

SANTA ON THE JURY

Written by

Frank Borne

2625 Sprig Dr., Marrero LA 70072
(504) 261-0369

FADE IN:

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

Coffee shop in historic area of busy city. Clothing worn by passersby carrying packages and shopping bags suggests frigid temperatures and holiday activities.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

Tables are filled with patrons mesmerized by their electronic devices. There is little interaction with one another, and they are oblivious to their surroundings. Pastries on display and decorations suggest Christmas is near.

THE SALES COUNTER

ELLE HOOPER, 20, a meek and introverted counter clerk, is frazzled and distracted. A line of irritated customers forms. JACOB WOODS, 25, manager of the shop, and co-workers grow frustrated. EDISON FAYER, 50s, picks up breakfast for himself and others.

EDISON

(Hands bag to Elle)

This was supposed to be a blueberry scone, two cranberry muffins, and an éclair.

ELLE

(Looks in bag)

I'm so sorry. I--

EDISON

(On cell phone)

I'm on my way, Lizbeth, but this girl just messed up my order.

ELLE

(Looks at receipt)

That was one blueberry scone, two--

EDISON

Just fix it, and hurry. I'm going to be late for work.

(Mumbles)

You try to do something nice for someone.

ELLE
 Of course. I'm sorry.
 (Knocks over cup of
 coffee)
 I--

EDISON
 (On cell phone)
 Now she just made a mess of the
 place, and got coffee on my coat!
 I'll be lucky to get out of here
 with anything.

JACOB
 (Takes bag)
 I'll take care of that, sir.

ELLE
 I can fix it.

JACOB
 I said I'll handle it. Refund his
 money. Elle, you need to
 concentrate.

ELLE
 I'll do better. I promise.

JACOB
 (Bagging order)
 I know you're having a hard time,
 but we're really busy with
 Christmas shoppers. You need to try
 to smile.

Elle sees a customer with a small dog and gets emotional,
 running from the area past a co-worker.

ELLE
 (Leaving area)
 I don't have anything to smile
 about.

JACOB
 Patsy, take over here. What's wrong
 with her?

Patsy shrugs, takes position at register, and refunds
 customer his money. Edison grabs the corrected order and
 leaves. Jacob goes to Elle.

PATSY
(Calls out, voice
trailing)
Merry...Christmas.

KITCHEN

JACOB
What is going on with you? You
can't get any of the orders right,
and you're not smiling. Customers
are walking out because of the long
line and your surly attitude.

ELLE
I'm sorry. Let me get myself
together.

JACOB
What is it? You're not usually like
this.

ELLE
Nothing.

JACOB
Obviously something is wrong, or
you would have your head together.
(Whispers)
You can tell me.

ELLE
I need space. Just cut me some
slack.

Elle storms out of kitchen, returns to front counter.

PATSY
Why don't you just tell him about
Peaches?

ELLE
He'll think it's stupid. You know
how cranky he can be.

PATSY
It's just going to be difficult
later, when, you know. I think he
likes you, when you're not a klutz.

ELLE
Ew.

PATSY

He's cute. Grumpy in a paw-paw sort of way, but cute. And you are kind of a klutz.

CHRISTOPHER SNOWE, 60s, portly with busy white beard and rosy cheeks, approaches the counter.

ELLE

May I help you?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes, you may, dear. I'd like a medium hot chocolate and a biscuit, please, to go. And a bag of those chocolate candies, too.

ELLE

(Hands cup to Christopher)
That's \$9.50.

CHRISTOPHER

It's quite frigid out. News said to expect snow again tomorrow, possibly heavy by the weekend.

(Chuckles)

I don't know where the city will put all of it.

ELLE

(Rolls eyes)
Like we haven't had enough already. Just one more thing to worry about.

Elle is distracted by the lady with the dog.

CHRISTOPHER

And the biscuit and candies?

ELLE

(Hands bag)
Oh, yes. Here.

CHRISTOPHER

Are you okay? I saw what happened. You seem disturbed by something, and that dog startled you.

ELLE

I am. I mean, yes, I'm okay. But my mind isn't right, no. You know?

CHRISTOPHER

I suppose. Anyway, cheer up. It's almost Christmas.

ELLE

Right. I guess there is that.

CHRISTOPHER

You don't like Christmas?

ELLE

I have very special memories of the season. Ordinarily, this would be my favorite holiday. Not so this year.

CHRISTOPHER

Something's troubling you?

ELLE

(Wipes counter)

I, I really can't talk about it. I'd better get to work. Thanks anyway.

CHRISTOPHER

I understand. Well, I hope things work out for you. Be happy you're not going where I'm going.

ELLE

Where is that?

CHRISTOPHER

(Winks)

To jury duty.

Chris exits the shop.

JACOB

(Facing window)

Hey, did you notice how much that guy looks like--?

ELLE

(Facing window)

Yeah. Looks like Santa's on the jury.

FADE OUT.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - MORNING

Climbing the steps to a big city multi-story historic courthouse are attorneys, civil litigants, criminal defendants, and government employees.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM - MORNING

Clerk of court employees man their workstations as they prepare for the jury manager, EDISON, tall and gruff, carrying a cup of coffee everywhere he goes, to open the doors to prospective jurors.

LIZBETH

(40s)

(Humming, candy cane in her mouth, wearing Santa hat)

Almost time to welcome our guests.

CHELSEA

(60s)

Guests? Are you kidding? And where did you get that sweater?

LIZBETH

It was a gift.

CHELSEA

In the '90s, right?

HUNTER

(20s)

That sweater is older than me!

LIZBETH

Hush, you!

HUNTER

I hope these people aren't here all day. Otherwise, Ed won't let me leave early. I want to get in line for the new game.

CHRISTOPHER

You gonna' wait in all that cold just for a computer game?

HUNTER

Yep, the one where the military battles Martians.

CHELSEA

Geez. With all the fun holiday stuff there is to do? Caroling, pageants, shopping. You gonna' sit in one of those tents in the snow? For how long?

HUNTER

For as long as it takes. My friends and I were in line for Black Friday the night before Thanksgiving. It's a ritual.

CHELSEA

And what did you get out of that?

HUNTER

A cool tablet forty percent off.

Chelsea nods head, grimaces.

LIZBETH

You know how these prosecutors can be. They want to get in a few more convictions to boost their numbers for the year.

HUNTER

That's selfish. They need to get a life.

CHELSEA

Says the guy who wants to sit on a sidewalk in fifteen degree temps.

LIZBETH

(Opens a platter of home-made cookies)

I don't mind being here. I love this time of year.

HUNTER

(Reaches for a cookie)

That's because you like to show off with your baking.

LIZBETH

(Squints, slaps Hunter's hand)

Hands off. No cookies for you. Those are for the jurors.

HUNTER

Your sweater is ugly.

CHELSEA

Oh, snap!

EDISON

(Clears throat)

Enough of this. Time to open the doors. Liz, remove the Santa hat and take that candy cane out of your mouth.

LIZBETH

(Removes hat, slouches)

Yes, sir.

EDISON

Don't look at me like that. And Hunter is right about the sweater. It is ugh-leeh.

Edison heads to the door.

CHELSEA

(Mumbles)

He's in a mood. I've never seen him like this.

HUNTER

(Motions to Lizbeth)

Not everyone likes the holidays like Mrs. Claus here.

LIZBETH

He brought us pastries. That's an improvement, isn't it?

Two hundred potential jurors enter the room. The clerks receive their summonses and check them in via computer, present them with ID tags and reading materials, and direct them to seating.

MALE CITIZEN

I can't be impartial. Let me out of here. Not gonna' serve. Can't. Won't. Not gonna' do it.

HUNTER

We're not authorize to let you go. You'll have to tell it to the judge, Sir.

MALE CITIZEN

Harrumph.

FEMALE CITIZEN

Do you think this will take long?

LIZBETH

We never really know. It might not take more than a few hours. But then again, there have been times when--

EDISON

(Approaches)

It could take all day, ma'am.

FEMALE CITIZEN

But I have to pick up my children at--

EDISON

(Clears throat)

You have time to make other arrangements.

FEMALE CITIZEN

They have a pageant Thursday evening.

EDISON

We have court *today*. Please have a seat.

Female citizen leaves counter; Christopher approaches Lizbeth. Edison mingles nearby.

CHRISTOPHER

Good morning. I like your sweater. I'm glad to see someone has the Christmas spirit.

LIZBETH

Thank you.

(Looks up from counter)

Oh. Umm, would you like a cookie?

CHRISTOPHER

Don't mind if I do. These are cute. You made them?

LIZBETH

(Looks at summons)

Yes. Yes, I did, Mr. Uh, Christopher Snowe?

Chelsea and Hunter eavesdrop.

CHRISTOPHER

(Tastes cookie)

Nice. Almost as good as my wife's were.

LIZBETH

Thank you. Well, take a booklet and ID tag, and make yourself at home.

CHRISTOPHER

Here. I bought some chocolates at the coffee shop around the corner.

LIZBETH

Thank you. I--

EDISON

(Approaches)

We cannot accept gifts.

