

POOR ON'RY PEOPLE

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

A caravan of military vehicles travels along an unimproved road near a primitive, half destroyed town. Dust clouds billow behind and reveal its path through the desert.

Super: "Afghanistan"

INT. MILITARY TRUCK - DAY (CONT'D)

Through the truck passenger's dirty front window, a soldier strains to see the vehicles ahead.

The soldier watches an improvised explosive device suddenly EXPLODE under the Hummer in front of them. The Hummer cartwheels into the sky.

A rock from the explosion sails straight toward the truck. It SHATTERS the driver's windshield and makes a muffled SPLAT. The truck veers off the road and CRUNCHES into a berm.

All goes black.

INT. GARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

GARY'S BEDROOM

The bed is empty.

On the floor in a fetal position, GARY wraps his arms around his head and trembles. He's 24, a little scruffy but very fit and scared. He moans quietly and breathes hard.

GARY

Eh uh. Eh uh. Eh uh...

Gary squeezes his head harder and scrunches into a ball.

LATER - DAWN

Gary, still on the floor, is stretched out now. He sleeps; he's very relaxed.

His widowed mother, BETH, 50, a major worrier and loving caretaker, sits on the floor beside him, her hand gently resting on Gary's arm.

Gary snores quietly, like a purr.

INT. STEVIE'S HOUSE - DAY

KITCHEN

Stevie, 11, active and high-functioning autistic, kneels on the floor and rifles through a bottom drawer.

Stevie's dad, DAVE, 46, pudgy and ornery, enters and sees Stevie on the floor.

He's frustrated and a little torqued.

DAVE
Stevie! What the heck are you
doing?

STEVIE
(startled, sheepishly)
Kneeling.

DAVE
I see that. But why?

STEVIE
I need a long spoon.

Stevie extracts a long wooden spoon from the drawer and stands, proud of himself.

STEVIE (CONT'D)
See. I found one in the bottom
drawer.

He holds it up like a trophy.

DAVE
Now what the...?

Stevie bolts past Dave into the living room.

LIVING ROOM

Stevie kneels in front of the sofa. Dave follows. He's still confused.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Come on, what gives?

Stevie lies on his belly and stretches his hand with the spoon under the sofa. He swishes his arm back and forth.

STEVIE
(grunts)
I'm. Getting. My car. Out.

A classy metal toy car suddenly zips out on the floor from the end of the sofa.

DAVE
I shoulda known. That dang car
again.

Stevie's mother, SARAH, 43, disheveled wearing a housedress, enters from the hallway.

SARAH
Good, you got it out.

DAVE
Someday you'll grow up and I'll
take that away.

STEVIE
No!

Stevie picks up and cuddles his car. He stands.

SARAH
Nobody'll take it away, Stevie.

DAVE
Oh yeah?

Stevie whimpers and goes to Sarah.

SARAH
You can keep your car as long as
you want, honey.

Dave throws up his hands, puts on his cap, and heads out the front door.

DAVE
Not if I can help it.
(beat)
I gotta get to work. You guys can
do whatever.

Dave pops his head back in he door.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Oh, remember: Jamie has a game
tonight. We're all going, right?

SARAH
Right. Last one before the
Christmas break.

Dave closes the door.

STEVIE
Do I have to go?

JAMIE, 16, athletic and stylish, comes down the hall.

JAMIE
Go where?

SARAH
To your game tonight. To be your
fan club.

JAMIE
Nice. Stevie too?

SARAH
Of course. Right Stevie?

STEVIE
Sure. With my car too?

Upbeat and friendly, Jamie teases Stevie.

JAMIE
Fine with me. I need as much
support as I can get.
(beat)
What about Molly? Will she be home
today?

SARAH
I'm not sure. She's buried in end-
of-semester finals, but as soon as
they're over, she'll take off for
home. She's got a ride with Robert
and Patrice.

JAMIE
Okay. It'll be good to find out how
she likes college life.

SARAH
Yeah. I miss her.

STEVIE
Me too.

SARAH
Now, you two, go get ready for
school.

Jamie and Stevie skedaddle to their rooms. Sarah wistfully
straightens family photos on a nearby table. Then heads to
the kitchen.

EXT. GARY'S HOUSE - DAY

Gary exits the front door. Beth follows and hands him a sack.

BETH
Here's your lunch. Have a good day.

GARY
Oh yeah, right. Thanks. You too.

Gary descends the front steps.

GARY (CONT'D)
I'll see you after work.

BETH
Say hi to... what's her name?

GARY
Linda.

BETH
Right. And she's a soprano in the
church choir too. I'm so forgetful.
(beat)
Home by five; dinner at five-
thirty.

As Gary heads down the sidewalk...

GARY
Always.

Beth reenters the house.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Gary passes the neighbor's house as Jamie and Stevie come out. They join Gary at the sidewalk and walk together.

JAMIE
Hey Gary! You coming to my game
tonight? Last one before winter
break.

GARY
I dunno. Maybe.

Gary spots Stevie's toy car, tight in Stevie's hand.

GARY (CONT'D)
Is that a Corvette Stingray?

Stevie looks at Jamie, who nods.

Then Stevie stares at his car.

STEVIE

Yes. It's a nineteen-seventy
Chevrolet Corvette Stingray... a
convertible.

They walk along in the same direction, with Jamie ahead of
Gary and Stevie.

GARY

Cool. Does it have the LT1 three-
fifty or the LS1 four-fifty-four
cubic inch engine?

Stevie lights up. They stop. Jamie continues.

He lifts the hood on the toy car and shows it to Gary.

STEVIE

I'm not sure. Can you tell?

GARY

Can I hold it?

STEVIE

(reluctantly)

Okay. But you have to give it right
back.

Stevie carefully hands the toy car to Gary who lifts the tiny
hood and examines its toy engine under the hood.

GARY

Looks like the bigger engine.
Probably a four-fifty-four.

He hands the car back to Stevie.

STEVIE

Wow! You know a lot...

Jamie, now ahead at the corner, interrupts.

JAMIE

Hey, we gotta go left here. Our
schools are that way.

Jamie points up the sidewalk.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Come on Stevie. Hurry up!

Stevie and Gary catch up. Gary points the other way.

GARY

And I have work that way. Nice
talking to you. Stevie, right?

Stevie hugs his car and looks down as Jamie gently tugs him
toward school.

JAMIE

Right. He's sometimes a little shy.

Everyone heads away. Stevie looks back at Gary who also looks
back. They exchange little 'bye' hand-waves.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Gary carefully stacks crates of apple bubbly bottles in a New
Years display next to a lit-up Christmas tree. He stands back
to admire his work and make sure it's straight and sturdy.

At a nearby check-out counter LINDA, 23, pretty, polite and
competent, hands a receipt to a customer.

LINDA

Thank you Mrs. Murphy. And merry
Christmas

MURPHY

Thanks. You too.

With no one in line, Linda turns to Gary and looks at the
stack of bottles.

LINDA

Nice, Gary. Looks good.

Gary adjusts one last crate and smiles at Linda.

GARY

Thanks.
(beat)
Oh, mom says hi.

LINDA

And hi to her too. She's such a
good alto. Really helps the choir.
(beat)
You guys all set for Christmas and
New Years festivities?

GARY
Probably. I don't know.
(beat)
Well... heck, I... I can't think
about that right now.

LINDA
I understand. Let me know if...

Another customer pushes a full cart up to Linda's station.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Let's talk later.
(beat)
Hello Mrs. Stewart

Gary retreats with his roller-cart full of other boxes to stock additional displays.

EXT. GARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Gary comes out a back door toward a detached garage that's closed but lit by a single-bulb wall-mounted lamp. He fumbles through a ring of keys.

He hears a door SLAM next door at Stevie's house. He scrunches down, but looks up and around.

DAVE (O.C.)
(loudly)
Here's what I think of your kiddy
toy.

STEVIE (O.C.)
(cries)
No Dad. I need my car.

Gary hears something fly through a hedge and THUD into his fence. He ducks around the corner of the garage and squats. He breathes hard.

DAVE (O.C.)
Now go to bed. No more acting like
a baby. Grow up.

SARAH (O.C.)
You didn't have to do that.

STEVIE (O.C.)
(sobs)
Dad, that's my favorite...

DAVE (O.C.)
(interrupts)
Somebody's gotta teach the boy to
be a man. Now get in here.

Stevie cries louder and harder. Their back door SLAMS shut.

Then silence, except for muffled crying and indistinguishable yelling inside the house next door.

Gary slowly rises and peeks carefully around the garage to the neighbor's house. All clear.

He relaxes a bit and returns to the garage door. He continues to 'check-six' as he finds the right key, unlocks a padlock, and rolls up the CREAKY garage door.

INT. GARY'S GARAGE - NIGHT

Sitting in the dark is a dusty, covered car. In the shadows, typical garage clutter and tools lie about.

Gary maneuvers in the dark to a work bench and finds a flashlight. He clicks it on, and the light goes on dimly and then fades out. He bangs it on his thigh, but still no light.

He waves his hand around over the bench until he finds a string and pulls it. A flickering fluorescent light goes on.

Gary finds some batteries and replaces them in the flashlight. He clicks it on and it works, but just barely.

He pauses before the covered car. He paints it with the dim flashlight, lays his free hand on it, lifts a corner of the cover a little, then stops, a long pause.

He releases his hold on the car cover; it drops back into place with a puff of dust. He turns and clicks off the fluorescent light and steps out of the garage.

EXT. GARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Gary rolls the garage door down, and with flashlight held under his arm, he snaps the padlock shut.

Flashlight in hand, Gary soldier-crawls along the fence where he heard something land, tossed from next door. He shines the dim light through cracks in the fence. He's on a mission: search and find.

Soon he sees something shiny. It's Stevie's toy car. He digs under the fence and stretches his arm toward it, grasps it, and pulls it under the fence.

He blows dirt from it and examines it with the flashlight. No apparent damage.

A screen door SLAMS a few houses away. He ducks down, cuddling the car. Then a garbage can lid CLANGS nearby.

He flattens low to the ground and turns the light off. He protects the toy car and lays low for a long while.

He breathes hard.

GARY

Eh uh. Eh uh. Eh uh...

Gary is alone but safe, concealed on the ground by his house.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Gary dillydallies, paces back and forth, on the sidewalk in front of his house. He watches his neighbor's house for signs of Stevie and Jamie.

He clutches two plastic grocery sacks. One has his lunch.

He peeks in the other and sees Stevie's toy car he retrieved last night.

The two boys pop out of their front door. Dave's behind them and gives Stevie a little push on the back.

DAVE

Quit your whimpering, Stevie. You don't need that dang toy car to survive. Especially at school, the last day before holiday vacation.

JAMIE

I'll take care of him, dad.

(beat)

Come on Stevie. Stick with me.

Dave re-enters his house and closes the door. Hard.

Gary hurries to catch up with the boys. When he does...

GARY

Hey guys.

Stevie ignores him and looks down.

JAMIE

Not a good time to talk.

GARY

Yeah but...

Gary follows in silence a short distance behind the two boys. Two sacks swing in his hand.

Right before they arrive at the corner, Gary holds up the bag with Stevie's car. Jamie glances, then ignores it.

Stevie doesn't even look at it. He looks down.

JAMIE

Really. We gotta get to school.

GARY

But I...

JAMIE

Sorry. We gotta go.

Jamie helps Stevie cross the street. Gary stands there holding the bags. Now what?

He continues his trek to work, but looks back... and pauses.

A car pulls up in front of Stevie's house. It stops. Three people get out: BOB, the overweight college-aged driver, PATRICE, a plainly dressed college student, and MOLLY, 19, pretty, happy, and lively.

Gary watches as Bob opens the back of the car, pulls out a suitcase, and rolls it to Molly.

BOB

There ya go. Need help?

MOLLY

Nah, I got it. See ya in a few weeks. And thanks for the ride. You guys have a merry Christmas. Be safe!

Molly hugs Patrice.

PATRICE

Don't forget to work on your term paper.

MOLLY

Oh yeah, right. Maybe a little.
(beat)
And Happy New Year!

PATRICE

Of course.

They both laugh. Patrice and Bob get back in the car and drive off. Molly waves to them and wheels her suitcase to the front porch.

She rings the doorbell, turns and sees Gary, at the corner. He still holds two bags and surveys the scene.

Molly smiles at him. He smiles back, looks at his two grocery sacks, hides them behind his back, waves, and looks up as the door opens.

Sarah appears, all in a tizzy, greets, and hugs Molly. They both disappear in the house.

Gary swings the bags from their hiding place and holds them up like silly trophies. He half-smiles.

Just then Molly steps out to retrieve her suitcase from the porch. She again looks at Gary and smiles.

