

CHRISTMAS JOE

Written by

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Based on a local
Small town legend

A BLACK SCREEN WITH V.O. -

NARRATOR - A FEMALE VOICE
(a very Southern accent)

FADE IN:

Time is a fleeting thing. It comes and goes without much notice, but as it passes it leaves a footprint...what we call memories. Some that seem so real to me, are remembered very differently by those who experienced the very same events. I remember the day my mother died. We buried her in a yellow dress. I chose it because it was her favorite. Her sister Rose swears it was green. I guess everyone has the right to remember personal things in their own way.

EXT. - DAYBREAK

The year is displayed on the screen:

1967

We hear the far-off sound of a FREIGHT TRAIN and its WHISTLE.

An AERIAL VIEW of the TRAIN traveling through fields of cotton and rice. We are in the deep South.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

(CONT'D)

But then there are events that are so profound that they make their mark on all of us. I wonder if time purposefully inserts itself into those days so that they are never forgotten, nor their message ever dimmed. December twenty first that year was a day like that in our town.

EXT.

A RAILROAD YARD - EARLY MORNING

The train pulls into the yard, slowing as it comes. On its engine the words "DELTA SOUTHERN". It is not a passenger train station but a place where railcars filled with freight, lumber, machinery, dry goods and livestock are loaded and unloaded from the train. The train squeals to a stop by a makeshift wooden platform and TWO RAILWORKERS exit from the engine onto it. They go about their business, talking and laughing as they go. Suddenly one sees something O. S.

RAILWORKER #1
Hey! You there. Stop!

We see two middle aged men, ragged in attire jumping from one of the freight cars and making a run for it away from the train

RAILWORKER #1 (CONT'D)
 (Calling after them)
 Yeah. That's right. Go on and run.
 Freeloaders! Don't let me catch
 you on this train again, ya hear?

The two men continue running into the distance.

RAILWORKER #2
 Hobos. Worthless hobos.

RAILWORKER #1
 Aww, we better get down there and
 check those other cars. Those bums
 are like roaches. There's never
 just a couple of 'em. We may have
 a whole train full.

They shake their heads and jump off the platform and head down the row of train cars, looking in each as they pass.

EXT.

RAIL YARD - DAY

FROM INSIDE A DARKENED RAIL CAR.

A heavy door slides open and sunlight rushes in. The two RAILWORKERS squint into the darkness. From their POV we see a huddled figure in the corner of the empty car. This is JOE TELLES. 60ish, possibly younger or older, we can't tell as he is unwashed, filthy clothes, possibly several weeks worth of beard stubble. He is barely able to raise his head.

RAILWORKER #1
 Hey you, get on out of there.

JOE looks up at them now and mumbles something unintelligible

RAILWORKER #2
 Aww, he's drunk. No wonder he
 didn't run with the rest of 'em.

RAILWORKER #1
 Come on buddy, get on out of there
 before I call the Sheriff.

JOE still doesn't move, but stares at them groggily

The two men scramble up into the car and each take JOE by an arm to lift him up.

RAILWORKER #2

Geez! He smells worse than that
cattle car we're carrying.

Both workers make a disgusted face as they lift him up and out of the boxcar.

RAILWORKER #1

What's your name, buddy?

JOE doesn't answer, but looks around at his surroundings. He appears dazed, confused.

RAILWORKER #2

Too drunk to know his name.

RAILWORKER #1

I don't smell whiskey on him.

RAILWORKER #2

I don't think you could even smell
bad whiskey over that stench.

They sit him down on the ground

RAILWORKER #1

Well, what are we gonna do with
him?

RAILWORKER #2

Leave him here. Let him sober up.
He'll be gone soon enough.

From O. C. we hear a man's voice

RAILYARD SUPERVISOR

What in blazes is goin' on down
here?

The two workers look at each other and then toward the front of the train where the RAILYARD SUPERVISOR, a large man wearing work clothes and a hard hat is coming toward them. He finally reaches them, out of breath as he puffs for air

RAILYARD SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)

What are you two boys up to? Who
is that man?

RAILWORKER #1

Don't know. Caught him riding the
rails. A hobo. Drunk, looks like.

RAILWORKER #2
His buddies run off and left him.

RAILYARD SUPERVISOR
(to Joe)
What's your name? Where you from?
Don't you know it's against the law
to freeload on this rail line?

RAILWORKER #1
He don't talk.

They look down at JOE, who acts as if he hears nothing. His eyes are closed as if he has nodded off again.

RAILYARD SUPERVISOR
Get him outta here.

RAILWORKER #2
What are we gonna do with him?

RAILYARD SUPERVISOR
I don't care what you do with him,
just get him outta here.

He turns to walk away and then calls back over his shoulder

RAILYARD SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)
Aww, never mind. I'm calling the
sheriff. If I don't, he'll sober
up and be back on this train when
it pulls out again this evenin'.

EXT.

OUTSIDE THE RAIL YARD A FEW MINUTES LATER.

The two workers have managed to get JOE up and have sat him in a chair outside the RAIL YARD OFFICE. JOE is awake now, but doesn't look at them. We see a PATROL CAR pull into the parking lot. A UNIFORMED OFFICER, large in girth gets out. This is the town SHERIFF

SHERIFF
What seems to be the problem boys?

RAILWORKER #1
We got us a hobo here, Sheriff

SHERIFF
He steal something?

They look at each other and shrug

RAILWORKER #1
Not that we know of.

SHERIFF
Well, what did he do?

RAILWORKER #2
Nothing other than mooching a train
ride with his buddies I guess.
They run off, but this one...he's
drunk

The SHERIFF looks again at JOE, who is studying something in
the dirt intently.

SHERIFF
Where'd he get on?

RAILWORKER #1
Couldn't say. We made a couple
stops overnight. Last one in
Memphis.

SHERIFF
(to Joe)
Where you from, old man?

JOE continues to study the dirt

RAILWORKER #2
He don't talk.

SHERIFF
Hmmp. Well, I don't reckon he's
hurting nobody. Just put him
outside the gate. He'll get on up
and leave when he sobers up.

The SUPERVISOR appears in the doorway

RAILYARD SUPERVISOR
He's breakin' the law riding the
rails and I want him arrested.

SHERIFF
I got enough real life law-breakers
over in the jail right now. I don't
need a drunk to warm one of my
cots.

RAILYARD SUPERVISOR
And I don't want word gettin' out
that the Delta Southern line
tolerates rail riders.
(MORE)

RAILYARD SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)

Now you take him on outta here down
to the jail. If you need a
complaint filed, I'm willin'.

A beat as the SHERIFF considers the SUPERVISOR

SHERIFF

Alright. I'll take him on in. Put
him in the car boys.

The workers haul JOE back to his feet and shuffle him into
the back of the SQUAD CAR. JOE begins a hacking cough as
they place him in the car. They close the door and the CAR
pulls away.

RAILWORKER #1

Drunk and sick, it looks like.

RAILWORKER #2

Probably has the TB or something.

The first worker looks shocked. He hadn't thought of that. He
looks at his hands and rubs them on his pants.

EXT.

MAIN STREET - TOWN - DAY

The PATROL CAR pulls up to the curb in front of a building
marked SHERIFF'S OFFICE. The SHERIFF gets out of the car,
goes around to the other side and opens the back door of the
car. We see JOE slumped in the back seat. The SHERIFF
studies him for a moment

SHERIFF

(to himself)

I'm gonna need help with this

He steps onto the sidewalk and then opens the door to the
building

INT.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

A MIDDLE-AGED BLACK MAN, a deputy, sweeps the floor of the
office. This is ABRAHAM "ABE" JACKSON.

SHERIFF

Abe, come on out here and help me
get this prisoner out of the car.

ABE immediately puts his broom down and hurries out the door.

EXT.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

ABE peers into the back seat of the PATROL CAR

ABE
What's the matter with him?

SHERIFF
Drunk. Came in on the train down at
the railyard. A hobo I guess.

ABE reaches into the car and pulls him out easily. He gets a whiff of him

ABE
Whoo-eee! We might need to hose him
down, 'fore we take him inside.

He helps the unsteady JOE into the office

INT.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

ABE sits JOE down in a chair, then looks closer at him. JOE is pale and sweaty. ABE places his hand on JOE'S forehead.

ABE
Sheriff, this here man ain't drunk.

SHERIFF
How do you know?

ABE
Well, I ain't no doctor, but I know
when a man be burnin' up with
fever.

SHERIFF
Fever?

ABE
Yeah. He be sick. Besides, I don't
smell no alcohol on him.

Then to JOE

ABE (CONT'D)
Hey man, how long you been sick
like this?

JOE doesn't respond

ABE (CONT'D)
Hey, I be talkin' to you. How long
you been sick? Where you from?

SHERIFF
They said he don't talk.

ABE considers this for a beat then takes a heavy book from
the table and drops it suddenly on the floor creating a LOUD
NOISE. JOE startles and finally looks at ABE

ABE
Well, he hear okay.

JOE withdraws again and looks away

A beat as the SHERIFF considers what to do

SHERIFF
Well, we can't have him here if
he's sick. Every prisoner here
will come down with it - whatever
it is. I'm gonna have to take him
on over to the hospital and have
that new doctor take a look at him,
I guess.

He sighs

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
This is not the way I had planned
my day out. I didn't even get my
breakfast this mornin' before all
of this started and now it's nearly
noon.

He looks to the clock on the wall. He sighs again

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
Well, put him back in the car.
Maybe the doctor will keep him over
there and take him off my hands.

ABE nods

ABE

Maybe so. One thing for sure, we don't need no sick prisoners over here.

He helps JOE back to his feet and shuffles him back out the door to the CAR outside. JOE again mumbles something unintelligible as they exit.

ABE (O.C.) (CONT'D)

So you do talk. I can't understand a word you be sayin' though. You gonna have to do better than that. You can't be mumblin' around, you gotta speak up to folks. Ya hear?

EXT.

PINEHAVEN HOSPITAL - DAY

The PATROL CAR pulls up in front of a largish wood-frame building. It is actually an older victorian style home, but suffices as the town hospital. At most, it might be able to care for a handful of patients at a time. A NURSE appears at the door as ABE and the SHERIFF assist JOE up the sidewalk.

SHERIFF

(to the Nurse)

Mornin' Sally. The doctor here?

SALLY

Yes, I told him you called about the prisoner. What's the matter with him?

She also gets a whiff of him as they walk past her into the waiting room

INT.

HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

SHERIFF

Don't rightly know. Abe here thinks he has a fever. Seems awful weak, we have to hold him up or he can't walk.

There are several people in the waiting room, each looks up at JOE as he passes by, his odor wafting behind him. As usual, JOE acknowledges no one, but moves in his customary shuffling gait, with ABE holding his arm.