CHRISTOPHER

Oh, dear. They didn't cost much, really. They're just small chocolates, shaped like reindeer, see?

EDISON

Sorry. We have strict ethics rules about not accepting gifts.

Edison is distracted by a phone call and steps away.

CHRISTOPHER

I apologize. I didn't mean anything by it.

LIZBETH

Don't worry about it. He's not himself right now.

CHRISTOPHER

I know you hear this often, but I'm very busy this time of year, so I mailed an excusal request. Could you check on it?

LIZBETH

Of course.

(Checks computer)

Oh, it was denied. I'm so sorry.

CHRISTOPHER

Oh, my. My helpers will be very disappointed.

EDISON
 (Approaches)
 We're *all* busy this time of year,
 Sir. Please take a seat. I'm about
 to begin orientation.

Christopher and the other jurors take seats in the cramped room. Edison begins a one hour monotone soliloquy prior to showing a dry video documentary.

HUNTER
 (Whispers)
 He's rough with these people today.

LIZBETH
 And what a time to be giving Santa
 a hard time.

HUNTER
 Santa? Earth to Lizbeth.

CHELSEA
 Has he told you anything about his
 wife's condition?

LIZBETH
 Not a word.

FADE OUT.

INT. JUDGE'S CHAMBERS - MORNING

Court employees prepare for the docket of Judge SUSAN WOO LEE, 50s. Prosecutor PHIL MADDEN, 30s, slender hotshot with slick hair, and public defender ANGELA DAVENPORT, 60s, short, stout and silver-haired, hold pre-trial conference in the judge's chambers. Defendants, witnesses, and victims wait in the courtroom for court to be called to session.

PHIL
 Your client is guilty and you know
 it. What the state is offering is
 generous.

ANGELA
 He will not be bullied by you, Mr.
 Madden. You're deal stinks.

PHIL
 Look, it's Christmas. We all have
 places to go and things to do. I'm
 sure the jurors can speed things
 up. Let's bring them up--

JUDGE LEE

My docket won't be rushed because Santa is in town, Mr. Prosecutor.

PHIL

(Sighs)

What do you suggest, Angie?

ANGELA

Two years maximum, Mr. Madden. Suspended.

PHIL

You're out of your mind.

ANGELA

Maybe he's right, Your Honor. Bring in the jurors. Let's see how happy they are to be on a jury so close to the holiday. Let's see who's right.

PHIL

Okay, okay. Geez.

JUDGE LEE

Cheer up, Mr. Prosecutor. It's Christmas. And a win is a win.

CLERK

Next case is *State v. Kitty Driscoll*, Your Honor.

PHIL

(Grins.)

This one definitely calls for jurors.

ANGELA

You have a tragic case of mistaken identity.

PHIL

It all fits, and you don't have a credible alibi. You're crazy.

JUDGE LEE

Oooh...Mr. Prosecutor, the defender and I are old enough to be your mother. I'd be careful about judging our wisdom and sanity.

PHIL

Sorry to disrespect, Your Honor.

ANGELA

I don't think we need to go through the expense and time of a trial. Let me talk to her.

PHIL

Well, I agree there. Let's get this done so we don't have to have a trial.

JUDGE LEE

Again, Mr. Prosecutor. Let's slow it down. Get it right.

FADE OUT.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

There's a lull in business, so Elle, daydreaming, cleans her workstation.

JACOB

You've been wiping that spot for twenty minutes. We need to get the counter stocked, and those tables need cleaning.

ELLE

Yes, Jacob. I will. I--

Elle knocks over a straw dispenser, creating a mess.

JACOB

Are you going to tell me what's wrong?

ELLE

I'm sorry I've been such a basket case.

JACOB

Go home, Elle. Come back tomorrow ready to work.

Elle nods, picks up purse, and leaves.

FADE OUT.

EXT. HOOPER TOWNHOME - AFTERNOON

Modest townhome where Elle lives with her parents, BEVERLY and ART (both 40s)

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOOPER TOWNHOME - AFTERNOON

Elle enters and removes her coat. In a pet bed by the fireplace, a small dog struggles to wag its tail. Art greets her in the foyer.

ART

You're home early.

ELLE

Not by choice. I couldn't concentrate. Where is she?

ART

Where she was when you left.

ELLE

(Kneels)

My baby. How are you?

The dog whimpers, stretches its paw.

ART

(Leans on door jamb)

She's watched that door ever since you left.

ELLE

(Tears up)

Peaches used to greet me. Now she can't stand at all.

ART

I think she could sense when you were a block away. Everyday, she was right by the door at 3:30.

ELLE

She could hear the school bus's squeaky brakes.

(Kisses pup)

Yeah. That's how you knew when I was coming home, huh?

ANGELA

The two of you grew up together.
She's been a part of the family.

ELLE

My best friend. My little sister.
I'd have been so lonely without
her.

Beverly enters.

BEVERLY

Here is her medicine. Should we try
again to get her to eat?

ART

It's only a matter of time, Elle.

ELLE

I know. It's hard to let her go.

ART

Even harder to watch her suffer.

ELLE

I've had her fourteen years this
Christmas.

BEVERLY

(Touches Art's shoulder)
Santa did well that year.

FADE OUT.

INT. PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICE - MID-DAY

KITTY DRISCOLL, 20s, visits Angela's office in the courthouse
to discuss her case.

ANGELA

Ms. Driscoll, you need to be aware
this is a dire situation. The
prosecutor is anxious for another
win, and he's in a hurry to leave
town for the holiday.

KITTY

So?

ANGELA

So we need to discuss a plea
bargain or your fate will be
decided by a jury.

(MORE)

ANGELA (CONT'D)

They are unpredictable, and it's Christmas week. They also are in a hurry to resume plans.

KITTY

Yeah, well I ain't got no plans. If I'm out or I'm in, I got nothing. They can keep their trips and their presents and trees and singing.

ANGELA

I know it's hard, but you have to think of your future. What happens after Christmas? You want to start a new year back in jail?

KITTY

I was trying to turn my life around, going to night school, working during the day, to stay out of here. For what?

ANGELA

I can only do so much. The state is powerful and has more resources. Are you being honest with me about your innocence?

KITTY

How can you represent me when you think I'm guilty but I'm not?

ANGELA

You haven't given me a good alibi, and the State has video.

KITTY

I've been guilty of other things, but not this.

ANGELA

I'll try to avoid putting you on the stand. We'll get you straight. Things will be different now that your boyfriend is gone.

KITTY

I get it. I ain't got much, and he was bad news. I'm glad he's gone.

ANGELA

There's got to be someone who can help you through this.

KITTY

My sister wants me to move in with her, so I can concentrate on school. Why she loves me, I don't know.

ANGELA

There you go. Love her back.

KITTY

Just like that.

ANGELA

Just like that.

Kitty is silent.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

I have to go back to court. We have other matters on the docket and may not get to yours until tomorrow. You think about all this, and let me know what you really want to do.

FADE OUT.

INT. JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM - MID-MORNING

Edison is speaking to the jurors.

EDISON

Well, if there are no further questions, you may move about the room and go to the lobby for brief breaks. There's free coffee and water over here to my right, restrooms to my left. Snacks are available in the food court. I'll be back from time to time to give you updates.

MALE CITIZEN

(To Christopher on his left)

Whew. An hour and fifteen minutes. I thought he'd never shut up.

CHRISTOPHER

He does love to hear the sound of his voice, doesn't he?

MALE CITIZEN

And why does he use a microphone?
I'm deaf now.

CHRISTOPHER

He might be hard of hearing.

MALE CITIZEN

I think he's just nuts. Say, has
anyone ever told you that you look
like Santa?

CHRISTOPHER

Santa who?

MALE CITIZEN

Santa. Oh, you know who I mean.
Never mind.

Christopher chuckles, cheeks turn rosy.

MALE CITIZEN (CONT'D)

(To lady on his right,
motions to Christopher)
I'm losing my mind. That guy
squawks like a drill sergeant, and
this guy's stomach moves like a
bowl of jelly.

Lady shakes head. Edison returns to front of room.

EDISON

I am happy to give you an update.

MALE CITIZEN

(Mutters)
Geez. He won't give up.

FEMALE CITIZEN

Shh. He might have good news.

EDISON

We had *nineteen* judges who might
have needed jurors. We're down to
eighteen! While I'm up here, let me
tell you about something that
happened seven years ago.

Crowd groans.

FADE OUT.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - EARLY MORNING

Christopher is having breakfast before his second day as a potential juror. This time, he eats at the coffee shop's counter.

PATSY

And you said your name is Christopher?

CHRISTOPHER

(Nods)

Snowe.

PATSY

Really? That's kinda' cute.

Christopher laughs.

PATSY (CONT'D)

Have you ever worked as a mall Santa?

Jacob approaches.

JACOB

Excuse me. Where is Elle?

PATSY

She called to say she'd be a little late. You know she has a problem.

JACOB

Again? She doesn't tell me anything. What could be so awful that she doesn't want me to know what's hurting her?

PATSY

Go easy on her. She's dealing with--

Elle runs in, punches the time clock, then joins her co-workers behind the counter.

JACOB

Where have you been?

ELLE

I'm sorry. I have a sick friend.