Gary nods and lifts his two bags in a salute to Molly. She nods back with a little giggle and retreats into the house with her suitcase.

He shakes his head (what a doofus!), turns, and tromps off to work.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

EMPLOYEE BREAK ROOM

Gary sits at a table and hovers over a half-eaten sandwich he holds with both hands. Two grocery sacks lie in front of him.

He takes a bite as a hand touches his shoulder. He ducks quickly.

LINDA

Oops, sorry. I didn't mean to
startle you.

Gary unflinches and looks back at Linda. He breathes hard.

GARY

That's okay. I, well, I...

He searches for words.

LINDA
Really, I'm sorry. I know...

Linda can't find the right words either.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Do you mind if I join you? I'm on
lunch-break too.

GARY
Okay.

Gary starts to get up to pull out a chair for Linda.

LINDA
No need. I got it.

She slides out a chair next to Gary as he resumes eating. Linda sits and places a sack in front of her. She extracts a salad container and plastic fork. Opens the container.

An awkward silence hangs in the lunchroom. Linda notices the second grocery sack in front of Gary. She gestures to the sack.

LINDA (CONT'D)
A present for your mom?

GARY
What?

LINDA
That sack. What's in it?

She points to the sack?

GARY
Oh. Well,... No it's not a present.
For anyone.
(beat)
Well, sort of, it is. But not
really. I don't know.

Linda slowly reaches out and gently puts a hand on Gary's arm.

LINDA
Sorry to pry. Never mind.

Gary stares at Linda's hand on his arm. He doesn't react. His breathing is calm, relaxed. His eyes are fixed.

Linda sees that Gary is on pause. She slowly pats his arm with three fingers, then squeezes softly.

Gary looks up at her. Their eyes meet. Linda smiles.

GARY
It's a toy car. My neighbor
Stevie's toy Corvette.

LINDA
What?

GARY
Stevie's dad took it away and threw
it at our fence. I retrieved it to
return it. But...

LINDA
That's nice of you. But why do you
still have it?

Gary searches for a response.

LINDA (CONT'D)
You don't have to explain.

Linda lifts her hand from Gary's arm and picks up her fork.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Let's finish lunch and get back to
work.

Linda stuffs a bite of salad in her mouth.

GARY
Right.

Gary takes a bite of his sandwich. They glance at each other, but not simultaneously.

EXT. STEVIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Late afternoon, the sun sets. Gary climbs the front steps with a grocery sack in hand, rings the doorbell, waits impatiently.

The front door opens. It's Molly.

MOLLY
Oh, hi Gary. You only have one sack
now.

She smiles and laughs slightly.

GARY
Yeah, about that...

Gary hesitates, lost for words.

GARY (CONT'D)
I mean, can we talk. Not inside,
please.

MOLLY
Sure.

Molly steps out on the porch, closes the door behind her, and steps a little too close to Gary. He backs up a bit.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
I love mystery. What's up?

GARY
I have this.

Gary opens the sack and shows Molly Stevie's toy car.

MOLLY
That's Stevie's favorite car! How'd
you get that?

GARY
I fetched it from under the back
fence.
(beat)
When your dad took it away and
chucked it into the bushes by our
garage last night.

MOLLY
So that's why Stevie's hiding in
his room. Won't even come out to
say hi to me.

GARY
I guess. I wanted to return it, but
I'm not so sure I should.

MOLLY
I get it. Dad's so uptight about
Stevie's obsession with that toy.

Gary reaches out with the sack.

GARY
Here. You want to give it back to
Stevie?

Molly starts to take the sack but hesitates.

MOLLY

I don't know. Dad'll kill me if I
give it back to Stevie.

(beat)

But I know it's Stevie's crutch,
his only link to reality. To
normalcy.

Again, Gary is left holding the bag. He looks down, confused.

Molly clearly senses Gary's dilemma and reaches out, puts her
hand on Gary's arm. He stares at it, calmly, like before with
Linda, and he breathes slowly.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Let me think about it. And test
dad's mental state. Maybe he'll
change, perhaps he'll eventually
understand Stevie's situation.

(beat)

Dad has never understood that
Stevie has...?

Molly suddenly notices that Gary seems distracted, almost in
a trance. She retrieves her hand. Quickly.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

As Molly lowers her head, slightly embarrassed, Gary reaches
out and unconsciously takes her hand.

GARY

No, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have
asked you to do this.

(beat)

My bad.

Gary stares into Molly's eyes, then looks down at his hand
holding hers. He releases her hand.

MOLLY

That's okay.

Gary backs up and almost falls down the front steps. He
recovers.

GARY

Woh! I'll think of something.

Gary retreats down the stairs.

MOLLY
And I'll let you know how things
are going here. Okay?

GARY
(turns back)
That would help. Thank you. Good
night.

He continues down the walk toward home.

MOLLY
See you Gary.
(beat)
Tomorrow. Maybe.

Molly opens the front door but looks back and catches Gary's eyes as he looks back at her, smiles, and trips over the hedge.

Molly smiles, chuckles, enters the house, and closes the front door.

Gary shakes his head. Big klutz! He heads home with the sack.

INT. GARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

KITCHEN

Gary sits at the table and carves a road with a spoon in his melting ice cream. A grocery sack lies on the table in front of him. Beth sits across from him.

BETH
What's wrong, dear?

Gary stops his puttering.

GARY
Mom, I'm confused.

BETH
About what?

GARY
People. Life.
(beat)
Why can't everyone just do what is
right? Do what's best for
everybody? Why so much drama in
handling such simple things?

BETH
Like what?

Gary struggles for words.

GARY
I don't know.
(beat)
Like this.

Gary opens the sack, extracts the toy car.

BETH
Oh! That looks familiar. Is that
Stevie's...?
(beat)
How'd you get it?

GARY
I retrieved it from under the fence
when his dad took it away and
chucked it through the bushes of
their yard into our fence last
night.

Gary tenses up, stuffs the car back into the bag.

BETH
Oh dear.

GARY
I tried to give it back, but Stevie
was so out of it, and Molly
wouldn't take it for fear of her
dad.
(beat)
Geez, it's just a toy car.

Gary cinches a tight knot in the grocery sack.

BETH
You saw Molly?

GARY
Yeah, I guess she's home from
college for the holidays.

Beth puts her hand on Gary's arm. He relaxes.

BETH
You'll figure it out.
(beat)
We all have challenges, Gary.
(MORE)

BETH (CONT'D)

(beat)

All different. All the time.

Beth stares out the window where nearby a photo of her husband, Gary's uniformed dad, hangs on the wall.

Palpable silence. A tear forms in her eye. Gary gets it.

GARY

I miss dad too.

Gary puts his hand on top of Beth's comforting hand. They share a moment, forehead touching forehead, hand to hand.

INT. STEVIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Molly stands outside of Stevie's bedroom. She hesitates but then knocks softly.

No response. She knocks again. A little harder.

MOLLY

Hey Stevie. Molly here. Can I come in?

STEVIE (O.C.)

I guess.

STEVIE'S ROOM

Head down at a desk, Stevie studies a car magazine.

Molly approaches slowly from behind him.

MOLLY

Sorry to bother you, but we haven't talked since I came home this morning. Not even at dinner.

Stevie ignores her.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

I saw your car today.

Stevie turns quickly.

STEVIE

You didn't. Dad tossed it away and I looked for it. It's gone. Just gone.

He turns back to his magazine. Upset. Still.

MOLLY

But I know where it is.

Stevie mumbles to his magazine.

STEVIE

I don't think so. Dad probably went out and got it and took it to a dumpster somewhere.

MOLLY

A good story. And I wouldn't put it past him.

(beat)

But you're wrong.

Molly retreats to the door and turns to Stevie's back. She announces her assertion one more time.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Let me know when you're ready to hear the truth.

Molly leaves and closes the door softly.

Meanwhile, Stevie, scissors in hand, cuts out a picture from the magazine. It's a photo of 1970 Corvette Stingray.

He carefully folds it and sticks it in one of his school books. A new bookmark he can look at whenever! He's proud of himself, turns off the light, and gets in bed.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

BREAK ROOM

Gary and Linda are eating their sack lunches when Roy, 17, a high school student and grocery bagger enters.

ROY

Hi guys, mind if I join you?

LINDA

Okay by me. What's up?

Gary continues eating. He's ambivalent about Roy's arrival.

ROY

Just earning a few extra bucks over the holidays.

Roy opens a burger sack from a nearby fast food store. He gobbles a bite and asks with a full mouth...

ROY (CONT'D)
Wha'cha doin' for the city's
holiday parade?

Linda looks at Gary who looks up and shrugs his shoulders.

LINDA
Just showing up I guess. Watching
from the sidewalk.

Gary continues his lunch and ignores the conversation. Roy looks at Gary, still oblivious to Roy's question.

ROY
How about you, Gary? There's a
group of veterans from the VFW
gonna march in the parade, some
with uniforms or guns or badges or
unit flags or... whatever.
(beat)
You're a Vet, Gary. Why not join
them?

Directly addressed, Gary responds.

GARY
Well, I don't know...

ROY
My dad'll be there. He was in
Desert Storm. Grandpa too. He's a
Vietnam vet.

LINDA
Yeah, Gary. My dad'll drive his
Jazzy because, well, you know, he
lost a leg in Iraq.

Gary suddenly gets up, trashes his leftovers, and leaves abruptly.

GARY
Excuse me. Gotta get back to work.
Later guys.

And Gary was gone.

ROY
That was weird. Did I say something
wrong?

LINDA

No. You're fine. Gary's kind of sensitive about his military experience in Afghanistan, not to mention losing his dad in Iraq.

ROY

Geez, I didn't know that.

LINDA

He doesn't talk about either one.

(beat)

His own experience was bad enough.

ROY

Oh, like maybe it was... what? Traumatic sort of?

LINDA

Not 'sort of.' Very much so.

ROY

P.T.S.D?

LINDA

Uh-huh. But he's doing okay, I think. And he's very nice. And kind.

ROY

You like him.

LINDA

He's easy to like.

(beat)

But he's not so easy to figure out.

Roy nods in agreement and takes another bite.

STORE CHECKOUT AREA - LATER

Gary restocks nearby convenience freezers. Linda helps several patrons lined up at her cash register while Roy bags her customer's groceries.

Molly and Sarah enter. Sarah grabs a cart, heads to produce, and Molly spots Gary, and heads toward him.

MOLLY

Hi Gary.

GARY

Oh, hello Molly. People like these
freezers up front; saves a hike to
the back of the store.

Linda, busy at her register, glances sideways and sees the
Molly-and-Gary encounter.

MOLLY

Agreed. I know you're busy, but I
thought you'd like to know.

(beat)

I told Stevie I knew where his toy
car was. But he didn't believe me.

Gary loads more ice cream into the freezer and replies.

GARY

So he still doesn't know I have it?

MOLLY

Nope. I'm waiting to see if his
curiosity takes hold. He'll
probably forget, though. He has a
one-track mind.

Linda again observes Molly and Gary chatting. She returns to
her duties.

Gary closes the freezer door. Looks straight at Molly.

GARY

The problem isn't Stevie. It's his
dad.

Gary opens the next freezer door and grabs some frozen juice
cans to stack.

GARY (CONT'D)

I shouldn't return Stevie's car
until you do something about your
father.

(beat)

Agree?

MOLLY

You're right. Dad can be very
stubborn, especially with Stevie.
But I'll work on him.

(beat)

Gotta go help mom. Good seeing you.

Molly scurries away. Gary's eyes follow her. Linda notices.

GARY

Good luck.

Molly turns back, gives a thumbs-up, and is gone.

Gary continues his work. He exchanges nods with Linda.

EXT. STEVIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Gary climbs the steps of the front porch. He takes a big breath and rings the doorbell. He waits.

He hears someone unlocking the door. He exhales. The door opens. It's Molly.

MOLLY

Oh. Gary. Hi.

Gary is speechless. His jaw drops. Words don't come out.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

You don't have the sack. No toy car.

GARY

Yeah. Right. Uh. Well, I, uh,...

MOLLY

I still haven't talked to dad.

(beat)

I'm, uh, still chicken.

GARY

Well, uh, is he here?

MOLLY

Yes, but...

Gary

I'd like to talk to him, please.

Molly steps out onto the porch. She semi-closes the door. Gary backs up.

MOLLY

I told you I'd take care of this.
When I'm ready. When he's ready.
And he's not.

GARY

I know. It's about something else.
I need his help.

MOLLY

What? Are you trying to trick him?
Or me?

GARY

No. He works in the service
department of the Chevy dealership,
right?

MOLLY

Yes. For almost twenty years.

GARY

So, I need to ask him a question.

Molly backs through the open door and stands there, somewhat
confused.