SALLY

Well, he can't stay out here, bring him on back, we'll put him in a room...

She looks at JOE with some distaste

SALLY (CONT'D)

By himself.

They follow SALLY toward a door marked "EXAM". As they go, the door opens and A YOUNG WOMAN exits with a YOUNG BOY, about five years old. ANGLE on JOE as he looks down at the BOY. A smile appears on his face for the first time. The BOY smiles back, but the WOMAN, his mother, seeing JOE'S condition, hurries him on past through the waiting room. The BOY looks back toward JOE before being ushered through the door.

INT.

HOSPITAL EXAM ROOM - DAY

JOE sits on an exam table, the SHERIFF and ABE still with him. A YOUNG DOCTOR enters the room, early 30s, this is BRADLEY HERRIN. He's a little harried, entering the room while reading the chart. The odor hits him and he looks up

BRADLEY

Good morning. I'm Doctor Herrin.
What do we have here?

SHERIFF

A bum we pulled off the train this morning. Took him over to the jail but Abe here thinks he's sick. We can't have no sick prisoners at the jail.

BRADLEY

(To Joe)

What seems to be the problem, sir?

ABE

He don't talk. Hadn't said a word since he got here.

BRADLEY

What's his name?

SHERIFF

Can't say.

BRADLEY takes his stethoscope out of his labcoat pocket and presses it to JOE'S chest as he listens. He reaches up to touch JOE'S face with the back of his hand.

BRADLEY

Sally.

Sally does not appear in the room

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

(louder this time)

Sally!

This time SALLY comes to the door and looks in

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

Let's get a temp on this guy, he's got fever for sure.

SALLY

Yes, sir.

She disappears and reappears a moment later with a thermometer. She takes his temperature. Meanwhile...

SHERIFF

Can we leave him here with you, Doc? We got to get back on over to the jail.

BRADLEY

I'm afraid that's not possible. You saw all the folks in the waiting room. And all the rooms are full. There's been an outbreak of influenza in town. We only have 8 beds and they're all taken.

SALLY removes the thermometer from JOE's mouth

SALLY

101.

BRADLEY

He may have flu, possibly pneumonia. His lungs don't sound too good.

SHERIFF

Aww, come on doctor, you've got to do something with him.

He considers JOE for a moment

BRADLEY

Sally, call over to administration
and see if they can free up a bed
for this man.

SALLY

Yes sir.

She exits

BRADLEY

(to the sheriff)

I can't promise you anything,
Sheriff.

SHERIFF

I understand. I appreciate any
help you can be.

BRADLEY

I don't know that he's ill enough
to be admitted, but I hate to see a
sick man denied care.

SALLY reappears and whispers something to BRADLEY. He nods
then looks at the SHERIFF solemnly

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Sheriff. We aren't
going to be able to keep him.

The SHERIFF rolls his eyes and lets out an exasperated sigh

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

Tell you what. I'm going to start
him on some antibiotics and send
him on back with you. We'll hope
that clears up whatever this is.

SHERIFF

I just told you, Doc. We can't
have no sick prisoners at the jail.
Every man in there will be down
with whatever he has.

BRADLEY

I'm sorry, sheriff, that's the best
I can do for now. We're just
covered up over here. We're doing
what we can. I've sent people home
today that were sicker.

The Sheriff rolls his eyes and looks at ABE who shrugs. They
help JOE off the exam table and shuffle him out of the room.

SALLY stops them in the hallway and hands them a small paper bag.

SALLY
Don't forget the medicine, sheriff.

A beat

SHERIFF
Well, I have a mind to sit him and his medicine out on the front porch of this hospital.

SALLY
Has he committed a crime of some sort?

SHERIFF
Nah, just bumming a ride on the train. The rail line wanted rid of him, so they called me to come and get him. And now...I'm stuck with him.

SALLY considers JOE for a moment

SALLY
Why don't you give Reverend Smalley a call over at the church. He's the chaplain for the hospital too, maybe he can help you.

The SHERIFF looks hopeful for the first time - an opportunity to shift his burden onto someone else

SHERIFF
I'll do that. I surely will.
Thank you, Sally.

SALLY
I just can't stand to see a sick man put out on the street. Just doesn't seem like the thing to do here just before Christmas.

ABE
You're right about that, ma'am.

The SHERIFF looks a little sheepish, but then regains his bluster

SHERIFF

Well, Christmas or no Christmas, we can't have him spreading contagion all over the jailhouse.

The SHERIFF and ABE shuffle JOE down the hall and out the hospital door.

EXT.

A SMALL TOWN STREET - DAY

The PATROL CAR pulls up in front of a church. A sign reads PINEHAVEN COMMUNITY CHURCH and underneath that "ALL GOD'S CHILDREN WELCOME HERE". The SHERIFF gets out of the PATROL CAR and walks up a sidewalk to the neighboring Rectory. He knocks on the door.

A beat

A pleasant-looking middle aged man - 40s, answers the door. This is REVEREND EDWARD SMALLEY. He wears a typical black shirt with a minister's white collar. He seems to be puzzled that the SHERIFF is standing at his door.

EDWARD

Sheriff? Good Morning. What can I do for you?

SHERIFF

The folks at the hospital sent me over. I was hopin' you could help me out.

EDWARD

Of course, Sheriff. If I'm able. What's the problem?

SHERIFF

The problem is sittin' in the back of my squad car over there.

REVEREND SMALLEY looks beyond the SHERIFF to see a figure sitting in the back of the car

EDWARD

A prisoner?

SHERIFF

Not exactly. We picked him up down at the railyard this morning. We thought he was drunk, so we took him over to the jail to dry out.

(MORE)

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Turns out he's sick. New doctor over to the hospital gave him some medicine but told me to take him back over to the jail. Trouble is...I can't have no sick people in the jail.

REVEREND SMALLEY is taking the story in. He knows what's coming

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Folks at the hospital said you might be able to help, bein' the Chaplain and all...

EDWARD

I see. He doesn't have any family or friends to contact?

SHERIFF

Don't know. Seems to be down on his luck, riding the rails and all. Probably not much family...and...he don't talk. At least he ain't said nothin' to nobody since he got here.

REVEREND SMALLEY considers this

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

He ain't got nowhere else to go, Reverend...

He attempts Sally's take on gaining some pity

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

It is nearly Christmas...four days...

REVEREND SMALLEY sighs

EDWARD

Well, we do have a small room over in the Church. It's not much. But it has a bed and he'd be out of the cold. We'd feed him of course and see to him until he's better. Then he can be on his way.

The SHERIFF is elated, his problem is solved

SHERIFF

(reaching out to shake the minister's hand)

(MORE)

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

That'd be more than adequate,
Reverend. I appreciate your
charity.

A WOMAN appears in the rectory doorway. Late 30s, pretty,
stylish hair and clothing, a southern belle. This is
ELIZABETH SMALLEY, the pastor's wife.

ELIZABETH

Edward? What's going on out here?

Then to the SHERIFF

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Sheriff? Is there a problem?

The SHERIFF tips his hat to her

SHERIFF

Oh, no ma'am. I was just talking
to the Reverend about getting some
help with a fellow we brought into
the jail this morning.

ELIZABETH

The jail?

EDWARD

He just needs a place to stay for a
couple days, honey. He's sick and
can't stay at the jail. I told the
Sheriff we'd take him in - the back
room there in the church...

ELIZABETH is not at all taken by this idea

ELIZABETH

Edward! We can't keep a sick
prisoner here. Sheriff, you're
just going to have to take him on
back with you to...where ever.

EDWARD

Elizabeth, there's nowhere else to
take him. The hospital won't keep
him, the Sheriff can't have a sick
man in the jail. He has nowhere to
go. And...it's Christmas.

ELIZABETH

Exactly. It IS Christmas. Do you
know how many things I have going
on right now?

(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

There's the church bake sale, the ladies' Christmas tea, the Christmas Eve program...

EDWARD

I know, I know. The timing is bad, but...I'll take care of him. It's only for a couple days. No one will even know he's there.

SHERIFF

Oh yes ma'am. He's quiet as a mouse. He don't talk. Don't make a sound. No one will know he's there.

ELIZABETH looks skeptical

ELIZABETH

Well...all right. It being Christmas and all. I guess it's the Christian thing to do...

She looks at EDWARD

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

A couple of days, Edward.

EDWARD

A couple of days.

ELIZABETH

Fine.

She nods to the SHERIFF and then squints menacingly at her husband and goes back inside.

The SHERIFF is relieved

EDWARD

Okay, Sheriff, let's get him to his new quarters.

They both head down the sidewalk to the waiting PATROL CAR.

INT.

PINEHAVEN CHURCH - DAY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

A small darkened room, lit only by a small window. The door to the room opens. EDWARD, ABE and the SHERIFF escort JOE inside.

EDWARD

Well, here we are.

He motions for JOE to sit on the bed and JOE shuffles over, head still down and not making eye contact

EDWARD (CONT'D)

(To Joe)

I'll get you some soap and towels

He casts a dubious glance at ABE and the SHERIFF

EDWARD (CONT'D)

There's a bath and shower down the hall. I think I have some clean clothes we can rustle up too.

Still no evidence that JOE comprehends any of this

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Can I help you out of your coat?

As he reaches for JOE'S arm, JOE pulls away and wraps his arms tight around himself to keep the coat from being removed. EDWARD backs away, his hands up in surrender

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Okay, okay. No problem. Maybe when we get your new clothes...

We hear a dog bark O.C. A border collie appears in the doorway.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Bo. What are you doing here? Go on back home.

The dog ignores him but watches JOE, wagging his tail. JOE looks up for the first time and smiles at the dog

SHERIFF

Well, looks like everything's taken care of here, Reverend. We'll be headed back over to the office. Let me know if you have any problems.

EDWARD nods

EDWARD

I'll be sure he gets his medicine. Maybe I'll call the doctor and see if he can come look in on him.

SHERIFF

I'd say that'd be a fine idea.
G'day Reverend.

The SHERIFF exits followed by ABE who gives once last glance toward JOE

ABE

Good luck ole fella. The good Lord
be with ya.

He follows the SHERIFF out the door

EDWARD

Well, let me go and see if I can
find those supplies. I'll be back,
you stay right there.

We see EDWARD fumbling through a closet and then a couple drawers in a chest picking and discarding items for JOE. He returns a few minutes later with an arm full of soap, towels and clothing. Just outside JOE's room he hears a man's voice. It is soft and full of kindness. It is JOE

JOE (O.C.)

My name's Joe.

EDWARD peeks around the corner of the door, to see JOE still sitting on the bed, but now the dog is at his feet.

JOE (CONT'D)

(To the Dog)

And your name's Bo. Our names are
alike. I had a dog once. He was a
good dog, just like you.