JACOB

This is getting old, Elle. Who is sick? How bad is it that it's affecting your work so much?

ELLE

I can't talk about it. Not right now, anyway.

Jacob and Patsy leave the area. Elle starts stocking the counter where Christopher sits.

CHRISTOPHER

Why won't you tell him what's wrong?

ELLE

I just did, in a way, the sick friend thing. He wouldn't understand, and I don't want him to see me falling to pieces.

CHRISTOPHER

He might. From what I can tell, he's upset more that you're not communicating than that you're late.

ELLE

You think so?

CHRISTOPHER

It's obvious that it's very personal to you, but be bold. Face it.

Elle glances at her co-workers.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

See all these people texting?
(Motions to room of
preoccupied patrons)
They should talk to one another.
There's nothing like hearing the
voice of someone who cares. There
are voices I would love to hear
again, but never will.

ELLE

That's the only thing helping my friend right now, my voice.

(Bows)

How was your day at jury duty?

CHRISTOPHER

Long and boring. They didn't release us until almost five o'clock.

ELLE

Wow. I've never been, but at least you're done.

CHRISTOPHER

It's not over. I have to go back today. The manager is certain that a trial is going to be held this week.

(Sighs)

I'm very busy this time of year. My people need me.

ELLE

I was wondering about that. What is it that you do?

JACOB

Elle, customers.

Christopher winks and places his finger on the side of his nose, then leaves.

FADE OUT.

INT. JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM - LATE MORNING

The jurors have returned for another day of boredom.

LIZBETH

Edison, how is Ruth?

EDISON

Fine. Not fine. I don't know.

LIZBETH

Still no results? It's been a week since the surgery, hasn't it?

EDISON

Yes. We don't know anything more than yesterday or the day before.

LIZBETH

I'm sorry it's taking so long.

EDISON

It's just like the last time, and bringing back too many unhappy memories.

LIZBETH

If there's anything I can do--

EDISON

Remember--you know about this by accident. Don't tell the others. I don't want or need pity right now.

LIZBETH

Not pity, sympathy. We're all in this together, and here to support you.

EDISON

Who, Hunter? He only cares about thinks that run on battery.

LIZBETH

He's young, but he and Chelsea notice that something is troubling you.

EDISON

(Grumbles)

Maybe when it's all over. For now, not a word.

The phone rings, and Edison answers it. Christopher approaches the public service counter. Male Citizen lingers nearby, eavesdropping.

CHRISTOPHER

Excuse me, ma'am.

LIZBETH

Yes, sir.

CHRISTOPHER

I was wondering how things are going, and if I could go to the lobby for a little fresh air.

LIZBETH

It's hard to say. We have one division left that has a heavy docket. A few others are close to canceling for the week.

CHRISTOPHER

I see. Will we have to come back every day?

LIZBETH

It's possible, but many of the judges are finished with jury trials until after the new year.

MALE CITIZEN

Can you at least change the station on the TV? These soaps are killing me.

LIZBETH

Let me see what I can do.

EDISON

(Hangs up phone)
Gentlemen, you need to be patient. There's nothing we can do to speed things up.

MALE CITIZEN

Look, man, we're going stir crazy in here while our families are out shopping and getting ready for Christmas. Pardon us if--

CHRISTOPHER

(Touches Male Citizen's arm)
We're just a little restless. Perhaps if we were allowed to go to the lobby for snacks and to walk around.

EDISON

I'm about to announce a lunch break. Please have a seat.

CHRISTOPHER

(Pats Male Citizen on back)
Come, let's do as he says. Thank you, Sir.

Christopher winks as he turns away. Edison rubs his forehead.

FADE OUT.

INT. JUDGE'S CHAMBERS - MID-DAY

Judge Lee takes recess from her docket between cases. Phil and Angela join her in the chambers for coffee. Judge Lee's secretary greets them with gingerbread cookies.

PHIL

(Waves off secretary)
I hate gingerbread.

(MORE)

PHIL (CONT'D)

Madam defender, what is the status of your talks with Ms. Driscoll? Is she going to plea?

ANGELA

We have plenty of docket remaining, Phil. There's time, but I will check with her again shortly.

PHIL

Your Honor, there are dozens of citizens in the jury assembly room waiting to be released or to do what they were called in to do. Let's get on with the trial.

JUDGE LEE

Phil, you've delayed picking jurors when it suits you. Spill it. What's the rush?

PHIL

There's a blizzard coming and I have plans to go skiing in Aspen. If I'm not out of here by Thursday, I could be stuck here.

ANGELA

(Shrugs)

My client could be back in jail for the holiday. Sounds fair.

PHIL

Don't do the crime if you can't do the time.

JUDGE LEE

Enough. Both of you. Angie, we do need an answer from the defendant. The jurors didn't ask to be pawns in this game of holiday chess.

ANGELA

Yes, Your Honor.

Angela bites the head off of a gingerbread man cookie as she glares at Phil, who swallows hard at the sight.

FADE OUT.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - MID-DAY

Jacob sees Elle sneaking a peek at her cell phone, texting her mother about the condition of Peaches. He shakes his head.

JACOB

Tell me what I have to do go get through to her.

PATSY

Her dog is dying. She's had her since she was a little girl, and it's hard for her, okay?

JACOB

That's the big secret?

PATSY

She doesn't think you'll understand. Don't be mean about this.

JACOB

Why would I be mean? Is that what you think of me? I have a heart.

PATSY

You can be rough sometimes. This is a coffee shop, not the Pentagon.

Jacob smirks, but is fixated on Elle, who dabs the corner of her eye with a napkin.

PATSY (CONT'D)

You care about her, don't you?

JACOB

Don't be silly. I have a shop to run. Get back to work, or I'll, well, I'll be mean or something.

PATSY

Uh huh.

Jacob moves toward Elle, but customers enter and consume her time, while he is called to another area of the shop.

FADE OUT.

INT. HOOPER TOWNHOME - EVENING

Art greets Jacob at the door.

JACOB

Hi, Mr. Hooper. I work with Elle down at the shop. I came to see how Peaches is doing.

ART

Oh yes, Elle has mentioned you. Please, come in.

JACOB

Your daughter was pretty shaken up this morning.

ART

(Whispers)

Yes, and she's no better. It's just a matter of time.

JACOB

That's awful. She talks about her all the time.

ART

Well, please come in. I'm sure she will be happy to see you.

JACOB

She'll be surprised nonetheless.

Art directs Jacob to the living room, where Elle holds the pup in her arms. The dog is wrapped in a blanket and they are looking at a photo album.

ELLE

Jacob? Is something wrong at the shop? Am I fired? You're firing me, aren't you?

JACOB

No, no. Goodness no. I was around the corner, so I wanted to see how you, I mean Peaches, was doing.

ELLE

Patsy told you? I swear that girl has a mouth as big as the Grand Canyon.

JACOB

Why didn't you want me to know?

ELLE

I shouldn't have let this interfere with my work, and there's nothing anyone can do, as a matter of fact.

JACOB

How is she?

ELLE

(Looks at pup)
Same, but she's glad I'm here.

JACOB

(Points to sofa)
May I?

ELLE

Yes, I'm sorry. Sit.

JACOB

(Sits, then pets dog)
Of course she's glad you're here.
She loves you.

ELLE

(Sobs)
I don't want her to leave me. She's my everything. Santa, well, my dad, gave her to me a long time ago.

JACOB

I know exactly what you're going through. When I was little, Santa brought me a puppy. Baxter, I called him Bax, was always by my side. These little things give unconditional love. They always understand us and tolerate us in any mood.

ELLE

What happened to him?

JACOB

He grew old, and became sick. I had to let him go. It was the hardest thing I've ever done.

ELLE

(Whispers)
I'm so sorry.

JACOB

(Takes album from Elle)
It's all good now. It hurt for a long time. Are these pictures from when you were little?

ELLE

Yes. That was Halloween. I was nine, getting a little old to be in costume.

JACOB

(Laughing)
Now this is too cute, you dressed as a monkey and she as a banana.

Jacob and Elle flip from the album, laughing and talking. From the kitchen, Art and Beverly watch the couple.

ART

This is going to be rough.

BEVERLY

Not with him by her side.

FADE OUT.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - EARLY MORNING

Elle is absent. Christopher glances at his watch.

JACOB

More coffee, sir?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes, thank you. Say, the young lady who has waited on me the past few days. She's not in?

JACOB

No. It's not a good day for her.

CHRISTOPHER

I know that something's been troubling her. Is she okay?

JACOB

She will be. Elle's dog passed away last night.

CHRISTOPHER

So sad. It all makes sense now, the sick friend and all that.

JACOB

I understand they've been inseparable since they were very little.

CHRISTOPHER

That's a shame. She reminds me of someone very special to me.

JACOB

It's rough. I had to make a hard decision once. At least she didn't have to do that.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, maybe she'll get another one this Christmas.

JACOB

Kinda' soon to think about that, don't you think?

CHRISTOPHER

Elle seems like a very sweet girl with a lot of love to give.

JACOB

She is.

CHRISTOPHER

Would be a shame to waste it, no?