GARY (CONT'D)

About a car.

MOLLY

(tentatively)

Okay.

GARY

So will you please see if he's
available to talk with me? Please.

MOLLY

Okay.

Molly turns and calls out.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Dad? Someone here to talk to you.

From the back of the house, a loud response.

DAVE (O.C.)

Tell'em I don't want any.

MOLLY

(loudly)

Not a salesman, Dad. Our neighbor,
Gary.

DAVE

Okay, okay. Here I come.

Dave slowly approaches.

Molly backs away. Dave fills the front door with a fake
smile.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Hello Gary. Wha'da'ya'want?

Gary extends his hand. Molly, still a bit confused, stands back and listens.

GARY
Good evening Mister Morgan. Sorry to bother you, but I understand you're an expert on Chivvies.

They shake hands.

DAVE
That's right. But your mom drives one of those foreign cars. I don't know much about them.

GARY
I know. But dad left me his mid-life crisis car. It's a 1970 Chevy that's been stored in our garage since he died and mom moved here, and all during my tour of duty, as well. Almost eight years now.
(beat)
And I don't know how to get it back into running shape.

DAVE
So you want me to revive it?

GARY
Or at least check it out and help me know what to do.

DAVE
So it's been stored before we moved here too, about five years ago?

GARY
Yes sir.

DAVE
Is it on blocks?

GARY
What?

DAVE
Is it sitting on its wheels or on jack stands or something?

GARY

Pretty sure it's on its wheels.

Dave scratches his head.

DAVE

Okay. I'll look at it. Probably needs new tires. Gas drained and replaced. An oil change. New brake fluid. Steam-cleaned engine.

(beat)

Not to mention a complete detail inside and out. May even have some critters nesting inside.

GARY

Thank you, thank you. I can handle a lot of that if you can just get it running.

(beat)

Or tell me what to do, or if I need to tow it to your shop.

DAVE

Okay. You have money for parts, tires, supplies, whatever you need to resurrect the beast?

GARY

Sure. I've been saving.

DAVE

Okay, look, I'm off this weekend. Except for church Sunday morning.

(whispered)

Unless I can con Sarah into letting me do a good turn instead, if you know what I mean.

GARY

I do. I work all day Saturday, but Sunday I'll introduce you to Mabel.

DAVE

Mabel?

GARY

Yeah, that's what dad called his other special girl. Vroom, vroom!

DAVE

Got it.

GARY
Just ring the doorbell whenever on
Sunday, okay?

DAVE
Yup.

GARY
Thanks. That's very kind of you.

DAVE
Now, back to the game. My Lakers
aren't as good as they used to be.

GARY
Roger that.

Dave disappears into the house and Molly closes the door as
Gary turns to leave.

MOLLY
Bye Gary.

GARY
See ya.

Gary waves. Molly waves to the back of Gary's departing head.
She's a bit confused as she closes the door.

INT. GARY'S HOUSE - DAY

Beth, all dressed up, passes through the living room and sees
Gary sitting on the sofa. Christmas music plays softly from a
small boom-box.

BETH
Sure you're not going to church
with me today? There's a special
week-before-Christmas program. And
the choir is singing.

GARY
No, Dave might come over any time.

BETH
Dave next door?

GARY
Yes. He's going to help me with a
project, getting dad's car back
running.

BETH
Okay. But while you're waiting, why
don't you read...

Gary holds up a Bible.

GARY
The Nativity in Luke?

BETH
You're so smart. Good idea.

Beth opens the front door.

BETH (CONT'D)
See you later then.

Beth leaves and Gary resumes his reading.

A few minutes later, a knock at the front door.

Gary gets up and answers. It's Dave, all Sunday-dressed up.

DAVE
Couldn't get out of the church bit.
Ya know, family affair, Christmas
season. Blah, blah, blah.

GARY
I get it. I told mom I'd read the
Bible instead.
(beat)
I think it upset her a bit cuz the
choir is singing. But I've got it
covered.

Gary holds up his book.

DAVE
You're smart. I'll come back this
afternoon. With my work clothes on.
If that's okay.

GARY
Sure. I'll still be here.

DAVE
Gotta run. See you then.

Dave departs. Gary closes the door.

He looks at his Bible. Then around the empty room as
Christmas music tugs at him.

GARY

Why not.

Gary lays down the Bible opens the door and rushes out.

EXT. GARY'S HOUSE - DAY

He sees Dave backing his car down his driveway next door and puts his hand up and yells.

GARY

Yo! Dave! Can I catch a ride to church?

Sarah spots Gary and urges Dave to stop. He does.

Gary runs next door.

EXT. STEVIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Gary quickly approaches Dave's car. Sarah rolls down her window.

GARY

Got room for one more?

SARAH

Sure. Jamie, come up front with us and let Gary squeeze in back with Molly and Stevie.

GARY

I changed my mind. I should join mom and you guys at church.

DAVE

Very wise. Get in.

A quick 'fire drill' ensues. Jamie opens the back door and gets out. He moves up front with Sarah and Dave. In back Molly slides to the center, and Gary climbs in and closes the door.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - DAY

As Dave backs into the street, Gary realizes he's elbow-to-elbow with Molly. He tries to get smaller.

Molly smiles at him.

MOLLY
Relax. I don't bite.

Molly puts her hand on Gary's arm. He goes on pause.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
There. That's better.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Dave's car zips away.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The chapel is almost full. The choir stands in front and sings a traditional Christmas hymn.

Through the rear doors Dave, Sarah, Jamie, Molly, Stevie, and Gary enter.

An usher greets them reverently.

USHER
Welcome, and Merry Christmas. I
don't think there's a place for you
all to sit together. How about...

The usher leads Dave, Sarah, and Jamie to a pew with just enough space for the three of them. They squeeze in.

He finds room across the aisle for Molly, Gary, and Stevie. They shuffle in.

MOLLY
Excuse us. Sorry.
(beat)
Thank you.

They sit. Gary ends up between Molly and Stevie. Again, Gary tries to compact himself and avoid touching Molly or Stevie.

Molly gently taps her hand on Gary's leg. She whispers.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
I told you, I don't bite. Relax.

Stevie whispers too.

STEVIE
Yes she does. Be careful.

They stifle a chuckle and turn their attention toward the front of the chapel and the beautiful music.

Gary spots his mother who sings forcefully. Then he scans the rest of the choir membership. He sees Linda.

He smiles. Molly and Stevie lean on him. He is relaxed, happy.

INT. GARY'S HOUSE - DAY

The front door opens and Beth enters, followed by Gary.

GARY
Thanks for the ride, mom. Dave's
car was crowded.

BETH
I saw you come in... late. I
thought you were...

Interrupting.

GARY
I was, but Dave got pressed into
going to church. So I decided to
join them.
(beat)
I'll go change now for when he
comes over to help me with dad's
car.

Gary heads to his room.

BETH
I'll fix us some lunch.

From his room.

GARY
Great, thanks.

LATER

Gary and Beth sit at a table eating soup.

A knock at the door. Gary gets up.

GARY (CONT'D)
I'll get it.

When he opens the door, he's surprised. It's Molly.

GARY (CONT'D)
Oh, hi. I thought your dad...

Interrupting.

MOLLY
He's... well, probably not coming over.

GARY
Oh. Everything okay?

MOLLY
Sort of. But, well... not really.

GARY
Let me guess. Stevie problem?

MOLLY
Sort of, but... more mom, dad... and Stevie.

GARY
Geez! And you're the designated messenger?

MOLLY
I guess. Dad took off. Mom's crying in her room. Jamie left to meet friends at the park. Stevie is hiding somewhere, probably in his room. The whole thing because of the sermon today.

GARY
Really? I thought it was pretty good, how the pastor linked the Good Samaritan with the Nativity, the week before Christmas even.

MOLLY
It was. But when we got home, mom kept pushing dad to be more patient, more like the Good Samaritan, and to treat Stevie with greater love and understanding.

GARY
Sounds good.

MOLLY
Sure, but mom wouldn't let up and dad kept pushing back.

(MORE)

MOLLY (CONT'D)

When the volume went up, Jamie took off, dad left in a huff, Stevie disappeared, mom slammed the her bedroom door, and I was by default the messenger. So here I am.

GARY

Well, thank you.

(beat)

Know how to work on cars?

MOLLY

I even have trouble getting gas. So no, I can't help you.

(big exhale)

So that's it. Sorry, I gotta go check on Stevie. He's probably scared by all the drama.

GARY

I understand. Let me know when things settle down. Or if I can help.

MOLLY

Sure. Thanks for listening.

Molly leaves. Gary closes the door and turns to Beth. He shrugs.

BETH

A lot going on next door. Now what?

GARY

I don't know.

Gary sits at the table. He and Beth work on their lunch. Beth has to say something.

BETH

Nice of Molly to come over.

GARY

Yeah, she's caught in the middle of a real mess.

(beat)

Some Christmas holiday for her.

BETH

Well, why, uh,... why don't you ask her out, go to a movie or dinner or something? That could be a break for her.

Gary pretends he didn't hear, takes the last big spoonful of his soup and stands.

GARY
(mumbling, mouth full)
Don't think so. I can't be a...
what? A Good Samaritan to anyone.
Not yet.

BETH
When you're ready, of course. But
you gotta get out there pretty
soon.

GARY
I know.

Gary picks up the Bible he left. He changes the subject.

GARY (CONT'D)
Maybe I'll go read more about the
Good Samaritan. Not very
Christmassy, but I like how the
pastor tied it in nicely: 'Peace on
earth, good will' and all that.
(beat)
And the choir sounded great. I
didn't know Linda sang in it.

BETH
Yup. She's our best soprano, even
does solos, has one for the
Christmas program next week.

GARY
Nice. I'll have to compliment her
at work tomorrow.

Gary goes to his room. Beth clears the table and goes to the kitchen. She sighs.

INT. STEVIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Molly taps on Stevie's bedroom door.

MOLLY
Stevie, can we talk?

No response. Molly knocks again.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Please, Stevie. I need your help.
Can I come in?

After a short pause, Stevie cracks open his door and peeks out.

STEVIE

I can't help you. You go to college.

MOLLY

Did you look for your car again?

STEVIE

Yeah, after school. Before dad got home from work.

(beat)

I think he went out and got it and threw it away.

MOLLY

He didn't. I know where it is.

Stevie opens the door further.

STEVIE

You said that before. So how could you? You weren't even here then.

MOLLY

Let me in and I'll explain it.

Stevie opens the door.

STEVIE

Okay.

Molly enters and closes the door behind her. She sits on Stevie's bed. Stevie pulls up the desk chair and sits.

MOLLY

I know how much that car means to you, so...

STEVIE

(interrupting)

So where's my car? Do you have it?

MOLLY

No, but I know where...

Stevie gets up, frustrated.

STEVIE

Did mom send you? Or did dad?

Stevie heads to his door.

STEVIE (CONT'D)
You're just like them, always
treating me like a baby.
(beat)
Please go.

Molly stays put.

MOLLY
No. I want to stay. I want to help
you. Help you help me.

STEVIE
Please leave.

Stevie opens his bedroom door. Molly looks away. She's calm.
She won't leave.

MOLLY
Please sit down. Let me explain.

It looks like a stalemate. Then suddenly Stevie walks out,
slams his door, and leaves Molly sitting there.

Molly lies back on a pillow on Stevie's bed. She will wait.

Molly's eyes scan Stevie's room. She sees pictures of cars
taped to walls, the closet door, even the ceiling right over
her head.

She smiles. She can wait.

And wait.

Stevie's bedroom door opens slowly. Stevie peeks in.

STEVIE
(calmly, resolved)
Where's my car?

Molly sits up.

MOLLY
What would dad do if he saw you
with your car again?

Stevie enters and thinks, shakes his head.

STEVIE
He'd probably take it away.
(beat)
Again.

MOLLY

Right.

STEVIE

So where's my car?

Molly taps the bed next to her. Stevie responds and sits.

MOLLY

The night he took your car away and
chucked it into the yard...

STEVIE

But you weren't here.

MOLLY

Hang on. I'll explain, okay?

STEVIE

Okay.

MOLLY

That night Gary was outside next
door.

STEVIE

Gary's nice. He knows all about my
car.

MOLLY

Anyway, he heard yelling and
crying. He also heard dad fling
your car through our bushes into
his fence.

STEVIE

Oh no!

MOLLY

What?

STEVIE

The day after, Gary tried to talk
to us, Jamie and me, on our way to
school. I bet he had the car for
me. And I was mean. I ignored him.

MOLLY

Well, it was probably a good thing.

STEVIE

You're right. Dad would have
exploded if he saw me with my car
again.

Molly and Stevie sit for a moment, silent.