From EDWARD'S POV we can see that the dog's attention is focused on JOE. He places his paw on JOE's leg. EDWARD knocks lightly on the door frame

EDWARD

So you can talk.

JOE doesn't respond but stares down at his hands folded in his lap

EDWARD (CONT'D)

You must have a way with dogs. Bo
doesn't usually warm up to people
that quickly.

A beat. EDWARD'S comments go unanswered

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Okay. Well...

Another beat

EDWARD (CONT'D)
I brought you a few things.

He lays the items on the bed beside JOE

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Some clean clothes. Soap, towels.
I'm sure it'll feel nice to get a
good hot bath.

He's hoping that will be the case as he eyes JOE

EDWARD (CONT'D)
I'll bring you something to eat.
My wife is a wonderful cook. I'm
sure we have something in the
kitchen. I know you must be
hungry.

Again, no response from JOE

EDWARD (CONT'D)
There's a Bible there on the table,
if you're inclined...

A beat

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Okay then....come on Bo, let's go
back to the house.

The dog doesn't obey, but continues to sit at JOE's feet

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Bo! I said come on.

The dog gets up reluctantly and follows EDWARD out of the
room.

INT.

JOE'S ROOM - DAY

A LITTLE LATER THAT DAY

EDWARD knocks on the frame of the open door. We see JOE
still sitting in the same spot on the bed.

The clothes, towels and other items are untouched, however we see a plate with a half eaten sandwich and hardly touched bowl of soup. The dog is with EDWARD and walks to the bed and sits on the floor beside JOE

EDWARD
Joe? You okay?

He looks at the barely eaten food

EDWARD (CONT'D)
You didn't eat much. You need your strength to get well. That's my wife's good potato soup, you don't know what you're missing.

His words fall on deaf ears. He sighs.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Bathroom's still open. Plenty of hot water...

A beat

EDWARD (CONT'D)
(To himself)
Yeah...

He turns to leave

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Come on, Bo.

Again, the dog disobeys

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Bo!

The dog gets up reluctantly and follows EDWARD. We hear EDWARD admonish him as they walk away down the hall.

EDWARD (O.C.) (CONT'D)
What's gotten into you?

O. C. we hear the dog whine in response

EXT.

CHURCH RECTORY - EVENING

LATER THAT SAME DAY

We see a 60s model stationwagon-type ambulance pull up in front of the Rectory. DR.BRADLEY HERRIN gets out and walks up the sidewalk to the Rectory. He knocks on the door.

A beat

A YOUNG GIRL opens the door. This is REBECCA SMALLEY, a 10 year old girl, daughter of ELIZABETH AND EDWARD.

BRADLEY

Hello. I'm Dr. Herrin. Is Reverend Smalley in?

REBECCA

You drive an ambulance?

She looks past him to the street where the ambulance is parked

BRADLEY

Uh, yeah.

REBECCA

That's kind of weird.

BRADLEY

Well, my car's in the shop and ...is Reverend Smalley in?

She eyes him again

REBECCA

Momma!

She yells inside the house

A beat and then ELIZABETH appears at the door

ELIZABETH

Why, Dr. Herrin, please come in. It's too cold to stand out there.

It's a small town, they've met before

And then to REBECCA

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Rebecca, where are your manners?

REBECCA shrugs

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

What brings you over this way, Dr. Herrin?

BRADLEY

Well, your husband called me a little earlier this afternoon and said the sheriff had brought a man here that I saw at the hospital this morning. I thought I'd come by and check on him.

ELIZABETH'S face falls

ELIZABETH

Oh yes. Him. We've evidently taken him in. Temporarily of course.

BRADLEY

Of course...is uh, Reverend Smalley here?

He's a little weary of asking the same question

ELIZABETH

(To Rebecca)

Rebecca, where is your daddy?

REBECCA

He's over in the church with the Bum.

ELIZABETH

Rebecca! That isn't a word a lady uses. Where in the world did you hear such a thing?

REBECCA

(flatly)

The Sheriff.

BRADLEY interrupts their banter

BRADLEY

Might I see both of them, Mrs. Smalley?

ELIZABETH

Oh, of course, Doctor. I'll take you over. Edward has set him up in a little room we have inside the church.

BRADLEY

Thank you, I'd appreciate it.

ELIZABETH

(To Rebecca)

Honey, you stay here. Mommy will be right back.

ELIZABETH leads the way to the church next to the Rectory. As they walk we here her voice O. C. as she echoes REBECCA'S earlier question

ELIZABETH (O.C.) (CONT'D)

You drive an ambulance?

BRADLEY (O.C.)

Uh...yeah. I do.

INT.

PINEHAVEN CHURCH - EVENING

ELIZABETH and BRADLEY enter. The church is empty. ELIZABETH calls out

ELIZABETH

Edward? Edward? Are you here?

EDWARD appears from under the pulpit

EDWARD

Yes, I'm here. I'm just trying to get this pulpit level. I'm tired of it rocking back and forth every time I give a sermon. Mrs. Amos accused me of having the devil himself under there.

ELIZABETH and BRADLEY walk toward the pulpit

ELIZABETH

Dr. Herrin has come to see our visitor.

EDWARD

Oh yes, Dr. Herrin, thank you so much for coming.

They shake hands

BRADLEY

My pleasure. To tell you the truth, I'm a little worried about him. I hated to send him away from the hospital today, we're just a little overwhelmed over there.

EDWARD

What do you think is wrong with him?

BRADLEY

I'm not sure. He's pretty run down. He had fever but that could be most anything. It's hard to say what's going on - him not talking and all. I met with the hospital administrator after he left about maybe bringing him back in and doing some tests, seeing if we can help him a little more.

EDWARD

Well, I think that would be a good idea...I...

BRADLEY

It would be a good idea...except they aren't inclined to do that...not knowing where he's from, if he has any family, not communicating...

EDWARD finishes the unspoken thought

EDWARD

Not having any money...

A beat

BRADLEY

Yes. I'm afraid that is at the heart of the decision.

EDWARD nods

EDWARD

It's a shame. Joe deserves care just as much as the next man.

BRADLEY

Joe? He told you his name? He talked to you?

He's obviously surprised

EDWARD

No...he uh...told my dog.

BRADLEY doesn't know what to think

BRADLEY

What?

EDWARD

I just overheard him. He told my dog, Bo that his name was Joe. He won't say a word to me.

ELIZABETH has been listening to their conversation

ELIZABETH

Edward, what kind of person have you brought into our church? What do you mean he talks to the dog but not to you?

EDWARD

I don't know what it means, Elizabeth. I'm just telling you what happened.

ELIZABETH

Is he mentally ill, Doctor?

BRADLEY

I couldn't say at this point, Mrs. Smalley.

He turns back to EDWARD

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

Could I see him now, Reverend?

EDWARD nods

EDWARD

He's in the back room. Come on, I'll take you back.

ELIZABETH starts to follow

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Honey, maybe you better go on back home. I'll be there after the Doctor is finished.

She is incensed

ELIZABETH

I will not be dismissed, Edward. This church is my home. I have a right to know what is going on under my own roof.

EDWARD is defeated. He sighs

EDWARD
All right, all right. Come on.

And then under his breath

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Oh boy...

The three of them head down the hallway toward JOE'S room. EDWARD and BRADLEY enter first, ELIZABETH a few steps behind. When she reaches the doorway, she sees...and smells...JOE for the first time - full out. It is like she has walked into a wall. She looks at the still filthy, disheveled JOE in disbelief

ELIZABETH
What in the world?

EDWARD steps between her and the sight

EDWARD
Now, honey...

ELIZABETH
Edward! What are you thinking?
He's...he's...he can't stay
here...like this.

She waves her hand in JOE'S direction

EDWARD
Now Elizabeth, I'm working on
getting him bathed and into clean
clothes. Let's give the doctor a
chance to look him over.

He eases her out of the room and closes the door leaving BRADLEY and JOE alone.

INT.

RECTORY - LIVING ROOM - EVENING - A LITTLE LATER

BRADLEY has finished examining JOE and is now in the Rectory talking with EDWARD and ELIZABETH

BRADLEY
I'm still not certain what's going
on with him. His fever's down, the
antibiotics are already helping
with that. Cough seems better too.
(MORE)

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

He didn't just get sick though.
He's probably fifty pounds
underweight. This has been going on
for awhile.

EDWARD

Is it possible he has cancer?

BRADLEY

It's possible.

ELIZABETH

Well, it's also possible that he
has something contagious...like
Tuberculosis, isn't it Doctor?

BRADLEY shrugs

BRADLEY

Yes. It's possible, but that
wouldn't be my first thought.

ELIZABETH

Well, I don't think it's worth
exposing us and all the church
members to whatever he has by
keeping him here.

EDWARD

Now Elizabeth, he's only going to
be here a day or two. When he's
better, we'll get him moved
somewhere else. Maybe the
Salvation Army could take him.

ELIZABETH

Well...maybe for only a day or
two...but you've got to get him
cleaned up. We can't have him
smelling up the place like this.

EDWARD

Okay, okay. I'll take care of it.

A beat as he gives a doubtful look to BRADLEY

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Well, alright Doctor Herrin. I'll
look in on him again this evening,
make sure he takes his medicine.

BRADLEY

I think that would be fine. I'll drop by again tomorrow. Hopefully I'll find him in better shape.

They say their goodbyes as BRADLEY exits the church

INT.

PINEHAVEN CHURCH - NIGHT

LATER THAT SAME EVENING

The church choir members have gathered to rehearse their Christmas musical. There are both adults and children making up the group. ELIZABETH is present and talks and laughs with the other adults. Their leader is a young woman, late 20s, this is JULIE ANN JEFFERS. A talented musician, she has recently returned home to Pinehaven from the East Coast. She is also the music director at the local high school.

JULIE ANN

Okay everybody, let's get started.
We're going to work on the children's numbers first so they can make it an early night.
Children?

She motions for them to line up then sits down at the piano. She begins to play "Away in a Manger". She is obviously talented - classically trained. Her opening notes of the song sound like something from a symphony pianist, not a small town church. She gives the cue for the children to sing.

As the children sing the first stanza of the song, we see ELIZABETH still engaged in a quiet conversation with another church member, when suddenly something O.C. catches her eye. She is looking toward the back of the church. Her eyes widen. From ELIZABETH'S POV we see JOE, seated in a last row pew, smiling as the children sing. ELIZABETH is frozen as she stares at him. The other choir members follow her gaze.

CHOIR LADY #1

Who on earth is that?

CHOIR LADY #2

I've never seen him here before.
Elizabeth, who is it? Do you know him?

ELIZABETH

Yes.

She rolls her eyes and sighs

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Edward has taken him in for a
couple days. He's...not from here.