JACOB

When the time is right, I'm sure she'll think about another one.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm talking about you. She's a pretty girl.

JACOB

Getting kinda' personal, aren't we? And yes, I've noticed.

CHRISTOPHER

(Shrugs)

I'm sure it won't be long before she welcomes a new pup.

JACOB

I never could think about getting another after I lost mine. I would have felt guilty. Strange, huh?

CHRISTOPHER

No, it's natural. But you should, with all the pets out there that need help. I can help you both get furry friends this Christmas. You two could raise them together.

JACOB

(Laughs)

Who are you? Santa Paws?

Christopher chuckles, then wipes his mouth and rises to leave.

CHRISTOPHER

(Hands business card to Jacob)

Think about it and let me know what you decide. It would be the perfect gift from you to her.

FADE OUT.

INT. HOOPER TOWNHOME - MID-MORNING

Elle is packing Peaches' belongings. Art enters room.

ART

Need some help, Hon?

ELLE

No. I have it. Thank you.

ART

Are you sure you're not moving too fast?

ELLE

No. I can't look at these right now.

ART

How are you feeling?

ELLE

Empty.

ART

You were very good to her. We'll never forget her.

ELLE

I know. That's what makes this so hard.

ART

Your mother wants to go shopping later, then to the square. They have Christmas music tonight. Want to come?

ELLE

I don't think I'd be much fun to be with right now.

ART

Of course you would. You haven't gone out much lately. Don't let Christmas pass you by. Come along.

ELLE

(Hands box to Art)
Can you take these out to the garage?

ART

Sure.

FADE OUT.

INT. JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM - AFTERNOON

Christopher is sitting at a table talking on his cell phone. Lizbeth is straightening a magazine rack nearby and eavesdrops.

CHRISTOPHER

(On phone)

This is dragging on longer than expected. Is everything ready for this weekend?

(Pauses)

Good. And the sleigh is in place? And the reindeer?

(Pauses)

Don't forget to make presents for the tree.

(Pauses)

Yes, I have my suit. Had to let it out again.

(Chuckles)

This will be better than making all of those stops. That was too much.

(MORE)

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
I wish we had thought of this a
long time ago.

Lizbeth gasps.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
Okay. I'll call you later. Bye.

LIZBETH
Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to
eavesdrop.

CHRISTOPHER
(Winks)
But you did. Now you know why I'm
needed elsewhere. You see, I--

LIZBETH
(Frazzled)
No need to explain, Mr. Claus, I
mean Mr. Snowe. I understand. I
wish there was something I could do
to get you out of here.

CHRISTOPHER
Actually, they've got everything
under control. They do all of the
work and all I do is show up and
get the credit.

LIZBETH
You're too modest, I'm sure. I
mean, without you, what would
Christmas be?

CHRISTOPHER
Huh? I think you're confused, dear.
I--

Edison approaches.

EDISON
Liz, it's time for you to go to
lunch. I'm letting Hunter go later
so he can stop moaning.

LIZBETH
That's nice of you.

EDISON
It's capitulating to silliness. He
needs to take a friend's place in
line at the game shop. He wore me
down with his whining.

Lizbeth glances at Christopher.

EDISON (CONT'D)

Shoo.

LIZBETH

We'll talk more, Mr. Snowe. Thank you for what you do.

Christopher places his finger on his lips and winks. Lizbeth dashes back to her desk. Edison smirks.

CHRISTOPHER

I think she was about to tell me what she wants for Christmas.

EDISON

Yeah, she's ditzy like that.

CHRISTOPHER

(Chuckles)

What do you want, young man?

EDISON

(Mumbles as he twirls his wedding ring)

A miracle. A miracle.

Christopher watches Edison return to the clerk's workstation.

FADE OUT.

INT. PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICE

Angela meets with Kitty.

ANGELA

Ms. Driscoll, I've stalled the court as much as I could. The judge wants to complete her docket. Are you ready to talk about a deal?

KITTY

No deal. I may not have much education, and I've made mistakes, but I know right from wrong.

ANGELA

Meaning?

KITTY

I'm not guilty this time, and I won't admit to something I didn't do.

ANGELA

I want to believe you. I just don't have much to contradict the State. The burden of proof is on the DA, but he can be very convincing with very little.

KITTY

Bring it on.

ANGELA

You could get a few years if the jurors are convinced.

KITTY

But your deal could leave a mark on my life, an admission of guilt.

ANGELA

Your past makes it difficult to get anything better.

KITTY

So be it. What's the difference? I need a miracle.

ANGELA

Santa Claus doesn't exist, Ms. Driscoll.

KITTY

Bring in the jurors.

INT. JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM - AFTERNOON

Edison turns off the television and faces the audience of prospective jurors.

MALE CITIZEN

(Mumbles)

Here he comes again. Let us go. Let us go. Let us go.

CHRISTOPHER

Don't make dinner plans just yet.

EDISON

We have just received word that
Judge Lee will select a jury at
9:00 a.m. tomorrow.

Crowd groans.

FADE OUT.

EXT. CITY PARK - EVENING

Busy city park with festival atmosphere. Snow is on the ground, but not falling. Hot chocolate and other vendors are present, and revelers await Santa Claus and the lighting of a Christmas tree. Carolers walk about entertaining the crowd. Elle and her parents mingle and enjoy hot beverages.

BEVERLY

I'm so glad you came with us, dear.

ELLE

I suppose it was that or sit at home feeling sorry for myself.

ART

That's the spirit.

Beverly swat's Art's arm.

ELLE

Oh, Daddy.

ART

Let's get some cocoa.

They are served and browse a crafts booth.

BEVERLY

Look, isn't that Jacob?

ELLE

Where?

(Pans crowd)

Yes, that's him.

BEVERLY

Why don't we go say hello?

ELLE

Nah, I'm good.

ART

He appears to be alone.

BEVERLY

Seems like a nice young man, coming to see you the other day.

ELLE

He wanted to see Peaches, not me.

BEVERLY

I'm not so sure about that. He's cute, too.

ELLE

Mom, please.

Elle turns her back to Jacob, but he sees them and heads over to meet them.

ART

And he's headed over here.

ELLE

Great.

JACOB

Mr. Hooper, Mrs. Hooper.

ART

Jacob, it's good to see you again.

JACOB

Same here. Hi, Elle.

ELLE

Oh, hi. We weren't sure if that was you over there.

JACOB

Patsy missed you at work today.

PATSY

Did she?

BEVERLY

Look, Art, they're selling scented candles. Let's see what aromas they have.

ART

Can never have too many of those.

ELLE

Wait, I'd like to see those, too.

Beverly and Art leave the young couple to visit a crafts booth.

JACOB
Parents.

ELLE
Yep.

JACOB
I missed you, too, Elle.

ELLE
Oh?

JACOB
You work the espresso machine better than anyone else.

ELLE
Ah, I see. Thanks.

JACOB
How're you doing with, you know?

ELLE
I packed her things, which were all over the house. Too many reminders. I couldn't handle that, you know?

JACOB
I hear you.

Awkward silence.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Patsy tells me I'm too hard on all of you.

ELLE
There she goes again.

JACOB
No--I needed to know that. I'll pull back, okay?

ELLE
Don't do that because of Peaches.

JACOB
No, no.

ELLE
Because I don't need pity.

JACOB

I know. Elle, maybe we could go--

A small dog bolts from its owner and runs up to Elle, barking.

ELLE

(Stoops to pet dog)

You're a cute one, aren't you? Why did you run away like that?

Dog jumps and barks, owner runs up to Elle.

DOG OWNER

I'm so sorry. She can be so bad sometimes. Marcie, let's leave this nice couple alone.

Dog owner tugs on leash, dog whimpers, and they leave.

JACOB

(Shaking head)

That was a little rough. You okay?

ELLE

Yeah.

JACOB

Elle, as I was saying--

ELLE

I'm sorry, Jacob. I have to go. Excuse me.

Jacob watches Elle leave.

FADE OUT.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

There's a break in the morning rush.

JACOB

Elle, did Christopher come in this morning?

ELLE

Who?

JACOB

You know, white beard, big belly.

Elle's confused.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Ho, ho, ho, and all that. Snowe,
Christopher Snowe.

ELLE
Ah, right. No. Why?

JACOB
I need to see him about getting
something for Christmas.

ELLE
You're a little old to be asking
Santa for help, aren't you?

JACOB
Ha ha.

ELLE
I know so little about our Santa
guy. What does Christopher do that
you would need his help to do your
shopping?

JACOB
Well, If I told you, that would
ruin your surprise, wouldn't it?
(Winks)
Don't make plans for tomorrow
night, okay?

Jacob retreats to the back of the shop. Elle touches Patsy's
arm.

ELLE
Did he just say that he's getting
me something for Christmas?

PATSY
(Shrugs)
Looks like your Christmas list just
got a little longer. And you two
have a date.

Elle gulps.

INT. JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM - MORNING

Edison and the clerks greet the jurors as they check in for
another day of jury service. Hunter glances at his cell phone
often during the process, causing Edison to lash out at him
in front of Christopher.

EDISON

Hunter, didn't I tell you to put your phone away until you go on break?