MOLLY

Here's the problem: Gary has your car and wants to give it back. He even enlisted me to help. But if dad knew you had it again, he would explode.

STEVIE

So the problem is dad, right?

MOLLY

Yes, mostly.

STEVIE

Mostly?

MOLLY

Well, yes. But let me ask you a very serious question.

(beat)

What would it take for you to get along without ever having that toy car again?

Stevie gasps, starts to get up, puckers his face, as if to cry. Molly puts her arm around Stevie, holds him down, hugs him.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. Dumb question. We'll figure out something.

They hug: Molly perplexed, Stevie tormented.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

BREAK ROOM

Gary and Linda eat sack lunches as before.

GARY

The choir was really good Sunday.

LINDA

Thank you.

(beat)

I saw you come in late and sit with Molly's family.

GARY

I wasn't planning to go to church cuz Dave was coming over to help me fix up my dad's old car. But he got guilted into going to church. Me too. So I joined them.

(beat)

Glad I did. A good service.

LINDA

It was. Very timely, and very different, this Christmas season.

(beat)

Are you close to Molly's family?

GARY

Not really. We moved in next door to them a few years ago. Well, mom did while I was overseas. She grew up here and wanted to come home after dad...

Gary takes a bite of his sandwich. Linda takes the opportunity to interrupt.

LINDA

You don't have to explain. Sorry to pry.

GARY

That's okay. What's going on these days is a lot more complex than my history.

(beat)

Maybe.

They both pause, eat, and eyeball each other, clearly confused where the conversation went... or goes.

Linda takes a chance.

LINDA

Complex?

GARY

What?

LINDA

You said things are complex for you now. More than your past.

GARY

Oh. Well, I'm in the middle of a major dilemma.

(MORE)

GARY (CONT'D)

(beat)

But I don't want to bother you.

LINDA

You mean things here are more
complex than in Afghanistan?

Gary has no come-back. In fact, he assumes pause status.
Stares at his sandwich, breathes heavily...

Linda touched a nerve. She puts her hand on Gary's arm.

LINDA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said
that.

Gary alters his view, stares at Linda's hand on his arm. She
doesn't remove it. She caresses his arm.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Let me help you. Please?

Gary changes his gaze, now into Linda's eyes.

GARY

Okay.

Roy enters the break room.

ROY

Hi guys. What's for lunch?

He notices Gary's and Linda's semi-intimacy

ROY (CONT'D)

Oh gee, sorry.

Linda and Gary resume their lunch, not touching anymore.

LINDA

No Roy. Nothing's going on. Just
trying to resolve some... complex
challenges.

ROY

Oh, can I help?

Roy extracts a sack lunch from the fridge.

LINDA

Nah. We'll work it out.

(beat)

Won't we Gary?

GARY

Sure.

(gets up)

I gotta get back to my stocking shelves.

Gary takes a final big bite of his sandwich, chucks the sack into the garbage.

LINDA

Let's talk later. Okay?

GARY

That would be nice. I'd appreciate your help.

Gary leaves. Roy sits and takes out a bag of chips.

ROY

He always leaves when I come in.

LINDA

It's your bad timing, Roy. Nothing more.

ROY

Okay. But I still think Gary is a little weird.

LINDA

Not weird, just different.

ROY

Whatever you say. I call it weird.

They both take a bite: Linda, her last; Roy, just begins. Then Linda gets up.

LINDA

See ya later.

Roy, his mouth full, mumbles.

ROY

Bye. Take care.

She leaves.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Linda's small purse dangles from her shoulder. She paces in front of the store as interior lights go out. Gary exits and Linda approaches.

LINDA
Walk me home?
(beat)
Please?

GARY
Sure, but don't you have a car?

LINDA
Not today. Mom dropped me off and
had a meeting at the church
tonight. I told her I'd find a
ride. And Dad doesn't drive much;
he mostly uses Uber or those
courtesy vans.

GARY
But I don't have a car.

LINDA
I know. But it's not far, only a
few blocks. Please?

GARY
Sure. But I should call mom and
tell her to expect me a bit late.

Gary gets out his cell phone and taps in a number as the
store manager locks the store in the background and waves
goodbye to Gary and Linda.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Gary and Linda walk quietly for a while.

LINDA
How bad was it?

GARY
What? My lunch?

LINDA
No silly, your experience in the
military.

Gary tenses up, silent.

A garbage truck down a nearby alley sets down a dumpster with
a loud CRASH!

Gary reflexively ducks behind a telephone pole and pulls
Linda there beside him, closely. He wraps his arms around her
protectively, and breathes deeply.

GARY
Eh uh. Eh uh. Eh uh...

Linda pats gently on Gary's shoulder.

LINDA
(calmly)
I'm okay, thank you. Just the
nightly garbage pick up.
(beat)
Let's keep going. Okay?

Gary surveys the perimeter. He feels Linda's touch and looks down at her.

He relaxes, suddenly embarrassed, and lets go of Linda.

Linda wraps her hand around Gary's arm.

Gary flinches slightly, confused, then relaxes.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Don't worry; I don't bite.

Gary smiles and Linda notices.

LINDA (CONT'D)
What?

GARY
That's what Molly said in the
church when we had to squeeze
together in the pew.
(beat)
Then Stevie said, 'Yes she does; be
careful.'

Linda smiles to herself as they resume their walk quietly,
with Linda still on Gary's arm. Then Linda opens up.

LINDA
You mother told me what happened
over there.

Gary doesn't respond.

LINDA (CONT'D)
She shared everything with me after
choir practice a while back.

Gary is still silent.

LINDA (CONT'D)
 I can't imagine.
 (beat)
 How awful.

More steps and more quiet.

GARY
 Worse for my buddy.
 (beat)
 Didn't make it.

Linda squeezes Gary's arm, pulls herself close as they walk, quietly again. But in a while...

LINDA
 I was little when dad was injured.
 So I grew up with a one-legged
 father. He used to say, 'It is what
 it is.' So it seemed natural.
 (beat)
 By the time I was old enough to
 learn what had happened, he had
 moved on, learned to navigate life,
 and got a job.
 (beat)
 Most people don't know he has a
 prosthetic leg, but for the
 parade's distance, he'll use his
 Jazzy.

Gary stops, turns and faces Linda.

GARY
 I didn't know. I'm sorry. I've been
 all about me.

LINDA
 No need to be sorry. My dad's a
 strong person and has accepted the
 cards he was dealt.
 (beat)
 What I'm sorry about is how he
 somehow blames God for his
 misfortune. Won't accept religion.
 (beat)
 He let's me go. And mom when she's
 not working at the hospital. God's
 not a topic in our house.

Right before the next corner. Linda directs.

LINDA (CONT'D)
 Turn left up here.

They turn and walk more. Gary gently removes Linda's hand from his arm; takes it in his hand, without looking down or even at her. She glances at him, smiles, and squeezes his hand.

GARY

Thank you.

LINDA

For what?

GARY

For sharing all that. I means a lot to me.

(beat)

And for not pressing me to talk about my experience. That's all the shrinks did: Constantly encouraging me to open up, to get it off my chest.

(snidely)

It'll make you feel better, help you readjust.

Linda keeps quiet.

GARY (CONT'D)

Mom understands. She's patient, caring. Always there for me.

(beat)

Like you.

They walk past a few houses.

LINDA

This is it.

They stop. Linda faces Gary. They still hold hands.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Thank you for walking me home.

Gary takes Linda's other hand.

GARY

Any time. And thank you.

Linda looks down and hides an apparent shyness.

LINDA

You're welcome.

(beat)

For whatever I did.

GARY
You shared. You listened. You
didn't judge. You didn't tell me
what I needed to do.

LINDA
Well, I'm not a shrink, just your
friend. Okay?

Linda releases her hand-hold and dishes a key from her purse.
She walks toward her house.

GARY
I like that. Friends. Cool.

Linda looks back and sees Gary assume a patrol mode (he
checks left and right) as Linda approaches her door, unlocks
it, turns, and waves.

LINDA
Thanks again. See you tomorrow.

All safe. Gary waves back.

GARY
Bye. Tomorrow.

Linda's door closes and Gary steps out briskly toward home.

INT. GARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

KITCHEN

Gary sits at the table eating warmed up dinner. Beth sits
with him, her dinner dishes cleared away.

GARY
This is terrific, Mom.
(munches)
You're such a good cook. You spoil
me.

Gary tosses down a large bite.

BETH
Thanks. I love to cook, especially
for you.
(beat)
You seem very hungry. And happy.

Gary finishes, chews a final morsel, puts down his fork.

GARY
Linda said you told her about my...
(beat)
Experience overseas.

BETH
I'm sorry. I didn't mean to...

Gary interrupts.

GARY
No. That's fine. Probably a good thing. She's so kind and patient, and, well, a lot like you.
(beat)
And a friend.

BETH
Oh good. I thought I was betraying a confidence. Behind your back.

GARY
No, it's fine. I need more people to get why I am the way I am.
(beat)
Which is fairly broken.

Beth reaches across the table. Smiles, and pats Gary's arm.

BETH
But getting better.

The front doorbell rings. Beth gets up.

BETH (CONT'D)
I'll get it. You clear and rinse your dishes.

Beth heads to the front door. Gary gets up, picks up his dishes, and goes to the kitchen.

LIVING ROOM

Beth opens the front door. Molly and Stevie stand there.

MOLLY
Hello, Mrs. Warner. Is Gary here?

Beth, a little surprised, responds.

BETH
Why yes Molly. And nice to see you too, Steven.

Stevie looks down, blushes.

MOLLY
He prefers Stevie, but can we talk
with Gary, please?

BETH
Of course.

Beth calls to Gary, now in the kitchen.

BETH (CONT'D)
Gary! You have visitors. Molly and
Stevie.

From the kitchen:

GARY (O.S.)
Coming!

Beth invites Molly and Stevie inside.

BETH
Come in, please.

Gary and Beth pass each other, Beth to the kitchen, Gary to
the living room.

GARY
Hi guys. What's up?

STEVIE
(blurts out)
Molly says you have my car. Do you?

MOLLY
Hold on, Stevie. I told you to be
polite. And patient.

Stevie grits his teeth, looks down, again.

GARY
Please sit. I'll get it.

Molly and Stevie sit. Gary goes to his room.

MOLLY
Relax Stevie. We have to figure out
what to do. You can't just get your
car, take it home, and have dad
blow his top again.

STEVIE
(sheepishly)
I know but...

Gary returns with a grocery sack. He opens it in front of Stevie.

GARY
Ta-dah.

Stevie reaches in the sack, extracts his car, and is all smiles.

MOLLY
What do you say Stevie?

STEVIE
Thank you, Gary. I missed my car.
Lots.

As Stevie examines his car, Gary and Molly exchange a glance.

GARY
Any update on your dad?

MOLLY
No. He's still grumpy about the sermon Sunday, and mom's being so pushy. So much drama.

GARY
Not fun. But I have an idea. Don't know if it'll work, but it's worth a try.

STEVIE
Will I get my car back?

GARY
Not right away, but if you'll be patient until Christmas, it may work.

STEVIE
But why can't I take the car home with me? I'll be careful.

MOLLY
You know what'll happen.

STEVIE
If dad finds out, he'll take it away again. For good.

MOLLY

Right.

(to Gary)

So what's the plan?

GARY

Well, first, I need your help,
Molly.

MOLLY

What can I do, brow-beat dad?

GARY

Not hardly. Bad idea.

MOLLY

Good. Cuz down deep he's a good
man. And a good father.

(beat)

Mostly.

GARY

Dave said he'd help me get my dad's
old car running again since it's
been stored for years. We were
supposed to work on it Sunday, but
we all ended up at church instead.
But then, well, your family had
a...

MOLLY

(interrupting)

Major crisis, a battle royal.

GARY

That. With Christmas on Sunday, do
you think he has any days off
before then?

MOLLY

He went to work today, so I'm not
sure.

GARY

Find out and let me know. Then I'll
approach him again and ask him to
help me get the car ready for the
holiday parade on Saturday.

MOLLY

Okay, but he's not in a very good
mood.

GARY
That's okay. I'll play dumb and do
a little schmoozing.

STEVIE
Then will I get my car back?

GARY
If things go well, yes. If not,
I'll come up with another plan.
Okay?

STEVIE
Okay.

Molly is confused.

MOLLY
So how are you going to...

GARY
(interrupting)
Like I said. I'll do my best. Just
be patient and trust me.

Gary picks up the grocery sack, spreads it open, and gestures
toward Stevie.

STEVIE
Do I have to?

MOLLY
Yes. You can't take it home right
now.

GARY
I'll guard it with my life.
Promise.

Stevie gently places his car back in to sack.

STEVIE
You better.

GARY
Cross my heart.