CHOIR LADY #1
Well, maybe we should invite him up
front to meet everyone.

ELIZABETH
No!

A beat

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
I mean...he's been ill. He's
supposed to be in the back room
resting. The doctor was here to
see him earlier. He shouldn't be
out here at all.

EDWARD appears through a side doorway. ELIZABETH spots him
immediately

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Edward!

She makes a bee line toward him. We cannot hear what she is
saying, but she is giving him an earful and pointing toward
JOE. EDWARD is nodding, holding his hands up in surrender,
trying to pacify her.

The children's song ends as does ELIZABETH'S tirade. EDWARD
heads toward the pew where JOE had been sitting to find that
it is now empty.

EXT

PINEHAVEN CHURCH - DAY

The ambulance pulls up in front of the church. BRADLEY gets
out and heads up the walk toward the church entrance. We hear
classical music from a piano being played inside the church.
BRADLEY pauses for a moment as he hears the music. It is
beautiful.

INT

PINEHAVEN CHURCH - DAY

BRADLEY enters the church. The pews are empty. From his POV
we see JULIE ANN in the front. She is seated at the piano.

She plays another few moments before she glances up and sees BRADLEY. She stops and smiles

JULIE ANN

Oh, hello. I didn't know anyone was here.

BRADLEY

I just came in...what is that you were playing?

JULIE ANN

It's called The Children's Prayer. It's from Hansel and Gretel.

BRADLEY

It's beautiful...

JULIE ANN

Thank you...

A beat as they consider each other

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

Reverend Smalley isn't here. Can I help you with something?

BRADLEY

Uh, yeah, I mean no...

He shakes off the spell of her and the music and comes back to why he's there

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

I'm Dr. Herrin. I just came by to see a gentleman that is staying here at the church. Reverend Smalley put him up in the extra room in back. His name is Joe. I know where to find him.

JULIE ANN looks at him quizzically

JULIE ANN

Joe? Hmmm... I didn't know anyone was staying here, but I'm sure it's fine for you to go back and see him.

A beat

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, where are my manners?
I'm Julie Ann Jeffers. I'm the
church music director. I heard we
had a new doctor in town. It's
nice to meet you.

BRADLEY

Same here.

Another beat

BRADLEY nods to her and heads toward JOE'S room. O. C. we
hear the piano begin to play again. BRADLEY smiles

CUT TO:

EXT

PINEHAVEN - MAIN STREET - DAY

OUTSIDE THE TOWN DINER - A LITTLE LATER THAT DAY

BRADLEY enters the diner. It's lunchtime and the place is
crowded. He is bumped and jostled as he looks about for an
empty spot.

WAITRESS

(to Bradley)

Take a seat where you can find one,
hon.

BRADLEY continues to look around, that doesn't seem possible.
From O.C. we hear a woman's voice it is JULIE ANN

JULIE ANN (O.C.)

Dr. Herrin?

He looks around trying to find who has called his name

JULIE ANN (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Dr. Herrin. Over here.

He finally sees her and smiles. She's sitting alone at a
small table. She motions for him to come over

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

You're welcome to join me...if
you're hungry that is. Otherwise,
it's going to be awhile.

BRADLEY

Is it always this busy in here?

JULIE ANN

Pretty much. The food's good. And cheap.

BRADLEY laughs

BRADLEY

Well, if you don't mind...

She waves her hand at the empty chair and he sits

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

What are the odds of us running into each other twice in one day?

JULIE ANN

Pretty good actually. This is a small town.

She has a point

CUT THROUGH images of them ordering food, talking, a waitress brings their orders

BRADLEY

So what else do you do besides play piano at the church?

JULIE ANN

I'm the music director at the high school. This is my second year.

BRADLEY

Why aren't you at school today?

A beat as she eyes him

JULIE ANN

It's... Christmas break. School's out.

BRADLEY

Oh yeah...right...

He should have known that

JULIE ANN

So, where are you from?

BRADLEY

Atlanta actually. I went to medical school at Emory.

JULIE ANN

Hmmm. Big city. Prestigious school. How does a fancy doctor from Atlanta end up here in Pinehaven?

BRADLEY

Well, I don't know about the fancy part...I just always wanted to practice medicine in a small town. I wanted to get to know my patients and I wanted them to know me...I wanted to run into folks in the town diner and have them ask me to join them for lunch.

She smiles at him. Clever.

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

What about you?

JULIE ANN

This is my home. I grew up here.

BRADLEY

And where did you learn to play the piano like that?

JULIE ANN

My mother was a piano teacher. She taught every kid in town to play for more than thirty years.

BRADLEY

Really? Because I could have sworn what I heard today was a little more than homemade piano lessons.

JULIE ANN lowers her eyes, then looks back up

JULIE ANN

Yes...a little more. I also studied at Juilliard.

BRADLEY

Juilliard?

He didn't see that coming

JULIE ANN

And I played for a couple of years with the Boston Symphony.

BRADLEY

Holy...! Okay, let me turn the question around on you. How does a fancy pianist from the Boston Symphony end up back in Pinehaven?

A beat as she ponders this memory

JULIE ANN

My mother became ill and I came home to help my father and my little sister. And then...she passed away.

BRADLEY

Oh...I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to...

JULIE ANN

It's okay. You didn't know.

A beat

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

Anyway, that was a couple of years ago. I was going to go back to Boston but as it turned out, they needed a music director at the high school and it just seemed like the right thing to do. So here I am - back in Pinehaven...running into folks in the town diner and asking them to join me for lunch.

He smiles at her equally clever reply. He likes this girl.

The WAITRESS brings their checks. He reaches over and takes hers.

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

No, please. I'll get it.

BRADLEY

It would be my pleasure. If it weren't for you I would have starved to death...or been trampled waiting for an open spot.

She softens

JULIE ANN

All right then. Thank you.

BRADLEY

Maybe we can do this again
sometime, Ms. Jeffers.

A beat as she considers him

JULIE ANN

Maybe we can, Dr. Herrin.

INT

PINEHAVEN CHURCH - NIGHT

LATER THAT SAME DAY

JULIE ANN arrives at the church for nightly choir practice. She enters the church, which is still empty, and sees JOE standing at the front near the piano. He is staring intently at a violin that sits in a stand next to the piano. He reaches out and touches it gently, obviously admiring it.

JULIE ANN's voice startles him.

JULIE ANN (O.C.)

Joe? Are you Joe?

He turns to see her walking up the aisle toward him. He pulls his hand away from the violin and assumes his customary eyes down demeanor

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

Do you like music?

No response

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

You must. I know you were here
last night at rehearsal.

He still doesn't look up

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

Did you ever play?

He glances up for just a moment and we see almost a smile in his eyes, if not on his lips

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

No one plays that violin anymore.
It belonged to one of our members,
Mr. Antonelli. He passed away
several years ago and his wife
donated it to the church.

(MORE)

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

I can play a little, but not enough
to do justice to that beautiful
instrument.

JOE still stands with his head down, but he's listening

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

You know, when I was a little girl,
Mr. Antonelli told me that his
father brought it here from Italy.
He said it was handmade - a real
work of art. He could play it so
beautifully...but now it just sits
there alone, waiting for someone to
give it a voice again...

They are interrupted by the sound of children O.C. JULIE ANN
looks up to see three children coming through the door of the
church.

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

Hey kids, come on in.

The children spy JOE and look curiously at him

GIRL #1

You were here last night.

JOE smiles at her and nods

GIRL#2

What's your name?

JOE smiles but doesn't answer

JULIE ANN

His name is Joe. He doesn't like
to talk a lot.

JOE smiles and nods at GIRL#2

BOY#1 (DANIEL)

My Mom's friend said he was a
smelly bum.

JULIE ANN

Daniel! That is a terrible thing
to say!

BOY#1

I didn't say it, my Mom's friend
did.

JULIE ANN

Well, regardless of who said it, it is mean-spirited and we ARE in the Lord's house here, aren't we?

CHILDREN (IN UNISON)

Yes ma'am.

JOE of course has heard the entire exchange. He begins to walk away.

GIRL #1

Mr. Joe?

He stops

GIRL #1 (CONT'D)

Would you like to stay and listen again?

JOE turns and then smiles and nods. He ambles to the rear and takes the same seat he occupied the night before.

JULIE ANN

You know, you children got more communication out of Joe than anyone I've seen so far.

GIRL#2

Where did he come from?

JULIE ANN

We don't know, honey. He just showed up in town a day or so ago.

GIRL #1

Maybe he's an angel...

Her eyes widen with the thought

GIRL#2

Yeah! Maybe he's a Christmas angel!

BOY#1

That's dumb. Angels don't look like that.

GIRL #2

How do you know what angels look like?

She sticks her tongue out at the boy

They are interrupted by several more adult choir members filing into the church, each of whom acknowledge JOE'S presence as they walk by, with a distasteful look on their faces. His odor and appearance have only grown worse.

We see ELIZABETH enter from the opposite side of the church. A couple of the choir members spot her and pull her aside.

CHOIR LADY #1

I see our "visitor" is still with us.

ELIZABETH rolls her eyes and sighs

ELIZABETH

Yes. Yes he is.

CHOIR LADY #2

I thought maybe someone would have gotten him cleaned up by now.

She wrinkles her nose in his direction

ELIZABETH

Well, Edward is trying. He's a very difficult man, unfortunately.

CHOIR LADY #1

We heard a rumor that he might, you know...

Her voice changes into a self-righteous whisper

CHOIR LADY #1 (CONT'D)

"Not be in his right mind."

CHOIR LADY #2

Do you think he could be dangerous?

ELIZABETH

Well, I don't know about that, but I don't like the idea of him hanging around our church, with the children and all. Edward assured me that he would stay in the back room and only for a couple days. I'm going to talk with the Salvation Army tomorrow and see if they can take him.

As they look back in JOE'S direction, the children have gathered around him again as he smiles kindly at their questions. This startles the ladies.

CHOIR LADY #1
 Patricia! Ya'll get on back over
 here.

PATRICIA
 We're just talking to Mr. Joe,
 Momma.

The CHOIR LADIES have now reached the children and are
 herding them away with looks of disapproval at JOE

CHOIR LADY #1
 Come on now, all of you, it's time
 to get back to rehearsal.

PATRICIA
 But Momma, we think he's an angel.

CHOIR LADY #1
 Oh nonsense.

She gives one last look of disapproval to JOE

CHOIR LADY #1 (CONT'D)
 That is no angel.

BOY#1
 (to PATRICIA)
 See, I told you. He's just a
 smelly bum.

She sticks her tongue out at him again.

JULIE ANN has been witnessing the entire interchange. She
 looks on silently as everyone takes their places on the stage

JULIE ANN
 Good evening, everyone.

THE CHOIR
 (in unison)
 Good evening.

