Andy paints her toenails on her bed.

ANDY

Sure, what's up?

Dave is in his sheriff deputy's uniform, hat in hand, he spins it nervously.

DAVE

It's James' funeral today. I was wondering...Well, you know I haven't talked to Jeannie since...she got the call. I told you before, she won't pick up the phone and she hasn't called me back.

Dave's head shakes slowly.

DAVE

Do you think I should go to the funeral?

Andy cocks her head as she looks up from painting her toenails.

ANDY

This is a tough one. My instant, gut reaction is yes. But, this is delicate.

Andy bites at her bottom lip as she concentrates and ponders.

ANDY

You know what, brother? Just go. Stay in the back, out of the way. If she approaches you, fine, if not, just quietly leave. You peripherally knew James, so it's fine. I don't see it being some big scandal in the community if you are there. Nobody knows about you and Jeannie.

DAVE

I think you might be surprised. This is Sisseton. It's a small town, and rumors spread like wildfire.

INT. LUTHERAN CHURCH - DAY

Dave slips into the back pew of the church as the funeral begins.

MONTAGE:

- Minister says a prayer.
- James' best friend gives Eulogy.
- Pall bearers roll the casket out followed by the family.
- Soloist sings Amazing Grace.

Jeannie, looking beautiful in a black dress, including black veil and hat, passes Dave in the back pew. She

double-takes as her eyes meet his. She mouths the words I'm sorry, and continues by.

END MONTAGE

INT. SWENSON HOUSE - DAY

The house is full. It's a limited reception for family who have gathered for coffee and to pay respects to Jeannie at her parents' house. Jeannie bravely greets everyone, until she is pulled by Donna into the laundry room, shutting the door behind them. They talk quietly.

DONNA

Are you ok?

JEANNIE

I don't know how to feel. My husband is dead. My soon to be ex-husband is dead.

DONNA

Look, it probably still hasn't set in.

JEANNIE

It's a nightmare. Look at me. I'm not even crying. I don't feel it. It's been over between James and I for, really, two years.

Donna listens, holding her sisters hand.

JEANNIE

I must look like a bitch to everyone. I can't even cry. The father of my daughter is dead, and I can't produce a tear. What is wrong with me?

DONNA

Like I said, maybe it just hasn't sunk in yet. How is Brandi?

JEANNIE

That's another thing. She has had such little contact with James

lately that it hasn't even impacted her. It's like it's not real. She hasn't seen me cry, and had sympathy tears with me.

DONNA

She's with her cousins right now, they'll help now and provide strength for the future. She's a great kid.

Donna hugs her sister a moment. She backs up holding her hands.

DONNA

I do have some good news for you. I have the canceled check for the insurance. One less headache for you to worry about.

Jeannie sighs in relief.

DONNA

I just thank God we were over at Mitchell's insurance for that stolen and wrecked car and we were able to get James' policy up to date.

Jeannie nods and her eyes well with tears. She falls into Donna's arms.

DONNA

Things happen for a reason. James was smart enough, and a good enough man to have that life insurance.

Jeannie sobs, the dam has broken. Donna tries to console her, providing multiple tissues.

JEANNIE

What am I going to do?

DONNA

I got you. I got you. Whatever you need. I'm here.

JEANNIE

Did you see Dave at the funeral?

DONNA

I saw him at the church. I didn't see him at the burial.

JEANNIE

I haven't even spoken to him since James died. I know he's called, I never answered the phone. I just can't...

DONNA

He's a good man. He's not going to pressure you. He's smart...and decent. You're a grieving widow.

JEANNIE

I just don't know what to do.

Jeannie pulls away and turns her back on her sister. Donna provides another tissue.

DONNA

If you think you need permission to see him and go forward with living, you officially have it from me.

Jeannie turns to her sister, dabbing at her eyes.

JEANNIE

Can it be that easy?

DONNA

Yes. You are hereby granted permission.

Jeannie forces a smile.

JEANNIE

Thanks, sis.

Donna opens her arms and Jeannie falls into Donna's comforting hug again.

INT. MITCHELL MUTAL INSURANCE - DAY

Donna, Jeannie, and Ed sit before Morgan Mitchell nervously searching through his papers with one hand, while glancing back and forth to the canceled check in his other.

MORGAN

I don't know what to say, Ed.
This is so embarrassing. You have to understand, I'm working with my son now, and the transition isn't without some bumps.

Ed shakes his head as he looks at the squirming, pitiful man in front of him.

MORGAN

What can I do to fix this and not lose your business?

ED

I expect we will be seeing discounted premiums going forward.

MORGAN

Ten percent, for you and your whole family.

ED

I was thinking more like twenty five percent. After all, I don't think we want to bring in your underwriting firm into this discussion.

MORGAN

You're right. Twenty five percent.