Gary crosses his heart while Molly smiles and stifles a
laugh.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

BREAK ROOM

Gary and Roy are eating their lunches.

ROY

Really? You might be in the parade?

GARY

If I can get Dave to help get my dad's old car running. It's been garaged for years.

ROY

If anyone can fix it, Dave can. He's an expert mechanic. Was even in the Army motorpool during the Kuwait incursion.

GARY

Really? I didn't know he was in the military.

Roy gets up and gathers up his lunch garbage as Linda enters.

ROY

Was only there for one tour. Then got out, got married, and moved here, had kids. Been at the Chevy dealer since it opened.

Roy tosses his lunch garbage in the trash.

ROY (CONT'D)

If anyone can get you on the road, it's him.

GARY

That's what I hear.

ROY

Back to work.

LINDA

Shaunda and Jean are on registers now. They'll need you ASAP.

ROY

On it, thanks.

Roy grabs a hand towel and leaves. Linda gestures to where Roy was sitting.

LINDA

This seat taken?

GARY
No. Join me for Mom's prized
Christmas apple pie?

LINDA
Dessert first is acceptable during
holidays.

Gary spoons off half the pie onto a paper plate as Linda
finds a plastic fork and sits down.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Thanks.

They both dig in.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Mmm! Your mom is the best cook.

GARY
Agreed. Makes me want to live at
home forever.

LINDA
You've got a pretty good situation.
(beat)
Except for the complex issue you
mentioned.

GARY
Yeah, about that...

LINDA
Anything to do with that toy car
you had? And maybe Dave helping fix
up your dad's car?
(beat)
Sorry. I eavesdropped a bit.

GARY
That's part of it, or should I say,
the gist of it. I just hope Dave
has time off before Christmas.
(beat)
And is willing to help me.

They both munch on the pie.

LINDA
You know, Dave is a really good
guy. He's helped so many people in
town, especially those who can't
afford to fix their cars. He helped
your mom while you were away too.

GARY

He did?

LINDA

Yup. When your mom got word about what happened to you, Dave and Sarah were right there for Beth.

(beat)

And for you too.

GARY

I didn't know that. I was kinda like a zombie when I arrived here from Afghanistan. It's all a big blur. Even today.

LINDA

I know. When your mom missed choir, Pastor Bullock visited her, learned what had happened, and immediately alerted the congregation to put into practice all the Christian teachings he's been preaching so many times over the pulpit. Since Dave and Sarah were next door, they did the most.

GARY

And now they are struggling.

LINDA

Really? I can't imagine why... unless it has something to do with their boy, Stevie.

(beat)

He's been a challenge for Dave.

GARY

Exactly. And now I'm in the middle of it.

LINDA

Your complexity issue.

(beat)

Got it. That toy car?

GARY

Yup.

Linda puts her hand on Gary's arm.

LINDA

Let me know if I can do anything, anything at all.

Gary puts his hand on Linda's. He smiles.

GARY
I will. Thank you.
(beat)
Now, eat your lunch. I gotta get
back to work.

Their closeness ends. Gary scoots his chair out and gets up.

LINDA
See ya in a bit.

Gary walks out the door.

GARY
Yeah, later.

STORE FRONT INSIDE

Gary restocks shelves near the cash registers. His cell phone rings. He takes it from his pocket, answers.

GARY (CONT'D)
Hi Mom, how's...

He stops talking, listens, and stiffens.

GARY (CONT'D)
What?

More silence. More listening. His face reflects concern.

GARY (CONT'D)
Okay, just a minute.

He lowers his phone and turns to Linda who is busy with a customer. Roy bags groceries.

GARY (CONT'D)
Do you have a pen and something I
can write on?

LINDA
Sure, hang on.

Linda grabs a pen and a stray cash register receipt, hands them to Gary.

GARY
Thanks.

LINDA
What's up?

Gary waves her off and goes back to his phone. Linda continues her job but eyes Gary curiously.

GARY
Okay mom, go ahead.

Gary listens as he scribbles several items on the tiny piece of paper.

GARY (CONT'D)
Okay, mom. I'll ask the boss to let me leave early, get those things, and be home soon.

Gary ends the call, hands Linda her pen, steps away from Linda's cash register, cleans up his work area, and heads to the main office.

Linda, still busy, follows him with her eyes.

LINDA'S CASH REGISTER (LATER)

Gary approaches with a cart containing only a few items. He loads them on the conveyor belt.

Linda rings them up, still curious.

LINDA
Chicken nuggets, frozen French fries, ice cream, and...
(beat)
What's all this for?

Gary is impatient, in a hurry. Takes over from Roy and bags his own items.

GARY
I got it, Roy.

ROY
Sure. Have at it.

GARY
Mom's fixing dinner for our neighbors, the Morgans.

Linda finishes ringing up the final few items.

LINDA
Oo-ka-ay.

Gary spurts out a rapid explanation as he bags the last item.

GARY

Jamie got knocked down playing basketball. Hit his head. He's in the hospital with his mom and dad and Molly. My mom's taking care of Stevie and needs help.

(beat)

Gotta run.

Gary leaves a \$20 bill on the counter, grabs the grocery sacks, and bolts for the door before Linda can finish her response.

LINDA

Oh no! Can I help? I'm happy to...

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Gary double-times it down the street. Two full sacks swing from his hands.

INT. GARY'S HOUSE - DAY

KITCHEN

Stevie sits at a small table. He fiddles with his toy car.

Beth enters with a handful of things she puts on the table in front of Stevie.

BETH

I think this should do.

(beat)

Two rags, one of them dampened, spray cleaner, and a few cotton swabs. Anything else?

STEVIE

Wow! Everything I need. Thank you.

Stevie picks up the damp rag. He sprays cleaner on it. Then he wipes his toy car, slowly, carefully.

After that, he dabs the swabs into tiny crevasses and wipes down the car with the dry rag.

Beth observes Stevie's meticulousness. She smiles and hears the front door open.

BETH

That'll be Gary.

She gets up and leaves. Stevie is so enveloped in his task, he doesn't notice or acknowledge Beth's departure.

LIVING ROOM

Gary closes the door as Beth arrives. She reaches out for the grocery sacks.

BETH (CONT'D)
Oh thank you, thank you.
(beat)
Now don't be mad.

Gary hands her the sacks.

GARY
Why would I be mad?

Beth whispers to him, arm on his shoulder as they move to the kitchen.

BETH
Stevie was so insistent on cleaning his toy car, I found it in your room and gave it to him. With some cleaning supplies.

Gary replies, a bit frustrated, but quietly.

GARY
I guess it's okay, as long as he realizes he still has to leave it here.

BETH
He thinks he can sneak it home, but I told him what you said: No way.

KITCHEN

Beth and Gary arrive. Beth heads to the oven and counter nearby and begins fixing dinner; Gary sits down next to Stevie.

GARY
Good job Stevie! I've never seen a cleaner car.

Stevie wipes his hands on the dry cloth and sets the toy car down on the table.

He bends close, leans side-to-side for an inspection.

STEVIE

Do we have to put it back in a
plastic grocery sack?

In the background Beth is busy putting dinner in the oven.

GARY

No, what do you suggest?

STEVIE

You have a little box? And maybe a
small towel or cloth to cushion it?

Beth gives a sideways smile and contributes:

BETH

I have a shoebox and an old hand
towel that should work. I'll get
them.

Beth leaves and Gary warns:

GARY

Remember though: You still have to
leave it here until I work out what
to do about your father.

STEVIE

I know. But when will that be? I'm
tired of just looking at pictures.

GARY

Soon I hope. Right now though, your
mom and dad are concentrating on
taking care of Jamie, right?

STEVIE

Yeah. Me too. Jamie's my best
friend.

(beat)

Maybe you too.

Beth enters with the shoebox and a tattered old hand towel.

BETH

This should do.

(beat)

See if it'll fit.

STEVIE

Looks right.

Beth puts the shoebox on the table, opens it, and carefully
folds the towel inside.

BETH
Your turn Stevie.

Stevie lays the toy car into the box, wraps the towel over the car, and puts the lid back on.

STEVIE
There.

GARY
You want to take it to my room?

STEVIE
No, I'd rather take it home, but I will.

Stevie rises, picks up the shoebox, and heads away.

GARY
Put it on my chest of drawers.

STEVIE
Okay.

DINING ROOM - LATER, EARLY EVENING

Gary, Beth, Stevie, Sarah, and Dave sit around the table. They work on the simple meal.

SARAH
So nice of you to do this for us.

BETH
The least we could do. You did so much for us.
(beat)
When Gary came home.

DAVE
Seems like Jamie is doing okay.
Close call.

SARAH
Yeah, he banged his head pretty hard on the concrete. We're glad Molly's here to be with him while we have dinner.
(beat)
I'll go back to be with him overnight.

BETH
Can I send some food with you for her?

SARAH

No, thank you so much. That's very kind, but she got something earlier in the hospital cafeteria.

A lull in the conversation. They continue to eat and glance side-to-side. Who'll say something?

Strangely, Stevie blurts out.

STEVIE

I wanna go see Jamie. Okay?

Dave shrugs and defers to Sarah.

SARAH

That's nice Stevie. I think we can arrange that.

(beat)

Tell you what: When I go back to stay the night, you come with me. Then, after a while, you can come home with Molly. How's that?

STEVIE

Can I stay with you. And Jamie?

SARAH

Probably not. He'll be asleep most likely. All night. They have a lounge chair I can doze in, but there's no place for you to sit or sleep.

Stevie is disappointed.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Come back in the morning with Dad and Molly. They'll probably discharge Jamie then, and you can push his wheelchair.

STEVIE

Wheelchair?

DAVE

Yeah, they always require anyone who's admitted to the hospital to get pushed out in a wheelchair, no matter what. Some crazy rule. Safety I guess.

STEVIE

Cool. I'm a safe driver, right Mom?

SARAH
Unless you're pushing your car in
the living room.
(beat)
Under the sofa.

STEVIE
But...

Gary gives Stevie the 'don't go there' sign. Stevie looks down. Dave wrinkles his brow.

Beth gets up quickly. She senses where the conversation heads.

BETH
Gary bought ice cream for dessert.
Who wants some?

Beth clears the table of empty dishes.

SARAH
That sounds lovely, thank you.
Dave? Stevie?

STEVIE
Yes please.

DAVE
Just a small dish, please.

GARY
Me too, Mom. Thanks.

EXT. STEVIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Dave pulls his car into the driveway and stops.

Molly and Stevie get out of the back. Sarah opens the front passenger door and gets out while Dave comes around from the driver's side.

Jamie scoots from the center, front seat to where Sarah and Dave help him get out.

MOLLY
Can I help?

STEVIE
Me too?

SARAH
No thanks. We got it.

As Jamie takes Sarah's hand to stand, he's embarrassed.

JAMIE

Come on everybody. I'm not an
invalid. I just got a little bump
on my head.

Jamie has a momentary dizzy spell. Dave steadies him.

DAVE

A little bump, huh?

JAMIE

Well, okay. A big bump.

The family, led by Molly and Stevie, who opens and holds the front door, go into their house.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

BREAK ROOM

Gary eats his sack lunch as Linda enters and sits.

LINDA

Is Jamie back from the hospital?

GARY

Yup. I saw them bring him home this morning. Some Christmas.

LINDA

Yeah, not to mention the other issue. You figure that out yet?

Linda rises, gets her lunch from the fridge.

GARY

Sort of. I still have to get Dave to come over to help me get dad's car running.

(beat)

That's when I'll execute my plan.

Linda sits again, across from Gary.

LINDA

Sounds kinda final. Execute.

GARY

You know what I mean.

LINDA

I do. Deals with handcuffs, a rope,
and what, a straight jacket?

GARY

Very funny.

Linda takes out her lunch and begins to eat. Silence for a while.

GARY (CONT'D)

How well do you know Dave and
Sarah?

LINDA

Oh, I see Sarah whenever she shops
here. Dave checked out a used car
mom bought a few years back. Mom
hired Jamie to mow our lawn last
year because dad had trouble doing
it. I see them at church.

(beat)

Why?

GARY

Hmm?

LINDA

What?

GARY

Dave was going to help me, but
things got O-B-E.

LINDA

O-B-E?

GARY

Overcome-by-events. Some family
drama next door.

(beat)

Anyway, what if, now this is just a
'what if,' you asked Dave to help
me fix up dad's car?

Linda interrupts.

LINDA

You're kidding.

GARY

No, hear me out. Tell Dave you've heard it through the grapevine that I'm going to ask you to ride with me in the holiday parade. That's why I need the car running pretty soon.

(Linda scowls)

Anyway we'd ride along with the military guys, some marching, some driving their cars with family members or friends, others, like Roy's dad, in mobility scooters.