JULIE ANN turns pointedly toward the back of the church and
 addresses JOE

JULIE ANN
 Joe, would you like to come up
 front and sit?

JOE, in his usual fashion does not respond, but continues to
 sit in place looking at the floor

CHOIR LADY #1
 Julie Ann! What are you thinking?
 He can't sit up here.

JULIE ANN
 Why not?

CHOIR LADY #1
 Because he just cannot. I mean,
 what if he comes and sits there
 tomorrow night, for the musical?

JULIE ANN
 What if he does?

ELIZABETH
 (interrupting)
 Well, we aren't going to have to
 worry about that. The Salvation
 Army will take him tomorrow. I
 will see to it myself.

ELIZABETH narrows her eyes at JULIE ANN but says no more. As the CHOIR MEMBERS murmur disapprovingly among themselves.

A WIDE SHOT shows that EDWARD has heard the entire scene from the darkened back of the church. He lowers his head and remains silent

CUT TO:

INT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - LATER THAT SAME EVENING

BRADLEY, medical bag in hand is exiting JOE'S room. He walks down the hallway and sees the last of the choir members leaving the church as JULIE ANN calls after them

JULIE ANN
 Good night everyone! Tomorrow's
 the big night - Christmas Eve. Be
 here early.

The CHOIR MEMBERS wave as they leave acknowledging her.

BRADLEY (O.C.)
 You put in a lot of late nights for
 this.

JULIE ANN turns toward him

JULIE ANN
 It's worth it. The program is
 going to be wonderful.

BRADLEY
I'm sure it will.

A beat as she waits on him, he obviously wants something

BRADLEY (CONT'D)
Uh, I was just checking on Joe.

JULIE ANN
How is he?

BRADLEY
A little better maybe. The cough is still there at times, but no more fever.

JULIE ANN
That's good...you know...some of the church people were not so kind to him this evening. I know he hears their comments and sees their stares.

BRADLEY nods in agreement

BRADLEY
Yeah. It's really too bad. He deserves kindness as much as the next one of us...even though he is different...and difficult, to say the least.

A beat as they silently agree

JULIE ANN
Dr. Herrin?

BRADLEY
Please, my name is Bradley.

She smiles at him

JULIE ANN
All right. Bradley...do you think you might be able to talk the powers that be over at the hospital into admitting Joe there. I mean, just temporarily. Until you can find out what's really wrong with him?

BRADLEY
I don't know. I've already talked with them.

(MORE)

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

They seem pretty set in their policies about payment and such.

JULIE ANN

He needs your help.

BRADLEY studies her and then relents

BRADLEY

Okay. I'll see what I can do... for you.

JULIE ANN

Not for me. For Joe.

He smiles

BRADLEY

All right. For Joe.

JULIE ANN

Thank you, Dr. Herrin....Bradley.

She smiles gratefully at him

A beat as he melts a little

BRADLEY

Well, it's getting late, can I give you a ride home?

JULIE ANN

Oh, no, I don't live very far. It's a nice night, I'm just going to walk.

BRADLEY

Alone?

JULIE ANN

Sure. I have the stars to keep me company.

This brings a smile from BRADLEY

BRADLEY

Well, do you mind if I walk with you then?

JULIE ANN

Of course. That would be nice. Let me get my coat.

CUT TO:

EXT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - A FEW MINUTES LATER

BRADLEY and JULIE ANN are exiting the church and start their walk down the darkened street. As they walk, BRADLEY looks up at the sky

BRADLEY

You know, that's something else I like about living in a small town.

JULIE ANN

What's that?

BRADLEY

You can see the stars.

JULIE ANN

You don't have stars in Atlanta?

She's teasing

BRADLEY

Sure, but you can't see them like this. Too much light from the city.

A beat as they both look up

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

Do you ever wonder what's up there?

JULIE ANN

Sometimes.

She continues to study the sky

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

I like to think that my mother is looking down on me...and that she's proud of what I'm doing.

BRADLEY

I'm sure she would be proud of you. Look what you've accomplished already in your life. Not too many people can say they graduated from Juilliard.

JULIE ANN

That was her dream, not mine.

A beat as she looks away from the sky and to BRADLEY

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

But somewhere along the way, it
became my dream. I did love it.
And I loved the symphony.

BRADLEY

Do you miss it?

JULIE ANN

I did for awhile. The celebrity,
the crowds, being a part of the
beautiful music...until I realized
something.

BRADLEY

And what was that?

JULIE ANN

That the music didn't live in that
symphony hall. It lives in me. In
my heart.

She places her hand over her heart

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

And it goes wherever I go. Whether
I am in huge auditorium packed with
hundreds of people, or in that
small church back there, surrounded
by the people I grew up with. The
music is still mine, still the
same. Still beautiful.

A beat as they look in each other's eyes

BRADLEY

(softly to her)

Yes. Beautiful

They smile and BRADLEY extends his arm to her, which she
takes as they stroll off into the night as Christmas lights
twinkle

FADE OUT:

EXT. PINEHAVEN HOSPITAL - THE NEXT DAY - QUICK SHOT

INT. PINEHAVEN HOSPITAL - MORNING

BRADLEY stands in the hallway, a beehive of hospital activity
swirling around him. He stares at a closed door.

From his POV, we see the title on the door "ADMINISTRATION". He knocks lightly then enters. A RECEPTIONIST is typing something at a desk. She looks up as BRADLEY enters

RECEPTIONIST

Why Dr. Herrin. Good Morning. What can we do for you?

BRADLEY

Good Morning. Is uh....Mr. Parker in this morning?

RECEPTIONIST

Yes, as a matter of fact he is. May I tell him what this is concerning?

BRADLEY

Uh....yes. Tell him it's concerning a...patient.

RECEPTIONIST

All right then. Have a seat, doctor. I'll tell him you're here.

She disappears down a hallway as BRADLEY sits and begins thumbing nervously through a magazine.

A beat and then the RECEPTIONIST reappears

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

He happens to have a moment, doctor. He'll see you now.

BRADLEY nods and rises

BRADLEY

Thank you.

The RECEPTIONIST shows him to the office door which reads EUGENE PARKER, HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR. BRADLEY enters as PARKER, a distinguished looking man, 60s, rises

MR. PARKER

Dr. Herrin. What a pleasure. Have a seat. What brings you in this morning?

BRADLEY takes a chair in front of the desk and they both sit

BRADLEY

I wanted to talk with you about a patient, sir.

MR. PARKER

A patient? Why certainly. That is our business, isn't it?

BRADLEY

I would hope so, sir.

A beat

MR. PARKER

Well, get on with it. Who is this patient?

BRADLEY

Well sir, he's not currently a patient....it's the gentleman that the Sheriff brought in the other day...

MR. PARKER

From the train?

BRADLEY

Yes sir.

MR. PARKER

(a little condescendingly)
Now Dr. Herrin, we already had this conversation. We agreed that, circumstances as they were, we would not be admitting Mr...Mr...?

BRADLEY

Joe. We uh....don't know his last name.

PARKER looks rather distasteful at this revelation

MR. PARKER

Well, he's over with Reverend Smalley at the church isn't he?

BRADLEY

Yes sir. But he is still ill.

MR. PARKER

Doctor Herrin. We discussed this on the phone the day he was here. We have a situation here in which there would be no payment for our services. Has that situation changed?

BRADLEY

No sir. Nothing has changed.

MR. PARKER

Doctor, I know your specialty is medicine and not business, but a hospital IS a business, and therefore must be run as such. Any time we have a patient who is unable to pay for services either personally or through insurance coverage, the citizens of this county are required to make up the difference...through taxes. One of my responsibilities as Administrator is to keep that tax burden at a minimum.

BRADLEY

I understand, but...

MR. PARKER

We don't even know this man. He's not from here, he has no people here. He is stranger to us. Can we be expected to just take him in and pay for medical expenses of who knows how much?

BRADLEY

The hospital I was previously associated with always had some type of fund to pay for these types of...

MR. PARKER

And this hospital was Emory in Atlanta, if memory serves me?

BRADLEY

Yes sir.

MR. PARKER

Dr. Herrin. Emory Hospital is one of the largest and finest hospitals in the South, I have visited there myself. And believe me when I tell you that Emory University Hospital has nothing....not one iota....in common with Pinehaven Community Hospital. We barely have the funds to take care of our own people....

A beat as he lets this sink in

MR. PARKER (CONT'D)

I believe our situation was made abundantly clear to you before you took this position, was it not?

BRADLEY

(solemnly)

Yes sir. Abundantly.

MR. PARKER

All right then. You have to understand our precarious situation when it comes to matters like this. I believe we did provide you with the medicine free of charge to treat this man, did we not?

BRADLEY

Yes sir, and I do thank you for that...but would you at least consider...

MR. PARKER

I'm sorry, Dr. Herrin. That is all that we are able to do for this Mr...Mr...

BRADLEY

Joe.

MR. PARKER

Joe. If anything changes, I will be the first to let you know.

He stands as if to dismiss BRADLEY. BRADLEY stands slowly, defeated

BRADLEY

I would appreciate that, sir.

He turns to exit the room as PARKER calls after him

MR. PARKER

Merry Christmas, Dr. Herrin.
Kindly close the door behind you.

BRADLEY turns and nods in acknowledgment

BRADLEY

To you as well, sir.

BRADLEY exits through the door, closes it and then leans back against it

BRADLEY (CONT'D)
 (to himself)
 Humbug, Mr. Scrooge.

FADE OUT:

INT. SMALLEY HOUSE - MORNING

ELIZABETH pours coffee as EDWARD finishes his breakfast. There is a strained silence between them. ELIZABETH speaks first

ELIZABETH
 I'm calling Dorothy Baker this morning.

EDWARD
 Dorothy?

ELIZABETH
 At the Salvation Army...about that man.

EDWARD
 He has a name. Joe.

A beat as ELIZABETH rolls her eyes

ELIZABETH
 Well, whatever. But I'm going to have her come over and get him and take him somewhere more appropriate than our church.

EDWARD
 What place could be more appropriate for someone needing the good-will of others than the church? I don't know why you're so anxious to rid yourself of him.

ELIZABETH
 Well, you were the one that came up with that idea the day they brought him here, were you not? And it's not just me...

She's not being totally truthful

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
 It's the other church members. They don't like it, Edward. He makes them uncomfortable.
 (MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

He has to go. I'm just not going to argue about this anymore. It's Christmas Eve and I just don't have the time or the patience to worry about this any longer.

EDWARD

(flatly)
Fine. Fine.

He holds his hands up in surrender

EDWARD (CONT'D)

I'm washing my hands of this. You arrange whatever you can with them and let's be done with it.

He's defeated

ELIZABETH

I'm glad you agree. I'll take care of it.