HUNTER

(Rolls eyes, sighs)
Yes, Sir.

EDISON

I don't like your attitude. I tried to help you yesterday and you just sneak more liberties. Don't you care about anything or anyone other than your toys?

HUNTER

I said yes, Sir.

EDISON

Reluctantly. I saw your expression, and I don't appreciate it.

LIZBETH

(Whispers)
It's okay. I'm sure he understands. Calm down.

HUNTER

Actually, I don't. And yes, I care about other people. Do you.

Hunter leaves the area. Edison checks Christopher in on the system.

CHRISTOPHER

It's none of my business, but I'm sure he regrets what he did.

EDISON

Perhaps. I apologize for him--and me. I'm not myself right now.

CHRISTOPHER

I know. I hope she's going to be okay.

EDISON

(Glances at computer,
pauses)
We'll know later today. Wait. How, and what do you know?

Christopher winks and takes a seat.

EDISON (CONT'D)
Did you tell him about Ruth?

LIZBETH
No. I swear.

CHELSEA
Oh, geez. Now I've got a funny
feeling about that old man.

EDISON
Yeah. Me too. Finish up here. I'm
going to find Hunter, and then I
want to talk to our jolly old elf.

FADE OUT.

INT. PET RESCUE CENTER - MID-DAY

Jacob visits a pet rescue center, a facility that appears clean and orderly, and there is an abundance of dogs and cats available for adoption. He is greeted by Rudy, a volunteer.

JACOB
Hi. I'm Jacob. I spoke to
Christopher earlier, and he said to
come on over.

RUDY
He mentioned that you would be
stopping by. As you know, he's on
jury duty this week.

JACOB
He's been to our coffee shop
everyday before going to the
courthouse.

RUDY
So, you are interested in a couple
of small dogs for you and a friend
of yours?

JACOB
Just one, actually, for my friend
Elle.

RUDY
Let's see what we have.

Rudy leads Jacob to a room with groups of dogs in pens with four-foot high fencing. The pets grow excited when they see their chance to show off for a visitor.

JACOB

My co-worker just lost her little dog after having her for many years. Christopher and I thought a new one might make a great gift.

RUDY

A lot of people are having the same idea right now. Unfortunately, some will be returned after Christmas.

JACOB

Oh?

RUDY

Either the child or recipient won't like them, or the giver just didn't think this through. You're certain she will want a pet again so soon?

JACOB

That's sad. Yes, I believe she will.

RUDY

As though they haven't been treated poorly enough, then they are rejected. They just want to be loved as much as they love their owner.

One little dog captures Jacob's attention. Jacob enters the pen and the dog approaches.

RUDY (CONT'D)

His name is Cash, after The Man in Black. He's about three years old, and we've had him for two months.

Jacob pets the dog.

RUDY (CONT'D)

His last owner used to punish him by locking him in a dark closet. He has a fear of small places now, as you might imagine.

JACOB

(Whispers)

You look so much like Baxter.

RUDY

Excuse me?

JACOB
(Wipes eyes)
He's cute. That's awful what they
did.

Another dog approaches.

RUDY
That's Sugar. She's about the same
age, and she's just as friendly,
and has beautiful expressions.
They're both trained, by the way.

JACOB
That's a plus, for sure.

Jacob takes Sugar into his arms.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Elle will love you.

Jacob rises to leave with Sugar. Cash whimpers, summoning a
glance from Jacob.

FADE OUT.

INT. COURTROOM - MORNING

Staff, counsel, and defendant Kitty Driscoll take their
places in the courtroom.

ANGELA
Ms. Driscoll, it's not too late to
bargain. Even after the trial
begins, you can tell me when you're
ready to make a deal, but it gets
harder from here.

KITTY
I know. I seen trials before.

Kitty's sister enters the courtroom and approaches.

BARBARA
Kitty, how are you?

KITTY
(Motions to courtroom)
The usual, see?

BARBARA
Mom wanted to be here, but Dad
isn't doing well. They miss and
love you.

KITTY
I'm sure.

BEVERLY
There you go again. You have no
self-esteem.

KITTY
(Raises voice)
With comments like that, is it no
wonder? Look, don't start on me. I
don't need you here.

BARBARA
(Whispers)
You're my baby sister. You need me,
and I love you.

KITTY
Really?

BARBARA
Did you change your mind about a
deal?

KITTY
No. I'm not guilty this time. I was
walking Ms. Swanson's dog that
morning.

BARBARA
We've talked about that, but
there's nothing else to back you
up.

ANGELA
I haven't been able to reason with
her either.

BARBARA
You're not guilty?

KITTY
Not this time. Honest. I want to
change.

Bailiff enters the courtroom.

BAILIFF

All rise. Court is now in session.
The Honorable Susan Woo Lee
presiding.

All turn attention to judge when she enters.

JUDGE LEE

Please be seated. Clerk, please
call the case.

CLERK

State v. Kitty Driscoll, Your
Honor.

JUDGE LEE

Mr. Prosecutor, are you ready to
proceed?

PHIL

Yes, Your Honor, unless the
defendant is prepared to accept the
State's very generous latest offer.

JUDGE LEE

A little less editorializing will
be appreciated, Mr. Prosecutor. Ms.
Davenport, what say you?

Angela glances at Kitty, who nods "no."

ANGELA

My client continues to assert her
innocence, which we will prove,
Your Honor.

JUDGE LEE

Very well. Mr. Prosecutor?

PHIL

Your Honor, the State moves to
proceed with jury selection.

JUDGE LEE

Clerk, please notify the jury
assembly room staff.

FADE OUT.

INT. JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM - MID-MORNING

Edison approaches Christopher, who is seated at a table with chairs reading the newspaper; an advertisement for a pet adoption event has captured his attention.

EDISON

Mr. Snowe.

CHRISTOPHER

Have a seat, please.

EDISON

Again, I apologize for the outburst.

CHRISTOPHER

No worries. How is the lad?

EDISON

He's fine. He's a good worker, young, though, sometimes immature. I apologized to him, and he to me.

CHRISTOPHER

We always hurt the ones we love.

EDISON

Love?

CHRISTOPHER

You love them. You have to. You're their patriarch. You spend eight hours a day with them, right?

EDISON

Yes.

CHRISTOPHER

So you spend most of your time all year long with them. What's a family? They're special to you just the same, aren't they?

EDISON

They are indeed. I should let them know I care for them.

CHRISTOPHER

Then do so.

Edison is paged by Lizbeth, so he rises to leave.

EDISON

Mr. Snowe,

CHRISTOPHER

Please, Chris.

EDISON

Chris, what did you mean when you said you know that I'm not myself lately?

CHRISTOPHER

Little clues that reminded me of someone I know. The surly demeanor, needing a miracle, and it's Christmas week, but you've worn pink neckties every day.

Edison glances at his tie.

EDISON

I guess I haven't been in the holiday spirit.

Edison is paged again.

EDISON (CONT'D)

It's time to send jurors up to court. Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER

I hope you get that miracle, whatever it is. I wish I had.

FADE OUT.

INT. HOOPER TOWNHOME - EARLY AFTERNOON

Beverly and Art are eating lunch and reading the newspaper. Art sees an advertisement for a pet adoption event at the pet rescue center. He neatly folds the paper so as to isolate the ad. Elle returns home from work.

ART

Good afternoon, dear.

BEVERLY

Had a good day at work?

ELLE

Pretty good, yes.

ART

So, what are you doing this afternoon?

ELLE

I need to finish my shopping, and I might go to the movies.

BEVERLY

That'll do you some good. Buy something for yourself while you're out, and go see a cheery Christmas movie.

ELLE

I was thinking more of going to some sad movie to remind me life isn't so bad.

ART

(Touches Elle's wrist)
Try to cheer up.

ELLE

Jacob asked me on a date, sort of.

BEVERLY

Did you say yes?

ELLE

Well, he didn't really ask. He more or less told me not to make plans.

BEVERLY

Pretty direct. I like it.

ART

Where is he taking you?

ELLE

I don't know, but he mentioned that he has a Christmas gift for me.

ART

Really? The cranky boss-man?

ELLE

Yeah, and now I've got to get something for him. The question is what?

BEVERLY

What does he like?

Elle sees the advertisement.

ELLE

What is that?

ART

This? Oh, there's a big pet adoption event this weekend, picture-taking with Santa, holiday food and beverages.

ELLE

Why do you have this out? You weren't thinking of replacing Peaches already, were you?

ART

No, dear, no.

ELLE

Because it's too soon. I couldn't think of having another pet right now.

BEVERLY

We understand. You need to be ready.

ELLE

I don't know if I ever want to have another one. Please don't get me one.

ART

(Stands, holds daughter close)

There, there. We won't. I promise.

FADE OUT.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - EARLY AFTERNOON

Edison and Ruth wait in an examination room to see Ruth's doctor.

EDISON

This is Deja vu. I hate this eerie silence while we wait for the doctor to come in.

RUTH

The waiting is torture, from waiting to have the lumpectomy to waiting for the results to waiting to begin treatment.

EDISON

You would think that the process would have sped up after all this time.