ED

I want my daughter to have those checks in hand by the end of the week.

MORGAN

Ed, \$220,000 for the life insurance policy? It's going to take some time. You know how these corporations are.

ED

I guess I can go straight over to Vig's Law Office, what are they, a block away from here? I'm sure he'd love a wintertime project to keep him busy. And I expect we're going to have to ask for double the amount. You know, pain and suffering.

MORGAN

Ed...

ED

No, no. Maybe that's the cleanest way to get things done. I have my youngest daughter sitting here. She's a widow now. With a four-year old daughter. How do you think that would play to a jury?

Morgan frowns and nods glancing to Jeannie and back to Ed.

ED

I want this done this week. I want this done fairly. And most of all I want you to apologize to my daughters.

MORGAN

Done. Jeannie, I am so sorry for your loss. I am sorry for my error and any pain it caused you. I promise you'll have the checks for the car and for the life insurance policy at the end of the week, even I have to write them out of my accounts myself.

Morgan looks to Donna and back to Jeannie, alternating as he continues.

MORGAN

I'm sorry Donna and Jeannie about the clerical error. I will do everything I can so this does not happen to anyone else, ever again. You have my promise to go above and beyond in handling future business.

Ed stands and extends his hand. Morgan stands and shakes Ed's hand.

ED

We're square.

Jeannie and Donna stand and shake Morgan's hand and they follow their father out the door.

MORGAN

Thanks, Colonel.

EXT. OUTSIDE MITCHELL MUTAL INSURANCE OFFICE - DAY

Ed, Jeannie, and Donna walk to Ed's Blazer in silence for a moment.

JEANNIE

Wow! Thank you, Dad. I don't know what to say.

ED

You're welcome, Honey. As long as he owned up to his responsibilities, we're all good.

JEANNIE

Can you drive by the sheriff's office, Dad? I want to check on something.

A simultaneous snorting laugh is emitted by both Ed and Donna.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Jeannie enters the basement office of the historic Roberts County Sheriff's Office. It's quiet in the office, the receptionist/dispatcher is at the front.

RECEPTIONIST

May I help you?

JEANNIE

Is Deputy Sheridan around?

The receptionist holds up a finger, picks up a phone and calls back to the offices. The receptionist's voice echoes overhead.

RECEPTIONIST

Deputy Sheridan, you have a visitor in reception.

The receptionist looks to Jeannie.

RECEPTIONIST

He'll be right with you.

Deputy Dave opens the secure door and does a double-take.

DAVE

Jeannie? Hi. What are you doing here? Everything Ok?

Jeannie smiles as Dave steps forward, but holds up the security door, restraining himself from her.

DAVE

I tried to call a few times...

Jeannie holds up a hand.

DAVE

I saw James' obituary in the Courier, it was really nice.

JEANNIE

It's ok. Can we go get some coffee?

EXT. SWENSON HOME - DAY

Dave's sheriff's unit pulls up to the curb on the street in front of the Swenson home. With a wave Jeannie exits the vehicle and hustles through the cold to the door.

INT. SWENSON KITCHEN - DAY

Betty Jean, Ed, and Jeannie sit at the small kitchen table drinking coffee and having fresh chocolate chip cookies.

JEANNIE

Was Brandi good this morning, Mom, while we were all gone?

BETTY JEAN

Yes, just played with her cousins.

JEANNIE

Must have been fun, she's been napping for an hour and a half now.

BETTY JEAN

Yes, Donna called when she got home to Aberdeen, and she said the boys slept the whole way.

JEANNIE

I'm sorry she had to go. I know she was concerned about the weather. I heard on the radio that there is a winter storm watch.

BETTY JEAN

Really? Watertown radio, or Fargo?

JEANNIE

It was the sheriff dispatch radio. I heard it when Dave gave me a ride home in his unit.

ED

How is Deputy Dave?

JEANNIE

Good.

ED

And how is it between you and
Deputy Dave?

Jeannie rolls her eyes.

JEANNIE

Good. It's the first time we've
talked...since I got the call about
James.

Jeannie sips her coffee in the silence.

JEANNIE

I was actually on the phone with
him when I answered the door and
the police told me the news. He
heard everything until I dropped
the phone.

ED

Oh, geez.

JEANNIE

I know. Poor guy. I really like
him.

Jeannie sighs.

JEANNIE

I don't see it as something. Not
a long-distance relationship.

ED

Yeah.

JEANNIE

I should get going?

BETTY JEAN

Back to Sioux Falls? At this
hour? No!

JEANNIE

I have students that need their teacher. They have had a substitute too long.

ED

Just go early tomorrow. I'll get you up when I'm heading to work.

JEANNIE

Maybe you're right. Ok.