She leaves the kitchen and EDWARD slumps in his chair like he's been pummelled. He has.

We hear ELIZABETH as she makes the phone call from the adjoining room

ELIZABETH (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Good morning, Dorothy. This is Elizabeth Smalley....yes, yes, the pastor's wife. I have a matter here at the church that I need help with...

Her voice fades as we see EDWARD rise from his chair, toss his napkin on the table in frustration and exit the room

CUT TO:

EXT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - LATER THAT SAME MORNING

A SALVATION ARMY VAN is parked in front of the church

CUT TO:

INT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - SIMULTANEOUS

ELIZABETH welcomes DOROTHY, a pleasant woman in her 60s. She wears the uniform of the SALVATION ARMY.

ELIZABETH

Dorothy, it's so nice to see you again. Merry Christmas.

DOROTHY

Merry Christmas, Mrs. Smalley. Thank you so much for the donations from the Church last month. The goods have helped out tremendously in helping others.

ELIZABETH

Of course. What is a church, if we can't be charitable to those in need?

A little ironic considering what's coming

DOROTHY

So how can we help you today?

ELIZABETH

Well, I want to assure you that I have more canned goods over in the rectory to send back with you...

DOROTHY

Well, that is appreciated of course, but on the phone you said you had a problem you needed help with. What is it?

ELIZABETH

Well...we have a man here at the church.

A beat as ELIZABETH plots how to lay out her plan

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

A hobo of sorts. He came in on the train the other day. Edward has been letting him stay in the back room here, but we aren't really set up to take in boarders...

DOROTHY nods her head in understanding

DOROTHY

And you'd like for us to take him.

ELIZABETH

Well, yes. I was hoping that would be possible.

DOROTHY

I must say, it's not the most convenient of times, it being Christmas Eve. We're on a skeleton staff at the barracks...

ELIZABETH is determined to make her case

ELIZABETH

But this is what you do, isn't it? You take in people who have nowhere else to go.

She's not taking no for answer

DOROTHY

Yes, Mrs. Smalley. That is what we do. Might I see this gentleman? Talk with him perhaps?

ELIZABETH

Well....he doesn't really talk. I mean not to us anyway. Hasn't said a word to anyone since he's been here.

DOROTHY looks puzzled

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I mean, he won't be any trouble, let me get Edward to go and get him and you can just take him on back with you.

DOROTHY realizes there are many unfilled blanks here

DOROTHY

Is there anything else I should know about this gentleman?

ELIZABETH

Like what?

DOROTHY

Well, for starters, is he in trouble with the law?

ELIZABETH

Oh no! No trouble that we know of.

DOROTHY

I heard a rumor that a man was brought in off the train the other day to the Sheriff's office. Is this that man?

ELIZABETH

Well, yes...but he's not a prisoner. They were just going to keep him at the jail until they found out he was too sick...

Oops, she didn't really mean to let that out

DOROTHY

Sick?

ELIZABETH

Oh, not any more. Not really. Dr. Herrin from the hospital has been coming by to see him every day. He's almost as good as new. He just has to take his medicine...

DOROTHY is already shaking her head

DOROTHY

Mrs. Smalley, we cannot have someone who is ill staying in our barracks. It is against our rules. We don't have anyone to look after him, especially now at Christmas. I'm sorry, but...

ELIZABETH

But you HAVE to take him!

DOROTHY

Maybe the doctor can find a room for him at the hospital. It sounds like that may be more appropriate.

ELIZABETH

They won't take him. All their beds are full and the doctor says he's not really sick enough to be admitted.

DOROTHY

I'm truly sorry, Mrs. Smalley. I'm afraid we can't help you with this. We aren't a hospital.

ELIZABETH rolls her eyes in frustration

ELIZABETH
Yeah, well neither are we.

DOROTHY redirects the conversation

DOROTHY
You did say you had some canned
goods to donate? Might I go ahead
and pick those up before I leave?

ELIZABETH looks back at her as if she can't believe her nerve

ELIZABETH
(a little sarcastically)
Of course. Let me go get your
donations.

A WIDE SHOT - we see JOE in the back hallway. BO the dog, his
near constant companion now, sits at his feet. He has heard
the entire conversation. His voice is soft as he speaks to BO

JOE
(to the dog)
It's alright. I don't stay long
nowhere.

The dog whines in response

JOE (CONT'D)
I gotta go now, but I'll always
remember you. You're my friend. I
ain't got many of those.

JOE smiles sadly and pats BO's head as we

FADE OUT:

EXT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - A FEW MINUTES LATER

DOROTHY has started the van as ELIZABETH looks on.

DOROTHY
Thank you again for the donations.
I do hope you find an appropriate
place for your visitor. I wish we
could have helped you. Merry
Christmas, Mrs. Smalley.

ELIZABETH nods, still frustrated as the van drives away

ELIZABETH
 (to herself)
 Yeah, Merry Christmas to me.

CUT TO:

EXT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - SAME DAY - SIMULTANEOUS

The ambulance driven by BRADLEY pulls up the street as the VAN drives away. ELIZABETH is walking back towards the house as she meets EDWARD coming out. He stops to say something to her, but she immediately puts her hand out in a "STOP" warning, says nothing and walks straight past him.

BRADLEY is now coming up the sidewalk.

BRADLEY
 (to Edward)
 Good Morning, Reverend.

EDWARD
 (curtly)
 Is it?

They both look after ELIZABETH stalks her way to rectory, goes inside and slams the door

EXT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - SAME DAY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

QUICK SHOT

CUT TO:

INT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - SAME TIME

JULIE ANN is busy arranging choir chairs, shuffling through music sheets, etc. preparing for the night's musical. Something catches her eye O.C. We follow to see that she is looking at the violin stand. It is empty. She walks toward it, then looks around as if she thinks the violin may have been moved. It is nowhere. We hear the church door open, but JULIE ANN is still busy looking about for the violin

BRADLEY (O.C.)
 Julie Ann? Are you here?

She is a little startled, still pre-occupied

JULIE ANN
 Yes, I'm here.

BRADLEY

Have you seen Joe?

JULIE ANN

No, not since last night. Is he not in his room?

BRADLEY

No. It doesn't even look like he's slept there. I came by to bring him some more medicine and see how he was doing.

JULIE ANN

Well, with the way he's been treated by some of the church members, I don't doubt that he left. He may be quiet, but I don't think he's stupid. He has heard every unkind word that was said.

BRADLEY

I just saw Reverend Smalley outside, he didn't mention anything about Joe not being here. It concerns me that he has just disappeared.

JULIE ANN

I overheard Mrs. Smalley telling one of the ladies last night that she was going to try and pawn him off on the Salvation Army today. Maybe she succeeded.

BRADLEY

Ahhh, so that's what was going on out there. The van was just pulling away when I got here. Mrs. Smalley did not look pleased with whatever had just happened.

JULIE ANN

Was Joe in the van?

BRADLEY

I don't know. I didn't see him.

BRADLEY sighs

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

I just wish I could get him a room at the hospital. I just have a bad feeling about him for some reason.

JULIE ANN

He hasn't seemed too ill in the last day or so.

BRADLEY

I hope you're right. Poor fellow, just can't get a break. And now he's disappeared.

JULIE ANN

There's something else that's disappeared.

BRADLEY

What's that?

JULIE ANN

The violin.

BRADLEY

The violin? I didn't think anyone played it.

JULIE ANN

They don't. That's just it. The only person who has shown any interest in it was Joe.

BRADLEY

Joe? What would he want with a violin?

JULIE ANN

I don't know. When I noticed him looking at it, I asked him if he played, but of course he didn't answer. He just kept staring at it.

A beat

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

That violin is valuable, you know. Hand made in Italy.

BRADLEY

I can't imagine that Joe took it.

JULIE ANN

Well I would hope not, but it's gone. And Joe is gone.

BRADLEY
 (with a sigh)
 Yeah.

A beat

BRADLEY (CONT'D)
 Well, I'm going to see if I can
 find the Reverend before we jump to
 any more conclusions. Maybe he
 knows something.

JULIE ANN
 I hope so...for Joe's sake. It's
 Christmas Eve.

He smiles at JULIE ANN

BRADLEY
 So, I'll see you this evening?

She returns his smile

JULIE ANN
 I'll be here.

CUT TO:

EXT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - A FEW MINUTES LATER

EDWARD is placing greenery on the church sign out front.
 BRADLEY spots him and walks over

BRADLEY
 Joe's not in his room. Julie Ann
 says she hasn't seen him all day.
 Did the Salvation Army take him?

EDWARD
 No, he's still here.

EDWARD smiles and nods his head in the direction behind
 BRADLEY as he turns to look. From BRADLEY'S POV in the
 distance we see JOE sitting on a bench. BO the dog is at his
 feet. Doves flutter around as he feeds them something from a
 bag. Two stray cats also are at his feet as he hands them
 morsels also.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
 He has a way with animals like no
 one I've ever seen.
 (MORE)

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Bo won't leave his side and Rebecca has been trying to lure those cats in for weeks but they won't come near her.

BRADLEY

I was afraid he had left town.

EDWARD

No, he's still here...despite my wife's efforts to rid herself of him.

BRADLEY

Why didn't the Salvation Army take him?

EDWARD

It's just like everywhere else. He wasn't welcome. Oh, of course they gave the excuse that they couldn't have a sick man there, you know, the usual.

BRADLEY

Too bad.

EDWARD

Yeah...

BRADLEY

Reverend Smalley...Julie Ann is concerned.

EDWARD

Concerned?

BRADLEY

Yes. The violin in the church is missing.

EDWARD

Missing?

BRADLEY

Yes. She said Joe was admiring it a day or so ago and now it's gone.

EDWARD

That's odd. What would a man like Joe want with a violin?

BRADLEY

Beats me. But Julie Ann is still worried. She says it's very valuable.

EDWARD

A musical instrument only has value if it's played. That violin has sat there silent since Mr. Antonelli died years ago.

BRADLEY

That may be, but I just thought you should know.

A beat

EDWARD

Thank you, I'll keep an eye out for it.

He changes the subject

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Will we see you at the Christmas Eve program this evening, Doctor?

BRADLEY

Oh yes, I wouldn't miss it...for the children of course.

EDWARD knows why BRADLEY is interested in the program and its not necessarily the children

EDWARD

Yes of course, the children. And Miss Jeffers?

BRADLEY

Oh yes, certainly Miss Jeffers. She's a wonderful pianist.

EDWARD smiles

EDWARD

Yes, yes she is.

BRADLEY looks a little sheepish

BRADLEY

Well, I have to get back to the hospital. Keep an eye out for the violin.

EDWARD

Yes. I will. See you this evening.