RUTH

They assure me that a lot has changed since I had it last time. The chemo, the nausea meds, etc. Twenty years is a lifetime in modern medicine.

EDISON

I just can't believe this is happening again.

RUTH

Not necessarily. We'll know in a few minutes. Re-occurrence has hung over us all this time. We knew it might return.

Edison begins pacing the room, pausing to gaze out of the window.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry that Christmas is ruined this year.

EDISON

Don't say that. Christmas is the furthest thing from my mind.

RUTH

We haven't done any shopping or had any fun. The kids will be so disappointed.

Edison sits with Ruth.

EDISON

(Whispers)

Hush. All that means nothing. I only want one thing this year. The kids feel the same.

They kiss and embrace.

EDISON (CONT'D)

Where is he? He knows we're needing the results, that we haven't slept or thought of anything else since they found the spot three weeks ago.

RUDY

Speak for yourself. I've slept.

EDISON

You have not. The bed has been shaking every night with your tossing and turning.

RUTH

That's you. I think this is harder on you than on me.

EDISON

It hurts me that you might have to fight again. It's not fair.

RUTH

Edison Fayer. Why is it so rare that I see this sensitive side?

EDISON

Makes it that much more special when you do, doesn't it?

RUTH

I suppose.

EDISON

I'm also selfish, though. I can't imagine losing you. I don't want to be alone.

RUTH

Now that's my Edison.

They laugh and embrace.

EDISON

You're so tough.

RUTH

I learned that I have to be.

The couple hears the doctor's footsteps and the unmistakable sound of him removing the patient's file from the door followed by a pause as he reviews the reason for the office visit.

FADE OUT.

INT. COURTROOM - AFTERNOON

Juror selection is complete and the trial begins.

PHIL

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury,
you are here for the trial of *State*
v. Kitty Driscoll. The defendant
(Points to Kitty)

Is accursed of theft of an
expensive designer purse and
accessories. The State will prove
without a doubt that she is guilty
as charged. You will hear her
motive and will see her commit the
brazen act when the State
introduces video evidence.

ANGELA

Good morning. The State may have
video on which it relies to
implicate the defendant. However,
the video does not clearly show the
perpetrator's face, and the State
can offer nothing else to support
its case--no DNA, no fingerprints,
and a specious motive. I believe
you cannot, in good conscious,
convict Ms. Driscoll for this crime
which she did not commit.

PHIL

Your Honor, the State calls as its
first witness Ms. Gloria Steib, the
manager of Glam and Glitz, a store
that specializes in designer purses
and accessories.

Ms. Steib takes the stand.

PHIL (CONT'D)

Ms. Steib, isn't it true that the
defendant has been a customer of
your establishment?

MS. STEIB

Yes. She has made purchases several times in months prior to this theft.

PHIL

On two occasions, correct?

MS. STEIB

Yes.

PHIL

The State introduces two receipts as evidence that Ms. Driscoll has been a customer of Glam and Glitz. Ms. Steib, didn't Ms. Driscoll visit your store a week prior to the theft, but did not purchase anything?

MS. STEIB

Yes.

PHIL

She did not purchase anything, but did take a liking to a purse, then haggled over the price, correct?

MS. STEIB

Yes. We had a dispute over the price, and she grew very angry and left.

PHIL

(Holds up a purse)
This is the purse that she wanted to purchase, is it not?

MS. STEIB

Yes.

PHIL

(Holds up a different purse)
This is a purse identical to the one that was stolen, correct?

MS. STEIB

Yes.

PHIL

Let the record show that the only difference between the two purses is a hue of brown.

ANGELA

Objection, Your Honor. Both are attractive handbags, to be sure, but none if this provides evidence that the defendant was present on the day of the crime.

PHIL

I'm trying to establish a relationship with the store, Your Honor, which speaks to motive.

JUDGE LEE

I'll allow for now.

PHIL

The State would like to introduce the following video evidence.

Audience views video surveillance.

PHIL (CONT'D)

Here we see the crime as it occurs. Ms. Driscoll is milling about the store. When staff are not looking, she places her own purse and several accessories, into one of the purses on display, and then walks out of the store without incident. Ms. Steib, this is video from your security system, correct?

MS. STEIB

Yes.

PHIL

And when you reviewed the video, you determined that the perpetrator is Ms. Driscoll?

MS. STEIB

Yes.

PHIL

No further questions.

ANGELA

Ms. Steib, did the defendant make any purchases on the day in question?

MS. STEIB

No.

ANGELA

Did you or any of your employees speak to Ms. Driscoll on that day?

MS. STEIB

No.

ANGELA

That's probably because she was walking her client's dog at the time of the theft.

MS. STEIB

That's not a question, Your Honor.

JUDGE LEE

Sustained.

ANGELA

So, your store issued no receipts to the defendant, and none of your people recall speaking to her?

MS. STEIB

No, but--

ANGELA

No further questions, Your Honor.

JUDGE LEE

Redirect, Mr. Prosecutor?

PHIL

Ms. Steib, does your store issue receipts to thieves?

MS. STEIB

No.

PHIL

The State rests, Your Honor.

FADE OUT.

INT. CHRISTOPHER SNOWE'S HOME - NIGHTTIME

Christopher is sitting in a recliner eating dinner on a TV tray. A cat and a dog sit at his feet. The dog is watching Christopher and listening to him.

CHRISTOPHER

Jury duty isn't all that bad, Estelle.

(MORE)

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

I wish I had been at the center all week, with us so busy for the holiday and all, but I suppose it was time for me to do my civic duty. The jury manager is gruff, but he has a good reason. Maybe you could put in a little word for them with you-know-who?

(Chuckles)

His staff is funny. The youngest one thinks only about toys even though he is in his 20s. Lizbeth has the Christmas spirit, even made cookies for us. I really like her. I told her the cookies weren't as good as yours were, of course.

(Glances at wife's empty chair)

Before I go to the courthouse, I stop at the coffee shop around the corner. There's a beautiful couple, Jacob and Elle, who work there. She reminds me so much of our Sadie. You'd like her.

(Glances again at wife's chair)

She just lost a little dog, poor thing.

Camera pulls away, and we see the empty recliner and another TV tray, on which is a framed photo of Christopher's deceased wife with their daughter.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Jacob and I have a plan, though. Oh, I know what you're thinking. It's too soon to replace the pooch. She'll be okay. When you have a lot of love to give, you find something or someone to love.

(Rubs beard, then gives scrap of food to the dog)

Well, I'm done.

(Wipes mouth, looks at wife's chair)

Say hello to Sadie for me, okay? I miss you both so much.

FADE OUT.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHTTIME

Jacob and Elle walk to a coffee shop (not the one where they work), where they share a slice of red velvet cake and drink hot cocoa.

ELLE

This peppermint frosting is amazing. We need to steal the idea.

JACOB

Let's take it and analyze the ingredients.

ELLE

Like scientists in a lab, right?

They laugh.

JACOB

Is it just me, or is it ironic that we ended up in a coffee shop?

ELLE

But it is a *different* coffee shop, almost a bakery actually.

JACOB

Sure. Look, the pastry display is over there instead of over there. And the newspaper rack is in that corner instead of that corner.

ELLE

And there's their Patsy at the counter.

Young woman at the counter looks confused when she notices the couple staring at her.

JACOB

So what are you doing this Christmas?

ELLE

We're traditional. Church on Christmas Eve, then visit family. Mom cooks on Christmas Day, and we open presents in the afternoon. You?

JACOB
Lost Mom when I was young. I'll go
with Dad to my brother's house on
Christmas Eve.

ELLE
And Christmas Day?

JACOB
(Shrugs)
Eat a pizza.

ELLE
Oh, I'm so sorry. You'll be alone
on Christmas?

JACOB
(Grins)
Mostly.

ELLE
Oh. Hmm.

Jacob leans forward to kiss her. Elle is distracted by one of
the workers.

ELLE (CONT'D)
They're closing up.

JACOB
I see. I need to bring you to pick
up your present, then walk you
home.

ELLE
I have to admit I'm a little
nervous.

JACOB
Don't be. I know you'll love it.

FADE TO:

INT. JACOB'S APARTMENT

JACOB
Have a seat. I'll go get it.

ELLE
Okay.

JACOB
Close your eyes.

ELLE
You're killing me with the
suspense.

Jacob enters with Sugar, sits next to Elle on the sofa.

JACOB
Okay. Open them.

Elle opens her eyes. Her smile turns to shock and surprise.

JACOB (CONT'D)
It's a dog. See? Her name is Sugar.

ELLE
Jacob. I, I don't know what to say.

JACOB
Surprise! I know how much you loved
Peaches, and I wanted--

ELLE
I *still* love Peaches.

Jacob cuddles the dog, who grows restless, wanting to jump into Elle's lap.

JACOB
Well, of course. That's
understandable.

ELLE
(Turns back to Jacob)
I'm sorry. I can't. I can't think
of replacing her.

JACOB
Sugar doesn't replace her. She will
have her own needs and personality,
and will love you in her own way.

Elle is silent.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Sugar doesn't want to compete with
Peaches. She wants to be loved.

ELLE
Take her back.