Jeannie sips coffee and looks at her parents. A smile forms, it's a feeling of normalcy for the first time in a while.

INT. SWENSON HOUSE - NIGHT

It's 5:00 AM, Ed looks out the living room window. Jeannie descends the stairs and joins her father at the window.

JEANNIE

The howling wind woke me up.

ED

Yup. It's a blizzard out there. I didn't wake you. You're not going anywhere. Ok. We'll see you later.

JEANNIE

What do you think you're doing? If I'm not going, you sure is heck aren't going out on those country roads.

ED

By now, you definitely know the motto of the Post Office: "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

JEANNIE

Dad, no. That's just some platitude.

Ed's hurt expression says it all.

ED

I have to go check. At least I'll get the sorting done for the day. It's busy still. Late Christmas cards and thank you cards still rolling in.

Betty Jean eases down the stairs.

BETTY JEAN

You're not going, are you?

JEANNIE

Listen to mom.

ED

Just to get some sorting done. You know Mel will be there, and Lord knows he needs supervision.

Ed kisses his wife goodbye. He looks to Betty Jean and points to Jeannie.

ED

Make sure she stays here.

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Ed looks out the window as the storm rages.

MEL

How's it look out there, Colonel?

ED

I think it's letting up. I'm getting ready to head out on my route.

MEL

Really? Are you crazy?

ED

I can't let all this mail build up. It just makes tomorrow's

delivery load heftier. Besides, I don't want to be cooped up here or at home.

MEL

No way, man. You're not getting me out there.

ED

Suit yourself. I'm heading out.

INT. ED SWENSON'S CHEVY BLAZER - DAY

Ed creeps along the lonely country in white out conditions. He pulls up along a mailbox, reaches across, and through the passenger window, shoves several letters in the receptacle. He pulls slowly back onto the road, the four-wheel drive grinding as it strains against the snow drifts. Ed shakes his head.

AM RADIO ANNOUNCER

No travel advised until 10 pm.
Snow with winds gusting to 45 mph
will continue off and on until 7
pm. Drifting snow will continue
to cause dangerous travel
conditions.

ED

No kidding.

Ed eases his vehicle along the road, guided by the weeds and taller grasses that missed the final mowing of the year, remaining along the shoulder of the road.

ED

At least there's no traffic.

Ed can't see the next mailbox until it is a mere 20 feet away. He puts the vehicle in park and delivers the mail to the mailbox. He pours a cup of coffee and looks around. He's nervous for the first time.

ED

Hmm. I may have underestimated
this storm.

Ed sighs and looks at his watch.

ED

I'm two and a half hours behind.

He looks around at the snow rushing horizontally across the windshield.

ED

I don't think I'm going to make it back before dark.

INT. SWENSON HOME - DAY

Betty Jean and Jeannie stand looking out the living room window at the storm raging outside. Jeannie checks her watch.

JEANNIE

That's it. He's two hours late.

Jeannie plucks her heavy coat from the chair next to her.

JEANNIE

Keep an eye on Brandi.

BETTY JEAN

Where do you think you're going, young lady?

JEANNIE

I'm going to find Dad.

BETTY JEAN

No, you're not.

JEANNIE

I'm going to Dave's and see if he can help. He's got a snowmobile.

Jeannie is out the door before her mom can say another word.

INT. ED'S BLAZER - DAY

The wind is relentless. Ed pulls up to a mailbox marked "MORT." He leans across, and through the passenger

window, delivers the mail. He steps on the gas and the engine dies.

ED

Uh-oh.

INT. DAVE'S TRAILER HOUSE - DAY

Dave sits at his cluttered kitchen table next to Jeannie. They look at a hand drawn map.

JEANNIE

You should start here.

Jeannie points to the map.

JEANNIE

Mel thought it might be best to go in reverse. Hopefully, he was just about finished up.

Dave nods slowly, as he stares at the map.

DAVE

Yeah, I know that area. It's right off the township road coming back north towards Highway 10.

Jeannie touches each marked mailbox on the map.

JEANNIE

Erving's, Hildebrandts, Thompsons, and Mortimers. That's four miles. If he's not there, we'll just come back. We might not have enough gas.

Dave snorts a laugh.

DAVE

Whoa. You're not coming.

Jeannie starts to protest.

JEANNIE

I...

Dave cuts her off.

DAVE

There wouldn't be enough room on the snowmobile if I do find him with you along. Plus, I'm going to need to be as light as possible to go fast and save gas.

Jeannie is silent. Her shoulders slump.

JEANNIE

I can't argue. You're right.

Dave is up from the table. He picks up the map and folds it. He shoves it in his pocket. He looks at his watch.

DAVE

What time is it? Just about three. I better suit up. I only got about two hours of daylight left.

Dave moves to the closet. He gets his snowsuit out and gets it on.