FADE OUT:

OVER A BLACK SCREEN WE HEAR A PIANO PLAYING CHRISTMAS MUSIC
AND THE MURMUR OF A CROWD

QUICK SHOT EXT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - NIGHT - CHRISTMAS EVE

INT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - SAME TIME

JULIE ANN is seated at the piano playing a Christmas piece as the crowd filters in. A curtain is closed on the stage but we see rustling from behind it as the players take their places. The music ends and JULIE ANN stands up to face the crowd.

JULIE ANN

(to the audience)

Everyone.

And then a little louder

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

Everyone! Please be seated. Our program is about to begin.

The crowd settles as JULIE ANN peeks behind the curtain

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

(to the children)

Okay everyone, in your places. Are we all ready?

CHILDREN

(in unison)

Yes, Miss Jeffers!

JULIE ANN

Alright then. Good luck. Do your best.

She smiles warmly at them and winks. She nods to the person in charge of the curtain and it opens. JULIE ANN turns to face the crowd. She makes a pointed glance to the rear of the church to the spot where JOE usually sat for the rehearsals. JOE is not there. She sighs but goes on

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

Good evening everyone and welcome
to the Pinehaven Community Church
Christmas Eve program.

The audience applauds. Some of the children wave to their parents who return the gesture. JULIE ANN takes her place at the piano.

We follow with takes on several Christmas carols sung by the children. A short take on a skit with a girl playing MARY holding BABY JESUS with children dressed as SHEPHERDS and WISEMEN in attendance. Cut through with shorts of Christmas hymns sung by the adult choir.

The evening finishes with the children singing "Here Comes Santa Claus" and he appears! CLOSE IN to reveal it is the SHERIFF dressed for the part. The crowd applauds as all the children and SANTA take a bow as the program comes to a close.

REVEREND SMALLEY takes the stage to end the program.

EDWARD

Thank you. Thank you everyone. I believe this ends our Christmas Eve program. But even though Santa made an appearance this evening, I want you all to leave remembering the true meaning of this night. It was the night of our Savior's birth. The true light that was born into the world. And with that in mind, I believe we have one last hymn from Miss Jeffers. Merry Christmas everyone.

CONGREGATION

Merry Christmas.

He turns to JULIE ANN

EDWARD

Julie Ann, if you would favor us with your beautiful rendition of Silent Night.

JULIE ANN smiles and nods. She begins the opening strains of SILENT NIGHT as a piano solo, but after a few stanzas suddenly O.C. we hear the hauntingly beautiful accompaniment of a violin. ANGLE to see it is JOE. JULIE ANN is taken aback for a moment but continues to play her part on the piano. JOE looks at no one.

His eyes are closed as he plays the strains of SILENT NIGHT. He is obviously an accomplished violinist.

When the song ends, the astonished crowd looks on with a deafening silence. JOE walks to the stand where the violin was kept. He caresses the instrument gently and places it back on the stand and turns to leave without a word

JULIE ANN

Joe...

JOE does not turn around but begins shuffling up the aisle toward the exit of the church. The congregation is still silent as they watch him leave. Suddenly, JOE falls to one knee and grasps his chest as the crowd gasps. BRADLEY jumps up to his aid, followed by EDWARD.

EDWARD

(to the murmuring
congregation)

It's all right everyone. It's all right. Everyone just go on home. It's getting late. We will tend to this.

JOE is attempting to stand as BRADLEY helps him

BRADLEY

Joe, maybe you better sit down.
Let us get you something to drink.

JOE pulls his arm away from BRADLEY. He says nothing, but starts again toward the rear of the church. The last of the crowd is leaving the building, still with distasteful looks toward Joe in spite of what they have just witnessed

EDWARD

We can't let him go out there alone.

BRADLEY

Do you think he might be able to stay here...just one more night?

EDWARD

Well, I don't know if....

ELIZABETH (O.C.)

No he may not.

ELIZABETH appears behind EDWARD

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

We cannot keep that man another night. I thought he had left already. No one's seen him all day.

EDWARD

Elizabeth, it's Christmas Eve, it's cold out. We can't just turn him out to fend for himself.

ELIZABETH

We have already been through this, Edward. You know that I....

They are interrupted by a voice O.C.

ABE (O.C.)

I'll take him.

They all turn to see ABE JACKSON. He has lingered after the program

ABE (CONT'D)

I can take him on over to the jail. The Sheriff won't be in for a couple days it bein' Christmas. He won't ever know he's there. At least he'll have a warm place to sleep and meals if he wants 'em. I'll see if I can't get him back on a train out of here before the Sheriff gets back in on Monday.

BRADLEY and EDWARD look at each other. There isn't another choice. ELIZABETH smiles a self-satisfied smile

ELIZABETH

I think that is the perfect solution. You just take him on now.

She waves her hand off in the direction of JOE who has now shuffled his way to the door.

ABE looks to BRADLEY and EDWARD

ABE

I won't lock him up. Can't see that he's done anything to deserve that. But he'll have a place to stay.

EDWARD

Thank you, deputy. We are in your debt.

ELIZABETH

Yes we are, and a very Merry Christmas to you.

She's a little too cheerful. ABE studies her for a moment then nods his head solemnly

ABE

Yes ma'am. Merry Christmas.

He turns and approaches JOE who he helps out the door of the church.

JULIE ANN arrives just in time to see ABE escorting JOE out the door.

JULIE ANN

What's going on? Why is the deputy taking Joe?

BRADLEY

He's going to put him up at the jail tonight.

JULIE ANN

What? You can't put him in jail. He's not a criminal.

Her voice rises with indignation

BRADLEY

He's not being arrested, Julie Ann, there's just nowhere else for him to go.

JULIE ANN

Well what about his room here?

ELIZABETH

I'm sorry, Julie Ann, but he has stayed his last night here. Our backroom is meant for someone in an urgent situation. One of our church members I mean. Like when the widow Sullivan's house burned. You understand.

JULIE ANN glares at her

JULIE ANN

No, actually I don't understand. Joe needs help and this is a church. Are you not supposed to help those in need? What about that sign out front that says, "All God's Children Welcome Here?" Does that mean just "God's Children" that you know, church members, people you consider "proper"?

BRADLEY

(interrupting)

Now, Julie Ann, Reverend and Mrs. Edwards...

JULIE ANN

And what about you? "Doctor" Herrin?

She sarcastically emphasizes his title

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

Have you washed your hands of this too? Joe is a sick man. You know that. He should be in YOUR hospital under YOUR care. You saw him tonight. He is not well. How can any of you let him be led out of here to a....a...jail cell? And on Christmas Eve. You should be ashamed. All of you.

A beat

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

You and every one in this town heard him play that violin tonight. Joe is not a worthless bum. He hasn't always been the way we see him now. I know a thing or two about music and that man was an extremely accomplished musician at some point in his life. Either that or the children were right...he is an angel.

BRADLEY, EDWARD and ELIZABETH have no rebuttal to this.
JULIE ANN is right

JULIE ANN turns to leave

BRADLEY
 Wait...Julie Ann, I'll walk you home.

JULIE ANN
 That won't be necessary. I can walk myself home.

BRADLEY
 Julie Ann...

She cuts him off

JULIE ANN
 (a little sarcastically)
 Merry Christmas to all of you.
 Good night.

And she is gone

BRADLEY follows her to the door but as he steps outside he only sees her stalking away down the street. He spies ABE who has just placed JOE in the back seat of the PATROL CAR. He calls out to him

BRADLEY
 Deputy....

ABE
 Yes sir?

BRADLEY
 Maybe I should go with you to get him settled in. I'll check him over and see that he gets his evening dose of medicine.

ABE
 Yes sir. That'll be fine. C'mon and get in the car. I'll drive you over.

As BRADLEY approaches the PATROL CAR, EDWARD calls to him from OC.

EDWARD
 Dr. Herrin? Can I be of some help?

BRADLEY
 No, no. Julie Ann was right. I'm the doctor. He is under my care. I'll go over with Abe and make sure he's okay for the evening.

EDWARD

Well...if you're sure I can't help...

BRADLEY

Reverend, it's getting late...and it's Christmas Eve. Go home to your family. I'll take care of Joe.

EDWARD

All right then...

BRADLEY turns to get in the car

EDWARD (CONT'D)

See you tomorrow for Christmas services?

BRADLEY

(softly, with a hint of sadness)

Sure. I wouldn't miss it.

They nod to each other in acknowledgment and BRADLEY gets into the PATROL CAR which promptly pulls away leaving EDWARD waving solemnly after them

CUT TO:

INT. - PINEHAVEN JAIL - A FEW MINUTES LATER

ABE has placed JOE in a cell where JOE sits on the bed. ABE lays an extra blanket at the foot of the bed. BRADLEY is finishing his exam of JOE and is listening to his chest with a stethoscope.

ABE

What do you think, doc?

BRADLEY

I don't know. His heart's a little irregular, not really much different than the other day at the hospital though.

ABE

Well, something be wrong with him. You saw him go to his knees up there at the church tonight.

BRADLEY

I don't know. The Reverend says he's hardly eaten anything. May just be weak from that. It's hard to say.

ABE

Maybe he do need to be over to the hospital.

BRADLEY

Maybe. Unfortunately, that ship has already sailed. The Administrator has already said no to that.

ABE

Is that Administrator a doctor?

BRADLEY

No, not hardly. He's a business man and he makes business decisions.

ABE

And if it was your decision, what would you do?

BRADLEY

I would put him in the hospital.

ABE

(nodding)

Um Hmm. I think I'd be wantin' a doctor to make those decisions if it were me. Not somebody who puts numbers on paper.

BRADLEY

Yeah. Me too. But I'm afraid that's a conversation for another day.

ABE

Yes sir, I expect it is.

BRADLEY offers JOE a medicine cup. JOE does not respond but sits with eyes downcast.

BRADLEY

Come on, Joe. You need your medicine.

JOE remains silent

BRADLEY (CONT'D)

(sighing)

All right then. Maybe tomorrow,
Joe. I'll be here first thing in
the morning to check on you.

He pats JOE gently on the shoulder as he rises to leave

ABE calls after him

ABE

Doctor?

BRADLEY

Yes?

ABE

You done your best, sir.

BRADLEY

I wish my best was good enough.

ABE

Yes sir. Good night, sir. And
Merry Christmas to you.

BRADLEY

Good night, Abe. Merry Christmas
to you.

He turns and is gone out the door

ABE turns to JOE

ABE

All right, ole feller. You got to
take that medicine, ya hear? I'm
goin' to leave it right here beside
you. I can't stay here all night,
but you'll be all right. There's
other prisoners here but they's
locked up and won't bother you.
You get a good night's rest and
I'll be here in the morning with
your breakfast.

JOE says nothing, but sits in his usual manner with his head
down.

ABE (CONT'D)

Good night then...and Merry
Christmas.