Again Linda cuts in.

LINDA

But you haven't.

Now Gary interrupts.

GARY

Haven't what?

Linda shakes her head. Gary finally gets it.

GARY (CONT'D)

I will.

(beat)

I am.

(beat)

Will you?

LINDA

I don't know. That's a real backhanded way to ask for a date.

(beat)

Is that what it is?

GARY

No.

(beat)

Well, maybe.

(beat)

Okay, yes.

Linda takes Gary's hand, smiles eye-to-eye at him.

LINDA

Okay. I'll do it.

(beat)

This is all for Stevie. Right?

GARY
Absolutely.

Gary takes Linda's hand in both of his. He smiles.

CASH REGISTERS

Molly is next in line at Linda's register.

LINDA
Hi Molly! I hear Jamie is home.
How's he doing?

Molly places a few items on the conveyer belt, including headache medicine.

MOLLY
Hi Linda. Yes, he's okay, except
for a bad headache. The doctor says
this stuff should help for a few
days.

As Linda rings up the medicine and a few other items, she broaches the topic Gary brought up.

LINDA
Gary told me Dave was going to help
him get his dad's old car ready for
the Holiday parade next week.
(beat)
May even take me along.

Linda is a bit giddy.

MOLLY
That would be nice, but dad's been
pretty occupied lately.

LINDA
I'm sure. Lots going on.

Linda drops the topic.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Cash or card?

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Gary totes a cart full of soft water salt bags for a display along the front of the store. As he arrives, Molly exits.

Molly sees Gary at work. She stops.

MOLLY

Hey Gary.

GARY

Oh, hi Molly, Jamie doing okay?

MOLLY

Sort of. I came for some pain meds. The doctor says over-the-counter stuff works fine for his headache.

GARY

Oh good. You guys need anything, let me know.

MOLLY

We will. But Linda says you need dad's help with your father's car.

GARY

True, but it can wait. Dave's got enough on his plate.

MOLLY

Yeah, but I'll still remind him, just in case he can break away. He's off the rest of the week I think.

GARY

Thanks. Cool. I'm off after work tomorrow too.

MOLLY

Gotta run.

GARY

Back to work. See ya.

MOLLY

Bye.

INT. GARY'S GARAGE - DAY

Late afternoon. Gary and Dave enter. They leave the garage door up.

GARY

Thanks for coming over. Glad Jamie is feeling better.

DAVE

Still woozy, but the bump and the pain are going down, thanks to those meds.

GARY

Good.

The covered car is exposed to late afternoon sunlight beaming in through the open garage door.

DAVE

This it?

Gary grabs a corner of the car cover.

GARY

Yup. Been under this cover for years.

(beat)

Stand back. Lots of dust here.

Dave grabs another cover corner.

DAVE

I'll help. I've been dirty before.

They both lift and slide the cover off. They clumsily roll it up in a cloud of dust and slip it to the side of the car.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Holy cow! You said you had a Chevy, not a Vette.

GARY

Well, it is a Chevy, right?

While Dave inspects the Corvette, Gary takes the lid off a shoe box from the nearby workbench.

DAVE

Well, yeah, but this is a classic. Looks like a real gem, kinda like...

Gary interrupts as he lifts Stevie's toy car from the shoebox and holds it up for Dave to view.

GARY

Like this?

Gary presents Stevie's toy car to Dave: same make, same color, exact replica of the car they stand next to.

Dave's jaw drops. He scrunches his brow, lifts his shoulders. A mixture of surprise, anger, and shock paint his face.

DAVE
That's not.

GARY
It is.

DAVE
How'd you?

GARY
Retrieved it from under the fence
when you tossed it away.

DAVE
But why?

GARY
Right thing to do.

DAVE
What I do in my family is my
business, not...

Gary interrupts.

GARY
Not my business. I know. But Stevie
is different.

DAVE
No kidding.

GARY
Just like me.

Dave has no come-back.

GARY (CONT'D)
Look. What I went through in
Afghanistan changed me in ways I
never imagined.

DAVE
That has nothing to do with...

Gary cuts him off.

GARY
It does. My brain got rewired when
my buddy's head got blown off right
next to me.

(MORE)

GARY (CONT'D)
Stevie's brain has been wired
differently since he was born. That
doesn't make him or me less
important, less grown up, or less
in need of understanding or
patience.

Dave's clenched jaw sends a distinct message.

DAVE
You through?

GARY
Yes.
(BEAT)
Well, no.

But Gary doesn't continue. Dave instantly changes the subject.

DAVE
You have the keys to this beauty?

Gary puts the toy car back in the shoebox and fishes keys from his pocket and hands them to Dave.

Apparently, Dave has moved on.

DAVE (CONT'D)
I'm pretty sure the battery is dead
but let's confirm it.

Dave gets in, gloats at the feeling of sitting in the classic Vette. He presses on the brake, inserts the key and turns it. Nothing. Zero. He gets out.

DAVE (CONT'D)
I have a portable battery charger.
I'll get it and be right back.
We'll hook it up to charge that old
battery over night, and I'll be
back in the morning to see if does
any good. Or if you need a new
battery. You probably do. Okay?

GARY
Sure.

DAVE
And you can keep both cars.
(beat)
For now.

Dave hands the car keys to Gary, brushes the dust off his pants, and leaves.

Gary is silent. He stands there, leans on the Vette, and waits for Dave to return with the battery charger.

INT. DAVE'S GARAGE - DAY

Dave flips a switch and a bank of florescent lights reveal a professional workshop: Metal cabinets and workbench, Epoxy-painted floor, and wall-mounted tools neatly organized over the workbench.

Framed photos line the opposite wall.

Dave removes from a storage cabinet a box containing a portable twelve-volt battery charger and places it on the bench.

He takes it from the box, examines it, makes sure its cables aren't frayed, and lifts it by its handle to leave.

He pauses at the line of photos and examines the one on the far left. It has a label: 'My dad's first car - 1958 Chevy Belaire.' Next to it is a photo with this label: 'My dad's favorite car - 1969 Chevy Impala.'

Dave smiles down memory lane as he reviews photos of his dad's cars and ones he has owned.

But he stops short at the picture in the middle. He blows dust off his own hand-written label. It reads: "My dream car - 1970 Corvette Stingray convertible."

Dave pauses. A long time.

INT. GARY'S GARAGE - DAY

The charger is plugged in, and Dave scrunches into the car, cables in hand. He leans behind the driver's seat where the battery compartment is located, removes its cover, and clips the cables to the Corvette's battery and frame. A small spark flashes.

DAVE

We should at least try that, but I doubt it'll work.

Dave gets out and stands. He wipes his hands on a rag.

GARY

Now what?

DAVE
I'm going home.

Dave leaves.

DAVE (CONT'D)
See ya tomorrow.

GARY
Okay. Thanks.

Gary sighs, grabs the shoe box, turns off lights, and leaves.

The garage door closes. The real Corvette remains. So does the toy Vette.

INT. STEVIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dave sits in a recliner in the living room. He stares at a basketball game on the television.

Sarah enters.

SARAH
What's the score.

No response.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Dave, what's the score?

Dave looks up at Sarah

DAVE
Am I wired wrong?

SARAH
Excuse me?

DAVE
How am I wired?

Sarah sits down on the sofa.

SARAH
I'm not sure what you mean. You're not a computer or a TV.

Dave mutes the television. He leans forward toward Sarah.

DAVE
Gary says that Stevie's brain was wired differently when he was born.
(MORE)

DAVE (CONT'D)

(beat)

Who did that? God? Genetics? Did we drop him?

SARAH

I don't know, except for sure we didn't drop him.

DAVE

True. But the shrink said he was on the spectrum, whatever that is. Ash-burgers or something weird like that. Who knows why or how.

SARAH

That's Asperger's Syndrome. She said that maybe he's borderline autistic. And that yes, he is wired differently.

(beat)

We all are.

(beat)

In many different ways.

DAVE

Gary said that he was rewired in Afghanistan. By the explosion that killed his buddy.

SARAH

It's called post-traumatic stress syndrome, P.T.S.D. You know that. It's probably worse than Stevie's condition.

DAVE

At least he doesn't carry around a toy car like it's his pet.

SARAH

But both Stevie and Gary are smart, kind, and happy.

(beat)

Mostly.

(beat)

And a little different, like you and me. We all have challenges, quirks, obsessions.

Dave goes on pause, clicks off the television, stares at the blank screen.

SARAH (CONT'D)
I cook. You fix cars. Stevie loves
his toy car. We're all different.
So what's the big deal?

DAVE
But what's with his love of a toy
Corvette?

Sarah smiles at Dave. An all-knowing, you-gotta-be-kidding-me
smile, and shakes her head.

Dave returns a look of 'what?' palms up.

He suddenly gets it.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Okay, guilty as charged.

Sarah stands, pats Dave on his shoulder, and announces:

SARAH
Oh, and you're also a very Good
Samaritan.

DAVE
Not that again...

SARAH
(interrupts)
How many times have you fixed
somebody's car, for nothing, while
they're on the road to...
(beat)
Just about anywhere?

DAVE
Well, I...

SARAH
Just sayin' sweetheart.
(beat)
That's why I married you.

Sarah gives Dave a little kiss and goes to the kitchen.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Good night.

The understanding wife.

Dave is left alone.

He sits and mulls over what has just happened. His eyes scan the room: blank TV, family photos on the wall, Jamie's basketball by the door, his Chevy-branded jacket tossed over the back of the sofa.

Sarah passes by with a glass of water.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I'm going to check on Jamie, give him a pain pill, then get ready for bed. You coming?

DAVE

Yeah, in a few.

Sarah disappears down the hallway.

Dave gets up and wanders the house. Turns off lights, locks the back door, grabs a cookie from an old piggy-shaped cookie jar and takes a bite.

He pauses at family photos hanging on the wall, hesitates at the front door, doesn't lock it, grabs his jacket, puts it on, and steps outside.

EXT. STEVIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dave closes the door, sits on the front porch, takes another bite of cookie.

The night is quiet.

Except for a new Corvette that rumbles by his house.

INT. GARY'S HOUSE - DAY

KITCHEN

Early morning, barely light, Gary stands at the fridge's open door, looks for something, to drink maybe.

The sound of a large motor, probably a truck, alerts him of possible danger. He quietly closes the fridge, ducks down, listens.

It's in his driveway! He creeps to the window, peers out.

The shadow of a large vehicle passes by slowly. Then the doorbell rings. He's confused, crouches on the floor.

The doorbell sounds again. He waits. The truck motor growls.

BETH (O.C)
(loudly)
Gary, are you up? Can you get the
door please?

Gary's eyes dart about. A truck in his driveway, someone at the door, his mother beckoning him.

The doorbell again. Screeching brakes indicate that the truck slows. It's closer.

Gary covers his head with his arms. He breathes heavily, sweats. Get low. Hide.

GARY
Eh-huh. Eh-huh. Eh-huh.

Beth enters the kitchen slowly. She bends down by Gary, whispers.

BETH
I'm here dear. Everything is okay.

Beth caresses Gary's shoulders, arms, and head.

He begins to relax. She takes his head in her hands, speaks tenderly and closely to him.

BETH (CONT'D)
Dave's at the door for you.
(beat)
Come on. Get up. Go see what he
wants. Please.

Gary's breathing slows. He gets up, hugs his mother.

GARY
Thanks mom. But there's a truck...

Sarah interrupts.

BETH
Go see Dave. He'll explain.

Gary heads to the front door.

LIVING ROOM

Dave stands there with a half-grin on his face.

DAVE
You okay Gary?

Gary looks affected, sweaty.

GARY

Sure. But why is there a truck here.

DAVE

It's a tow truck, from the Chevy dealer.

GARY

But...

DAVE

Look. You can't--I can't--do everything that's required to get that Corvette street ready while it sits in your garage. And trickle-charging a ten-year old battery didn't work, never would.

GARY

But...

DAVE

I'll need to drain and replace all the fluids, give it a lube job, install new tires, steam-clean under the hood, give it a tune-up, detail it front-to-back, get rid of any nesting critters...

(beat)

Well, you get the picture?

GARY

Yes, but...

DAVE

No buts. I understand you want to have your girl ride with you in the New Years parade, right?

GARY

Well, maybe...

(beat)

I guess, but she's not my...

Dave cuts in.

DAVE

She should be. Pretty. And sings like an angel.

Gary is miffed, silent, surprised.

DAVE (CONT'D)
You said you've got money saved to
cover expenses.

GARY
Yes, but not enough to...

DAVE
Just pay what you can, mainly for
parts, like tires, battery, oil,
and stuff. I'll cover the rest,
including labor. And whatever you
can't cover, I'll take care of
anyway. Okay?

