

CHRISTMAS JOE

Written by

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Inspired by a
True story

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FADE IN:

EXT. - DAYBREAK

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

NARRATOR (V.O.)
(A Mature Female voice, Southern
accent)

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.

SUPER:

"1967"

NARRATOR (V.O.)

(CONT'D)

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.

O.S. the SOUND of the far away train and its WHISTLE.

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 AGE 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
Aw, 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 FARRIS. 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
Aw, 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, 50s 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 - DAY.

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, 50s, 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. 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
 All right. 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. TOWN - MAIN STREET - DAY

The Squad 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 (CONT'D)
 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
And how do you know that?

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 patrol 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 in starched white, SALLY, 50s 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 TOWNSPEOPLE 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
ten beds and they're all taken.

Sally removes the thermometer from Joe's mouth and reads it.

SALLY
One Hundred One.

She raises a concerned eyebrow as she looks to Dr. Herrin.

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

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

He considers Joe for a moment.

BRADLEY
Sally, call up 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. 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)
 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? 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.
(MORE)

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

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 visibly 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 (CONT'D)

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. LATER THAT SAME 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 (CONT'D)
 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 EVENING

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 without looking away from the doctor.

An uncomfortable beat as Elizabeth continues to stare.

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.

EXT. CHURCH PREMISES - DAY - CONTINUOUS

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.)
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 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.
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, all right 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 good-byes as Bradley exits the church.

INT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - NIGHT - LATER THAT 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.

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. A WAITRESS, matronly, 60s, spies him.

WAITRESS

(to Bradley)

Take a seat where you can find one, Hon.

Bradley continues to look around, that doesn't seem possible. From O.S. we hear a woman's voice. It is Julie Ann.

JULIE ANN (O.S.)
Dr. Herrin?

He looks around trying to find who has called his name.

JULIE ANN (O.S.) (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, the 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 as she lowers her eyes and then looks back at him.

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 may have starved to death...or been trampled waiting for an open spot.

She softens and smiles.

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 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.S.) (CONT'D)
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. 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
(To Girl #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.

INT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - LATER THAT 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. 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.

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.

A beat

JULIE ANN
That was her dream, not mine.

Another 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.
(MORE)

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

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.

(MORE)

MR. PARKER (CONT'D)

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 medical institutions 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 in dismissal. 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.

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. 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 O.C. as she makes the phone call from the adjoining room.

ELIZABETH (O.C.)
 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.

EXT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - LATER THAT SAME MORNING

A SALVATION ARMY VAN is parked in front of the church.

INT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

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.
(MORE)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

We don't have anyone to look after him, especially now at Christmas. I'm sorry, but...

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

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 all right. 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.

EXT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - SAME DAY - CONTINUOUS

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 as she stalks her way to the rectory, goes inside and slams the door.

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

QUICK SHOT - CONTINUOUS

INT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

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.

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. 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 BLACK

A PIANO PLAYING CHRISTMAS MUSIC AND THE MURMUR OF A CROWD

EXT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - NIGHT - CHRISTMAS EVE - QUICK SHOT

INT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

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
 All right 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 breathes a sigh 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.

Edward 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.S.)

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.

(MORE)

ABE (CONT'D)

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
 back room 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.
 (MORE)

JULIE ANN (CONT'D)

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.

EXT. PINEHAVEN CHURCH - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

BRADLEY (CONT'D)
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 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.

INT. - PINEHAVEN JAIL - NIGHT - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Abe has placed Joe in a cell where Joe now 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 (CONT'D)
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 - DAY

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.

INT. PINEHAVEN JAIL - CONTINUOUS

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 family...where to send his body...call the undertaker...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.

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 - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The congregation settles as Edward 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 church.

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. 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 Farris. 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 Farris 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. The Silver Star, denoting gallantry of a high degree in battle. And the Purple Heart, indicating he was also wounded in combat. Joe Farris' 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.

(MORE)

EDWARD (CONT'D)

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 Farris 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 Farris. 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 a solemn Julie Ann at the piano.

JULIE ANN

Amen.

They are followed by a rising crescendo of "Amens" 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. TOWN OF PINE HAVEN - DAY

SUPER: PRESENT DAY

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. And yes, 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?

FADE OUT:

THE END