ABE walks away and starts to close the door to the cell, but then pointedly leaves it open.

ABE (CONT'D)
 (to himself)
 Man ain't done no harm to nobody.
 I ain't going to cage him up like
 an animal.

ABE turns out the light and we see the shadow of JOE left sitting in the darkness only illuminated by a small, bare light bulb above him

FADE OUT:

INT. - SMALLEY HOUSE - BEDROOM - EARLY CHRISTMAS MORNING

It is still dark and quiet as we see EDWARD and ELIZABETH sleeping in their bed. A ray of light shines in as the door cracks open

REBECCA (O.C.)
 (whispering)
 Daddy!

EDWARD doesn't awake, so she tries again, a little louder this time

REBECCA (O.C.) (CONT'D)
 Daddy!

EDWARD now rouses, sits up and looks toward the door

REBECCA (CONT'D)
 Daddy, it's Christmas! Can we go
 downstairs and see what Santa
 brought?

EDWARD rubs his eyes and looks at the glowing face of the alarm clock beside the bed. It reads 5:55 a.m.

EDWARD
 Rebecca, it's not even six o'clock
 yet. You know your mother won't be
 pleased if we wake her.

REBECCA
 But Daddy....please! It's
 Christmas!

EDWARD

Go back to bed for just a little while, honey. We'll get up when the sun's up.

REBECCA

But that's going to be forever.

She's whining a little now

EDWARD

Thirty minutes. That's not forever. Now go on back to bed before you wake your mother.

REBECCA lets out a disappointed sigh

REBECCA

Okay...

She pulls the door to and EDWARD fluffs his pillow and lays back down. He's no more than closed his eyes when we hear the PHONE on the bedside table ring. EDWARD'S eyes pop open and he lets out a sigh. ELIZABETH is also now awakened as the PHONE continues to ring

ELIZABETH

What in the world? What time is it? Who could that be calling on Christmas morning?

EDWARD

I don't know.

He reaches for the phone

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Hello?

ELIZABETH turns over, puts the pillow over her head and goes back to sleep

CUT TO:

INT. - PINEHAVEN JAIL - SAME TIME

ABE

Reverend Smalley?

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

EDWARD

Yes. Who's this?

ABE

It's Abe Jackson, the deputy over to the Sheriff's office. I'm sorry to be callin' ya at this time of the morning...it bein' Christmas and all...

EDWARD

Is there a problem, Deputy?

ABE

Well, yes sir, I'm afraid there is. You see, I just come in to the jail to bring breakfast to the prisoners like I always do at this time o' morning. And I found somethin' awful, sir.

EDWARD is concerned now and rises to sit on the side of the bed

EDWARD

What's happened. Is something wrong with Joe?

ABE

Well yes sir....

EDWARD

He didn't leave during the night, did he?

ABE

No sir. He still here but... he be... dead. Passed some time during the night near as I can tell.

EDWARD'S shoulders slump as he hears the news

EDWARD

Oh no....

A beat as he sighs

EDWARD (CONT'D)

We'll have to get in touch with Dr. Herrin.

ABE

I already called him, sir. He on his way as we speakin'

Another beat

ABE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry to have to call you with this news, Reverend, on Christmas mornin'. I'm just real sorry for that...and for that old feller too. He didn't seem to have no harm in him. Just a lonely old soul that didn't have nobody or no place to go.

EDWARD nods silently in agreement

EDWARD

Let me get dressed, I'll be down there in a few minutes.

ABE

Yes sir. I be here waitin' and ol' Joe, well he ain't goin' nowhere.

EDWARD hangs up the phone and runs his hands through his hair as ELIZABETH stirs again

ELIZABETH

Honey? Who was on the phone?

EDWARD

The jail.

ELIZABETH

The jail? At this hour? Not more trouble with that hobo is there?

EDWARD

No. No. He won't be any more trouble. To anybody.

ELIZABETH

Well good. Hopefully they can put him back on a train and back to where ever he came from. The sooner the better.

EDWARD rises from the bed and heads toward the closet to retrieve his clothes

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

EDWARD

I'm getting dressed.

ELIZABETH

This early? Christmas services aren't until eleven and we haven't even opened presents yet.

EDWARD

I have to go down to the jail, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

For what? I thought you said there wasn't going to be anymore trouble with that man.

EDWARD

(bluntly)
He's dead, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH is a little taken aback

EDWARD (CONT'D)

He's not going to cause anyone in Pinehaven any more inconvenience. I just need to go down and meet the doctor and decide what we do now...how to find his friends or relatives...where to send his body...things you don't plan on doing on Christmas morning.

ELIZABETH is silent for a moment, slightly embarrassed by her selfishness

ELIZABETH

I see.

A beat

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I am sorry, Edward. I know you and the children saw something in him that escaped me somehow. Maybe I wasn't as charitable toward him as I should have been.

The door cracks open again and REBECCA'S head appears

REBECCA

Momma! You're up! Can we open presents now?

ELIZABETH

Hush now, Rebecca, your Daddy and I are talking.

REBECCA

But Momma, it's Christmas!

ELIZABETH

I know that. You go on downstairs and see what Santa brought. Daddy and I will be there in just a minute.

REBECCA squeals with delight and scampers away

ELIZABETH looks to EDWARD whose sadness registers plainly on his face

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I am truly sorry, honey. You go on down to the jail and do what you have to do, but then come back home. It IS Christmas and you have your family and you have a sermon to give this morning. You've worked on it for weeks now and I know it's going to be very special.

She places her hand under his chin to raise his still down-turned face

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Merry Christmas, Edward.

He smiles back at her half-heartedly, somewhat sighing

EDWARD

Yeah, Merry Christmas.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

A LONG SHOT of BRADLEY and EDWARD meeting outside the building. They say a few words and then both shake their heads. BRADLEY places his hand on EDWARD'S shoulder as they disappear inside the building.

EXT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - DAY

CHRISTMAS MORNING

CUT THROUGH SCENES of the church members entering the church, dressed in Christmas finery, laughing and talking gaily with liberal doses of "Merry Christmas"

INT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - DAY

The congregation settles as REV. EDWARD SMALLEY steps to the lectern. His face is more grim than one might expect on Christmas morning. He looks out at the congregation and then down to the pulpit as though pondering what he might say. He begins solemnly

EDWARD
Merry Christmas.

THE CONGREGATION
Merry Christmas!

A beat

EDWARD
I had a sermon prepared for this, our holiest of days. It was full of happiness and hope in the light that has once again shown in the darkness.

Another beat

EDWARD (CONT'D)
I won't be giving that sermon today...

The CONGREGATION look quizzically at each other

EDWARD (CONT'D)
I received a phone call early this morning from Abe Jackson, the deputy over at the Sheriff's office. He called to tell me that our visitor, Joe...

A beat as he pauses to compose himself

EDWARD (CONT'D)
...had passed away sometime during the night.

A hushed murmur runs through the CONGREGATION

EDWARD (CONT'D)
He had been sick when he came here four days ago. Dr. Herrin has been caring for him, first here at the church and then last night, Christmas Eve, at the jail.
(MORE)

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Joe never made it to the place he was going, wherever that was, I don't know. What I do know is that a stranger traveling alone at Christmas - admittedly an inconvenient time - showed up in our town. We didn't know him. He was different from us and as it turns out, we had no room for him. No one would take him in and so we shuffled him from one place to the next until he ended up in a jail cell, though he had done nothing wrong. That seems to be the order of things when unexpected strangers show up...you put them out of the way, out of sight, in a jail cell or perhaps...in a stable...

The crowd is hushed now. Solemn.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

I don't know what, if any, prayers Joe prayed last night before he died. Alone. In the dark, in the middle of that silent, holy night. Joe wasn't a man of many words. He expressed himself best to animals and children. The innocents most like himself. Our Lord once said that He marveled that such wealth had come to live in such poverty. I believe he was talking about those like Joe.

He pauses as he looks out over the CONGREGATION again

EDWARD (CONT'D)

His name was Joe Telles. We didn't know that until this morning when Dr. Herrin and I removed his coat. Yes, that filthy coat that he guarded with his very life and refused to take off. We found no money. Joe Telles had no material belongings, no family names or photos. He had nothing....

He holds up two military medals

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Except for these two medals... from our last World War.

(MORE)

EDWARD (CONT'D)

The Silver Star, denoting gallantry of a high degree in battle. And the Purple Heart, indicating he was also wounded in combat. Joe Telles' name is engraved on these medals. He was a hero.

Another beat as the CONGREGATION considers this

EDWARD (CONT'D)

From what we saw and heard last night, we know that Joe was a gifted and accomplished musician. At some point in his life he had been a very different man than the one who came to our town a few days ago. I don't know what horrors he had seen in war that may have set him on his path or what led him here to us, but I can't help but hear the echo of our Lord's words this morning, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me".

A beat

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Joe Telles left us with a gift last night. The only gift he had to give. A gift from his heart. A gift of beauty and grace even in the face of our selfishness. God forgive us and help us to remember this man and the Christmas message he was sent to deliver. And Godspeed, Joe Telles. I wish for you a more permanent and beautiful home than you were given here on this earth.

A beat as we see a long shot of BRADLEY who is the first to speak

BRADLEY

Amen.

QUICK SHOT of JULIE ANN at the piano.

JULIE ANN

Amen.

They are followed by a rising crescendo of "Amen's" from the other church members, and finally CLOSE on ELIZABETH as she raises her downcast eyes and dabs a tear

ELIZABETH
(softly)
Amen.

FADE OUT:

EXT. PINEHAVEN - DAY

PRESENT TIME

CUT THROUGH with scenes of MODERN DAY PINEHAVEN. The church, a new hospital, an overhead of the train leaving town at dusk. A now elderly BRADLEY and JULIE ANN eating at the same diner, cut with scenes of their anniversary party also at the diner. We now discover that the NARRATOR is the adult REBECCA

NARRATOR (V.O.)
It's been more than fifty years since my Daddy gave that sermon on Christmas morning. So many things have changed in our town...but so many have stayed the same. Dr. Herrin and his Julie Ann still have lunch every day at the diner. Their grandchildren surprised them with a party there on their fiftieth wedding anniversary. And that train. It still comes and goes every morning and every evening, like a memory that keeps repeating itself. And of course, December twenty-first comes each year. There are still those of us who remember; who realize that once that day comes, there is still time. Four days to make amends; to awaken and realize that sometimes the greatest gifts are the most unexpected ones. Four days to realize that the true gifts are not wrapped in bright paper and bows, but disguised so that at first we do not recognize them. I believe that some are chosen to bear a light so strong that even when they are gone, the light lives on inside those who were a witness to it. Isn't that the story of Christmas?
(MORE)

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

FADE OUT:

THE END