GARY
Well. Yes. I guess.
(dumbfounded)
That's outstanding. And so kind.
You shouldn't, really, but thank
you.

Gary extends his hand.

DAVE
Just trying to be a Good Samaritan.
(shakes hands)
Not my strength, in case you
haven't noticed.
(beat)
Just ask Sarah.

Gary maintains their grip. He pulls Dave close, into a man-hug.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Come on, man. I'm not a hugger.

GARY
I'm not either.
(whispers in Dave's ear)
But this just seems right. Thank
you, thank you.

Dave backs up, a little embarrassed. Hand-shake breaks.

DAVE
Look, we need to help Bob load the
Vette on the tow truck. Come on.
Let's go see what we can do.

GARY
Okay, good idea.

Gary opens the front door.

Beth peeks out from the kitchen as Dave and Gary depart. A big smile on her face.

Gary closes the door behind them.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Linda is at the registers with customers. A busy store.

Gary pops in the front door and passes the check stand.

LINDA

Hi Gary. I thought you were off today.

Gary nods at customers as he passes by.

GARY

Yeah, but I need to make up for when I left early.

(beat)

A few more displays to fix up. More shelf-stocking and stuff.

LINDA

Right. See ya later.

Gary hurries to the employee room for his outfit. Linda continues her tasks.

EMPLOYEE BREAK ROOM - LATER

Gary and Roy sit at the table and eat their lunches.

ROY

Hot dang! Dad'll be happy you're joining him in the parade.

(beat)

You gonna walk, march... what?

Linda comes in.

GARY

Not sure.

LINDA

Not sure about what?

Linda retrieves her lunch from the fridge.

ROY
If he can still march.

LINDA
I bet he can. Have you seen how
precise his displays are?

GARY
That's not marching. It's
organizing. Getting things done
just right. Not the same.

Linda sits next to Gary. Opens her salad container.

LINDA
Besides, he might drive his dad's
midlife crisis car.
(beat)
If Gary can get Dave to get it
working again. Right Gary?

GARY
Well, yeah. He's got it now at his
shop.

ROY
Very cool.

GARY
(whispered to Linda)
Thanks for whatever you did to make
that happen.

LINDA
(whispered)
You're welcome.
(to Roy)
Maybe with me riding along.

ROY
I knew you two were...

Gary interrupts.

GARY
We're not.

LINDA
Not what?

Linda puts her hand on Gary's shoulder.

GARY
Uh.

Roy smiles.

ROY
I thought so.

GARY
Not so.

Linda gives Gary the stink-eye but quickly changes her expression to a big smile.

LINDA
Roy, Gary and I are just good friends, right?

GARY
Right.

LINDA
For now.

Roy smiles too.

ROY
Ri-ight.

Linda removes her hand from Gary's shoulder and digs in to her salad.

Roy gets up, tosses his lunch trash in the garbage can, and heads back to work.

ROY (CONT'D)
I'll leave you two love birds to swoon over your lunches. See ya later.

As Roy departs with a tease of a smile, Gary replies.

GARY
We're not...

Roy is gone. Gary shakes his head.

Linda and Gary silently eat their lunches, side-by-side.

Occasionally their elbows touch, but Gary doesn't pull back. When they touch, Linda glances sideways at Gary. She smiles, but he seems busy with a sandwich.

Silence for a while. Then Linda ventures into the unknown.

LINDA

So Dave is helping you with your car, Jamie is healing at home, you're driving in the holiday parade, if your car is ready, and...

(beat)

What's going on with Stevie? And his toy car?

Gary puts down his sandwich.

GARY

Good question.

LINDA

So? Now what?

GARY

I don't know. Ever since I showed Dave that I had Stevie's toy car, he changed the subject. To working on my car.

(beat)

Almost as if he were angry, then suddenly oblivious to what I just told him. But when he came over to tow dad's car to his garage, he seemed another person.

LINDA

Some people are like that.

GARY

Like what?

LINDA

They can compartmentalize their emotions. Or their thoughts, or beliefs.

(beat)

I do that. You do that. We all do.

Gary chomps on his sandwich and ponders what Linda just said. Linda remains quiet, let's Gary process.

GARY

The holiday parade is day after tomorrow. Then Christmas. So I gotta get busy if my plan is going to work.

Gary gets up.

LINDA
Your plan?

GARY
Yeah. I'm trying to work out
something with Molly.

Linda scrunches her brow. Gary cleans up his lunch mess and gets up.

LINDA
With Molly?

GARY
Yeah, she's the key to making this
all work. But I haven't heard from
her lately.
(beat)
I'll try to see her after work. To
check on her part in all this.

Gary tosses his lunch trash in the garbage can and starts out the door.

LINDA
Let me know if I can help.

GARY (O.S.)
Will do. Thanks.

EXT. STEVIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Late afternoon, Gary and Molly sit on her porch.

MOLLY
So dad knows you have Stevie's toy
car?

GARY
Yup. Showed it to him the other
night. He seemed shocked, then mad,
and then, well,... He just changed
the subject.

MOLLY
Typical.

GARY
What?

MOLLY
Dad's a count-to-ten guy. Mostly.
Except with Stevie.

(MORE)

MOLLY (CONT'D)

(BEAT)

Then he mulls over whatever it is
for who knows how long?

GARY

When he came by this morning to tow
my car to his shop, he seemed like
a new man, a Good Samaritan even.

Molly smiles, even chuckles a little.

MOLLY

That's dad.

GARY

Huh?

MOLLY

I think he's bipolar.

GARY

Sure, doctor Molly.

MOLLY

No, really.

(beat)

Well, maybe.

Both sit quietly, their conversation goes nowhere. They stare
out into the street.

A car approaches. It's Dave. He pulls into the driveway.
Turns off the engine and gets out.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Hi dad.

GARY

Hello.

Dave is cheery.

DAVE

Howdy guys. Got the Vette running.

Molly is surprised, curious.

GARY

Already?

Dave approaches, hands and face streaked from hard work.

DAVE

Yup. Drained and replaced fluids, steam-cleaning under the hood, installed a new battery. That engine is like new, purrs like a kitten.

MOLLY

You have a Corvette?

GARY

It was dad's.

DAVE

Still lots to do before it's ready for the street.

(beat)

You have paperwork on it, to get its registration and plates current?

GARY

I think I can find it.

DAVE

Good. I'll mount new tires and detail it tomorrow and then get it smogged and safety-checked. You handle all the administrative stuff, okay?

GARY

Of course.

Gary and Molly get up so Dave can pass to get inside.

DAVE

Gotta go clean up. You guys stay put.

Dave goes in the house. Gary and Molly look at each other, a little confused.

MOLLY

That was strange.

GARY

What?

MOLLY

Dad's been pretty standoffish since Sunday. Now he's, well, different.

GARY
Better?

MOLLY
Yeah, lots.

Both are pensive. They sit back down on the porch. What to do now.

GARY
Tell ya what. Don't say anything to your dad or to Stevie about the toy car.

MOLLY
Really?

GARY
Yes. If Stevie asks what's going on, just tell him that I'm working on it.
(beat)
And I am.

MOLLY
And with dad?

GARY
Just play dumb. You know nothing.
(beat)
And you don't, cuz I won't tell you anything. Deal?

MOLLY
If you say so. But I...

Gary interrupts.

GARY
Nothing.

Gary gets up to leave.

MOLLY
Okay. Got it.

GARY
I'm going to choir practice with mom tonight.

MOLLY
You singing.
(beat)
In the choir?

GARY

Heck no. Just wanna hear it before
the Christmas crowd fills the
chapel.

MOLLY

I like that. Good idea.

Gary heads home. Molly stands.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Maybe I'll...

Gary scurries away before Molly finishes. From a distance
Gary yells.

GARY

See ya later.

Molly watches him leave.

MOLLY

Bye.

She's somewhat bewildered, but seems sparked with an idea.
She goes inside.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

The choir, in the rostrum, sings the ending of a beautiful
Christmas hymn. It echoes through the cavernous, near-empty
building.

Several choir family members are scattered around the chapel.
A few tend children who have coloring books.

Gary sits quietly in the back. He pays particular attention
to Linda. But also smiles at his mother.

The number is over. A few small children clap. A nearby adult
shushes them.

Gary can't hear what the choir director says but it sounds
like instructions, corrections, or something else.

Linda comes forward and stands near a microphone.

As she does, Dave and Molly slide in next to Gary, Molly's
arm touches Gary's. Dave leans around Molly.

DAVE

(whispered)

Wha'd I miss?

GARY
 (whispered)
 'O Holy Night' and 'Little Town of
 Bethlehem.'
 (beat)
 Linda must have a solo now.

MOLLY
 (whispered)
 This should be good. She has a
 beautiful voice.

GARY
 Shh.

Gary, Dave, and Molly sit back. All ears. Gary notices how
 close Molly sits. He squirms a little.

The piano begins an introduction to Linda's solo.

Linda begins, with the choir and piano accompanying:

LINDA
 (sings)
 'I wonder as I wander out under the
 sky, How Jesus the Savior did come
 for to die. For poor on'ry people
 like you and like I... I wonder as
 I wander out under the sky.'

During the interlude between verses Dave leans over Molly and
 whispers to Gary.

DAVE
 Sounds like me, 'poor on'ry
 people.'

GARY
 (whispered)
 Me too.

Between them Molly shushes.

MOLLY
 (whispered)
 And me.
 (beat)
 Now shh.

Linda begins the next verse.

LINDA

(sings)

'When Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a
cow's stall, With wise men and
farmers and shepherds and all.
But high from God's heaven a star's
light did fall, And the promise of
ages it then did recall.'

During the next interlude, Gary leans around Molly, his face close to hers, and whispers to Dave.

GARY

She's so good. Wow!

Dave and Molly nod in assent. Gary leans back and focuses on Linda.

LINDA

(sings)

'If Jesus had wanted for any wee
thing, A star in the sky, or a bird
on the wing, Or all of God's angels
in heav'n for to sing, He surely
could have it, 'cause he was the
King.'

At the conclusion of Linda's solo, the rest of the choir and everyone seated in the chapel applaud.

Linda blushes and urges everyone to stop (so does the director). He turns and encourages the choir to move on to the next number.

Molly re-takes her place in the soprano section.

From across the chapel, Linda's and Gary's eyes meet. Gary gives her an okay sign. Linda smiles but notices Molly next to Gary. Her smile disappears.

In the distance, the choir director gives instructions that are inaudible in the back of the chapel.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Dave and Molly, in their car, pull away. Gary exchanges goodbye waves with them as he descends the front stairs with Beth on his arm.

GARY

That was so good mom. Thanks for
inviting me.

(MORE)

GARY (CONT'D)

The resonance in the big chapel
made the choir sound heavenly!

BETH

Thank you. I always enjoy our
practices. They're uplifting,
almost more than our performances
on Sundays.

Several other participants pass by, all heading home.

Linda exits too amidst many compliments.

Gary sees her, waves her over. She approaches.

GARY

Linda, your solo was so good!

LINDA

Thank you. It's one of my favorite
songs, though not as popular as
most Christmas tunes.

GARY

Well, it got Dave to confess that
he was one of the 'poor on'ry
people.' Just like me.

LINDA

Like I am too.

Beth joins in.

BETH

That describes most of us I
suspect.

They all laugh lightly.

GARY

Did you drive?

LINDA

No, mom dropped me off and dad's
out of town. Mom said to call when
we finished.

BETH

I can give you a ride.

LINDA

That's okay...

GARY

We insist.

BETH

We sure do. Drop me off first,
Gary, then take Linda home. Okay?

GARY

I can do that. Linda?

Feigning reluctance, Linda agrees.

LINDA

Well, sure. Why not. I'll let mom
know I have a ride.

Linda takes out her phone and calls.

EXT. GARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Beth gets out of the back seat of her car. Before closing the door she leans in and lectures Gary and Linda.

BETH

Now don't hurry home, Gary.

(beat)

Go have a treat at an ice cream
parlor.

GARY

Ice cream parlor? Mom, That's so
fifty's. Just say Baskin-Robbins or
Dairy Queen.

BETH

Whatever. Go hang out together.

(beat)

Is that a current phrase?

Linda puts her hand over her mouth in a held-back chuckle.

GARY

Yes, mom. But it doesn't mean what
you think it means.

Beth looks confused.

BETH

Oh.

GARY

Never mind. I'll get Linda home
safely.

LINDA
I'd appreciate that.
(beat)
Good night Mrs. Warner.

BETH
Good night then.

GARY
Good night mom.

Beth closes the car door and heads up the sidewalk and into the house.

INT. BETH'S CAR - NIGHT

Gary watches Beth until she closes the house door.

Linda observes Gary's vigilance of his mom.

LINDA
You always do that?