JACOB
Take her back? Christopher and I
thought that because you loved
dogs, that you would like another.

ELLE

Christopher? The Santa guy in the shop?

JACOB

He runs a pet rescue center. It's a nice place, very clean. But very sad, too.

ELLE

(Glances at dog)
I have to leave.

JACOB

I didn't mean to upset you. Let me walk you home.

ELLE

No. I'm fine. Good night.

Elle leaves. Jacob sits on the sofa with Sugar. Cash runs in and leaps onto the sofa to join them.

JACOB

I have to figure out how you're opening that gate, you.

The dogs start playing on Jacob's lap.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Looks like Sugar is spending another night, Cash.

FADE OUT.

INT. JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM - MORNING

The jury assembly room is empty, except for staff, who are dismayed that Edison did not come to work the day after his wife's appointment. Lizbeth is wearing normal work clothes and none of the staff are in the holiday mood.

HUNTER

He didn't say anything about the results?

LIZBETH

No, he just sent a text saying that he was taking the day off because he has things to do.

CHELSEA

That can't be good.

Lizabeth turns off the radio, which was playing Christmas music.

HUNTER
(Shakes head)
Can't be good at all.

CHELSEA
There's nothing going on here. You have time now to get in line for that game.

HUNTER
Nah. I'm not in the mood now.

LIZBETH
Poor Mrs. Ruth. She's so sweet. I hate that she has to go through this again.

CHELSEA
And Edison, too. It's not easy on the family, either.

They look at Hunter.

HUNTER
What? I'd never wish this on anyone. I'll straighten up so he has an easy time here.

LIZBETH
Good idea. They will need our support. I will bake something extra special for them tonight.

CHELSEA
Other than the trial upstairs, there won't be any more jurors the rest of the year. I'm going to do his bookkeeping for the month.

HUNTER
Let's get a little something for them, to show we care.

LIZBETH
Another good idea. Wait, I need this.

Lizabeth reaches into her drawer for her Santa hat.

FADE OUT.

INT. COURTROOM - MORNING

The defense begins its presentation of its case.

ANGELA

The defense calls Ms. Tanya Swanson
to the stand.

Ms. Swanson takes the stand.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

Ms. Swanson, you are the owner of a
golden retriever, correct?

MS. SWANSON

Yes, Ginger.

ANGELA

And you hired Ms. Driscoll to walk
Ginger, correct?

MS. SWANSON

Yes, three days a week.

ANGELA

On the date in question, Ms.
Driscoll picked up Ginger, correct?

MS. SWANSON

Yes.

ANGELA

No further questions, Your Honor.

JUDGE LEE

Mr. Prosecutor?

PHIL

Ms. Swanson, do you know where Ms.
Driscoll took Ginger?

MS. SWANSON

Yes, City Park, which is a quarter
mile from my townhome.

PHIL

But, did you see Ms. Driscoll in
the park with Ginger?

MS. SWANSON

No.

PHIL

What time did she return the dog?

MS. SWANSON
Around noon, I suppose.

PHIL
Plenty of time to get to the store,
commit the crime, and then return.
Thank you.

JUDGE LEE
Redirect, Ms. Davenport?

ANGELA
No, Your Honor. The defense calls
Mr. Bob Ritter, of SoSafe Security,
to the stand.

Mr. Ritter takes the stand.

ANGELA (CONT'D)
Mr. Ritter, you installed a
security system at 223 Chestnut
Dr., the home of Ms. Tanya Swanson,
correct?

MR. RITTER
Yes.

ANGELA
That system includes sophisticated
cameras that can record activity,
correct?

MR. RITTER
Yes, the highest quality available.

ANGELA
The defense enters this video clip,
of Ms. Driscoll leaving Ms.
Swanson's house at 9:00 a.m. on the
day of the theft. You can see Ms.
Driscoll, in running clothes,
accompanied by a golden retriever,
Ginger. Let's watch it.

Video is shown. Christopher leans forward and adjusts his
eyeglasses.

ANGELA (CONT'D)
Mr. Ritter, you can verify that
this clip was uploaded to your
servers on the date in question at
the time indicated, correct?

MR. RITTER

Yes.

ANGELA

No further questions, Your Honor.

PHIL

Mr. Ritter, you can certify that the date and time are accurate?

MR. RITTER

Yes.

PHIL

Good. Ms. Driscoll's departure provides ample time for her to change and get to Glam and Glitz to steal the purse. Thank you. No further questions.

JUDGE LEE

Redirect?

ANGELA

None, Your Honor.

Defendant has a look of concern. Phil grins.

CHRISTOPHER

Your Honor, may I see you in your chambers?

Audience gasps. All eyes turn to Christopher.

JUDGE LEE

(Rises)

Recess. Bailiff, Madam Clerk, bring Mr. Snowe to my chambers--now.

FADE TO:

INT. JUDGE'S CHAMBERS

JUDGE LEE

Mr. Snowe, this is highly unusual. You are threatening a mistrial.

CHRISTOPHER

I know, Your Honor, and I'm very sorry, but I can tell you everywhere that dog has been in the past year, if you can get her here.

JUDGE LEE
Clerk, issue an instanter subpoena
for Ms. Gingersnap Swanson.

CLERK
Huh?

JUDGE LEE
Get me that dog.

FADE OUT.

INT. JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM - MORNING

Edison, carrying a box of pastries and a shopping bag, enters the jury assembly room, where his staff have a surprise for him. The employees are all dressed in pink in support of Ruth, yet it is they who are surprised by their boss's appearance.

EDISON
(Flings door open)
Merry Christmas!

EMPLOYEES
(In unison)
Surprise!

EDISON
Whoa! What?

LIZBETH
We, uh, wanted to surprise you with
our support.
(Motions to her pink
clothing)
See?

EDISON
(Laughs)
I love it. Pink became my favorite
color a long time ago. It's nice to
see it even though it's not
October.

HUNTER
But, Edison--

EDISON
Hunter, you've been here five
years. Call me Ed. Except in front
of jurors, of course, when it's Mr.
Fayer.

HUNTER

Yeah. Okay, Ed. What's with the ugly sweater you're wearing?

EDISON

It's Christmas, lad! I had to go to three thrift stores to find this. Like it?

HUNTER

Hmmm.

Edison places the box and bag on the counter and then hugs each of them.

CHELSEA

How is Mrs. Ruth?

EDISON

She's doing great!

LIZBETH

And?

EDISON

And? Oh, it was benign!

The trio sighs in relief.

EDISON (CONT'D)

Wait, you all thought that-- I should have told you. We got our miracle. No cancer. The cancer did not return.

LIZBETH

We're so happy for you both!

CHELSEA

Then why the day off?

EDISON

To celebrate, of course, and to shop, and we went ice skating!

HUNTER

You went ice skating?

EDISON

I haven't done that in years. Then, we finished our Christmas shopping, which we hadn't started, actually.

(MORE)

EDISON (CONT'D)

Here, I have something for each of you. Ruth selected them, so I know you'll like them.

They laugh.

CHELSEA

Thank you. We're so happy it turned out okay.

EDISON

No, thank you. I'm sorry I've been so rough. Now, come on, turn on the Christmas music. Lizbeth, where's your Santa hat?

FADE OUT.

INT. COURTROOM - AFTERNOON

The trial resumes with an alternate juror taking Christopher's place. Elle enters the courtroom and sits in the audience. Christopher notices her and winks.

JUDGE LEE

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I have spoken to the prosecutor and the defense regarding the departure of Mr. Snowe from the jury. Mr. Snowe believes he has information that will assist the defendant, so I have agreed to allow him to serve as an expert witness. Ms. Davenport, please proceed.

PHIL

Your Honor, the State objects to the development.

JUDGE LEE

Noted. Overruled.

ANGELA

The defense has one more witness, Your Honor. We call to the stand Gingersnap "Ginger" Swanson.

Tanya brings the dog into the courtroom. The audience mumbles and laughs.

PHIL

Objection, Your Honor!

JUDGE LEE

(Snickers)

We discussed this during the recess, Mr. Prosecutor.

PHIL

For the record, Your Honor, this is outrageous. This animal cannot testify.

ANGELA

Ginger is Ms. Driscoll's alibi, and can prove where they were at the time of the theft.

JUDGE LEE

I'll allow, Ms. Davenport and Mr. Snowe, but this better be good. Mr. Prosecutor, you know you can't wait to see where this is going. Clerk, swear the witness.

CLERK

(Whispers)

Really?

The judge nods. The dog jumps onto the chair at the witness stand.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Uh...do you swear that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Dog raises right front paw.

GINGER

Woof!

COURT REPORTER

Your Honor, was that a "woof" or an "arf"?

Audience laughs.

JUDGE LEE

Use your judgment, Ms. Stentz.

ANGELA

I would like Mr. Snowe, who is the director of a pet rescue organization, to provide a demonstration and assist in questioning the witness. He is familiar with GPS technology in Ginger's possession.

CHRISTOPHER

Ginger, your collar is the PetLocator 2.0, Which has sophisticated GPS tracking, correct?

GINGER

Woof!

CHRISTOPHER

Permit me to demonstrate how your device works.