DAVE

Come on.

Dave moves to the door and Jeannie follows.

EXT. DAVE'S HOUSE - DAY

Jeannie dons her hat and gloves as they hustle to the detached garage, leaning against the buffeting wind. Dave flings open the garage door and they step inside, protected from the elements.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Dave picks up his helmet.

JEANNIE

Wait!

Jeannie throws her arms around him and kisses him on the mouth.

JEANNIE
Please, find my dad.

DAVE
I will.

Dave straps on his helmet.

JEANNIE
I'm heading back to my mom's.

DAVE
Can you get the door after I
leave?

Dave points above him.

Jeannie nods. Dave pulls the starting cord and the snowmobile's engine ROARS to life. He gives a thumbs up with his mittened hand and takes off into the storm.

Jeannie gives a wave as Dave looks over his shoulder, returning the farewell. The ENGINE NOISE disappears as does the vision of Dave, enveloped by the storm. Jeannie reaches for the rope to close the garage door.

INT. SWENSON HOME - DAY

It's quiet in the kitchen. Betty Jean and Jeannie sit silently at the kitchen table, coffee cups in front of them. Jeannie's fingers drum on the table. The phone RINGS, knifing through the silence, and Jeannie jumps up.

JEANNIE
I got it?

Jeannie answers the phone.

JEANNIE
Hello? Daddy?

Jeannie's shoulders slumped.

JEANNIE
Oh, it's you.

Jeannie calls over to her mom, mouthing the words.

JEANNIE

It's Donna.

Jeannie turns her attention to the phone.

JEANNIE

No word yet. There's only about a half hour of daylight left, if that. (beat) Yup. Better keep the line open.

Jeannie hangs up the phone. Jeannie's eyes turn to the darkening kitchen window.

BETTY JEAN

Go get Brandi. You two need to eat. I'll warm up something.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jeannie nurses a cup of copy as she looks at the storm illuminated under the streetlight.

JEANNIE

(voice straining)

The sun's been down for two hours. Something's wrong.

BETTY JEAN

I'm sure they're fi...

The phone RINGS cutting Betty Jean's sentence off. Their heads snap to the RINGING phone, frozen a moment, waiting for a another RING. Jeannie rushes to the phone.

JEANNIE

I got it!

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jeannie answers

JEANNIE

(breathlessly)

Hello?

ED (O.S.)
Hi, Honey. Thanks for the sending
the rescue party.

JEANNIE
(screaming)
Daddy!

ED (O.S.)
We're ok. We're ok. Calm down.
Somebody here wants to say "Hi,"
but put your mom on the phone for
a second. Love you.

Betty Jean is by Jeannie's side waiting.

JEANNIE
They're ok.

Jeannie hands the phone to her mom. Tears are flowing
and she collapses onto a kitchen chair.

BETTY JEAN
Dad, I'm so relieved. Where are
you?

ED (O.S.)
We're at the Mortimer Ranch, we're
just going to stay here tonight.
The Blazer conked out on me.
Universal belt broke. Good thing
Dave came along on the snowmobile.
Would've been a long, cold night.

BETTY JEAN
Well, thank goodness. We'll talk
about it later, but what were you
thinking? Going out on your route
in this storm?

ED (O.S.)
I know. Not smart. Hey, Dave
wants to talk to Jeannie.

Betty Jean hands the phone to Jeannie, wrung out on the
chair.

JEANNIE

Hey.

DAVE (O.S.)

Hey. You are not going to believe this, but Mrs. Mortimer, the kindergarten teacher in Sisseton...she's retiring at the end of the year. I was just thinking...

BLACK SCREEN:

SUPER: ONE YEAR LATER

EXT. DOWNTOWN SISSETON - NIGHT

Dave, Jeannie, and Brandi walk hand in hand along the sidewalk...slowly. The Christmas Decorations light the streets with red, white, and blue.

JEANNIE

I'm not of fan of the red, white, and blue Bi-centennial Christmas decorations. To Fourth of July-ee.

Jeanne waddles under one of the streetlights clad in its Christmas décor, and she looks up. She is very pregnant, and she stumbles a bit.

DAVE

Careful.

They meet a woman walking with her young daughter.

WOMAN

Hi, Mrs. Sheridan. Say "Hi" to your teacher, Amy.

AMY

(shyly)
Hi, Mrs. Sheridan.

WOMAN

(embarrassed)

It's weird for her, not in the
classroom and all. Merry
Christmas.

The group continues to walk and they head for A&C
Variety.

JEANNIE

One more item to get.

DAVE

What's that?

JEANNIE

My dad wants some new playing
cards. The one thing he said he
wants for Christmas. He's got to
have them for poker nights.

They enter A&C Variety as the door gongs behind them,
signifying a customer.

THE END.