GARY
What?

LINDA
Stand guard till everyone's safe?

GARY
Well, yes. That's my job.

LINDA
You did that when you walked me home. Waited until I was inside before you left.

GARY
It's just right.

LINDA
It is.
(teasing)
Now what? Let's go hang out?

GARY
Ha-ha. I take you home.

LINDA
So you can go hang out with Molly?

GARY

That'll be the day. We're Still trying to figure out how to handle her family drama. You know, Stevie's toy car issue. His dad's strange attitude.

LINDA

How's that going?

Gary hesitates responding.

GARY

Well I had a plan. Then things changed. Then I revised my plan.

LINDA

Then it all changed again, right?

GARY

Right.

LINDA

So let's sum up what's known, okay?

GARY

Sure, but...

LINDA

Not buts. Who knows you have Stevie's toy car?

GARY

Everybody.

LINDA

Everybody? Dave? Molly?...

GARY

I said, everybody. You, mom. Even Stevie.

LINDA

And Dave's acting like nothing happened. Fixing up your dad's Corvette, going to choir practice, being nice to you...

GARY

Yes! That wasn't in my plan.

LINDA

What was your plan?

GARY

Wrap up the toy car, give it to Dave, and convince him to return it to Stevie as Christmas present.

LINDA

But?

GARY

Dave turned all 'Good Samaritan' and now I'm at a loss, confused.

LINDA

And he's fixing up your Corvette so I can ride with you in the holiday parade, along with other veterans?

GARY

That's it... more or less. And tomorrow is the day before the Saturday parade.

(beat)

But what about Stevie's toy car, with Christmas the day after that?

Linda smiles as if a light bulb lit over her head.

LINDA

Go inside and get that toy car. Bring it to me.

GARY

But...

LINDA

Now. Please.

GARY

Okay. But...

LINDA

No buts. Just do it.

Gary, very doubtful, gets out and heads into his house.

LATER

Gary approaches the car carrying a shoe box and gets in.

He hands the box to Linda.

GARY

Okay, now what are you going to do?

LINDA
You'll see.

Gary is confused.

GARY
But...

LINDA
No buts. Remember.

GARY
But...

LINDA
Gary, do you trust me?

GARY
Yes, but...

LINDA
Then, please take me home. No buts.
No hanging out. Got it?

GARY
Yes dear.

LINDA
Dear?

GARY
You sound like my mother.

They both laugh. Gary puts the car in DRIVE.

LINDA
I'll take that as a compliment,
thank you.

EXT. GARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Beth's car drives off with Gary at the wheel, Linda riding shotgun.

INT. STEVIE'S HOUSE - DAY

It's early, sun barely up. Dave sits in the kitchen with a cup of coffee. He scrolls through his cell phone when it suddenly rings.

It startles him and he taps 'connect.'

DAVE

Hello?

(beat)

Oh yes, Linda, hi. Your solo at the practice was great.

(beat)

You're welcome, and I'll be there Christmas morning to hear it again, maybe not so on'ry by then.

(laughs, beat)

Sure Molly's here. I'll get her.

Dave puts down his phone, leaves, and returns with Molly who looks like she just got up. She picks up Dave's phone. Dave sits.

MOLLY

Hello, Linda?

(beat)

Say that again.

(beat)

You know about that and want me to do what?

(beat)

I guess I can do it. Don't know if it'll work, but since we're down to the wire, I'll do it and call you with a report later.

(beat)

Okay, I'll meet you there at noon.

(beat)

You're welcome. Pray and cross your fingers.

(beat)

Okay. I'll give the phone back to dad.

Molly hands the phone to Dave.

DAVE

(to Molly)

What's that all about?

MOLLY

Linda wants to get together later.

DAVE

Good. She has a pretty voice and seems like a good kid. I think Gary's got a crush on her too... Maybe.

Dave puts his phone to his ear, continues his conversation with Linda. Molly leaves.

DAVE (CONT'D)
You still there?
(beat)
Gary's Corvette? Sure I should have
it ready later today for the parade
tomorrow.
(confused)
You want me to lie to him?
(beat)
Oh, that's different. Surprise him.
(beat)
Okay, I can do that. But it all
sounds fishy.
(beat)
I get it. You seem to have a thing
for him. Am I right?.
(beat)
I can play along. Hope it works.
(beat)
You're welcome. Bye.

Dave ends the call. Sips his coffee.

INT. GARY'S HOUSE - DAY

Still early morning. Gary paces from the kitchen to the
living room and back. He munches on a granola bar, sips a
glass of milk.

KITCHEN

His cell phone rings. He sees it's Dave and answers.

GARY
Morning Dave.
(beat)
What? Oh no.
(beat)
Tomorrow? For sure? But...
(beat)
Oh. That could work.
(beat)
Okay, I'll have mom take me to pick
up Linda early and then drop us off
at the staging area by nine.
(beat)
And then you'll be there with the
Vette?
(beat)
Sure I'll be in uniform ready to
go. With Linda.
(beat)
(MORE)

GARY (CONT'D)

That'll be nice, you joining us too is cool.

(beat)

Okay, see you tomorrow. And thanks again for all you're doing. I'm so grateful.

Gary ends the call. Beth comes into the kitchen, sees that Gary has just ended a phone call and appears concerned.

BETH

Who was that dear?

GARY

Dave. Says that dad's car won't be ready today and that he'll meet us with the car at the parade staging area tomorrow.

BETH

That doesn't sound so bad.

GARY

It's just cutting it close, and you'll have to drive Linda and me there by nine AM.

BETH

That's no problem.

GARY

But I still haven't resolved Stevie's toy car issue.

BETH

Any ideas?

GARY

I don't have any, but apparently Linda does. I gave her the toy car last night. She insisted.

BETH

She's a smart girl. I'm sure she knows what she's doing.

GARY

I hope so. So far this whole thing has been a nightmare.

BETH

Do you trust her? You said you did.

GARY

Yes, but not knowing is what's bothering me.

BETH

Have faith in her. Trust her.

GARY

I do, but... But it's hard.

BETH

I know, dear. Things always could be worse; you know that more than anyone.

(beat)

Call her and let her know about tomorrow's new plans, and ask her about the toy car. Okay?

GARY

I will. You're right. I'll relax. Somehow.

INT. LINDA'S HOUSE - DAY

In her room, Linda gets ready to go somewhere. Her phone rings.

LINDA

Hello?

(beat)

Hi, Gary. All excited about the parade to morrow?

(beat)

Me too, but... What?

(beat)

You sure Dave'll make it there tomorrow... with your car?

(beat)

Really? He's marching too? Very nice. So don't worry, he's as honest as they come.

(beat)

Sure, I can be ready by then.

(beat)

Yeah, dad's coming too, but he has to load his scooter onto the car carrier and leave earlier to unload it and get in line.

(beat)

Right. We'll see him there.

(beat)

(MORE)

LINDA (CONT'D)
Okay. Sounds good. See you
tomorrow.

Linda ends her call finishes getting ready, and puts a Christmas-wrapped shoebox in a large store-bag. She leaves.

EXT. HOLIDAY PARADE STAGING SITE - DAY

Gary, in uniform, not as sharply attired as years before, and Linda, warmly dressed and very pretty, wave goodbye to Beth as she drives away.

They survey the scene: A gaggle of people rambling about looking for their spot in the parade queue.

GARY
Wow! I didn't know this little town
had so many people and clubs and...
who knows how many organizations.

LINDA
Looks like the whole town is here.

GARY
Who's left to watch?

They see small signs on stakes placed along the street.

LINDA
Look! I bet those signs indicate
who lines up where.

A stranger wearing a nametag approaches.

STRANGER
I bet you're in the veterans'
bunch.

GARY
Right. Where are they? I don't see
them anywhere.

STRANGER
That's because they're up front.
They're carrying the flags. Go that
way, just around the corner, at the
beginning of the parade column.

The stranger points to a street corner a few hundred feet ahead.

GARY

Thanks.

(takes Linda's hand)

Let's go find your dad.

(beat)

And my car.

Gary and Linda walk fast. They pass simple floats including the high school choir on a hay wagon, a few businesses, the local chamber, a blowup Frosty-the-Snowman, and the high school band (warming up to a lively Christmas tune).

They turn the corner and see ahead three flags sticking up.

GARY (CONT'D)

There they are.

Their pace slows as they pass several veterans. Some are pushed in wheelchairs, some have walkers or scooters, a few are on crutches. Some are missing limbs or have guide or companion dogs. A few appear normal.

They pass a few custom cars and motorcycles. Standing next to or seated in them are veterans in a conglomerate of uniforms and hats with badges and patches, some with flags, a few with spouses and kids accompanying them.

Gary greets many of them, and salutes a few, in passing.

As they approach the front, they see three mobile scooters.

Linda's dad is in the middle with the American flag affixed to his Jazzy. Another has the state flag while Roy chats with the driver. The other Jazzy carries the city banner.

Gary slows, stops. Linda walks ahead to talk to her dad.

Gary rotates his gaze around the entire veterans' group. He strains to find Dave and his car.

Nothing. Major disappointment registers on his face. He's completely frustrated.

He saunters to the curb. He hears a PA announcement.

PUBLIC ADDRESS

The parade starts in five minutes.
Please line up now and be ready to
go. Thank you.

Gary sits on the curb and waits. And waits. And closes down.

Linda approaches.

LINDA
He'll be here. You'll see.

GARY
But they're starting. Soon. It's
impossible. I messed up.

Gary panics. He hangs his head and breathes hard.

LINDA
No. It'll be fine. Stand up. Let's
be ready.
(beat)
For whatever.
(beat)
Come on Gary.

Linda takes Gary's hand, coaxes him up. Reluctantly he stands. Linda wraps Gary in her arms and hugs him. She takes his face in her hands and looks him in the face.

LINDA (CONT'D)
You said you trusted me.

GARY
I did.

LINDA
Then believe me: Everything will be
okay. Everything.

GARY
But...

LINDA
Gary. No buts.

GARY
But...

LINDA
Stop it. No buts!

GARY
(with difficulty)
Okay.

A loud horn sounds. Way back, a band's drum cadence begins.

LINDA
Come on, let's walk.

Linda leads Gary by hand to the head of the veteran parade line, right behind the three flag-bearing mobile scooters.

The Jazzy trio starts moving slowly. But the troops behind remain frozen. No one takes a step. The distance widens.

Linda and Gary reach the front of the troops as the mobile flagged scooters slowly pull away from them. Gary is confused.

GARY

What's happening? Why aren't they moving?

From a nearby driveway, hidden next to a house, an engine starts up, a very loud engine.

Suddenly, a Corvette convertible slowly pulls out and takes its place behind the flags, in front of Gary and Linda.

Magnetic signs affixed to its doors read, 'GOD BLESS OUR AMERICAN HEROES.'

Then Gary's jaw drops: A very happy Dave, in uniform, drives Gary's car... and Stevie rides shotgun, wears his dad's Army cap, smiles big, holds up his toy car, and zooms it round and round through the sky.

Linda puts her arm around Gary.

LINDA

Now, let's march along with your buddies. Okay?

Gary struggles to speak. A tear runs down his cheek.

GARY

(emotionally)

You... you did this... for me?

(beat)

Thank you.

LINDA

And for them.

(points to Dave and Stevie)

Gary takes Linda in his arms and gives her a big kiss. From back in the veteran group a big WHOOP erupts. Gary with a hand held high, bellows out:

GARY

FOR-WARD, 'ARCH!

With Linda, Gary leads the company of heroes, who now, with effort but smartly, step out and follow him, the Corvette, and the flags onward, first in the Holiday parade.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Linda stands at the rostrum and begins her solo.

LINDA

'I wonder as I wander out under the
sky, How Jesus the Savior did come
for to die. For poor on'ry people
like you and like I... I wonder as
I wander out under the sky.'

As she sings, near the front of the chapel a row of fans
smile and enjoy. There's Beth who leans on Gary, then Stevie
(with his toy car), Sarah, Dave, Molly, Jamie...

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

(sings)

'When Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a
cow's stall, With wise men and
farmers and shepherds and all.
But high from God's heaven a star's
light did fall, And the promise of
ages it then did recall.'

Sarah and Molly put their arms on Dave's shoulders, hug him,
and smile. Dave nods and smiles too.

Then we see Roy and his dad and mom, Linda's mom and,
surprisingly, her dad... and a packed congregation of
Christmas worshippers.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

As a dove flies by, Linda's solo floats from the chapel out
into the city through a light breeze.

LINDA (O.C.)

(sings)

'If Jesus had wanted for any wee
thing, A star in the sky, or a bird
on the wing, Or all of God's angels
in heav'n for to sing, He surely
could have it, 'cause he was the
King.'

END