Christopher uses a tablet in conjunction with a monitor to open an app.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Using the mobile app associated with the device around Ginger's neck, we can locate her. I will press "Where's My Pooch?"

Audience chuckles. A map opens with a pulsating dog-bone-shaped cursor. Its location is the courthouse. Audience murmurs.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

See, it shows that you are in the government complex.

GINGER

Woof!

PHIL

Your Honor, he's, uh, leading the witness.

JUDGE LEE

(Grimaces)

Overruled, Mr. Prosecutor.

CHRISTOPHER

And, if we press this feature, we can see all points visited by Ginger on any given date within the past year. Here, one can see that Ginger spent three hours in City Park on the morning of the theft. See how the path leads from Ginger's home to the park, then throughout the park several times? Ginger, Kitty was with you the entire time, correct?

GINGER

Woof!

ANGELA

Thank you, Mr. Snowe. No further questions, Your Honor.

JUDGE LEE

Redirect, Mr. Prosecutor?

Ginger growls.

PHIL

(Smirks)

You must be kidding, Your Honor.

(Shrugs)

The State rests.

JUDGE LEE

You may proceed with closing arguments.

PHIL

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the evidence is clear, despite the antics the defense has conducted. Ms. Driscoll was enamored with the high-priced items at Glam and Glitz, so much so that she visited the store two times to make purchases, and on one occasion haggling over the price to the point of argument. She is seen, by defense's own admission, leaving her client's home the morning of the crime with ample time to get to the store.

(Voice begins to trail off)

She was available, had motive, has no credible alibi

(MORE)

PHIL (CONT'D)
(Looks at dog)
And, oh, heck...the State drops the charges.

Audience cheers.

GINGER
Woof! Woof!

FADE OUT.

INT. COURTHOUSE LOBBY - EVENING

The jurors are leaving the courthouse, passing through the lobby, where Edison stops Christopher.

EDISON
Chris, wait.

CHRISTOPHER
Mr. Fayer? It's after 4:30. Why are you still here?

EDISON
Call me Ed, please. I wanted to see you before you left. The trial is over?

CHRISTOPHER
Yes. The State dropped the charges.

EDISON
Seemed like a rushed case.

Phil rushes past them through the lobby, followed by Ginger, who is barking. Christopher and Edison chuckle.

CHRISTOPHER
He's rushing now. Ed, I like that sweater.

EDISON
(Blushes)
Yes, well, it's the new me.

CHRISTOPHER
Your wife must have received good news at the doctor.

EDISON
The best--no cancer. And my staff, well, you were right. They're the greatest.

CHRISTOPHER

You see?

EDISON

We are a family. They were ready to support me in a dark time. I learned that I cherish them.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm so glad that everything worked out for all of you.

EDISON

You were an important part of that, prodding me to see the good in my people.

CHRISTOPHER

(Shrugs)

It's what I do.

EDISON

Chris, I'm sorry about your wife and daughter. I feel almost guilty.

CHRISTOPHER

No--don't ever feel guilty that your wife made it and others haven't. How did you know?

EDISON

I checked our database, saw they were deceased. I found the obituaries online.

CHRISTOPHER

I asked for their help to get you your miracle.

EDISON

Bless you--and them.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, I guess I will see you again in what, two years?

EDISON

Yep. I wish there were some way I could repay you.

CHRISTOPHER

No need. You already have.

They shake hands, and Christopher turns to leave, then pauses.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
You know, Santa could use some
helpers, Ed.

FADE OUT.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHTTIME

Christopher enters the coffee shop, which is near closing time. Only two patrons are there. Elle is cleaning tables.

CHRISTOPHER
Working late?

ELLE
Can't always have the morning
shift, now can I?

CHRISTOPHER
My jury duty service is complete.

ELLE
Good for you.

Christopher sits at the table she is cleaning.

CHRISTOPHER
I saw you in the courtroom. What
made you come to the trial?

ELLE
It's a public forum. I wanted to
see justice in action.

CHRISTOPHER
Elle.

ELLE
That was rude of me. I apologize.

Elle sits.

ELLE (CONT'D)
I'm just not ready to replace
Peaches.

CHRISTOPHER
There's nothing wrong with that.
Don't feel embarrassed or ashamed.
We'll take the pup back.

(MORE)

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
Maybe someone will adopt her this weekend.

ELLE
I hate to do that to Sugar. She is a sweet little thing, but if feels disrespectful to Peaches.

CHRISTOPHER
Peaches is gone, Elle. The love you have in your heart, that love that you want to give, remains. You can love another dog and still hold her in your heart.

Elle tears up.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
Your real problem is Jacob. When you rejected Sugar, you rejected him, too. I'm sorry I pushed him to get you the dog. My magic doesn't always work the way it's supposed to.

ELLE
It was very thoughtful of him, and you. You both were only trying to make me happy.

CHRISTOPHER
(Nods)
We'll find another home for Sugar, in time. You will have to decide what to do about Jacob.

Christopher rises.

ELLE
You've given me a lot to think about. You're a very special person, Chris.

CHRISTOPHER
You also are special. I'm glad we met. You remind me so much of my daughter.

FADE OUT.

INT. PET RESCUE CENTER - NIGHTTIME

The rescue center is decorated for Christmas, and volunteers are dressed as elves and have duties about the room, which has a sleigh on a stage, buffet tables (for humans and pets), tables and chairs, and a band playing light Christmas music. A line of pet owners and adoptees forms to take photos with Chris (as Santa). Hunter, Lizbeth, Edison, Chelsea, and Ruth are serving food at the humans' buffet table.

CHRISTOPHER

Ho, ho, ho, my helpers. Santa thanks you for your hard work.

LIZBETH

(To Hunter)

See? I told you!

EDISON

We're glad to be here, Santa!

Kitty and Angela are serving pet treats at the pet buffet.

KITTY

Mr. Snowe, thank you so much for all you've done for me.

CHRISTOPHER

It was all you, Kitty. You were not guilty. You deserve another chance, given all you've been through. We all need mercy sometimes.

KITTY

Amen. I won't let you down.

ANGELA

(To Kitty)

We won't let you let us down.

CHRISTOPHER

(To Kitty)

She's a tough one. You'd better listen to her.

ANGELA

Say, uh, Chris, er, Santa? How about you call me Angie, and we have a little dance when you're finished with the photos?

CHRISTOPHER

Well, I, uh.

KITTY
You'd better listen to her.

CHRISTOPHER
Sustained.

FADE OUT.

INT. BUSY AIRPORT - NIGHTTIME

Thousands are stranded in the terminal of a busy airport as heavy snow pounds the facility and tarmac. Phil tosses his carryon baggage to the floor as he reads a monitor that provides the flight schedule. Every flight is CANCELLED.

FADE OUT.

INT. PET RESCUE CENTER - NIGHTTIME

Christopher is seated in the sleigh, and is taking photos with pet owners and pets. Elle, Art, and Beverly enter the center and gaze about the room.

ART
Wow. This is impressive.

BEVERLY
He's in line, Elle.

Elle rushes to the stage, where Jacob, Cash, and Sugar are sixth in line to have photos taken.

JACOB
Elle? Is something wrong?

ELLE
No. I wanted to see you, I mean Sugar, again.

JACOB
Elle, I shouldn't have rushed to get you another dog. It was too soon, and we should have talked about it first. I felt so bad for you, and I knew what that pain was like, so I should have known better.

ELLE
If I had been upfront about why I was upset, we probably would have discussed this before Peaches died.

(MORE)

ELLE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry I pushed you, and Sugar, away.

JACOB

I forgive you. Sugar, on the other hand, holds grudges.

ELLE

Aw. I need to make it up to her, then.

JACOB

She's not happy unless I'm happy. She and Cash and I have grown close already. Three amigos, right, guys?

DOGS IN UNISON

Woof!

ELLE

Gee. Is there any room for me in this little group?

JACOB

I could convince them to squeeze you into our clique. I'm sure Sugar would even go home with you if you asked nicely.

ELLE

I'd like that. What do you say, Sugar?

Sugar barks. They laugh. Others in line behind them grumble as they grow agitated when the line is held up.

ELLE (CONT'D)

(Whispers)

Thank you, Jacob.

Jacob and Elle kiss. Others in line and around the room clap.

CHRISTOPHER

Santa has a long line, kiddos. Let's get this picture taken, okay?

ELLE

You are a very special person, you know that?

CHRISTOPHER

I'm just good at getting others to see light through darkness, and to love others.

JACOB

To do that, you first have to have
love for others, for total
strangers.

CHRISTOPHER

Just like Santa?

ELLE

Yeah.

(Tilts head)

Just like Santa.

Christopher winks, then places his finger on his lips. They pose for the photo. Art and Beverly also are taking photos. All in the room are happily working at their respective stations and listening to the Christmas music.

FADE TO:

EXT. PET RESCUE CENTER -- NIGHTTIME

Heavy snow is unable to drown the sound of Christmas music and cheer inside the pet rescue center.

FADE TO BLACK.

Christopher and his dog reappear to tell the audience "Merry Christmas! Ho! Ho! Ho! Woof! Woof! Woof!"

THE END